



PrOF¹ Guides have been developed to help build confidence and capability, distilling useful tips and considerations that may help teams think through programme delivery issues and interpret elements of the PrOF Rules.

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¹ Programme Operating Framework



Introduction

To use this PrOF Guide, we encourage you to read the first seven pages, which summarise the key practical tips and considerations for quality beneficiary engagement. Then we recommend you dive into the sections that contain the content most relevant to your current work. This PrOF Guide lays out:

- The definition of beneficiary engagement:
- The case for beneficiary engagement
- FCDO's approach to beneficiary engagement.
- Practical tips for how to integrate beneficiary engagement throughout the programme cycle, including guiding questions to ask, rules of thumb to apply, tools to use and challenges and special topics to consider during Design, Mobilisation, Delivery and Closure phases.

At its core, beneficiary engagement is about processes that recognise the dignity and support the agency of the people whose lives we are trying to improve. It is about beneficiaries and programme constituents having a say over what assistance they receive and how they receive it. It is about engaging beneficiaries and programme constituents as people with valuable insights and capabilities, rather than a compliance exercise. It is about empowering all beneficiaries and programme constituents to improve their lives by engaging them in helping us make better design and delivery decisions for the programmes that affect their lives. It's about ensuring that a diverse set of voices are heard. Harnessing the power of beneficiary engagement can also improve outcomes and help programmes reach them more efficiently. It helps define and promote Value for Money, improve transparency and ensure that beneficiaries are safe from harm and empowered to speak out wherever harm does occur.

Beneficiary engagement is supported by FCDO policy commitments, PrOF Rules, internal guidance and key international commitments. Beneficiary engagement is applicable to, and valuable in, a range of contexts, including humanitarian contexts.

Beneficiary engagement requires time and resources, but programmes can help ensure the benefits of engagement outweigh the costs by Doing No Harm, Engaging Early and Closing the Loop.

It is ultimately the Programme Responsible Owner's responsibility to determine what beneficiary engagement is suitable and feasible for a programme. Quality beneficiary engagement is not about applying the one "right" approach but rather thoughtfully considering key questions and applying key principles and proven tools to the programme's context to achieve a programme that supports the dignity and agency of all beneficiaries as much as possible.



Overarching Beneficiary Engagement Principles

At its core, beneficiary engagement is about upholding beneficiary dignity and agency, and the right of beneficiaries and programme constituents to have a say over decisions that affect their lives. Beneficiaries and programme constituents are people, and they are not a homogenous group - programmes affect beneficiaries differently depending on their characteristics and circumstances. Effective beneficiary engagement treats each beneficiary with the respect and care to which all people are entitled. Beneficiary engagement is not a box-ticking or compliance exercise, but rather a process of thoughtfully finding ways to help beneficiaries have more agency in a meaningful and safe manner. These four principles are intended to help you keep that in mind:

Do No Harm. Beneficiaries and programme constituents need to feel safe before they will want to engage and ensuring that they are requires careful thought. Engaging beneficiaries, particularly in the design phase of a programme, can help to mitigate the risk of harm. However, engaging can also raise risk for beneficiaries and programme constituents. Beneficiaries and programme constituents may fear that voicing negative feedback will lead to programme support being withdrawn, and beneficiaries who voice dissenting views may risk reprisals from other community members. Beneficiaries and programme constituents also risk having their time wasted if their input or feedback is not acted upon. Beneficiary engagement should be designed with care to ensure beneficiaries and programme constituents aren't harmed by engaging and that the information they provide is kept safe. Careful thought should be paid in particular to the safety of beneficiaries who are marginalised, for example because of their gender, disability or other characteristics.

Engage Early. For beneficiary engagement to be an empowering exercise for the people involved, beneficiary input and feedback needs to contribute to meaningful design and delivery decisions. It is easiest to ensure that happens if the programme plans how it will engage beneficiaries and the resources needed for that engagement from the outset. Programmes that engage with beneficiaries and programme constituents early in the design phase are most likely to improve their programmes based on what they learn, and offer beneficiaries meaningful opportunities to have a say over decisions that affect their lives.

Leave No One Behind. Beneficiary engagement should reach all beneficiaries and programme constituents, including those beneficiaries who are the most marginalised. They can be the hardest beneficiaries to identify, reach and engage, but it is important to carefully design ways to do so. These groups, which may include disabled people, the elderly, women and girls or others facing discrimination based on who they are and where they live, often have unique and poorly understood needs. The views of women and girl beneficiaries should, for example, be understood separately because gender norms and



beliefs dictate that women and girls will engage with and benefit from programmes differently than men and boys. Ensuring the most marginalised beneficiaries are engaged is a key step toward ensuring their needs are met and their capabilities are supported.

Close the Loop. The full benefits of beneficiary engagement can only be realised if you close the loop: act on what you hear from beneficiaries and programme constituents and let them know how you acted. This is key to respectful engagement processes and increases the chances that beneficiaries will engage constructively.

Summary of Beneficiary Engagement Tools

Below is a summary of the beneficiary engagement tools highlighted in this PrOF Guide. Different tools will be appropriate for different contexts; However, regardless of which tool you use it is important that it is used within a continuous process of learning how to improve the programme and support the agency of beneficiaries. This will help to ensure that the programme's empowerment goals for beneficiary engagement are realised.

Human-centred Design, page 13

Creative approach focused on designing with the perspectives and desires of potential users in mind.

Key Informant Interviews, page 14

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews of beneficiaries and programme constituents with specific knowledge of or experiences with a topic.

Focus Group Discussions, page 13

Facilitated discussion of a given topic with a small group of beneficiaries and programme constituents.

Community Consultation, page 13

A range of approaches for engaging beneficiaries and programme constituents in the assessment of their priorities, needs and assets.

Data Visualisation, page 20

Graphical representations of data that help decision-makers absorb and understand the trends, patterns and relationships in data.

Independent/Third-party Monitoring, page 27

Contracting parties outside the programme's management structure to engage beneficiaries and programme constituents.

Participatory Monitoring, page 23

Engaging beneficiaries and programme constituents to define monitoring indicators, track progress toward them and make sense of lessons learned.

Surveys, page 24

Formal questionnaires administered to a large, representative sample of beneficiaries and programme constituents.

Mobile Apps, page 28

Smartphone or tablet computer applications that enable beneficiaries to ask



questions, provide input or feedback and receive information.

[Suggestion Box, page 34](#)

Physical box into which beneficiaries and programme constituents can insert written input or feedback.

[Mobile Phone – SMS, page 29](#)

Widely used form of text message that enables beneficiaries to obtain information and provide input or feedback by texting from their mobile phone.

[Mobile Phone – Interactive Voice Response, page 29](#)

Automated phone system that enables beneficiaries and programme constituents to obtain information and provide input or feedback by speaking into their mobile phone.

[Hotline, page 29](#)

Dedicated phone number beneficiaries and programme constituents can call to access information and provide input or feedback.

[Social Media, page 29](#)

Online social networks where beneficiaries and programme constituents can access information or engage in discussion.

[Help Desk, page 29](#)

Physical locations where beneficiaries and programme constituents can ask a person for information or share feedback about a programme.

[Radio with call-in, page 29](#)

Call-in radio shows broadcast information and offer a channel for beneficiaries and constituents to share feedback and discuss topics of importance.

[Participatory Evaluation, page 32](#)

Beneficiaries and programme constituents design and carry out programme evaluation and make sense of and disseminate evaluation findings.



What is Beneficiary Engagement?

Beneficiary engagement is the two-way process of involving beneficiaries in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Beneficiaries are the people whose lives we are trying to improve. **Direct beneficiaries** are people who take part or are otherwise immediately involved in programme activities. **Indirect beneficiaries** are the people whose lives we are ultimately trying to improve, even if we are not working with them directly. Note that beneficiaries are not a homogenous group even if they are all members of the same community.

Beneficiary engagement usually involves:

- Providing information to beneficiaries
- Ensuring the design, delivery and monitoring and evaluation of programmes incorporate beneficiary views, ideas and preferences
- Enabling beneficiaries to comment on programmes
- Communicating the actions taken in response to beneficiary engagement back to beneficiaries

The term '**beneficiary**' is highly contested. It arguably suggests that programmes always benefit the people they aim to help and that those people are passive recipients of support from altruistic benefactors. Terms like end-user, affected population, affected communities or constituents may be more appropriate in some cases. In this PrOF Guide we use the term beneficiary for want of a better, equally clear term while acknowledging the problematic bias inherent in the term.

An important subset of beneficiary engagement is **beneficiary feedback**, which is a dynamic process of listening and responding to the people whose lives we are trying to improve.

Of particular importance is **perceptual beneficiary feedback**, which focuses on beneficiaries' perspectives, feelings and opinions rather than objective facts.



Who Engages Beneficiaries?

In many cases FCDO staff are not the main party engaging with beneficiaries directly. Rather, delivery partners are often primarily responsible for engaging beneficiaries and listening and responding to beneficiary input or feedback. The role of FCDO staff then is to ensure that beneficiary engagement happens well, which means ensuring that at every stage of the programme cycle:

Adequate resources and the necessary flexibility for quality beneficiary engagement are available, including sufficient resources for engaging marginalised beneficiaries

Partners understand and agree to the expectations for how they will engage beneficiaries and report on that engagement

Lessons learned from beneficiary engagement are being responded to and, where relevant, shared beyond the programme

FCDO staff also have a key role to play in ensuring beneficiaries are being engaged safely and effectively, and in a way that is representative of all beneficiaries. This may mean using third-party monitoring or FCDO staff monitoring engagement directly.

Identifying Beneficiaries

FCDO undertakes many programmes with complex theories of change that benefit different groups of people in different ways. To figure out who the beneficiaries of a programme are, ask, **“Who is this programme trying to impact directly and indirectly at different points in the results chain and theory of change?”** Consider unexpected ways in which the programme might affect people so as not to disregard people who are not directly involved in the programme but may be affected nonetheless. When you are drawing up the

Beneficiary Engagement and Investment Programmes

FCDO often undertakes programmes with a long line of sight between the programme activities and indirect beneficiaries. Consider, for example, a programme that invests in the capacity of a country’s electricity grid. It may be difficult to identify and engage all beneficiaries of such a programme. But engaging with the programme’s indirect beneficiaries, for example in this case poor households that were previously unelectrified, remains important. They would have unique insights about whether they are experiencing better access to electricity after the programme is implemented. Furthermore, they are the primary arbiters of whether increased access to electricity brings value to their lives. Think carefully about how indirect beneficiaries might be engaged. Tools such as mobile phone calls and SMS and intermediaries such as the media may be helpful for identifying and engaging large, possibly representative samples of indirect beneficiaries, although it is always important to assess who has access to and feels comfortable using these channels.



delivery chain map for your programme or when identifying each tier of the chain consider where suitable opportunities are for connecting with beneficiaries – and consider where you would expect to engage directly and where you would expect partners to engage.

