

Designed with purpose  
A collaboration between



The behavioral & human-centered  
**Persona Toolkit**

# Preface

Impactful innovation begins with understanding people. Not as abstract beneficiaries, but as individuals with rich experiences, distinct motivations, and real constraints. Yet in development practice, this depth is often lost. The **GRACE Persona Toolkit** brings it back. Developed by **Glashaus** and **Busara**, it merges the strengths of behavioral science and human-centered design to help you build personas that unlock more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. As you move through this toolkit, we encourage you to question assumptions, engage with real stories, and let GRACE guide you toward interventions that genuinely reflect how people live, decide, and adapt.



**GRACE** is our shared approach to designing innovations and interventions. It brings together Behavior Change and Human-Centered Design process models in one framework that captures the best of both worlds.

## What our partners are saying about this toolkit:

Personas are a great tool to design with people in rural communities. Personas can unlock more relevant solutions, but only if they're based on real behavioral data and used actively in the design process.

The GRACE toolkit, developed by Glashaus and Busara, is a great source to learn about building personas from a behavioral and human-centered design angle and how to integrate the persona in your design process.

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**Anna Muller**

Senior Scientist and Team Lead Inclusive Design and User Research  
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# Authors



**Busara** is a leading behavioral science organization dedicated to advancing evidence-based decision-making across the Global South. Through rigorous research, human-centered design, and applied behavioral insights, Busara works with governments, nonprofits, and private-sector partners to create solutions that are both context-driven and impact-focused. Our approach combines deep local understanding with global scientific expertise, enabling programs and policies that meaningfully improve lives and drive equitable development. This toolkit reflects Busara's commitment to translating behavioral science into practical, scalable tools for real-world change.

Busara



**Juhi Jain** is an Associate Director at Busara, where she leads the FARM portfolio (Food, Agriculture and Resilience Management) and works across Africa and the Global South. With over a decade of experience in policy, behavior change, and sustainable development, she has designed and implemented strategies that advance inclusion and sustainability at national and global levels.

Previously, Juhi worked at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led the Behavioral Insights Unit at NITI Aayog, where she oversaw “Mission LiFE,” an international initiative promoting sustainable lifestyles. She has also supported India’s entrepreneurship ecosystem through the Atal Innovation Mission.

Juhi has represented India in global policy dialogues, is a Salzburg Global Fellow and TEDx speaker, and holds an MBA and a bachelor’s degree in economics.



**Laura** is an Associate at Busara, where she leads research projects from design to analysis and dissemination. Her work examines how people make decisions within systems that often disadvantage them, with a particular focus on smallholder farmers, informal vendors, and low-income consumers. She has worked across a range of agriculture and food systems topics, aiming to stay close to lived realities and support practical, context-appropriate solutions.

Before joining Busara, she worked across public and private organizations on sustainability, social impact, and environmental governance in India and France. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from Leiden University, where she also completed a minor in sustainable development.

# Authors



**Glashaus Innovation** is a human-centered innovation studio that helps teams design solutions rooted in real user needs. We translate people's voices into clear design decisions, support the development of measurable and sustainable innovations, and strengthen teams with practical, accessible HCD methods. With 16 years of combined experience across research, product design, testing, and evaluation, we have worked in more than ten countries on three continents. Drawing on experience ranging from research, nutrition and soil science to AI, new work, and e-commerce, Glashaus brings together rigorous inquiry and participatory design. This toolkit reflects our commitment to closing the gap between people and innovation - making human-centered design a priority from the start, not an afterthought.

[Glashaus Innovation](#)

## The founders of Glashaus:

**Charlotte Schumann** is the Research & Strategy Lead at Glashaus Innovation. She specializes in turning research results into actionable strategy and sustainable solutions. With over a decade of experience in user research, HCD capacity building, and digital innovation, she has developed toolkits and advised global teams across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.



Her consulting portfolio includes GIZ, CGIAR, universities, and nonprofits, and she regularly leads workshops on design sprints, scenario planning, and stakeholder engagement around the world. Charlotte holds a PhD in Social Anthropology and is a Nielsen Norman Group-certified User Experience Expert. She works in German, English, Portuguese, and French.

**Aline Weinsheimer** is the Design & Communication Lead at Glashaus Innovation, where she turns user insights into intuitive, accessible, and seamlessly executed experiences. With a strong focus on bridging research and design, she ensures that evidence-based findings translate into strategies and products that work in the real world. Aline has extensive experience leading HCD-driven product development for CGIAR initiatives, including Artemis AI Technology, UXtools4Ag, and the HCD Course for Digital Inclusion. She is also an experienced facilitator, guiding participatory workshops and co-creation sessions that energize teams and accelerate innovation. Aline is a certified UX/UI Designer (Ironhack) and an advanced Figma practitioner (Designlab). On top of that, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She works in German and English.

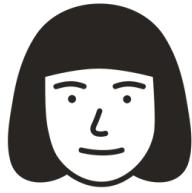
# Glossary

<b>Affinity Mapping</b>	A clustering method used to group related insights, quotes, and observations to identify behavioral patterns.
<b>Behavior Change</b>	A process focused on understanding and influencing the motivations, barriers, and triggers that shape human decisions.
<b>Behavioral Persona</b>	A persona based primarily on motivations, behavior patterns, constraints, and decision drivers—rather than demographics.
<b>Behavioral Science</b>	A field studying how people make decisions based on emotions, biases, heuristics, social norms, and limited information.
<b>Clustering (Insight Clustering)</b>	The process of grouping similar insights or behaviors to form persona types.
<b>Classical Persona</b>	A persona built from qualitative field research such as interviews, FGDs, or observations.
<b>Coding (Qualitative Coding)</b>	The process of labeling and categorizing qualitative data to identify themes and patterns. Includes inductive and deductive coding.
<b>Data-Based Personas</b>	Personas developed from qualitative and/or quantitative data rather than assumptions.
<b>Deductive Coding</b>	Applying a predefined coding framework to qualitative data.
<b>Empathy (in HCD)</b>	The ability to understand users' motivations, constraints, and emotional drivers to inform design decisions.
<b>Field Validation</b>	Checking persona accuracy by returning to real users and receiving direct feedback.
<b>Focus Group Discussion (FGD)</b>	A moderated group conversation to uncover social norms, shared beliefs, and community dynamics.
<b>GRACE Framework</b>	A combined Human-Centered Design and Behavior Change process: Gather, Research, Assemble, Check, Evolve.

<b>Human-Centered Design (HCD)</b>	A design approach that prioritizes user needs, context, and iterative testing.
<b>Inductive Coding</b>	Developing codes directly from the data (bottom-up), useful for exploratory research.
<b>Journey Mapping / User Journey</b>	A tool to visualize how a persona interacts with a product or service step by step.
<b>Mental Models</b>	Internal beliefs or assumptions that guide how users interpret information and make decisions.
<b>Persona</b>	A semi-fictional representation of a user group built from real insights, motivations, constraints, and behaviors.
<b>Proto-Persona (Protopersona)</b>	A quick, assumption-based persona created before any field research to align teams and identify knowledge gaps.
<b>Segmentation</b>	Dividing users into meaningful groups based on behavioral patterns rather than demographics.

# Abbreviations

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>FGD</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HCD</b>	Human-Centered Design
<b>IDI</b>	In-Depth Interview
<b>LLM</b>	Large Language Model
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service (text messaging)
<b>UX</b>	User Experience



# Introducing GRACE

G

**Gather** is the phase in which we collect requirements, business needs, prior research data and scope the problem: **What is a problem worth to be solved?** For personas, this can mean making silent assumptions explicit with the help of Protopersonas - build on your team's experience.

