16.6: Timetable for field activities

An organizational timetable should be constructed which shows all of the field activities and indicates when each will be undertaken. An example of such a timetable, for a trial of the effect of regular vitamin A supplementation on episodes of diarrhoea and respiratory infections, is shown in Figure 16.1 (Betty Kirkwood, personal communication). The dates for fieldwork may have to be fixed some time in advance. The time required for preparations and pilot testing may overlap with training, but all three must be completed before the start of the main fieldwork. Similarly, analysis and consultations should be completed, before the final report is produced.

The planning of trial activities must take account of climatic and seasonal factors. These may affect access to the trial area (for example, flooding) and the activities of those in the area such as to make them difficult to survey (for example, seasonal migrations for work, working on farms during the planting or harvesting seasons). It may be important to plan activities to take into account market days, local holidays and festivals, and activities of the local medical services (for example, antenatal clinics). Also, adequate plans must be made to allow for staff leave (both annual leave, sickness absences, and compassionate leave such as to attend funerals or to look after a close relative). The timetable should fit into local practices, if possible (for example, in Muslim countries, if most people do not work on a Friday, the trial should be planned to fit in with this).