

CHAPTER 6

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REFERENCE SHEETS

Developing Clear and Consistent Indicator Documentation

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, participants will be able to:

- Explain the purpose of a Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
- Develop a complete indicator definition
- Specify the unit of measurement
- Document calculation methods
- Identify appropriate data sources
- Select data-collection methods
- Determine data-collection frequency
- Assign responsibilities
- Define disaggregation requirements
- Record baselines, targets and milestones
- Identify data-quality risks
- Develop reporting and interpretation notes
- Prepare complete PIRS documents

What is a PIRS?

DEFINITION

A standardized document that provides the complete technical definition and management requirements for one indicator.

A PIRS explains:

- What the indicator measures
- How it is calculated
- Where the data come from
- Who collects and reports the data
- When the data are collected
- How the indicator should be interpreted

Why is a PIRS Necessary?

A PIRS helps prevent:

- Different interpretations of the same indicator
- Inconsistent calculations
- Changing denominators
- Double counting
- Inappropriate disaggregation
- Weak data sources
- Inconsistent reporting across locations
- Loss of institutional knowledge

Purpose of a PIRS

Standardization

Consistency

Transparency

Continuity

Accountability

Data-quality control

Clear responsibilities

Guidance for reporting

**Reference for audits &
evaluations**

PIRS and Other MEAL Tools

The PIRS supports and connects with:

Logframe

Provides the indicator title.

Performance Management Plan

Provides collection, analysis and use arrangements.

Indicator Tracking Table

Records targets and actual results.

Data-Collection Tools

Generate the indicator data.

Reports

Communicate performance.

One PIRS per Indicator

GOOD PRACTICE

One complete PIRS for each core project indicator.

The PIRS should be developed:

- During project design
- Before routine data collection begins
- Before baseline studies
- Before partners begin reporting
- Whenever an indicator is revised

PIRS Development Team

The PIRS should be developed collaboratively by:

- MEAL staff
- Program or technical specialists
- Project managers
- Data-management staff
- Field teams
- Partner representatives
- Donor focal persons, where required

Main Components of a PIRS

A complete PIRS normally includes:

- 1 Indicator identification
- 2 Indicator definition
- 3 Purpose and result linkage
- 4 Unit of measurement
- 5 Calculation method
- 6 Data source
- 7 Data-collection method
- 8 Frequency and timing
- 9 Responsibility
- 10 Disaggregation
- 11 Baseline and targets
- 12 Data-quality issues
- 13 Reporting and interpretation
- 14 Revision and approval history

Indicator Identification

The identification section may include:

- Project name
- Indicator code
- Indicator title
- Result level
- Related objective
- Donor indicator code
- Sector
- Version number
- Date approved

Indicator Code

A clear coding system

- Project
- Result level
- Result number
- Indicator sequence

Worked example

EDU-IR2-IND3

- Education project
- Intermediate Result 2
- Indicator 3

Indicator Title

The indicator title should clearly state:

- Unit of measurement
- Target group
- Condition being measured
- Geographic or program scope, where necessary

EXAMPLE

“Percentage of supported schools meeting the minimum safe-learning-environment standards.”

Why Definitions Matter

Terms that appear simple may be interpreted differently:

Reached

Trained

Functional

Vulnerable

Improved

Completed

Regular attendance

Safe

Quality service

Indicator Definition

The definition should explain:

- Exactly what the indicator measures
- Who is included
- Who is excluded
- What conditions must be met
- The time period covered
- The geographic scope
- Relevant technical standards

Example of a Weak Definition

INDICATOR

Number of people trained.

WEAK DEFINITION

People who attended training.

Problems:

- How much of the training must they attend?
- Are repeat participants counted?
- Are facilitators included?
- Must participants pass an assessment?
- What counts as training?

Improved Definition

INDICATOR

Number of participants completing project-supported training.

