# MODULE 2

# FEEDBACK ESSENTIALS

A quick guide to setting up
a simple feedback mechanism

October 2022


IFRC FEEDBACK KIT

# CONTENTS


**Navigating this guide** 4

**At a glance:** feedback essentials 6

**Introduction** 10

**Stages of a feedback mechanism** 16

- **Stage 1:** Building your feedback mechanism 16
- **Stage 2:** Collecting community feedback 25
- **Stage 3:** Feedback referral and analysis 27
- **Stage 4:** Sharing and acting on feedback 31
- **Stage 5:** Closing the loop 34
- **Stage 6:** Reviewing and adapting the mechanism 37

**Additional resources** 38

**Glossary of terms** 39

**Acknowledgements** 41


Mozambique - Sonia Foustino, 40, a Red Cross volunteer for 14 years, in an accommodation centre in Beira for displaced families, ensuring they have access to clean water, assisting particular needs families, sharing critical health, sanitation and hygiene messages, and providing psychosocial support.
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# NAVIGATING THIS GUIDE

## What is this document?

This module of the IFRC Feedback Kit provides the most important tips for setting up and running a simple feedback mechanism. It is organised around the feedback cycle and provides resources that help you plan the mechanism and collect, answer, analyse, share and act on community feedback data.

### KEY TO READING THE GUIDE

The guide provides:

- Key terms defined in the glossary hyperlinked

**Resources**

**Tips**

**Examples**

## Who is this document for?

This document is for anyone who would like to set up or strengthen any kind of feedback mechanism. It is kept simple and practical to ensure it is easy to use and the key steps and elements are emphasised. More detailed, in-depth guidance and tools can be found in other modules of the Feedback Kit. You can access the introduction providing an overview here.

# How to read this document?

The overview on the next pages helps you to quickly identify what part of this guidance might be most relevant to your situation. It lays out each section of the module, what is included in that section, who should prioritise reading it, and an overview of the different resources provided (with embedded links to the sections and resources). The resources are distinguished between:

**Guidance documents**
text that outlines advice, key concepts, and best practices

**Tools**
resources that you can fill out to help you make decisions

**Templates**
samples of tools that you can use in a real-life implementation of a feedback mechanism, all of which can be modified to fit your organisation's specific context and needs

# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| CEA | Community Engagement and Accountability[1] |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| FAQ | Frequently Asked Questions |
| HR | Human Resources |
| IFRC | International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies |
| IT | Information Technology |
| KAP | Knowledge, attitudes, and practices |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| PGI | Protection Gender and Inclusion |
| PMER | Planning Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting |
| SEA | Sexual Exploitation and Abuse |

1. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) describes the process of working in a transparent and participatory way with communities that improves the quality of programmes and operations. It can be used interchangeably with Accountability of Affected People or Populations (AAP).

# **AT A GLANCE:** FEEDBACK ESSENTIALS

## Overview of the stages and available tools

| INTRODUCTION | |
|---|---|
| ***Content includes*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
| • Introduction to community feedback and the stages of the feedback cycle | Anyone who is relatively new to the concepts and practice of setting up or strengthening feedback mechanisms and/or is looking to use the document as a step-by-step guide |
| **STAGE 1: BUILDING YOUR FEEDBACK MECHANISM** | |
| ***Steps to take:*** | ***Who should read this*** |
| **1.** Get the buy-in you need<br>**2.** Determine the scale of the feedback mechanism<br>**3.** Define your communication channels<br>**4.** Determine how you will document open feedback<br>**5.** Map and design information flows<br>**6.** Agree on roles, responsibilities, and timeframes<br>**7.** Identify the resources you will need<br>**8.** Conduct the necessary trainings<br>**9.** Advertise the feedback mechanism | Anyone who is at the beginning stages of setting up a simple feedback mechanism or wants to strengthen such a mechanism |
| ***Resources include:*** | ***What is this resource for?*** |
| Feedback tool 1: Tips for creating leadership buy-in | Practical tips that can help you approach and win over the leaders of your organization and make them advocates for community feedback mechanisms |
| Feedback tool 2: Determining the scale of a feedback mechanism | Asking your organisation critical questions to help ensure you can handle the feedback you will receive and to ensure analysis and action is happening at the right levels |
| CEA toolkit tool 19: Communication channel matrix | Provides detailed information on a wide variety of information channels, their strengths and weaknesses, and their best uses |
| Feedback tool 3: Defining the communication channels for a feedback mechanisms | Walks you through the steps of how to engage the community in selecting the right communication channel |

| | |
|---|---|
| Feedback tool 4: Deciding on how to document your feedback data | Provides a decision-tree tool to help you decide the most appropriate way to document feedback, as well as the advantages/disadvantages of each approach |
| Feedback tool 5: Community feedback form | Provides a Word document template form for recording individual pieces of feedback |
| Feedback tool 6: Community feedback form for KoBo Collect | Provides an Excel spreadsheet template for those using the KoBo collect software on a mobile device for collecting feedback |
| Feedback tool 7: Community feedback logbook | Provides an Excel spreadsheet template for how to log feedback in a central location in a way that will let you begin to organise and analyse it |
| Feedback tool 8: Feedback mechanism design workshop package | A facilitator agenda and slides for a workshop organised with key stakeholders to discuss and agree on the essential aspects of the feedback mechanism |
| Feedback tool 9: Mapping the information flow | Provides advice about how different kinds of feedback should be handled internally and questions to help you map how information does and should flow in your organisation |
| Feedback tool 10: Mapping and agreeing on roles, responsibilities, and resources | A document that includes a table for you to fill out that will help you think through what human, financial, and technical resources you will need for each step of the feedback cycle |
| Feedback tool 11: Template budget for feedback mechanisms | A template that helps you to develop a detailed budget for a feedback mechanism |
| Feedback tool 12: Community feedback training package | Provides model agenda and PowerPoint slide decks for training data collectors and data analysts on community feedback mechanisms |

## STAGE 2: COLLECTING FEEDBACK

| ***Steps to take:*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
|---|---|
| **1.** Listen and acknowledge<br>**2.** Ask for permission to use and share the information<br>**3.** Record community feedback<br>**4.** Provide initial responses | Anyone who is directly interfacing with communities who are providing feedback, or is working with/ supporting the people who are |
| ***Resources include:*** | ***What is this resource for?*** |
| Feedback tool 18: Important skills for effective listening | A guidance document with best practices on how to actively and respectfully listen to community feedback |

## STAGE 3: FEEDBACK REFERRAL AND ANALYSIS

| ***Steps to take:*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
|---|---|
| **1.** Consolidate and clean data<br>**2.** Prioritise and refer feedback<br>**3.** Coding data to identify key themes<br>**4.** Disaggregate and triangulate the data<br>**5.** Integrating feedback data into broader analysis processes | Anyone who is responsible for handling feedback data, including those who compile feedback, analyse feedback for broader trends, and refer feedback for immediate action |
| ***Resources include:*** | ***What is this resource for?*** |
| Feedback tool 25: Types and examples of data disaggregation | Provides a summary of the most common categories for data disaggregation with a brief example of the kind of analysis each could produce |
| Feedback tool 26: Example analytical framework for community feedback | This framework helps structure the analysis of and conversations around what communities share with us and helps triangulate it with other data sources. It can be used for both secondary data analysis, as well as help to organise codes for open, unstructured community feedback. |

## STAGE 4: SHARING AND ACTING ON FEEDBACK

| ***Steps to take:*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
|---|---|
| **1.** Share feedback data in appropriate formats<br>**2.** Discuss the feedback with the relevant stakeholders<br>**3.** Take action | Anyone who is responsible for sharing feedback with decision-makers at any level of the organisation, as well as people who are using feedback to make decisions |
| ***Resources include:*** | ***What is this resource for?*** |
| Feedback tool 27: Identifying the right format for your audience | Includes a table to map out who needs what kind of information in what format, as well as a decision-making tree for what kinds of products you can develop |

| | |
|---|---|
| Feedback tool 28: Formats for sharing community feedback | Provides an overview of the different ways you can share feedback analysis with stakeholders, the advantages and disadvantages of each, and advice on good practice for each |
| Feedback tool 29: Key considerations for sharing community feedback data | A short overview of the main things to consider when sharing community feedback data |
| Feedback tool 30: Inter-agency or inter-office sharing of community feedback highlights | A Word document that provides an example questionnaire to gather information from different stakeholders inside or outside your organisation about how they collect feedback data to facilitate the sharing of those data |
| Feedback tool 31: Developing an action plan for addressing community feedback | Provides a decision-tree to help plan out whether and how action can be taken in response to certain feedback data |
| Feedback tool 32: Community feedback action tracker | An Excel spreadsheet that provides a template for how an organisation can keep track of what actions it is taking in response to community feedback |
| **STAGE 5: CLOSING THE LOOP** | |
| ***Steps to take:*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
| 1. 'Close the loop' internally<br>2. 'Close the loop' with the community<br>3. Document the closing of the loop | People involved at every step of the feedback cycle – decision-makers who decide what happens with feedback data, community-facing staff and volunteers who need to let communities know what has happened with their feedback, and the people managing the flow of information between both groups |
| **STAGE 6: REVIEWING AND ADAPTING THE MECHANISM** | |
| ***Step to take:*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
| 1. Check if the mechanism is working and adapt where necessary | People who are responsible for running the feedback mechanism and community engagement more broadly |
| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** | |
| ***Content includes*** | ***Who should read this?*** |
| • Additional resources<br>• Glossary of terms used in document | Anyone who needs additional references and resources |

