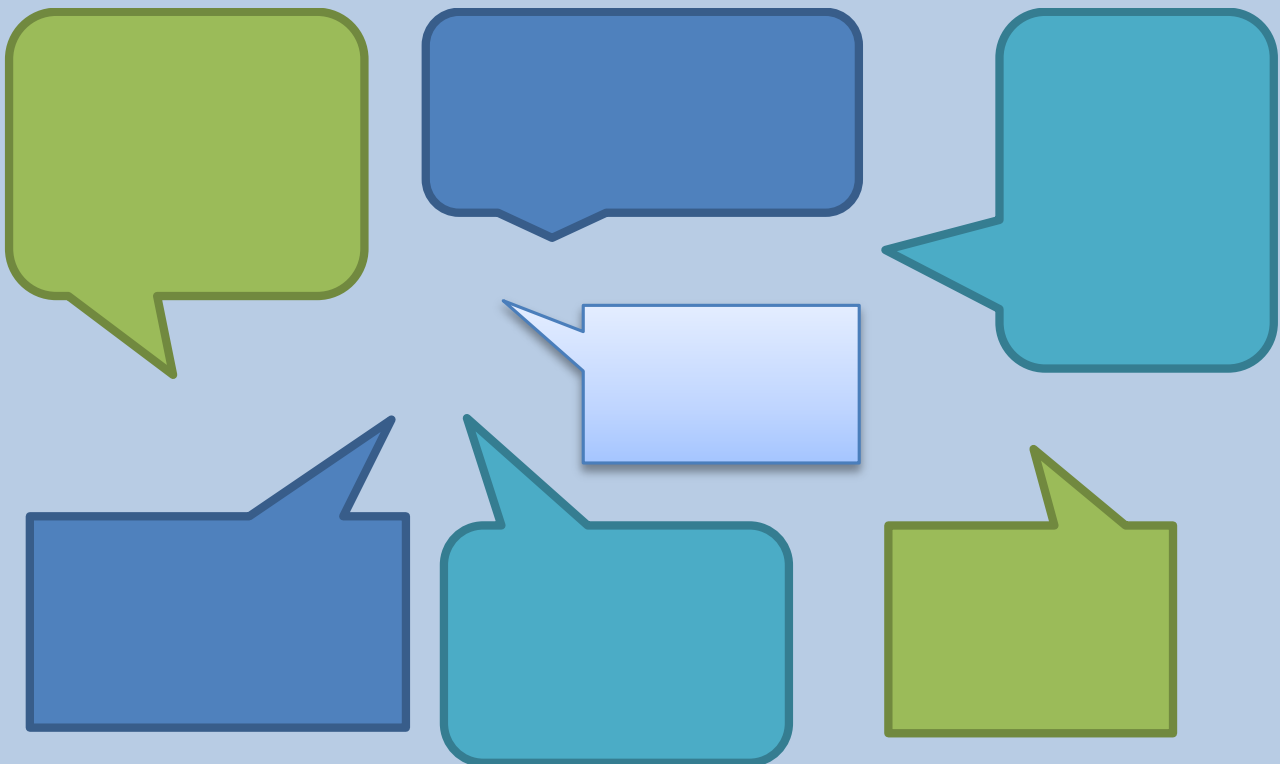




Department
for International
Development



Beneficiary Feedback in Evaluation



February 2015

The report has been prepared by Dr Leslie Groves, an Independent Consultant. Full responsibility for the text of this paper rests with the author. In common with all reports commissioned by DFID's Evaluation Department, the views contained in the report do not necessarily represent those of DFID.

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Executive Summary

The **purpose of this paper** is to analyse current practice of beneficiary feedback in evaluation and to stimulate further thinking and activity in this area. The Terms of Reference required a review of practice within DFID and externally. This is not a practical guide or How to Note, though it does make some recommendations on how to improve the practice of beneficiary feedback in evaluation.

The paper builds on current UK commitments to increasing the voice and influence of beneficiaries in aid programmes. It has been commissioned by the Evaluation Department of the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

Evidence base

The paper builds on:

- A review of over 130 documents (DFID and other development agencies), including policy and practice reports, evaluations and their Terms of Reference, web pages, blogs, journal articles and books;
- Interviews with 36 key informants representing DFID, INGOs, evaluation consultants/consultancy firms and a focus group with 13 members of the Beneficiary Feedback Learning Partnership;
- Contributions from 33 practitioners via email and through a blog set up for the purpose of this research (<https://beneficiaryfeedbackinevaluationandresearch.wordpress.com/>) and;
- Analysis of 32 evaluations containing examples of different types of beneficiary feedback.

It is important to note that the research process revealed that the literature on beneficiary feedback in evaluation is scant. Yet, the research process revealed that there is a strong appetite for developing a shared understanding and building on existing, limited practice.

Content

The paper provides:

- An analysis of current practice of beneficiary feedback within evaluation principles, standards and practice;
- A framework for applying beneficiary feedback within evaluation and;
- Practical tools for evaluation commissioners and practitioners.

“Beneficiary feedback” is a highly contested term. There is diverse understanding of what it involves. In the absence of a definition of beneficiary feedback in evaluation, the paper proposes the following working definition as a first step to developing a shared understanding of the parameters of beneficiary feedback in evaluation:

“A beneficiary feedback approach to development evaluation involves a one way or two way flow of information between beneficiaries and evaluators for the purpose of improving evaluation process, findings and use. It is a structured and systematic approach that cuts across all stages of evaluation - from design to dissemination. It is relevant to all types of evaluation design. It is not a subset of participatory evaluation; and goes beyond evidence gathering. It can engage both extractive and/ or participatory methods”.

The paper argues that beneficiary feedback is relevant to each stage of the evaluation process and not just to data collection. The four stages of evaluation used in this paper are:



A simple, jargon-free typology is proposed as a helpful approach to distinguishing and analysing different types of feedback at each stage of the evaluation process. This typology covers the diverse understandings of beneficiary feedback that were shared during the research process.

The four types of feedback proposed are:

- One-way feedback **to** beneficiaries;
- One-way feedback **from** beneficiaries;
- Two-way feedback with **inter active conversation** between beneficiaries and evaluators but with evaluation team retaining independence and power and;
- Two-way feedback through **participatory evaluation** with beneficiaries as part of the evaluation team.

No judgement is provided as to which type of feedback is better or worse. Decision-making needs to be informed by evaluation context. The position taken is that feedback is still relevant where it is one-way (and may be necessary for pragmatic reasons), although it may not represent best practice.

It is important to note the distinction in this paper between participatory evaluation (as a specific evaluative approach) and participatory methods which may involve beneficiary feedback.

The report contains 5 key messages.

Key Message 1: Lack of definitional clarity has led to a situation where the term beneficiary feedback is subject to vastly differing interpretations and levels of ambition within evaluation.

It has been noted that there is a lack of uniform understanding as to the concept of beneficiary feedback within the international development sector generally (Jump 2013). This paper confirms that this is also true for evaluation specifically. While there is a growing interest in beneficiary feedback in programme implementation, no prior study of beneficiary feedback in evaluation was found.

Key Message 2: There is a shared, normative value that it is important to hear from those who are affected by an intervention about their experiences. However, in practice this has been translated into beneficiary as data provider, rather than beneficiary as having a role to play in design, data validation and analysis and dissemination and communication.

