

BASELINE

This chapter includes:

1. Description of a baseline
2. Difference between conflict assessments and baselines
3. Baseline plans
4. Who conducts baselines and when

INTRODUCTION

“The term up has no meaning apart from the word down. The term fast has no meaning apart from the term slow. In addition, such terms have no meaning even when used together, except when confined to a very particular situation...”

- THURMAN W. ARNOLD

A baseline provides a starting point from which a comparison can be made.

Baselines are the most often forgotten component within design, monitoring and evaluation, yet they are key to proving that change has truly taken place. This chapter describes what constitutes a baseline and contrasts that description with conflict assessments. It then provides a planning tool for baseline development. Finally, it covers a number of the practical issues relevant to implementing baselines.

What is a baseline?

A baseline provides a starting point from which a comparison can be made. It is conducted prior to the beginning of the intervention and is the point of comparison for monitoring and evaluation data. The bulk of baseline studies focus on the intended outcomes of a project. They can also take into account secondary outcomes and assumptions, though these are not the primary emphasis.

What is the difference between a conflict assessment and a baseline?

A conflict assessment is an exploration of the realities of the conflict and an analysis of its underlying causes. An assessment can be done at any time, independently of a program or as a part of an existing program. Assessments are often conducted to determine whether an intervention is needed and, if so, what type of intervention. In a sense, an assessment is the basis from which the programming will be designed. Conversely, a baseline identifies the status of the targeted change before the project starts but after it has been designed.

Assessments and baselines should not be blended together. Nor should one be used as a substitute for the other since their *raison d'être*, focus, and implementation are very different.

Distinguishing Conflict Assessments and Baseline Studies

	Conflict Assessment	Baseline Study
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand key factors and actors • Inform strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the status of the intended changes as a point of comparison
Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff, external consultants, or blend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally, this is the same person who will conduct the evaluation
When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the project design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the design and before the implementation
Where	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally in the conflict area, though desk-based is possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict area

Example

Land Claims Conflict

Part 1: Consider a conflict environment where the conflict analysis shows:

- Misinformation around land claims is a significant cause of violence
- Lack of access to official land registry offices make it difficult for legitimate landowners to get the appropriate documentation
- District councils appear to be central actors in resolving land claim disputes
- Approximately 80% of district councils have land claim policies
- Approximately 90% of people interviewed did not know that the district council had a policy, although the majority of this grouping thought that it was the role of the district council to do something

Based on this conflict assessment, an intervention was designed to decrease violence initiated by land disputes. It has two objectives. The first is, “Land-owning population has increased knowledge of local government initiatives relating to land claims.” One of the indicators developed for this objective is “% of district councils which have implemented communication strategies on land claim policies in 1 year.” A more direct indicator for this objective would be “% of people who can correctly state land claim policies.” However, the project team felt that collecting data that represented the entire country for this indicator was not feasible.

The second objective is, “Increased percentage of land owners who have proper documentation regarding their ownership by participating in the district council land claims procedure.” The activities around this objective will start in July, six months after the activities for the first objec-

Before the activities for the first objective get started, the project team needs to know how many district councils are already implementing communication strategies on land claims. This will allow them to set the target within their indicator and to understand the difference their project is making since they will be able to draw a before-and-after comparison.

How is a baseline utilized?

Baseline information is used in a number of different ways:

- **COMPARE BASELINE INFORMATION WITH SUBSEQUENT INFORMATION TO SHOW THE CHANGE THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE OVER TIME.** For instance, a baseline conducted in 2003 in Angola showed that, before a project started, 75% of soldiers thought it acceptable to use violence against civilians. After two years of work consisting of trainings, a media campaign targeted at the public, and a knowledge-raising campaign within the rank-and-file of the military, a formative evaluation was conducted. The 2005 evaluation showed that 55% of soldiers think it is acceptable to use violence against civilians – a decrease of 20%.
- **REFINE PROGRAMMING DECISIONS ABOUT KEY STAKEHOLDERS OR POSSIBLE RESISTERS.** For example, an organization conducted a broad conflict assessment which determined that male youth ages 13-21 were the key recruits for two rebel groups in a conflict. It then created a prevention program focused on boys 10-13 years old. The baseline revealed that boys 15 and younger are less likely to be recruited; thus, there was a difference in age between those targeted by the program and those targeted by the rebels. In this case, prevention program target group could be refined to focus on the 12-14 year-old age group rather than the younger audience that was the original emphasis.
- **SET ACHIEVABLE AND REALISTIC TARGETS.** Consider the Angola military example once again. When the baseline study showed that 75% of soldiers thought it acceptable to use violence against civilians, the project team then knew the exact extent of the problem they wished to change. As a result, the team discussed the degree of change that would be realistic for them to expect to achieve based on the resources available for the project. At that point, they set the target for their objective: “At the end of a four-year project, less than 10% of the military will think it is acceptable to use violence against civilians.”
- **ENABLES MONITORING DATA TO HAVE GREATER UTILITY EARLIER IN THE PROJECT CYCLE.** Continuing with the Angolan military example, the project team gathered monitoring