# INTRODUCTION

Setting up a feedback mechanism is one of the key pillars of community engagement. A feedback mechanism can help organisations better engage the communities they are working with, be more accountable to the people they serve, and ultimately contributes to a better quality of programmes and services. But what does a feedback mechanism look like? And what are the steps to take once you have collected feedback? In this module we walk you through the main steps of the feedback cycle and link you to the tools you need to set up and manage an effective feedback mechanism.

## What is feedback and how does it relate to other data sources?

Community feedback are insights generated by community members and can include any type of information, such as questions, suggestions, concerns, misinformation[2] or statements of thanks. It can be received in all kinds of ways, for example as part of an informal conversation with a staff member, via a phone call to a call centre, or in the form of responses to structured surveys. Read more in Module 1.

Community feedback is not different to monitoring data, or assessment data, it is an integral part of the monitoring system of a programme or operation. Any information community members share with us, is community feedback. It can relate to the activities we are conducting, the situation of the community, or other topics relevant to our work, such as public health concerns.

## How can feedback data be collected?

Community feedback can be collected through a reactive system where people come to us when they have feedback to share (e.g., a telephone hotline), or a proactive system, where we actively solicit feedback (e.g., focus group discussions). Both are important and the best feedback mechanisms will use a mix of proactive and reactive methods.

| Reactive ways to collect feedback (unsolicited) | Proactive ways to collect feedback (solicited) |
|---|---|
| **People contact us when they have feedback to share** | **We actively solicit feedback by asking questions** |
| Example channels:<br>• Hotline<br>• Helpdesk<br>• Suggestion box | Example channels:<br>• Focus group discussions<br>• Perception surveys<br>• Key informant interviews |
| **Most feedback channels can be used for both ways of collecting feedback. For example: call centres can receive calls but also conduct phone-based surveys, household visits can be used for asking specific questions, but also for recording unsolicited feedback.** | |
| Advantages:<br>• Available when people need to use it<br>• Can capture feedback on anything | Advantages:<br>• Can collect feedback on specific topics<br>• People might not come forward to share feedback otherwise<br>• Can ensure that you hear from marginalised and vulnerable individuals |

2. Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information. It is often spread rapidly through a group or population as a rumour. When shared to deceive or manipulate people, we refer to «disinformation».

| **Reactive ways to collect feedback (unsolicited)** | **Proactive ways to collect feedback (solicited)** |
|---|---|
| Disadvantages:<br>• If people don't use the system, you don't get any feedback<br>• Needs to be advertised | Disadvantages:<br>• By asking specific questions, you might miss feedback on other topics<br>• People might not be able to report issues when they need to |
| Purposes best suited for:<br>• Fixing issues timely (e.g., issues with cash transfers)<br>• Providing needed information<br>• Confidential handling of sensitive feedback | Purposes best suited for:<br>• Understanding the community<br>• Meaningful two-way dialogue<br>• Monitoring key metrics |

We categorise feedback as either open or structured, and which type is generated largely depends on the channel being used. The differences between open and structured feedback is described in the chart below:

| | **Open feedback** | **Structured feedback** |
|---|---|---|
| **General description:** | Listening to (and also asking for) anything community members want to share | Actively soliciting feedback from communities about specific topics |
| **Feedback shared:** | Formally and informally | Formally |
| **Channels and activities for collecting this kind of feedback:** | Community meetings, interactive radio shows, hotlines, discussions after community events, informal conversations during daily activities, etc. | Perception or Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) surveys, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, social media polls, etc. |
| **Topics covered:** | Any topic the community wants to comment on | Topics pre-determined by aid organization |
| **Timing:** | Open and varied, whenever community members want to share | Specific times pre-determined by aid organization |
| **Type of data generated by feedback:** | Qualitative data | Qualitative data and/or quantitative data |
| **Useful for:** | Understanding the thoughts and priorities of communities in real-time | Answering specific questions that can help to design programs, activities, and strategies |

While a single aid organisation or response effort can deal with both open and structured feedback, each type of feedback needs to be handled differently.

You can find more in-depth guidance on how to handle open, unstructured feedback in Module 3 of the Feedback Kit, and guidance and tools for perception surveys in Module 4.

## The difference between “feedback mechanism“ and “feedback channel“

We sometimes mix up these two terms, so here are the definitions:

**Feedback mechanism:**

A feedback mechanism is a system to allow community members to share insights, most commonly on their experience of the support they receive. It includes the channels for receiving feedback, the processes and tools for managing, analysing and sharing the data, as well as the processes for ensuring the feedback is acted upon, and communities are informed of the actions.

**Feedback channel:**

A feedback channel is a modality through which community insights can be shared, captured and received. By its very nature, each channel has its own characteristics that affect how accessible it is to certain individuals and groups in a community.

We can see that a feedback mechanism is the broader system that ensures a whole feedback loop, while the feedback channel is limited to the collection of the feedback. One feedback mechanism can, and should, comprise various different feedback channels.

# What are the uses of community feedback?

Most importantly it helps you to be accountable to communities and mitigate or prevent harm. You can use feedback to monitor your activities and react to it in real time, assess the needs of the communities to ensure what you do is relevant and reach those who need your support most. You can use feedback to understand the broader situation, evaluate progammes and operations to learn for the future, and understand how you can better work together with the people you are aiming to serve.

# What is social listening, and how does it relate to community feedback?

During recent public health emergencies, some of our partners have started using the term “social listening” in risk communication and community engagement. To understand how it relates to our approaches, we need to look at its roots. Social listening originates in the private sector, where brands track mentions and conversations on social media to tailor their products and services and better reach their customers. This approach has been introduced to the humanitarian space, where online conversations related to critical topics are monitored, primarily using computer algorithms to facilitate and improve the analysis of the data (called machine learning).

When our partners refer to social listening, they usually refer to ways of capturing what people are talking about, primarily on social media, and using this information to support risk communication and community engagement activities. Our community feedback approach is different, as community members share their thoughts with us directly, usually as part of a two-way dialogue. We can complement community feedback findings with insights from monitoring conversations on social media, but it is essential to remember that this information alone is only a small part of our broader community feedback approach.

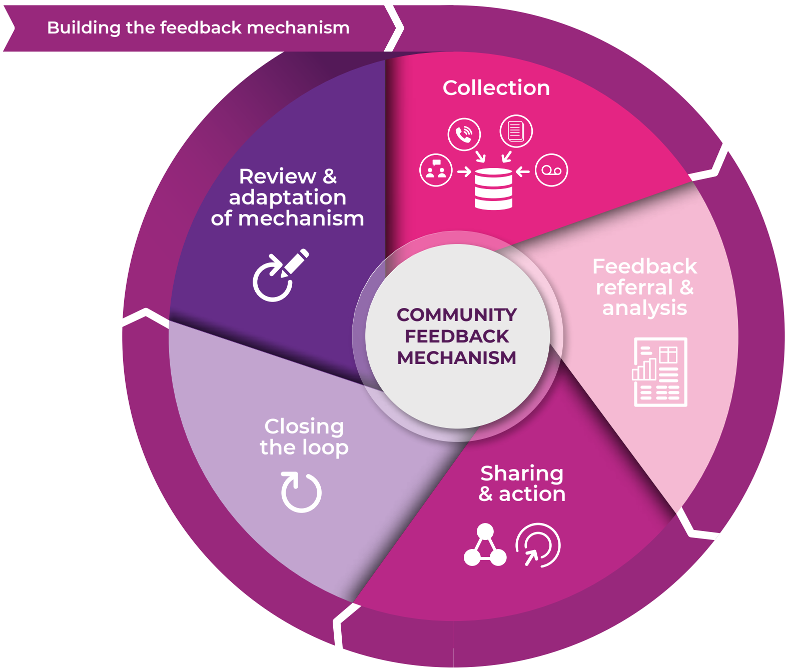
Humanitarian programmes can only be successful if we understand communities’ realities, provide the most relevant, timely and needed information, demonstrate how we address issues highlighted, and accompany communities to be part of the solution. Both community feedback and social listening mechanisms help us do so. Regardless of the mechanism and its name, we need to ensure these insights improve how we respond to disasters and work with communities.

