

What is an Annual Outcome Survey?



IFAD has developed a standard methodology for impact measurement, the Results and Impact Monitoring System (RIMS), which includes the organisation of mandatory, standard impact surveys called RIMS impact surveys (<http://www.ifad.org/operations/rims/index.htm>). However, these impact surveys are not providing the type of results-based information that can allow project management teams to take timely, corrective action during the course of project implementation. Such impact surveys are primarily intended to document the impact of the project once the project is completed.

In an effort to shift the focus from impact documentation at the end of project stage to measuring outcomes during project implementation, IFAD is now encouraging all its projects in the Asia and the Pacific region to

survey on an annual basis a small sample of beneficiaries. This is done to

1. measure more regularly the positive or negative changes/outcomes taking place at the household level,
2. provide early evidence of project success or failure,
3. provide timely performance information so that corrective action can be taken, and
4. assess targeting efficiency.

What is an annual outcome survey?

The annual outcome survey (AOS) is a simple household survey that is undertaken annually by project staff and that covers a small sample of 200 randomly selected households.

The survey is normally conducted in villages targeted by the project to receive project interventions. It will typically include both project beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries. The latter are used as a control group, providing a basis for comparison and control. This helps the project management team to filter out other explanations for project outcomes. For instance, if 50% of targeted households report increases in yields, one would want to know if this is due to better weather conditions or is this the result of higher crop prices? But if it was known that the control group's yield was only 15%, the better weather explanation can be ruled out.

While it would be ideal if all IFAD-funded projects would be able to regularly collect and analyse outcome and impact information from their entire beneficiary population (for example through participatory M&E or census-based surveys), one also needs to recognize that this is unrealistic and difficult to manage.

The survey is expected to take no more than 3 months (typically, it has taken about 1 month) and can be implemented by project staff and extension officers, with or without external support.

How and when is the survey conducted?

It is useful to conduct AOS from the second year of implementation onwards. The survey should be undertaken in conjunction with qualitative assessments that would thereby complement the household-level data, providing information on 'why' and 'how' some outcomes were or were not achieved. To generate such data, in addition to the household interviews, the team should conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the survey design. Field data collection teams will go to 20 villages. In each village, they will conduct 10 household survey interviews as well as focus group discussions and/or key informant interviews. The number of qualitative interviews to be conducted is determined by the project (Figure 1).

