DECISIONS TO MAKE BEFORE STARTING

This chapter is written for programme directors, their national counterparts, technical resource persons and survey coordinators. It will help you to:

✔ Identify and contact potential resource persons.

✔ Decide on the level of aggregation for the estimates.

✔ Find out how long the survey will take.

✔ Estimate how much it will cost.

As soon as it is decided that a survey is necessary for measuring the Mid-Decade Goals (MDGs), some important decisions must be made.

- **First**, you must identify a survey coordinator and a senior resource person who will be in charge of the design, implementation and analysis of the data.

- **Second**, you must decide whether a nationally representative sample is sufficient or whether there is also a need for subnational estimates—for example, at the state or province level.

- **Third**, a timetable must be established for the study. Early planning is crucial because the full survey cycle, from inception to publication of results, may take several months.

- **Fourth** and finally, it is necessary to calculate how much the survey will cost.

IDENTIFYING AND CONTACTING POTENTIAL RESOURCE PERSONS

A **survey coordinator** must be identified in collaboration with government partners. This person will preferably be a professional in a governmental institution who is able to dedicate him/herself full-time for the duration of the project (about six months). The coordinator may also be an independent consultant, but should have the respect of national counterparts. Previous experience in survey implementation and a firm grounding in scientific methodology (e.g.,

> **Do not attempt to do a survey unless you can identify a full-time survey coordinator. There is no substitute for this important person's role.**

a postgraduate degree in public health or a related field) are also required. This person will make sure that the entire process runs smoothly and that the basic protocols are followed, including carrying

out the first stages of sampling, selecting and training field workers, supervising overall field activities and processing data. The survey coordinator will also be responsible for obtaining the assistance of the resource person(s) (see below), as well as the cooperation of other government agencies at different levels.

A **senior resource person or institution** should be identified to collaborate closely with the survey coordinator, especially at the survey design stages. This person will have ample technical expertise in survey design, implementation and analysis. A list of such persons will be available from Regional Offices and from the Planning and Coordination Office in New York.

DECIDING ON THE LEVEL OF AGGREGATION OF THE INDICATORS

Sample size depends on whether indicators will be measured at the national or subnational level. Countries are expected to fill major gaps in basic indicators so that they may report on MDGs at the national level. A typical sample for studying **national-level indicators** will be around 4,500 households, in at least 100 clusters spread across the country (see chapter 4 for a full discussion of sample size requirements). It will allow estimation of coverage goals with a margin of error of 5 percentage points or less. This will also usually be adequate for providing baseline estimates to compare with data from a repeat survey in several years time, in order to measure changes. Gender-specific estimates will have a margin of error of about 7 percentage points.

Some countries may also wish to have **subnational estimates** for planning and evaluation purposes. For example, separate estimates for the main provinces or special populations such as slum dwellers may be desirable. Simulations show that samples of 300–500 households per subnational group are sufficient for most MDG indicators (see chapter 4). Subgroup estimates, however, will have wider margins of error (10 percentage points) and will be based on broader age groups than required for reporting on goals at the national level. Alternatively, a subgroup could be oversampled, resulting in an increase in the overall number of households to be surveyed. The potential gains from these options need to be carefully weighed against the additional costs in both time and money that they will inevitably entail.

ESTIMATING HOW LONG THE SURVEY WILL TAKE

Due to the pressing need for reporting, survey planning activities should start as soon as possible. Good planning means specifying clearly at the outset what you need to learn from the survey and how you will use that information. Each step should then be tightly orchestrated around those needs, with the report format and plans for dissemination set out in advance. Experience has shown that without such planning, questionnaire length can get out of control with the inclusion of poorly conceived questions that lack a clear purpose. More important, unless the final phase of the survey

is planned in detail before the outset, data processing, data analysis and report writing will inevitably be delayed, often to the point of rendering the results obsolete by the time they finally appear.

The model timetable presented in Table 2.1 shows the minimum estimated time for completing the full survey cycle for a sample of 150 clusters of 30 households each. This table is provided for general guidance only, since local characteristics may greatly affect the duration of the study. Important factors include the geography of the country, road conditions and previous experience of the survey team, among others.

Table 2.1. Typical timetable for a national survey covering 4,500 households

Tasks	Weeks									
	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
Identify resource person and coordinator, plan survey.	■	■								
Carry out sampling, adapt/pre-test questionnaire and training materials.		■	■							
Complete logistic arrangements.			■	■						
Select and train interviewers.					■					
Conduct pilot study and collect data.						■	■	■		
Enter and clean data.						■	■	■		
Complete data processing.							■	■	■	
Prepare report.									■	■

Assumptions: 150 clusters of 30 households; one cluster a day with two interviewers. This equals 300 interviewer-days of data collection, or 4 weeks for 20 interviewers allowing travel time and a safety margin.

A very important issue which may affect the timing of your survey is seasonality. Field work may not be feasible during the rainy season due to poor road conditions, or during special religious holidays such as Ramadam. Also, some indicators may show seasonal variations, such as the prevalence of malnutrition. These influences must be taken into account, particularly if the survey results will be compared with earlier findings.

CALCULATING HOW MUCH THE SURVEY WILL COST

Costs will vary widely from country to country. This variability depends not only on currency and labor costs, but also on the degree to which one can reduce costs by using existing facilities. For

example, you can achieve important savings by using government personnel for interviewing, employing public or government-provided transportation, obtaining free accommodations and meals for the survey team from local institutions, and so forth.

Table 2.2 contains a comprehensive checklist of expenditure items. As discussed above, many of the items may not be applicable for particular countries. When applicable, the expenditure is described for a survey with five teams—each team consisting of four interviewers, a supervisor and a driver—spending four weeks in the field. An additional week for training is also budgeted for supervisors and interviewers. Their accommodation costs cover the field work as well as the training period because it is recommended that they be brought to a central location for all training.

Table 2.2. Common survey budget items and approximate estimates for a survey of 4,500 households

Budget item	Basis for calculation
Personnel (salaries plus indirect costs)	
Consultants	variable
Field supervisors	5 supervisors x 5 weeks
Interviewers	20 interviewers x 5 weeks
Drivers	5 drivers x 4 weeks
Translators	variable
Local guides	5 guides x 4 weeks
Data entry clerks	2 clerks x 5 weeks
Computer programmers	1 programmer x 8 weeks
Transportation	
Vehicle rental	5 cars x 4 weeks
Public transportation allowance (urban areas)	variable
Fuel	provision for 5 cars x 4 weeks
Eventual costs (repairs, ferries, etc.)	variable
Consultant's visit	variable
Per diems (room and board)	
Field supervisors	5 supervisors x 5 weeks
Interviewers	20 interviewers x 5 weeks
Drivers	5 drivers x 4 weeks
Translators	variable
Local guides (meal allowance)	variable
Consumables	
Stationery (paper, pencils, pens, etc.)	variable
Identification cards	variable
Envelopes for filing	120 envelopes
Computing supplies (paper, diskettes, ribbons, cartridges)	variable

(table continues on next page)

(Table 2.2, continued)

Other Costs

Questionnaire and form printing . . . . 6,000 sets

Photocopies of maps, listings and instruction manuals . . . . 100 maps, etc.

Anthropometric equipment (weighing scales, length meters, etc.) . . . . 12 sets

Communications (phone, fax, postage, etc.) . . . . variable

Report writing and printing . . . . variable