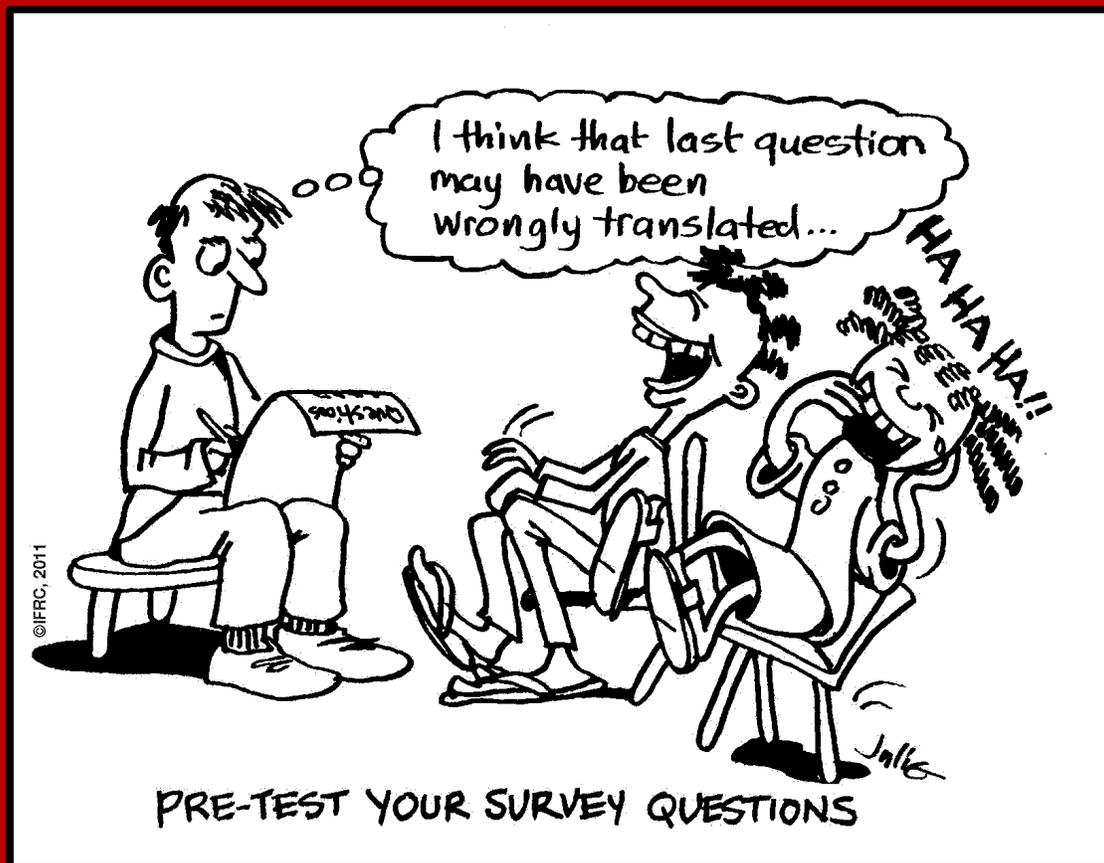


# Baseline Basics

(Reviewer's note: I suggest we commission a cartoon conveying that there is not just one way to do a survey. But for now, this one from our library seemed suitable.)

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## 1. Purpose & audience of this guide

This guide is intended to support NS and other IFRC project<sup>1</sup> teams and stakeholders to conduct reliable and useful baseline studies that help better measure and deliver services to those in need. It is meant to be succinct, but with enough information to practically guide the user to plan for and implement a baseline study, pointing to additional resources for further reference. Feedback is welcome, and can be sent to [PED@IFRC.org](mailto:PED@IFRC.org).



Recognize the guide to the left? If not, you should! It is the [IFRC Project/Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), and it is an important resource to complement this guide, with further information key monitoring and evaluation (M&E) topics. The guide and other IFRC planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (PMER) resources can be found at [www.ifrc.org/mande](http://www.ifrc.org/mande).

## 2. What is a baseline?

A “baseline” refers to measurements of key conditions (indicators) before a project begins, from which change and progress can be assessed. Sometimes baseline data is available, other times a baseline study is needed to determine baseline conditions. As this guide highlights, there are a variety of different scenarios for and ways to conduct baseline studies. The specific methodology will depend on a variety of project-specific factors, ranging from specific indicators to time and budget.

Using baseline data may actually be more common than you think! For example, you may record your weight prior to a diet to monitor your progress and later determine whether your diet made any difference.



<sup>1</sup> “Project” will be used throughout this guide, but the concepts in this guide apply as well to programs (typically consisting of multiple projects at a larger scale and duration) and other similar service delivery interventions using baseline studies.

