

MODULE 5 BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK LOOPS AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

PART 1 Beneficiary Feedback

This module is about Beneficiary Feedback but will explore several case studies in which aid organizations failed to or successfully used beneficiary feedback when delivering assistance after natural disasters or conflicts.

In part 1, however, we are going to explore beneficiary feedback, complaints mechanisms, and feedback loops.

Assumed beneficiaries' needs vs Actual beneficiaries' needs

Project implementation can often be driven by what you want and not necessarily by what the community wants and so it's very important to have mechanisms ready whereby the beneficiary can explain their views about the project. The project feedback and complaints mechanisms can therefore help to empower the beneficiaries and positively impact the relevance and local acceptance of the project assistance.

Getting beneficiary feedback can also improve your project content and the delivery of your project.

There are several mechanisms which aid organizations use to gather beneficiary feedback. Complaint response mechanisms, for example, include complaints boxes in IDP camps, WhatsApp groups, complaints contact numbers, social media pages, email addresses, and more. Remember, some beneficiaries are illiterate and so complaint response mechanisms should be adapted accordingly through the use of diagrams, visuals, or other means.

Post distribution monitoring and third party monitoring are other mechanisms used to gather beneficiary feedback on project activities. However, these often *prioritize donor accountability over beneficiaries' needs*. They are nonetheless often used to confirm whether the *project was implemented as planned* and used to analyze the project activities and how much *beneficiaries benefited from them*. Attaining beneficiary feedback can also importantly help you to understand the broader issues which create the demands for aid and assistance.

Here are three of the most popular “**feedback loops**” which aid organizations employ to do this:

1. **Public focus groups**

These allow big groups of beneficiaries to have their say on what project activities and outputs could have been better or what aspects did not meet their needs. Public focus groups are *effective in terms of attaining large data* however you should consider various risk factors such as *COVID-19, overcrowding, marginalization and misrepresentation*.

2. Individual household visits

These are more *private and personal* and allow individuals of all ages, genders, religions, ethnicities, and abilities to provide their comments on project assistance. However, for aid organizations these can *take more time to gather significant amounts of feedback* with large confidence intervals.

3. Focus discussion groups

This is the middle option as usually between 5 to 10 people attend focus group discussions. They can be *conversational and open-ended* so that there is an atmosphere of freedom for the beneficiaries to give their honest opinions. Again, however, for aid organizations these can *take more time* to gather significant amounts of feedback with large confidence intervals and organizers have to consider factors that would make beneficiaries potentially uncomfortable e.g., mixed gender groups, isolated focus groups for PWDs, etc.

Nevertheless, all of the 3 methods mentioned to gather beneficiary feedback allow you to *explore* and *anticipate* positive or negative outcomes of your project, secondary outcomes, and *factors that you may not have considered in your project design*.

There are many other, more informal ways to engage with beneficiaries and gather their feedback, such as taking the opportunity to talk when beneficiaries are queuing for supplies or services, or inviting beneficiaries for soft drinks in their IDP camp or wherever they might feel comfortable.

Always remember to

1. Ask for beneficiaries' consent
2. To maintain confidentiality and respect
3. Reassure beneficiaries of their right to complain or give feedback regarding the assistance they receive

Often aid agencies have a monopoly in terms of the provision of services or supplies and so you must be *considerate* of the fact that some beneficiaries are reliant on these for survival, therefore, they may not be inclined or feel comfortable complaining or giving feedback for fear that it will negatively impact them in some way. Put simply, for *your assistance to be accepted* by the community, you need to

have a *clear plan of action* that can be *adapted to suit their needs* and allow for and accommodate their feedback.

The next parts of this module will introduce some historical case studies so that you can gain a broader understanding of how aid organizations collecting, or in some instances not collecting, beneficiary feedback can affect humanitarian responses to natural disasters and conflict situations.