

# Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms

## About this guidance

This guidance seeks to ensure that UK Aid Direct applicants and grant holders understand what the Department for International Development (DFID) means by beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and more specifically, that they:

- Understand the terms used that relate to beneficiary feedback mechanisms in UK Aid Match guidance and templates
- Understand beneficiary feedback mechanisms and why they are a useful tool for project monitoring and learning
- Learn how to use beneficiary feedback mechanisms during project implementation
- Can demonstrate that using beneficiary feedback mechanisms can lead to greater accountability

These areas are addressed below. At the end of the document there is a list of useful websites for further information and reference.

## What is a beneficiary feedback mechanism?

A beneficiary feedback mechanism is a tool designed to gather and respond to the views of recipients of aid, often called beneficiaries. By responding to the views of aid recipients, organisations can improve or evaluate their projects and be held accountable for project implementation. Some other ways of describing them may be helpful:

- A tool designed to gather and respond to the views of beneficiaries
- A way of increasing the participation and ownership of beneficiaries
- An opportunity for organisations to improve or evaluate their projects and be held accountable for project implementation
- A way to ensure activities are being delivered which address and meet beneficiary needs
- A way of capturing issues, gathering ideas and listening to beneficiaries so that project work can be adapted if needed
- A chance for real time adaptation of projects - this requires projects to be designed in a way that allows for flexibility and adaptation
- A means to improve empowerment, accountability, and transparency

A number of different terms describing beneficiary feedback are in use, including:

- Community participant feedback
- Participatory feedback
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation
- Participatory self-review and planning.

## A range of BFM engagement exists among UK Aid Match CSOs

A small number are using multiple BFMs. Some engage through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) activities which is largely the same thing. A number call it something different but obtain feedback from beneficiaries through routine project activities, such as at the end of training events or during routine monitoring activities. Some are in the process of developing BFM mechanisms, and a small number are not using any BFM.

### Why do we need BFMs?

There are a number of reasons why BFMs are becoming a strongly recommended practice, now mandatory for DFID projects. Some of these are:

#### *Accountability*

Generating greater accountability allows beneficiaries to hold the project implementing organisation and its staff to account; where government staff and services are being facilitated, holding them to account also.

- By ensuring organisations and government are held to account by people affected by poverty, more relevant quality programmes that meet people's needs and priorities are likely to be designed
- Reduces the possibility of mistakes, abuse and corruption
- Accountability processes that are managed effectively help to assess and improve the quality of work, which benefits both the organisation and the people

#### *Real time adaptation of projects*

Rather than wait for monthly, quarterly or end of project monitoring reports, by capturing your beneficiaries' feedback through an ongoing process, you can respond to their issues in real time and act upon it before the project ends. There may be several ways that you find the need to fine-tune or make bigger changes to the project mid-stream. Some examples:

- Changes in types of interventions for the context you are working in
- Changes in the quality of the services provided
- Changes regarding the needs of beneficiaries that weren't previously identified

#### *Empowerment*

Feedback mechanisms are valued by beneficiaries as platforms through which they can exercise voice.

- Giving feedback holds intrinsic value for many beneficiaries in its own right
- Confidence to give feedback increases over time, and quieter voices gain confidence as they gain trust
- Beneficiaries are then empowered to claim their entitlements and know their rights
- Closing the feedback loop is critical to achieving a sense of empowerment

### When to begin BFMs?

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.

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.

## Types of Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms

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 also using a range of mechanisms. Some of the types of BFM from which to choose are:

### Informal feedback mechanisms (unsolicited)

Unstructured and a way to gather feedback on any issue. Examples:

- Suggestion boxes
- Hotlines/ Toll free community phone numbers
- SMS feedback
- Logbooks

### Direct, face-to-face (solicited)

Structured feedback allowing beneficiaries to outline specific issues related to the project, collected via pre-determined indicators. Examples:

- Focus group discussions (FGDs)
- Individual discussions, key informant interviews (KIIs)
- Customer service mechanisms
- Project design meetings
- Regular beneficiary feedback meetings
- Feedback committees
- Client forums
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Routine community visits.

## What BFM works best?

What works for one project or CSO may not be the best type for another, there is no one-size-fits-all, and bespoke tailor-made solutions may be the best for you.

- Where beneficiaries have lower literacy and higher levels of poverty, face-to-face mechanisms have proved most effective
- Use a range of mechanisms rather than a sole instrument, which will help to reach more beneficiaries
- BFMs will work best where beneficiaries are fully aware of the purpose and process of giving feedback, and where expectations are managed
- The best solutions are likely to come from communities themselves
- More frequent feedback can allow for more timely action within the life of a project
- Two-way channels of communication are essential - respond to beneficiaries and close the feedback loop

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## Challenging cases

In some cases, obtaining feedback is especially difficult and sensitive. Dealing with these cases must be context-specific. Tools will need to be developed that are sensitive to the situation, and feedback will need to be addressed by specialised staff, fully trained in psycho-social support. Examples of this are:

- Projects dealing with the disabled, especially with sensory impairments where communication with the beneficiary may be hard or not possible
- Projects dealing with child cancer, where families that may be deeply traumatised have difficulties in dealing with life-changing circumstances let alone providing feedback
- Projects dealing with GBV, where deeply traumatised women who may come from cultures with deeply engrained taboos may find communication about their situations impossibly hard

## Closing the feedback loop ....

Regardless of whether action is to be taken, a response should be communicated back to beneficiaries as an essential part of the process. This is called 'closing the feedback loop'.

- Gather and listen to feedback from beneficiaries, using carefully chosen methods
- Following collation and analysis of feedback, project teams decide whether action is necessary/appropriate or not
- Beneficiaries may be asked whether they feel issues have been addressed, at regular meetings; if not, the process continues until the matter is brought to closure.



## A summary: what needs to be done to ensure beneficiary feedback mechanisms are effective?

- Target beneficiaries and front-line staff must be aware of the purpose and process of giving feedback. This ensures that relevant feedback will be provided, and beneficiaries will be assured that their feedback will actually be actioned upon
- 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 and high poverty levels, face-to-face mechanisms have proved most effective
- Close 'the feedback loop', and respond back to beneficiaries 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

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- Create clear referral pathways with stakeholders to enable the project to respond to 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 phase

#### Some issues for management ....

There are a number of management considerations that will need attention prior to implementing a BFM programme within your project. Some of these are:

- Ensure you've got the budget and resources to implement this
- Also make sure that you have adequate human capacity within the organisation both to implement and analyse
- When analysing data, disaggregate by gender, age etc to increase relevance
- Make sure you've built in enough flexibility into project design to enable any changes and responses to be made
- Consider sustainability and your project exit strategy right at the beginning, during design
- Create clear referral pathways with all your external stakeholders (partners, donors), to enable you to respond to feedback by making changes
- Make sure your approach is accessible to all

#### Some more reading ....

- <http://feedbackmechanisms.org/2016/08/09/what-is-a-beneficiary-feedback-mechanism/>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5baxHyd\\_XM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5baxHyd_XM)
- <https://www.intrac.org/beneficiary-feedback-mechanisms-whatever-happened-participatorymonitoring-evaluation/>
- <http://feedbackmechanisms.org/public/files/BFM%20End-point%20Synthesis%20%20full%20report.pdf>
- <https://www.devex.com/news/dfid-s-evolving-approach-to-beneficiary-feedback-89059>
- Bonino F., with Jean, I. and Knox Clarke, P. (2014) Closing the Loop - Practitioner guidance on effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts. London: ALNAP/ODI