This First Draft guide «Newsgathering and Montoring on thie Social Web» provides guidance to find sources, monitor conversations, track events and find the issues that affect a community online.

# The feedback cycle and its stages

Feedback mechanisms come in many different sizes, structures, and levels of complexity – but they all contain some version of a set of core stages. These stages form an ongoing cycle of dialogue with the community that you aim to serve.

**Figure:** Stages of a feedback mechanism




1. **Building the feedback mechanism:** Determine what kind of information is already received by the community, what additional channels might be required (based on the context and the community preference) and plan the feedback process together with the community. Clearly identify the processes to collect, manage, and share the community feedback and the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved.

2. **Collecting feedback:** Feedback from the community can come through a formal channel (like a hotline or suggestion box) or through informal channels (like conversations with staff during other activities). No matter what form of feedback, it needs to be collected, recorded, and processed. This also means recording information about when and where it was collected and some information about who the feedback came from.

3. **Feedback referral and analysis:** Some feedback comments might be addressed immediately; others might have to be escalated to program teams or leadership. Once feedback has been recorded, you need to sort and treat the different types of feedback according to the nature of the feedback (level of sensitivity or criticality). Consider combining and confirming feedback findings with operational, epidemiological and social data. The feedback also needs to be analysed for immediate action and understanding longer-term trends.

4. **Sharing and acting on feedback:** The most essential step of the feedback cycle is gathering together to discuss what you have been hearing, what it means, and what you can do to address it. To facilitate this process, you need to share and discuss the findings with those who are in the position to act on the feedback. This includes internal discussions, external discussions (with peers and others) and, importantly, meetings with the community. It is equally important to use feedback findings as a source of future community-led social science research

5. **Closing the loop:** A fully functioning feedback mechanism is one in which the community knows what happens with the feedback they gave, a process referred to as "closing the feedback loop". To close the feedback cycle, document the agreed action points and provide updates on what has been done with the feedback to the community.
6. **Reviewing and adapting the mechanism:** Carry out regular checks to make sure the feedback mechanism is working, and people still feel comfortable using it. This includes looking at who has been using the feedback mechanism, and who might not have access or trust in the system. This stage allows you to make improvements to the process and adapt to changes in the context and programming.

## Examples of feedback mechanisms

Here are some examples of which shapes a feedback mechanism can take:

### A national hotline in Lebanon

In 2014, the Lebanese Red Cross Society (LRCS) piloted a small hotline to support a cash and voucher assistance (CVA) project, supported by the British Red Cross. Initially managed by the disaster management team, it was soon handed over to the PMER team as the number of calls grew. The mechanism was rolled out to cover most LRCS programmes and operations and the number of calls has increased each year. LRCS advertises the feedback mechanism through a variety of channels including SMS, during activities in communities, posters and flyers and through partner organisations. Key benefits from the feedback mechanism include LRCS can now respond much more quickly to problems, such as lost cash cards or liquidity issues with agents. Programme staff also report the information provided by the mechanism is extremely useful to assess and adapt their services to better meet peoples' needs. Some of the feedback mechanism's success is attributed to the fact it started small and has been continually improved and adapted based on experience. You can access the full report here.

### Understanding community perceptions on COVID-19 in Ukraine

During the COVID-19 response, the Ukrainian Red Cross set up a new feedback mechanism to better understand the perceptions of community members on COVID-19. Communities were asked to share the main observations, beliefs, questions, concerns or suggestions they hear in their communities about COVID-19, as well as to share the feedback on the URCS response to COVID-19. The feedback was collected through several channels, including face-to-face surveys, focus group discussions, phone calls, community meetings. The feedback was used to improve the way the Ukrainian Red Cross supports the response to COVID-19, including updated communication plans, finding new ways to engage communities, working with media to better reach communities and make sure they receive the information they need, coordination with key health actors and sharing feedback findings with them. You can access reports here and here. The Ukrainian Red Cross has since developed its own feedback policy which ensures a systematic and consistent approach to how community feedback is handled, shared and responded to across the National Society.

## DRC Red Cross collecting community feedback during regular activities

During the Ebola response in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which started in 2018 and lasted for more than two years, Red Cross volunteers conducted a range of activities. They shared information about the virus, ways to protect yourself, and the response activities with community members. They conducted household visits, discussions with community groups, interactive radio shows, and more. During these activities, the volunteers received lots of feedback from community members, which they recorded using paper forms. All data were entered into an Excel database, coded and analysed on a regular basis. The findings were shared and discussed with local government-led risk communication commissions and Ebola response leaders as well as regional and global partners, to inform strategic discussions and decisions. The feedback data helped the Red Cross operation to respond to community concerns and suggestions in real-time, which built trust and acceptance for health interventions. This method has since been used in several contexts, including more recent emergencies such as the response to the volcanic eruption in Goma, a population movement response, and has also been integrated into the IFRC Community Epidemics and Pandemics Preparedness Programme (CP3). For more on the feedback mechanism in DRC, see articles in the Humanitarian Practice Network and Global Health: Science and Practice.

Kenya - Murito Loso, 40, a Maasai woman volunteering in Nkoilale village. Kenya Red Cross, with support from IFRC, and funding from USAID, helps communities prepare and prevent the spread of diseases like anthrax, which can infect humans through cattle, an important resource of cultural and economic significance for the Maasai.
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# STAGES OF A FEEDBACK MECHANISM

## STAGE 1: BUILDING YOUR FEEDBACK MECHANISM

No matter how big or small your feedback mechanism will be, and which context you are working in, the following key steps need to be taken to ensure the mechanism will be supported by those who need to be involved, you are able to handle the information, and will be able to close the loop with those who provided feedback.

It is important for the community to be involved in setting up the mechanism to ensure there is agreement on its purpose, channels used, how they want to be involved in the analysis and decision-making process, and how they would like to receive a response to their feedback. Communities are diverse, so consult and engage different groups as they will have their own specific needs and preferences, including women, youth, people with disabilities and members of marginalised groups.

### 1.1. Get the buy-in you need

A feedback mechanism requires staff time, funding, and a commitment to make changes based on what the community says, so it’s important everyone is on board and understands their role.

Here is how:

#### Get the management on board

If management supports the feedback mechanism this sends a strong message to the rest of the organisation. Highlight the benefits a feedback mechanism provides and point out that communities will have feedback even if there is no feedback mechanism, so better to have a system in place to manage feedback positively and use it as a tool for improvement.

#### Involve the following key teams early

Make sure you involve your colleagues who hold the following roles as soon as you start the process:

- **Programme and operations staff** to seek their input on the best way to share feedback findings so they can be easily understood and acted on
- **Information management** to help manage and visualize feedback data so it can be used for tracking and decision-making
- **IT** if specific equipment or technology is needed
- **PMER** so feedback data can be included in monitoring
- **PGI** to ensure safe and confidential processes for managing and referring sensitive feedback and serious complaints
- **HR and legal staff** to support investigations into complaints about SEA or fraud and corruption by staff or volunteers.
- **Logistics** to make sure you are aware of the procedures to procure any needed equipment

#### Talk to the community

If it is clear already which communities you will build the feedback mechanism with, you should already share your plans and get them on board. Discuss the concept of community engagement and accountability and their right to be involved and share their feedback. This is essential to make sure the feedback mechanism will be trusted and used. If the scale and geographic scope is not clear at this stage, you can take this step once this has been clarified.

Following resources can help you with this task:

## Resources

- Feedback tool 1: Tips for creating leadership buy-in
- Module 1: Community Feedback – Why Bother?
- CEA toolkit tool 1: Briefing for senior leadership
- Zine: Do you want people to trust you? Start by listening.

# 1.2 Determine the scale of the feedback mechanism

Feedback mechanisms can range from small feedback systems at the local office to large regional inter-agency efforts. One of the first steps to developing a feedback system is determining its scale, which requires you to think about the mechanism's purpose.

You will need to think about the following questions:

- ***What is the purpose or goal of the feedback mechanism (beyond ensuring accountability)?***
- ***Where will we be collecting data?***
- ***Who needs to see what information within my team, organisation, and among external stakeholders?***
- ***What resources do we need to set this up? What resources are available?***
- ***What are the long-term needs related to feedback for the community and the local teams?***

To help you translate these questions into more concrete decisions, you can use the following decision tree tool to help you determine what scale of feedback mechanism is best suited for your situation and context.