In addition to “baseline,” there are other related terms that are important to understand relative to baselines. **Table 1** below defines key concepts useful to understand when working with baselines:

<b>TABLE 1: Useful Terms to Understand</b>		
<b>Terms</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Further explanations</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	Data that measures conditions (appropriate indicators) before project start for later comparison .	Baseline data provides a historical point of reference to: 1) inform program planning, such as target setting, and 2) monitor and evaluation change for program implementation and impact assessment.
<b>Baseline Study</b>	Data collection and analysis exercise to determine the baseline conditions (indicators).	If resources are invested into a baseline study, it is important to budget and plan for an <i>endline study</i> of the same baseline conditions (indicators) using the same methodology for reliable comparison.
<b>Needs Assessment<sup>2</sup></b>	Exercise to identify if and what needs exist, and inform how to best address such needs.	A needs assessment is different from a baseline study. A needs assessment identifies needs, and informs whether and how to intervene (the project design); A baseline study measures specific conditions after a project has been designed, based on the indicators (e.g. in the logframe). Data from needs assessments may be used in a baseline study, but only if it reliably captures the relevant conditions.
<b>Evaluation</b>	Exercise to reflect upon and judges the worth (value) of what has been done.	A baseline study is not an evaluation, but can be an important part of an evaluation, providing important data to measure change and assess performance.
<b>Target</b>	The specific, planned level of result to be achieved (e.g. for an indicator) within an explicit timeframe.	Targets are critical to motivate the project team, establish clear expectations, and compare with actual performance to assess and adjust project implementation. A baseline value for an indicator is not a target, but helps to inform realistic target setting.
<b>Benchmark</b>	A target to based on an existing industry standard, minimum requirement, or best practice. A benchmark can be used to help set a specific indicator target, and to compare and assess the indicator performance (against industry standards).	While a baseline measures the actual conditions (indicators) prior to implementation, a benchmark is an industry-recognized reference point or standard against for the indicator. Like a baseline measurement, a benchmark can be used to: 1) help set a specific indicator target, 2) compare with and assess indicator performance. However, they are different. For example, a baseline value for an indicator measuring actual water availability following a disaster may be .5 litres per person per day, while the benchmark is 1.5 litres, (based on the international <a href="#">Sphere Standards</a> ).

### 3. Why is baseline data important?

Without baseline data, it can be very difficult to plan, monitor and evaluate future performance. Baseline data help to set achievable and realistic indicator targets for each level of result in a project’s design (e.g. logframe), and then determine and adjust progress towards these targets and their respective results. Additional reasons for conducting baseline studies include:

- ü **Inform project management decision-making**, providing a reference point to determine progress and adjust project implementation to best serve people in need.
- ü **Assess measurability of the selected indicators** and fine tune the systems for future measurement.
- ü **Uphold accountability**, informing impact evaluation to compare and measure what difference the project is making.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to IFRC’s own needs assessment resources, such as [vulnerability capacity assessments \(VCAs\)](#) and the [Guidelines for Assessment in Emergencies](#), readers may be interested in the World Bank’s “[A Guide to Assessing Needs](#).”

- ü **Promote stakeholder participation**, providing a catalyst for discussion and motivation among community members and project partners on the most appropriate means of action.
- ü **Shape expectations and communication strategies** by assisting by sharpening communication objectives, and focusing content of media materials.
- ü **Convince and provide justification** to policy-makers and donors for a project intervention.
- ü **Support resource mobilization for and celebration** of accomplished project results compared to baseline conditions.
- ü If conducted properly, baseline results can be generalized and used to **inform service delivery for communities with similar characteristics**.

#### 4. Is a baseline study necessary, and if so what kind?

Before embarking on a baseline study, it is first important to determine whether one is really require, and if so, Step 1 in the Checklist for Baseline Planning (below) discusses the importance to determine the purpose and scope of the baseline study. We recommend consulting expertise if needed, such as the PMER resource people in your IFRC zone or regional office. The table below summarizes four common scenarios for obtaining baseline data to help you consider baseline studies.

No Study Needed	<p><b>Sometimes the baseline data is already known.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, the indicator value may be known to be "0" prior to the project start. For instance, with an indicator for a disaster preparedness project, "# of communities that have conducted a vulnerability capacity assessment," it may already be known that none of the communities have conducted a VCA.</li> <li>○ Sometimes baseline data is already available from secondary data, such as the project needs assessment or other reliable external resources.</li> </ul>
"Light" Study Needed	<p><b>Sometimes the number of baseline indicators and the methods to measure them is not excessive in time, capacity, and resources.</b> For example, a combination of any of the following may make a baseline study "lighter" in workload:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Secondary data from the project needs assessment or other reliable external sources may be available.</li> <li>○ Qualitative methods such as individual/group interviews, which can be less costly than a household survey, may be sufficient to establish a baseline value for an indicator.</li> <li>○ Some surveys can be relatively easy and low-cost to conduct, such as an online survey.</li> </ul>
"Heavy" Study Needed	<p><b>Sometimes it is necessary to have a more rigorous baseline study.</b> For example, the indicator for a water/sanitation project, "% children in target communities under 3 years of age with diarrhea in the last two weeks," may require a household survey along with other baseline indicators, which could involve developing a questionnaire, determining the sample method, training enumerators, and statistically analyzing the data.</p>
Reconstructing Baseline Data	<p><b>Sometimes a baseline study is needed, but it was not conducted prior or near to program start.</b> As discussed in Section 8 of this guide, this may occur for a variety of reasons, but there are some methods to <b>reconstruct the baseline</b> measurements.</p>