This largely extractive process brings risks for rights based working, learning, evaluation rigour and robustness, as well as the meeting of ethical standards that one might expect.

Key Message 3: It is possible to adopt a meaningful, appropriate and robust approach to beneficiary feedback at key stages of the evaluation process, if not in all of them.

The paper proposes a simple, practical framework for beneficiary feedback in evaluation that can be used to apply a structured and systematic approach that cuts across all stages of evaluation - from design to dissemination. The framework takes the form of a matrix, as shown below, that evaluation commissioners and practitioners can use to map different types of beneficiary feedback onto each of the different stages of evaluation. This will support them in making choices as to which type of beneficiary feedback is most appropriate in the given evaluation context.

	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Two-way feedback - inter active conversation between beneficiaries and evaluators	Two-way feedback through participatory evaluation
Evaluation Design				
Evidence Gathering				
Validation and Analysis				
Dissemination and Communication				

Key Message 4: It is recommended that a minimum standard is put in place. This minimum standard would require that evaluation commissioners and evaluators give due consideration to applying a beneficiary feedback approach at each of the four key stages of the evaluation process.

Where decisions are taken not to solicit beneficiary feedback at one or more stages, it is reasonable to expect that this is justified in evaluation design to be clear that the decision to exclude beneficiaries from the evaluation process is one of design rather than of omission. Quality assurance processes should integrate this standard, and methodology papers should explain the rationale.

The framework fits in with existing evaluation principles, as well as within DFID's systems and policies. It does not require a new set of principles. It does, however, require explicit consideration of these principles, particularly ethical principles. This will improve the chances of moving away from extractive data collection to ethical and meaningful feedback.

Key Message 5: A beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation does not in any way negate the need to give due consideration to the best combination of methods for collecting reliable data from beneficiaries and sourcing evidence from other sources.

As with any evaluation, consideration will need to be given to how to: avoid elite capture and bias; ensure diverse views, including those of women and men, are heard; develop a robust sampling protocol and; defend cost effectiveness proposals and the generalizability of findings.

Concluding thoughts

It is time to move beyond the normative positioning around beneficiary feedback as “a good thing” towards explicit and systematic application of different types of beneficiary feedback throughout the evaluation process. The current approach to beneficiary as data provider raises important methodological and ethical questions for evaluators. The paper highlights these and shows that it is possible to adopt a meaningful, appropriate and robust approach to beneficiary feedback at key stages of the evaluation process, if not in all of them. It is suggested that the framework proposed is both reasonable and achievable and will be a useful tool for evaluation commissioners as well as practitioners.

Introduction

Context

In the UK, there is a commitment to increasing the voice and influence of beneficiaries in aid programmes¹. This is seen to be necessary to improving the development results that can be achieved and the value for money of UK aid.² One commonly used way of framing approaches that attempt to do this is 'beneficiary feedback'. In practice, however, this term currently raises more questions than it answers. It means different things to different people and there are no clear frameworks for ensuring beneficiary feedback in evaluation. This has contributed to an under-utilisation of systematic beneficiary feedback within development evaluation.

Purpose

This paper was commissioned by Evaluation Department of the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It is intended to be a short practical note that summarises the literature on beneficiary feedback in evaluation, assesses its current and potential use, and helps DFID to move towards evaluation practice that takes full account of the need for beneficiary feedback.

It is intended to be of use within and beyond DFID and has been developed in the spirit of learning. See Annex 6 for the Terms of Reference³.

Note: This paper builds on a number of learning initiatives that DFID has engaged in on the topic of beneficiary feedback since 2010:

- 2010: Policy lead on beneficiary feedback appointed;
- 2011: Access and Beneficiary Feedback Pilots Programme set up;
- 2012: Internal intranet discussion group established. "How To Note on Beneficiary Participation in Monitoring" published;
- 2013: Evidence and Programme Exchange site on Beneficiary Feedback developed.

Scope

A commitment to enhancing beneficiary feedback has two important implications for evaluations commissioned by DFID:

1. Evaluations will need to assess the extent to which beneficiaries have had the opportunity to influence programming from both a process and results perspective and from conceptualisation onwards (i.e. the measurement of beneficiary feedback).
2. The voice and influence of beneficiaries within evaluations themselves will also need to be increased.

This note explores implication number two. It does not provide guidance for measuring and evaluating beneficiary feedback within DFID programmes⁴. DFID could consider opportunities for guidance that addresses implication one.

This report is limited to the evaluation phase of the programme cycle. However, it is noted that evaluations do not take place in a vacuum and that this work will therefore feed into other DFID work on beneficiary feedback.

¹ Details of the UK's commitments to transparency and beneficiary feedback are set out in a suite of documents: [Aid Transparency Guarantee](#), [Open Data Strategy](#) and [Aid Transparency Challenge](#).

² See Annual Report on beneficiary feedback pilots (DFID 2014b). DFID is currently running seven pilot beneficiary feedback programmes in six countries, testing three different beneficiary feedback mechanisms.

³ In the initial Terms of Reference, this work was to cover both the evaluation and research functions through this one assignment. See Groves 2014 Inception Report. Whilst this report focuses on evaluation, many of the findings and tools will be useful in supporting research design and implementation.

⁴ The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), the independent body responsible for reporting on the impact and value for money achieved by UK aid, has committed to scrutinising and reporting on DFID's integration of beneficiary feedback in its programming. Its assessment framework systematically integrates questions to assess beneficiary feedback in programming (ICAI 2014c).

Structure

The paper is divided into three parts:

- Part A explores current definitions of beneficiary feedback and provides a framework and working definition of a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation;
- Part B situates beneficiary feedback within current evaluation standards and practice and;
- Part C argues how a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation can enhance ethical and rigorous evaluation practice. Checklists to support evaluation commissioners and practitioners implement the approach are proposed and potential obstacles to implementation of the approach are discussed.

Evidence Base for Findings

This paper builds on:

- A literature review of over 130 documents including policy and practice reports, evaluations and their Terms of Reference, web pages, blogs, journal articles and books. Documents were obtained through an academic literature search: using search strings via google scholar and the University of Sussex online journal database; an online grey literature search; a review of DFID's internal Evidence and Programme Exchange portal, including the theory of change for beneficiary feedback and; through requests for documents from interviewees and email posters;
- Interviews with 36 key informants representing DFID, INGOs and evaluation consultants/consultancy firms;
- Contributions from 33 practitioners via email and through a blog set up for the purpose of the research (<https://beneficiaryfeedbackinevaluationandresearch.wordpress.com/>) and;
- A focus group discussion with 13 members of the Beneficiary Feedback Learning Partnership;
- Analysis of 32 evaluations, identified during the mapping as including examples of beneficiary feedback.

Snowballing and backward snowballing⁵ techniques were used for data gathering. Requests for contributions in terms of documents and undocumented experiences were distributed via DFID's Evaluation Newsletter to over 170 evaluation cadre members; posts on DFID's internal Yammer discussion platform; via the UK BOND e-list; via the Pelican [Platform for Evidence-based Learning & Communication for Social Change](#) and [MandE](#) group (over 2,500 users) e-lists.

Attempts were made to minimise North-North bias through posting in different forums. In terms of whether this was successful, it is only possible to view where blog users were based (not their nationalities). The blog statistics indicate a good geographical spread amongst users- it received 476 views from 202 visitors in 44 countries over the eight week research period (12 countries in Africa, 9 countries in Asia, 14 in Europe, 2 in North America, 3 in Oceania and 4 countries in South America). The figures have continued to grow since the report was drafted, with almost one thousand views and 450 visitors by the time this report was finalised.