Once you have identified groups of direct and indirect beneficiaries, ask, “**What are different characteristics of beneficiaries within each group?**”

Beneficiaries who belong to the same community are not homogenous and vary by age, gender, social status, physical attributes and other characteristics. Different methods are needed to safely and effectively engage different groups of beneficiaries, especially the most marginalised.

Then, consider **what results level would the beneficiary engagement align to. Outputs or outcomes?** Beneficiary engagement can be helpful for both monitoring whether outputs are being achieved (and why) as well as whether outcomes are being achieved (and how). Depending on the outcome level, different beneficiaries may be engaged with different mechanisms and plans for how to use beneficiary input or feedback.

Finally, it is important to scan the existing engagement landscape to understand what existing engagement mechanisms are reaching beneficiaries. There may be opportunities to align with or leverage existing mechanisms rather than duplicating efforts.

Clarifying Beneficiary Engagement Goals

Once you have identified the beneficiaries of your programme ask, “**What goal am I trying to achieve by engaging beneficiaries?**” Beneficiary engagement can serve many purposes, from gathering information to empowering beneficiaries. It is particularly helpful to ask:

How do we want to adjust the design and delivery of our programme in response to beneficiary needs or preferences? This will help you identify *accountability* goals.

What real-time information about what is working for our intended beneficiaries do we want to gather, analyse and present? This will help you identify *learning* goals.

Are there specific results elements of the theory of change and causal chain we need beneficiary engagement to assess? This will help you identify *monitoring and evaluation* goals.

How do we want to increase the power and agency that beneficiaries have vis-à-vis the programme, the delivery partner, FCDO or other stakeholders? This will



help you identify *empowerment* goals.

How will engaging beneficiaries help protect them from the risk of harm? How will we ensure that engagement is safe for all beneficiaries? This will help you identify *safeguarding* goals.

What goals might beneficiaries hold for their engagement? It is important to be flexible enough to satisfy beneficiary goals for engaging as you find out what they are.

Teams need to weigh the pros and cons of what they want to achieve through beneficiary engagement with the resources they have and the context of the programme. Trade-offs should be made clear at the outset. Note that programmes often focus on monitoring and learning goals for beneficiary engagement. While empowerment and accountability goals may not always be suitable or feasible, carefully consider whether they can be incorporated.

What Does Beneficiary Engagement Cost?

It is important to consider the value for money that beneficiary engagement provides and invest accordingly. The cost of beneficiary engagement is balanced by significant benefits, such as the ability to improve programme design early on, identify and address issues before they develop, and support beneficiary dignity and agency while delivering more effective, transparent programmes. To learn more about the benefits of beneficiary engagement, refer to Annex B.

Consider the programme's goals for engaging beneficiaries and what resources are necessary to reap the benefits of achieving those goals. International development programmes often spend between 0.1 and 1% of a programme's budget on beneficiary engagement. That percentage may be lower for programmes with very large budgets. It may also be higher, for example 2 to 5%, for programmes that deliver many activities through engagement or programmes that engage beneficiaries in highly participatory monitoring and evaluation.

It is important to factor the cost of beneficiary engagement into programme budgets during the design phase in order to ensure that engagement is embedded in the programme and has sufficient resources allocated to it. Potential costs to consider may include:

- Sensitisation of beneficiaries to the purpose of and opportunity for beneficiary engagement
- Identification of beneficiaries, particularly the most marginalised and least visible
- Staff, materials, and technology needed to engage beneficiaries
- Translation of engagement materials and beneficiary responses and other costs associated with ensuring materials are in an accessible format for



- all beneficiaries
- Engagement activities
- Transcription of data from beneficiary engagement into digital form, and secure storage or disposal of that data
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Converting analysis into a form that decision-makers will use

‘Closing the loop’ – responding to beneficiary input or feedback and letting beneficiaries know how the programme responded

While beneficiary engagement does have a cost, the value of engagement can more than account for the cost. Appropriate engagement methods can be chosen that fit within budget constraints.

Common Concerns and How to Address Them

Quality beneficiary engagement can mitigate the following common concerns:

What if the programme doesn’t interact with beneficiaries?

Some programmes, for example investment programmes, have a long line of sight between the programme’s activities and the people whose lives the programme is ultimately trying to improve. Other programmes may aim for systemic outcomes with unclear pathways to effects on the lives of beneficiaries. In such cases, it may not be suitable to engage beneficiaries for design or monitoring purposes. However, there is value in engaging beneficiaries in order to be transparent and accountable to them. Technologies like [automated mobile phone calls and SMS](#) can help the programme team or delivery partner identify and engage a representative sample of beneficiaries in the most appropriate or sensitive way.

What if we hear unanticipated input or feedback?

Programmes will often hear beneficiary input or feedback that they didn’t anticipate. In such cases programme teams and delivery partners need to consider what flexibility they have to respond. During [mobilisation](#) it is helpful to set clear expectations for how delivery partners will handle unanticipated feedback and reflect the flexibility they will have to respond in terms of reference and contracts. Open channels of communication with the programme team can help delivery partners feel comfortable sharing unanticipated feedback and adjusting the programme to respond to it. If the programme is unable to respond to unanticipated feedback, consider whether the feedback can be responded to by future programmes or by external partners, other donors and governments. It is important to ‘close the loop’ even if the



programme does not respond in line with the input or feedback – let beneficiaries know they were heard and be transparent about why the programme didn't respond. (Note that, from a [safeguarding](#) perspective, if unanticipated feedback suggests beneficiaries are at risk it must be responded to).

Beneficiary Engagement in Practice in the Programme Cycle

It is important in development contexts to plan and deliver beneficiary engagement around the programme cycle and programme control points. This section describes guiding questions and rules of thumb to apply at every stage of the programme cycle. For sample questions and language to use for specific programme control points, refer to Annex C.

Design

Teams that engage beneficiaries during the design of a programme are more likely to use beneficiary input to improve their programmes and have an easier time incorporating engagement activities during programme delivery⁹. They will have better information about context, risks and preferences with which to make better design decisions and will tend to design programmes that are more closely aligned to beneficiary needs. Engaging beneficiaries in the design of a programme is also more likely to empower them as active participants in the development process. Programmes that consider beneficiary engagement in the design stage will also be better positioned to find and leverage existing beneficiary engagement mechanisms rather than duplicating efforts.

The design stage offers an important opportunity to:

Engage beneficiaries in the design of the programme's goals and how it will achieve them.

Ensure that beneficiary engagement mechanisms are planned for and adequately resourced.

Ensure enough flexibility is built into the programme that partners can respond to what they hear.

Plan how beneficiary engagement will be incorporated into programme monitoring and evaluation.

Engaging beneficiaries in the design of the programme's goals and how it will achieve them

Beneficiaries have valuable insights into the context in which a programme will take place. Tapping into beneficiary knowledge can help teams validate assumptions on which the programme is based, discover unknown unknowns,



uncover beneficiary capabilities that can support the programme, and make savvy design choices. These programmes are more likely to effect positive change on the lives of beneficiaries. Furthermore, engaging beneficiaries in designing the goals of a programme and how they will be achieved signals a commitment to ensuring that the programme is empowering.

Guiding questions

What beneficiary input or feedback from previous programmes can inform the design of this program? Beneficiary input or feedback gathered by previous programmes can help inform a team's understanding of context, beneficiary needs, preferences and capabilities and potential risks. Input or feedback gathered by previous programmes through monitoring, evaluation or dedicated beneficiary feedback mechanisms may be particularly useful during the drafting of the concept note before more intensive beneficiary engagement in programme design is undertaken. Scan the existing engagement landscape to find existing engagement mechanisms reaching the same or overlapping beneficiaries, whether the mechanism is serving another programme, another actor or a common or system-wide feedback mechanism.

What do I need to know about the programme's context, beneficiary perspectives, potential risks or validity of assumptions that only beneficiary engagement can elucidate?¹⁰ Beneficiaries have rich knowledge about their needs, capabilities and preferences and their context and risks that the programme might encounter. Accessing that knowledge can arm the team designing the programme with stronger insights that in turn help them make better design choices and mitigate identified risks.

What are beneficiaries' preferences for engagement? The success of beneficiary engagement, both during the design of a programme and during delivery, often depends on whether the engagement methods account for how beneficiaries want to engage and on factors like literacy, mobility or phone ownership that affect how beneficiaries can engage. Consider social and gender-related norms and how they may affect an individual's ability to engage. Consider systematically asking beneficiaries what their engagement preferences are, taking into account that beneficiaries who are part of the same community may have different preferences.

Rules of thumb

Be transparent. Beneficiaries often lack basic information about a programme and that can lower their willingness and ability to engage. During the design stage it is important to be clear about the goals of the programme and what decisions will be informed by beneficiary engagement and what will not. It is also important to be clear about how the information beneficiaries provide will be used, stored and disposed of. This will help beneficiaries make an informed decision about



whether to engage and, by helping them feel comfortable with how their data will be handled, feel more comfortable engaging. Transparency is a key tenant of engaging ethically and helps avoid misaligned expectations and disappointment.

Probe the unknown. Engaging beneficiaries in programme design offers the opportunity to incorporate new information to make better design decisions. Focus on drawing out insights that only beneficiaries themselves can tell you and engaging beneficiaries in a way that increases the likelihood they'll make you aware of context, risks or community capabilities of which you were previously unaware.

Understand the engagement context. Successful beneficiary engagement will fit the local context and consider local power structures, social norms and how beneficiaries prefer to communicate and engage. Undertake situational and context analysis to understand power dynamics, security constraints, cultural norms, existing engagement structures and beneficiary preferences around channels of communication and modes of engagement. Consider also how the programme itself will change the engagement context. Look for opportunities to leverage existing engagement mechanisms rather than duplicating them and, when working with local organisations representing different groups of beneficiaries, look for representative groups that are as far as possible led by the beneficiaries they represent.

Tools

Human-centred Design Human-centred design is a creative approach to problem-solving that focuses on designing solutions with the perspectives and desires of potential users in mind. This approach prioritises testing prototypes with potential users and improving them based on user feedback. Human-centred design is particularly powerful when we need to find innovative solutions that users will embrace.

Focus Group Discussions Focus group discussions are a common participatory technique during which a small group of participants is guided by a facilitator to discuss a given topic. Focus groups can be particularly useful for exploring a range of beneficiary views on a given topic, although they can tend to highlight the views of the most powerful beneficiaries. For tips on how to successfully plan for and facilitate a focus group discussion, refer to USAID's [technical note](#) or this INTRAC [guide](#).

Community Consultation Community consultation encompasses a wide range of approaches for listening to beneficiary views on development priorities and programmes, often engaging beneficiaries in the assessment of their needs and assets. Approaches include the [Reality Check Approach](#), developed by Sida and used by FCDO in Nepal, and the [Participatory Poverty Assessment](#) method



developed by the World Bank as well as many other tools for [participatory analysis of poverty and vulnerability](#).