R

**Research** is the step of meeting our users or target groups, talking to them, observing them, walking a bit in their shoes. **We aim to understand the challenge at hand through their eyes.**

Here we move to evidence-based personas: Either you test your Protopersona or you start collecting data with real people.

A

**Assemble** is when we generate ideas based on prior insights, select the best and prototype them.

**Hands in the dough: We're now making sense of our data!** Building meaningful clusters of answers to research questions is the real art of persona-building.

C

**Check** is what we do with our early-stage or (later) fully developed prototypes: We release them into the wild, run field labs or usability tests and understand how they work (or don't!) in the real world. **We iterate, go out again, until we feel confident about what we built.**

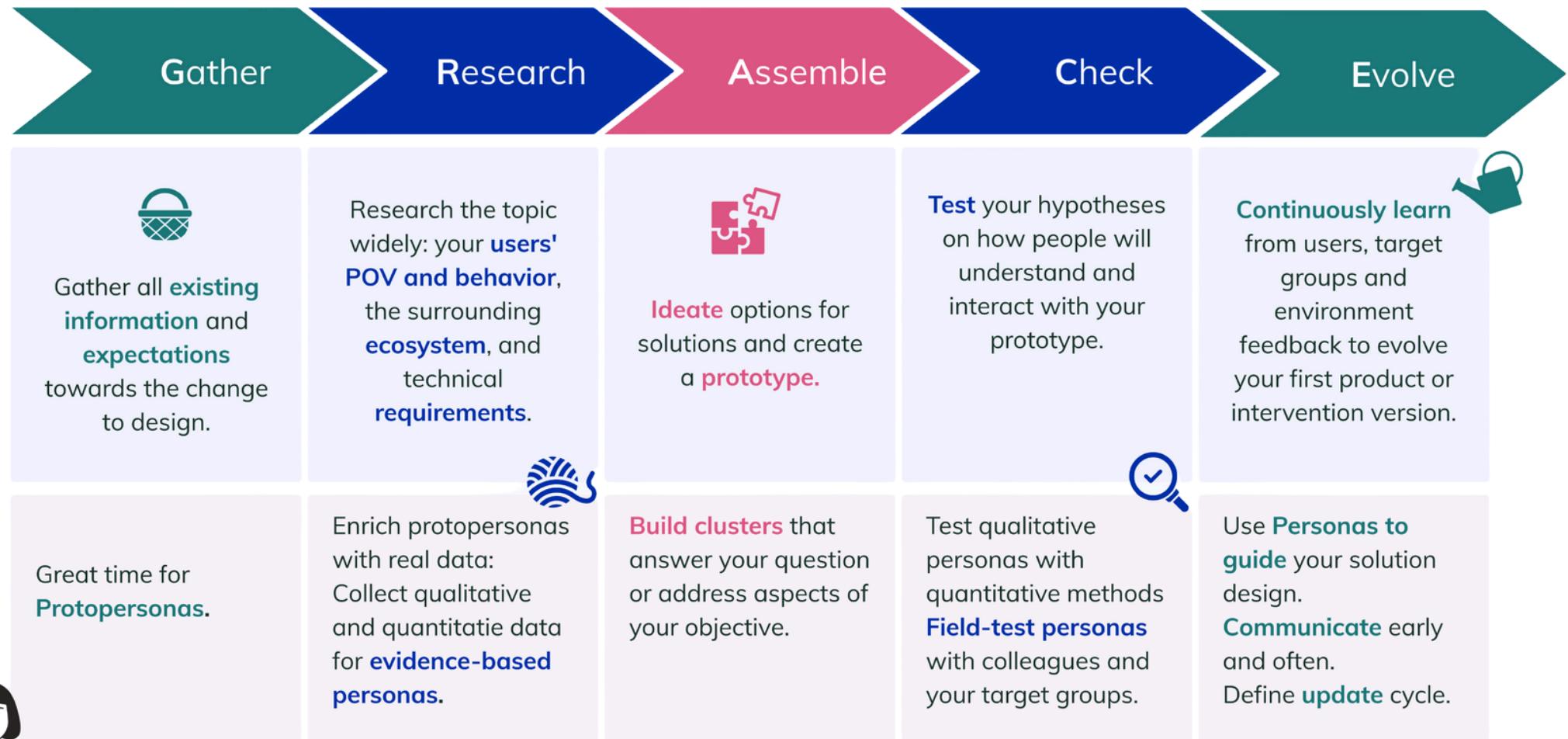
Validating Personas is necessary every time you approach a new question or scale, or simply when you feel they are not answering your original question anymore. A quick update beats recycling by far.

E

**Evolve** means following our solution into the real world and continuing to learn from its users. It also means you start working with them!

Good user-centered design means to take your personas to almost every decision - **ask for every new project or feature how it's going to affect your personas!**

# GRACE model



GRACE applied to personas

# Road to a great persona

Click the page links to access each chapter.

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## 1. Introduction

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Gather all existing information

## 2. Define Objectives and Understand User

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## 3. Gather Insights: Data Collection Methods

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Research your users' views and behavior



Assemble new ideas in a prototype

Check your hypotheses on how people will use your prototype

## 4. Synthesize and Segment: Building Persona Clusters

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## 5. Build Vivid Persona Profiles

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## 6. Linking Personas to Action

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## 7. Validate and Refine your Personas



## 8. Next Steps & Practical Advice

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Evolve each version continuously by learning from users

# 1. Introduction

**Rural communities often operate in rapidly shifting environments** that include volatile market conditions, climate shocks, and deeply rooted cultural norms. Yet, too many interventions ignore the real drivers of decision-making: e.g. social norms, motivation gaps, and distrust of the unfamiliar. When designers assume a “rational” user instead of engaging with real experiences, the result is predictable: low adoption, wasted resources, and unmet goals.

Therefore, designing effective and realistic local solutions requires an understanding of human behavior, mental models and existing local practices . Behavioral science helps us understand these dynamics by revealing that decisions are not always logical, but often driven by factors including habits, social norms, emotional responses, or limited information. In rural and agricultural settings, these behavioral factors can strongly influence how individuals adopt new practices, respond to risk, or manage resources. Design Thinking offers tools to translate the behavioral insights into innovation by fostering empathy, reframing problems creatively, and co-creating solutions with intended users. In intervention design for the Global South, this unlocks participatory, user-centered approaches to build sustainable solutions.

Within this user-centred approach, persona-building offers a practical way to bring behavioral insights to life. Instead of treating end-users as uniform recipients, personas represent different types of users by highlighting unique motivations, constraints, beliefs, and aspirations. By doing so, they not only foster empathy and improve communication among design teams, but also surface risks and opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden, ultimately leading to more user-centered solutions. By learning from these distinct user groups, practitioners working in food systems, agriculture, climate resilience, and environmental sustainability can shape interventions that are locally grounded and address specific needs and motivations. Personas serve as a concrete reference point, helping planners see their audience as real individuals rather than abstract demographics.

## How much do two persons have in common?



Prince Charles

- male
- Born in 1948
- Raised in the UK
- Married twice
- Lived in a castle
- Wealthy & famous



Ozzy Osbourne

- male
- Born in 1948
- Raised in the UK
- Married twice
- Lived in a castle
- Wealthy & famous

~~Personas should be about demographics.~~



Personas should be about the needs & challenges people face.

