ENHANCING UNHCR SOCIOECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS

A TEMPLATE 'TERMS OF REFERENCE' FOR HIRING A CONTRACTOR TO CARRY OUT A SOCIOECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (SEA)

SEA RESOURCE PACK

This guide is part of a resource pack for planning and implementing SEAs.

Other planning aids available include:
- Guide to starting a SEA
- Standardized questionnaire modules
- Note on resolving the "case versus household" issue common to surveys for forcibly displaced people

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livelihoods@unhcr.org

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A template 'terms of reference' for hiring a contractor to carry out a socioeconomic assessment

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS TEMPLATE

UNHCR operations regularly engage contractors in the design, implementation and analysis of socioeconomic assessments (SEAs). This document provides a template for preparing the Terms of Reference (TORs) for procuring consultants or consulting firms to carry out an SEA. While this template is a suggestion and its use is not mandatory, it is highly recommended that any TOR prepared for carrying out an SEA include the key elements suggested below.

Before using this template, please read the 'Guide to Starting a Socioeconomic Assessment'.

In this template, all text in italics constitutes guidance/instructions to the person preparing the TOR, and should be removed before publicizing the TOR (including this box). In contrast, all text in regular font constitutes actual content of the eventual TOR.

Please note that this TOR template was developed for SEAs consisting of a quantitative survey only. Past SEAs have occasionally complemented the quantitative with a qualitative survey component. Such a qualitative component would have to be added into the TOR.

Background

The first section of the TORs should offer an orientation about the overall operation/project/programme context of the SEA. It provides the context in which the tasks described are to be performed. It should also outline briefly what data collection tasks are to be performed and what are the main expected outcomes. It should also provide a review of existing literature and data.

Survey outline

This section of the TORs should provide the following items of the survey outline described in further detail in the Guide to Starting a Socioeconomic Assessment:

- *Survey objectives*

- *Target population*

- *Key indicators of interest*

- *Determine the necessary disaggregation of results required (e.g. by location, country of origin, gender, etc.*

- *Indicative budget frame*

- *Review current literature and data to inform survey design*

- *Outline other relevant best practice tools to inform survey design*

- *Identify potential sampling approaches*

- *Expectations of questionnaire standardization*

Most operations in past SEAs had not developed a full survey methodology – or parts thereof – by the time of procuring the survey firm and left this task to the hired contractor. However, should any methodological aspects beyond the above survey outline "basics" be decided at the time of preparing the TORs, they should also be discussed in this section.

Key considerations on survey design, implementation and analysis

While every SEA is different, there are a few major technical issues that any SEA should take into consideration. The below list provides a non-exhaustive set of considerations that applies to any SEA.

- Avoid non-probability sampling approaches (e.g. convenience sampling, where every subject meeting the criteria is administered a questionnaire until the sample size is met, or snowball sampling, where respondents refer enumerators to acquaintances).

- Where the survey aims to produce disaggregated data on specific subpopulations (e.g. subcamps, country of origin, etc.), consider oversampling of underrepresented subpopulations as a means of increasing sampling efficiency

- Where the sampling approach results in differing selection probabilities, ensure the application of weights during the analysis stage to ensure an unbiased inference from the sample to the population

- Individual-level information (e.g. education, employment, etc.) should always be captured for all household members, not just the household head

- Carefully consider all potential sampling frames. While registration (proGres) data can be a powerful frame, the population under analysis (in particular in camps) often also lends itself well to alternative sampling approaches.

- Where UNHCR registration data is used as a sampling frame, be aware of the fact that the grouping of individuals into "cases"/"groups" in UNHCR registration data is not equivalent with the concept of a "household" applied in standard survey methodology. See technical note "Resolving the 'case' versus 'household' issue in UNHCR's quantitative surveys" for further detail on this issue.

- Align questionnaire with existing international statistical standards and methods wherever possible.