data after the first six months of project implementation. They were able to compare it against the baseline to see if any progress had been made. The first time they collected data, it showed an increase in acceptance of the use of violence against civilians among soldiers rather than a decrease. The team discussed this finding and decided to hold the course until the next set of monitoring information was collected because they had actually only been working with soldiers for three months; the first three months had been spent in preparation. They hypothesized that the increase was due to more people hearing about the topic but not having enough time to internalize the actual message. Sure enough, six months later, the monitoring data showed a small but hopeful decrease.

- **ENSURES ACCURACY AND UTILITY OF INDICATORS.** The process of conducting the baseline itself provides the “testing” of the proposed indicators. This test informs the project team whether the indicators are an accurate signal and whether they can be measured. Consider a project with a goal of increasing cooperation between rural Hutus and Tutsis. One of the indicators proposed is, “An increase in neighbors of different ethnicity assisting each other in the fields.” However, when the baseline team went out to gather information, they discovered that, in the target communities, Hutu and Tutsi fields were rarely close together making it difficult for members from each community to assist each other even if they had wanted to. As a result, a new indicator was created.

Once the baseline data is available, the project team should be convened to review the results. This review is not an abstract discussion. It should include setting the targets for objectives and indicators. A discussion on whether the baseline information suggests that any element of the project needs to be refined should also occur. The project team should leave this meeting with a common understanding of the starting point for the project.

The baseline report and raw data should be stored so that the evaluation team can verify the conclusions, and/or analyze the raw data from a different perspective. See page 201 of the Methods chapter for more information.

Example

Land Claims Conflict

Part 2: The baseline study showed that 30% of district councils had communication strategies. However, only 10% of the communication strategies included the land claims policy components. The project team members can use this information to set their indicator targets as well as to refine the work plan.

The team determined that their one-year target would be that 75% of district councils would have communication strategies with a land claims component.

With this information, the project team can now refine their activities targeting those district councils with communication strategies differently than those councils who have no strategy at all.

What does a baseline focus on?

Baselines explore three areas:

- Change (outcomes)
- Secondary changes
- Assumptions

The first area, change, is required of all baselines, while the latter two, secondary changes and assumptions, are optional depending on the project. The majority of baselines focus on collecting data on the status of the targeted change (outcome or outcome-level indicators) before the project begins. For outcomes that do not require indicators, data is collected for the outcome (change) itself.

It is feasible, though not recommended, for impact-level change to be the focus of a baseline. Since the impact a project will have often requires a longer timeframe (5-10 years) to occur, focusing the baseline on a project's impact may result in selling the project short if its duration is not long enough.

Consider a project whose goal is to change public opinion in the Basque region of Spain from acceptance of political kidnappings as an appropriate tactic to non-acceptance of such acts. The project received funds for one year. The baseline gathered data on indicators of goal achievement only. After one year, many changes had occurred as a result of this project, such as an increase in the public's knowledge of the frequency of kidnappings and a significant change in the tone of media articles portraying the incidents. However, little movement had taken place at the public opinion level. The similar and more immediate changes (outcomes) were not captured in the evaluation because it only looked at impact (long term) achievement. If the baseline had focused on outcomes, the evaluation would have shown significantly better results. A compromise between the two is to select a few impact indicators that are deemed most important and include them in the baseline study. These indicators can provide useful information on an overall shift.

The second area that a baseline can include is secondary changes, both positive and negative. If a project team wants to understand the effects

on or relationship between their project and an indirect target, this is a secondary change. The direct change is not what is being examined by looking at secondary changes; rather, there is a belief that the project will affect an indirect target in some way. Of course, this effect could be positive or negative. Gathering data on the effects of the intervention in terms of a secondary change can be very useful in advancing the field's understanding of how peacebuilding projects affect the environments in which they operate.