## Resource

- Feedback tool 2: Determining the scale of a feedback mechanism

## Aim for one central mechanism

We have seen that setting up several small feedback mechanisms linked to specific projects and operations means that these mechanisms are not sustainable and lead to confusions and tension within the teams working on them. Make sure you involve the relevant partners supporting feedback mechanisms and set up a coordination platform for discussing one common strategy for the National Society.

# 1.3 Define your communication channels

Once you determine the scale of the feedback system you need, it is vital to consider which channels the feedback mechanism will be comprised of. It is likely that there are already channels in place, so you need to see if there are gaps and think about how to best fill them.

### Channels for different stages of the feedback cycle

A feedback mechanism consists of channels to (**1**) provide information, (**2**) to receive the community feedback, and to (**3**) respond to the feedback.

Here is an overview of these three functions:

| 1. Information Provision Channels | 2. Feedback Channels | 3. Response Channels |
|---|---|---|
| Are channels through which **we can share information about our organisation, partners, programs, and response plans with the community** in the areas where we work. These channels can be used to advertise the feedback mechanism, as well as share requested information. | Are channels through which **we collect insights from communities about our work and services, and anything else of importance to the community**. This can include broad information about cultural and contextual conditions for the target population. | Are the channels through which **we respond to community feedback, usually during our process of "closing the loop"**. It is important to remember that channels for collecting feedback are not always the appropriate channels to respond to the feedback. |

Nigeria - Mombeyo is a 93-year-old woman who is partially blind. When water began to rise in her home in Anambra state, Nigeria, Red Cross volunteers were able to help her evacuate to a displacement camp where she has been able to get food and basic shelter.
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## Channels for different ways of communicating

Every channel will be more or less accessible to different groups in a community, therefore only a combination of these can ensure the process is inclusive, and all community groups can be heard and are able to contribute.

| written communication | | verbal communication | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **offline – no internet access needed** | **online – internet access needed** | **face-to-face** | **phone calls** | **voice or video recorder video recorder** |
| For example:<br>• SMS messaging<br>• Suggestion boxes<br>• Letters | For example:<br>• Social media<br>• Messaging applications<br>• Chatbots<br>• Emails | For example:<br>• Helpdesks<br>• Conversations during regular activities<br>• Focus group discussions<br>• Community meetings<br>• In-person surveys or interviews<br>• Household visits<br>• Community committee | For example:<br>• Hotline<br>• Call-ins during radio or TV show<br>• Interactive Voice response<br>• Phone-based survey or interview | For example:<br>• Recorder is placed at a safe place for community member to use them independently<br>• Community members record their feedback on their own devices |

More information on the different options can be found here:

### Resource

- CEA toolkit tool 19: Communication channel matrix

Main questions you need to find the answers to:

- ***Which channels are we currently using to share information, receive feedback, and respond to communities?***
- ***Are there structures managed by the community or other partners that we can use?***
- ***Are these channels suitable and working?***
- ***Do we need additional channels?***

Some of the answers to these questions might already be available, while other topics will need to be further discussed with the community, colleagues and partners.

The following tool guides you through this process and provides more information:

### Resources

- Feedback tool 3: Defining the communication channels for a feedback mechanism

## 1.4 Determine how you will document open feedback

Once you are clear about what channels you will use, you need to set up the tools and processes that are needed for systematically documenting and collecting the feedback data.

The following tool will help you select the appropriate documentation strategy for each channel:

### Resource

- Feedback tool 4: Deciding on how to document the feedback data

Once you decide on a data collection approach for each channel, you can develop the tools and processes to ensure that your teams can effectively document the feedback.

### Steps for setting up data collection tools and processes include:

- For each kind of data collection, **develop a model of the tool** that will be used to document the feedback. That could be a simple form that data collectors fill out, an online survey on a mobile device, an Excel database for a call centre, software for managing community feedback etc. Make sure the tool can capture the feedback itself and other important information (date and time of the feedback, demographics, and language of the feedback provider, etc).
- **Test data collection tools** with data collectors and community members to ensure they are user-friendly and easily understood.
- **Set up the data collection processes** to ensure sensitive data will be transferred and stored in a manner that means it is only accessible to authorised, trained personnel. See more about how to handle sensitive data in Module 5 of the Feedback Kit.
- **Create detailed standard operating procedures** (SOPs) for each of the tools, clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, and timeframes for all data collection steps.

### Resources

- Feedback tool 5: An example form for recording open community feedback on paper
- Feedback tool 6: An example Excel logbook for community feedback
- Feedback tool 7: An example form for recording open community feedback using a KoBo survey

For more information on how to set up tools and processes for open, unstructured feedback, see Module 3, and for perception surveys see Module 4.

## 1.5 Map and design information flows

After you decide on how to document open feedback, you need to decide on how this information will be shared inside of your organisation, as well as with external stakeholders. It is vital to map out how feedback data will flow through your organisation to those who have the decision-making power and responsibility to act on it. Otherwise, community feedback may never lead to real changes, which can lead to the community distrusting the feedback mechanism and ultimately stop participating in it.

Mapping out how information is currently shared in your organization can make it easier to identify gaps in where feedback data could get lost or missed. In a dedicated meeting, you will discuss the following questions:

- ***Where does what kind of feedback go once it was collected?***
- ***Where is it consolidated and analysed?***
- ***Who needs to act on what type of feedback and in what timeline?***
- ***Who will be responsible in each sector for following up on feedback?***
- ***Who and how are stakeholders informed about the decisions that were or were not made based on feedback?***
- ***Who is or could be involved in closing the loop with communities?***

The following tools help you to convene the discussion and provides guidance for the mapping process:

### Resources

- Feedback tool 8: Feedback mechanism design workshop package
- Feedback tool 9: Mapping the information flow

## 1.6 Agree on roles, responsibilities, and timeframes

Once you have mapped out the information flow, you need to assign more concrete roles, responsibilities, and timeframes for each stage of the feedback mechanism. A few helpful questions to keep in mind are:

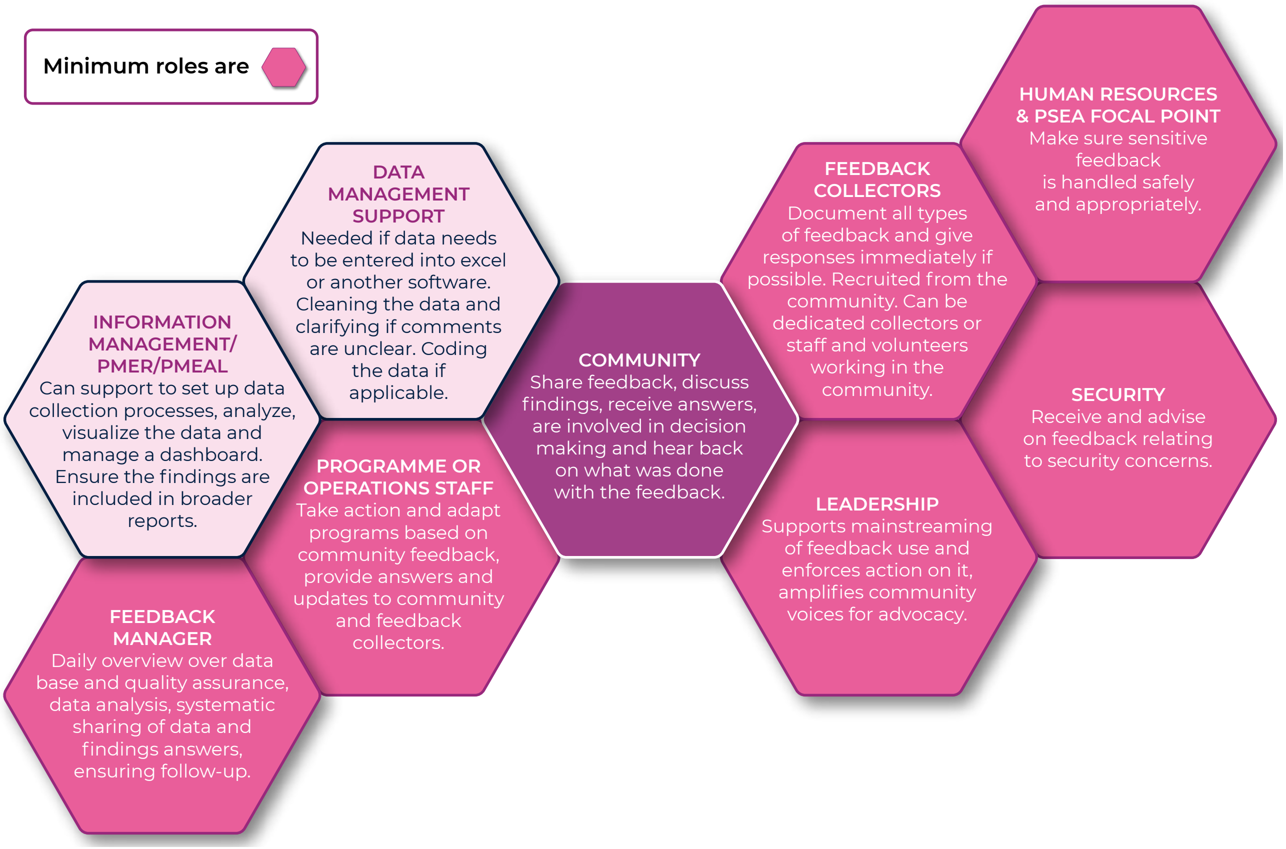
- ***Who is already doing this work?***
- ***Who has the capacity to fill gaps and/or reinforce what is already happening?***
- ***Who can play an enabling or supporting role?***