## 5. When conduct a baseline study?

**Before project start.** In relation to the project cycle, a baseline study should be conducted after the initial needs assessment and project design, but prior to the start of a project (Diagram 1). This will allow the project team to assess pre-project conditions and set specific targets for the indicators identified to measure the results. Sometimes a baseline study is required well before a project start to inform project development (according to donor requirements), providing the basis for any investment decision. But typically, the baseline study is conducted after the project design (and respected indicators) are determined from the needs assessment.

*It is important to recognize that a project may begin to affect baseline conditions prior to the formal project start.<sup>3</sup>* For example, once it is known that roads, water supply, or other services are to be provided to certain communities, speculators may begin to buy land and families may start to make improvements to their property. Many of these important changes may not be captured, which can result in a baseline that underestimates the effect of the project. As discussed in Section 7, using recall methods can address this problem and capture pre-project conditions.

**After project start.** While a pre-project baseline study is ideal, *it is not uncommon for the study to be conducted after the project has already been started.* For instance, in an emergency operation, it may be necessary to deliver services prior to conducting a reliable baseline. When speed is of the essence, baseline data should be collected reasonably close to the project start, with “reasonable” being defined by the rapidity of change in the context. The greater the time lag between the delivery of project activities and the baseline study, the more likely it will have a measurable effect on the indicators; this can lead to an underestimation of the project’s overall impact. Section 7 of this guide discusses how to reconstruct baseline data in the unfortunate circumstance when a baseline study during or near the project start was not possible.



## 6. Who conducts a baseline study?

Who conducts the baseline will depend on the specific project context, but key considerations are reliability and credibility/ownership of the baseline data. Typically the process is managed by the project team, but participatory involvement of local stakeholders can build ownership and motivation for improving the baseline conditions. Sometimes, it may be necessary to use external technical assistance, e.g. such as a consultancy to enumerate a statistically reliable household survey. Another consideration is that those conducting a baseline study are methodologically competent, as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate. **Whoever conducts the baseline study, it will be important to identify early in the process who will be leading/managing the overall process.** Step 6 in the following section on planning a baseline study provides further human resource considerations for the baseline study.

<sup>3</sup> Kusek et al., 2004.

## 7. How to plan for a baseline study?

The following checklist summarizes six steps for planning a baseline study that mirror the recommended steps for M&E planning in the [IFRC Project/Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), which can be referred to for additional discussion of key concepts and practice.

### CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING A BASELINE STUDY

#### 1. Identify the purpose and scope of the baseline study

As discussed, the overall purpose of a baseline is to measure key conditions (indicators) before a project begins, which can then be used to monitor and evaluate the project's progress. However, it is important to refine the purpose and scope of the baseline study.

- £ **Provide clear justification for the baseline study.** It is important to communicate to other stakeholders the rationale for the study and the required time and resources. This includes explaining the utility of the specific study to ensure it does not duplicate existing research.
- £ **Identify and consult with the key stakeholders and intended audience of the study.** This is important to determine who to involve early in the planning process for ownership and to ensure the baseline will ultimately be conducted and used most effectively.
  - Ø **Partner collaboration!** Oftentimes, especially in complex contexts such as a large scale emergency operation, there are multiple projects by different organizations. If each organization conducts its own baseline study, it can be counterproductive, resulting in “assessment fatigue” in the target population; this can lead not only to unreliable data, but it can foster local resentment. Therefore, it is highly recommended to collaborate and coordinate baseline studies with other implementing projects when possible.
- £ **Identify any baseline requirements/expectations.** Related to the baseline justification, a baseline may be required by a donor, the implementing and/or partner organizations, or based on internationally-agreed-upon standards and best practices. There may also be local government requirements that are better to know and plan for early; for instance, a baseline study of a school population may require parental permission approved by the Ministry of Education. *At IFRC, all secretariat-funded projects/programmes are required to conduct a baseline.*
- £ **Identify the timing of the study.** It is important to determine early on when the study will occur, and when it will need to be repeated for comparison. For instance, will the data be collected and analysed prior to or during project start (see Section 4). Related, when and how often will it be repeated for comparison – only the project start and end, or will there be periodic measurement of baseline data during the project?
- £ **Identify the geographic and demographic scope of the study.** Who and what localities will be included in the study? This will be related to the specific sampling methodology (discussed below), and is an important consideration to estimate need time and resources.
- £ **Identify any critical conditions/assumptions for the study.** For example, the prevailing political, economic, and cultural conditions. Is recent or expected extraordinary events such as natural disasters, political upheavals or economic shocks? Are there planned national or religious holidays (e.g. Ramadan), political elections, or seasonality concerns such as monsoon season or dry season that can affect the ability to conduct the baseline study, as well as the reliability for the measurements?
- £ **Identify available budget for the study.** Prior to detailing out the data collection methodology, it is important to determine what amount of funding is available. Is funding provided by the donor, budgeted into the existing project budget, or does it need to be secured and approved?
- £ **Develop a Terms of Reference (ToR) for the baseline study.**<sup>4</sup> Whether the baseline study will be conducted externally (e.g. by a consultancy firm), internally (e.g. by the project team), or a combination of both, a ToR plays a critical role summarizing the key elements of the baseline study. This not only assists in the planning of the baseline, but in clarifying and communicating with key stakeholders to ensure understanding, ownership, and support. The specific content of the ToR will depend on the project, but key sections to the ToR format typically include:
  - 1) *Summary*
  - 2) *Background*

