

AusGuideline

Activity implementation

4.2 Baseline studies

Associated guidance on activity implementation

Part 4: implementation

AusGuideline 4.1: *Mobilising an activity*

AusGuideline 4.3: *Monitoring activities & managing contracts*

AusGuideline 4.4: *Preparing an annual plan*

AusGuideline 4.5: *Using a technical advisory group*

AusGuideline 4.6: an implementation review

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1 Purpose of a baseline study

Usually an activity design requires the delivery organisation to undertake a baseline study of the activity's situation shortly after implementation begins. The purpose of the study is to provide an information base against which to monitor and assess an activity's progress and effectiveness during implementation and after the activity is completed.

The study is usually designed and undertaken in close consultation with partner government authorities, as it must meet their needs as well as the needs of the Australian Government and the delivery organisation.

Being effectively the first step in the activity's monitoring and evaluation system, the baseline study is an early element of the activity monitoring plan. This plan, which reflects the logframe's levels of desired achievement or hierarchy of objectives, includes indicators of achievement and means of verification. The baseline study gathers the information to be used in subsequent assessments of how efficiently the activity is being implemented and the eventual results of the activity. (Note that these 'results' include all effects, achievements, benefits, outcomes and impacts of the activity - which are all concepts widely used in development cooperation.)

The monitoring of activity progress, which also gathers and analyses data using the logframe, will be consistent with, but will not repeat, the baseline study. Mid-term reviews, project completion reports and other evaluations will judge progress largely by comparing recent data with the information from the baseline study.

A 'needs assessment study', which collects information during the design of an activity, is not a baseline study and this guideline does not address the requirements of needs assessment studies.

The focus of this guideline is socioeconomic baseline studies, which are not a substitute for, but a complement to, physical science or environmental baseline studies in many activities.

2 When is a baseline study necessary?

Most activities will require a baseline study. However, for a major activity that will be designed during its inception phase, it might be preferable to collect baseline data on a rolling basis. For activities that are small-scale or of a short duration, a baseline study is unlikely to be warranted.

Sometimes the data needed for a baseline, against which to measure the degree and quality of change during an activity's implementation, will already exist. In such cases the only task is to collate the data and ensure that it can be updated in the longer term. So it is important to find out what information is already available.

But more commonly, there will not be any existing data, or it will be incomplete or of poor quality, or it will need to be supplemented or further disaggregated. For example, data related to gender and other marginalised groups often need to be disaggregated for an adequate initial poverty analysis. A baseline study will help to overcome these shortcomings. Wherever possible it should maximise the use of existing good-quality local data. The only new data collected should be for monitoring the quality of activity implementation and measuring the development results. If that information will not be used (or subsequently replicated), the need for a baseline study should be seriously questioned.

A baseline study should meet the needs and interests of key stakeholders. If it does not, the study is either unnecessary or the approach should be reconsidered. If the baseline information will satisfy the needs of only one stakeholder or group, it is likely that the relevance of the study needs to be broadened.

3 When should a baseline study be undertaken?

A baseline study should take place as soon as practicable after an activity begins. This does not necessarily mean that such studies must be conducted within the first few months of activity implementation. A study is better conducted when the main implementation partners have a reasonable understanding of the context of the activity. This will allow time for the delivery organisation to thoroughly plan the study and gain the commitment and involvement of local partners. The delivery organisation needs to be able to confirm that the proposed baseline study will not duplicate research and that all partners are familiar with existing data sources.

4 What should be considered when planning a baseline study?

Time devoted to research and planning at the beginning will help to minimise the risk of squandered effort and dissatisfied partners later on. The delivery organisation is responsible and accountable for thinking through and ensuring that the baseline study will be meaningful, relevant, cost effective and not overly academic.

The study should be closely linked with the critical aspects of the activity monitoring plan so that the data collected can be replicated if necessary during ongoing activity monitoring, for any mid-term review, when the activity is being assessed for the activity completion report and for any subsequent evaluations. 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.

It is advisable to review the logframe with all partners to ensure that it is clear and well structured. Logical and precisely expressed outputs, component level objectives, purpose and goal for an activity will assist data collection because they make clear what needs to be measured.

Although the context of the proposed activity is analysed during its design phase, circumstances can change significantly between the design and start of an activity. Each partner needs to understand the conditions in which the baseline study will be undertaken – for example, the season of the year, the prevailing political conditions, the state of the economy, any cultural divisions, and recent or expected extraordinary events such as natural disasters, political upheavals or economic shocks. If partners are not clear about such conditions, the meaning of the data generated by the baseline study might be misunderstood.

