



INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Does MISEREOR require a baseline study?

Information document for our partners

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This information document deals with a number of questions that arise in the general context of ‘baselines’.

The term ‘baseline’ is usually understood to imply an extensive baseline study of the status quo in a project region conducted before or during project planning. It might cover numerous aspects: target group needs, distribution of the target group by region, contextual information, situation analyses etc. These studies are usually conducted by external consultants, and are often comparatively time-consuming and costly.

MISEREOR, on the other hand, does not wish to focus on expensive studies. We prefer to advocate a careful, **participatory** approach to project planning in which the beneficiaries are actively involved from the outset, and in which the information is collected that can later be used to assess the outcomes and impacts of the project. In other words, rather than commissioning extensive studies, MISEREOR prefers to speak of gathering ‘baseline values’. Not infrequently, involving the beneficiaries in the planning process leads to these actors themselves seeing things in a new light, giving them a more self-assured understanding of their role in the project and their personal objectives.

The present information document will define in more detail this notion of baseline values. It will also discuss what role baseline values should play within a planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) system, and how these data can be collected.

### **1. What are baseline values? Why do you need them?**

Identifying/recording baseline values is closely linked to planning and describing project objectives and indicators. Whenever any project is being planned, it is first of all necessary to ask: what is the status quo in the region or area where we intend to work? And secondly: what do we wish to change and what are we able to change there through our project? This change, i.e. the intended effects, should be described in the project objectives, and monitored or measured using indicators. In order to be able to verify at the end of a project whether the desired changes have actually occurred, we need baseline values. These enable us to compare the status quo before and after the project in relation to the formulated project objectives and their indicators.

#### **Example 1:**

**Project objective:** The food situation in farming households in region XY has improved by the end of the project.

**Alternative indicator 1:** The households receiving extension services in region XY have obtained a yield of at least 2.5 tonnes of maize per hectare by the end of the project.

**(Baseline value at launch of project: 2 tonnes per hectare)**

or

**Alternative indicator 2:** The households receiving extension services in region XY have increased their maize yields by an average of 25 % by the end of the project.

**(Baseline value at launch of project: 2 tonnes per hectare)**

This example clearly demonstrates that

- without baseline values realistic planning is difficult. With respect to indicator 1 this means that a yield of 2.5 tonnes of maize per hectare indeed represents a positive change as at the beginning of the project yields were below 2.5 tonnes. If, however, at the beginning of the project yields would already have been at 2.5 tonnes of maize per hectare or higher, then the target would have been met already at that point.
- without baseline value for indicator 2, it will not be possible to say at the end of the project when or whether the increase of 25 % was achieved.

### Example 2:

**Project objective:** Women in the 20 villages of region XY actively participate in decision-making processes concerning village development (village development plans)<sup>1</sup>.

**Indicator 1:** By the end of the project 30 % of seats on each 'village development committee' are occupied by women.

**(Baseline values at launch of project: village 1: 1 seat out of 10 = 10 %, village 2: 3 seats out of 15 = 20 %, etc.)**

**Indicator 2<sup>2</sup>:** By the end of the project, 70 % of the men in the respective 'village development committees' see the female members as a valuable and indispensable part of decision-making processes.

**(Baseline values at launch of project: village 1: 9 men, 2 of whom share this view = approx. 20 %, etc.)**

or

**Indicator 3:** In the 20 villages, an average of 30 % of the activities/measures in the village development plans that are realised can be traced back to proposals made or initiatives launched by women.

**(Baseline values at launch of project: village 1: 1 out of 10 proposals = 10 %, village 2: none of the 12 proposals = 0 %, etc.)<sup>3</sup>**

Consequently, baseline values are necessary in order to a) describe the planned changes, b) monitor and assess the changes that do occur, and c) report on these changes as part of the formal reporting process.

#### a) Planning

Any project aims to benefit particular people in a defined region. Within that project region, however, there may be different relations of ownership and needs, as well as various groups, some of whom are part of the project, but some of whom do not fit into it (e.g. because they are too well off). Since funds are limited, a choice has to be made as to who and what the project can support, and who and what it cannot. Therefore, when the project is being planned or launched, data should be available that document the situation of the beneficiaries at the outset of the project in relation to the project objectives and their respective indicators. These data serve several purposes:

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<sup>1</sup> This objective presupposes that village development committees exist and are operational.

<sup>2</sup> For this indicator it is necessary to devise an appropriate method for surveying men's attitudes toward women in political decision-making processes. It is helpful to ask what 'valuable' and 'indispensable' might mean (to the men) in this context. On this basis it might then for instance be possible to develop a questionnaire or structured interview.

<sup>3</sup> To obtain a percentage which is meaningful in a given context it is important at the same time to determine the total number of activities/initiatives realised.