<sup>4</sup> For further detail, refer IFRC, 2009, [Preparing a Terms of Reference Guidelines & Example Format](#).

- 3) *Purpose and Scope*
- 4) *Specific objectives* – i.e. particular focus areas/questions for the study.
- 5) *Methodology*
- 6) *Deliverables* – i.e. the report and potential oral presentation of findings/conclusions.
- 7) *Timeframe - schedule*
- 8) *Quality and ethical standards*
- 9) *Qualifications or description of the baseline study team*
- 10) *Application procedures* – for studies for which an external team will be commissioned.

## 2. Plan for data collection (methodology) and management

As already discussed, the overall purpose of a baseline is to obtain reliable and useful data prior to a project start, which can then be used to monitor and evaluate the project. However, it is important to refine the purpose and scope of the baseline study.

- £ **Identify what is to exactly be measured.** Identify the baseline indicators and assumptions from the project design (logframe), and refer to any other relevant M&E planning tools, such as an M&E Plan table.<sup>5</sup> Baseline studies typically concentrate on higher level indicators – e.g. outcome rather than output indicators that focus on changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice (behaviour). Oftentimes, the baseline indicators are industry-recognized, such as [Sphere](#) or [Cluster approach to humanitarian response](#) indicators. Don't forget to measure any key assumptions (risks) that may be critical to monitor to ensure the successful project implementation.<sup>6</sup>
- £ **Only measure what is necessary and sufficient.** “Baseline data should provide the minimum information required to assess the quality of the activity implementation and measure the development results. Anything more than this is likely to be a waste of time, effort and resources and risks making replication of the baseline study difficult.”<sup>7</sup>
- £ **Determine the appropriate data sources and methods for the baseline indicators.** This will vary according to the project context, which includes the types of indicators, the baseline scope (discussed above), and the available budget and resources. Again, reference to thought already given to this should be made to the project logframe and any existing M&E Plan. Key considerations include the balance of qualitative and quantitative data, and triangulating data sources and methods.<sup>8</sup>
  - Ø **Secondary data.** Assess the availability of existing baseline data \already collected by the project team, organization, or other organizations/agencies: this can save considerable time and resources. However, whatever the secondary source, it is critical to ensure that it is reliable and relevant! Examples of secondary data for baseline measurements include administrative records, census and survey data from government agencies, studies from NGOs and donors, university research studies, media sources, financial market data, etc. Occasionally data from a needs assessment or vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA) can be used in a baseline study.
  - Ø **Primary data.** To what degree does the project team need to collect baseline data itself, and which qualitative and quantitative methods are most suited to the baseline study? Data collection methods involve trade-offs with respect to cost, precision, credibility, and timeliness. For example, quantitative methods, such as household surveys tend to be more precise and objective, but can be costly and time consuming. On the other hand, qualitative methods, such as individual interviews and focus group discussions, may be preferable to measure key indicators that are difficult to quantify, or in situations when a structured survey is not feasible. See Section 8 below on reconstructing baseline data to read further on the use of individual and group interviews. Other qualitative approaches for baseline data collection can include the use of audio-visual methods, as well as case studies and stories.
  - Ø **Triangulate – mix methods and sources.** It is good practice to triangulate or mix sources and/or methods of data collection. For example, secondary and primary data can be used to complement and confirm data accuracy and precision. Oftentimes a mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and

<sup>5</sup> Refer to [IFRC Project/Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), page 32, for further discussion on M&E Plans.