The following tool can be used for discussing and documenting the roles and responsibilities for all steps of the feedback cycle:

### Resource

- Feedback tool 10: Mapping and agreeing on needed roles, responsibilities and resources

Here is an overview of the roles that are typically involved in feedback mechanisms:




### Time frame for responding to feedback

The time set to respond to feedback comments that require an individual response will depend on the context, capacity and type of feedback. As a general rule:

- **Routine feedback** should be responded to within a maximum of two weeks. Ideally much quicker (2-3 days).
- **Sensitive and critical feedback** should be immediately acted on (within 24 hours maximum) and acknowledged with the person who submitted them. You also need to explain how sensitive feedback will be handled.

## 1.7 Identify the resources you will need (financial and human)

The next step is to determine what kinds of resources and support those people will need to carry out their roles effectively. This includes human resource support (who will be needed), material support (what tools will be needed), technical support (what expertise and training they will need), and financial support (what budgets will be required to obtain these other resources).

You can use the mapping tool introduced above to identify and document the resources you need:

### Resource

- Feedback tool 10: Mapping and agreeing on needed roles, responsibilities and resources

All these resources need to be put into a budget to quantify and advocate for the financial resources necessary to build an effective feedback mechanism. The template budget below can help you with that.

## Resource

- Feedback tool 11: A template budget for feedback mechanisms

## Invest in dedicated staff and good information management

Without at least one dedicated staff member to drive the process, your feedback mechanism is likely going to struggle. You need someone to supervise all steps of the feedback cycle and monitor how the feedback is shared, acted upon and the feedback loop is closed. To do so in a systematic way, you need support with managing the information. Without clear mapping and documentation of data flows and actions, you will struggle to sort and prioritise data, present it in a compelling way, and monitor the progress that is made to address the feedback.

# 1.8 Conduct the necessary trainings

Once it is clear who will be involved and how the mechanism will function, ensure that everyone is adequately briefed and trained on their roles and responsibilities. If any gaps are identified, organise trainings to provide or reinforce those skills. Use the tool for mapping roles, responsibilities, and resources to help you anticipate training needs.

## Resource

- Feedback tool 10: Mapping and agreeing on needed roles, responsibilities and resources

Examples of trainings and briefings that can be provided for different people involved in the feedback mechanism

- **BRIEFING for leadership and senior management teams:** How does the feedback mechanism strengthen accountability and trust between the organisation and the community? How can you use community feedback data to advocate for broader change and new/improved programming? (See: CEA toolkit tool 1: CEA briefing for leadership).
- **TRAINING for people engaging directly with communities:** How to receive and record community feedback? How to close the loop with communities?
- **TRAINING for data analysts:** How to clean, code, and analyse qualitative data and present it in formats suitable for different audiences.

## Resource

- Feedback tool 12: Community feedback training package

## 1.9 Advertise the feedback mechanism

Communities need to know the feedback mechanism exists and how to access it. For sharing information about the feedback mechanism, you can use the channels that you previously. Ensure that you:

- **Communicate with communities** so they understand that they have a right to provide feedback and that even negative feedback is welcomed as it helps the National Society to improve its services.
- Stress there will be **no negative consequences** if people complain.
- **Manage expectations** by being clear about what type of feedback the mechanism can respond to and how long it will take to respond.
- Assure people that **sensitive feedback and serious complaints** will be handled safely and confidentially.

Make sure the feedback mechanism is known by everyone within your organisation as well including staff and volunteers. Share information about the mechanism at staff meetings, put up posters in your office with the details about the feedback mechanism, etc.

You can use the following tools to find the right channel for sharing information on the feedback mechanism:

### Resources

- Feedback tool 3: Defining the communication channels for a feedback mechanism
- CEA toolkit tool 19: Overview of information channels


South Sudan 2017 - Volunteers help register a women who will receive their essential household kit from the Red Cross. The boxes include blankets, mats, soap, aquatabs, mosquito nets, oral rehydration salts, kitchen sets, buckets and jerry cans, and were distributed to 30,000 people in Aweil East state.
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# STAGE 2: COLLECTING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

A feedback mechanism relies on good quality data. Therefore, the process of data collection must be carried out with skill, strategy, and integrity. This section provides a brief overview of the key skills and processes that are necessary for a strong data collection process.

If you will be collecting open, unstructured data, you find the guidance and tools you will need in Module 3.

If you will be rolling out perception surveys as part of your feedback mechanism, you can find the guidance and tools you will need in Module 4.

For information on how to collect social science data that complements community feedback, see Module 4 of the Social Science training on operational social science research.

## 2.1 Listen and acknowledge

Intentional and active listening is a way to show respect and to create an open space for dialogue. It requires the listener to be humble, have an open mind, to suspend their judgments and preconceptions, and to be open to hear not just words, but also the feelings and meanings behind the words.

The following resource provides some guidance on how to listen effectively:

### Resource

- Feedback tool 18: Important skills for effective listening

Feedback received through any kind of channel needs to be acknowledged. This includes:

- Thanking the feedback provider,
- Telling them what you will do with the feedback,
- Explaining how long they should expect to receive a response, and
- Noting through what channels they should expect to receive a response.

Each feedback channel can have different ways of acknowledging the receipt of feedback: for instance, in-person conversations can end with a verbal acknowledgement, an email or social media inbox can respond with a short message, or anonymous feedback can be acknowledged with a carefully worded mention in a community meeting.

## 2.2 Ask for permission to use and share the information

Whenever a feedback mechanism is set up, the community should be informed about what kind of information may be documented, what will be done with that information, and their rights to not share information if they do not feel comfortable. When feedback is shared in public forums or during other routine activities (e.g., a health visit), it is also good practice to ask the person giving the feedback if they are ok with you writing down that feedback. It helps to keep the feedback process open and transparent.

Before documenting and sharing any personal data, you need to make sure the person who shares feedback is clear about the process and who the information might be shared with. This is called informed consent.

If the feedback can be used to identify a person, only document the information if the person gives informed consent. This means the person needs to understand and agree with:

- The intended purpose of the data collection and processing.
- What data you are collecting (e.g., demographic data) and what data you aren't collecting (e.g., their name or address).
- With whom their data may be shared.
- Any risks associated with collection, processing or sharing of their personal data.
- Alternatives in the case that they do not wish to, or cannot, share their personal data.

## Handling data received through one-way channels

Permission to use and share the feedback received through a one-way feedback channel (e.g., a suggestion box or a voice recorder) can be implied if the feedback channel was clearly introduced to the community or the feedback was shared in public (e.g., on a public social media page). This is limited to the aspects of the feedback that cannot identify the individual (e.g.: the content of the feedback, or location and the age of the feedback provider). If personal data was shared, and follow-up is needed, informed consent needs to be sought before taking the next steps and processing the data.

If the feedback cannot be resolved by the person who received it, ask the feedback provider to consent to share their contact details for the referral and follow-up. Only record personal information such as the name and contact details if necessary and informed consent was given to do so.

In general, pictures should not be taken during community feedback processes. This is because it can make the person providing feedback uncomfortable or put photographed people at risk. However, a picture may sometimes be necessary for feedback provision (e.g., taking a picture of damaged goods given to a family). Before taking pictures, you need to get informed consent from the people the image relates to, especially if they are visible in the picture. You need to be clear on how the image will be used and with whom it will be shared.