Key Informant Interviews Key Informant Interviews are qualitative, semi-structured interviews of beneficiaries selected for their knowledge of, or experiences with, a topic. Key informant interviews can be particularly useful for gathering in-depth insights from selected individuals and for providing a forum that may be more conducive to candid sharing of dissenting views than a focus group discussion. For tips on carrying out key informant interviews, refer to USAID's [Tips sheet](#).

Case Study: Engaging Youth in Programme Design Through Workshops and WhatsApp

The FCDO-funded Voices for Change (V4C) programme, carried out in Nigeria from 2013 to 2017, promoted positive gender norms through the marketing of a lifestyle brand named Purple. “As a core component of Voices for Change was communications and marketing, it was absolutely essential that we understood what the beneficiaries needed and that we responded to that,” said Caroline Enye, team leader of V4C. A small sample of young people from four states participated in design workshops, and a WhatsApp group of approximately 40 young volunteers provided feedback on brand messages before the brand was launched. Their feedback highlighted that the programme had falsely assumed that men and women should receive different content about gender. In response, the programme significantly restructured the curricula it offered, improving the effectiveness of V4C’s gender content and messages about violence against women and girls. Facebook and website forums provided further opportunities for young people to provide feedback to the programme throughout implementation. By December 2017, 4.68 million unique active users had visited the Purple website.

Ensuring that beneficiary engagement mechanisms are planned for and adequately resourced

It is important during the design stage to thoughtfully plan for which beneficiary engagement methods will be used during delivery and to ensure that enough resources, including staff time and money, are budgeted to carry out those methods well.

Guiding questions

How will the programme elicit quality beneficiary engagement? Beneficiary



engagement is most useful for programme design when it produces high-quality insights. Use our guide to different methods, and your understanding of the context, to help you make decisions about which beneficiary engagement methods will produce the best quality engagement for the programme.

How will the programme engage the most marginalised beneficiaries?

FCDO is committed to prioritising the interests of the world's most vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Marginalised beneficiary groups may encounter barriers to engagement or be less comfortable engaging with the programme compared to other, more powerful beneficiary groups. Their engagement is essential because they have specific needs that are often poorly understood, and their voices are least often heard in programme design or humanitarian response.

How much time will be necessary for each step of engagement and how much will it cost? Beneficiary engagement, done right, requires time and monetary resources. The design stage is the time to choose beneficiary engagement methods that fit the programme budget and delivery option and ensure that resources for engagement are adequately budgeted.

Rules of thumb

Be inclusive. It is difficult to find one beneficiary engagement mechanism that works equally well for all beneficiaries. Different groups of beneficiaries have different levels of literacy, mobility, access to technology, power and other characteristics that mean an engagement channel that's accessible to one group of beneficiaries may not be accessible to another. For example, a community meeting may invite dialogue from those with power within a community but not feel like a safe forum for beneficiaries with dissenting views or who fear reprisals from other community members if they engage. Designing multiple engagement channels allows a programme to match different channels to the accessibility constraints and engagement preferences of different subsets of beneficiaries.

Build trust. Beneficiaries often fear that providing negative input or feedback to aid agencies or delivery partners will cause programmes to be scaled back. It is important to understand existing levels of trust. Increase trust by operating through trusted intermediaries, explaining how data gathered through engagement will be handled and kept safe and clarifying how negative feedback or complaints will be received.

Case Study: Understanding the Context Leads to Successful Engagement

As part of the FCDO-supported Common Service for Community Engagement and Accountability



- set up in 2017 to engage the Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh - BBC Media Action, Internews and Translators Without Borders invested deeply in finding out how Rohingya people wanted to be engaged. They heard that most Rohingya people relied on mahjis, or community leaders, as their primary source of information but did not always trust the information they provided. The common service helped agencies work with mahjis to provide more accurate information and their actions have contributed to people feeling substantially better informed. In October 2017, only 23% of Rohingya people felt they had the information they needed to make good decisions for themselves and their families. By July 2018, that number

Plan to close the loop. When beneficiaries feel that a programme has solicited but not acted on their input or feedback it can elicit disappointment, resentment and an unwillingness to further engage. One of the often-overlooked costs of beneficiary engagement is the cost of communicating back to beneficiaries how their input or feedback was used. It is important to plan for this cost, especially as it helps ensure a willingness to engage throughout the lifespan of the programme.

Ensure enough flexibility is built into the programme so partners can respond to what they hear

Beneficiary engagement is only powerful if the programme can be adapted and improved based on what beneficiaries say. That requires a programme to have built in enough flexibility to be able to respond to beneficiary input or feedback by shifting resources or modifying its approach.

Guiding Questions

When will the programme partner and FCDO staff pause to reflect on beneficiary input and feedback? The first step toward adjusting a programme based on beneficiary engagement is pausing to take stock of what is being heard from beneficiaries and reflect on what that means for the programme. These moments of reflection should be planned for and happen at regular intervals that are aligned to the programme's decision-making cycles.

What flexibility or adaptability is suitable for this programme? Not every FCDO-funded programme will undertake an adaptive approach, but the programme should have the flexibility to adjust resource allocation and activities based on beneficiary engagement as needed.

How can contracts and procurement enable adjustments based on beneficiary input or feedback? Thoughtful contracts and procurement are



important, sometimes overlooked aspects of ensuring that a programme has the flexibility it needs to adjust based on beneficiary engagement. Consider how you will ensure priority is given to beneficiary engagement and the flexibility needed to respond after engagement, during procurement.

Gender and Beneficiary Engagement

It is important to consider how gender may affect a beneficiary's ability or willingness to engage. In some communities women, for example, may face greater language or literacy barriers, lower access to technology, or be more hesitant to talk to outsiders. It is important to uncover gendered barriers to engagement and invest in overcoming them. Factors to consider include the timing of your engagement request, who is engaging the beneficiary and how that engagement is happening. For example, tech-enabled engagement mechanisms like SMS and phone calls tend to have greater gender disparities in participation rates than other mechanisms like face-to-face engagement. Women-led rights organisations can help facilitate engagement with a gender lens, although it is important to note the difference between organisations that represent the voices of women and girls and those that advocate on their behalf. As civic space shrinks in some countries, these organisations may face increasing repression. It is important to seek out connections with and support such civil society organisations.

Case Study: Flexible Programmes Respond Effectively to Beneficiary Engagement

The case of Pyoe Pin, a FCDO-funded governance programme in Myanmar, illustrates the benefits that beneficiary engagement can generate if the programme is designed to be flexible. Pyoe Pin facilitates social and political change by engaging coalitions of civil society, private sector, government and community actors to address issues in sectors like fisheries, health, education and forestry. Pyoe Pin takes a flexible, issue-driven approach, focusing on continuous iteration. They integrate quick feedback loops and a focus on learning from the stakeholders it engages, and the flexibility built into the programme design means that learning informs next steps. This flexible approach, with programmes designed to start small in a sector and grow iteratively, also helps limit the perceived threat to vested interests while encouraging support from beneficiaries. Pyoe Pin has demonstrated that flexible approaches that learn from beneficiary engagement can work in fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings. For example, the programme helped achieve legal reform in the fishing sector to help prevent overfishing, illegal fishing and damage to mangroves. The programme has not only achieved material improvements in the sectors in which it works but has also



improved the confidence and capacity of a significant portion of Myanmar's civil society and demonstrated the value of more open, inclusive processes of policy deliberation.

Rules of Thumb

Plan for flexibility. Designing a programme that can flexibly adjust based on beneficiary engagement starts in the design phase. Where suitable and feasible, the team should build flexibility, and possibly an adaptive approach, into the concept note and business case of the programme.

Focus on decision-makers. It is important to keep in mind what data is relevant to decision-makers when designing beneficiary engagement mechanisms. Ask: when, according to the delivery plan, will decisions be made about the programme? Who will make them? When and in what format does beneficiary input or feedback need to be delivered to those decision-makers in order to feed into their decision-making? If data generated by beneficiary engagement doesn't obviously feed into a decision point, consider whether that specific engagement might waste beneficiaries' time.

Integrate engagement in strong organisational systems. Engaging with beneficiaries is often the responsibility of implementing partners and/or monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning teams. Ensuring useful insights generated through beneficiary engagement are communicated to, and used by, partners or FCDO staff who are not part of those teams means the programme needs strong communication and coordination systems. Consider putting in place robust mechanisms that support the sharing of and follow-up on beneficiary input and feedback.

Programme Control Points

At the following control points look to answer:

Business Plan

What is the department/office plan to engage with beneficiaries and capture disaggregated evidence about the impact of beneficiary engagement, and what drives that impact?

How are we sharing lessons within the department more widely?

Concept Note

Who are the beneficiaries? How will they be engaged during design and delivery? How will we ensure we are reaching the most marginalised beneficiaries?

What lessons from beneficiary engagement with previous programmes contribute to the evidence base for this programme?



Sample language: At the design stage, an early market engagement event (EME) will be held to gather beneficiary feedback. This feedback will be used to inform programme activities to ensure that they are relevant and effective. Key beneficiaries relevant to this programme will also be engaged throughout programme implementation.



Business Case

- What evidence, information about context or unknown unknowns gathered from beneficiary engagement inform this programme?
- How can beneficiary engagement provide information about the programme's context, beneficiary needs (including the different needs of different groups of beneficiaries), preferences and capabilities, potential risks or validity of assumptions?
- How will the programme elicit quality beneficiary engagement and feedback, especially from the most marginalised beneficiaries?
- How much time will be necessary for each step of engagement and how much will it cost?
- How will the programme plan for the flexibility needed to adjust based on beneficiary input and feedback? Example business case language: Feedback from potential implementing partners will be sought during the EME event which will be held 9 months before the proposed start date of the programme. Component 2 of the programme involves the delivery of small grants and technical assistance to existing and start up local businesses. A scoping study has been built into the inception phase to gather input and feedback from potential beneficiaries prior to implementation. This will provide a better understanding of local markets and opportunities. The feedback will inform the design of the programme and ensure the delivery of grants and assistance is relevant and effective. Key beneficiaries relevant to this programme will also be engaged throughout the programme cycle, namely through the FCDO annual review process and through the monitoring and evaluation component. Both processes will enable a feedback and improvement cycle. Some monitoring, particularly to capture results against the log frame, will be carried out by the implementing partner. As per the log frame in Annex A, it is proposed that a perception survey be carried out to track the quality of activities and outputs of component 2.

Tools

Data visualization Data visualisation tools help you create graphical representations of data. They are particularly powerful for creating images that help decision-makers absorb and understand the trends, patterns and relationships in data that is produced through beneficiary engagement. For tips on how to use data visualisation tools, refer to these USAID [resources](#).

Planning how beneficiary engagement will be integrated into programme monitoring and evaluation.

