

What do we mean by beneficiary feedback mechanisms?

Why use a beneficiary feedback mechanism?

Beneficiary feedback mechanisms are used to collect feedback from those benefitting from projects, analyse the feedback and then respond to that feedback. Programmes need to flex to adapt to changing context and the needs of those benefitting from their interventions. By seeking feedback, analysing it then using it to make changes and adaptations the project will have a greater impact, greater sustainability and greater ownership from those it is seeking to support.

A good project design will ensure that potential beneficiaries have been consulted at the start of the project design period. This may mean that the original design envisaged by the implementer is adapted based on the initial feedback. The project will then be addressing a need that is of relevance for the beneficiaries, for stakeholders and for the context.

However, gathering regular feedback from beneficiaries is often neglected during the course of the project or if collected is not analysed or used to make changes to the programming accordingly.

By addressing problems early, time and money can be better spent. Not only will relationships with the communities improve, but the beneficiaries involved in beneficiary feedback mechanisms report a feeling of empowerment. It can also ensure that the most vulnerable are included and benefit from projects.

What needs to be done to ensure beneficiary feedback mechanisms are effective?

- ensure sensitisation of target beneficiaries to the purpose and process of giving feedback. This then gives them greater confidence to provide relevant feedback and be assured that their feedback will actually be listened to
- both beneficiaries and front line staff need to be fully sensitised as to the benefits of using the mechanism. Equally there must be capacity within the organisation to not just carry out the mechanism but to be able to analyse the results
- use a range of mechanisms, rather than relying on a sole approach. This helps to reach a greater number of beneficiaries, some of whom may not respond well to one type of mechanism
- in situations where beneficiaries have lower literacy levels and high poverty levels, face to face mechanisms have proved most effective
- close 'the feedback loop', and respond back to the beneficiary on the changes that have been made as well as communicating the feedback higher up the delivery chain to inform upward accountability to the donor
- ensure that there are clear referral pathways with stakeholders to enable the project to be respond to the feedback with revised flexible project activities and budgets
- ensure there is sufficient scope in the programme design to make changes and respond to requests
- consider the sustainability and exit strategy for the feedback mechanism as part of the initial design phas

What kind of mechanisms are there?

There are multiple feedback mechanisms from which to choose. A thorough context analysis should be conducted before deciding on a particular feedback mechanism. Consider cost, literacy and other barriers to the success of your chosen mechanism. Consider using a range of mechanisms.

Examples of mechanisms include:

Use of SMS and mobile phone technology
Focus group discussions
Questionnaires
One on one interviews
Meetings
Billboards
Radio
Suggestion boxes

See www.feedbackmechanism.org for practice notes and further guidance

There is further information and experiences from the field, available on a UK Aid Direct webinar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5baxHyd_XM