ARISE The Frontline of Abolition

BASELINE - MEL TOOL

A baseline is a collection of data that captures the current situation that you are interested in changing before you start a project. It helps you understand what the project achieves by measuring the difference between the situation at the start and end of the project.

Let's consider this example:
For the outcome: Increased rate of children's attendance to local schools
You create the indicator: Number of children attending school daily (disaggregated by age, sex, and caste)

You then measure the indicator at the start and end of the project:

START OF THE PROJECT

Baseline measure of indicator: 100 out of 320 or 31% of children attend school daily

END OF THE PROJECT

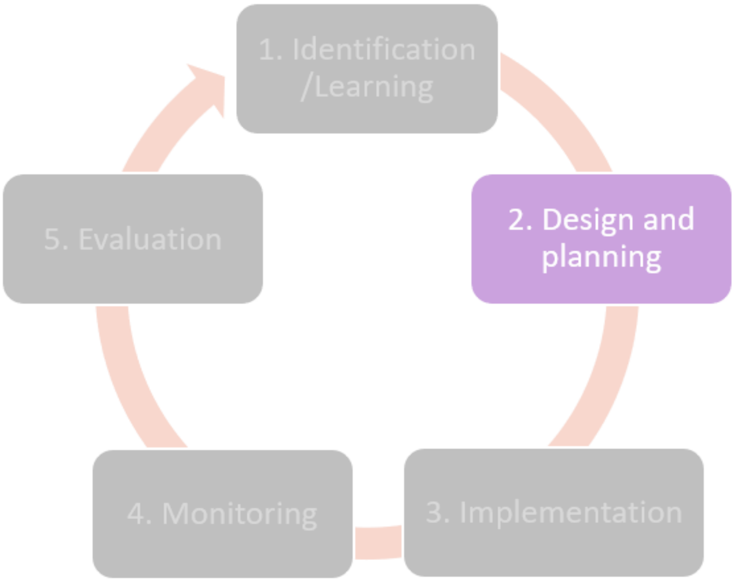
Endline measure of indicator: 243 out of 320, or 75% of children attend school daily

This shows that the project had the following **impact**: 44.4% more children are now attending school daily.

You can collect baseline information from surveys, interviews or other tools, but make sure to use the same method to assess the results at the end of the project (also known as the **endline**) so that they are comparable**.** When you establish a good baseline at the beginning of your project, the conclusions you make later about the results you achieved will be more reliable. A baseline also helps you in creating targets for your outcomes indicators at the start of the project.

Not all indicators need to be assessed during the baseline. Usually indicators that are measured at the baseline tend to be for higher-levels of change, such as for outcomes related to changes in behaviour or knowledge or practices, rather than at the output level.

When to plan and conduct a baseline study?



It takes place after the project design is complete but before the project begins.

Baselines cannot be conducted before you decide what changes you hope to achieve and what your project design is. This is to avoid measuring things that are irrelevant or inaccurate when you have not yet decided your project objectives.

How to plan and conduct a baseline study?

1. Identify the purpose and scope

The purpose of a baseline is to measure current conditions before a project begins, which can then be used to monitor and evaluate the project's progress. It is important to take into consideration the following aspects while identifying the purpose and scope of the baseline study.

- Any baseline requirements from donors or partner organisations who may have specific requirements about what they want to find out and how to undertake the process, etc.
- Timing - the baseline needs to be determined as early as possible
- Key stakeholders and target audiences - consider who you need to talk to and who would provide important information
- Geographic area and demographic (target community groups)

- Budget (see point below)
- Potential contextual/political impacts of involving the target community group in the baseline

2. Budget for the baseline study

It is best to determine your baseline study budget early on to determine what is possible to cover within the funds available.

- Ensure that the baseline **and** endline costs are included in the overall project budget. This helps to ensure that the costs are secured in the budget. Make sure it is detailed and covers staff costs (any external consultants, training/capacity building, translation, data entry, etc.), and costs such as equipment, travel and accommodation, printing, etc.
- Plan for contingency costs - Unexpected costs may arise during the baseline study, such as the need for additional data collection/analysis to verify findings.
- If the baseline study is required by the donor, determine whether they are willing to provide funding for it. Some donors are not willing to fund baseline activities so be sure to also check for exclusions. If you are using multiple funding sources for the baseline, make sure that you reveal this in the budget.

3. Human resources and capacity building

Try to ensure that your baseline fits well within the time and capacity of staff. This will help increase the value and usefulness of a baseline study.

- Assess the project team's capacity to conduct the baseline study - do they have the skills and time to carry out this activity? Plan for any capacity-building requirements, if needed (for example, training on how to conduct a baseline)
- Determine whether it is more convenient to hire someone externally to lead the baseline

At times, organisations will outsource the baseline study to a consultant to undertake. This may be due to time or capacity constraints, or perhaps it is a more complex project. If you choose to go this route, be very clear about what you expect the consultant to produce in your contract to avoid disagreements or discrepancies later.

4. Indicators and data collection methods

Once you decide your indicators, you can quickly identify what you need to cover in your baseline study. You can refer to other relevant MEL tools available to understand how to set indicators *(Available on Arise website)*.

- Decide what to include depending on your activities and how relevant indicators are to them.
- Determine the appropriate methods and data sources. These need to be the same when the baseline and endline assessments are carried out.

5. Data analysis and applying information gained

Data analysis is the process of converting the data from the baseline study into usable information. You should plan beforehand on how you wish to use the analysis. Where will the information be used in project planning (log frames or work plans) and monitoring and reporting? Who needs to know the results of the baseline study and analysis?

If the baseline finds something new or different to what was expected, changes might be needed to the planned activities, methods or participants.

Depending on context:

1. Write a baseline report: It may be relevant or useful to produce a report from the baseline study that highlights which indicators you measured in the baseline and what you learnt from the study.

2. Sharing the baseline report with stakeholders: This can be a strategic decision that helps build recognition and support for the project and sets the expectations of what the project can achieve among stakeholders. You can do this by arranging a presentation of your baseline study findings to local government, partner organisations, and international donors. This will help to check accuracy of data, confirm findings, and provide additional inputs to inform future actions/ recommendations.

3. Beneficiary communication: It is important to follow up and communicate the baseline findings to the target community group, especially those directly involved in the study.

Sometimes, our baseline and endline data may tell us something different to what we originally thought and that is alright - the whole process is about learning and ensuring all our projects make the most effective impact in beneficiaries' lives. When this is the case, it is important to communicate honestly about this to your donors and beneficiary communities, as it builds trust and accountability.