While segmentation approaches such as archetypes, attitudinal profiles, and psychographic clusters are common in research and design, this toolkit focuses specifically on personas because they offer a richer behavioral lens, enabling practitioners to design more empathetic, actionable and behaviorally informed interventions. Unlike archetypes, which rely on abstract character types, or profiles, which emphasize static traits, personas are grounded in real needs, pain points, and behaviors. By giving a human face to the motivations, constraints, and lived experiences that shape behavior, personas foster empathy with the people you design for and help bridge the gap between behavioral theory and design practice.

## 1.1 Purpose & Audience

This toolkit is a step-by-step guide for creating and applying personas in development projects. It draws on behavioral science approaches that uncover hidden biases and cultural dynamics, as well as human-centered design principles that center empathy and iterative testing and refinement.



**Busara's** and **Glashaus'** work with personas in previous projects consistently highlights essential insights into rural life realities.

### Social Norms

Rural communities often rely heavily on collective decision-making. For example, a new farming technique might be rejected if influential community members don't visibly endorse it.

### Risk Perceptions

Even seemingly beneficial practices may appear risky if they threaten immediate livelihoods. Farmers may stick to lower-yielding but familiar practices due to fear of loss or uncertainty.

## Learning Styles

In adopting new practices, we all have different preferences and challenges. Learning materials can offer persona-focused learning pathways to keep a diverse audience engaged.

## Opportunities

Existing hierarchical structures often prevent the right people from participating in innovation development. For example, field technicians might be the right group to involve in data analysis instead of just data collection on the field to achieve holistic results.

Interventions often overlook crucial factors, such as the ones mentioned above, that influence behaviors. By acknowledging these realities during persona development, interventions can be designed in a way that addresses the behaviors you aim to influence.

## Who It's For

This toolkit is designed for professionals working across food systems, agriculture, climate adaptation, and environmental sustainability in developing contexts. It is particularly valuable for design and implementation teams, including NGOs, government actors, and donor-funded programs, seeking deeper alignment between their interventions and the lived realities of their target populations. Research and insight specialists will benefit from its guidance on moving beyond basic demographic segmentation toward uncovering the drivers behind real-world decisions. Behavior change and communication experts can use the toolkit to develop outreach strategies that leverage local trust, cultural norms, and community perceptions. Additionally, project managers and MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning) specialists will find it instrumental in embedding a consistent, user-centered lens throughout the entire project lifecycle from inception to impact assessment.

### 1.2. When to use this toolkit

The toolkit is most effective when used at key strategic points in a project's lifecycle. During early design and planning, it supports the identification of behavior change objectives and the outlining of target groups. In the field research phase, it enables teams to systematically collect insights that reflect the complexity of real user experiences. During intervention development and testing, it helps translate these insights into targeted, context-sensitive actions or steer feature development by using them to communicate goals across multi-functional teams.

Lastly, in the monitoring and evaluation stages, the toolkit provides guidance for validating and refining personas as user needs, market conditions, and community dynamics evolve. Its structure aligns seamlessly with the joint process model for human-centered design and behavior change we outlined above. At the end of each chapter, you can find links to external resources to guide you further in exploring the Journey to excellent personas.

## 1.3. How this toolkit helps you

By using this toolkit, teams can:

- identify and develop realistic, behaviorally grounded personas that reflect the everyday experiences, aspirations and pain points, as well as decision-making patterns of real users.
- It enables the direct integration of **behavioral science** and **design thinking** into intervention design

Rather than relying on generic, one-size-fits-all approaches, the toolkit helps design tailored, locally resonant strategies that improve both uptake and sustainability of interventions. In doing so, it promotes empathetic programming and innovation design that respects local realities.

The toolkit also encourages continuous learning by providing mechanisms to validate and adapt personas based on new feedback and shifting community conditions ensuring your interventions remain relevant and impactful over time.

Throughout the toolkit, you'll find:

### Interactive Tools

Worksheets, checklists, and templates ready for immediate field use.

### GRACE's Reflection Prompts



Questions designed to critically assess your understanding and approach at every stage.



#### GRACE's quick tips for maximum impact

- Don't skip reflection prompts: They help ensure your personas stay grounded.
- Keep it practical: Test and validate personas regularly with local teams and users.
- Start small and iterate: You can start with personas today, in your office, and build iteratively stronger, more data-driven personas.

This toolkit is not intended as a theoretical report. Instead, it's a dynamic guide to embedding deep, behaviorally informed user understanding into your daily work, resulting in interventions that communities truly embrace and sustain.

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## Introducing Christine

Throughout this toolkit, you will encounter Christine. She serves as our example persona. By following the steps used to build her, you'll learn the process of creating your own personas.



Christine is a 32-year-old mother of two who lives in a peri-urban community. She cares about feeding her children healthy, safe food, but she's wary of packaged or processed products. Christine often prepares porridge for her kids, yet she hesitates to buy semi-processed versions because she doesn't fully trust the labels and worries about hidden additives.

She represents many mothers who juggle health goals, tight budgets, and limited access to clear information. Christine wants products she can trust, from sources or people she recognizes. She'll often ask other mums or trusted shop vendors before trying something new.



In each section of Christine, you can click on the "Next" button to follow her example.

**Next**



## 2. Define Objectives and Understand Your Users

Before diving into persona-building, you must have clear objectives and a deep initial understanding of the specific users you aim to serve. Persona-building isn't merely categorizing groups by age, income, or location; it's about uncovering why users behave the way they do, identifying their real-life challenges, their aspirations, and pinpointing opportunities to support meaningful behavior change aligned with your project objective.

### 2.1 Scoping Your Personas

The first step is to frame the right research question, one that is open and user-focused rather than narrowly solution-driven. The way you frame this question helps define the scope of your persona, determining which users, behaviors, and contexts you will study. At this stage, proto-personas, using long term working experience, can serve as a starting point. A clearly defined scope guides your research, making it more focused, manageable, and actionable.

The examples below illustrate how reframing research questions can shift your understanding of users and enable the scoping of personas.

Weak Research Questions	Open, User-focused Question	Examples for potential persona categories
How can we make farmers adopt improved seeds?	How do farmers decide on their seed selection?	Communal decision-maker: Waits for village meeting and does what the majority does. Early adopter: Will try out every new variety on a small plot to be innovative
How to reach farmers via SMS?	How do farmers receive and share information?	Traditional Mobile Desktop

## 2.2 Types of Personas

Depending on the identified scope and resources available (especially team time and field work budget), you can choose to create different types of personas. This will influence your data collection as well as the applicability of the results. This toolkit will focus on presenting classical personas, built on insights generated through qualitative research (interviews, focus groups, observation). For these, field research is paramount.



Knowing the reality of project work in development contexts in the Global South, we want to offer you different entry points to start working with Personas, where you are and with the resources and skills available:

### Proto-Personas

Proto-Personas are light-weight versions of Personas that use your assumptions and experience as starting point. They are a tool to communicate your current knowledge and vision of your users.

### Classical Personas

Classical Personas are built on qualitative data collected during field visits, interviews, or focus group discussions.

### Statistical Persona

Statistical Personas build on Classical Personas and are a way to integrate quantitative data.

### AI-Generated Personas

AI-Generated Personas are built through feeding your data into an AI tool, the analysis is done by the tool. Some tools offer interactive experiences of the personas built: you can interview them.

Here is an overview of the data the different persona types are built on.