# 2.3 Record community feedback

When recording feedback, as much as possible, you write down the comment as it was shared with you and in the language it was shared. Summarising and paraphrasing too much will create challenges in interpreting what the person wanted to say and might change the meaning of the feedback.

While it is important to take good notes, you should still pay attention to the person sharing the feedback. Whenever possible, there should be a second person who records the feedback (especially during longer discussions). Sometimes, it may be more culturally appropriate to write down notes after the conversation, although this may result in lower quality notes.

# 2.4 Provide initial responses

Ideally, feedback can be responded to immediately by the person who receives it. For example, questions can be answered, misunderstandings clarified, and rumours addressed. Even when feedback is responded to immediately, it should still be documented so it can be consolidated and compiled with other feedback data.

To increase your team's ability to respond to feedback in the moment, it is useful to maintain a list of "Frequently Asked Questions". This list should be updated and discussed regularly. During emergencies, it is essential to have regular meetings with data collectors to provide updates, discuss answers to emerging common questions, and practice addressing rumours and misinformation.

# **STAGE 3:** FEEDBACK REFERRAL AND ANALYSIS

Once feedback has been collected, it needs to be managed and shared in the appropriate way. This section explains how to manage, prioritize and refer feedback data.

## 3.1 Consolidate and clean data

Based on the decisions you made about how to document feedback (whether verbally or through data collection tools), consolidate feedback from each individual channel. If you have multiple feedback channels, you can then periodically compile all feedback data into one central location so you can analyse all of it together. Remember, how you compile data depends on the scale your feedback mechanism is operating at; refer to the Feedback tool 2 to help you plan how to do this.

The Feedback Kit Module 3 on open, unstructured feedback data provides more detailed guidance if you are working with that kind of data, and below is a template that can be used:

**Resources**

- Feedback tool 7: The template Excel logbook that can be used for consolidating the feedback

### Cleaning feedback data

Once the feedback has been documented and consolidated in one place, it needs to be reviewed by someone else to make sure it has been properly recorded and entered (a process called "cleaning" the data). The person responsible for data cleaning should be indicated in your roles and responsibilities planning.

Tasks involved with cleaning and reviewing data include:

Once data have been cleaned and reviewed, it is essential to share observations about common mistakes with the data collectors, which will help them to learn from those mistakes and avoid issues in the future.

1. Ensure **no** sensitive feedback **was mistakenly classified as non-sensitive.** If there was, change the status of the feedback comment and delete any unnecessary personal information.
2. Review feedback data to check for duplicates, ensure each comment is assigned a **unique ID**, comments are **tagged and categorised correctly**, and **inconsistencies** fixed (e.g., data in wrong columns, wrong formats, inconsistent spelling of categories or missing data)
3. Monitor if specific topics should urgently be addressed with data collectors, updated in the repository of **key messages and talking points**, and/or **discussed with leadership** and external partners.
4. If GPS data were recorded, check if there are any **obvious outliers** (e.g., one point in another county or department) as this might indicate a mistake was made.
5. Check if all **feedback comments were added to the database** in the correct language, and if not, check back with the data collectors to try to find how it was recorded in its original language.

## Regular spot checks will increase the quality of data

Data collectors need to be aware their data is reviewed. Whenever there are errors made when entering the data, these should be flagged by the person reviewing the data, ideally in real time. This will allow those collecting the data to improve while collecting the data and motivate them to enter the data without needed clarification and follow-up.

# 3.2 Prioritise and refer

Some feedback comments might be critical, meaning they need **urgent and specific follow-up** ahead of the general analysis and discussion of all feedback data. These can include issues like the delivery of spoiled food, potential security risks, signs of an outbreak of disease, or new rumours that might threaten programming. As feedback is being consolidated, anything of a sensitive or urgent nature needs to be flagged and immediately referred to the people designated in your internal referral framework (See: Section 1.5).

In the case of sensitive data, only the pre-identified focal point should have access to the information. Depending on your organisation's policy on handling sensitive information, sensitive feedback comments can be shared via email with a password-protected attachment and the password transmitted through a different channel, such as a text message. See more about how to handle sensitive data in Module 5.

Once you have referred feedback comments to the appropriate focal point for action, document to whom you have referred the feedback case with the date and focal point for follow-up. You can do so in a feedback database or logbook.

# 3.3 Identify key themes

Analysing community feedback to identify patterns and trends is critical if you want to share it in a compelling and actionable way by showing the bigger picture.

If you use the same template for data collection it will be easier to combine the data collected through different sources and analyse them across channels and mechanisms. If you record the age, gender and other demographic information of people who answer a perception survey or call a hotline for example, you will be able to compare the data for these two channels for example.

The steps for analysing the data will look different for open, unstructured feedback data (where the feedback provider speaks openly about what is of importance to them) and structured feedback data (where the feedback provider answers a question by picking an answer option).

Module 3 of the Feedback Kit provides detailed guidance and resources for analysing qualitative feedback data, including the coding process. Module 4 supports you to analyse structured perception survey data.

# 3.4 Disaggregate and triangulate the data

Disaggregation and triangulation of the data allows us to understand important trends, outliers, and the bigger picture.

## Disaggregating data

Disaggregation is when you sort your feedback data to understand trends about who said what, when, how, and why. For example, a common kind of data disaggregation is separating feedback by the gender of the feedback provider, which may help you notice whether women's concerns or priorities may be different than men's concerns. Data can be disaggregated in many ways, including:

- By **demographics** (e.g., the age, gender, ethnic group, etc.) or location of the feedback provider
- By the **project type or programmatic sector**, the feedback refers to (e.g., WASH or cash)
- By the **feedback channel** they came through (e.g., hotline or community meetings)
- By most or least common **topics**
- By the **time** the feedback was captured (e.g., by month or point in the project cycle)

The following document gives an overview of these (and other) approaches to data disaggregation and examples of the kind of analysis they can produce:

## Resource

- Feedback tool 25: Types and examples of data disaggregation

## Triangulating data

Compare the information with other data sources to confirm your findings and gain more insights, a process called **triangulation**. Bringing together multiple data sources can help to make your feedback findings stronger and more compelling, to explain confusing feedback trends, or reveal patterns that are not being captured in your feedback data. There are various ways for you to do this:

- You can hold **discussions with community members, colleagues and other partners** who know the context and can help understand the situation.

- **Sit down with those who collected the information**, or at least their representatives, to ensure their analysis informs the interpretation of the findings and the formulation of recommendations.

- You can **combine the findings with other operational data**, including needs assessments, monitoring data, security incidents, survey findings, epidemiological data, staff surveys, etc.

- You can **triangulate the findings with data from social science** that provide expanded and in-depth understanding of the context, like recent survey findings, qualitative studies, anthropological studies.

- You can **look at other public reports and articles** to help contextualise and explain key trends in the feedback data. This can include internal and external reports, local media, scientific articles, etc.

## 3.5 Integrate feedback data into broader analysis processes

Community feedback should not only be analysed and discussed by practitioners who are focusing on community feedback but needs to be included in broader analysis such as monitoring and evaluation processes, needs assessments, and integrated outbreak analytics. The Data to Action Handbook provides useful guidance on this topic.

### Using an analytical framework

An analytical framework helps organise information around critical areas linked to humanitarian response. It can frame initial thought processes and conversations, helps triangulate different types of data sources, and provides an overview of the available information on the key areas of interest. It does so by categorising all kinds of information, such as monitoring data, reports on the disaster, social science findings, and community feedback. The codes included in the coding framework for community feedback can be used to link the feedback data to the analytical framework.

If an analytical framework exists for various information sources of your programme and operation, you can include community feedback in that broader framework. This helps to avoid community feedback being discussed and handled in a silo. In case there isn't a more general framework in use, you can use and adapt the example framework provided below. The framework needs to be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure it reflects what you are hearing from the community.

### Resource

- Feedback tool 26: Example analytical framework for community feedback

Nigeria - Mariya holds her granddaughter while speaking with Nigerian Red Cross volunteer, Hauwa, in her flooded home. The floods that hit this community in Kogi state, has had a devastating impact on her and her husband who lost their fishing tools and farmland, their only source of income.
© Corrie Butler/IFRC

# **STAGE 4:** SHARING AND ACTING ON FEEDBACK

This section outlines how to share your analysis of community feedback with different stakeholders to ensure that action is taken, and that feedback can inform the broader humanitarian response. When sharing the feedback, it is important to think about who needs what kind of information and when. Review your information flow chart and your roles and responsibilities chart, which was part of the design of the feedback mechanism.