DEFINITION

A participant is counted once after attending at least 80% of the scheduled sessions and completing the final assessment. Trainers, observers and individuals attending less than 80% are excluded.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Include

- Eligible participants
- Verified completed cases
- Participants within the reporting period
- Individuals meeting the defined threshold

Exclude

- Duplicate participants
- Ineligible participants
- Incomplete records
- Staff and facilitators, unless specified
- Activities outside the project scope

Operational Definitions

An operational definition converts an abstract concept into observable criteria.

CONCEPT

A functional water point.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

A water point is functional when it provides water on the day of inspection, meets agreed flow requirements and has no major repair preventing regular use.

Indicator Purpose

The PIRS should explain why the indicator is collected. Possible purposes include:

- Tracking project progress
- Meeting donor requirements
- Supporting management decisions
- Assessing service quality
- Monitoring inclusion
- Triggering corrective action
- Supporting evaluation
- Informing communities

Link to the Results Framework

Specify the result that the indicator measures:

- Goal or impact
- Outcome
- Intermediate Result
- Output
- Activity

RESULT

Teachers apply learner-centred methods.

INDICATOR

Percentage of observed teachers correctly applying at least three learner-centred techniques.

What is the Unit of Measurement?

The unit of measurement describes how the result is expressed. Common units include:

Number

Percentage

Proportion

Rate

Ratio

Average

Score

Index

Currency value

**Qualitative
category**

Count Indicators

Count indicators report a total number. Examples:

- Number of people trained
- Number of schools rehabilitated
- Number of complaints resolved
- Number of policies approved

Percentage Indicators

A percentage expresses part of an eligible population.

$$\textit{Percentage} = \textit{Numerator} \div \textit{Denominator} \times 100$$

EXAMPLE

Percentage of supported farmers applying at least three promoted practices.

Rates, Ratios and Averages

Rate

Events relative to a population and period.

e.g. Disease incidence rate

Ratio

Comparison between two quantities.

e.g. Teacher-to-student ratio

Average

Total value divided by the number of observations.

e.g. Average monthly household income

Scores and Indices

Examples

- Resilience score
- Food consumption score
- Satisfaction index
- Institutional capacity score

The PIRS should explain

- Component questions
- Scoring rules
- Weighting
- Cut-off points
- Interpretation categories

What is the Calculation Method?

The calculation method explains:

- The formula
- Numerator
- Denominator
- Counting rules
- Aggregation rules
- Treatment of missing data
- Rounding rules
- Cumulative or period reporting

Numerator and Denominator Example

INDICATOR

Percentage of trained teachers applying the promoted methods.

NUMERATOR

Number of trained teachers observed correctly applying at least three promoted methods.

DENOMINATOR

Total number of trained teachers observed during the reporting period.

Counting Unique Participants

For participant indicators, clarify:

- Whether people are counted once or repeatedly
- How unique identities are verified
- How repeat participation is managed
- Whether referrals count
- Whether indirect beneficiaries are included

Cumulative Reporting

DEFINITION & EXAMPLE

A cumulative indicator adds achievements across reporting periods — e.g. total number of unique participants trained since project start.

Rules should address:

- Duplicate removal
- Corrections from prior periods
- Participants attending multiple activities
- Project-year versus life-of-project totals

Non-Cumulative Reporting

A non-cumulative indicator reports the value for a specific period. Examples:

- Percentage of complaints resolved within 30 days each quarter
- Monthly stock-out rate
- Quarterly attendance rate

Missing Data

The PIRS should explain:

- What counts as missing
- Whether incomplete records are excluded
- How missing values affect the denominator
- Whether imputation is permitted
- How missing-data levels will be reported

Rounding and Reporting Rules

Specify:

- Number of decimal places
- Whether percentages are rounded
- How small values are presented
- Currency conversion rules
- Reporting of numerator and denominator

EXAMPLE

“Percentages will be reported to one decimal place, together with the raw numerator and denominator.”

What is a Data Source?

The original location or record from which indicator information is obtained. Examples:

Participant register

Household survey

Facility records

Observation forms

**Government
information system**

Complaints database

Financial records

Evaluation dataset

Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary Data

Collected directly for the indicator.