Although beneficiaries are often seen as simply a source of monitoring and



evaluation data, deeper engagement of beneficiaries can significantly strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems. Engaging beneficiaries in the design of monitoring and evaluation systems helps ensure that information is gathered on the aspects of the programme that are important to beneficiaries, which in turn helps to define whether the programme is achieving value for money. It is important to ensure that a diverse range of views are heard, including from women, men, girls, boys and people with disabilities.

Guiding questions

What approach will the programme take to incorporating beneficiary engagement in monitoring? Beneficiaries can be engaged to provide data about pre-defined monitoring indicators, or they can be engaged in the selection of indicators and decisions about how they will be measured. Programmes can also engage beneficiaries to hold decision-makers accountable, with monitoring data produced as a by-product. (See FCDO's How to Note on Beneficiary Participation in Monitoring.)

What indicators will we track based on beneficiary engagement? Beneficiary engagement should be incorporated into the framework for results with particular thought given to what indicators of progress can only be gathered from beneficiary feedback. These unique indicators will often focus on the perceptions, opinions and feelings of beneficiaries, which is commonly known as perceptual feedback.

If there will be an evaluation, how will beneficiaries be included? If the decision is made to evaluate the programme, beneficiary engagement represents an opportunity to strengthen evaluation design. The design of the evaluation will be affected by who the programme's beneficiaries are and what relationship they have to the programme implementer.

Rules of thumb

Ensure credibility. Decision-makers rarely make significant modifications to programmes based on beneficiary input or feedback alone. Often, for the data generated through beneficiary engagement to be credible and relevant to decision-makers it needs to be combined, with or triangulated by, other types of data. Ensure that beneficiary feedback indicators are designed to be combined with, or compared to, other indicators.

Beneficiary Engagement in Different Monitoring Approaches

Beneficiary engagement can be included in different approaches to monitoring. Three common approaches are:

Logical Framework Approach This approach forms the basis of FCDO's



monitoring systems. The logical framework, or log frame, describes a results chain of how an intervention's inputs and activities lead to outputs, outcomes and impacts. In this approach, beneficiaries' perspectives are used as input to assess progress on pre-determined results, indicators and milestones in the project's log frame. Beneficiaries' perspectives are one source of monitoring information to complement other sources.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation This approach is well established in the development sector. Participatory monitoring and evaluation involve beneficiaries as active participants who take the lead in defining indicators, tracking progress toward them and making sense of lessons learned. In this approach, beneficiaries are empowered to lead monitoring and evaluation.

Social Accountability Embedded in Programmes This approach focuses on citizen-led interventions to hold decision-makers accountable. Monitoring data on progress made toward chosen indicators is produced as a by-product of the accountability process. In this approach, accountability to beneficiaries is an explicit aim.

In addition to engaging beneficiaries in monitoring or evaluating progress against indicators, it is important to engage them in assessing the programme's causal path and whether programme inputs are leading to outcomes in the way that was expected.

Involve beneficiaries as more than data sources. Evaluations typically engage beneficiaries as sources from whom monitoring and evaluation data is collected, but beneficiaries can also be meaningfully engaged in the design of evaluations, validation and analysis of evaluation data and dissemination and communication of evaluation results.

Align with other systems. Monitoring systems that funnel beneficiary input or feedback directly to FCDO or its delivery partners risk undermining a government's accountability and responsiveness to its citizens. As you incorporate beneficiary engagement in the programme's monitoring systems, look for ways to strengthen domestic systems - for example by working with government partners to conduct joint monitoring. In humanitarian contexts, it is important to align beneficiary engagement with response-wide systems.

Case Study: Engaging Beneficiaries in Monitoring Curbs Corruption

The FCDO-funded Community Support Programme that ran from 2003 to 2012 in Nepal used public audits to engage beneficiaries in monitoring as more than just data sources. Community members were informed early on about a project's objectives, activities, and resources. They monitored



whether the project was meeting its objectives and using its resources properly and had the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions for improvements mid-way through the project and upon project completion. The public audits not only generated quality monitoring data but also promoted transparency and curbed corruption, with communities able to detect irregularities in resource use and take steps to address them. The public audits were integrated into local government systems, contributing to more responsive local government as well.

Case Study: Beneficiary Engagement Strengthens Government Systems and Combats Fraud

FCDO's Beneficiary Feedback Pilot Programme in Tanzania used beneficiary feedback collected via text messages, phone calls and suggestion boxes as a source of monitoring data that complemented other, more traditional sources of monitoring data. The pilot team shared feedback with the district government, ensuring that feedback pertaining to specific departments was passed on for action and helping to identify cases of fraud. For example, beneficiary feedback alerted programme and district staff that a Health Officer in charge of a health centre had stolen supplies. District staff investigated promptly, and the equipment was recovered. The more local authorities demonstrated they were responding to feedback, the more feedback beneficiaries shared. As one programme staff put it, "During the last three months of the project we got almost the same number of feedback we got in the previous twelve. because in the meantime we arranged many times to solve problems raised or, at least to go physically on the field to listen directly from the people." The pilot also set up an inter-sectoral district task force with local authorities, which met quarterly to address feedback received. This led to better coordination between district government departments, particularly on sensitive topics like gender-based violence that were raised by beneficiary feedback.

Bias in Beneficiary Engagement

The data generated by beneficiary engagement is, like all data, subject to bias. It is therefore important to ensure beneficiary input and feedback is collected systematically, with careful thought given to how to ensure representative sampling. Contact FCDO Statistics Advisors to get help thoughtfully addressing issues of bias and ensuring the data generated through beneficiary engagement is as useful as possible for monitoring and learning.

Tools

Independent or Third-party monitoring Independent or third-party monitoring involves contracting parties outside the programme's management structure to collect and verify monitoring data. It can be especially useful for monitoring the



activities of partner organisations or collecting beneficiary feedback in insecure contexts where FCDO or partner staff face access issues, although it is increasingly used in other contexts as well. It can also enable beneficiary engagement across a portfolio of programmes. However, its focus is usually on verification rather than closing the loop, so it is best used alongside complementary beneficiary engagement mechanisms.

Participatory monitoring Participatory Monitoring encompasses a wide range of methods in which beneficiaries are active participants in tracking and making sense of progress toward monitoring indicators. Participatory monitoring can, in addition to supporting increased effectiveness of programmes, lead to greater transparency, accountability and empowerment. Two commonly used methods that aim to empower and increase accountability through the monitoring process include Citizen Report Cards and Community Score Cards.

Surveys; Surveys are formal questionnaires administered to a large, representative sample of beneficiaries. Household surveys are administered to a representative of a household and are an important data source worldwide. Although surveys often rely on closed-ended questions, they can be used to capture perceptual feedback - That is data about the perceptions, views and opinions of beneficiaries.

Programme Control Points

At the following control points look to answer: Framework for results

How will beneficiary feedback feed into indicators, milestones, and changes to assumptions? If the programme will be evaluated, how will beneficiaries be involved?

Is engagement with beneficiaries being set at output or outcome level (or both)? Sample language: FCDO are particularly keen to receive proposals for monitoring and evaluation that utilise innovative and wide-ranging beneficiary feedback in a participatory approach. The chosen approach should ensure that stakeholders can participate in the collection of data, analysis of findings, and implementation of recommendations. This will facilitate the generation of evaluation findings which are both useful and relevant. Any stakeholder or beneficiary engagement should be as inclusive as possible.

Mobilisation

Mobilisation is the time to ensure that the delivery partner(s) chosen to implement the programme will engage beneficiaries in effective, respectful and safe ways. It is the time to set clear expectations around how partners will engage beneficiaries and communicate the results of that engagement to FCDO. For further examples of how this can be done, refer to [Annex E](#).



Guiding questions

How will you make clear the requirement to engage with beneficiaries to potential delivery partners? As part of the procurement process, clearly lay out expectations for implementing partners to systematically engage beneficiaries in meaningful, empowering and inclusive ways.

Do partner staff have the skills they need to successfully engage beneficiaries? As part of the due diligence processes assess whether partners have the capabilities needed to effectively and sensitively engage beneficiaries and deliver on expectations for effective engagement..Key capabilities include the ability to promote dialogue, to understand community dynamics and social norms, to respectfully receive negative input or feedback, to manage large-scale data collection (and protection of any personal data), and most importantly to close the loop.

When and how will partners report to FCDO on their engagement with beneficiaries? It is important to set clear expectations on how and how often partners will report on how they are engaging with beneficiaries, what they are hearing, what they are learning from it, and how they are closing the loop. In humanitarian contexts, it may be important to report to other actors and forums, in addition to FCDO.

Case Study: Focusing on Delivering Relevant Feedback Data to Decision-Makers

The Nepal Common Feedback Programme, set up after the 2015 earthquake, focused on a relatively short set of questions with a relatively small sample size, because this produced almost real-time information that could be acted upon more quickly by agencies to improve delivery. The Common Feedback Programme dedicated a lot of effort to ensuring that findings were “seen by the right people at the right time, in the right language.” Strong communication skills on the part of the implementing team were essential to ensuring that information was used by decision-makers. Evidence suggests that programmes did adjust based on the feedback heard but that sometimes partners were hesitant to make the case for adjusting because they were worried about their reputation. Had FCDO been even more clear with partners that adjustments to programmes based on strong feedback evidence would have been well received, partners might have been even more likely to adapt based on feedback.

Rules of thumb

Create expectations for engagement. Beneficiary engagement should be reflected in budgets and built into ToRs with partners and contracts with suppliers. Contracts and ToRs should also reflect the flexibility that the programme needs to respond to beneficiary input and feedback.



Ask for evidence of closing the loop. It can be tempting for partners to report positive beneficiary input or feedback that reinforces that the programme is on the right track. FCDO should explicitly ask partners to demonstrate that they are probing unexpected results or unknown unknowns with beneficiaries. Ask them to report on evidence that they are uncovering input or feedback that requires adjustments to the programme and that they are letting beneficiaries know how they are adjusting. FCDO staff should decide whether they are confident they are getting accurate information about how the partner is closing the loop or whether third-party verification is appropriate.

Look for more than collection skills. Partner staff must be able to turn beneficiary input or feedback into information that is used in decision-making and communicate programme responses back to beneficiaries. Look for strong communication skills and the ability to help decision-makers interpret and use data, in addition to dialogue, and data collection skills.

Contracts, Due Diligence and Accountable Grants for Beneficiary Engagement

For competitively tendered contracts, the contracting process provides the required due diligence. As stated in the PrOF Rules, “Developing a strong Terms of Reference (ToR) is the backbone of the commercial contracting process. In the ToR teams can determine exactly what they need to deliver the programme objectives and it is up to them - drawing on commercial advice – to decide what is most appropriate to deliver the programme.” Consider incorporating specific criteria in the ToR on beneficiary engagement that set clear requirements for beneficiary engagement. Consider also how the programme could allow for learning, flexibility and adaptability to facilitate programme adjustments based on beneficiary input or feedback and reflect this flexibility in ToRs and contracts. A technical weighting should be applied to beneficiary engagement if it is a fundamental part of the programme success, and bidders should be evaluated on their specific tailored response. For example, if the technical evaluation weighting is 60% overall then a certain percentage of it should be allocated to beneficiary engagement.