The practicalities of the baseline study should be assessed both in terms of its demand for material and human resources, and in terms of timing and duration. Each partner in an activity has competing workloads and different capacities, and these must be clearly understood for realistic planning. The baseline study requires considerable commitment from all personnel involved and they will need to be flexible and willing to compromise. Local resources are often limited and time is precious for everyone. This is an issue of particular importance for women who have the ‘double burden’ of work and family.

It is desirable to prepare and agree with partners a plan showing detailed resourcing and a budget before the study begins. The cost of the baseline study should be proportionate to the total cost of the activity.

Box 1 A baseline study should ...

- not be overly complex or theoretical
- have a justifiable budget
- be able to be replicated by local partners
- not duplicate existing data collected by counterparts or other donors
- focus on the information required for assessing activity objectives and results achieved
- provide the basis for monitoring key risks to successful implementation
- supply data that can be used in subsequent activity management

- deliver the data wanted by local partners
- adequately address different gender perspectives
- have participation or ownership by local partners
- provide an adequate basis for judging development results, and
- draw on appropriate and cost-effective Australian and local expertise.

Planning should include adequate provision for data collation and analysis, including appropriate staff, materials such as computer software and recording forms, data storage facilities and a clear picture of who will need to access data and in what form.

Training for those conducting the baseline study and the benefits of undertaking a pilot study should be considered. A pilot study, which should be satisfactorily completed and analysed before the full study begins, will help to avoid common field problems such as inappropriate use of language, poor interview or observation techniques, teams that are too large or too small, logistical difficulties and uncertainty in how to monitor the quality of a study team's work in the field. Lessons from a pilot study can be used to prioritise and allocate resources.

The delivery organisation should try to minimise the time that key technical staff are engaged in data collection and supervision, and the extent to which the daily life of communities being studied are disrupted – from the perspective of both men and women. Where practicable, local or Australian research students could be engaged to help undertake the baseline study. Several Australian universities are prepared to recommend Masters and PhD students for baseline work. AusAID is comfortable with this approach if the Australian and/or local students are appropriately skilled and well supervised.

Some baseline studies demand specific and high-level technical skills. In such cases the delivery organisation should ensure that these skills are available and that any training required takes place prior to the study. Even after training, local capacity might not match all the needs of the original plan for the study and initial expectations may need to be scaled down.

If specific equipment is needed, this should be available early enough to enable staff to become familiar with its use and to ensure that it can be delivered to the field on time. And if the study will use survey forms, maps, photographs or other such materials, the delivery organisation should ensure that there are sufficient copies.

The following links provide detailed information on planning baseline studies

- www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/
International Fund for Agricultural Development, *A guide for project M&E*. Sections 4 & 5 provide advice on setting up a monitoring and evaluation system and deciding what to monitor, and Section 8 shows how monitoring and evaluation can be integrated into project management.

- www.ifad.org/pub/bsf/cppe/cppe.pdf
International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Comprehensive participatory planning and evaluation*. Section II contains information on setting up a monitoring and evaluation system.
- www.undp.org/eo/Methodology/
United Nations Development Programme, *Handbook on monitoring and evaluating for results*. The handbook is comprehensive and focused on performance measurement.
- www.unfpa.org/monitoring/toolkit.htm
United Nations Population Fund, *The programme manager's planning, monitoring and evaluation toolkit*. This page of downloadable documents makes up UNFPA's monitoring and evaluation toolkit. Section 5 provides guidance on planning and managing an evaluation, and Section 6 discusses indicators.
- www.dec.org/pdf_docs/pnaby215.pdf
USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, *Performance monitoring and evaluation TIPS: preparing a performance monitoring plan*.

5 How should change be measured?

When planning a baseline study the delivery organisation needs to determine both what change needs to be assessed and what sort of comparison(s) will need to be made as part of that assessment of change.

There are two common ways to measure change

- 'with and without' activity – this seeks to mimic the use of an experimental control, and compares change in the activity location to change in a similar location where the activity has not been implemented, and
- 'before and after' activity – this measures change over time in the activity location alone.