<sup>6</sup> There is a wealth of information on indicator development and use. References in this guide include IFRC 2011, [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#); Caldwell 2011, [Guidelines to CARE Malawi for the Design of Future Baseline and Evaluation Studies](#); Church and Rogers 2006, [Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programs](#); Kusek et al. 2004, [Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System](#)

<sup>7</sup> AusAid, 2005

<sup>8</sup> There is a wealth of information on sources and methods: see footnote #7 above for some specifically provided in this guide.

quantitative methods is preferable; for instance, qualitative research that is conducted first to inform the development of a quantitative survey. The rule of thumb is not to overburden the data collection process and resultant data – only what is necessary and sufficient to accurately measure the baseline indicators.

- £ **Determine the sampling requirements.** A sample is a subset of a whole population selected to study and draw conclusions about the population as a whole. Sampling (the process of selecting a sample) occurs whether the data uses random (probability) samples for quantitative methods such as a survey, or purposeful (non-random) samples for qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups.<sup>9</sup>
- £ **Prepare and pilot the data collection tools.** It is important to carefully prepare data collection tools and guidance so that baseline indicators will be consistently and reliably measured among data collectors in different locations and at different times. This is critical for the comparability of the data, which is a primary function of conducting a baseline. It is also extremely important to pre-test the data collection tools to ensure they are linguistically and culturally appropriate. Management procedures and formats should be designed according to the project's needs, size and complexity, and is often part of an organization's overall data management system.
- £ **Prepare for data management.** Data management should be timely and secure, and in a format that is practical and user-friendly. Poorly managed data wastes time, money and resources; lost or incorrectly recorded data affects not only the quality and reliability of the data but also all the time and resources invested in its analysis and use. Data management includes consideration to data format, organization, availability, security, technology, and quality control.<sup>10</sup>
- £ **Ensure data disaggregation by gender and other appropriate demographic characteristics.** It is essential that data collection and management tools disaggregate demographic for key population characteristics, including gender, age, and any other relevant socioeconomic, ethnic, religious characteristics. It is critical to measure the baseline situation of potentially marginalized populations to assess their degree of participation, access to services, and empowerment. Planning for this during data collection/management will allow such important characteristics to be examined and reported on during the data analysis.
- £ **Prepare for the target population.** It is necessary to properly inform and gain permission from the target communities prior to conducting a baseline (e.g. community leaders, elders) – this may occur earlier when initially consulting with the key stakeholders. Later, during the actual data collection, it is necessary to individually inform and gain consent from baseline participants – (this should be built into the data collection tools/guidance, discussed above). Not only is this ethically responsible, (upholding the Red Cross and Red Crescent Fundamental Principles and Code of Conduct), it also ensures that the baseline study respects local customs, culture, and dignity of human subjects in the study.

### 3. Plan for data analysis

Data analysis is the process of converting collected (raw) data into usable information. It is important to have a clear plan for data analysis, which should account for the purpose, timing, methods, and people responsible for the data analysis. Key elements of data analysis include:<sup>11</sup>

- £ **Identify the purpose for analysis.** What and how data is analysed will be largely determined by the specific project indicators, and ultimately adequately capturing the pre-project conditions for later comparison and assessment of the project.
- £ **Plan for timely data analysis.** Accurate information is of little value if it is not timely. Depending on the methods involved, it is important to plan for efficient data analysis so baseline values can inform realistic target setting of the baseline indicators. It may be necessary to compromise between speed, frequency and accuracy. Timeliness can be largely enhanced with effective use of data management and analysis technology, such as digital data collection using mobile phones that utilize the internet to transfer data for efficient analysis.<sup>12</sup>
- £ **Determine the appropriate data collection methods and tools.** As with the data collection, it is important that the data analysis methods and tools can be replicated in a consistent and reliable manner by different people and at different times for the comparability of the data. Therefore, it is useful to clarify this in a data analysis

<sup>9</sup> There is a wealth of information on sampling and surveys. For an overview, refer to IFRC 2011, [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), p. 36-38, and the Resources section (Annex 2) lists other useful resources. IFRC 2012, [Rapid Mobile Phone-based \(RAMP\) survey](#), is a valuable resource not only on the use of mobile phones for data collection, but practical sampling and survey information.

<sup>10</sup> IFRC 2011, [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> IFRC 2011, [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), p. 48

<sup>12</sup> IFRC 2012, [Rapid Mobile Phone-based \(RAMP\) survey](#)

plan/guidance, which includes data preparation, the actual analysis, data validation and presentation. Related, it is important to pre-test the data analysis methods to assess accuracy and amount of time needed.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Plan for information reporting and utilization

Reporting of the baseline data plays a critical role in how the data is immediately put to use to inform and motivate project implementation, and how it is later put to use to compare with future measurements of the baseline indicators. It is important to remember that reporting can be done in different formats according to audience and purpose:

£ **Written baseline report.** The baseline report is the end-product of the baseline study. The format and content will be specific to the particular project and baseline indicators being reported on. For example, statistical survey data may have a different presentation format (e.g. pie charts or graphs) than narrative data obtained from observation and interviews. It is important that the report is complete, concise, and well-structure so that it is accessible and user-friendly. It is worth noting that a baseline study does not typically include recommendations; it may inform recommendation in an evaluative study, but its primary focus is on findings and conclusions. Following is an example of a written baseline report format:<sup>14</sup>