Consider a television project in Macedonia directed at children ages 6-11 that challenges negative stereotypes of the “other.” In addition to the direct impact of the show on the children watching, the project staff members also wanted to know if children can influence their parents' thinking about the “other.” If so, the parents may be an indirect target of this intervention; therefore, the project team would like to understand more about the secondary changes to this indirect target. To elicit such information, project team members added parents to the list of people to be interviewed during the baseline about their attitudes and behaviors on ethnic relations.

Assumptions about the objectives also need to be considered in determining what information to obtain in the baseline. The question is, what information will help program managers determine if the assumption continues to hold true? Consider the example of a project that seeks to reduce incidents of youth violence. One of the activities within this project is to introduce community policing in particularly violent neighborhoods. The assumption associated with this activity is that neighborhoods will participate in community policing. Useful information to gather in the baseline would be neighborhood knowledge and attitudes about community policing. This would not only inform the strategy, it could also be tracked over time as part of the indirect changes enacted by the project. More on this example may be found in the Design chapter on page 25.

A baseline plan illustrates what information is needed as well as how, where, and from whom it will be collected. It is very similar to an evaluation plan, a description of which can be found in the Evaluation Management chapter on page 153.

Example

Land Claims Conflict

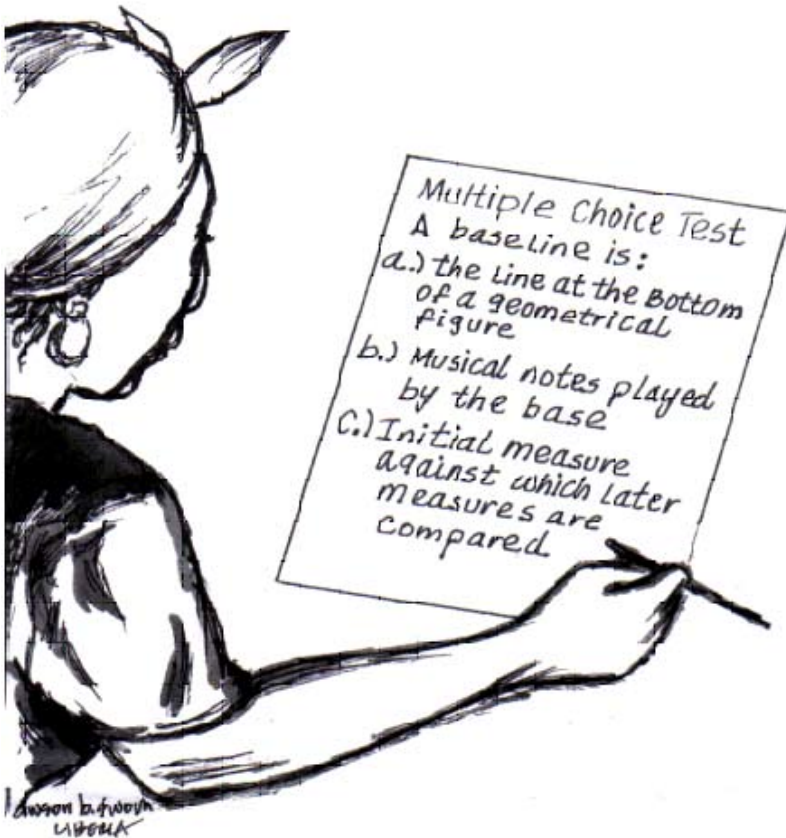
Part 3: The project team understood that “change” had to be a focus of their baseline study. As a result, indicators for each objective were included. The results for one of those indicators showed that only 10% of district councils had communication strategies with land claim components included.

Example

Because the organization had run this type of project in many other countries, the team manager felt that the model was well-developed. She had read the previous project designs and evaluations as well as the lessons learned documents that were generated about this approach. Consequently, she felt that there were no secondary outcomes to be added to the baseline.

In terms of assumptions as a baseline focus, there is some additional information to gather. The first objective is “land-owning population has increased knowledge of local government initiatives relating to land claims.” The assumption is that the government initiatives to address land claims are effective responses to the problems. In the baseline, data on people’s perceptions of the effectiveness of the governmental land claim policies was collected.

