# Chapter Three

Participatory Baselines
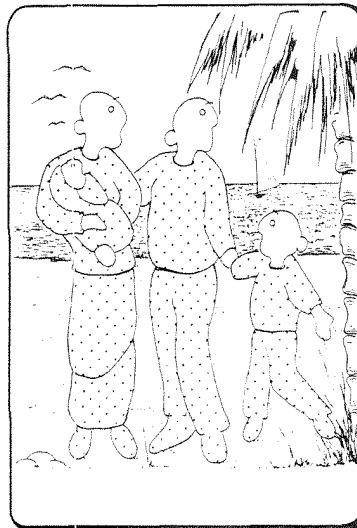
What is a Participatory Baseline?

A Participatory Baseline provides a description and information, from the insiders perspective, of a specific situation. It is done so that activities can be focused, and change can be measured by comparison with similar situations at some future time. Information is identified and collected to describe the present situation as it specifically relates to the objectives. For example, if one of the objectives is to increase the supply of fish to a community, the baseline information required might include:

What is the present fish supply?
What is the size of the present fishing fleet?
What fishing methods are in use?
What is the household fish consumption?

A Participatory Baseline enables insiders to measure and evaluate change in specific conditions. It provides a point from which change can be measured.
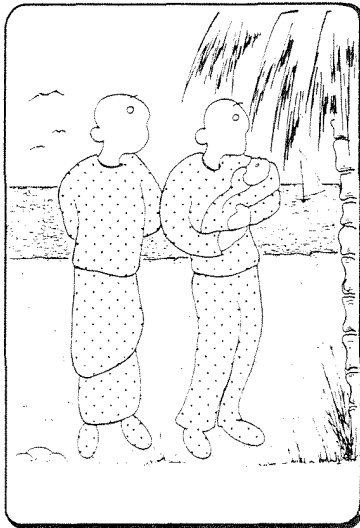
Suppose you want to measure change in a family. It could be decided that this could best be done by measuring the number and growth of children. Measuring change in a family might include a photograph of the family at the beginning, and a series of photographs of drawings over time.


The photograph at the beginning would be a "baseline" while the other photographs would show change over time.
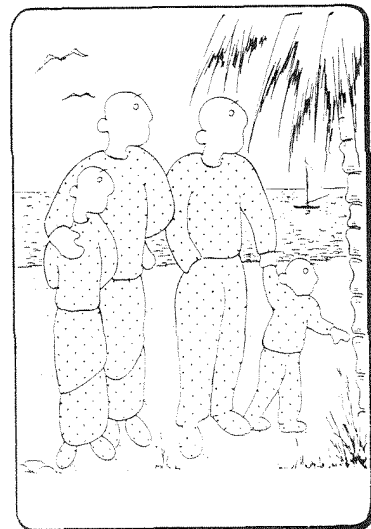
It is most important to establish criteria to measure change

For a development project which for example, has identified the need for improved landing facilities, the base line could be a photograph of how the landing site looks now. Change could be measured by taking further photographs either at periodic times or after the main steps in development have been completed.
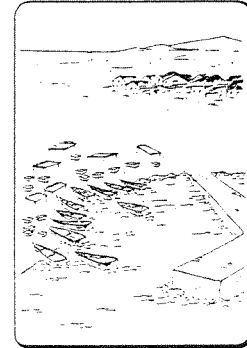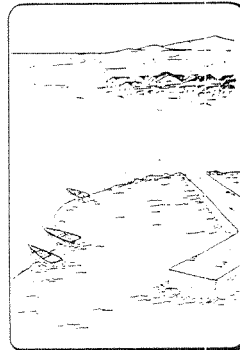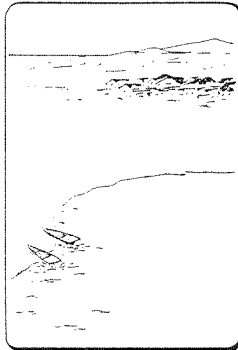
Provides information needed to start activities

A baseline can provide additional information about a specific topic. For example, a new activity to process and sell a new fish product, might require a market survey.

The Benefits of Participatory Baselines

Community can readily observe change

The communities discuss and agree upon ways to measure and observe change.

Provides a way to obtain information when needed

When insiders need specific information about an activity or proposed activity, the baseline is a way for them to organise and obtain the information.

Complements baselines by outsiders

Baseline surveys by outsiders may be costly, and often the information is difficult to interpret. Participatory Baselines can complement and enrich outsider baselines by providing a comparison of the perceptions of insiders and outsiders

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Information is immediately useful to insiders and outsiders

Because insiders and outsiders are both involved in the planning and analysis of baselines, it is a learning experience for both groups. The result is understandable by all and can be used for confirmation of problem identification and solutions, planning project activities and identifying potential problems.