## 4.1 Share feedback data in appropriate formats

To share the feedback with the different stakeholders, you need to ask the following questions:

- ***Who needs to see what kind of feedback?***
- ***What level of detail do they need?***
- ***How often do they need to see the feedback?***
- ***In what form do they need to see the feedback?***

The following tools guide you through this process:

**Resource**

- Feedback tool 27: Identifying the right format for your audience

Once you have identified the most appropriate information products, you need to package the findings in a way the audience can understand, discuss, further explore, and address. You do not need to report on every detail but highlight what is interesting and actionable. The tool below also includes links to examples or templates for different information products, including a template PowerPoint presentation and a narrative report.

**Resource**

- Feedback tool 28: Formats for sharing community feedback

### Sharing raw data vs. sharing highlights for broader analysis

There may be some stakeholders who would prefer raw data instead of information products that summarise findings. Raw data should be saved to inform broader analysis and allow colleagues with specific interests to access the details they need. Some of the potential uses of raw data include:

- Enabling colleagues to address specific feedback cases which relate to their area of work.
- Compiling feedback data collected in different locations and/or different channels for central analysis to inform learning and adaptation.
- Enabling key stakeholders (including communities themselves, technical colleagues, coordination groups, research organisations, journalists, etc.) to analyse, explore, and use the data for their own purposes.

When you cannot share raw data but still want to contribute to a broader analysis of community feedback, you can still share the highlights from your analysis of the community feedback. This can be relevant in inter-agency structures or when sharing highlights from feedback that was analysed on a more local level with colleagues in national or regional offices.

The following tool helps you to share community feedback data in a safe and responsible way:

**Resource**

- Feedback tool 29: Key considerations for sharing feedback data

The following tool provides an example for how to share the highlights:

**Resource**

- Feedback tool 30: Inter-agency or inter-office sharing of feedback highlights

## 4.2 Discuss the feedback with the relevant stakeholders

Sharing the feedback is not enough. To enable the right people to engage with the data and take action, you need to make sure the feedback findings are discussed in the right places at the right time. Especially during humanitarian responses, it is essential to look beyond your own organisation. A lot of the feedback you are receiving will fall outside of your mandate and/or be relevant to other groups involved in the humanitarian response.

### Internal meetings

- In internal coordination meetings, it should be a **standing agenda point** to share and discuss updates on community feedback. Updates should be short and concise and followed by a discussion of who can do what in response to the feedback.
- A "**community feedback working group**" can be established to share and discuss community feedback, particularly during the early stages of setting up the mechanism.
- Some issues will require more in-depth discussions. For these, **bilateral meetings**, or meetings with relevant colleagues to discuss specific issues, should be organised to share insights and discuss options for taking action.

### External meetings

- Community insights also need to be shared in **inter-agency coordination meetings**. Not all other organisations are in regular contact with community members, and they may depend on insights shared by organisations like yours. There are often thematic inter-agency groups that focus on community feedback. It is important to share your feedback with other organisations to triangulate findings and prioritise and coordinate joint action.
- It can also be important to organise **bilateral meetings with external stakeholders** to discuss specific issues. This can include meetings with community representatives and groups, local authorities, other humanitarian organisations, media, and anyone else who can act on the feedback.

### Community meetings

**Discussing feedback with community members** is important as it does not only allow you to better understand certain issues but also to discuss what needs to be done about them. Rather than you making a decision independently, you should see if the community already has suggestions or solutions and see to what extent your support is needed to implement them. These kinds of discussions also are part of closing the loop (see Stage 6).

# 4.3 Take action

Moving from analysis to action is probably the most challenging task. Together with those who are in the position to act, you will need to answer the following questions:

- ***Which topic do we need to address?***
- ***What kind of action needs to be taken?***
- ***Who needs to take responsibility for the action(s)?***
- ***Have those who should act agreed to take action?***
- ***Is there something that can be done to learn from the feedback for the future?***

Acting on feedback can include fixing certain issues and changing how you work, who you work with or what you do. This can, for example, include fixing broken latrines, the establishment of a project committee, or a change from the provision to in-kind aid to cash transfers. Acting on feedback can also mean sharing information on certain topics, such as where to register for support, when a project will end, or why requested cash transfers are currently not feasible. When recommending changes based on feedback, the recommendations should be clear, concise, and realistic. Some feedback might not require any changes, such as positive feedback, which can confirm what you are doing works and should be shared with your colleagues to motivate them.

The following tool guides you through this process and provides more details:

## Resource

- Feedback tool 31: Developing an action plan for addressing community feedback

Documenting the recommendations or action points in a document accessible to everyone allows you to monitor progress and hold different stakeholders to account. You can use and adapt following template for keeping track of your recommendations and agreed actions:

## Resource

- Feedback tool 32: Community feedback action tracker

# STAGE 5: CLOSING THE LOOP

A fully functioning feedback mechanism is one in which the community knows what happens with the feedback they give, a process referred to as "closing the feedback loop". If community members do not receive a response to their feedback, they may assume it has been ignored, which could lead them to lose trust in the feedback mechanism and stop using it. This step must not replace the regular involvement of community members throughout the feedback cycle; it is being highlighted separately because it is so important yet often treated as an afterthought. The following tools will be useful for this entire stage:

**Resources**

- Feedback tool 32: Community feedback action tracker
- Feedback tool 9: Mapping the information flow
- Feedback tool 10: Mapping and agreeing on needed roles, responsibilities and resources

## 5.1 'Close the loop' internally

Before you can close the loop with the community, you should make sure it is closed within your organisation. The staff and volunteers who are engaging with the community on a regular basis need to know what has been done with feedback so that they can communicate this back to the community. The loop should also be closed internally with other members of your organisation by sharing decisions and actions with staff in the project (including technical staff, support staff, M&E team members, etc.), other projects, and senior managers. This will help all staff understand the value of a functioning feedback mechanism.

Part of the action plans, information flows, and roles and responsibilities developed in Section 1.6 should include: ***who*** *is responsible for communicating* ***what*** *to different staff and volunteers and* ***when*** *they should do it.*

Ways to close the loop internally with community-facing staff might include weekly updates about what has been done in response to community feedback, regularly updated FAQ documents, or monthly meetings where staff can ask questions about what actions have been taken in response to feedback. Ways to close the loop with other internal stakeholders could include sharing in staff meetings, all-staff emails, monthly reports to staff, etc.

## 5.2 'Close the loop' with the community

Just as there needs to be a plan to close the loop internally, there has to be a plan to close the loop with the community. There are many ways to return information back to the community, depending on the kind of information and action.

One of the main decisions that need to be made is whether to share the response to the feedback with an individual or the community as a whole:

| OPTIONS FOR "CLOSING THE LOOP" WITH COMMUNITIES | | |
|---|---|---|
| **WHO TO SHARE WITH:** | **Directly with the person who provided feedback** | **With the whole community** |
| **WHEN IS THIS IMPORTANT?** | • When the feedback shared was sensitive<br>• When the person urgently needs to hear back about a specific issue<br>• If there is a need for the person to provide consent to share their contact details | • When the feedback issue and response is of interest to the whole community<br>• If the feedback was provided anonymously and the response can be shared without identifying the person who shared it |
| **HOW CAN THIS BE DONE?** | Directly contacting the person the way they prefer and is feasible (e.g., in person, via phone, or email) | Options include:<br>• Updates and discussions during regular activities<br>• Community meetings on the topic<br>• Discussing the issue on community radio programming<br>• Posting signs or posters with the relevant information in public spaces |

The following describes some good practice when closing the feedback loop with communities:

- **Use diverse and preferred communication channels** – Use the community's preferred channels of communication for providing, noting these may be different to how they prefer to provide feedback.
- **Make sure it is clear who is closing the loop and with whom** – In your information flow & roles and responsibility documents, make sure it is clear who is responsible for closing the loop with specific groups in the community. For example, this could be a community engagement team or programme staff.
- **Close the loop, even if no action was taken** – It is important to explain to communities' if their questions or requests cannot be addressed and why. This helps community members and staff better understand the constraints that the organisation, and the response as a whole, is experiencing.

## 5.3 Document the closing of the loop

It is important to track when the loop has been closed on individual pieces of feedback and when it has not. This can be documented in the feedback logbook or database. Record when the person was informed of the decision/action taken and how that information was delivered to them. This will help hold everyone accountable and ensure the community knows what has happened with their feedback.

Note: this process may be different for sensitive feedback, where the investigation process might be conducted completely separately and documented in a more confidential manner.

For action taken in response to broader feedback trends, this can be documented in the community feedback action tracker used for documenting recommendations and actions taken (See: Section 4.3).