A baseline plan illustrates what information is needed as well as how, where, and from whom it will be collected.



Early efforts at certifying evaluators

Written by *M. M. Rogers* and illustrated by *Lawson Sworb*

What is a baseline plan?

The table below shows the different areas that should be included in a baseline plan. The baseline focus column always contains the intended

change (outcomes) and may include optional areas such as secondary changes or assumptions. The optional areas are depicted by the asterisk in the diagram.

Baseline Plan

Baseline Focus	Indicators or Line of Inquiry	Means of Verification (MOV)	Data Source & Target	Location of Data Collection	Conflict Considerations	Means of Analysis	Time Needed
Change (Outcomes)							
Secondary Change*							
Assumptions*							

What does a baseline plan contain?

BASELINE FOCUS: There are three possible areas of focus: change, secondary outcomes and assumptions. Descriptions of each of these areas may be found on page 66 earlier in this chapter.

INDICATORS OR LINES OF INQUIRY: Pending the baseline focus, indicators or lines of inquiry may need to be developed to further direct the study. A line of inquiry is a more specific question or set of questions than the focus. An indicator, on the other hand, is used where an outcome cannot be measured directly. See page 142 in Evaluation Management for more information on lines of inquiry.

For the change focus of the baseline, the indicators for each outcome should be found in the design tool, which are most often logical frameworks or results frameworks. Alterations to the indicators can be made at this time; in fact, there is no better time to refine them. The project team needs to be fully supportive of any refinements to, or additions of, indicators since it is best to not change them again after this point. Altering the indicators later would probably make the baseline useless unless the new indicator is based on some reconfiguration of the same data. Of course, if the situation on the ground has changed drastically by the time the evaluation occurs, the indicators may nevertheless need to be altered in order for them to be useful in the new reality.

Indicators are also needed for secondary outcomes. Indicators for secondary outcomes would generally be developed when the baseline plan is created since they are not normally part of a design tool. Finally, when assumptions are included in a baseline, they frequently require lines of inquiry to be developed for each assumption so that the evaluator has a more specific question to gather data for. An example is found on page 71 later in the chapter.

MEANS OF VERIFICATION (MOV): The MOV, also called data collection methods, is the way in which data will be collected. The methods available for evaluations are also available for baseline studies. Fundamentally, method selection is driven by the information one is trying to find. Where possible, use the same methods for the baseline and the evaluation. This saves time and money since new instruments or tools need not be developed and tested. Assuming that quality instruments were developed for the baseline, use of the same methods also enhances the accuracy of the results. However, if there are drastic shifts in the context or perceived flaws in the baseline approach, new methods may need to be selected for the evaluation. More on data collection may be found in the Methods chapter, page 201.

Methods selection is based on the best way to access the information being sought. Different data collection methods may be utilized for each baseline focus. Similarly, different methods may be chosen to gather data on the same focus. On the other hand, the same method can be used for each focus. For the change focus, the MOV is generally a required part of the design tool. The methods to collect data on the secondary outcomes and assumptions will need to be developed with the baseline plan because these are generally not part of the average project design process.

DATA SOURCE AND QUANTITY: The data source and target refer to where the data will be accessed and how many data sources will be utilized. For instance, a data source and target might be 80% of the participants in training.

LOCATION OF DATA COLLECTION: Where will the data be collected? Using the training example from the previous paragraph, will it be during the training, in their homes, electronically via e-mail or a website, or in their place of work?

CONFLICT CONSIDERATIONS: This includes issues specific to the conflict that may affect the baseline such as security environment, implication of language selection, nationality of researcher, or avoiding contentious memorial days in the conflict. See Evaluation Management, page 137, for a more in-depth discussion of this issue.

TIME NEEDED: Time depicts the number of days to implement each aspect of the baseline including doing the analysis of the data.

A line of inquiry is a more specific question or set of questions than the focus.