- 1) *Title page*
- 2) *Acronyms*
- 3) *Executive summary*
- 4) *Table of contents*
- 5) *Introduction and background*
- 6) *Methodology (and methodological limitations)*
- 7) *Analysis of the findings*
- 8) *Conclusions*

£ **Baseline report dissemination.** This can be a strategic decision that can help build recognition and support for the project, and frame expectations among stakeholders. It also upholds transparency and accountability, and it is important to note that it is an ethical responsibility to share critical findings related to health and other key measures of target population safety and welfare. How the report is disseminated can raise awareness, and generate further discussion and feedback. Typical outlets for written report dissemination include email, websites, and delivery of printed report.

£ **Oral presentation of findings.** In addition to the written report, it is advisable to have an oral debrief and presentation from the baseline study team. This helps to check accuracy of data, confirm findings, and provide additional input and impressions to inform future action/recommendation. Furthermore, it keeps stakeholders informed, reinforcing transparency, building ownership, and supporting organizational learning.

£ **Beneficiary communication.** It is an ethical responsibility to follow-up and communicate the baseline findings to the target population, especially those directly involved in the study. Formats for communicating the baseline findings should be appropriate to the target population; examples include community meetings (especially for illiterate populations), summaries on notice boards using visuals, information pamphlets or devoted sections in the local newspaper, radio spots, websites, etc. A critical reminder with beneficiary communication is that it should be “two way,” meaning that it is not enough to just inform the target population of the findings, but to meaningfully engage them and listen to their responses and perspectives. This upholds the participatory principles central to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and can be an important strategy to build stakeholder understanding, frame expectations, and encourage ownership and support for the project. For instance, if community members discuss starting conditions prior to a project, it can motivate their participation in the project, and their input can result in innovative, sustainable solutions to future programming.

#### 5. Plan for human resources and capacity building

The usefulness of a baseline study depends on the competence of those doing the data collection analysis, and reporting.

£ **Identify the baseline study manager.** First and foremost, it is important to identify the person who will take the lead in managing the baseline study. Typically it is someone from the project team. However, it is important to remember that the manager delegates and ensures that people follow-through and the study is completed according

<sup>13</sup> For further information, refer to IFRC 2011, [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), p. 38, and the Resources section (Annex 2) lists other useful resources, including WFP. 2011, [How to consolidate, process and analyse qualitative and quantitative data](#).

<sup>14</sup> ASARECA, 2010. [Guidelines for Project Baseline studies](#), p. 10

to the ToR/schedule; they are not expected to do everything!

- £ **Assess the project team's capacity to conduct the baseline study.** This will largely depend on the scope and complexity of the baselines study, and the project team members' experience and expertise. Accurate data collection is important, and both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis requires a degree of expertise. For example, conducting a household survey requires experience with random sampling, questionnaire development, proper enumeration, statistical analysis, and report writing. Such skills are not beyond a project team, and ample guidance is available, but it is critical that data collection is reliable if it is to be useful.
- £ **Determine the extent of local participation.** Participation of local stakeholders in the baseline data collection and analysis can be empowering, building capacity and ownership to support project implementation and sustainability. It can also be more culturally and linguistically appropriate, while saving money and time compared with using the project staff or external consultants. On the other hand, the use of local people can require more time and cost to train and manage them, and it can jeopardize the quality of data and analysis due to local bias. It is also dependent on the capacity of local people, who may not be able to afford the time to be trained and participate in the baseline study.
- £ **Determine the extent of outside expertise.** Outside specialists are usually employed for technical expertise, objectivity and credibility, to save time and/or as a donor requirement. It is important to anticipate this need early, and to incorporate it into the baseline study ToR (discussed above) with ample time to commission external expertise. There are a range of consultants that specialize in baseline studies/surveys, and sometimes it may be possible to utilize local university students/professors or NGO staff.
- £ **Define roles and responsibilities.** Whether the baseline study is to be internally, externally, or a combination of both, it is important to clearly identify who will be responsible for the various parts of the study. IFRC recommends that this is done as part of an M&E Plan.<sup>15</sup> Key responsibilities include the development of data collection and analysis methods and tools, enumerator training, data collection, data analysis, report writing and sharing, etc. It can be helpful to refer to any M&E plan that may have been developed identifying key responsibilities and scheduling.
- £ **Plan for any capacity building requirements.** Once roles and responsibilities have been determined, it is important to plan for any specific training requirements. Oftentimes, this includes enumerator or data collection training for field work. It can also include specialized training for targeted individuals, such as sampling methods, survey development, statistical analysis and use of statistical software programs, etc. Training can involve employing an outside trainer, sending individuals to training workshops, online or academic courses, etc. However capacity building needs are met, it is critical that baseline team members are competent to collect and analyse data in a reliable manner, according to specified methods.