☐ Can identify
    research needs

If it is not known what information is needed, or whether or not information is available, topics that need to be researched can be identified. This research can be done by insiders and outsiders (see: Participatory Action Research Tool), or requested of local research agencies.

Steps to Participatory Baselines

Participatory Baselines can be done with the whole community or with the client group. This will depend on the size of the community and their interest. If there is a large community group, it may be best if responsibilities for the baseline are delegated to a few people: a baseline team. The baseline team will be directed by the baseline questions developed by the larger group, and reported back to them.

The facilitating role of the outsiders should be discussed. Outsiders generally have access to information from urban markets, libraries, other agencies and government sources which can be of use to communities.

A baseline framework is used to plan the gathering and analysis of information. The following steps describe the framework.

Step #1	**Discuss the purpose of a baseline**

Describe baselines to the group. Discuss with them the benefits of baseline information. What kind of information will be useful to them? If they decide to proceed, what do they want to know? Do they want to measure progress or obtain information about a specific issue?
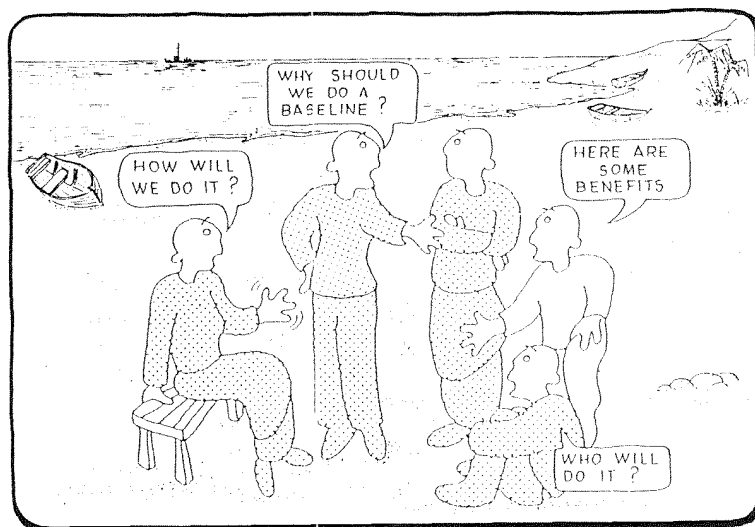

Step #2	**Review objectives and activities**

If a baseline is being done for the purpose of measuring change at a future date, then objectives and activities can be reviewed. These objectives and activities may have been established during a Participatory Assessment. If not, the objectives and activities established by the outsiders can be reviewed and discussed.

If a baseline is being done to obtain specific information for a new activity or, reviewing the objectives and activities associated with the activity can be useful.
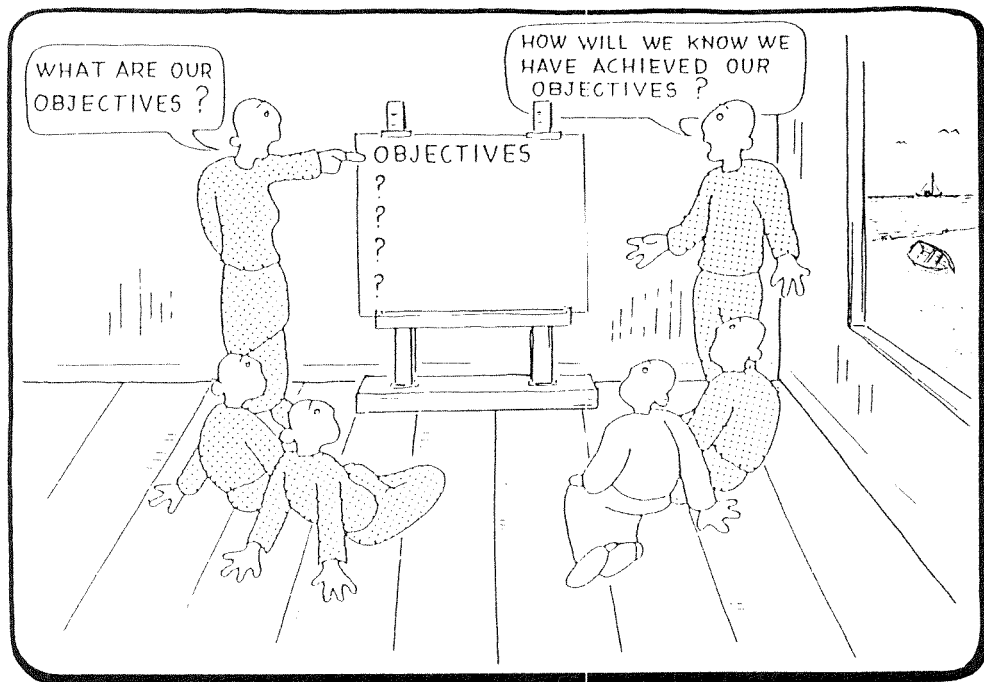
Step #3	**Establish baseline questions**

Once the reason for conducting the baseline has been determined, the group must decide what information will tell them what they want to know. This can be discussed by the group, and then later prioritised if there are too many questions. If the group is large they may wish, at this point, to delegate responsibility to the baseline team.