Baseline Plan Example

Baseline Focus	Indicators or Line of Inquiry	Means of Verification (MOV)	Data Source & Quantity	Location of Data Collection	Conflict Considerations	Means of Analysis	Time Needed
Change							
Objective 1: Reduce negative stereotypes of the “other” held by teenagers	% increase in number of children who have friends of the other religion [indicator]	Direct observation	Approximately 40 children from 4 “hang-out” areas accessible by both communities*	Play areas throughout the village		Review of observation notes	1.5 days
Objective 1: Reduce negative stereotypes of the “other” held by teenagers	% decrease in the number of children who associate negative images with descriptions of the “other” [indicator]	One-on-one interviews	6 teachers per school (3 schools)	In a private office of the school	Nationality of the interviewer Language of interview	Review of interview transcripts utilizing pre-set criteria	3.5 days
Objective 1: Reduce negative stereotypes of the “other” held by teenagers	% decrease in the number of children who associate negative images with descriptions of the “other” [indicator]	Photographs of what represents the “other”	50 teenagers* [25 teenagers from each religion]	Village	Security concern of those taking photos. Will it be acceptable or cause offense?	Photos will be categorized according to types of images	1.5 days
Objective 2: Equip teenagers with the skills and motivation to use conflict resolution techniques when conflict arises	What skills do students currently utilize in dealing with conflicts? [line of inquiry]	4 focus groups	32 parents* [16 parents from each religion]	Held in the schools	Identify appropriate language and sensitive words for questions	Review of transcripts	4.5 days
		Role plays with discussion groups	20 teenagers* [10 teenagers from each religion]	Held in the schools	Identify appropriate language and sensitive words for questions	Assess role plays against specified behaviors and language	2 days

Baseline Plan Example

Baseline Focus	Indicators or Line of Inquiry	Means of Verification (MOV)	Data Source & Quantity	Location of Data Collection	Conflict Considerations	Means of Analysis	Time Needed
Objective 2: Equip teenagers with the skills and motivation to use conflict resolution techniques when conflict arises	% increase in number of conflicts that teenagers use conflict resolution skills [indicator]	One-on-one interviews	6 teachers from each school	In a private office of the school	Language of interview Nationality of the interviewer	Review of interview transcripts utilizing pre-set criteria	.5 day
		Focus groups	32 parents* [16 parents from each religion]	Held in the schools	Identify appropriate language and sensitive words for questions	Review of transcripts	.5 day
Hypothesized Outcomes							
Conflict resolution skills utilized in family settings	% decrease in domestic violence	Secondary data review	Official police statistics	Central police station in village	Consider the gender makeup of the police Consider the domestic violence reporting system	Document review	1 day
Assumptions							
Negative stereotypes foster violence against the “other”	What percentage of the causes of violence between teenagers of different religions is not the result of negative stereotypes? [line of inquiry]	Photographs of causes of violence	50 teenagers* [25 teenagers from each religion]	Village	Security concern of those taking photos. Will it be acceptable or cause offense?	Photos will be categorized according to types of images	1 day
		One-on-one interviews	10 local police officers who work in different areas of the village	In their offices		Review of notes	3.5 days

* Indicates that the data will be disaggregated by gender.

Baseline Plan Example

Consider a project that is being developed to target children ages 12-15 in a large village in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The goal of the project is to decrease “tension” between Christian and Muslim youth age 12-15 in the village. The project has two objectives and has just received confirmation from the donor that it will be funded. Refer to Baseline Plan Example chart on page 71.

PROJECT LOGIC:

Goal: Decrease tension between Christian and Muslim youth ages 12-15 in the village.

Objective #1: Reduce negative stereotypes of the “other” held by teenagers ages 12-15 within the village.

Assumption: Negative stereotypes foster tension against the “other.”

Objective #2: Equip teenagers ages 12-15 within the village with the skills and motivation to use conflict resolution techniques when conflict arises.

Activities: The peacebuilding work includes a comic book series based on the reality of Central Sulawesi. The characters in the comic books model conflict resolution techniques and positive images of the “other.” In addition, there will be a curriculum for teachers to use in schools based on the comic book series. The teachers will also be trained in how to teach and discuss the issues in the curriculum.

Definition: The term “tension” is defined very broadly to include bullying, swearing, graffiti, and all other forms of intimidation.

The project team wanted data on both objectives (i.e., reduction of negative stereotypes and providing conflict resolution skills), one secondary outcome, and one of their core assumptions. A variety of methods were used, many applying to more than one focus area.