The paper is written by an Independent Evaluation Consultant, specialised in inclusive approaches to programming and evaluation.

⁵ This involved looking at the reference lists of publications and identifying other relevant publications on the same research question and reviewing those publications. This was repeated. The methodology also drew on Hagen-Zanker and Mallett 2013 "*How to do a rigorous, evidence-focused literature review in international development. A guidance note*" and DFID 2013 "*Assessing the Strength of Evidence. How-to-Note*".

Part A: A Framework for a Beneficiary Feedback Approach to Evaluation

Part A of this report:

- Analyses current definitions of beneficiary feedback in evaluation;
- Proposes a working definition for a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation and;
- Proposes a framework for implementing a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.

A.1 Drawing a line in the sand: defining beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation

A review of the literature and inputs from interviews, a focus group with UK NGO members of the Learning Group on Beneficiary Feedback, forum posts and email exchanges showed that there is no single, coherent definition of what constitutes “beneficiary feedback”. This was as true for the purposes of evaluation as for other components of policy and programming.⁶ Lack of agreed definition is compounded by lack of consensus as to the meaning of either “beneficiary” or “feedback”. For the purposes of this report, we aim to move the reader beyond the “*paralysing effect of the debate on language*”⁷ to focus on understanding the implications of beneficiary feedback for evaluation policy and practice. This section will:

- Highlight current use of the term “beneficiary feedback”;
- Break down the term to explore current debates around both “beneficiary” and “feedback”;
- Explore the meaning of beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation and;
- Propose a working definition for beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation.

A.1.1 Current use of the term “beneficiary feedback”

The term “beneficiary feedback” is often used as an adjective to describe a particular approach, system or method. Some commentators refer to beneficiary feedback *mechanisms* (DFID 2014b, Bonino et al 2014b). Others refer to a beneficiary feedback *approach* (Jacobs 2010) or a beneficiary feedback *process* (DFID EPE Notes). Beneficiary feedback is also seen as a *principle* for enhancing beneficiaries’ voice throughout the programme cycle (Ward 2013).

Box 1 below provides the different definitions for “beneficiary feedback” found during the literature review. These reveal different levels of ambition- ranging from collection of views, to listening and responding to views and finally to triggering of response and communication of actions taken. It is important to note that no definitions were found relating specifically to the context of evaluation. Indeed the literature on beneficiary feedback specific to evaluation is extremely scant.

⁶ See also [Bonino et al \(2014: 26\)](#) and Jump (2013 :8-10).

⁷ As noted by a DFID staff member- an opinion also expressed by two NGO sector interviewees.

Box 1: Definitions of “beneficiary feedback”

“A beneficiary feedback system is a systematic approach **to collecting** the views of...key stakeholders about the quality and impact of work undertaken by a development agency, generating quantitative data” (Jacobs 2010).

“A feedback mechanism is a set of procedures and tools formally established and used to allow humanitarian aid recipients (...) to **provide information** on their experience of a humanitarian agency or of the wider humanitarian system.” (Bonino et al 2014)

“Beneficiary feedback: Comments, suggestions, statements of appreciation and criticisms **expressed by the recipients** of aid projects.” (Jump 2013)

“Beneficiary feedback is a dynamic process of **listening and responding** to beneficiaries”. (DFID’s internal Evidence and Program Exchange (EPE) portal on beneficiary feedback)

“An effective beneficiary feedback process is one where feedback from beneficiaries is solicited and listened to; collated and analysed; **triggers a response/action at the required level; and communicates the response/action** where relevant back to the original provider and if appropriate the wider beneficiary community” DFID Access & Beneficiary Feedback Pilots Programme

In addition to being used to describe different approaches or methods, the term “beneficiary feedback” is located in different realms of expertise or practice. For some, it is a subset of participatory monitoring and evaluation, for others it belongs to the field of social accountability⁸. For others it relates to organisational learning and change processes and is a mechanism for linking beneficiaries with decision makers (Barder 2009, ICAI 2014d).

The *word cloud*⁹ below highlights some of the terms used inter-changeably with “beneficiary feedback”.



The lack of standardisation of use of “beneficiary feedback” has led to “*confusion of purpose, ideas and hence conclusions*” (Jump 2013: 8) and to wide ranging interpretations of what the term signifies. Breaking the term into its constituent parts does little to clear the muddy waters. Both “beneficiary” and “feedback” are riddled with their own controversies and different interpretations, as discussed in Sections A.1.2 and A.1.3 below.

A.1.2 Defining “Beneficiary”

⁸ See Jacobs, Barnett and Ponsford (2010) for their analysis of how beneficiary feedback systems have grown out of participatory monitoring and evaluation, social accountability and customer satisfaction.

⁹ This simple illustration is not weighted nor is it exhaustive. It shows the number of different terms picked up during the literature review and discussions.

“Beneficiary” is a widely disliked term. Even amongst those who choose to use the term, there is a lack of consensus on who constitutes a “beneficiary”. There is strong resistance, both within and outside of DFID, to the term “beneficiary”¹⁰. It is seen as redundant in both rights based approaches to development, where poor people are seen not as recipients of charity but as holders of rights, and in a political economy analysis of development whereby “beneficiaries” of aid include donor countries and their agency staff. Furthermore, the term “beneficiaries” is loaded with power dynamics which can be an immediate barrier to a genuine two way feedback process, for example. It is important to note that there is no definition of “beneficiary” within DFID guidance on beneficiary feedback.

In the context of evaluation, the limiting nature of the word “beneficiary” brings its own dilemmas. Evaluation, if it asks the right questions, often highlights the lack of inclusion of some of the more excluded groups in a given community. These groups do not “benefit”, even though they may have been targeted and have an equal right to the benefits of development efforts. They are therefore further excluded by the terminology of “beneficiary” itself - an important point for evaluators who are seeking to explore the impact of aid on different groups in a given community. ICAI’s use of *intended* beneficiary is one way around the concern but it doesn’t resolve the initial dilemma surrounding the politics of the term itself. Nor the fact that evaluation often aims to pick up on the unintended or negative consequences of an intervention.

The short-term solution adopted by some members of DFID and their partners is to footnote their dislike of the term in reports, whilst noting they will use it for pragmatic reasons¹¹. It may be helpful for DFID to consider whether this is an appropriate approach in the long term.

In the meantime, and for the purposes of this report, the term “beneficiary” will be used to refer to two groups of people:

- Those in whose name funds are raised or contributed i.e. men, women, girls and boys living in poverty, vulnerability or affected by disasters¹². This includes those who have benefited (whether this was intended or unintended), those who have been negatively affected, and those who should have benefited but have not been reached.
- Those included at the outcomes level of the results chain. The latter group would include, for example, health professionals or civil servants receiving training – and not only the poor communities who will ultimately benefit from that training.

Not included in this definition are those who are indirectly benefiting from the resources invested in international development and humanitarian efforts, such as staff or consultants.

NOTE: The aggregate term “beneficiary” does not preclude evaluation requirements for:

- Gender and power analysis
- Methodological rigour in ensuring that beneficiary selection is non-discriminatory and allows for the inclusion of diverse voices.
- Sex and other data disaggregation to understand the specifics of who exactly does or does not benefit from an intervention and why.