- Unless there is a documented reason that would prevent it, the use of UNHCR KoBo Toolbox as the mobile data collection software is encouraged: http://kobo.unhcr.org. KoBo Toolbox is a free open-source tool for mobile data collection, available to all. It allows you to collect data in the field using mobile devices such as mobile phones or tablets, as well as with paper or computers. It is being continuously improved and optimised particularly for the use of humanitarian actors in emergencies and difficult field environments, in support of needs assessments, monitoring and other data collection activities. The adaptation of the KoBo Toolbox for humanitarian use is a joint initiative between OCHA, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Deliverables, timeline and payment schedule

This section describes in detail the deliverables that the contractor is expected to provide, and under which timeline. It often also indicates the payment schedule against deliverables.

Typical deliverables for a SEA include the following:

1. *Submission of brief inception report, documenting an early set of considerations and technical decisions agreed between UNHCR and the contractor in the early stages of the survey design process. This also outlines clearly any inputs that the contractor will require from UNHCR side.*

2. *Submission of full survey methodology document (it should be noted that the technical proposal received from a survey firm in response to the TORs should not be considered a full survey methodology document. Survey firms must revise and expand their technical proposals into a full survey methodology after further discussions with the UNHCR operation and resubmit as such for review and approval by UNHCR before fieldwork can start). A full survey methodology document usually includes, but is not limited to, the following:*

   - *Background and existing literature/data*

   - *Survey objectives*

   - *Target population and analysis domains*

   - *Key indicators of interest*

   - *Survey governance*

   - *Sampling strategy*

   - *Overview of questionnaire development:*

     o *Proposed scope and structure of questionnaire (an Annex should be included for the full questionnaire)*

     o *Stakeholder / data user consultations that were carried out*

- o *Confirmation that questionnaire is based in a well-developed data analysis plan (include an Annex for the full analysis plan)[1]*
- o *Outline of piloting / testing of questionnaire that was carried out*
- o *Description of standardized modules used in questionnaire development*
- *Field staffing structure, training plan and fieldwork plan*
- *Fieldwork quality control mechanisms*
- *Data processing approach (e.g. tablet-based, pen-and-paper with or without subsequent double entry, etc.)*
- *Data analysis approach (how will the raw data be turned into the indicators of interest)*
- *Full costing of survey implementation*
- *Annex: Survey timeline (Gantt chart)*
- *Annex: Full draft questionnaire*
- *Annex: Field manual*
- *Annex: Data analysis plan*

3. *Fieldwork / data collection completed*

4. *Data analysis/reporting completed, and relevant report(s) submitted*

5. *Submission of microdata, metadata and all associated files to UNHCR (see also section on data submission requirements below)*

Survey governance, roles and responsibilities

This section should describe in detail the ways in which the contractor, UNHCR, and (if applicable) other key stakeholders of the SEA will interact in the implementation of the SEA. This is particularly relevant for the parts of the survey process where UNHCR wishes to be actively involved in the work of the contractor. If not described explicitly in the section above on deliverables/timeline, this section should also detail the necessary clearances/approvals required for key deliverables by UNHCR.

Areas often covered in this section are:

- *UNHCR inputs/oversight to the development of survey methodology;*
- *UNHCR oversight of field staff recruitment, testing and selection;*
- *UNHCR participation/inputs in field staff training;*
- *Regular reporting of the contractor to UNHCR on fieldwork progress and quality monitoring;*
- *Roles and responsibilities of UNHCR and the contractor in securing access to survey target population.*

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[1] A data analysis plan should always be devised in the early stages of survey planning. Instead of deciding survey questions first, key indicators and required tabulations must be determined in line with information needs.

This section may also state requirements for the contractor to hold stakeholder and/or data user consultations, and at what steps of the process.

Data ownership, data confidentiality and data submission requirements

All data collected under these TORs (including microdata, accompanying documentation/metadata, and aggregate results) are confidential and are the property of UNHCR. All data files, both uncleaned and clean, and accompanying data logs must be shared with UNHCR before the end of this contract.

The party executing these TORs, must protect the confidentiality of responding establishments and individuals participating in the data collection at all stages as described in "Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR". The external party must ensure that data or the documentation referred to above, collected or compiled under these TORs, are not distributed for commercial or non-commercial purposes to third parties, nor will they be used by the firm, their staff and/or consultants, or their sub-contractors for purposes other than those expressly stated in these TORs, without the written approval of UNHCR prior to, during, or after completion of the assignments.