Delivery

Delivery is the time to reap the rewards of the careful design and planning you have put in place for beneficiary engagement. During delivery, a virtuous cycle can be created: as partners close the loop beneficiaries see that their input and feedback is valued and acted upon and can become more willing to engage.

Guiding questions



What is beneficiary engagement telling us about whether we are on track for the results we expect and the validity of our theory of change? The annual review provides an excellent opportunity to consider these questions, especially given its unique power to support learning. Section G of the annual review template asks for a summary of “monitoring activities throughout the review period (field visits, reviews, engagement with stakeholders including beneficiary feedback) and how these have informed programming decisions.” Consider especially how beneficiary engagement is informing the programme’s understanding of unexpected results or unknown unknowns.

How are our partners adjusting programme activities in response to beneficiary engagement and closing the loop? During delivery, this question should be asked regularly. Partners may be reticent to share information on how they are adjusting if it can be construed as failure or evidence of poor planning on their part. Clear reporting expectations set during the mobilisation phase should be supported by interactions with FCDO staff that reinforce the importance of learning from beneficiary engagement.

What are we learning from beneficiary engagement that goes beyond the programme? Beneficiary input and feedback is not only a powerful tool to drive programmatic improvements, it can also inform better strategies and decision-making at the country, portfolio, sectoral, FCDO or wider global aid effectiveness levels. Ask yourself: at what level(s) could lessons learned from beneficiary engagement be applied? With whom, at those levels, should I share beneficiary input and feedback? What other pieces of information should I combine it with in order to make it relevant and credible to decision-makers at those levels?

Rules of thumb

Create a relationship that rewards engagement. The way FCDO staff react to partner reports on beneficiary engagement has a big influence on how able and willing partners are to seek out, respond to and share beneficiary input and feedback. Ask, “How do we encourage and reward beneficiary engagement? How do we deal with ‘bad news’? Are we responsive and flexible when there is a need for changes? Do SROs, advisors and program managers all communicate about the importance of beneficiary engagement consistently?”

Ensure early sensitisation. It is important that, early in delivery, programme implementers share with beneficiaries what they can expect from the programme as well as why the programme is engaging them, how they can provide input, feedback or complaints and how their input will be handled and responded to. This helps build beneficiaries’ trust and confidence in the engagement mechanisms and their ability to provide feedback.

Close the loop even when the answer is ‘no’. Sometimes, even with a flexible programme, delivery partners will be unable or unwilling to respond to beneficiary input or feedback. In these cases, closing the loop with beneficiaries is still



important. It is better to respectfully explain to beneficiaries why their input or feedback can't be incorporated than to leave them guessing and frustrated at the lack of communication.

Case Study: Closing the Loop with Beneficiaries Drives Engagement

The Iraq Internally Displaced Persons Information Centre (IIC) is a single, toll-free national humanitarian hotline that serves as the primary humanitarian complaint and feedback mechanism in Iraq. Displaced populations can call the hotline to request help, access information, provide feedback and lodge complaints. UNOPS focuses on ensuring the loop is closed on caller input. They circulate information to the humanitarian community, where it helps ensure that responses are aligned with beneficiary needs and responses to protection issues are triggered. UNOPS also closes the loop with beneficiaries, not only one-on-one with callers but also through household visits, focus group discussions and text messages to all mobile phones in Iraq. In 2017, 15 months after the hotline was launched, the hotline handled its 100,000th call.

Tools

Mobile Apps Mobile applications running on smartphones or tablet computers can enable beneficiaries to ask questions, provide input and feedback. Some programmes use mobile apps developed specifically to collect beneficiary input or feedback specifically to collect beneficiary input or feedback, such as [DevelopmentCheck](#), [Ushahidi](#) or [Kuja Kuja](#). Others rely on existing apps in wide use among beneficiaries, such as WhatsApp. For considerations on the use of mobile apps for beneficiary engagement, refer to this [SAVE resource](#).

Suggestion boxes: Suggestion boxes are physical boxes into which beneficiaries can insert written input or feedback. Suggestion boxes are low tech, low cost mechanism that, depending on literacy rates, can provide a confidential channel

Programme Control Points

Delivery Plan

- How will beneficiary input and feedback be considered at key decision points in the delivery plan?

Annual Review

- What does beneficiary engagement tell us about whether we are on track for the results we expect and the validity of our theory of change? What does it tell us about whether outputs and/or outcomes are being achieved and why?
- What beneficiary engagement has taken place and what beneficiary input and feedback has been gathered during the programme by the delivery partner? Do you want to commission independent monitoring? How has beneficiary engagement informed programming decisions? What do the disaggregated results tell us about impact on different demographics and groups?



for beneficiary engagement. In order to close the loop on anonymous input or feedback received through suggestion boxes, implementing staff can provide face-to-face reports on how input or feedback was responded to or post report noticeboards.

Mobile phone Mobile phone-based beneficiary engagement systems generally leverage either SMS or interactive voice response (IVR) systems. SMS is a widely used form of text message, enabling beneficiaries to obtain information and provide input or feedback by texting from their mobile phone. IVR is an automated phone system that enables beneficiaries to obtain information and provide input or feedback by speaking into their mobile phone. It is important to consider who has access to mobile phones and who feels comfortable using them as a channel of engagement. For example, in some contexts women and girls have lower access to, and feel less comfortable engaging through, mobile phones. For considerations in designing mobile phone systems, and for a list of providers, refer to this SAVE [resource](#).

Hotline Hotlines are dedicated phone numbers that beneficiaries can call to access information from automated menus and to speak to a person who can assist them or listen to their feedback. They provide an anonymous channel for beneficiaries to receive information about a programme and provide feedback and opinions on it that can be reached from anywhere in a country or region.

Social Media Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter provide a channel to share information with beneficiaries and engage them in discussion.⁶⁸ Furthermore, analysis of beneficiary posts on social media networks can provide insight into beneficiary sentiments. Make sure to consider the context and any sensitivities around visible beneficiary responses. For more guidance on leveraging social media networks, refer to this SAVE [resource](#).

Help desks Help desks are physical locations where beneficiaries can go to ask for information or share feedback about a programme. Help desks provide an opportunity for face-to-face feedback and access to information, although they may not be appropriate for beneficiaries who have mobility issues, limits on their freedom of movement or prefer confidential engagement channels.

Radio Radio remains a popular technology for receiving information in many parts of the world, and radio broadcasts can be used to share information with beneficiaries. When radio broadcasts incorporate call-in shows or beneficiary-produced content, they can also offer a channel through which beneficiaries can share feedback, raise concerns and discuss issues of importance to them.

Closure The closure phase provides an opportunity to reflect on what the programme heard from beneficiaries and what it learned from that engagement.

Guiding questions



What does beneficiary engagement tell us about programme effectiveness and the validity of the programme’s theory of change? The project completion review is a good opportunity to take stock of what beneficiary input and feedback teaches us about the effectiveness of the programme and the validity of the programme’s theory of change.

How well did this programme close the loop? Reflecting on how well the programme engaged with beneficiaries, adjusted based on that engagement and told beneficiaries what changed will provide valuable input for the design of beneficiary engagement mechanisms in future programmes. It can be helpful to ask what percent of beneficiary input or feedback resulted in an adjustment to the programme and how often the ways in which the programme adjusted was communicated to beneficiaries.

How can the beneficiary input or feedback this programme received inform future programmes? The beneficiary input or feedback received by a programme contains rich insights into the context, needs, preferences, capabilities and risks facing people who may constitute the beneficiaries of future programmes. Capturing those insights can help with future concept notes and business cases.

Rules of thumb

Close the loop on evaluations. Beneficiaries are not just sources of valuable evaluation data, but can also contribute to evaluation design, analysis and validation, and dissemination of evaluation findings. At minimum, beneficiaries should be informed of the results of a programme’s evaluation, and how their input into it will influence future programmes or FCDO’s overall approach.

Share learning widely. The lessons learned from beneficiary engagement should inform future programmes and also support FCDO’s commitment to transparency. Consider sharing insights generated through beneficiary engagement within the immediate team or department, between programmes in the same portfolio, among advisory cadres, or through an Insight article. Consider also sharing beneficiary views of a programme outside of FCDO, for example with other donors or to the general public, if it is possible to safely and ethically. This kind of sharing can reinforce FCDO’s transparency.

Programme Control Points

Project Completion Review

- What does beneficiary engagement tell us about the validity of our theory of change? How can it inform future programmes?
- How well did the programme close the loop, and what can we learn for next time?



Consider the bigger picture. The beneficiary engagement efforts from one programme do not exist in a vacuum but rather within a constellation of other engagement efforts being carried out by other organisations. Consider who beyond FCDO might do more effective work as a result of hearing insights from beneficiary engagement that FCDO has carried out. Consider sharing insights with other donors, governments and implementers, if it can be ethically and safely shared with them.

Case Study: Sharing Lessons Learned from Engagement Improves Future Programmes

The FCDO-funded Indashyikirwa (Agents of Change) programme, implemented in Rwanda from 2014 to 2018, demonstrates the power of ensuring lessons learned from beneficiary engagement influence the design of future programmes. The evaluation team engaged beneficiaries to provide input into the design of the programme's impact evaluation and to help with data analysis. Beneficiary feedback also informed the evaluation, which helped triangulate information provided by partner staff to form a richer picture of the programme. The evaluation team ensured that key insights gathered from beneficiary feedback informed the World Bank-funded scale up of the programme, in particular sharing an analysis of feedback that highlighted areas where beneficiaries were more resistant to the changes promoted by the programme. That meant the scaled-up programme had the opportunity to improve upon the original programme design.

Case Study: Sharing Lessons Learned from Beneficiary Engagement Widely

The case of the FCDO-funded Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP/Shiree) programme illustrates how insights from beneficiary engagement can be shared beyond a single programme. The Shiree programme invested in participatory evaluation with beneficiaries, providing them a forum to explain the changes in their lives that had occurred because of the programme, but the Shiree programme went beyond evaluation of their particular programme. The programme combined beneficiary experiences and feedback with other data and studies in the Extreme Poverty Monitor, presenting a more complete analysis of the dynamics of extreme poverty in Bangladesh. By sharing this analysis beyond the programme implementers and funders, the programme aims to transform the way other donors, NGOs and governments approach extreme poverty in Bangladesh.

Tools



Participatory evaluation: Participator evaluation Involves beneficiaries in the design and implementation of the evaluation of a programme, including making sense findings. Participatory evaluations, like all evaluations, will choose from a range of data collection, analysis and dissemination methods depending on the goals of the evaluation.