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Observations
- Assessments

Secondary Data

Already collected by another system or organization.

- Government statistics
- Facility registers
- Partner databases
- Administrative records

Data-Collection Method

The method describes how data are obtained. Possible methods include:

Questionnaire

Observation

Record review

**Key informant
interview**

**Focus group
discussion**

Test or assessment

**Digital system
extraction**

Physical measurement

Matching the Method to the Indicator

Indicator	Suitable Method
Number completing training	Attendance and completion records
% using safe water	Household survey and observation
Quality of service experience	Interviews or focus groups
Student learning achievement	Standardized assessment
Water quality compliance	Laboratory and sanitary testing

Measurement Trade-Offs

When selecting a method, consider:

- Data reliability
- Validity
- Cost
- Complexity
- Staff skills
- Cultural acceptability
- Participant burden
- Ethical risk
- Timeliness

Data-Collection Tool Reference

The PIRS should identify:

- Tool name
- Tool version
- Relevant question numbers
- Observation criteria
- Electronic form or system
- Storage location

EXAMPLE

“Household WASH Survey, Version 2, Questions 17–22.”

Data-Collection Frequency

Frequency may be:

Real time

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Quarterly

Semi-annual

Annual

Baseline & endline

At project milestones

Factors Affecting Frequency

Consider:

- How quickly change is expected
- Management needs
- Donor reporting schedules
- Seasonal patterns
- Cost and staffing
- Data availability
- Risk level
- Participant burden
- Time needed for analysis

Timing Considerations

Timing may be influenced by:

- Agricultural seasons
- School calendars
- Weather
- Migration patterns
- Religious holidays
- Conflict or access constraints
- Market cycles
- Program implementation phases

Reporting vs Collection Frequency

Data may be

- Collected monthly
- Reviewed quarterly
- Reported semi-annually

The PIRS should distinguish

- Collection frequency
- Compilation frequency
- Analysis frequency
- Reporting frequency

Responsible Persons

The PIRS should identify who is responsible for:

- Data collection
- Data entry
- Data cleaning
- Data validation
- Analysis
- Approval
- Reporting
- Data storage

Responsibility Example

Task	Responsible Role
Collection	Field officer
Verification	Project coordinator
Cleaning	MEAL assistant
Analysis	MEAL officer
Approval	Project manager
Reporting	Program manager

Partner Responsibilities

Where partners report data, specify:

- Reporting template
- Submission deadline
- Validation process
- Supporting documents
- Correction process
- Escalation for late or poor-quality data
- Partner focal person

Disaggregation Requirements

The PIRS should specify required disaggregation by:

Sex

Age

Disability

Location

Vulnerability status

Displacement status

Service type

**Other relevant
characteristics**

Defining Disaggregation Categories

DO NOT WRITE ONLY

“Disaggregate by age.”

Specify the categories:

0–5

6–11

12–17

18–24

25–49

50+

Disaggregation and Calculation

Clarify whether:

- Each subgroup has its own numerator and denominator
- Participants may appear in several categories
- Totals must equal subgroup sums
- Small groups will be suppressed for confidentiality
- Unknown categories are permitted

Baseline Information

The PIRS should record:

- Baseline value
- Baseline date
- Baseline source
- Measurement method
- Population covered
- Relevant limitations

Target Information

Record:

- Final target
- Annual targets
- Quarterly or interim milestones
- Target-setting rationale
- Disaggregated targets, where appropriate
- Target approval date

Target Example

Period	Target
Baseline	24%
Year 1	40%
Year 2	60%
Final	75%

INDICATOR

Percentage of supported schools meeting minimum WASH standards.

Data-Quality Dimensions

The PIRS should identify risks relating to:

Validity

Reliability

Precision

Integrity

Completeness

Timeliness

Consistency

Validity Issues

VALIDITY ASKS

Does the indicator accurately measure the intended result?