The final step in any survey process is proper documentation and archiving. UNHCR maintains platforms and processes to systematically document and archive its SEA microdata. UNHCR's Data Curation Team leads this process; however, the party executing these TORs is responsible for submitting the microdata, metadata (including survey methodology, questionnaires, etc.), and all produced reports, in accordance with the following requirements:

- Ensure that all microdata files are cleaned and labelled in one of the usual statistical formats, such as Stata, R, SPSS, etc. (Excel data files should be avoided if possible). Analysis weights and any "derived" variables created during the data analysis process (e.g. aggregates of consumption expenditure, indices, scores, rankings, etc.) should be included in the microdata.

- Associated files (such as survey methodology document, questionnaires, field manuals, and survey report) are submitted together with the microdata.

- The following metadata items are accurately and comprehensively described, either in the above-mentioned associated files or in a separate document:
    - Full survey title
    - Abstract
    - Scope (topics) of questionnaire
    - Universe (i.e. target population)
    - Geographic coverage
    - Producers & sponsors
    - Sampling procedure
    - Response rate
    - Weighting
    - Dates of data collection

- o Mode of data collection (e.g. paper-based, tablet-assisted, etc.)
- o Summary of field oversight / quality control procedures applied
- o Summary of any major edits made during data cleaning

- Appropriate security protocols must be observed in the transfer or transmission of datasets to UNHCR, in particular with regard to microdata containing direct/personal identifiers. Some guidelines on data encryption are outlined in Annex B.

Once it has been used for its defined purpose and submitted to UNCHR, and after consulting with UNHCR, the data will be disposed of at the end of the contract by the party executing these TORs.

Ethical provisions

Data collection situations often warrant compliance with ethical standards of social science research that involves human subjects. While preparing and testing the survey questions and the surveying process itself, the external party must comply with such standards. An informed consent by the survey respondent to participate in the interview is required. Efforts should be made by the surveyor to balance transparency of the survey and confidentiality of the respondent. Ethical provisions for data collection in use by the national statistical offices or ministries of the government should be adhered to, unless they do not exist or are inadequate. In such situations, the external party should be encouraged to comply with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the country, or with other regional or international review boards. Annex A gives some guidelines on the Ethical Provisions in data collection.

Qualifications

This section lays out the mix of knowledge and skills needed to execute the scope and methodology described in the TORs. Project Managers may describe the profile of the specialists or the team needed for the tasks, including the technical competence in the sector or discipline, language proficiency and in-country or regional experience. See Annex C for an example of desirable core competencies for recruitment of a data collection consultant or firm.

Selection criteria

Where the selection of the external party is being done through a competitive process, this section is required. The detailed technical evaluation criteria and the relative weightage for each should be outlined here, based on the desired qualifications. While the qualifications are closely connected to the selection criteria, it is recommended to consult with UNHCR procurement colleagues for the appropriate formulation of the latter.

Annex A: Ethical provisions in data collection

These guidelines on ethical provisions - adapted from the Ethics Principles for Research and Evaluation established by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and adopted by the Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF) of the World Bank - may be annexed to the TORs for firms hired for data collection. They are applicable to data collection tasks on sensitive topics or those involving human subjects. The purpose is to encourage and ensure that contracted firms adhere to the highest standards of ethics in data collection.

1. Researchers and evaluators would be responsible for identifying the need for and securing any necessary ethics approval for the study they are undertaking. Technical proposals should include a description of the protocol for human subjects and a plan for securing ethical clearance in the technical proposal. Such a protocol may be from national or local ethics committees in countries in which the study will be undertaken, or other stakeholder institutions with formal ethics approval systems.

2. Researchers and evaluators should avoid harm to participants in studies. They should ensure that the basic human rights of individuals and groups with whom they interact are protected. This is particularly important when working with asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, or returnees. The wellbeing of researchers/ evaluators working in the field should also be considered.

3. Participation in research and evaluation should be voluntary and free from external pressure. Information should not be withheld from prospective participants that might affect their willingness to participate. All participants should have a right to withdraw from research/ evaluation and withdraw any data concerning them at any point without fear of penalty.

4. Researchers and evaluators should ensure confidentiality of information, privacy and anonymity of study participants. They should communicate clearly with prospective participants any limits to confidentiality.