Sharing Engagement Lessons Learned

Lessons learned by one programme on how to effectively and respectfully engage with beneficiaries can be immensely valuable to other programme teams and partners, yet lessons learned through and about beneficiary engagement are often not shared broadly around and outside of FCDO. FCDO also shares a wide range of information about Beneficiary engagement on [EPE](#) and [Sharepoint](#) sites. Contact Better Delivery Department if you want to discuss sharing a resource or learning out with your department. Sharing learning and examples of good practice helps FCDO in its drive to improve the lives of the poorest people.

Sharing Data Between Programmes

Beneficiary input and feedback can support greater learning when it is shared between programmes or across systems, as with other monitoring and results data. To facilitate that sharing it is helpful to use common “data architecture” across different programmes - that is, for different programmes to describe beneficiary input or feedback in the same terms. FCDO’s Data Science Hub is undertaking work to increase the transferability of data between programmes. Consult them for support ensuring the data generated through beneficiary engagement in one programme can be easily shared with another programme.

Special Topics in

Beneficiary Engagement

The sections below address topics of particular interest in beneficiary engagement.

Beneficiary Engagement and Safeguarding

The term ‘safeguarding’ in this PrOF Guide focuses specifically on **safeguarding people from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH)**, which covers SEAH perpetrated by aid workers against beneficiaries or other aid workers. It is vital that all beneficiaries and other aid workers who come into contact with FCDO programmes are **safe from harm** and **empowered** to speak out wherever harm does occur. Beneficiary engagement, particularly at the design stage of a programme, is an important component of safeguarding against



sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) and helps to manage the risk of SEAH occurring.

Providing appropriate community reporting, complaints and feedback mechanisms helps empower beneficiaries to report SEAH. Engaging with beneficiaries throughout the design and delivery of the programme helps to adapt the programme approach to avoid risk of SEAH where needed and helps ensure that beneficiaries are aware of their rights and know how they can raise complaints or protection issues. At the same time, engagement can increase risks to beneficiaries, in particular the risk of retribution if they share feedback or engage in a way that threatens or is considered unacceptable by other community members, programme or government staff. The Core Humanitarian Standard, to which FCDO is aligned, requires the following:

- Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them
- Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints

FCDO's implementing partners' ability to implement this is assessed through the Due Diligence Guide.

FCDO's Humanitarian Guidance Note: Accountability to Affected Populations also emphasises that it is important for safeguarding that beneficiaries, including marginalised and vulnerable groups (such as women and girls or people with disabilities), be able to assess and comment on the behaviour of aid workers and the performance (and relevance) of agencies. The safety and accessibility of such channels are key.

Beneficiary Data Protection

Information about beneficiaries is sensitive. In the wrong hands, the information that beneficiaries share can expose them to risks. For example, beneficiaries who share negative views about community leaders or government programmes may fear retribution if others find out about their views. Beneficiaries who feel the information they share will not be kept safe will be less likely to engage.

One of the key ways to ensure that engagement doesn't expose beneficiaries to risks or retribution is to ensure that the information beneficiaries share is protected. FCDO's Humanitarian Guidance Note: Accountability to Affected Populations emphasises the importance of considering data protection issues. Ensuring that beneficiaries can access confidential engagement and complaint channels is an engagement best practice and that means ensuring personal data stays confidential after it is shared. It is particularly important to be thoughtful about how data will be protected as the proliferation of data sets increases the likelihood that individually anonymised data can, when combined with other data sets, be rendered identifiable. It is equally important to recognise that the



individuals that programmes are collecting data from have the right to informed consent when sharing their data. It is important to clearly let beneficiaries know how their data will be used, collected, manipulated and stored or disposed of, and give them the opportunity to give or withhold consent.

[The Data Protection Bill 2018](#) enshrines the standards within the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) in UK law. This legislation governs the storage and handling of personal data.

Personal data is defined as **any** information relating to an identified (or identifiable from the information) living individual. Personal data of an individual (the “data subject”) includes:

- Personal details such as name, address, date of birth Images, photos, recordings, voice recordings and other biometric data Family, lifestyle and social circumstance

- Financial Details

- Education details

- Employment details

- Comments or judgments about a person

- Online identifiers, for example IP address or cookies

Sensitive personal data (which GDPR calls “special categories of personal data”) consists of information concerning a data subject’s:

- Racial or ethnic origin

- Political opinions

- Religious or philosophical beliefs

- Trade union membership

- Biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying someone’s health

- Sex life or sexual orientation

However, protecting beneficiary data goes beyond GDPR compliance. It is important to carefully think through how to ensure beneficiary data is kept safe and that beneficiaries themselves are confident their data will be protected. Within the contracting and due diligence processes, it is important to ensure that delivery partners have effective policies in place to ensure any personal data provided by beneficiaries is protected. FCDO has a responsibility to ensure data is collected, stored, shared and analysed in a secure, legal and ethical way.

For principles and best practices for protecting data shared by beneficiaries, refer to:



Engaging Marginalised Beneficiaries

FCDO is committed to leaving no one behind, in part by “listening and responding to the voices of those left furthest behind.” Engagement with the most marginalised or excluded beneficiaries, which may include people with disabilities, the elderly, women, children and others facing discrimination based on who they are and where they live, requires special thought. The most marginalised beneficiaries may be reticent to engage if they feel that they risk retribution or further exclusion. They may be less well-known to programme staff and therefore harder to engage. They may experience greater mobility challenges or language barriers, higher illiteracy rates, lower access to technology or other circumstances that mean that engagement channels that work for less marginalised people don’t work as well for them. Best practice is to ensure the programme has accessible engagement channels in place that work for specific populations of marginalised beneficiaries.

In the context of shrinking civic space organisations that represent marginalised beneficiaries, which include women’s rights organisations and disabled people’s organisations, may face increased repression. This may mean it’s harder to find or interact with them and may make it more difficult for them to facilitate engagement with the beneficiaries they represent. It is important to put extra effort toward identifying and connecting with such groups in order to find and effectively engage with marginalised beneficiaries.

Engaging Beneficiaries with Disabilities

One group of beneficiaries that may be particularly marginalised are people with disabilities. FCDO is committed to a vision of the world where all disabled people are engaged, empowered and able to exercise and enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. It is important to ensure engagement is sensitive to different impairment types and degree of need and consider discriminations like gender, age and ethnicity that intersect with disability. Some people with disabilities may require tailored methods and tools to engage on an equal basis to others. It is important to invest in the capacity of disabled peoples’ organisations - organisations led and staffed by people with disabilities to effectively represent the interests of people with disabilities.



FCDO's disability inclusion business standards lay out minimum and high achievement standards engagement with beneficiaries with disabilities and disabled peoples' organisations. These are:

	Minimum standard by July 2019	High achievement
1 Office wide approach and culture	Clear commitment from head of Office/Mission/Department. Disability champion appointed. Disability inclusion plan/ strategy in place including to increase staff with disabilities and ensure HR processes, communications and IT are accessible.	Continued strong signalling from leadership. Disability is included in country/Department strategy and plans. Increased capacity of staff and numbers of staff with disabilities.
2 Engagement and empowerment of people with disabilities	Annual (at least) consultation at business unit level with Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) on design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and office policy and strategy. Consultation carried out in a way that builds capacity, involving groups that are sometimes excluded such as women and people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.	Active support by FCDO to build strong networks of Disabled Peoples Organisations in developing countries who know how to influence government policy, including through alliances with women's rights organisations.
3 Influencing	Regular engagement on disability inclusion with stakeholders including private sector. Consistent signalling that disability inclusion and gender equality are important to FCDO and mutually reinforcing. Countries only: Regular advocacy with country governments. Existing donor/civil society co-ordination mechanisms involve Disabled Peoples Organisations and ensure women's voices are well-represented.	Governments/other stakeholders are supported to address stigma and discrimination and implement their commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and those made at Global Disability Summit and subsequent summits. Dedicated donor/civil society co-ordination mechanism for disability issues involves Disabled Peoples Organisations.
4 Programming	Stocktake of programmes carried out to assess whether they are disability inclusive. All new Business Cases, terms of reference for suppliers and all Annual Reviews consider the needs of people with disabilities, including the differential needs of women and girls in line with the Gender Equality Act. Flagship programmes in focus sectors pilot an in-depth approach to mainstreaming with involvement of Disabled Peoples Organisation. All programmes are marked against the disability spend marker.	All programmes in the focus sectors are considering the needs of people with disabilities, including the differential needs of women and girls, and justify if and how they are actively supporting them. Flagship programmes delivering results at scale for people with disabilities. Programmes are addressing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities.
5 Data, evidence and learning	All new programmes collect and use disability disaggregated data for relevant indicators. Lessons from pilot programmes are shared regularly.	Cutting-edge evidence and learning generated that informs gender-responsive, disability inclusive programming in FCDO and beyond. Countries only: information is collected on barriers and enablers for women, girls, men and boys with disabilities.



Tech-enabled Beneficiary Engagement

Using Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to support beneficiary engagement has the potential to enable engagement with more people, more quickly and more effectively than ever before. A Centre for Global Development study found that mobile phone-based approaches can be an effective, cheaper tool for engaging with citizens, even across countries with variable mobile phone penetration rates and language fractionalisation.

However, technology is not a panacea. Not all beneficiaries can be engaged effectively through technology and the use of technology can increase risks to beneficiary safety unless questions of data agency, transparency, privacy and informed consent are carefully considered. There are also disparities in access to and comfort using technology that can make it difficult for some groups, such as women and girls, to engage through technological channels. It is important to choose the appropriate method of engagement for a specific context, rather than prioritising the use of a specific technology.

Engaging Beneficiaries Collectively

Most beneficiary engagement mechanisms are linked to a specific programme and focus solely on improving that programme's activities and outcomes.⁸⁵ However, there is immense value in multiple programmes, partners or donors engaging beneficiaries collectively - that is, coordinating engagement and sharing beneficiary input and feedback across programmes and partners. Collective beneficiary engagement has been shown to improve the reach and effectiveness of assistance in highly insecure contexts. Engaging beneficiaries once on behalf of multiple programmes can help ensure beneficiary time is not wasted and can improve efficiency if multiple programmes are not duplicating the resources needed to engage beneficiaries. Furthermore, combining beneficiary input and feedback collected by multiple programmes can help create a fuller picture of beneficiary needs and preferences. It is important to scan the landscape of beneficiary engagement to identify and leverage existing beneficiary engagement mechanisms and avoid duplicating efforts.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a way to engage beneficiaries that combines democratic processes with the details of policy making. Participatory budgeting enables beneficiaries to decide how part of a public budget should be spent and monitor that spending. More than 1,500 participatory budgets have been deployed around the world. Participatory budgeting can contribute to public expenditures that closely match public preferences and have, as an example, been shown to lead to investments in services that decrease infant mortality.



Annex A - FCDO Approach to Beneficiary Engagement

Below is a snapshot of some of FCDO's key commitments, requirements and agreements regarding beneficiary engagement.