Experience-based personas		Data-based personas		
	Proto-persona	Classical Persona	Statistical Persona	AI-generated Persona
<b>Data</b>	Team experience & assumptions	Qualitative data	First qualitative, then quantitative data	Combine qualitative and quantitative data
<b>Phase</b>	Gather	Assemble	Check	Check
<b>Resource investment</b>	Low	High	Very High	Low
<b>Persona skill level needed</b>	Beginner	Intermediate	Statistician or data scientist	Experienced in using GenAI tools & qualitative research analysis

## 2.3 Planning Your Persona Work

Clear planning ensures your persona work remains focused and manageable. Use this quick checklist to plan your research:



### Checklist for planning personas

- Problem statement**, or research question: Clearly defined behaviors you want to influence, problem you want to solve, or question you want to understand
- Audience**: Well-delineated primary user groups
- Hypotheses**: Key insights you need to understand about existing behavior
- Scope and type**: Which persona type is adequate for your resources and stage? How many users will you involve? How deeply? How wide geographically?
- Methods selection**: Desktop, qualitative, quantitative, or all approaches combined?

# What about Christine?

For Christine, we started with the following research question:

**What motivates mothers' decisions when selecting porridge for their children, and what would encourage them to consider semi-processed porridge?**



## Behavior of Interest

- Weekly purchase of porridge for children
- Consideration of semi-processed
- porridge as an alternative

## Notes

This frames the behaviour we want to explore, without assuming motivations or barriers in advance.

## Target group

- Mothers of primary school-aged children living in urban or peri-urban estates.
- Regular purchasers of porridge or equivalent breakfast staples managing tight household budgets

This is because, this is the group most directly affected by the problem and most likely to benefit from the solution.

Keep in mind, this is a starting slice, it will sharpen after Step 3.

## Persona & Sample Scope

- Behavioral persona (light, exploratory)
- 8–12 mothers across Athi River

We did not have survey, behavioural, or panel data.

A lighter, insight-driven persona is realistic and appropriate for early-stage, resource-conscious context. The sample is enough to detect patterns, not trends. Small enough to stay practical and affordable.

## Hypotheses

These are working guesses to guide exploration. They will be tested, refined, or discarded after real conversations. They are prompts for learning, not conclusions.

- **Decision-making is influenced by trusted people (e.g. kiosk vendors, neighbours, other mums).**
- **Label clarity shapes confidence**
- **Household budget constraints leads to risk aversion**
- **Children finicky habits is a risk factor**

## Method Selection

We need to understand motivations, social dynamics, and decision drivers. We need depth, not statistical precision, at this stage.

1. **Desktop review + light qualitative research**
2. **Desktop scan** for existing insights (nutrition programs, local buying patterns)
3. **Qualitative interviews** with 8–10 mothers
4. **Short ethnographic observation** (kiosk visits, shopping behaviours)
5. **Mini-activities** (e.g., showing packaging, simple choice tasks)

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Next



### Helpful resources for Scoping and Planning Personas:

By Nielsen & Norman Group:

How to scope your personas

Fully study guide on personas

Read the user personas module on:

CGIAR's UXtools4Ag



### 3. Gather Insights: Data Collection Methods

Personas can be created based either on prior experience and assumptions (protopersonas) or data (data-based personas).



#### Proto-personas

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Proto-personas are a lightweight form of personas created ad-hoc with no new research. They look and feel just like classical personas, but instead of being built on rigorous research, they're crafted from your team's collective knowledge, hunches, and existing insights. This makes them the perfect starting point to reveal information gaps and kickstart meaningful user research, like planning interviews, digging into secondary data, or heading out for field observations.

To create the data for Protopersonas, start by gathering your team and stakeholders in a collaborative workshop. Write down all your assumptions and any existing data about who your users are, how they interact with your product, and what motivates them - this could include prior research or even anecdotal evidence from the team's experience. Once you have noted down your assumptions, proceed just like with real data - create clusters and visualize these insights, giving your Protopersonas a human face and story that everyone can connect with.

#### Data-based personas

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For all personas based on field data, once you've clearly defined your objectives and identified your priority user groups, the next critical step is gathering insights from the field. Full qualitative personas are built from rich, authentic data not generalizations. Your goal here is to understand deeply why your users behave as they do, and what drives or constrains their actions.

This section guides you through selecting appropriate data collection methods, ensuring your insights are behaviorally grounded and reflective of real community experiences.

## 3.1 Choose the Right Methods

Your persona insights should combine multiple data sources, ideally both qualitative and quantitative, to give you the clearest picture possible.

### Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods are well suited to answer questions about the “how” and “why”. Use qualitative methods to uncover deeper motivations, emotional drivers, and contextual nuances:

#### In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

Conduct one-on-one conversations to gather attitudinal data on personal beliefs, aspirations, experiences, and decision-making patterns. Note that all attitudinal data is what people tell you about their thoughts, actions and motives. This might be very much influenced by what they feel you want to hear, is socially adequate etc. Example question ["Can you tell me about how you decide which fruits and vegetables to buy each week?"](#)

#### Risk Perceptions

Even seemingly beneficial practices may appear risky if they threaten immediate livelihoods. Farmers may stick to lower-yielding but familiar practices due to fear of loss or uncertainty.

#### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Facilitate group discussions to uncover social norms, peer influences, support systems, and shared community perceptions. Example scenario: discuss in a group: ["What are your thoughts when you see a neighbor using new farming techniques?"](#)

#### Observational Methods

Directly observe behaviors in real-life contexts to identify what users actually do, not just what they say. Apply methods like behavioral mapping and journey mapping to gain insights into users' experiences along a journey and interactions with physical environments. Example observation: Observe how the community forage various indigenous fruits and vegetables and why they value it.

## Small Scope Test

Run small tests using prototypes of your solution/intervention, or use existing competitor solutions to collect behavioral data, observing people's interaction with it and learning about their actual choices and moments of despair or delight.



What people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things.

— Margaret Mead —

AZ QUOTES

Margaret Mead, famous social anthropologist on behavioral & attitudinal data

Source: [AZ Quotes](#)



### GRACE's quick tips for maximum impact

- Test your questions with colleagues and friends!
- Use AI to inspire you on more interview questions and to critically review your questions for objectivity and openness



### To ensure robust qualitative research, it's important to address common biases:

- Apply the 80/20 rule to focus on the most relevant data.
- Monitor body language to avoid influencing participants.
- Maintain professional rapport without crossing into friendship.
- Cross-check user statements with observations.
- Focus on present experiences rather than distant past events.
- Include third-party perspectives to reduce individual bias.
- Avoid over-researching beforehand to prevent preconceived notions.

## Sample sizes for qualitative persona interviews, observations or tests:

Qualitative methods could use rolling samples - interview rounds of 4 people per subtype until saturation point. Saturation point is the point in qualitative data analysis (see below) when your coding and categorizing does not produce any new output. In selecting your respondents, go back to your research question and/or intervention objective, and create hypotheses on which social clusters (groups around age, gender, or place of residence) matter for your sample. Make sure to include all relevant groups.



### Note on personas built solely on qualitative data:

Depending on the stage of your project, personas built on qualitative data might be enough. Studies show that insights tend to reach a plateau even below 10 tests or interviews. If you feel you have discovered a pattern, it might be enough to create empathy and inspire you for first design exercises and prototype building.

[Read more](#)

## Quantitative Methods & Secondary Data

With quantitative methods you can gather data talking about the “when” and “how many”. Use quantitative or secondary data to validate and contextualize qualitative insights, ensuring your personas represent broader user groups:

### Surveys

Capture larger-scale attitudes and behaviors clearly and consistently. Note that this, too, is attitudinal data and talks only to some extent about real-world behavior. Example survey item: "On a scale of 1–5, how much do you trust information from agricultural extension workers?"

