Example of Guidelines on Baseline Information Collection M4C

5.1 Establishing Baselines

In order to predict the changes in indicators as a result of M4C's planned interventions and also to measure the changes over time, the project must know the status of the indicators at the time the intervention starts or before the project activities cause changes. This can be accomplished through a pre-intervention baseline study of the status of indicators in the results chain, or it can be done by a retrospective study (in absence of baseline) that compares the present with a previous point in time in order to assess changes.

Pre-Intervention Baseline Study

When: A baseline assessment should be conducted per intervention when activities start being implemented. The key is to establish the participants' condition before they have been significantly affected by Project activities. Thus assessment should therefore take place after the provider has been chosen but before significant capacity building has taken place.

How: If comprehensive sector research has been conducted as outlined in section 3.2, it may not be necessary to gather all additional data to measure the status of the indicators; there may be sufficient information from the sector study/initial market research and analysis. Those responsible for establishing the baseline indicators may therefore wish to take the following steps:

1. Determine what data on the indicators is available from previous sector research and analysis

2. Based on this data, calculate and record a baseline figure for as many indicators as possible

3. Make a plan to gather any additional data needed to complete calculations that is not available from previous sector research. (It is usually necessary to gather data on a sample of char households who will get the new or better service, input or relationship so that these same households can be interviewed again after they are expected to have benefited from the service, input or relationship.)

4. Determine the sample size and locations for the baseline data collection. M4C may calculate the sample size using the sample calculator of the following link -www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html. As a general rule, M4C will assume 50% response distribution and choose a sample with 10% margin of error and 90% confidence interval. (for example, if intervention has the potential to reach 5000 HHs, M4C will take baseline of 67 HHs) However, if the first year's results in a sector show that impact is likely to be a large part of the portfolio, an additional baseline may be conducted on new households to increase rigor of the study.

5. Gather the relevant data e.g. though surveys, interviews, etc.

6. Process the data and calculate the status of the remaining indicators

7. Make a record of the status of all the indicators at the baseline

8. Check the baseline figures on subsequent monitoring visits.

On top of the data on the indicators M4C sub-contractors (local NGOs), who are facilitating organization of producer groups, also need to establish baseline for the group members in terms of their poverty status, livelihood options and status of market integration before the intervention starts. A template for collecting those data can be found in the Annex.

Establishing a Retrospective Baseline

If a baseline was not established at the time of intervention design, M4C will try to collect baseline information retrospectively by using recall data. Individuals will be asked for recollection of the situation before the intervention and what would have happened if there had been no intervention. However, information that depends on recall over an extended period can be unreliable: “this is especially true for measuring change in areas where recall is weak, or if attitudes, opinions and behaviors are likely to change over time. For example, recall data on income, regular expenditures are not very reliable, especially when using a long reference period.” However information on behavior can sometimes be recollected through recall data. Also in the case of partners and service providers, M4C might be able to collect baseline retrospectively by looking at their written records (e.g. seed sales for retailers, number of participants in groups/associations, etc.).

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