FCDO Policy Commitments

We will put people at the centre of our work and ensure that as much of our work as possible is informed by intended beneficiaries.

We will listen and respond to the voices of those left furthest behind, such as people with disabilities, children, older people and those who face discrimination.

We will regularly ask those on the ground whether we are using our money to best effect, integrating beneficiary feedback mechanisms into more of our programmes. We will ask our multilateral, private sector and civil society partners to show leadership, strengthening how they use data and listen to their beneficiaries as they implement our programmes.

A principles-based approach to beneficiary feedback gives teams the flexibility to implement beneficiary feedback processes in a way that adds value to their programmes and context, rather than as a box-ticking exercise. This is framed within the fundamental 'rule' that all programmes should consider including beneficiary feedback and justify the approach adopted, including the decision not to conduct beneficiary feedback along the programme cycle. The critical points for this are at Business Case, programme plan and annual review stages.



Key International Agreements & Commitments

We have signed onto the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes recognition that, “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.”

We have committed to a Grand Bargain commitment on a Participation Revolution to include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives.

We have agreed to international standards to ensure people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them; and that people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints, (including those of a sensitive nature such as SEA).

We will request implementing humanitarian organisations to ensure adequate involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian response.



Annex B - The Case for Beneficiary Engagement

An extensive review of evidence from programmes around the world suggests that, when done well, engaging the people that we are working with, and on behalf of, can improve the way programmes are delivered and the lives of beneficiaries.

The **improvements in outcomes** from beneficiary engagement can be significant. Programmes across FCDO have improved the reliability of cash transfers to 40,000 children, rectified corruption and reduced disputes by engaging beneficiaries. A World Bank programme in Uganda found that engaging beneficiaries in improving health services led to a 33% reduction in under-5 child mortality. Beneficiary engagement in budgeting reduced infant mortality in Brazil by encouraging municipal governments to allocate larger shares of funding to sanitation and health services. Beneficiary engagement in Uganda contributed to a 13.2% reduction in teacher absenteeism by better involving teachers, pupils and other community members in school monitoring.

In addition to improving outcomes for beneficiaries, beneficiary engagement can help programmes **achieve outcomes more efficiently**. For example, government officials in Indonesia used a digital system to combine sensor data on water levels with citizen feedback collected from Twitter on whether they were experiencing flooding. They used this information to create digital maps of flood events, which enabled them to respond to flooding more quickly and efficiently.

Beneficiary engagement can help both **define and promote Value for Money**. Beneficiary engagement invites beneficiaries to share their perceptions of the value of specific improvements in their lives. This information can complement other measures of value to help define what value a programme is aiming to deliver. Beneficiary engagement can also increase the effectiveness of programmes, for example through better targeting of initiatives and calling attention to poor performance and by suggesting ways to address it, thereby improving Value for Money. Finally, listening and responding to what beneficiaries want has been shown to contribute to increased levels of beneficiary satisfaction with services, thereby increasing the perceived value imparted by a programme.

FCDO is committed to improving standards across the aid sector so that all beneficiaries who come into contact with our programmes are **safe from harm** and **empowered** to speak out wherever harm does occur. Beneficiary engagement and accountability are vital components of safeguarding, which, in this document, refers specifically to safeguarding people from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) perpetrated by aid workers against beneficiaries or other aid workers. It is important that we are more accountable



to beneficiaries (and survivors) and address the unhelpful power dynamics implicit in aid that increases the risk of SEAH. Beneficiary engagement from the design stage is key to both preventing and responding to SEAH. It is also an important part of empowering beneficiaries to engage in inclusive and transparent processes that afford voice and redress if required. It acknowledges beneficiaries' right to be informed and engaged on initiatives that will impact on their social, economic and environmental circumstances. As a 2018 paper written by the Bond Feedback and Accountability Learning Group argues, "A key part of any safeguarding process is having processes for people affected by development and humanitarian projects to raise concerns and complaints or give feedback about how they have been harmed by those projects or personnel." It is only through the use of beneficiary feedback mechanisms that true accountability and safeguarding practices can be enacted. Additionally, through the effective use of beneficiary feedback citizens gain an understanding of their rights and an ability to use them, further contributing to their safety.

Good beneficiary engagement practices can also help to **improve transparency**. As stated in FCDO's Beneficiary Feedback: Strengthening the Impact of our Work, "Good beneficiary feedback mechanisms - built on accessible, transparent information - can give people greater agency and voice." Transparency has value in its own right and FCDO is committed to being a world leader in transparency. Safely and ethically sharing beneficiary views on FCDO programmes and what FCDO has done in response can improve FCDO's transparency. Transparency may also lead to improved outcomes. While the evidence between transparency and positive outcomes still could benefit from further research, initial studies conclude that transparency can contribute to lowering of corruption, increased institutional responsiveness and better delivery of services.

In addition, beneficiary engagement can help to **identify and mitigate against potential fraud** such as the diversion of funds through ghost, duplicate or non-eligible beneficiaries, theft or collusion between retailers and distributors. Where beneficiaries are well informed of the nature and intent of a programme and understand what they are entitled to under it, engagement can help to identify discrepancies or false reporting more easily. Depending on the engagement mechanisms that are in place, beneficiaries may be able to proactively raise concerns acting as a first line of defence against the diversion of resources. And as beneficiary engagement helps programme staff better understand the reality on the ground, it can help better equip them to recognise and reduce the risk of fraud. Beneficiaries' position at the front end of programme delivery provides opportunity to gather powerful insight into whether the intention of a programme is being realised.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, beneficiary engagement helps to ensure that **development is an empowering process that reinforces the dignity of**



people we seek to serve. Beneficiary engagement, done well, can give beneficiaries back some power in cases where they have had power and agency taken away from them. Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is a commitment adopted by the humanitarian sector to take account of, and be held accountable by, the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist. AAP is a key pillar of FCDO's work, and is in essence about the right of beneficiaries to be heard and FCDO's duty to respond. Beneficiary engagement is a key way to ensure beneficiaries are listened to and that programmes are accountable to them. Beneficiary engagement reinforces a larger goal of providing agency and respect to those served by FCDO's programmes. Listening is an act of respect, and providing beneficiary engagement mechanisms is a way to show that respect.



Annex C - Guiding Questions and Sample Language for Programme Control Points

Single Departmental Plan

Putting people at the centre of our work and ensuring that as much of our work as possible is informed by intended beneficiaries are key FCDO aims, reflected in the Internal Strategic plan, Beneficiary Feedback policy/ approach and the principles of the PrOF Rules. FCDO empowers staff to identify what types of beneficiary engagement are suitable and feasible within their programmes and contexts.

Business Plan

What is the department/office plan to engage with beneficiaries and capture disaggregated evidence about the impact of beneficiary engagement and what drives that impact?

How are we sharing lessons within the department and sharing them more widely?

Concept Note

Who are the beneficiaries? How will they be engaged during design and delivery?

How will we ensure we are reaching the most marginalised beneficiaries?

What lessons from beneficiary engagement with previous programmes contribute to the evidence base for this programme?

Sample language: At the design stage an early market engagement event (EME) will be held to gather beneficiary feedback. This feedback will be used to inform programme activities to ensure that they are relevant and effective. Key beneficiaries relevant to this programme will also be engaged throughout programme implementation.

Business Case

What evidence, information about context or unknown unknowns gathered from beneficiary engagement inform this programme?

How can beneficiary engagement provide information about the programme's context, beneficiary needs (including the different needs of different groups of beneficiaries), preferences and capabilities, potential risks, or validity of assumptions?

How will the programme elicit quality beneficiary engagement and feedback, especially from the most marginalised beneficiaries?

How much time will be necessary for each step of engagement and how much will it cost? How will the programme plan for the flexibility needed to adjust based on beneficiary input and feedback?

Sample language: Feedback from potential implementing partners will be sought during the EME event which will be held 9 months before the proposed start date of the programme. Component 2 of the programme involves the delivery of small grants and technical assistance to existing and start up local businesses. A scoping study has been built into the inception phase to gather input and feedback from potential beneficiaries prior to implementation. This will provide a better



understanding of local markets and opportunities. The feedback will inform the design of the programme and ensure the delivery of grants and assistance is relevant and effective. Key beneficiaries relevant to this programme will also be engaged throughout the programme cycle, namely through the FCDO annual review process and through the monitoring and evaluation component. Both processes will enable a feedback and improvement cycle. Some monitoring, particularly to capture results against the log frame, will be carried out by the implementing partner. As per the log frame in Annex A, it is proposed that a perception survey be carried out to track the quality of activities and outputs of component 2.

Framework for results

How will beneficiary feedback feed into indicators, milestones and changes to assumptions?

If the programme will be evaluated, how will beneficiaries be involved?

Is engagement with beneficiaries being set at output or outcome level (or both)?

Sample language: FCDO are particularly keen to receive proposals for monitoring and evaluation that utilise innovative and wide-ranging beneficiary feedback in a participatory approach. The chosen approach should ensure that stakeholders can participate in the collection of data, analysis of findings and implementation of recommendations. This will facilitate the generation of evaluation findings which are both useful and relevant. Any stakeholder or beneficiary engagement should be as inclusive as possible.

Formal Agreements

When and how will partners report to FCDO on their engagement with beneficiaries?

In formal selection of the implementing partner, what weighting will be given to beneficiary engagement?

Delivery Plans

How will beneficiary input and feedback be considered at key decision points in the delivery plan?

Annual Review

What does beneficiary engagement tell us about whether we are on track for the results we expect and the validity of our theory of change?

What beneficiary engagement has taken place and what beneficiary input and feedback has been gathered during the programme by the delivery partner? Do you want to commission independent monitoring? How has beneficiary engagement informed programming decisions? What do the disaggregated results tell us about impact on different demographics and groups?

Project Completion Review

What does beneficiary engagement tell us about the validity of our theory of change? How can it inform future programmes?

How well did the programme close the loop, and what can we learn for next time?



Annex D Tool Comparison Table

Different beneficiary engagement tools will be appropriate for different contexts. However, regardless of which tool is selected it is important to ensure that it is used within a continuous process of learning how to improve the programme and support the agency of beneficiaries. This will help to ensure that the programme's empowerment goals for beneficiary engagement are realised.

Tool	Relative Cost*	Pros	Cons	Accessibility Considerations
 <p>Human-Centred Design</p> <p>Creative approach to problem-solving focused on designing with the perspectives and desires of potential users in mind.</p>	7 – 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables in-depth understanding of beneficiary preferences and needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff with local language capabilities, strong facilitation skills and design skills 	In-person interactions may be less accessible for beneficiaries with mobility issues. Visual methods may be more accessible to beneficiaries with lower literacy.
 <p>Community Consultations</p> <p>A range of approaches for engaging beneficiaries in the assessment of their priorities, needs and assets.</p>	5 – 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows various beneficiary ideas and opinions to emerge and interact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff with local language capabilities and strong facilitation skills 	Less accessible for beneficiaries who have mobility issues preventing them from attending the consultation and for beneficiaries who feel uncomfortable sharing their views in group discussion.
 <p>Focus Group Discussion</p> <p>Facilitated discussion of a given topic with a small group of beneficiaries.</p>	4 – 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows various beneficiary ideas and opinions to emerge and interact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff with local language capabilities and strong facilitation skills Small group may not represent the entire community 	Less accessible for beneficiaries who have mobility issues preventing them from attending the discussion and for beneficiaries who feel uncomfortable sharing their views in group discussion.