Understanding “who” the beneficiaries are and are not, and the different experiences of different beneficiaries, is an essential component of any evaluation.

¹⁰ See Green (2014) and the strong response to this term in the Pelican platform public email exchange.

¹¹ See Newman (2014) and Chambers (2014).

¹² This is the definition used by the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) for example who identify “intended beneficiaries as those whom the aid is ultimately intended to benefit and not those who are sometimes referred to as ‘beneficiaries’ but who are, in fact, other stakeholders or recipients who are involved at various stages in the delivery of the aid” (ICAI 2014a).

A.1.3 Defining “Feedback”

The literature is clear that the purpose of “feedback” is to enhance aid outcomes through soliciting the views of beneficiaries on the work of a development or humanitarian agency. In theory, data gathered is used to adapt and improve both process and results.¹³ However, in practice, this is limited where there is insufficient scope for adaptive programming, as is the case where rigid logframes or other programme management tools are applied.

The methods used for soliciting feedback are many. They range from the use of information and communication technology to comments boxes outside humanitarian food distribution sites¹⁴.

Interviews and the literature review revealed that, most commonly, feedback is one of two types:

- A **one-way system of data extraction** i.e. from those affected by disasters or living in poverty to those delivering or supporting programmes. This can be one-off or on-going.
- A **two-way system or a “closed feedback loop”** that involves a dynamic process of listening and responding to feedback. This is the approach currently being piloted by DFID’s Access and Beneficiary Feedback programmes (DFID 2014a and b)¹⁵ and recommended by CDA-ALNAP’s 2014 report “*Closing the Loop: Effective feedback in humanitarian contexts*”.

In evaluation, “feedback” is commonly interpreted as a one-way flow of information from beneficiaries to the evaluation team during the evidence gathering phase of the evaluation. The evaluation team then filter and process the information for use by the evaluation commissioners. Some evaluation commissioners, including DFID, then make evaluation reports and management responses available online. No examples were found of management responses being shared directly with beneficiaries or of providing beneficiaries with the relevant website addresses so as to locate the reports themselves. It is important to be clear that publishing a report to the web without an accompanying process to provide this information to beneficiaries does not constitute beneficiary feedback.

“Current interest in feedback needs to be carefully managed if it is going to contribute to real change in the sector. There is a real risk that ‘feedback’ becomes a toothless slogan that means everything and nothing. General exhortations to improve practice are unlikely to work any better now than they have in the past.” Jacobs 2013.

Part 3 will explore current practice further. In the Section below we will outline a framework that could enhance understanding and implementation of feedback in the context of evaluation.

A.2 Towards a framework for applying a “beneficiary feedback” approach in the context of evaluation

It was noted in 2.1 above that no specific definition of beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation was found. The normative value is that it is important to hear from those who are affected by an intervention about their experiences. In reality, this has been translated into beneficiary = data provider. As will be discussed later in this paper, this brings risks of a disempowering experience for beneficiaries, with associated risks for rights based working, learning, evaluation rigour and robustness, as well as the meeting of ethical standards that one might expect¹⁶.

This section therefore seeks to break down the evaluation process by stage and by type of feedback in order to support clarity in understanding the role of beneficiary feedback within an evaluation.

¹³ DFID’s How To Guidance (2012) provides guidance on beneficiary feedback as a tool for monitoring.

¹⁴ In Dadaab refugee camp, CARE are using a combination of SMS text feedback, radio call-in programmes, Complaints Hotline cell phone number, camp committees to solicit feedback (pers.comm). See Jump 2013 for a review of different methods.

¹⁵ See Bonino et al (2014a).

¹⁶ See also Cekan and Green (2014).

The four stages of evaluation used in this paper are:



The following typology is proposed as a helpful approach to distinguishing and analysing different types of feedback:

- One-way feedback to beneficiaries
- One-way feedback from beneficiaries
- Two-way feedback with inter active conversation between beneficiaries and evaluators but with evaluation team retaining independence and power.
- Two-way feedback through participatory evaluation with beneficiaries as part of the evaluation team¹⁷.

It is important to note the following:

- **Different types of feedback can be used in a complementary manner at different evaluation stages. They are not exclusive.** So, for example, one way feedback from beneficiaries will remain an extractive process unless it is combined with one way feedback back to beneficiaries or is integrated in a broader approach of two way feedback.
- There is no judgement as to whether one of these types of feedback is better or worse than another. **They are all types of feedback and each may be appropriate** depending on the evaluation context and / or design.
- This paper recommends one minimum standard for a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation: that **evaluation commissioners and evaluators engage in a systematic process of exploring the different types of feedback that will be most appropriate at the different stages of the evaluation.** This should be a proactive assessment of opportunities, rather than a tick box process of doing the minimum possible in an extractive and/or unethical manner. This one standard should be applied alongside existing evaluation standards and principles. It does not require a new set of principles. It does, however, require explicit consideration of these principles, particularly ethical principles. This will enhance the chances of moving away from extractive data collection in evaluation to ethical and meaningful feedback. Annex 3 outlines important ethical considerations when using a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.
- A beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation does not in any way negate the need to give due consideration to **the best combination of methods for collecting reliable data from beneficiaries and obtaining evidence from other sources** (Newman 2014). As with any evaluation, consideration will need to be given to how to: avoid elite capture and bias; ensure diverse views, including those of women and men, are heard; develop a robust sampling protocol and; defend cost effectiveness proposals and the generalizability of findings¹⁸.

¹⁷ Participatory evaluation is guided by the principles of empowerment and accountability, and primary stakeholders are included as co-evaluators, both to ensure the inclusion of their voices and values in evaluation and to help them strengthen their evaluation capacity. Participants' knowledge and perspectives influence the design of evaluation questions, designs and methods, as well as data analysis and conclusions (see Gaventa and Estrella (2000) and Hilhorst and Guijt (2006). See http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation for further references. For information on the use of participatory approaches in impact evaluation see Guijt (2014). For discussion as to the limitations and challenges of participatory evaluation see Estrella and Gaventa 1998.

¹⁸ There are numerous texts on evaluation methods and frameworks that are relevant to enhancing rigour and robustness in data collection with beneficiaries. See Garbarino and Holland 2009; Stern et al. 2014 and others for impact evaluation methods; Jupp and Ali 2010 for a methodology for quantifying qualitative outcomes obtained through the analysis of men and women living in poverty that meets the criteria for rigour and robustness and; Salmen 2002 for sampling for beneficiary assessment.

The matrix below provides some illustrative examples of methods that could be used for the different types of feedback at each of the different stages. These will be explored further, using examples from current practice, in Part 3.

