

TOOL 8

Baseline studies and impact assessments

Baseline studies seek to document the state of a community and/or the environment prior to the commencement of significant project activity. Such studies are generally used to enhance a company's knowledge of the context in which it is operating and provide a benchmark against which the potential impact of mining operations can be anticipated and change measured.

Baseline studies

Well-designed baseline studies not only provide a snapshot at one point in time, but also have a dynamic component focused on identifying historical trends and likely trajectories. Examples of baseline studies include:

- cultural heritage assessments and archaeological surveys
- vegetation and wildlife surveys
- water monitoring studies
- ethnographies and social mapping studies
- livelihood and household surveys
- community health studies and surveys
- economic capabilities analysis

Baseline studies are usually undertaken at the concept stage as part of an environmental and/or social impact assessment, but companies may initiate them earlier if needed (eg where there is a risk that exploration activities may damage cultural heritage or potentially adversely affect community health). Such studies should not be static one-off exercises, but rather updated regularly, particularly when there is a significant change to the scale and/or scope of a project.

Prior to conducting baseline studies and subsequent stakeholder engagement, it is important that companies are aware of the ethical considerations and issues relating to such activities. In the absence of careful planning, companies can unintentionally breach individuals' privacy if they disclose sensitive information, which in some cases can

put the individual at risk of physical or other harm. Companies should report the findings of baseline studies back to local communities in a language they can understand. However, ethical and privacy considerations must be taken into account prior to doing so.

Undertaking a baseline study

Like all baseline studies, a baseline study of an indigenous community usually involves the following components:

Desktop analysis

To gather contextual and background information, companies should undertake a desktop analysis of existing literature (eg from government agencies, NGOs, development organizations, schools, health posts and businesses in the area, etc) and any previous related company documents and reports.

To provide greater context, data should be collected at both the local and regional levels. A baseline study of an indigenous community will likely include the same collected data as a "standard" baseline study (eg quantitative and qualitative data on employment, income levels, health, living conditions, etc), but should also include explicit consideration of:

- customary property rights
- social structures: roles and responsibilities
- cultural protocols, including traditional ways of dealing with grievances and conflict, principles of reciprocity
- governance and decision-making structures
- environmental and natural resource management strategies