The advantages and disadvantages of these approaches are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 **Advantages and disadvantages of different ways of measuring change as a result of an activity**

With and without activity	Before and after activity
<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increases the likelihood of identifying causal factors in change. ▪ Allows a clearer measure of the degree of change. 	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to collect data from only activity area, so demands fewer resources. ▪ Allows a combination of monitoring and evaluation functions. ▪ Provides a stronger motivation for participatory

monitoring and evaluation.

Disadvantages

- Difficult to find truly comparable areas in terms of ecology, resources and capacities.
- Can be compromised by the activities of other donors, local government or community organisations in the 'without' location.
- Requires more advanced statistical skills and software.
- Is more expensive.
- Tends to give information that is needed in only impact evaluations, not monitoring.
- Poses an ethical problem if 'without' groups are used to measure change and impact but are excluded from development opportunities.

Disadvantages

- More difficult to identify causal factors in change, especially when other activities are taking place in the same location.
- Assumes that change will be a linear progression.

6 What research methods are appropriate?

Many research methods can be used in baseline studies. All social research methods have strengths and weaknesses. These should be analysed and matched against the needs of the specific activity, the time and resources available, and the context in which the baseline study will be conducted.

Social scientists usually distinguish between quantitative and qualitative methods, and a good baseline study will use both. The World Bank document *Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches in program evaluation* <http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/12930_chapter7.pdf> argues that combining these methods will yield insights that neither can achieve on its own.

A range of computer software is available to analyse numerical and textual data, but these programs often demand a high level of technical skills. This can reduce the likelihood that they will be regularly used or adopted locally. The software chosen should be the most appropriate for the circumstances.

Visual items, including photographs, maps and diagrams, are important pieces of data and are often neglected or underused in a baseline study. It is often necessary to be creative and innovative about the data sources used.

Of central importance in choosing a research method is the reliability of the data ultimately collected. It is desirable to combine the methods in a way that maximises the reliability of the data.

Some methods will be more appropriate for measuring the progress and developmental impact that the specific activity is seeking to achieve. For example, for an activity aiming to increase school attendance the baseline study will need to use methods for collecting and analysing statistical indicators, but for an activity attempting to change beliefs about the transmission of malaria the study will require participatory and observational methods that measure changes in thinking.

Because it is important to be able to replicate, as appropriate, the baseline study during the implementation of the activity, whatever methods are used need to be explained and justified in detail in the baseline study plans and subsequent reports. This will help others to assess the reliability and suitability of the approach taken, and to reproduce the study in any future review, evaluation or extension of the activity.

Before the baseline study begins, the delivery organisation will need to consider how the resulting data will be analysed and whether this requires specialist inputs, subcontracting to research institutions or preparatory training. If the process is overly complicated, this may indicate that data collection for monitoring will be difficult to sustain during the activity or to replicate in any evaluation.

In some situations the beneficiaries of the activity will influence the research methods used. For example, it may be necessary to hold interviews with separate focus groups of women and men, and/or have same gender interviewers/facilitators. There may be similar implications for different ethnic, age or socioeconomic groups.

A quality-control process should be built into each method used in the baseline study to ensure that the data are collected according to the principles and criteria on which the study was planned. If there is a pilot study, the methods and quality-control procedures should be thoroughly tested to allow for any modifications before the full study begins.

7 What indicators should be used?

Indicators are a first, but important, step towards understanding the quality and effectiveness of an activity and thereby understanding how to improve management of the activity.

Indicators are pieces of information that help to assess the quality of activity implementation and measure the development results. They help to measure or monitor change; they do not explain change. For example, sex-disaggregated indicators will not explain gender issues, but will provide data that allow gender issues to be explained and addressed. Similarly, information on time travelled to markets does not explain participation in a local economy,

but does provide data that will help in the analysis of issues of participation and in more effectively targeting disadvantaged groups.

Indicators should be clearly linked to the various levels of the activity logframe – goal, purpose, component level objectives and outputs. A clear distinction should be made between indicators that can be used in

- monitoring the quality of activity implementation, including assessing the progress in achieving objectives and the professionalism of activity management in terms of specific actions, contractual deliverables and outputs, and
- measuring development results, such as the achievement of the activity's component-level outcomes and its goal and purpose-level impacts as specified in the logframe.

Indicators should be SMART

- **Specific** – clear, simple, single items of information
- **Measurable** – items that can be reliably quantified
- **Attainable** – data that are easily and cost-effectively gathered and available for the duration of the activity
- **Relevant** – information that relates to the goal, purpose, component level objectives and outputs of the activity
- **Timely** – data that can be collected and analysed quickly enough to be useful in activity management.