The indicators had been well-developed by the project team so they required no refinement by the evaluators. The indicators included:

Objective 1: % increase in number of teenagers (ages 12-15 within the village) who have friends of the other religion

Objective 1: % decrease in the number of teenagers (ages 12-15 within the village) who associate negative images with descriptions of the “other”

Objective 2: % increase in the number of conflicts in which teenagers (ages 12-15 within the village) use conflict resolution techniques when conflict arises

The first objective, “Reduce negative stereotypes of the “other” held by teenagers,” has two indicators, both included in the baseline. The data for the first indicator, “% increase in number of teenagers who have friends of the other religion,” will be collected using two means: direct observation and one-on-one interviews with teachers. Two data collection methods were selected in order to strengthen the validity of the information gathered.

The direct observation (method) will be conducted at four different hang-out areas (location of data collection) throughout the village where it is known that teenagers of both religions frequent but rarely mix. It is hoped that approximately 50 teenagers (data source and quantity) will be observed through this method. Every effort will be made to ensure that there are boys and girls represented in these areas. A local parent in each area will assist the evaluator in determining the religion of each teenager.

Prior to collecting the data, the evaluator will develop an observation guide that outlines what she/he is looking for, such as terms used in conversations or types of behavior. The data will be broken out by gender as well (means of analysis). Developing the observation guide, gathering data, and analyzing the results should take approximately 1.5 days (time).

To supplement the observation the evaluator will also do one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (method) with six teachers (data source and quantity) from each of the three schools in the village for a total of 18 teachers. The teachers will be from different age groupings in the school. The interviews will be conducted in a private office within the school (location of data collection) to ensure that the teachers feel comfortable speaking truthfully. In developing the interview guidelines, the evaluator will need to ensure that the language selected for the questions is appropriate, unbiased, and non-inflammatory, and avoids taboo topics. She/he should also check with the project team to see if language appropriateness differs between the two communities. In addition, the evaluator should investigate the potential effects and perceptions that people may have due to her/his nationality.

The notes from the interviews will be analyzed against pre-set criteria (means of analysis). Developing the interview guide, arranging the interviews, collecting data, and doing the analysis will take approximately 3.5 days (time).

Data for the second indicator, “% decrease in the number of teenagers who associate negative images with descriptions of the ‘other,’” will

be gathered through photographs (methods) taken by 40 teenagers (data source and quantity) depicting what they feel are images of the “other.” Half of the group will be Christians and the other half Muslims, and they will be from different areas of the village. The evaluator will need to take care that the act of taking pictures will not be seen as provocative or offensive (conflict considerations). The photographs will then be categorized (means of analysis). The entire process will take approximately 1.5 days (time).

The second objective is, “Equip teenagers with the skills and motivation to use conflict resolution techniques when conflict arises.” The project team wanted the baseline to investigate one line of inquiry and one indicator. The team wanted more information on the skills students currently utilize in dealing with conflicts (line of inquiry). To gather this data, four (data quantity) focus groups (method) of parents (data source) will be conducted. Two groups will be of the Christian religion and two groups Muslim (conflict consideration). The sessions will be held in the appropriate local school (location of data collection). Care needs to be taken in developing the language of the questions for the facilitation (conflict consideration). The results will be analyzed through a review of the transcripts (means of analysis), all of which should take approximately 4.5 days (time).

The other data method will be role-plays done by 20 teenagers (data source and quantity). The teenagers will need to have gender and religious equity in their numbers (conflict consideration). As time is limited, the teenagers who will be taking photographs will be invited to provide the names of other teenagers who could be invited to the role-plays. The role-plays will depict common conflict situations and the teenagers will need to behave the way they think someone from the “other” community would behave in that situation. Immediately following the role plays, small group discussions will be held to review how the roles were depicted and if that was realistic to life situations. Held in schools (location of data collection), the evaluator will assess the plays and the subsequent discussions against a specified set of behaviors and language (means of analysis). It is estimated that this will take two days to complete (time).

The second objective also has an indicator, “% increase in the number of conflicts in which teenagers use conflict resolution skills.” Data collection for this indicator will be interwoven into methods previously mentioned: the one-on-one interviews of teachers and the focus groups of parents. It is anticipated that the additional instrument development and analysis will require an extra half-day for each method.

The project team believes that this intervention could also have some other indirect effects or secondary outcomes. Due to time and budget constraints, they selected one of these to investigate further: the use of conflict resolution skills in family settings. The team believes that, if

teenagers develop conflict resolution skills, they will not only apply those skills to conflicts with the “other” but they will also use them among friends and family to a positive end. To collect data on this potential indirect effect, an indicator was developed to look at the percentage decrease in domestic violence. A secondary data review (method) of official police statistics over the past six months (data source and quantity) will be conducted. The data will be sourced from the central police station in the village (location of data collection).