5. Researchers and evaluators should operate in accordance with local laws and international human rights conventions and covenants. They should respect cultural sensitivities, such as: differences in culture, local behaviour and norms, religious beliefs and practices, sexual orientation, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity and other social differences.

Annex B: Suggestions for file encryption

Summary

The steps below may be used to encrypt data or other sensitive information for digital transmission. This process can be used when sharing among partners or team members, ideally in conjunction with a secure corporate file-sharing service (such as Microsoft OneDrive). Use of a strong password (at least 10 character long with a mixture of lowercase and uppercase alphabetic character, numbers and symbols) is highly recommend. Files may be compressed using the 7zip format with the 7zip software. Passwords should be shared with the recipient via a separate delivery mechanism.

Principles

1. Use a well know encryption approach. The common standard is Advanced Encryption Standard (AES): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advanced_Encryption_Standard
2. Rely on open source software. This allows both parties to easily encrypt and decrypt without being tied to software procurement obstacles
3. Combine encryption and file compression. This facilitates sharing and transmission of files with more ease.
4. Consider sharing encrypted files via a corporate file sharing platform (such as Microsoft OneDrive). Remember to share the password via a separate channel and to delete the shared folder when it has been successfully downloaded.

Implementation

Consider using 7zip, an open source software that can implement the above principles. It can be downloaded here: www.7-zip.org. A portable version allows use of the software on computers where users do not have administrative privileges.

Figure 1: Encryption using 7-zip
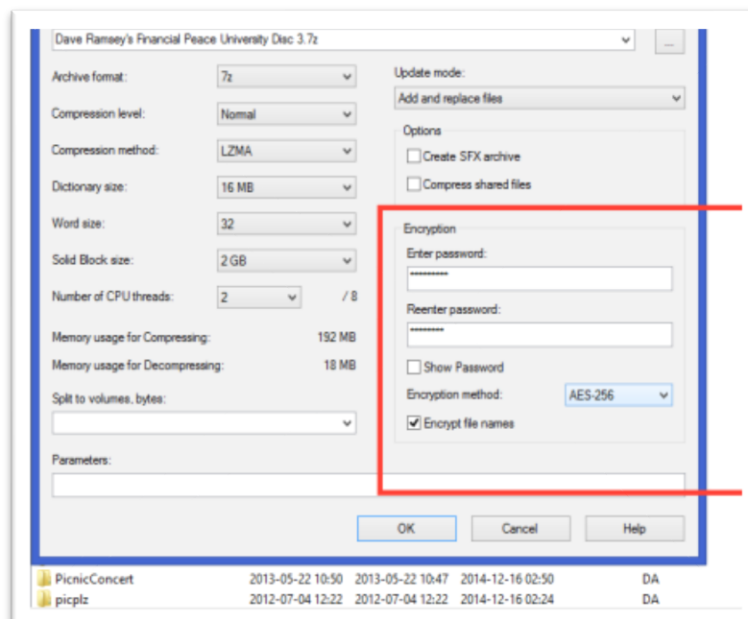
Annex C: Example competencies for data collection

The section below provides list of core competencies for a data collection consultant. These qualifications will need to be adapted based on the needs and context of the data collection effort and whether an individual or survey firm is being recruited to manage this task. While the qualifications are closely connected to the selection criteria, it is recommended to consult with UNHCR procurement colleagues for the appropriate formulation of the latter.

Example competencies for data collection

a. Have legal status enabling the organization to perform the tasks required by the terms of reference

b. Be an expert in fieldwork required for large scale economic surveys.

c. Demonstrated experience in organizing surveys on the scale of this project over the past five years.

d. Strong capacity and experience in planning and organizing survey logistics, including the design and implementation of protocols to ensure high quality data.

e. Demonstrate experience in interviewing individuals/households/structures

f. Demonstrate experience working in a forced displacement context seen as desirable

g. Demonstrate skills in project management, including initiatives with multiple initiatives

h. Strong capacity in database design, data management, and statistics.

i. Ability to report to the management team effectively on progress of the work, including the submission of interim entered data and the identification of noticeable difficulties.

- Capacity to store and maintain data in a manner that protects respondents' identities, in line with UNHCR's data protection policy

j. Be able to begin work in an agreeable timeframe.