The Australian Government's aid program has five guiding themes that link its poverty reduction strategy with individual aid activities – governance, globalisation, human capital, security, and sustainable resource management. (For detailed descriptions, see *Australian aid: investing in growth, stability and prosperity* – eleventh statement to Parliament on Australia's Development Cooperation Program <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/eleventh.pdf>>, sections 2.1–2.3).

When selecting indicators for which the baseline study will collect data, it is vital to include indicators for the relevant guiding themes that link the poverty reduction strategy of the Australian Government's aid program to the specific activity. This will enable an assessment of how the activity is contributing to the overall impact of its aid program. (The themes relevant to the activity will normally be set out in the design document).

It is important that the indicators chosen are those most relevant to the activity. While indicators generally only point to change, some will improve understanding of the change observed. But too many indicators will increase costs and time demands, and reduce the likelihood that people will continue to collect the data.

Considerable thought should be given to the appropriate level of disaggregation of the data by gender and major socioeconomic, ethnic and/or age group. To track gender-related change over time among the population affected by the activity, it will be necessary to determine the baseline situation of the needs of women and men, the constraints to participation, the access to basic services and the degree of empowerment of women in terms of, for example, status, decision-making and mobility.

The following links provide help and further discussion on selecting and using indicators

- www.adb.org/statistics/poverty/glossary.asp
The Asian Development Bank's alphabetical list of indicators to provide data on poverty and development, including health issues.
- www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/45/1896978.pdf
The DAC's indicator methodology sheets, which show suggested indicators and some recommended methods of collection.
- www.minefi.gouv.fr/TRESOR/cicid/atelier/som_contrib.htm
Contributions to a workshop on evaluation held in March 2003. Paper 2.9 by the UNDP's Ruby Sandhu-Rojon discusses indicators.
- www.dec.org/pdf_docs/pnaby214.pdf
USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, *Performance monitoring and evaluation TIPS: selecting performance indicators*.
- www.dec.org/pdf_docs/pnaca927.pdf
USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, *Performance monitoring and evaluation TIPS: guidelines for indicator and data quality*.
- [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cida_ind.nsf/0/98005d3629e784fe8525694f0064f11f/\\$FILE/WID-GUID-E.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cida_ind.nsf/0/98005d3629e784fe8525694f0064f11f/$FILE/WID-GUID-E.pdf)
CIDA's *Guide to gender sensitive indicators* is a tool for practitioners wishing to strengthen the women in development/gender equality evaluation component of their project work through better use of gender-sensitive indicators.

8 What sampling techniques should be used?

Sampling is a way of choosing limited information when it is not feasible to collect all available information. It applies to a range of research methods, not only questionnaire surveys.

Good sampling helps improve the reliability and quality of data, and can save time and resources. It generally requires specific technical skills. Most development workers are aware

that sampling should be 'representative', but the key is to know of what it is to be representative.

Most data collection uses random sampling to gather indicators that are representative of the overall population supported by an activity. This is often useful, but will not always give a clear picture of an activity's impact.

Activities are usually concerned with one or more general concepts such as access, gender, participation, discrimination, poverty or capacity. Indicators have to be developed for these concepts, and the implications for sampling need to be considered. For example, an activity to improve access to social services might require indicators of time, service delivery and communications infrastructure, as well as indicators to compare 'central' and 'remote' communities. Similarly, an activity to improve household wealth will need indicators such as cash income, seasonal employment levels and in-kind exchanges, as well as indicators of different types of household or of households of different ethnic groups.

If a pilot study is undertaken, its results should be closely analysed to check that the indicators and sampling method are providing the information needed to assess the quality of activity implementation and to measure development results.

The Cornell University website <<http://trochim.human.cornell.edu/sampling.htm>> provides a clear and brief explanation of sampling and basic methods.

9 How important is data analysis?

A common aim of many development activities is to help partner agencies to improve the quality of their data collection and its use in planning and management.

It is a common complaint that partner agencies collect large amounts of information but do not analyse it to give direction to their resource allocation or policy development. Yet many activity managers fail to use their baseline studies in the same way.

Data collection provides numerous facts, which are of little use if the information is not interpreted or used in decision-making and actions. Analysis of the data collected is arguably the most important step in a baseline study, and it is important to ensure that adequate time and resources are allocated to it. Analysis involves collating the data and interpreting the results in the broader context of the activity.