### Secondary Data

Analyze existing research reports or demographic data to contextualize your qualitative insights, identify trends and behaviors at scale. Example data source: Market research reports on crop yields and farmer income patterns.

## Adapting to Low-Literacy or Low-Connectivity Settings

Rural communities often face barriers such as low literacy or limited digital connectivity. It's crucial that your data collection methods remain accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.

## GRACE's Quick tips for maximum impact



- **Use Visual Aids** and Storyboards: In interviews and focus groups, allow participants to point, discuss, or indicate their choices visually.
- **Shorten and Simplify Questions:** Avoid jargon and overly academic phrasing in interviews and surveys. Ask clear, open-ended questions.
- **Observe Real Behaviors/Shadowing:** In contexts where surveys or interviews are difficult, directly observing user interactions can provide powerful insights.
- **Involving local community facilitators:** for focus groups to create a familiar environment
- **Bottom up data collection methods:** like participatory video, where participants tell their own stories about their lives
- **Consider role play activities and games:** to understand behavior types, skill levels and attitudes toward specific questions, e.g. buying decisions or knowledge about statistical concepts

## Building Trust and Openness

High-quality data depends on the trust and openness of your respondents. To foster trust:

### Clarify roles and context

"We are a research team from institute XYZ, exploring opportunities for AI-powered decision support tools."

### Clearly communicate your purpose

"We want to learn how best to support your farming decisions. There's no right or wrong answer."

### Act local

Local facilitators improve the openness of respondents due to familiarity and shared context.

### Think about social hierarchies

Social hierarchies that might influence peoples' answers and try different settings for focus group discussions

## Anonymity and privacy

Ensure anonymity and privacy clearly and repeatedly: Remind respondents their identities and opinions will remain confidential. Offer options to opt out at any point of the research.

## Be gender sensitive

When interviewing women respondents, additional sensitivities may need to be considered. For example, scheduling around school times for children, ensuring cultural appropriateness in interviewer–respondent dynamics (such as not having a man interview a woman in certain contexts), and creating safe, comfortable environments for participation.

## No wrong answers

Confirm that there are no wrong answers.

## Social appreciation

Offer responsible and ethical incentives.



## Helpful resources on data collection for personas

How to make your Personas more scientific:

Measuring U Blog

How to calculate your sample size in qualitative studies:

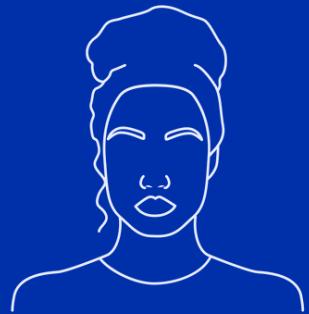
User Interviews



Sometimes people say what they think you want to hear. To balance that, watch what they actually do. For example, which brand they buy or which label they point to.

# What about Christine?

We planned field data collection via focus group discussions since the topic is not sensitive. We want to see how mothers agree, disagree, and influence each other. Norms, rumours, and shared beliefs matter for trust in food products.



## Focus Group Discussions



- 2 FGDs
- 4–6 mothers per group (total 8–12) in the target estates
- Built-in activity: Show 2–3 real porridge packages. Ask mothers to sort them from “most trust” to “least trust” and explain why

## Observations

- We will observe mothers at local kiosks/shops during regular buying times: What they look at, what they ask, where they hesitate, what they finally choose.
- This helps us see which cues matter (icons, colour, text, brand, vendor reputation).

## Field preparation

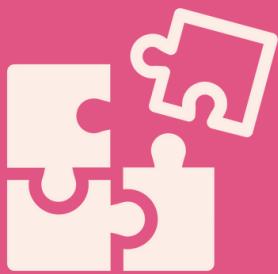
- Secondary data / expert input (to shape our tools):
- Checked for existing reports or program notes on: how often families use packaged foods, any known concerns about additives or processed foods.
- Where no written data was available, we spoke to: a local nutrition officer, and 1–2 experienced kiosk vendors to understand common questions mothers ask about packaged foods.



## Field Logistics

- Facilitators:** local female facilitators who speak the local language.
- Venue:** community hall / school / church space close to where mothers live.
- Scheduling:** mid-morning or early afternoon (after school drop-off / before evening chores).
- Recording:** with consent, we'll take notes + audio recording for analysis.
- Incentives:** small refreshment or transport support, clearly explained up front.

Next



# 4. Synthesize and Segment: Building Persona Clusters

After gathering your data, your next critical step is to synthesize it into clear, meaningful clusters. Effective personas aren't built directly from raw interview transcripts or survey data. Instead, you first identify behavioral patterns and shared motivations, then cluster them into user groups that reflect real-world decision-making.

This section guides you through practical steps for synthesizing insights, spotting patterns, creating meaningful clusters, and avoiding common pitfalls like over-segmentation.

## 4.1 Synthesizing Insights from Data

To begin, carefully review your notes, transcripts, and survey results. You want to identify recurring themes, phrases, behaviors, and motivations that emerge consistently. Here's how:

### 1. Review transcript and notes

Highlight key quotes, recurring motivations, and frequently mentioned challenges.

### 2. Extract core themes

Common examples:

- Price sensitivity ("It's affordable, but does it really work?")
- Trust and social influence ("I trust it when neighbors try it first.")
- Risk perception ("If it fails, I could lose my entire harvest.")

### 3. Group & sort

Highlight key quotes, recurring motivations, and frequently mentioned challenges.

There are different ways to approach Step 2 - **Coding**.



## Inductive coding

Inductive coding implies reviewing the texts, noting repeating themes and creating codes from this. It involves a repetitive scanning of texts and going back and forth until you feel you have captured all underlying themes referring to your research question. Inductive coding is great for exploratory research or times when you want to come up with new theories, ideas or concepts.

## Deductive coding

Deductive coding starts with a set of codes (they can be expressions of your research question) and checks where and how they are represented in the texts you are analyzing. No new codes are added. Deductive coding works well in more fixed settings, e.g. program evaluations, where the criteria of analysis are predetermined.

“Think of qualitative coding like exploring a new city. Deductive coding is like following a set itinerary to popular spots, while inductive coding is like combing the streets to discover new places as you explore.”

DELVETOOL

## 4.2 Spotting Meaningful Patterns

Effective clustering goes beyond simple demographic or geographic groupings. Behavioral personas are strongest when built on deeper psychological, social, or economic motivations. Look for:

### Risk and Uncertainty Patterns

Do some farmers consistently show caution or risk-taking behavior?

## Social Influence Patterns

Do certain individuals rely heavily on community approval, while others are more individualistic?

## Decision Patterns

How strongly do budget constraints or financial incentives drive decisions?

### Examples:

Mothers prioritized price-per-serving and nutritional content over convenience or familiarity, reflecting a preference for budget-conscious, health-driven decisions for their children.

Younger urban workers prioritized convenience and time-saving over nutritional content or traditional preparation methods, aligning with fast-paced lifestyles and limited cooking time.

Field-level extensionists preferred learning opportunities they could access offline, on their long drives from their urban offices to the villages they serve. They were looking for compact, mobile-friendly learning modules for the time they spent in the car.

## 4.3 Creating Clusters - Affinity Mapping

Now you organize insights into manageable, meaningful clusters (ideally 3–5). Each cluster should represent users sharing common motivations, challenges, or behaviors.