*Cost ranges are illustrative only. They are estimated on a relative scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the least expensive and 10 is the most expensive. Actual cost amounts are not provided because they will vary widely for the same engagement method based on the scale of engagement.



 <p>Key Informant Interviews</p> <p>Qualitative, semi-structured interviews of beneficiaries with specific knowledge of or experiences with a topic.</p>	4 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables targeting discussions with beneficiaries with valuable insights Gives beneficiaries a chance to express opinions in private and in-depth, which may encourage candour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff with local language capabilities and strong interviewing skills 	Less accessible to beneficiaries who are not known to programme staff and beneficiaries who feel uncomfortable sharing views face-to-face.
 <p>Data visualisation</p> <p>Graphical representations of data that help decision-makers absorb and understand the trends, patterns and relationships in data.</p>	4 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can help decision-makers understand data from beneficiary engagement, making action more likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires staff with the ability to turn data into useful graphics and images 	Less accessible to decision-makers with visual impairment
 <p>Independent/Third-party Monitoring</p> <p>Contracting parties outside the programme's management structure to engage beneficiaries.</p>	7 - 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can enable monitoring in insecure or sensitive contexts in which partner staff movement is limited Offers the opportunity to verify other sources of beneficiary engagement data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners may perceive third-party monitoring as second-guessing their actions or monitoring reports 	Draws on different methods that can be accessible to different groups of beneficiaries.
 <p>Participatory Monitoring</p> <p>Engaging beneficiaries to define indicators, track progress toward them and make sense of lessons learned.</p>	5 - 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can uncover hidden insights and allow for the tracking of unique indicators that can only be assessed by asking beneficiaries Can offer beneficiaries an opportunity to hold decision-makers to account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires strong coordination and engagement skills on the part of the monitoring team 	Draws on different methods that can be accessible to different groups of beneficiaries.
 <p>Surveys</p> <p>Formal questionnaires administered to a large, representative sample of beneficiaries.</p>	7 - 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for comparison of responses across beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can contribute to 'survey fatigue,' where beneficiaries are surveyed often and therefore are less willing to engage 	Surveys administered in person may be less accessible to beneficiaries who are uncomfortable sharing their views in person. Written surveys may be less accessible to beneficiaries with low literacy.



 <p>Mobile Apps</p> <p>Smartphone or tablet computer applications that enable beneficiaries to ask questions, answer surveys and receive information</p>	3 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiar interfaces that users may already be using Fewer limits on survey length, data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires app download Requires mobile data plan 	<p>Less accessible for beneficiaries with low literacy or who don't own mobile devices. Community-accessed mobile devices can mitigate ownership issues, but beneficiaries may feel uncomfortable being observed seeking out the community-managed mobile device.</p>
 <p>Suggestion Box</p> <p>Physical box into which beneficiaries can insert written input or feedback.</p>	1 - 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidential mechanism, if implemented carefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiaries may not trust that their suggestions will be kept confidential. 	<p>Less accessible for beneficiaries with low literacy or who have mobility issues preventing travel to the location of the suggestion box. Illiterate beneficiaries may feel uncomfortable asking staff or peers to write down their suggestion for them.</p>
 <p>Mobile Phone - SMS</p> <p>Widely used form of text message that enables beneficiaries to obtain information and provide input or feedback by texting from their mobile phone.</p>	5 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally easy to understand No special equipment or download needed by user Targeted input or feedback collection¹¹⁰ Can analyse large amounts of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires strong coordination and engagement skills on the part of the monitoring team 	<p>Draws on different methods that can be accessible to different groups of beneficiaries.</p>
 <p>Mobile Phone - Interactive Voice Response</p> <p>Automated phone system that enables beneficiaries to obtain information and provide input or feedback by speaking into their mobile phone.</p>	5 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can communicate more information than SMS No special equipment or download needed by user Targeted input or feedback collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires calls be translated into local language Depends on beneficiaries answering their phone 	<p>Less accessible for beneficiaries who don't own mobile phones. Beneficiaries may feel uncomfortable borrowing a phone if it raises questions about why they are interacting with a programme.</p>



 <p>Hotline</p> <p>Phone number beneficiaries can call to access information or provide feedback.</p>	7 - 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for tailored information sharing • Enables confidential engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data suggests beneficiaries often prefer engaging face-to-face to hotlines • Can be difficult to close the loop • Requires trained staff with local language capabilities 	Less accessible for beneficiaries without access to a phone. Beneficiaries may feel uncomfortable borrowing a phone if it raises questions about why they are interacting with a programme.
 <p>Social Media</p> <p>Online social networks where beneficiaries can access information or engage in discussion.</p>	2 - 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar interfaces that users may already be using to engage in discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires app download • Requires mobile data plan 	Less accessible for beneficiaries who are illiterate, aren't active on social media or who feel uncomfortable engaging on public forums.
 <p>Help Desk</p> <p>Physical locations where beneficiaries can go to ask for information or share feedback about a programme.</p>	4 - 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for tailored information sharing • Enables face-to-face engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires staff to be at help desk 	Less accessible for beneficiaries who have mobility issues preventing travel to the location of the help desk and for beneficiaries who feel uncomfortable providing face-to-face feedback.
 <p>Radio with call-in</p> <p>Call-in radio shows broadcast information and offer a channel for beneficiaries to share feedback and discuss topics of importance.</p>	4 - 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted, widely accessible information source • Can convey detailed information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantees of reaching audience • Feedback collection limited to call-in options 	Less accessible for beneficiaries without access to a radio or radio signal.
 <p>Participatory Evaluation</p> <p>Engaging beneficiaries to design and carry out programme evaluation and to make sense of and disseminate evaluation findings</p>	7 - 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can uncover beneficiary insights about the impact of the programme, or meaning of the evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires strong coordination and engagement skills on the part of the evaluation team 	Draws on different methods that can be accessible to different groups of beneficiaries.



Annex E Ensuring It Happens: Example from FCDO Kenya

Below is guidance that FCDO Kenya has developed for how programmes should incorporate beneficiary feedback. In many cases, programmes are already carrying out all, or most, of this guidance. The purpose of this guidance is to make their approach consistent and to develop a system of learning so that they can a

Process	Compliance	Minimum Standard	Best Practice
Monitoring and evaluation terms of reference must include beneficiary feedback	Will be assessed by ART (Accountability and Results Team) during quality assurance of terms of reference.	Terms of References for monitoring and evaluation must include beneficiary feedback to monitor performance in triangulation with other data sources (e.g., to support log frame indicators).	Details on how beneficiary feedback could be sought and used can be included in terms of reference sections covering data collection, data sources, methodology, and audiences.
Business cases must include a section on beneficiary feedback	Will be assessed by ART during quality assurance of business cases.	All new business cases should include a section on beneficiary feedback within the monitoring and evaluation section of the management case. This should set out who the programme beneficiaries are and a requirement that implementing partners use beneficiary feedback during programme implementation and delivery as outlined below.	The monitoring and evaluation section could also include suggestions for what feedback might be sought from beneficiaries, and what processes could be used to ensure beneficiary feedback is used to inform programme design and delivery. Where possible, this should also indicate budget allocation to beneficiary engagement mechanisms.
Programme design stage should include a beneficiary engagement exercise which extends beyond market engagement	Will be assessed by ART during quality assurance of business cases.	A beneficiary engagement exercise must be included in the ToRs for the programme. The ToRs must clearly set out what evidence should be gathered from these engagement exercises. If a beneficiary engagement exercise is not deemed feasible, then a rationale must be given in the ToRs.	Feedback from the beneficiary engagement can be included in the business case as evidence of the relevance, feasibility, and suitability of the intervention and delivery mechanisms to meet the needs of beneficiaries (and other stakeholders). This can include feedback from a full range of beneficiaries and programme stakeholders.



Process	Compliance	Minimum Standard	Best Practice
All procurements should conduct an early market engagement exercise with potential implementing partners.	Will be implemented by programme team and ART during procurement (already in process).	An early market engagement exercise must be considered during business case development. The business case must clearly set out the evidence gathered from these engagement exercises where they have taken place. If an early market engagement exercise is not deemed feasible, then a rationale must be given in the business case.	Stakeholder feedback on feasibility, risk, delivery, and appraisal options can be incorporated into the business case.
Responsibilities of implementing partners in consulting beneficiaries will be included in all new Terms of References.	Will be included in Terms of Reference for new programmes by programme team.	Implementing partners must consult with beneficiaries during inception phase of programme. This must include all groups outlined above unless not relevant to the programme. Implementing partners must report on how feedback from beneficiaries has been used to inform programme design.	Where possible, implementing partners should consider how beneficiary feedback can be used continuously throughout the programme. Where a monitoring and evaluation partner is responsible for beneficiary feedback mechanisms, implementing partners should still indicate how they will use findings to improve the programme.
Annual review (AR) and programme completion review (PCR) processes must include narrative on beneficiary's engagement.	Will be assessed by ART during quality assurance of annual reviews	ARs and PCRs must include an assessment of to what extent beneficiaries have engaged with the programme through beneficiary engagement or feedback mechanisms.	AR and PCR processes should try to engage a range of beneficiaries. Processes should be used that give FCDO staff the time to seek beneficiary feedback (surplus to other beneficiary feedback activities performed by implementing partners or monitoring and evaluation teams).



Process	Compliance	Minimum Standard	Best Practice
For each programme, lessons learned from beneficiary feedback should be shared with the FCDO Kenya office at regular intervals.	ART will include lessons learned in the dashboard on a quarterly basis, and work with programme teams to disseminate findings.	No minimum standard	Ideally at the annual review stage lessons learned should be shared with the FCDO Kenya office. This should include both the findings from beneficiary feedback, and importantly also lessons learned from conducting beneficiary feedback to improve the design and use of beneficiary feedback mechanisms across the office. For example, this could include how beneficiary feedback was collected and what was done with the data that was collected, how it has informed programme delivery, and how the process was fed back to beneficiaries
FCDO Kenya will continue to conduct spot-checks through the programme officer role in the Accountability and Results Team	ART will continue to conduct spot-checks on FCDO programmes, in partnership with programme teams where	No minimum standard	These spot-checks will include terms of reference that set out the objectives of each spot check with stakeholders and beneficiaries. Any recommendations or lessons learned will be shared with programme teams and included in the monthly dashboard