Step #4	**Choose indicators**

To establish indicators for each baseline question, think of the indicators that are possible. Will the indicators answer the questions with the level of accuracy required? Record indicators for each baseline question or set of questions.

Indicators:

Direct and indirect Indicators

Direct indicators are pieces of information that expressly relate to what is being measured. For example, if information on fish yields are required then fish yields are measured.
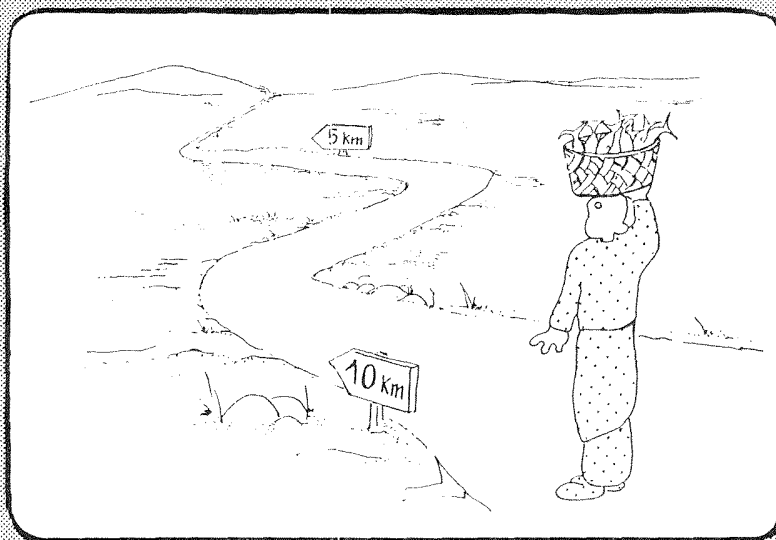
Indirect indicators are pieces of information chosen from among many possible pieces of information which serve as substitutes and/or respond to statements that are difficult to measure.

For example, rather than using the direct indicator of income to determine economic well being, indirect indicators regarding wealth might be:
- Persons are poor if they have to hire themselves out as labour;
- Persons are rich if *they* can hire labour.

Key Indicators

Key indicators are essential pieces of information that can be direct or indirect indicators. Indicators can be compared to road signs. Road signs give information that tell the traveller how far it is to a certain town. The traveller can then estimate the time it will take to make the journey.

Establishing indicators may take some time, but experience shows that this is time well spent. Three important questions to be answered are:
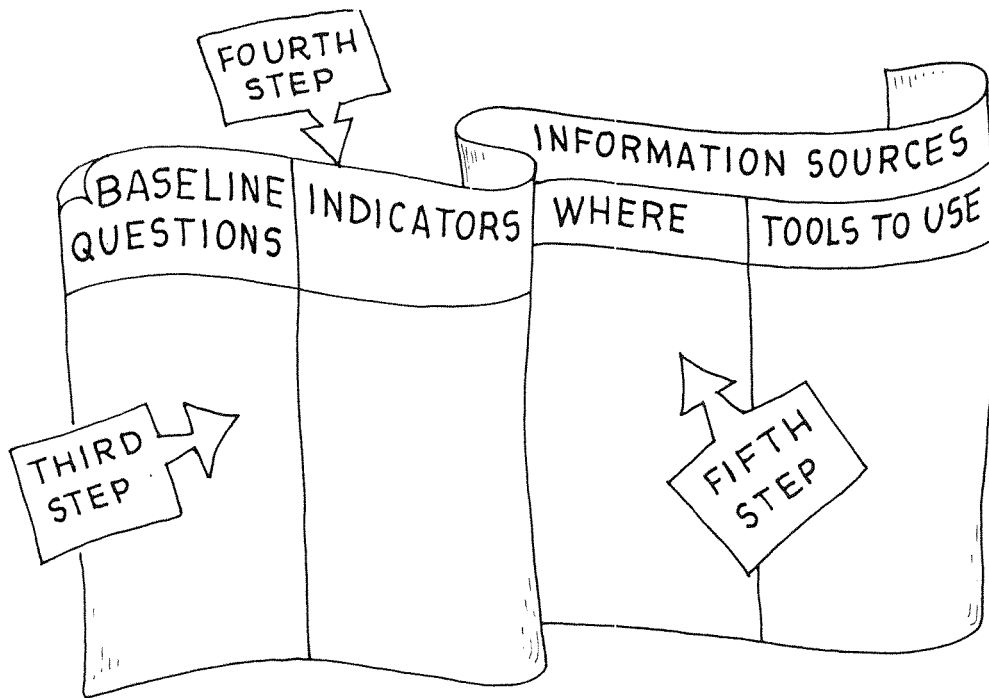
- What do we want to know?
- What are the many pieces of information that could tell us this?
- What are the few pieces of information (key indicators) that will tell us this?