Matrix 1: Illustrative examples of beneficiary feedback at different stages of the evaluation process

	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Two-way feedback - inter active conversation between beneficiaries and evaluators	Two-way feedback through participatory evaluation
Evaluation Design	Dissemination of evaluation protocol to enhance informed consent and meaningful engagement with content and process of evaluation	Views of beneficiaries sought on evaluation questions/ protocol	Joint discussion on evaluation protocol/ questions. This could be at different stages of design. Ultimate design decisions rest with evaluation team	Beneficiaries input into evaluation design as evaluation team members
Evidence Gathering	Beneficiaries informed of Evidence Gathering processes, including with other stakeholders	Views of beneficiaries sought alongside other evidence gathering methods. This could be through survey, interview, focus group discussion where evaluators extract data with no return of/ joint discussion on data	Beneficiaries question each other and evaluators as data is collected through e.g. interactive focus group discussions or discussion of survey findings in order to challenge own and evaluators' assumptions and interpretations	Beneficiaries engaged in evidence gathering as members of team
Validation and Analysis	Sharing of early findings and/ or analysis with beneficiaries	Beneficiaries share their views of early findings with evaluation team- questioning or validating these	Beneficiaries and evaluation team discuss and refine findings together, jointly discussing recommendations. Ultimate decisions rest with evaluation team.	Beneficiaries engaged as part of evaluation team in validation and analysis of evaluation findings
Dissemination and Communication	Dissemination of relevant evaluation findings and management response in appropriate format (poster/ document/ radio/ video/ face to face)	Beneficiaries provide their views on materials shared: this can be on content or methodology	Beneficiaries and evaluation team or programme team (depending on dissemination and communication plan) discuss findings together, learning jointly from process	Beneficiaries, as part of evaluation team, design and support dissemination and communication activities

Distinguishing beneficiary feedback from participatory evaluation

Some commentators see feedback systems as a subset of participatory evaluation (see Jacobs et al 2010¹⁹). This paper argues, however, that it is very important to distinguish a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation from participatory evaluation for two key reasons:

¹⁹ The authors suggest that "Feedback systems are emerging as a subset of PM&E as a systematic approach to monitoring development interventions. They generate 'customer-orientated' data about intended beneficiaries' perceptions of how well an intervention is working during its life cycle" (Jacobs et al 2010).

- **Beneficiary feedback is broader than participatory evaluation-** a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation requires due consideration of the flow of information between beneficiaries and evaluators throughout the evaluation process. It may be that a one-way flow of information is the most appropriate choice at one or more stages of the evaluation. Or it may be that a participatory evaluation will best support the evaluation, or that participatory methods for evidence gathering or data validation are the most appropriate choice for the given evaluation context²⁰.
- **Beneficiary feedback mechanisms are often not embedded within participatory evaluation principles-** they may simply require sending a text as an extractive method of data collection without due consideration to the principles of participatory evaluation. Principles that include empowerment and accountability and that require primary stakeholders to be included as co-evaluators, both to ensure the inclusion of their voices and values in evaluation and to help them strengthen their evaluation capacity.

Applying a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation where the programme only indirectly benefits men, women, girls and boys living in poverty

The case for a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation is maybe clearest where the programme directly benefits or engages women, men, girls and boys living in poverty. But what about programmes that indirectly benefit these people? For example, capacity building activities of the Ministry of Finance or other government department? Or, where evaluations are conducted of partner organisations, should feedback from partners' beneficiaries be sought?

This paper argues that **all** evaluations need to follow a process of due consideration of the different types of feedback that are appropriate at different stages of the evaluation. There is not a type of programme or evaluation that should engage a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation more than another. Choices around suitability and feasibility need to be made explicit and justified, based on specific context and evaluation design. Indirect delivery programmes are not exempt. In fact, feedback of these types of programmes from ultimate or secondary beneficiaries - women, men, girls and boys living in poverty- can produce immensely valuable evaluation data. For example, they can help test theory of change assumptions about programme impact i.e. that trained health technicians will be more responsive to client needs. Seeking feedback from ultimate beneficiaries is therefore both valid and relevant.

Evaluation design would need to consider questions such as:

- Who the ultimate beneficiaries, both intended and unintended, are;
- Whether ultimate beneficiaries are traceable/ have existing relationship with programme implementers;
- Whether adaptive programming is feasible and therefore justifies the sourcing and engagement of people living in poverty;
- Whether it is possible to meaningfully and ethically engage people living in poverty at one of more stages of the evaluation and;
- Whether it would be unethical not to engage people living in poverty in one or more stages of the evaluation.

It may ultimately be decided that beneficiary feedback at one or other stage of the evaluation is not appropriate. It may be decided that the causal chain is such that it would be unethical to seek to engage people living in poverty who are not directly affected by the programme in the evaluation. These would be acceptable outcomes of a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.

²⁰ See also the DFID commissioned papers by [Gabarino and Holland](#) (2009) and [Stern et al](#) (2012) on selecting the most appropriate methods for impact evaluation. A checklist is provided in Section 5 below to support evaluation commissioners and teams in exploring the relevant questions at each stage.

A.3 A working definition of beneficiary feedback in evaluation

Based on an understanding of the potential of beneficiary feedback at each stage of the evaluation process and on an understanding of the different types of feedback, this paper proposes the following working definition of a “beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation”:

“A beneficiary feedback approach to development evaluation involves a one way or two way flow of information between beneficiaries and evaluators for the purpose of improving evaluation process, findings and use. It is a structured and systematic approach that cuts across all stages of evaluation - from design to dissemination. It is relevant to all types of evaluation design. It is not a subset of participatory evaluation; and goes beyond evidence gathering. It can engage both extractive and/ or participatory methods”.

In view of the fact that beneficiary feedback is essentially an adjective, the definition proposed relates to a beneficiary feedback **approach**. By approach, we mean that a systematic process is required and assessed as part of evaluation quality assurance. This goes beyond a commitment to broad principles of engaging with beneficiaries during evaluation and beyond specific methods for this engagement.

It is recommended that this definition is discussed and that an official definition is issued by DFID to support both staff, grantees and contractors in moving forward and being clear as to what is required of them in an evaluation context.

Part A: Summary

Part A of this report has:

- Highlighted the lack of clarity around the term “beneficiary feedback”;
- Shown that there is no specific definition or framework for beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation;
- Provided a draft framework for analysing and applying different types of beneficiary feedback at different stages of the evaluation process;
- Distinguished a beneficiary feedback to evaluation from participatory evaluation and participatory evidence gathering mechanisms; and;
- Provided a working definition of a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.

Part B below situates the beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation outlined here within DFID systems and evaluation standards.

Part B: Situating Beneficiary Feedback in Current Evaluation Practice

Part B of this report situates beneficiary feedback in current evaluation practice. As part of DFID's commitment to learning and improving its systems, the report specifically assesses DFID's internal systems and standards to look for entry points for improving practice.

This section analyses:

DFID internal systems and standards;

Evaluation practice within different NGOs, multilaterals and bilaterals.

B.1 Situating beneficiary feedback in evaluation within DFID systems and evaluation standards

In this section, beneficiary feedback will be situated within:

- DFID internal guidance, standards and systems;
- Evaluation standards and principles.

B.1.1 Applying a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation within DFID evaluations

DFID's internal guidance on beneficiary feedback (Evidence and Programme Exchange EPE platform), and its Access & Beneficiary Feedback Pilots Programme and its Smart Rules together provide a platform for embedding beneficiary feedback principles and methods within DFID commissioned evaluation.

As noted in Part A above, **DFID's internal guidance** on beneficiary feedback provides a clear framework for implementing a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation. It requires staff to go beyond more extractive data gathering processes to engage in "*a dynamic process of listening and responding to beneficiaries*"²¹.

DFID's Smart Rules²² require beneficiary feedback in the context of evaluation, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly:

- Staff are required to make "*practical attempts to get feedback on our performance*" and to "*committing to collate and share lessons from annual reviews, project completion reviews and evaluations*" (p.105). Whether this feedback or sharing of lessons from evaluations is to be with beneficiaries is not specified.
- Staff are required to prioritise "*learning from contractors, stakeholders and beneficiaries at all stages in the delivery chain*" (p.104).
- As part of the Rules, Principles and Standards, staff are required to "*Ensure that the views and experiences of citizens and beneficiaries inform the design and delivery of our programmes*" (p.17).