Consideration of the gender makeup of the police force, as well as the domestic violence reporting procedure, should also be part of the analysis. This effort should take approximately one day (time).

Finally, when the project team reviewed their assumptions, there was one for which they anticipated that further data collection would be beneficial: the assumption that negative stereotypes foster violence against the “other.” The line of inquiry chosen was, “In what amount are other reasons the cause of violence between teenagers of different religions?” Data on causes of violence will come from the photographs (methods) taken by teenagers as described earlier. The additional analysis should take approximately one day (time).

The information on the amount that those other causes spark violence will come from one-on-one interviews (methods) with ten local police (data source and quantity), conducted in their offices (data collection location). The work will take around 3.5 days to complete (time).

The evaluator conducting the study most commonly develops the baseline plan in conjunction with the project team.

Who develops the baseline plan and when?

The evaluator conducting the study most commonly develops the baseline plan in conjunction with the project team. Key elements of the plan, such as indicators, are generally derived from the project documentation. If they have the experience, the project team members can also develop the baseline plan, although they should not finalize it until the evaluator has been hired and can provide input.

If feasible, the baseline plan should be developed immediately prior to its implementation. This ensures that it reflects the most current situation on the ground as well as any changes in thinking by the project team.

Example

Land Claims Conflict

Part 4: The organization has a Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DM&E) Specialist as part of its regional team whose members have been supporting the intervention design. With the DM&E Specialist’s help, the project team determined what would be included in the baseline focus during one of the project meetings to finalize the design.

Example

Rather than develop the full baseline plan, the team contracted an evaluator who had delivered a high quality evaluation on a similar project in the region. (This sole-source approach for recruiting is explained further in *Managing Evaluations*, page 153). They decided that the evaluator should develop the baseline plan since this would be a more time-effective process. The evaluator drafted the remaining aspects of the baseline plan after many discussions with the project team. The team then offered their input and the evaluator reworked the plan accordingly.

The baseline occurs a few weeks before the intervention is implemented.

For complex programs where there are several different changes projected, each resulting from activities that start at significantly different times, a rolling baseline should be considered.

When does a baseline study take place?

The baseline occurs a few weeks before the intervention is implemented. Practically speaking, it is included as the first activity in the project work plan. The data gathered from the baseline then informs the target setting in the design tool.

This can be difficult to achieve in conflict contexts where it can be important to be on the ground very quickly or where sudden shifts can cause unexpected delays. When speed is of the essence, it is possible to conduct the baseline simultaneously with the first stages of the project. Conversely, there should not be a time lag between the baseline and the intervention start. The data should be collected reasonably close to the start of the project, with “reasonable” being defined by the rapidity of change in the context. A situation in rapid flux should attempt to minimize the time (e.g., 3-4 weeks) between the baseline and implementation, while a more stable situation could handle a longer delay (e.g., 2-3 months).

For complex programs where there are several different changes projected, each resulting from activities that start at significantly different times, a rolling baseline should be considered. In this approach, the baseline is broken into segments according to the different changes and is implemented prior to the start of activities for each new change. When using a rolling baseline for different implementation start dates, it is not simply a matter of different activities beginning; rather, the deciding factor is that the project is initiating a new change through the newly started activities.

Consider for example, a three-year project in Kosovo with a goal of decreased Serb-Albanian violence in the Peje/Pec municipality. The objectives include 1) increased community utilization of the UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) war crimes investigation task force, 2) local truth and reconciliation structures operating within communities, and 3) increased trust in the Kosovo Police Service. Activities for the latter two objectives will start immediately after the receipt of funds, while the

activities for the first objective, the utilization of the UNMIK war crimes investigation task force, will start after 1.5 years. Before the project starts, baseline information should be gathered on the latter two objectives. At the 1.5 year mark of the project, the baseline should be conducted for the first objective.

A rolling baseline also applies for projects that have geographic rollouts. The project starts in one province and then moves to the next province after a set period of time (e.g., nine months). The baseline should be collected for each new provincial project launch. If there were 20 provinces and limited resources, one could select a portion of those provinces and conduct baselines in that portion only.