## 6. Prepare the budget for the baseline study

As noted in Step 1 above, it is best to determine and plan for the budget early on to 1) determine what is within the financial capacity of the study and 2) best ensure adequate funding is available. Following are key considerations for budget planning after the baseline study is considered in more detail through the above planning steps.

- £ **Itemize the baseline study budget.** This includes: 1) human resources such as staffing, any external expertise, training/capacity building, translation, data entry, etc., and 2) capital costs such as equipment, travel and accommodation, computer and software, printing, publication, dissemination, etc. It is best to prepare a spread sheet clearly itemizing baselines expenses, following any format requirements from the implementing organization/donor. It is recommended to provide any narrative necessary to justify each budget items.
- £ **Incorporate baseline costs into the project budget.** It is better to include baseline costs as part of the project overall budget, rather than as part of the organization's overhead. This helps to ensure the true cost of the project is reflected and secured in the budget, rather than later suggesting inefficiencies or poor planning.
- £ **Check any donor budget requirements and contributions.** If the baseline study is required by the donor or implementing organization, determine whether equivalent is provided. If multiple funding sources are utilized, ensure that the budget is broken down by donor source, and identify any additional cost not covered.
- £ **Plan for contingency costs.** Unexpected costs may arise during the baseline study, such as the need for additional data collection/analysis to verify findings. Although budget planning seeks to avoid such risks, unexpected expenses do arise and it is better to be prepared.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion on M&E Plans refer to [IFRC Project/Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#), page 32.

## 8. Reconstructing Baseline Data

Ideally, baseline data should be measured prior or near to program start (see Section 5). This can largely impede measurement of impact and should be avoided as it undermines the very purpose of the baseline study. However this may not be possible for a variety of reasons. For example, access to the target population may not be possible due to natural or man-made circumstance, such a natural disaster or civil conflict.<sup>16</sup> Other reasons may include, “a lack of awareness of the importance of baseline data, a lack of financial resources, or limited technical expertise. Even when management recognizes its importance, administrative procedures (for example, recruiting and training M&E staff, purchasing computers, or commissioning consultants) may create long delays before baseline data can be collected.”<sup>17</sup>

When a baseline study is not conducted prior or near to program start, it may be possible to approximate baseline conditions through a variety of methods.<sup>18</sup> Even if a baseline can be conducted just prior to project start, a project may begin to affect baseline conditions prior to the formal project start. For example, once it is known that roads, water supply, or other services are to be provided to certain communities, speculators may begin to buy land and families may start to make improvements to their property. Many of these important changes may not be captured, which can result in a baseline that underestimates the effect of the project. Therefore, it may be important to reconstruct baseline conditions in response to such pre-project influence.

### Following are some key reminders when reconstructing baseline data:

- Ø **Triangulation.** As discussed in Step 2 in the Checklist for Baseline Planning (above), it is good practice to triangulate or mix sources and/or methods of data collection. This is especially critical when attempting to reconstruct a picture of pre-project conditions.
- Ø **Use secondary data.** Per Step 2 in the Checklist for Baseline Planning (above), examples of secondary data for baseline measurements include census and survey data from government agencies, studies from NGOs and donors, university research studies, media sources, financial market data, etc.
- Ø **Project data.** Another form of secondary data not collected specifically for the baseline study is existing project data. Baseline data may be obtained from any needs assessment, feasibility study or vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA), as well as other internal project records, such as registration forms, on-going monitoring reports, meeting minutes, etc.
- Ø **Ensure reliability of secondary/project data.** It is worth stressing that secondary data should be relevant and reliable to the specific baseline indicators.<sup>19</sup> This means it should cover the appropriate population, time period, and the indicators relevant for the baseline study. It is important to check the reputation of the data source, including credentials; the motive/reasons for the measurement of the data, including any potential political or economic bias; and that specific data collection, analysis, and quality control methodologies are rigorous for accurate measure of what it is intended to measure.
- Ø **Recall.** Recall involves surveys and individual or group interviews to obtain information relevant to the baseline conditions/indicators. Depending on the project context, this can include questions regarding socioeconomic conditions, access to services, participation and engagement, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, etc. While such information is susceptible to selected-memory and bias, it can nevertheless help provide a measure over time. For example, a survey or interview can ask, “Compared with two years ago, there has been an improvement in XXX condition. Strongly disagree – Disagree – Agree – Strongly agree.” Sometimes recall can be triangulated by respondent records, such as household or medical records. It is helpful to link recall to important reference points with the respondent to help memory, such as significant events as elections, harvest, disasters, construction of household or municipal roads, schools, etc.
- Ø **Key informant interviews.** Related to recall, individual interviews can provide particular knowledge and experience to triangulate. It is important to include a variety of key informants to obtain and triangulate different perspectives. It is important to include not only community leaders, officials, and others of high status, but a purposeful sample that includes representation of gender and age, and relevant demographic characteristics, especially potentially marginalized populations (see Step 2 of the Checklist for Baseline Planning, above).
- Ø **Group interviews.** Group recall through formats such as focus groups and participatory assessment techniques (e.g. participatory rural/rapid assessments – PRAs) are useful to discuss and cross-check participants recall. Group

<sup>16</sup>Church and Rogers 2006, [Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programs](#) .