To do this, you can write each larger topic on sticky notes and cluster them on a wall. Once all items are grouped, label each cluster with a concise, descriptive theme that captures the essence of the group. Finally, use these clusters to identify key insights, patterns, or next steps for your project or research

## 4.4 How to avoid over-segmentation and biases during synthesis

While segmentation is essential, creating too many clusters can overwhelm your team and dilute actionable insights. Aim for no more than five strong persona clusters:



Too broad: "Farmers in general"

Too narrow: "Farmers who plant maize on Tuesdays"

It is important that your segments answer your initial research question, design challenge or behavior change objective.

When dealing with adoption of new practices or products, one way to cluster could be to group users based on their readiness to adopt:

Adoption Category	Behavioral Traits	Design Focus
Early Adopters	Already motivated, open to new ideas, may serve as local champions	Leverage as influencers or peer educators
On-the-Fence Users	Interested but hesitant, need proof, examples, or incentives to shift behavior	Use nudges, testimonials, clear benefit framing
Late Adopters	Risk-averse, skeptical, or resource-constrained; prefer routines	Provide reassurance, support systems, and incentives
Special Segments	Groups with unique dynamics (e.g., youth, gender-specific roles, informal leaders)	Tailor outreach and content to their context

This framing can guide teams toward forming 3–5 meaningful clusters based on readiness, needs, and social positioning, rather than arbitrary demographics or psychographics.



These aren't scientific categories. They help us understand the different attitudes and motivations towards our research question, and ultimately design better messages and test different approaches.

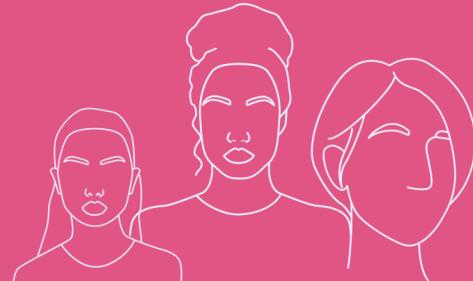
### Checklist for Strong Clusters:



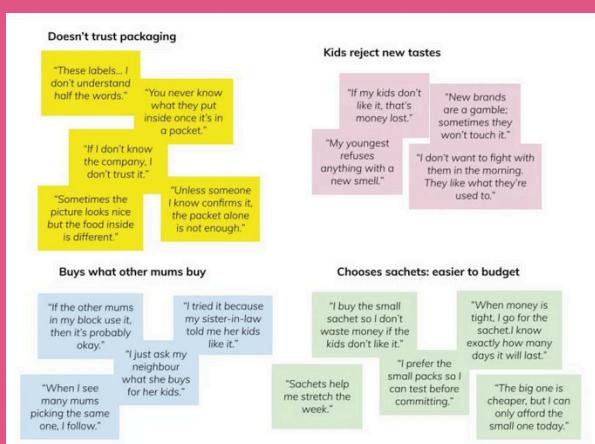
- Does each cluster reflect clear, distinct behavioral or attitude types? Good clusters focus on the largest distinguishing attributes between groups of people.
- Are clusters actionable and clearly linked to a research question or potential interventions?
- Are clusters few enough to remain manageable?

## What about Christine?

After talking to and observing the target group and others, we spread everything out on a board. You don't need fancy tools: sticky notes, markers, or even bottle caps work.



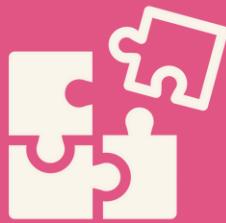
### Clustering



We grouped reactions and statements on sticky notes and found 3 main groups:

- **Cautious Christine:** needs proof it's safe for kids.
- **Busy Brenda:** cares most about convenience.
- **Saver Sarah:** focuses on price and quantity.

Next



## 5. Create Vivid Persona Profiles

Personas aren't just user descriptions, they're tools that help your team focus, empathize, and design solutions that feel real. Done well, a persona becomes a reference point for decisions across research, intervention design, communication, and evaluation.

This section helps you design fully fleshed-out personas, highlighting their day-to-day realities, motivations, challenges, and aspirations.

### 5.1 Create Vivid Persona Profiles

The selected components should align with the research question, project objectives or target behavioral outcomes to ensure they are both relevant and actionable. Personas are at their core a communication tool for your research (or a first summary of your assumptions) meant to create alignment in multi-disciplinary teams. Design your persona with your target audience in mind.

**Must have** components for every persona

Name and Background: Briefly describe who they are, where they live, their daily responsibilities.

Core Behavioral Motivation: Summarize clearly their main drivers, fears, or aspirations in a single compelling sentence.

Key Challenges or Barriers (call-outs): Clearly highlight their main obstacles or concerns.

Direct User Quote (from your field research): Capture authentic voice clearly reflecting their beliefs or concerns.

**Nice to have** components depending on your question or objective

Influences and Communication Channels: Identify how they get information and who influences their decisions.

Skill Levels for key expertise fields (e.g. breeding knowledge, or digital literacy)

Typical Day/Scenario (storytelling): Describe a realistic scenario illustrating how their behavior plays out daily.



### Reflection Prompt



Does your persona feel authentic and relatable enough for your team to clearly imagine designing solutions for them?

## 5.2 Visuals for personas

Select the template that suits your audience:

- Do you need a first impression for the team to start discussing user needs in depth?
  - Use a simple visualization summarizing your insights on slides
- Do you need a detailed guide on a specific question to develop a service, product or intervention?
  - Use a more sophisticated template on Canvas, a digital whiteboard, or Figma
- Prioritize visual clarity over complexity

Use templates on:



Figma



Miro



Canva



Power Point

## 5.3 Avoiding common pitfalls

Personas can be more confusing than helpful if they are too complex, confusing or communicated badly.

Mistake

Listing static demographics instead of behavior

Too many personas

Too many details

Fix

Focus on decisions, motivations, and constraints

Keep it to 3–5 max, each clearly distinct in behavior

Focus on what is relevant to answer your research question

# What about Christine?



## Christine

### ○ The Cautious Buyer

Name	Christine
Age	32
Occupation	Housewife
Location	Machakos

### ○ Motivations

- Social proof
- Clear, easy packaging cues
- Vendor testimonials
- Low-risk options

### ○ Quote

"If my neighbour's kids like it and the label is simple, I'll try it."

### ○ Goals & Needs

- Provide safe, healthy food her children will reliably eat
- Avoid wasting money on products that might go unused
- Feel confident choosing between packaged and semi-processed options
- Rely on trusted information, not confusing claims or ingredients

### ○ Challenges

- Confusion or doubt when reading complex ingredient lists
- Fear of buying something her kids may reject due to taste
- Strong reliance on peer reassurance, which can delay adoption
- Balancing healthy choices with tight, weekly budgeting

### ○ Opportunities

- Access to familiar kiosk vendor whose recommendations she values
- Lives in a community where mothers actively share experiences and advice
- Increasing exposure to clearer packaging icons and claims
- Open to trying new products if trust is established first



## Busy Brenda

### ○ The Busy Buyer

Goals	save time on busy mornings
Challenges	long routines rushing to school
Opportunities	needs breakfast solutions, likes quick preparation



## Saver Sarah

### ○ The Safe Buyer

Goals	make safe food choices for her kids
Challenges	misleading ingredients, kids rejecting the taste
Opportunities	checks labels carefully, asks other moms for advice

With goals, fears and habits being different, this helps you identify **how design needs adapt according to the user**. Examples are:

1. What you highlight on the packaging (i.e. Christine needs trust cues, while Brenda needs speed cues)
2. What trial formats work best (i.e. Christine, small sachets reduce risk of wasting money if kids reject it, while for Brenda, multi-packs help her plan the week and avoid morning stress)

Next



# 6. Apply in Design: Linking Personas to Action

Creating personas is only the beginning; their real value comes when you use them to inform intervention design, communication, and strategic decisions. This section walks you through how to translate persona insights into practical actions using behavioral science, real-world mapping, and design tools.