Step #5 Identify the information sources and tools for baseline questions

For each baseline question decide where and how the information can best be obtained. Some information may be available from a secondary source (such as a recent fisheries survey), while other information will have to be collected.

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                          FOURTH
                          STEP
                                      INFORMATION SOURCES
    BASELINE  INDICATORS  WHERE    TOOLS TO USE
    QUESTIONS

      THIRD                            FIFTH
      STEP                             STEP
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It may be that many baseline questions can be answered using the same information gathering tool. Some useful baseline information gathering tools are:

- Drawing and Discussion

- Flannel Boards

- Open-ended Stories

- Semi-structured Interviews

- Ranking, Rating and Sorting

- Maps and Mapping

Step # 6

Decide on the resources in terms of skills, time and the labour required to obtain information

Participatory Baselines may require the assistance of people with specific abilities, such as interviewing skills, math skills, artistic skills and/or dramatic skills. It will also require a certain amount of labour and time from people.

The group (or baseline team) must decide what skills and labour are available within and outside the community, and what other outside resources are available to them. They might ask the questions:

What skills, time and labour do we need?
What skills, time and labour do we have, or can we develop?
What other skills and labour do we need?

RESOURCES		
REQUIRED	AVAILABLE	USED

Step # 7

Decide when information gathering can be done

The time when the baseline will be done must take into account factors such as: seasonal constraints (fishing seasons); religious holidays; availability of field staff; and availability of community labour.

For each indicator, or baseline question, the group decided approximately how each task will take and when it will be done

| TIME		
PERSONS	DAYS	DATES

Step # 8 Decide who will gather information

When the specific dates, time and skills required are known, the tasks can then be delegated to individuals or small working groups.

Step # 9 Decide what to do with the information

Depending on the purpose of the baseline, the information can be analysed and stored, analysed and presented and stored, or roughly analysed and stored.
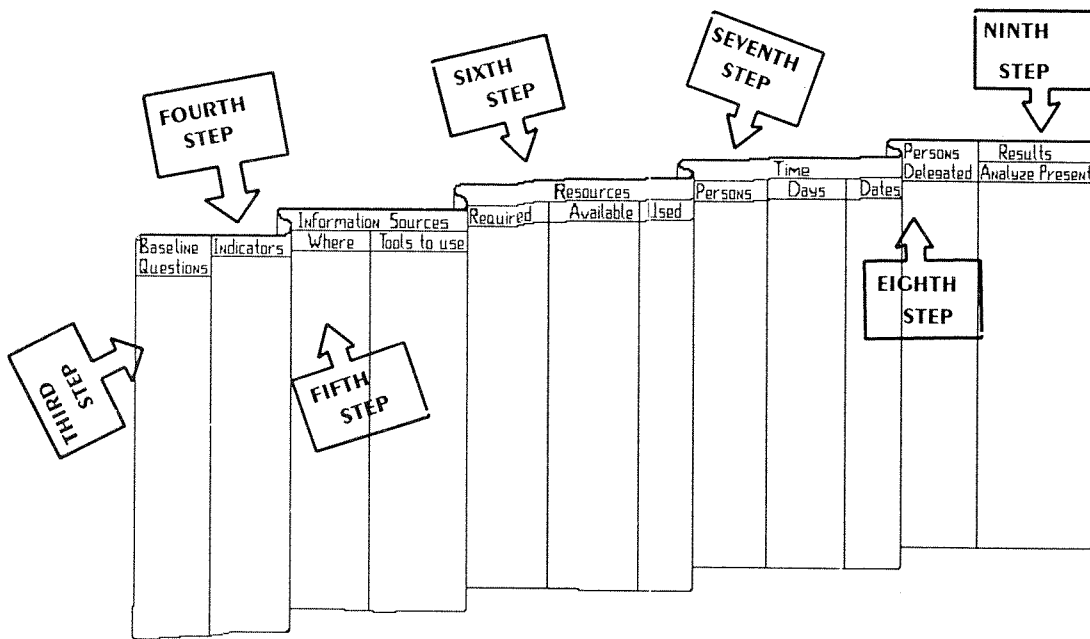
Chapters Seven and Eight describe ways to analyse and present information.

The information from Participatory Baselines will be useful in the future. Store the information in a safe-place.