²¹ See DFID's internal Evidence and Program Exchange (EPE) portal on beneficiary feedback

²² DFID. "DFID Smart Rules: Better Programme Delivery - Publications - GOV.UK." Accessed September 9, 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery>.

- Arguably, meeting Principles 2 on Transparency, 6 on being Evidence-based and 7 on being Responsible and Accountable also require beneficiary feedback, even if this is not explicitly mentioned.

ICAI's recent Rapid Review of the Smart Rules (December 2014) recommended that the rules need to be *"more explicit about intended beneficiary involvement"*; and should make the minimum standards for beneficiary participation/consultation clear. The review notes specifically in paragraph 2.24 that *"there is no specific mention of beneficiaries' role in the monitoring and evaluation sections of the Smart Rules beyond some general consideration"*. This paper will support DFID in considering beneficiaries' role in evaluation and laying down some minimum standards for beneficiary feedback in evaluation.

DFID's Access & Beneficiary Feedback Pilots Programme is supporting 8 pilots testing different approaches to beneficiary feedback across 6 countries²³. The pilots focus on beneficiary feedback within programmes and are therefore not evaluation focused. However, the programme is collating learning on how best to support beneficiary feedback and this will support DFID in effectively implementing a beneficiary feedback approach in evaluation. Learning so far includes the importance of good communication, research and planning, particularly to selecting the most context appropriate methods, clarifying expectations and proactively enhancing the collection of feedback from excluded individuals or groups (DFID 2014a).

B.1.2 Inclusion of beneficiary feedback in evaluation policies, standards and principles

As part of the research for this report, a review was conducted of internal and external evaluation standards and principles to assess their inclusion of beneficiary feedback.

In summary, it was found that World Vision was the organisation that was most explicit and most developed in its commitment to beneficiary feedback in evaluation. It was found that DFID related evaluation standards and guidance showed a limited commitment to beneficiary feedback. On the whole, commitments need to be inferred from DFID standards and guidance. **DFID's evaluation policy and Evaluation Quality Assurance Template do not provide a sufficient framework for beneficiary feedback in evaluation.** While a commissioner or tenderer pre-disposed to beneficiary feedback may well read an implicit requirement for beneficiary feedback, this may not be evident to those not yet pre-disposed or even aware of the value of beneficiary feedback in evaluation. The 2010 **OECD DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, that DFID has signed up to, do contain both explicit and implicit inclusion of beneficiary feedback principles at each of the key stages of the evaluation process** (see paragraphs 1.6, 1.7 2.5, 3.2, 3.15 and 4.3).

Table 1 below highlights the evaluation policies and standards that were reviewed to assess their commitment to taking beneficiary feedback into account during evaluations. It highlights where commitments are explicit and where they are inferred. Annex 3 contains the detailed analysis of different clauses.

²³ The pilots are operating within UK AID Direct- DFID's vehicle for providing support to civil society organisations. World Vision and INTRAC are the implementing partners. The underlying theory of change for the programme is that increased aid transparency together with beneficiary feedback will lead to greater oversight in how aid is used, and therefore give greater accountability in donor decision making and influence better development results.

Table 1: Inclusion of beneficiary feedback in selected Evaluation Policies and Standards

Name	Explicit inclusion of beneficiary feedback?	Implicit/ could be read as including beneficiary feedback requirements
DFID's Evaluation Policy (2013)		✓
DFID ethics principles for research and evaluation (2011)	✓	✓
Civil Society Challenge Fund Evaluation Guidelines (2014)	✓	
Revised 2014 Programme Partnerships Arrangements (PPA) Evaluation Strategy (2014)		✓
OECD DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (2010)	✓	✓
OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria (2000)		✓
Plan International Evaluation Standards (2014)	✓	
World Vision LEAP Learning through Evaluation with Accountability and Planning Evaluation Report Guidelines (2008)	✓	
BOND Evidence Principles (2013)	✓	

Table 2 situates a beneficiary feedback approach, as developed in Part A of this paper, within key principles of good evaluation, as per DFID's Evaluation Policy (2013) and the OECD DAC Principles (1991).

Table 2: Evaluation Principles and beneficiary feedback

Principle	How Beneficiary Feedback supports Principle
Utility Principle	<p>Evaluations are expected to be designed to be of use to all those affected directly and indirectly by findings and recommendations (DFID 2013: 7).</p> <p>Beneficiaries will be affected by findings and recommendations, particularly if a recommendation is programme closure or scaling up. Lessons from one community involved in a global programme on what they did particularly effectively or how they overcome challenges may also be useful to another community engaged in the programme elsewhere.</p>
Transparency Principle	<p>The transparency principle requires that findings are available and accessible (DFID 2013: 6).</p> <p>While there is no explicit mention of availability and accessibility to beneficiaries this can be inferred. This would require more, however, than website publication after an evaluation has been completed. Due consideration will therefore be required of how best to meet the principle in relation to beneficiaries in any dissemination and communications plan.</p>
Ethics Principle	<p>Feedback of those and to those engaged in a programme falls clearly within principles of ethical evaluation.</p> <p>DFID's Ethics principles for research and evaluation (2011) require that all DFID funded research/ evaluation should have particular emphasis on ensuring participation from women and socially excluded groups²⁴.</p>
Quality Principle	<p>Beneficiary feedback can support the meeting of each of the OECD DAC evaluation criteria (see Annex 3).</p> <p>Ensuring beneficiary feedback at each stage of the evaluation process, where appropriate, will support evaluation design through asking those directly affected by the intervention whether the evaluation approaches and methods will enable the right people to be reached in the best way to solicit meaningful responses.</p>

It is important to note here that mis-interpretation of the principle of evaluation independence has worked against implementing DFID's commitments to beneficiary feedback. DFID's Evaluation Policy (2013) notes the conditions of independence as: *"those conducting the evaluation must be*

²⁴ Ethics principles will also need to guide the "How to" meaningfully and appropriately enhance beneficiary feedback, including respecting do no harm principles. Under ethical criteria for impact evaluations Stern et al (2012) include the specification and use of feedback and validation procedures that involve stakeholders.

objective and not connected with the intervention under study". This has been interpreted by some as meaning that beneficiaries should not be involved in participating in the evaluation as they are connected to the intervention. This interpretation would preclude any participatory method, which is clearly not the intention of the Policy. This report highlights a need for DFID to clarify its understanding of independence in order to move forward with implementing a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.

Section Summary

This section has:

- Located a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation within the context of evaluation policies, standards and principles as well as DFID's own internal rules and guidance.
- Noted that DFID's evaluation policy and Evaluation Quality Assurance Template do not provide an adequate framework for beneficiary feedback in evaluation. Inclusion of beneficiary feedback is often implicit within current commitments rather than explicit.
- Recommended that DFID make its requirements explicit to enhance both transparency in its requirements of staff, grantees and evaluation teams and methodological rigour. This includes locating beneficiary feedback within the principle of evaluation independence.

The Section below analyses the current practice of beneficiary feedback in evaluation.