Monitor whether communities are satisfied with the way their feedback has been handled and responded to. You may believe that the loop has been closed in a satisfactory way but affected communities may have a different impression (e.g., that it took too long, that the response was not clear enough, etc.). This kind of dialogue helps all stakeholders reflect on how well the feedback mechanism is working.


Guyana 2021 - Melissa Lewis talks about staying safe and healthy during COVID-19, while the Guyana Red Cross team delivers hygiene kits to difficult-to-access communities living along the rivers. © Angela Hill/IFRC

# **STAGE 6:** REVIEWING AND ADAPTING THE MECHANISM

This last section focuses on how to review the feedback process as a whole, which allows you to make improvements to the process and adapt to changes in the context and programming.

## 6.1 Check if the mechanism is working and adapt where necessary

Carry out regular checks to make sure the feedback mechanism is working, and people still feel comfortable using it. Some questions to ask regularly include:

- ***Are the feedback channels being used?***
  *If the amount of feedback received is low, is it because people do not trust the mechanism? Have you received sensitive feedback?*
- ***Who is sharing feedback – and who isn't?***
  *Are there certain groups of people (e.g. women, elderly, certain ethnicities, or locations) that you are not hearing from?*
- ***What are communities' views on the process?***
  *Are they satisfied? Do they feel heard?*
- ***Has the feedback led to action?***
  *If not, why?*
- ***Are people hearing back about the feedback they shared?***
  *If not, why?*

Answers to the questions above can be found by reviewing the feedback data and documentation of how the feedback was handled, having discussions with colleagues and community members, and collecting structured data. The tool on how to define communication channels with the community provides guidance on how to best seek structured feedback from communities and other stakeholders.

### Resource

- Feedback tool 3: Defining communication channels for a feedback mechanism

### The following indicators can help to monitor the feedback mechanism's performance:

- # and type of methods established to collect feedback and complaints from the community
- # of operational decisions made based on community feedback
- % of community members who feel their opinion is taken into account during operation planning and decision-making
- % of community members, including marginalized and at-risk groups, who know how to provide feedback or make a complaint about the operation
- % of people who received a response to their feedback or complaint about the operation

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Key guidance complementing this guide:

- IFRC Feedback Kit
- Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability and Toolkit
- Hotline in a Box guide
- Social Science Training - Red Cross Red Crescent Adaptation

You can find more information on feedback mechanisms on following platforms:

- Community Engagement Hub: for videos, case studies, guidance documents and more.
- IASC Accountability and Inclusion Resources Portal: for guidance documents, standards, tools, and articles.
- CDA Collaborative Learning: for key publications including practical tools and case studies on the topic.

Indonesia - The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI), with support from IFRC, and funding from USAID, helps communities through the epidemic and pandemic preparedness programme (CP3). PMI is working with governments, communities, local responders and humanitarian partners to collectively prepare for and respond to epidemics. © IFRC/Corrie Butler

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Below are the definitions for critical terms used throughout this document.

### Closing the feedback loop

The process of communicating to feedback providers what has been done in response to their feedback. It involves explaining and discussing how the feedback was considered, what was feasible to do (or not), the rationale behind these decisions, and what this means for the future. Closing the loop is not the end of the feedback cycle, because feedback is continuous; however, it is often a missing piece that is critical to managing individual feedback.

### Community

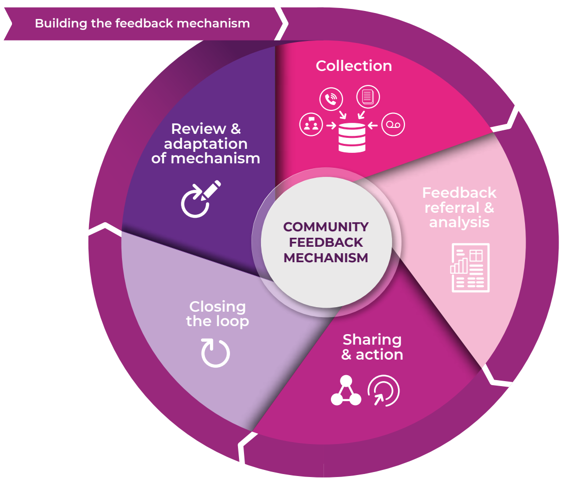
The term 'community' is used throughout this guide and refers to the group of people affected by the organisation's activities, programmes, or operations – including those who receive support and those who do not. Not everyone in the community is the same and within and across communities there will be a wide range of needs, capacities, and risks. Therefore, when you see the word 'community' in this document, it refers to all the diverse groups who make up a community, including women, men, boys, and girls, older persons, people with disabilities, different ethnic groups, sexual and gender minorities and marginalized or at-risk groups. This also includes community representatives, such as local leaders, organisations, and authorities.

### Community feedback data collector

The person receiving and documenting the information shared by community members. This includes staff and volunteers documenting insights during their regular activities, as well as staff or volunteers (or representatives of third parties) specifically tasked with collecting and documenting community feedback.

### Community feedback mechanism

A feedback mechanism is a system to enable community members to share information, express concerns and needs or suggest changes of importance to them. It includes the channels for receiving feedback, the processes and tools for managing, analysing and sharing the data, as well as the processes for ensuring the feedback is acted upon, and communities are informed of the actions. A feedback mechanism helps organisations be more accountable to communities and ultimately contributes to better quality of programming.




### Critical feedback

Any feedback that requires urgent/timely follow-up but is not sensitive in nature. These can include issues like the delivery of spoiled food, potential security risks, signs of an outbreak of disease, or new rumours in the community that might directly threaten upcoming programming. Critical feedback comments need to be shared immediately with the person in the best position to address the issue.

### Community Feedback

Community feedback are insights generated by community members and can be positive and negative in nature. Feedback offers the agency with an understanding of the community's needs, perspectives, experiences, challenges, and opportunities both related to the humanitarian response and outside of it. It can be received in all kinds of ways, for example as part of an informal conversation with a staff member, via a phone call to a call centre, or in the form of responses to structured surveys.

### Feedback channel

A feedback channel is a modality through which community insights can be shared, captured, and received. For example, this can be a hotline, a face-to-face interview, or a feedback box. By its very nature, each channel has its own characteristics that affect how accessible it is to certain individuals and groups in a community. We can see that a feedback mechanism is the broader system that ensures a whole feedback loop, while the feedback channel is limited to the collection of the feedback. One feedback mechanism can, and should, comprise various feedback channels.

### Informed consent

The permission granted by an individual to collect and process their personal data after understanding and voluntarily agreeing to: 1) the intended purpose of the data collection and processing; 2) with whom their data may be shared; 3) any risks associated with collection, processing or sharing of their personal data; and 4) alternatives in the case that they do not wish to, or cannot, share their personal data.[3]

### Information flow

The information flow refers to how people inside of your organisation share and receive different kinds of information (in this case, information from community feedback), this is also sometimes referred to as internal referral pathways. Information can be shared in formal, structured ways (e.g., through weekly reports, monthly meetings, databases, etc.) and through more informal, less structured ways (e.g., because the community engagement team and health team share the same office, the health team is often informed about current events in the community).

### Open, unstructured feedback

Feedback that community members share when they want about topics they want to address (as opposed to structured feedback, when an organisation actively solicits feedback from communities about certain topics). It can come through routine conversations, community meetings, telephone hotlines, interactive radio shows, etc. and generates qualitative data for the organisation to analyse and act upon.

### Personal data (or personal information, personal identifiable information)

Any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, or the cultural or social identity of that natural person.[4]

### Sensitive Feedback

Any information that can put the person sharing it or other people linked to it at risk and needs to be handled with care.[5] This involves any allegation related to serious violations of national or international law pertaining to the rights of the individual; any breach of the code of conduct or safeguarding policies; and/or safety and security threats targeting the humanitarian community.[6] Sensitive feedback can be received as any type of feedback, such as a complaint, a question, or a suggestion as it depends on the specific situation if it puts a person at risk if shared with others.

3. World Food Programme (2020). Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms Guidance Document, p.66.
4. OCHA (2019): Data Responsibility Guidelines, p.49. https://centre.humdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OCHA-DR-Guidelines-working-draft-032019.pdf
5. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2021). Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Contexts. Operational Guidance, p.30. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/operational-response/iasc-operational-guidance-data-responsibility-humanitarian-action
6. Danish Refugee Council (2022): Community Feedback Mechanism. Guidance and Toolkit., p.8. https://www.drc.ngo/media/vzlhxkea/drc_global-cfm-guidance_web_low-res.pdf

### Social Science

Is the scientific study of individuals and communities, how individuals interact with each other, how people behave and the dynamics between different (population) groups.  This information is used to adapt the design and delivery of services and the way response actors engage with communities throughout the response.

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