Example

Land Claims Conflict

Part 5: A rolling baseline will be used in such a manner that the second half of the baseline is implemented before the activities to initiate the second objective start. The first part of the baseline for this land claims conflict project was implemented within three weeks of receiving the project grant money. It gathered data on the first objective, “Land-owning population has increased information on local government initiatives relating to land claims,” because the activities to initiate this change were to start within eight weeks of receiving the funds. This timing, although tight, worked well because the data was brought back to the project team while there was still time to adjust the work plan and activities.

The second part of the baseline explored the second intended outcome, “Increased percentage of land owners who have proper documentation for their property.” The activities to initiate this change will occur nine months after the launch of the activities to increase the land-owning population’s knowledge of governmental land claims policies.

Who conducts the baseline?

The individual or team conducting the evaluation is the ideal choice to conduct the baseline. This approach ensures continuity between the baseline and evaluation and minimizes the chances of the baseline data being deemed incomplete or invalid. Moreover, it deepens the evaluators’ knowledge and implicit understanding of the context because they will have a picture of the “before” state. Of course, a different consultant who produces a high quality product may also be contracted, though this does not capitalize on the full package of potential benefits that would result from using the same people who conducted the evaluation and/or baselines.

An evaluation expert contracted to conduct a baseline can also provide valuable input into the project logic of the intervention. This expert can advise on the logic, indicator development, and the monitoring system as well. Since the project is not yet underway, it is a strategic time for this type of expert advice.

It is essential that the baseline be professionally implemented since it is pivotal to so many other steps in the project, from refining the design to measuring change. The methods must be appropriately selected and implemented well, and the analysis must be based on the evidence. A professional evaluation team will discard a baseline study that is not credible or that makes their job more difficult.

If contracting an external professional to conduct the full baseline is beyond the scope of the budget, and the specialized skills necessary do not exist on staff, consider hiring an external advisor. This person could still be a member of the future evaluation team, but would not implement the baseline in this scenario. Rather, she/he would advise on the methods selected, train the data collectors, and provide a quality check on the analysis.

We have no time to recruit an evaluator for the baseline, what do we do?

Baselines are generally not conducted unless funding has been secured, but once the funding becomes available, they should be rapidly implemented. This dynamic makes recruiting a qualified person challenging. If the time between receiving funds and the implementation start date is short, it is recommended to do the preliminary work for recruiting before the funds are awarded. This includes the development of the Terms of Reference and, potentially, the recruiting of an evaluator. Doing this advance preparation enables the baseline to be “on-the-ground” rapidly while still engaging qualified external support.

Example

Land Claims Conflict

Part 6: Since the baseline needed to be implemented very shortly after the funds were received, the team did some pre-planning for the recruitment of the evaluator. The team drafted the terms of reference, discussed evaluator options with the regional DM&E specialist, contacted the evaluator, and tentatively agreed on working terms. Upon receiving word that the grant was awarded, the team notified the evaluator so that dates could be blocked to conduct the baseline as soon as possible.

What should be done if a complete baseline is not possible?

If the timing and resources are such that a comprehensive baseline cannot be performed, there are two second-best options. The first is to conduct a condensed baseline where data is gathered on a few key indicators within the change focus. Start by selecting the key indicators either by identifying the ones that are most important overall or by selecting one for each objective.

The second option is to make the first monitoring exercise more comprehensive. This would involve collecting more data from more people than normally involved in a monitoring exercise. This is really a second best option since it does not provide the geographic or population coverage needed to make sound conclusions. Furthermore, because monitoring is generally conducted by staff members, the methods to be used will be limited to those that the staff members are competent in developing.

Not having a baseline does not invalidate the entire monitoring and evaluation process. Many evaluations are conducted in the absence of a baseline; however, the degree of conclusiveness of the findings is inherently limited where no baseline occurred. In other words, one can never say definitively that a change of X percent or from one status to another occurred since the beginning status is an approximation at best.

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How do evaluators use baseline data?

Evaluators utilize baseline data as a point of comparison for the data that they collect during the evaluation. The baseline data should not be accepted as sound, however, without some form of verification. At a minimum, both the methodology and analysis should be reviewed. Doing a review does not mean redoing the entire analysis, but selecting a few key areas and checking to see if the approach was sound. Even when the person who conducted the baseline and evaluation are the same, a small portion of time should be taken to confirm that no mistakes were made in the baseline study.

For further information on recruiting consultants and managing evaluation projects, see *Evaluation Management*, page 137.