Methods of analysis range from simple aggregations to complex computer-based regression and network analyses. The appropriate methods of analysis need to be selected and prioritised

on the basis of those that will significantly help in measuring the activity's results and management efficiency.

Research students in Australian and local institutions are often a good source of expertise in data analysis. Consulting this expertise at the planning stage and using it during analysis will avoid wasted time and effort.

If improved systems of data collection and analysis are to be adopted in partner agencies, it is important that the systems can be sustained beyond the life of the activity. A good activity will develop a practical model of data collection and analysis that partners find useful, relevant and affordable.

The analysis of baseline data should be followed by regular (usually annual) analysis of the data collected during activity implementation. The findings can be used in planning and as a guide in allocating human and physical resources.

If the data analysis is not informing the activity manager on how to improve the quality of activity implementation and measure development results, the delivery organisation should question why resources are being used to collect the information.

10 Can a baseline study build partners' ownership and capacity?

In most cases, everyone involved in an activity should be able to effectively use the information collected in a baseline study to make informed management decisions, strengthen local systems and build capacity. All implementation partners should see the baseline study as relevant, useful and important.

Cooperative involvement from the outset is vital and should continue through the stages of planning, piloting, collection, analysis and feedback to managers. An activity should begin with a common vision of what is to be achieved, even if there are competing ideas of how to get there. This common vision will largely determine the content and methods of the baseline study and agreed measures of progress towards the common goal.

There are three major reasons why partners fail to become involved in a baseline study.

- Partners have insufficient time or resources to participate
This issue should be addressed in the design phase of an activity but, if not, it should be considered and resolved during the planning of a baseline study. Sometimes providing new materials such as computers and software or transport will suffice, but not always. It is better to adjust the available resources and time rather than exclude key partners.

- Partners have insufficient skills to participate
This problem can be addressed by capacity building and training, or subcontracting specific tasks. Partners may require ongoing support beyond the duration of the activity. However, if the skills gap is too great and cannot be closed, the sustainability and relevance of the activity's monitoring and evaluation system needs to be questioned.
- The baseline study is not seen as important or relevant to local needs
This issue should have been addressed during the activity design. It signals a possible flaw in the conception of the activity and the delivery organisation should consider whether there is a more serious lack of commitment to the activity.

If the analysis of baseline information is to improve activity management and development outcomes, its results have to be shared, but after consensus has been reached on what the analysis shows. The systems to share and disseminate information and the results of analysis should have been considered and agreed in the study's planning stage.

In most cases the results of the baseline study are reported in standard formats to AusAID and the partner government, but other stakeholders, donors and development workers are likely to be interested in the results. The delivery organisation must consider the best ways to present information to them. Reports should be clearly and simply written with the primary audience in mind and be available in relevant languages. Other formats for reporting, such as exhibitions, workshops and slide shows, can spread key messages effectively and reach a larger audience.

Sharing results and encouraging wider analysis and discussion will enrich the quality and impact of an activity, as well as contribute lessons and good practice to other activities.

11 Other Internet links to useful information

www.usaid.gov/pubs/usaid_eval/

A page of downloadable documents in various areas of monitoring and evaluation. The section *Performance monitoring and evaluation TIPS* has documents on preparing a monitoring plan, selecting indicators and some common field research methods.

poverty.worldbank.org/files/4480_chap3.pdf

Information on how to set up a poverty monitoring system, including choosing indicators, designing impact evaluation and feeding monitoring and evaluation results back into management. It is part of the World Bank's *Poverty reduction strategy sourcebook* <www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/sourcons.htm>.

poverty.worldbank.org/files/4943_annex_c.pdf

A set of technical notes and case studies that can be read in conjunction with the previous link.

62.189.42.51/DFIDstage/pubs/files/sdd_kothari.pdf

Paper by Uma Kothari of Manchester University that focuses on assessment procedures and measuring outcomes.

sites.maxwell.syr.edu/intlevel/readings/chapter6a-f.htm

Academic notes on the design and implementation of baseline studies from the course 'Evaluation of international programs and projects' at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

www.consultpdm.com/publications.htm

Downloadable version of *Bridging the gap: a guide to monitoring and evaluating projects* on the site of PDM, a private consulting company in Australia. Chapters 2 and 3 on the principles and establishment of monitoring systems can be downloaded individually.

www.alterra.nl/publ-prod/rapporten/download/AlterraRapport675.pdf

Schrevel's 2002 paper *The socio-economic baseline survey*, which focuses on how to conduct a survey in a rural development setting.

www.foodaidmanagement.org/mne3.htm

Page with links to useful documents, toolkits and indicator guides with a bias towards health and nutrition issues.