Possible risks:

- Weak proxy indicators
- Self-report bias
- Vague definitions
- Inappropriate tools
- Incorrect respondents

Reliability Issues

RELIABILITY ASKS

Would repeated measurement produce consistent results?

Possible risks:

- Different interpretations
- Poor enumerator training
- Unstandardized tools
- Inconsistent equipment
- Changes in methodology

Completeness and Timeliness

Completeness Risks

- Missing records
- Late partner submissions
- Incomplete questionnaires
- Unreported locations

Timeliness Risks

- Delayed data entry
- Slow verification
- Reporting after decisions are made

Data-Quality Controls

Possible controls include:

- Enumerator training
- Tool pretesting
- Built-in digital validation
- Supervisory checks
- Source-document verification
- Back checks
- Duplicate detection
- Data-quality assessments
- Approval workflows
- Audit trails

Known Limitations

Examples:

- Self-reported behaviour may be overstated
- Administrative data may be incomplete
- Seasonal variation may affect results
- Small samples may limit subgroup analysis
- Observation may influence behaviour
- Proxy measures may not capture actual use

Reporting Notes

The PIRS should specify:

- Reporting unit
- Reporting period
- Cumulative status
- Required disaggregation
- Report format
- Decimal and rounding rules
- Supporting documentation
- Narrative explanation requirements

Interpretation Notes

Interpretation notes may explain:

- What an increase means
- What a decrease means
- Whether higher is always better
- Thresholds for acceptable performance
- Seasonal factors
- Contextual influences
- Limits on causal interpretation

Example of Interpretation Risk

INDICATOR

Number of safeguarding complaints received.

INCORRECT INTERPRETATION

More complaints mean safeguarding performance is worsening.

More careful interpretation — an increase may reflect:

- Greater awareness
- Improved accessibility
- Increased trust
- More incidents
- Better reporting systems

Variance Explanation

When actual performance differs from the target, reports should explain:

- Why variance occurred
- Whether the definition was applied correctly
- Which groups or locations were affected
- Whether data-quality problems contributed
- What corrective action is planned

Revision History

The PIRS should record:

- Version number
- Date revised
- Section changed
- Reason for change
- Person proposing revision
- Person approving revision

Approval Section

The approval section may include:

- Prepared by
- Reviewed by
- Technical approval
- MEAL approval
- Project manager approval
- Donor approval, where required
- Effective date

Sample Indicator

INDICATOR

Percentage of target households correctly storing drinking water.

RESULT LEVEL

Intermediate Result

UNIT

Percentage

REPORTING TYPE

Non-cumulative

Sample Definition

A household stores drinking water correctly when:

- Water is stored in a clean container
- The container is covered
- Water is removed without hand contact
- The container is located away from visible contamination

EXCLUSION

Households unavailable after two agreed follow-up attempts are excluded from the survey sample analysis.

Sample Calculation

NUMERATOR

Number of surveyed target households meeting all four correct-storage criteria.

DENOMINATOR

Total surveyed target households with complete observations for all four criteria.

$$\text{Numerator} \div \text{Denominator} \times 100$$

Sample Data Arrangements

DATA SOURCE

Household WASH assessment

METHOD

Structured household observation

FREQUENCY

Baseline, annually and endline

RESPONSIBLE PERSON

MEAL Officer, supported by trained enumerators

Sample Disaggregation and Targets

Disaggregation

- Sex of household head
- Location
- Displacement status
- Disability status, where safely collected

BASELINE

38%

YEAR 1 TARGET

55%

FINAL TARGET

75%

Sample Data-Quality Notes

Risks

- Households may temporarily improve storage because they expect observation
- Enumerators may interpret cleanliness differently
- Some households may be unavailable
- Seasonal water shortages may influence practices

Controls

- Standard observation checklist
- Enumerator practice and certification
- Spot checks
- Collection during comparable seasons

Sample Interpretation Notes

- Higher values indicate improved compliance with safe storage standards.
- The indicator measures observed storage conditions, not water quality.
- Results should be interpreted alongside water-quality testing and household interviews.
- Changes may be influenced by container availability and seasonal water access.