## 6.1 Behavior Change: Reconnect Personas to Behavior Goals

Go back to the target behavior identified in Section 3. For each persona, ask:

- What exactly do we want this persona to start doing, do more of, or stop doing?
- What friction or trigger points showed up in their story?
- Example: Christine (Wellness Mom)
  - → Goal behavior: Buy semi-processed porridge weekly
  - → Current friction: Doesn't trust labeling, wants peer proof



Are you designing for the real reason the behavior isn't happening (not just awareness)?

## 6.2 Human Centered Design: Brainstorm & Prioritize features with your Personas

With the help of your persona, you can start understanding the state of the art of the challenge you are designing for. In each phase of the HCD process, personas can help us to converge, define, and prioritize. You can use Personas to

### Crazy 8s

Focus on one persona and develop 8 ideas (they can be crazy) how your service or product or intervention could help them. Try out new angles and entry points.

## Prioritization

Prioritize feature ideas or program activities by ranking them as per their usefulness to your different Personas

## User Journey

Design a whole User Journey outlining how your Personas would be (or is, if your product exists already) using the service you are offering step by step. This is a great way to step into your users' shoes and see what you're building through their eyes. E.g. How would a busy project manager navigate your advisory dashboard? What would be pain points and moments of delight, given what you know about their habits and skills? How would that differ from how an extension agent in the field checks into your service, navigates to where he or she wants to go, and applies what they find in reality? And, most important: how can you create a successful experience for both these personas?

## 6.3 Communication: Design Messaging Based on Personas

Each persona thinks and reacts differently, and has different communication channels in their daily life. Messages that work for one segment may backfire for another. Here's how to tailor communication using the personas you've developed.

### Messaging Framer

Who are you speaking to?	Jamo, convenience-seeker	Shawn, fitness-guru
Mental shortcut	"Time is money"	"My body is my temple."
Message angle	"This porridge is ready in 2 minutes."	"This porridge holds 80% of your recommended protein intake"
Best messenger	His kiosk vendor	An instagram story



### GRACE's Quick tips for maximum impact

- ✓ Use peer voices, not official slogans
- ✓ Match language level and tone to persona
- ✓ Be honest about trade-offs (e.g., taste vs nutrition)

## 6.4 Strategy: Connect to Program Design

Each insight from your persona should guide all design decisions made around your product, service or intervention. Here is an example:

Design Lever	Persona-Informed Strategy
Product Packaging	Label with visible “child-safe” icons for Christine
Pricing Strategy	Offer sachets or bundle discounts (budget shopper)
Training/Outreach	Use community radio with relatable stories for rural farmers
Rollout Timing	Sync trials with religious gatherings or harvest cycles
Delivery Channel	Sell via trusted local retailers, not supermarkets



### Checklist:

- Are your value propositions tied directly to persona beliefs or constraints?
- Is your delivery method trusted and accessible to your user?
- Do you consider all aspects of meeting your persona in real life? (E.g. packing, pricing, communication channel etc.)

# Developing ideas with Christine in mind:

What's holding her back?

**Lack of trust and social proof.**

**What to try:**

- At the shelf: “Mums in this estate prefer this” tag; vendor testimonial card.
- On the pack: Big “No additives” pictogram and short ingredient list.
- In promotion: A coupon for first-time buyers and smaller, one-serve sachets to reduce risk.



**Christine**

○ The Cautious Buyer

**In communication:**

- Who: Christine
- Angle: “Kid-safe, mum-approved.”
- Messenger: Vendor or WhatsApp voice note from another mum

**Journey:**



**Next**



# 7. Validate and Refine Your Personas

Creating personas is not a one-time task. As projects evolve, market dynamics shift, or new user feedback emerges, your personas should adapt too. This section guides you through how to test, validate, and update your personas to ensure they stay accurate and useful.

## 7.1 Why Validate (or Update)?

Even well-crafted personas can become outdated or drift from field realities. Persona types like Protopersonas are even meant to be only a starting point for you to go out and validate your assumptions.

Common risks of holding on too long to personas include:

- Teams using personas that no longer reflect community dynamics
- Personas shaped by early assumptions, not actual user input
- Using personas created for a specific question or objective as general archetypes for every purpose



### Selfcheck:

- Are we still observing the behaviors or attitudes we attributed to each persona?
- Are personas still informing design decisions?
- Do field teams or stakeholders find them believable?
- Are we still trying to solve the issue we initially created personas for?
- Do we see significant market changes or shifts in industry trends?
- Do we see noticeable shifts in user demographics or factors influencing behaviors?

One clear trigger for updating personas is when you are scaling your intervention, product or service - as your project grows, so should your personas. That doesn't mean starting from scratch each time, it means localizing and adapting what already works.



### Scaling Checklist

- Are you entering a region with different languages or norms?
- Are there new actors (e.g., youth vendors, digital-first farmers)?
- Are trust channels or decision dynamics different?



### Localization Checklist

- Run internal and external persona validations as explained below. Run interviews to test the assumptions underlying your current personas.
- Adjust messaging and media preferences by audience (e.g., radio in rural vs. WhatsApp in peri-urban).
- Add sub-personas or layered scenarios (e.g., “Christine in a drought-affected zone”).

## 7.2. Internal Validation: Team and Stakeholder Review

Start by reviewing personas with your internal team and partners.



### Internal Review Questions

- Does this persona reflect what we're seeing in the field?
- Would this persona respond to our intervention design challenge or research question?
- Is there any behavior, belief, or constraint missing?

“What can I learn from Christine about how to target my communication strategy? / Does the persona contain an answer to the questions I have?”

## 7.3 Field Validation: Community Feedback

Validation isn't complete without the voice of real users. Here's how to return to the field to test personas with community members (this should be your first step when starting with Proto-personas):

### Light-Touch Field Validation

Bring	Ask
Summarized persona story cards and share with local participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Does this sound like someone you know?”</li><li>“What part of this story feels true or untrue?”</li><li>“Is there anything missing?”</li></ul>
Where to validate	
Use trusted community intermediaries (e.g. local extension officers, vendors, Community health workers)	
Hold short feedback sessions at the market, during home visits, or community group meetings	



### Checklist for field validation

- Did you use participant language and phrasing?
- Have you incorporated diverse respondent perspectives (gender, location)?
- Did you note all suggested updates clearly?

## 7.4 Quantitative Validation

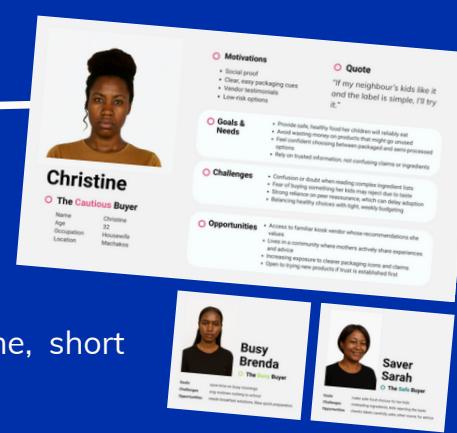
If you have built qualitative personas first, quantifying your insights is a great way to validate your insights on “how” and “why” with numbers - how many people share the behavior, motivation, pain point or need you found?