A Baseline study checklist – questions to be answered

Initial considerations

- Is a baseline study necessary? Would improving the quality of existing data collections obviate the need for a baseline study? Was adequate appropriate information gathered through the planning process for the activity? Would a baseline study duplicate existing information?
- Is the study going to measure the right things? If people unfamiliar with the activity were to review the data collected, would it help them to understand what the activity is designed to achieve? What is the core, minimal information needed to measure the activity's results?
- Are all partners committed to conducting the baseline study, providing the budget and using the results?
- Does the activity focus on socioeconomic issues?
- Are there other AusAID guidelines you should consult before commencing the baseline study?
- Is the baseline study integrated into the activity's monitoring and evaluation system? Can it be replicated during implementation or after the activity is completed?
- Will all the results of the baseline study be used to assess activity progress and measure development results?
- Does the activity have a clear logframe agreed with partners? Are all the indicators in the logframe to be measured in the baseline study?
- Is the context in which the baseline study will take place clear? How will that context be accounted for in the planning?
- Have you considered what logistical preparations are needed for collecting, analysing, storing and sharing data?
- How will the activity's monitoring and evaluation system be incorporated into the systems of partner agencies? Can the partners replicate the baseline study?
- What will be the financial and management costs of the study? Is that estimated cost proportionate to the overall activity?

Broad-brush planning

- Will all key partners in the activity be involved in the baseline study? Are they agreed on the plan and the budget?
- What logistical preparations are needed to collect, analyse, store and share data?

- Does the team have all the skills needed to conduct the baseline study? If not, how will additional expertise be obtained?
- Are all key partners agreed on what the activity is seeking to achieve, and is that reflected in the baseline study design?
- Is the baseline study feasible in terms of timing and resources?
- Will it be possible to gather similar data or replicate the baseline study during subsequent monitoring and a possible evaluation?
- What approach will be taken to ensure that gender aspects are adequately addressed?

Method options and piloting

- Have the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods to be used been analysed?
- Will a variety of methods be used in the baseline study to improve reliability?
- Will the selected methods clearly measure progress and results achieved against the aims of the activity?
- Will the selected methods enable subsequent assessment of the quality of activity implementation and measurement of the impact?
- Is the methodology explicit and recorded?
- How will the data collected be analysed?
- What are the quality-control procedures and are they in place?
- Should a pilot study be conducted to determine the method or scale of the baseline study?
- Are the methods cost effective and do they represent value for money when compared with the total size of the activity?

Adequacy of indicators

- Will the indicators measured in the baseline study be suitable for assessing the quality of activity implementation and for measuring development results?
- Are the indicators SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, reliable and timely)?
- Do the indicators cover each level of the activity's logframe?
- Will the indicators enable judgments to be made about impacts on gender and marginalised and other important groups in society?
- Are there indicators on relevant AusAID guiding themes?
- Will the indicators help to explain the cause of observed changes?
- Are the means of verifying the indicators practicable?
- Are there too many indicators, given the study's budget and the time available?

Sampling method

- Does the team have sufficient expertise in sampling? If not, how will this expertise be obtained?
- What sampling techniques are suitable for the study?

Analysis of the data collected

- Does the team have all of the expertise required to carry out the required data analysis? If not, how will additional expertise be obtained?
- Will the analysis assess the quality of activity management and implementation and measure development results?
- How will the data be collated and stored?
- How will the results be shared among implementation partners and with other stakeholders?
- Has regular analysis of data over the course of the activity been planned and budgeted for?
- How will the analysis of data be fed back into activity management?

Partner ownership and capacity

- How will the data of the baseline study be shared and disseminated among the implementation partners and other stakeholders?
- What adjustments need to be made to make the information culturally appropriate and/or easy to interpret?
- Have all partners agreed on the formats for reporting the baseline information, and is there opportunity for criticism and discussion?
- Who will be able to access and use the baseline information in the future?
- How will new procedures for data collection and analysis be embedded in local systems?
- Have appropriate opportunities and strategies for building capacity been considered and included in baseline planning, management and implementation with the partners?