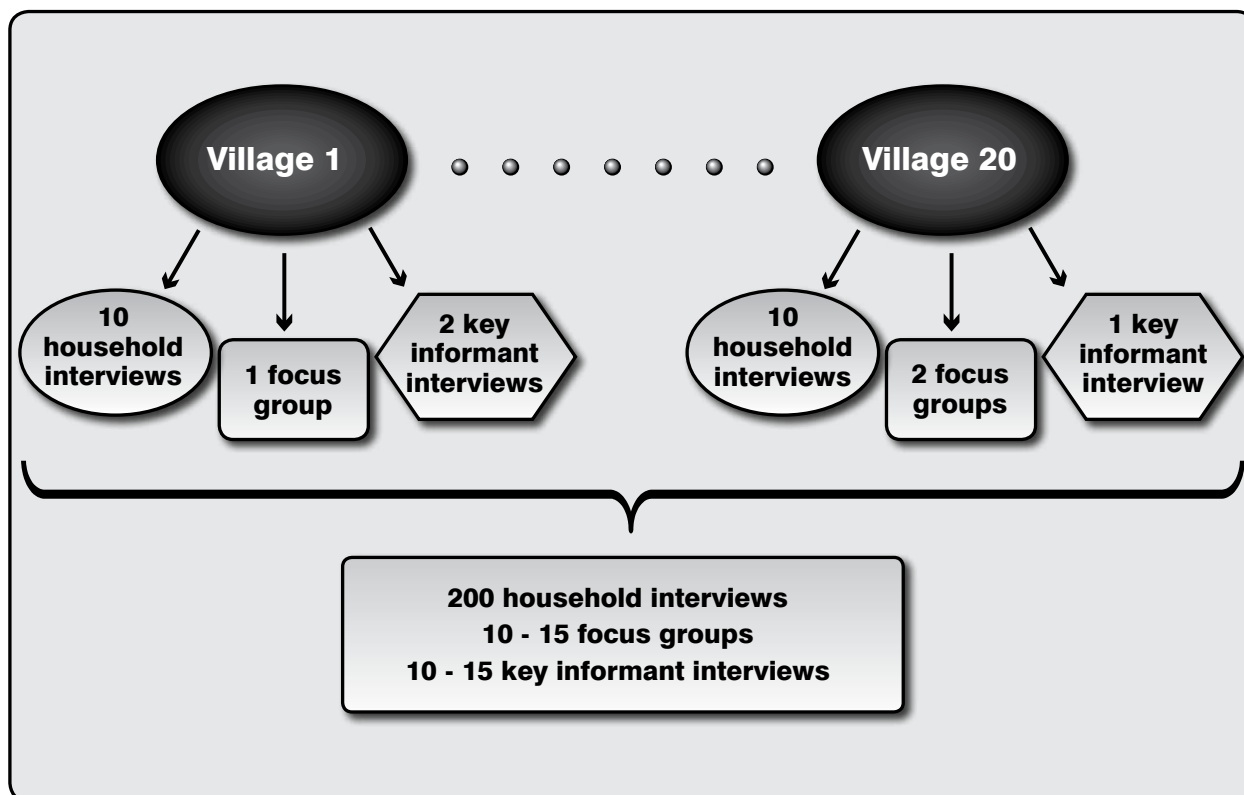


Figure 1. A typical survey design for an AOS.

In the first year an AOS is conducted, it might be better that focus group discussions and key informant interviews are conducted after the survey is completed and the results are analysed. The initial findings may reveal certain problem areas or unexpected outcomes, which can be further analysed in focus group discussions using qualitative methods/tools. For example, if the survey results show that 95% of farmers are unsatisfied with project services, one may want to organise focus group discussions with beneficiary farmers to understand the reasons for the dissatisfaction.

Conducting an annual outcome survey

A standard AOS questionnaire can be accessed on the IFAD website under the “Collections tab” (<http://asia.ifad.org>). This questionnaire may be adapted and fine-tuned to reflect project objectives and the unique characteristics of project target beneficiaries.

Below is a brief guideline describing a step-by-step approach for conducting an AOS.

Table 1. Step-by-step overview of the AOS process.

	Activity/step	Estimated duration	Comments	Responsibility
Step 1	Fine-tuning of standard survey questionnaires and preparation of interview guides for qualitative assessment	1-3 days	Can take longer if questions are added or modified from the standard template	M&E officer, with inputs from component coordinators and project coordinator
Step 2	Sample selection	1-3 days	Depends on availability of reliable lists	M&E officer. Lists to be provided by project staff (villages) and local authorities (households).
Step 3	Training of enumerators and field testing of questionnaires and qualitative assessment guides	1-2 days	Training should include a session on sampling.	M&E officer and external consultant, (if any).
Step 4	Logistical planning, preparation for data collection	1-2 days		M&E officer
Step 5	Data collection	1-3 weeks	Depends on availability of cars/motorbikes	Enumerators and their supervisors
Step 6	Data entry	1-2 weeks	If an MS Excel file is used, data entry can only be conducted by one person at a time.	M&E Officer for supervision, assistant for data entry.
Step 7	Data analysis	1 week		M&E Officer with support from external consultant (if any).

	Activity/step	Estimated duration	Comments	Responsibility
Step 8	Report writing	1 week		M&E officer, with inputs from component coordinators and project coordinator/director
Step 9	Communicating and sharing results	Ad hoc		Project coordinator, M&E and KM officers

The AOS is useful to provide timely information on

- outcomes to support RIMS level 2 indicators
- initial impacts (e.g., changes in food security) for supervision reports
- outcomes for project completion reports

Acronyms and abbreviations

AOS	annual outcome survey
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
FGD	focus group discussion
KM	knowledge management
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
RIMS	results and impact monitoring system

Source

Technical Guidelines, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management. A tool kit for project staff, Asia Pacific Division, IFAD, Rome.