Usually people build surveys with questions building on your qualitative insights.

# What about Christine?

## Light touch field validation

- We brought simple persona story cards with: name, short story, goals, barriers, daily routine snippet, influences



## Participants

- 10 mothers across different estates in Machakos
- 2 kiosk vendors
- 1 community health volunteer
- 1 local shop owner who knows mothers' buying patterns

## Location & Logistics

- Kiosk counters, market areas, home visit moments, women's saving group meeting.
- Used trusted intermediaries (e.g. kiosk vendor, community health volunteer, women's group leader etc.)

## Questions

Does this sound like someone you know?

Which part is true for mothers? What does not really fit?

What is missing about how mothers make decisions when buying porridge or snacks?

## Insights Confirmed

"Yes, many women don't trust labels. We always ask each other first."

"Mornings are hectic. We grab something quick before our kids get late."

"At the end of the month we buy the cheapest one."

## Insights Changed

"Not many mums listen to radio now. WhatsApp is more common."

"Sometimes we don't have time to check the label. We just ask quickly."

## Missing insights (Added)

- "Children refusing the taste is a big issue, please include it."
- "Some mums get ideas from TikTok videos, not only neighbours."

Next



## 8. Next Steps and Practical Advice

Personas are only as useful as how well they're embedded in your everyday decisions. This final section highlights how to carry your persona work forward across new phases, partners, and geographies while staying grounded in behavioral science and community voice.

### 8.1 Recap: What Good Persona Use Looks Like

Strong persona use goes beyond documentation, it creates a behavioral lens that shapes how teams think, plan, and act. When personas are built and used effectively, teams can clearly articulate why users behave the way they do, not just describe what they do. Each intervention, message, or design decision is anchored in specific persona insights, ensuring user-centeredness and behavioral relevance. Field teams find the personas familiar, relatable, and actionable. Most importantly, personas are continuously tested, validated, and refined as new feedback emerges, ensuring they remain aligned with community realities and evolving project goals.

### 8.2 Avoid Common Pitfalls

#### Do's

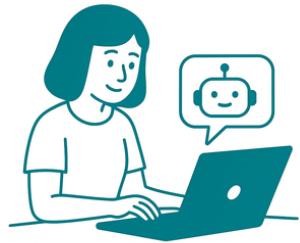
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- A **cross-functional team** will help you see all sides of the challenge plus create ownership in your team. Invite marketing and engineering as well!
- **Invite leadership** to key points in your persona-creation process. Ask them to come as observers during data collection or prioritize findings with you. They will make or break your personas.
- Make them **part of daily planning and monitoring**.
- Keep 3–5 strong, distinct personas. Focus on **action, not description**.
- Every persona should make you ask: “What motivates them? What stops them?”
- **Reality-check** your personas with community voices — not just internal guesses.

## Don'ts

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- Build personas only with the social science team.
- Deliver your personas when done.
- Treat personas as reports, not a communication & alignment tool.
- Too much segmentation, too little action.
- Personas without behavior.
- Skipping validation.



## 8.3. A Word on AI-generated Personas (“Synthetic Users”)

With the growth of Large Language Models (LLMs) in processing text inputs, some researchers have turned to their agents to generate User Personas.

### Ways of using AI in Persona creation

Research assistant to support your coding process: AI agents like ChatGPT can assist your coding process by providing rapid, surface-level insights, such as suggesting codes or interview questions. However, it struggles with nuanced, culturally dependent interpretations. AI is better suited for deductive coding and initial brainstorming, but human researchers remain essential for deeper, context-aware analysis. In this sense, AI serves as a helpful research assistant, not a replacement for human interpretation.

By creating synthetic user personas for you to interact with: Tools like Synthetic Users offer you to create virtual personas based on your input, with whom you can endlessly chat, review your product or intervention ideas. Synthetic users are useful for generating hypotheses, but not as final guides to your design decisions. They should enhance, not replace your research.

### Why AI generated Personas are to be taken with a grain of salt:

- Personas are built first and foremost on qualitative data analysis, which is inherently a process of interpretation using all our human skills: creativity, empathy, context awareness. AI will not be able to pick up subtle, between-the-lines meaning or induce (culturally dependent) context-based meaning.
- Personas are training for your team's empathy muscle! If you let AI do the most important learning part, you run the risk of creating personas no one is actually involved in, or related to. They will be less valuable, and easier to set aside while they are a prime entry point for user-centeredness.
- Especially for sensitive topics or vulnerable users, you risk a breach of privacy if feeding free AI agents like ChatGPT with your interview data.

## 8.4 Your Project's Next Steps

Completing the persona-building process is only the beginning. To ensure personas remain a living part of your project's strategy, it's critical to plan for their ongoing integration, use, and refinement.

### Step 1

Begin by establishing a regular review cycle to determine how often your team will revisit and update the personas to reflect emerging data and shifting community dynamics.

### Step 2

Assign clear ownership for persona maintenance, whether within the MEL team, design unit, or broader program team, so that iteration becomes a shared responsibility.

### Step 3

Communicate your personas by posters, one-pagers, during brown bag presentations, in a research newsletter, in a show and tell exhibition, or in short video clips!

### Step 4

Use your personas' names in user stories, when writing problem or need statements, so that you keep relating to them and target your product, service or intervention design towards their goals and aspirations.

### Step 5

Ensure personas are stored in a centralized, easily accessible location, enabling all stakeholders to reference them during design, implementation, and evaluation phases.

Most importantly, think ahead about how personas can shape future research priorities, funding proposals, and policy engagement efforts. When embedded thoughtfully, personas can evolve from static tools into strategic assets that deepen empathy, sharpen focus, and strengthen behavioral outcomes across the life of your project.

# What about Christine?

As the project expands into Tanzania, the team revisits Christine to check whether her story still fits mothers in the new context.

## What the team reviewed:

- Do Tanzanian mothers shop in the same places?
- Do they trust the same people (vendors, neighbours, WhatsApp groups)?
- Do they face similar barriers around labels, additives, or counterfeit fears?
- Are their routines similar, especially morning food preparation?



After further investigation, differences meant the **original Christine**, heavily vendor-influenced, **needed adaptation**.



## Early insights

Many Tanzanian mums still buy from kiosks and small shops, but in peri-urban Dar es Salaam some already:

- use WhatsApp bulk-buying groups
- order via delivery riders
- share product reviews in local mum groups
- follow influencers for food tips

## Concrete updates

- Added a **Kiswahili version** of the label explanation
- Adjusted **icons** for lower literacy settings
- **Removed channels** that were less relevant (e.g., Kenyan radio shows)
- **Added TikTok/short-form videos** for the urban audience
- Collected five new audio voice notes from real Tanzanian mums and **integrated** into **Whatsapp text messages**
- Adapted scripts to **local expressions**
- Added examples of “**what other mums say here**”
- Created **two versions**: supermarket promoter + kiosk vendor



## Ongoing check-ins

Every 6 months, the team asks:

- Does Christine still represent the main group we're designing for?
- Have new behaviors emerged (e.g., new apps, new concerns)?
- Are any parts of her story feeling outdated? etc.



## GRACE's closing words:

Most importantly, **think ahead** about how personas can shape future research priorities, funding proposals, and policy engagement efforts. When embedded thoughtfully, personas can evolve from static tools into **strategic assets** that deepen empathy, sharpen focus, and strengthen behavioral outcomes across the life of your project.