- First of all they provide an indication of who will be supported, i.e. they indicate the beneficiaries selected.
- They also enable both the project and MISEREOR to assess the project objectives: are these realistic or are they too ambitious?

#### *b) Monitoring*

- Secondly they also serve as a basis for subsequent project monitoring. By comparing monitoring data with the baseline values, a project is able to determine how behaviour has changed and to what extent things are moving in the direction of the objectives.

#### *c) Reporting to MISEREOR/assessing the success of the project*

- Finally, the baseline values are an important source of information for the indicators contractually agreed with MISEREOR. These indicators, which become legally binding in the project contract, are assessed when the project is completed. This provides one basis for measuring the changes brought about, and thus the success of the project. The relevant baseline values should be included in the annual narrative reports, in order to back up the comments contained therein on the changes observed.

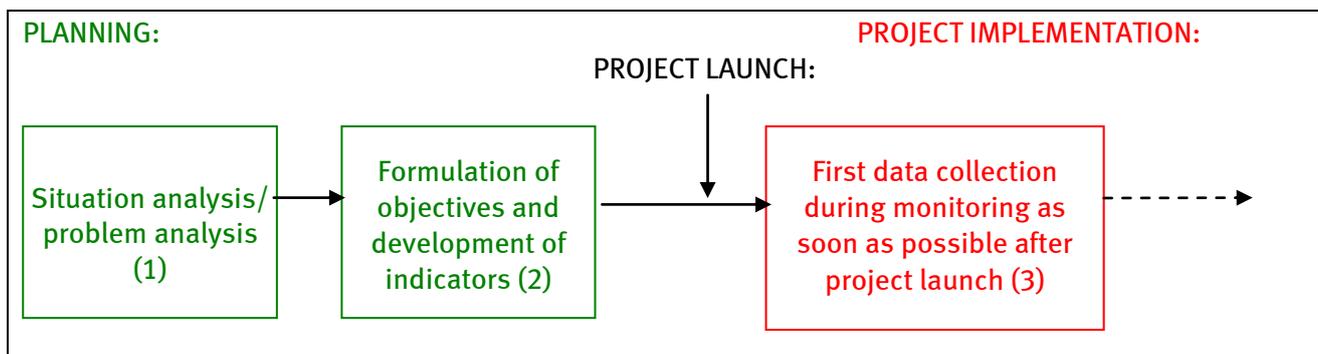
Indicators and the baseline values to which they relate should meet four key criteria:

- They should describe how the changes can be monitored or measured.
- They should relate to a project objective.
- They should be as specific and clear as possible.
- Project personnel or beneficiaries should be able to measure them directly without excessive labour or cost.

## ***2. When do you obtain baseline data? How do you obtain them?***

To collect baseline data it is not necessary to conduct a large-scale study. The information can be gathered in the course of participatory planning, or during the initial monitoring phase of projects that are already ongoing. In projects where a more extensive baseline study is, however, carried out it makes sense to obtain the baseline values as part of the study.

During participatory planning, there are several points at which you can hold interviews or discussions with the beneficiaries in order to obtain the baseline data. This is illustrated in the graphic below:



- (1) During the joint situation analysis with the beneficiaries, the latter will already provide you with a first description of the status quo when you interview them. You may refer to this pool of information when formulating indicators and identifying baseline values.
- (2) When formulating objectives and indicators, you can determine the baseline values in a more specific and detailed way by giving the beneficiaries an opportunity to describe their situation in relation to the jointly identified indicators.
- (3) You can also do this during project monitoring, which focuses on changes that can be observed in relation to the defined objectives.

This shows that identifying baseline values can be an integral component of a participatory planning process.

If a project pursuing the same/similar objectives with the same target group has been implemented previously, you might draw data from that project and use them as baseline values.

We leave it up to you, our partners, to decide how and by what method you wish to collect the data (e.g. from documentation of group meetings, surveys, interviews, votes taken in the villages, monitoring, data from official agencies). Please choose a method that is workable in the local context, and that can be used directly to document changes. Whatever method you choose, you should always involve the project beneficiaries as closely as possible for the reasons mentioned above. To keep the work to a minimum, a sample of the beneficiary group can be selected for interview.

So, the answer to the question raised by this information document - **Does MISEREOR require a baseline study?** – is as follows:

MISEREOR does not require a comprehensive baseline study. What it does require are baseline data that deliver information relating to the project objectives and their indicators, and thus provide a basis for assessing project success. MISEREOR does not request these baseline values before signing the project contract, but does require that they be included in the annual reports as a point of reference.

We would like to encourage you, our partners, to collect the baseline data (early on) in the course of a participatory planning process, and would hope that you will find this approach very helpful. We are convinced this approach makes it easier to formulate realistic objectives and indicators, and monitor these, which in turn will facilitate learning within the project and contribute to effective project steering.

EQM

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