B.2 Learning from experience: Assessment of current practice

It is important to note that there was no evidence of a systematic review of beneficiary feedback in evaluation at the time of writing this paper. Existing reviews have focused on the use of beneficiary feedback as a tool for informing on-going programme management but have not been evaluation specific.²⁵

This paper draws on learning from:

Beneficiary feedback as a tool for on-going programme management;

- Individual examples of beneficiary feedback in evaluation obtained for this specific piece of research. Learning was extracted from interviews, e-discussions and a review of evaluation designs, terms of reference, inception reports and evaluation reports, as well as methodological tools.
- The wealth of learning from the literature on participatory evaluation and "beneficiary assessments"²⁶.

B.2.1 Existing analysis of current performance of beneficiary feedback in the development sector generally

There has been a renewed interest in developing more systematic approaches to enhancing beneficiary voice in development efforts, through feedback as well as through other methods. As Guijt notes: *"many people and organisations simply feel it is 'time to listen' to the women, men and children on the receiving end of aid efforts"* (2014b). In 2013, the [World Bank](#) announced that it was committed to gathering participant feedback in all of its projects that have clear participants.

It is worth noting that in the humanitarian sector, the need to involve beneficiaries in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes has been codified in various initiatives. These include

²⁵ [Jump](#) (2013), [Threlfall](#) (2013) and Bonino et al (2014) provide the most comprehensive reviews to date See also Isabella Jean. "Closing the Loop Systematic Feedback Mechanisms in International Assistance Efforts." Monthly Developments 30, no. 12 (February 2012).

²⁶ Initially used by the World Bank, see Salmen 1998 and 2002, Shurtt and Ruedin 2013 and Ticehurst 2013.

the [2010 Humanitarian Accountability Partnership \(HAP\) Principles of Accountability](#), the [Sphere Project](#) and the recently approved [Core Humanitarian Standard](#). UNHCR has used mandatory participatory assessments with women, men, girls and boys of different backgrounds to inform country office planning for over 10 years.

However, even in this sector, it is important to note that:

“While those affected by crisis may be engaged during implementation (including by providing time, labour, and feedback) and monitoring (again by providing feedback), they are even less involved during evaluation” ([Brown et al. 2014: 14](#)).

This is a state of affairs that the US Senate has recognised, passing the [Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act 2015](#) that requires that:

“funds made available for monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian assistance shall be made available, as appropriate, for the regular collection and feedback obtained directly from beneficiaries of humanitarian programs (...) to maximize effectiveness of programs and accountability to beneficiaries. In addition grantees that receive funds under such headings shall establish procedures for collecting and responding to such feedback including developing a methodology for collecting the feedback that ensures a representative and accurate reflection of beneficiary views (pages 1223-24, Division J).

In the development sector, there is no uniform set of standards. Instead, organisations and networks have committed to their own approaches. While it could be argued that this is necessary so that organisations can find approaches that best suit their needs and contexts, it can also be argued that this may well have furthered sectoral confusion and led to missed opportunities for enhancing beneficiary feedback. In 2009, an influential paper was published concluding that “A particular challenge for aid is that there is a broken ‘feedback loop’ connecting the intended beneficiaries and decision-makers” (Barder 2009). While awareness of this was not new- participatory development practitioners have been flagging this issue up for decades- there has been a renewed interest in developing more systematic approaches to enhancing beneficiary voice in development efforts. In 2014, [Interaction](#)²⁷, conducted a mapping with its members to locate individual members experimenting with feedback mechanisms (See Levine and Grino 2014). The [Bond](#)²⁸ [Health Check](#) assesses UK NGOs’ practices in relation to transparency and participation of beneficiaries. [Feedback Labs](#) is a consortium of organisations “trying to create a new culture that recognizes that collecting and responding to feedback from the people we are trying to help is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do”. The [Big Development Data Shift](#) led by Civicus is “a bottom up approach designed to put citizens at the centre of the development agenda” through developing citizen-generated data for monitoring of MDGs and other global commitments. Again, there is no specific effort to tackle beneficiary feedback *in evaluation*, although it is worth noting that the Terms of Reference of evaluations commissioned by UN WOMEN now require the use of participatory methods (pers.comm.).

A recent survey shows that NGOs in the development sector are still facing challenges in integrating beneficiary feedback, despite rhetorical commitment. UK BOND’s 2013 Health Check report noted that transparency and participation of beneficiaries was a relatively low-scoring pillar overall, with just under 20% of organisations systematically making information available to beneficiaries, consulting with them throughout the project cycle and seeking feedback from them at all stages. The report concludes that the scores “generally suggest that engagement with the people organisations work with and for could be made more systematic and consistent, and there is a need for more joint working and two-way communications”.

²⁷ The largest alliance of U.S. private voluntary organizations and partners identified as associate members, with over 180 members.

²⁸ [BOND](#) is the UK membership body for NGOs working in international development.

Less recent, but still illustrative, is a 2006 Keystone Accountability survey on the ways civil society organizations and donors learn from and account to the intended beneficiaries of their work showed an important discrepancy between appreciation/ perceived value by donors on having views of beneficiaries in understanding performance of grantees (94% said this would be valuable or extremely valuable) and requirement for grantees to report on beneficiaries' views where only 17 % routinely require grantees to report on beneficiaries' views on day-to-day performance, and only 20% routinely require grantees to report on beneficiaries' views of their contributions to long-term development impact (Bonbright 2006)²⁹.

When it comes to evaluation, performance is even lower, as noted by Brown and colleagues during the Listening Project:

"While those affected by crisis may be engaged during implementation (including by providing time, labour, and feedback) and monitoring (again by providing feedback), they are even less involved during evaluation" (Brown et al. 2014: 14).

It is perhaps sobering to note that this quote shows that there has been little evolution since Cracknell's conclusion almost 20 years ago that the key weaknesses of donor evaluation practices are *"inadequate feedback, and a failure to involve the stakeholders in evaluations"* (Cracknell 1996).

B.2.2 Specific examples of beneficiary feedback in evaluation

As part of the assessment of current practice, a wide net was cast to solicit examples of beneficiary feedback in evaluation (see Introduction section on methodology). Of the evaluations sourced for this paper, 32 were reviewed in more depth. They were mapped according to a) evaluation stage and b) type of feedback (see Part 1 for typology).