<sup>17</sup> Bamberger., 2010.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion on reconstructing baselines: Bamberger., 2010. [Reconstructing Baseline Data for Impact Evaluation and Results Measurement](#) , ASARECA, 2010. [Guidelines for Project Baseline studies](#) , p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion on secondary data, refer to [IFRC Project/Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#) , page 33.

dynamics can create synergistic dialogue that can prompt participant's memory, and provide consensus estimates and prioritization. For instance, groups can provides estimates on volume and quantity of water, and prioritize changes such as decrease in incident rate of diarrhoea. In addition to discussion, PRAs can also utilize charts, maps, seasonal calendars, timelines, daily activity schedules, and group prioritization (Bamberger p.5). The group format for an interview may be less intrusive on individuals who may feel more comfortable expressing themselves with peers. However, there is a risk that group discussion is dominated by certain individuals with higher economic status, political power, or education; therefore, it may be necessary to select discussion groups according to demographic characteristics to minimize such risks.

## 9. Resources

The following summarizes some key considerations particularly useful for baseline studies; all are open resources on the internet, hyperlinked for easy access with a click on the title, (otherwise, search for the document titles using Google or other search engines). There are a wealth of other resources available. First and foremost, refer to the IFRC (2011) [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#) which contains further information on M&E methods and practices, and which has a Resources Section (Annex 2) that lists multiple other M&E resources useful for baseline studies. Other IFRC planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting (PMER) resources can be accessed at [www.ifrc.org/mande](http://www.ifrc.org/mande). If you are feeling adventurous and want to do your own searches, enter “[baseline studies](#)” into Google or other search engines and you can spend hours navigating through multitudes of resources.

- ASARECA, 2010. [Guidelines for Project Baseline studies](#). The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa.
- AusAid, 2005. [Baseline studies Baseline Study Guidelines](#). Australian Government Overseas Aid Program. *Provides a basic overview of baseline studies, with links to additional resources.*
- Bamberger, Michael. 2010. [Reconstructing Baseline Data for Impact Evaluation and Results Measurement](#). PREM Notes, November 2010, #4. The World Bank.
- Caldwell, Rich. 2011. [Guidelines to CARE Malawi for the Design of Future Baseline and Evaluation Studies](#). CARE Malawi.
- CARE, 2009. [Guidelines for the implementation of Baseline study for women’s empowerment programmes funded by Norad](#)
- Church, Cheyanne and Mark M. Rogers. 2006. [Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programs](#), Chapter 5: Baseline. Search for Common Ground.
- FAO, 2004. [Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal Starting with People](#), Chapter 5; Baseline Study in PRC. Food and Agriculture Organization.
- ICRC, and IFRC, 2008. [Guidelines for Assessment Emergencies](#). International Committee of the Red Cross, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- IFRC. 2011. [Project/Programmer Monitoring and Evaluation Guide](#). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Planning and Evaluation Department. *This provides a comprehensive overview of M&E planning, including methods and practices applicable to baseline studies.*
- IFRC. 2013.
- IFRC. 2013. [Community Based Health and First Aid \(CBHFA\) PMER Toolkit](#). *Translated into 4 languages, this toolkit contains a survey guide for CBHFA.*
- IFRC. 2013. [Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment \(VCA\) online resources](#). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- IFRC. 2012. [Rapid Mobile Phone-based \(RAMP\) survey](#). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. *This is a valuable resource consisting of three volumes; it not only provides guidance on the use of mobile phones for data collection, but also generic guidance on planning for and enumerating community household surveys.*
- IFRC. 2009. [Preparing a Terms of Reference Guidelines & Example Format](#). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Planning and Evaluation Department.
- United Nations. 2010. [Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners’ Guide to Benchmarking](#).
- Kusek, Jody Zall, and Ray Risk. 2004. [Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System](#), Chapter 4: Setting Baselines and Gathering Data on Indicators. The World Bank.
- USAID. 2010. [TIPS – Baselines and Targets](#). The United States Agency for International Development.
- Walkins, Ryan, Maurya West Meisers, Yusra Laila Visser. 2012. [A Guide to Assessing Needs](#). The World Bank.
- WFP. 2011. [How to Plan a Baseline](#). United Nations World Food Programme, Office of Evaluation.
- WFP. 2011, [How to consolidate, process and analyse qualitative and quantitative data](#). United Nations World Food Programme, Office of Evaluation.