
CHAPTER 6

PARTICIPATORY BASELINES

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In this chapter, we will discuss the need for baseline data, and processes that allow data to be analyzed and synthesized at the community level.

WHAT IS BASELINE INFORMATION?

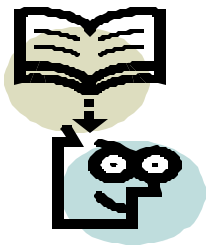
Baseline refers to information describing aspects of communities, households or individuals that help explain the situation before starting project activities. When the project is over, the same information can be collected once again. In comparing the “before” information with the “after” information, you can see what changes, if any, occurred as a result of project activities.

WHY DO WE NEED BASELINE INFORMATION?

Baseline information serves three important purposes:

1. It helps in defining community needs and priorities before you start. This understanding contributes to designing project activities that are best suited to the community.
2. Once the project ends, baseline data can be used to measure the changes that may have occurred due to the project activities. This makes it easier to carry out an evaluation at the end of the project.
3. Baseline can contribute to the design and establishment of a monitoring system. For example, a random sample of 10 households can be selected in a community during a participatory appraisal. They can be interviewed

individually to ask questions relating to their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, their sources of information, their sexual behavior, etc. These interviews can be continued at intervals of six months during the life of the project. This can become an important part of the project monitoring system.



Remember!

Without baseline data it will be very difficult to carry out an evaluation of the project when it ends.

Baseline data usually includes information that is easily measurable and that can be quantified, such as number of men who report using condoms. However, it can also include information that is not as easy to quantify, but still provides valuable insight into aspects of people's lives or their concerns—such as perceptions about, or behavior related to, stigma. Such indicators can also be included in the baseline. Baseline information can be collected at community, group, household and individual levels.

For example: If you are planning on implementing a project around “awareness-raising about HIV/AIDS”, your baseline data should include issues like:

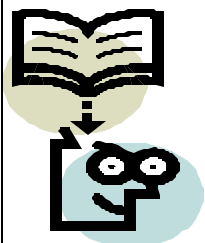
- ⇒ What are the current levels of knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS? Are these different among men and women? Among older and younger people?
- ⇒ What are the gaps in people's information and knowledge? Are there differences among men and women? Among older and younger people?
- ⇒ What are the sources of information? Men's sources versus women's sources? Older and younger people?
- ⇒ What do people know about 'safe sex'? Men's knowledge versus women's knowledge? Older and younger people?
- ⇒ Where do people obtain condoms? Men's sources versus women's sources?

WHEN IS BASELINE INFORMATION COLLECTED?

Baseline information is collected **before** you start implementing the project. If you collect this information after the project has already started, you will lose an opportunity to measure your project's impact by comparing a "before" and "after" snapshot of the community situation, and the changes that occurred in between as a result of your project's activities.

You can use findings from the **participatory appraisals** that were conducted in the project's communities to help develop your baseline. The results from these appraisals can be reviewed to select indicators (see chapter 5) that will be used for the baseline data. For example, if the participatory appraisals show that unsafe sex is very common at the community level, emphasis should be placed on indicators measuring change in sexual behavior. The selection of indicators should be determined by the activities that the project wants to implement. If you are planning to work only on providing care and support for the people affected by HIV/AIDS, the community and project staff will select indicators relevant to this activity.

FOR FACILITATORS EXPERIENCED IN PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES: If planned well, it is possible to include baseline information needs in a participatory appraisal. Once the indicators for the baseline have been agreed upon, the interviews and FGDs can easily be included in the participatory appraisal process, so that there is no duplication of effort, and the process can be completed within a few days at the community level.



Remember!

Results from the first few participatory appraisals can help in determining the indicators for the baseline data. Subsequent participatory appraisals can include baseline data gathering activities as well.

HOW IS BASELINE DATA COLLECTED?

Baseline information can be collected in two ways: individual and/or household interviews; Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Individual interviews are best used when collecting information related to individual behavior, views, knowledge, and so on, such as condom use, number of sex partners, and number of people affected by HIV/AIDS. FGDs are useful to help understand community-level information, concerns, and perspectives, such as identifying and assessing the quality of sources of information on HIV/AIDS or community-level support systems to cope with HIV/AIDS, etc.

Usually individual interviews are conducted with a sample of individuals or households selected from the community, or in some cases selected from among the project participants, as would be the case when working only with people affected by HIV/AIDS. The same households can be visited again during the project to monitor its progress, and then again at the end of the project to determine if and how the project activities have affected them.

The selected sample of individuals/households for the interviews should be **representative** of all the participants the project plans to work with in a community. For example, it should include men and women, older and younger people, single parent and “both” parent households, the well-off and the poor, large and small households, etc.

In order to conduct an interview, you need to prepare a list of questions. All the individuals selected for the interviews are asked the same questions. Keep your questions simple, and keep your questions focused on essential information that you need to gather given the project’s objectives.

Focus Group Discussions can be held with groups of men and women – or with any other categories of people, e.g. vulnerable children, people affected by HIV/AIDS, single women, young men, grandmothers taking care of orphans, and so on. It is best to have a group of 8-15 people take part in a FGD, so that they can all participate in the discussions. Once again, it is useful to prepare a checklist of issues that will be discussed with the group.

Once the interviews and the FGDs have been carried out, the results have to be aggregated and put together. Information can be aggregated at group, community and/or project level.

WHO COLLECTS BASELINE INFORMATION?

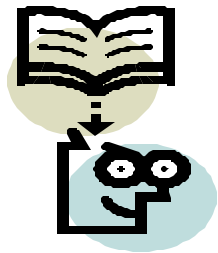
Sine we are interested in developing a participatory monitoring process, the project participants at the community level should be involved in collecting baseline data. Members of the community can facilitate discussions, conduct interviews, document the information, and analyze and use the results. The project should provide training to community level facilitators. This can be done on-the-job, by demonstrating the process in one community with representatives from other communities invited as observers and ‘trainees’, and by asking experienced community facilitators to carry out the process in other communities. Project staff should provide support where needed.

Once the indicators for baseline have been decided upon with the community, it is important to discuss the monitoring plan with them. If the project plans to work with several communities, it may be worthwhile to invite community representatives to a meeting where these decisions can be taken collectively. This will help in building a shared vision of the monitoring process, as well as ensuring that a common set of indicators are used across all the communities that the project plans to work with.

Note: Sometimes it may not be possible for members of a community to interview their neighbors regarding sensitive issues, such as sexual behavior. In such circumstances, it may be best to have an ‘outsider’ such as project staff or fieldworkers from another community carry out the interviews.

Documentation

In order to make good use of the baseline data, it is important to record the information in a systematic manner. If the project has computers, you can store the information in data files. Otherwise, file the records on paper, with separate files for each community. Copies of the baseline information should always be available in the communities where the baseline was conducted so that people have easy access to it.



Remember!

- ✓ Baseline information must be collected before you start implementing project activities.
- ✓ Indicators for baseline can be included in the participatory appraisal.
- ✓ Keep the baseline simple and focused on your project purpose.
- ✓ Results from the baseline should be used to design project activities as well as the participatory monitoring system.
- ✓ Store the results from the baseline safely, as these will be used again for monitoring and evaluation.