Practical Exercise

Participants should select two project indicators:

One output indicator

Choose an indicator that measures the direct products of project activities.

One outcome / IR indicator

Choose an outcome or Intermediate Result indicator that measures change.

TASK

For each indicator, prepare a complete PIRS.

PIRS Exercise Template

Participants should complete:

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|----|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Indicator code and title | 9 | Frequency |
| 2 | Related result | 10 | Responsibility |
| 3 | Definition | 11 | Disaggregation |
| 4 | Purpose | 12 | Baseline |
| 5 | Unit | 13 | Targets |
| 6 | Calculation | 14 | Data-quality issues |
| 7 | Data source | 15 | Reporting & interpretation notes |
| 8 | Collection method | | |

Peer Review Questions

Review another group's PIRS:

- Is the indicator clearly defined?
- Are inclusion and exclusion rules clear?
- Can the calculation be reproduced?
- Are numerator and denominator aligned?
- Is the data source reliable?
- Is the method feasible and ethical?
- Is responsibility clear?
- Is disaggregation appropriate?
- Are data-quality risks acknowledged?
- Can the indicator be interpreted correctly?

PIRS Quality Checklist

A strong PIRS is:

✓ Complete

✓ Clear

✓ Consistent

✓ Technically
accurate

✓ Reproducible

✓ Feasible

✓ Inclusive

✓ Ethical

✓ Approved

✓ Version
controlled

Common PIRS Weaknesses

Avoid:

- Copying only the indicator title
- Undefined technical terms
- Missing numerator or denominator
- Unclear counting rules
- Listing reports instead of original data sources
- Assigning unclear responsibilities
- Excessive disaggregation
- Missing data-quality risks
- Changing definitions without approval
- Ignoring interpretation limitations

Consequences of Weak Documentation

Weak documentation can lead to:

- Different results from the same data
- Donor reporting disputes
- Audit findings
- Double counting
- Incorrect targets
- Misleading conclusions
- Poor management decisions
- Inability to compare locations or periods

Maintaining PIRS Documents

PIRS documents should be reviewed:

- At project start
- After the baseline
- During indicator revisions
- When donor guidance changes
- When tools or methods change
- After data-quality assessments
- During major project adaptations
- Before endline or evaluation

PIRS Storage and Access

PIRS documents should be:

- Stored centrally
- Version controlled
- Accessible to relevant teams
- Linked to data-collection tools
- Included in partner orientation
- Referenced in the PMP
- Available for audits and evaluations

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we learned that:

- A PIRS provides the complete technical specification for an indicator.
- Definitions establish consistent interpretation and counting.
- The unit and calculation method must be explicit.
- Data sources and collection methods should be credible and feasible.
- Frequency should reflect change, management needs and reporting requirements.
- Responsibilities must cover collection, validation, analysis and approval.
- Disaggregation must be clearly defined and ethically managed.
- Baselines and targets must use consistent definitions.
- Data-quality risks and controls should be documented.
- Reporting and interpretation notes prevent misleading conclusions.
- PIRS revisions require documentation and approval.

Knowledge Check

1

What is the main purpose of a PIRS?

2

Why are inclusion and exclusion criteria necessary?

3

What is the difference between unit of measurement and calculation method?

4

Why should original data sources be identified?

5

What factors determine collection frequency?

6

Which responsibilities should be documented?

7

Why must disaggregation categories be defined?

8

What data-quality issues should a PIRS record?

9

Why are interpretation notes important?

10

When should a PIRS be revised?

Action Planning

Each participant should identify:

- One indicator without a PIRS
- One indicator with an unclear definition
- One calculation inconsistency
- One data-quality risk
- One required revision
- Responsible person
- Approval authority
- Completion date

THANK YOU

Questions and Discussion

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“A strong indicator tells us what to measure. A strong PIRS ensures that everyone measures, calculates and interprets it in the same way.”