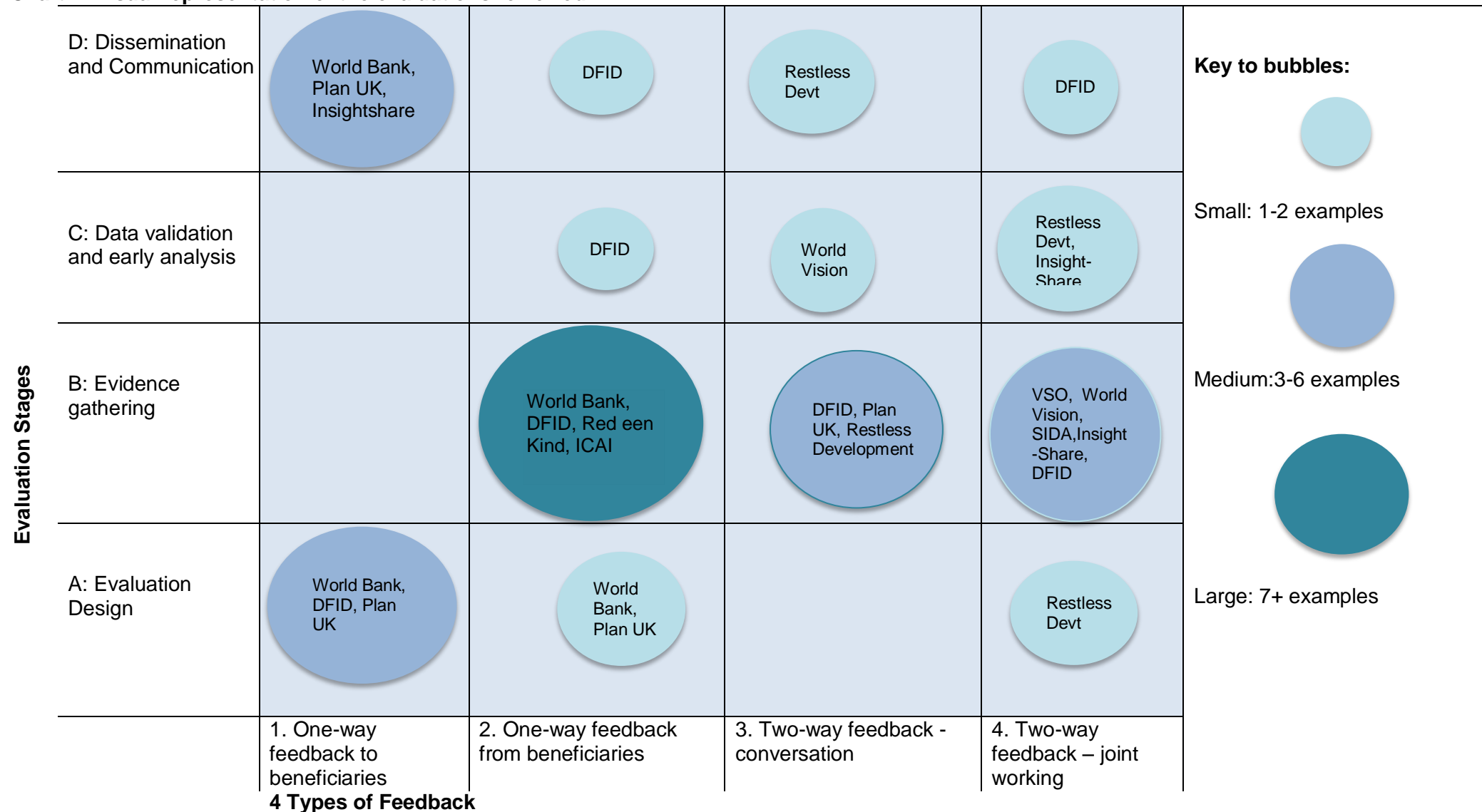
Chart 1 below provides a visual analysis of the evaluations reviewed, showing the quantity of evaluations responding to each type and stage.

Each bubble on the chart represents examples of evaluations that have employed the particular feedback type at each stage of the evaluation process. The size of bubble corresponds with the number of examples. In addition, the name of the organisation which provided at least one example is noted within the bubble. The smallest bubble shows instances of 1-2 examples; the medium (light blue) bubble shows instances of 3-6 examples; and; the largest (dark blue) bubble shows instances of 7 or more examples.

Annex 4 provides further detail of the examples shown in the Chart.

²⁹ While the survey was conducted in 2006, there is no indication from this research that the situation would be radically different should the survey be conducted again.

Chart 1: Visual representation of the evaluations reviewed.



The chart reveals that the majority of examples were related to the evidence gathering stage of the evaluation process. This is highlighted in the arrow visual below. There were few examples of beneficiary feedback at design, data validation and early analysis or dissemination stages- particularly where the “beneficiary” is defined in the narrowest sense as being women, men, girls and boys living in poverty. Where the “beneficiary” is defined as an institution then more examples were found of feedback at dissemination stages, with some cases of institutions being engaged in early validation and analysis of findings.



Within the evidence gathering stage, the majority of evaluations reviewed had engaged one-way feedback from beneficiaries. In practice, most examples were limited to surveys, with a handful of Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Examples of two-way feedback were also found, although often these were isolated examples resulting from the commissioning of evaluators who work in a participatory manner rather than an organisation wide commitment to engaging two way feedback during the evidence gathering phase of the evaluation³⁰.

It is also worth noting that the evaluations analysed for this paper frequently failed to line up with the beneficiary feedback principles of the programme itself. A working hypothesis had been that evaluations of programmes flagged as showing good practice in beneficiary feedback in on-going programme management would be those most likely to demonstrate good practice in beneficiary feedback in evaluation as many of the conditions for feedback would already be in place for the evaluation team to build on. To test the hypothesis, evaluations of programmes that had been lauded for bringing the feedback of beneficiaries into programme monitoring and decision making were selected for analysis. Unfortunately, evaluations of most of these initiatives are scheduled for 2015. The ones that were reviewed did not evidence beneficiary feedback in the evaluation process, other than as part of evidence gathering³¹. This was also the case for the ICAI assessments reviewed³².

“Often beneficiary feedback in evaluation is poorly done. There is a lack of reflection of how we collect beneficiary feedback, the purpose of collection and what we use it for. This leads to missed opportunities for use. The aim should be to understand how people are interacting with the programme and their views on how it is working, what their experiences are, whether their priorities are the same as ours. Then we should follow through with appropriate support. Instead, beneficiary feedback is often interpreted as surveys with those we happen to be able to find. It is often seen as a stand-alone activity with no clear structure rather than a core element of the programme cycle”. DFID Staff member.

Annex 4 provides additional detail of the different examples of methods used for beneficiary feedback in evaluation. Table 3 below highlight a few of the good practices found.

³⁰ This is perhaps surprising when one considers the multitude of tried and tested methods available to evaluators. These include participatory methods, such as participatory video (Lemaire and Lunch 2014), PRA methods (Chambers 1994), and the most significant change technique (Davies and Dart 2005). The People First Impact Method was used in a number of the examples provided, see <http://p-fim.org/>.

³¹ This included a document review of the annual reviews of PATHS 2 Nigeria, the planned evaluation for DFID’s Beneficiary Feedback pilot programme (since changed into a learning review) and evaluations of Yemen’s Social Fund for Development and Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme.

³² ICAI’s assessments of DFID’s Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programming in Sudan (2013); of Empowerment and Accountability in Ghana and Malawi (2013); of Health Programming in Burma (2013) and of DFID’s Approach to Anti-Corruption and its Impact on the Poor (2014).

Table 3: Examples of different types of beneficiary feedback at different evaluation stages

	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Two-way feedback - inter active conversation between beneficiaries and evaluators	Two-way feedback through participatory evaluation
Evaluation Design	Draft evaluation questions were shared with groups of young people prior to field visits. This was to ensure that a) consent to participate was informed and b) to provide young people with the opportunity to comment on/ modify the proposed questions. In some countries, the protocol was followed prior to the evaluation team's arrival. In others it wasn't. (Plan UK Global Evaluation of Youth Governance Programme).		The evaluation team had an initial set of in-country meetings with community members to gather information and to discuss/agree the draft research questions and tools. These informal, guided conversations with beneficiaries (and programme staff) used tools such as life history interviews identifying changes in individuals' lives and drivers of those changes, to be able to understand the effects of the project on their current situation. (Restless Development)	No specific examples
Evidence gathering	No specific examples	A series of Client Satisfaction surveys were used to evaluate: - How people view changes in lives and livelihoods generally - Importance and quality of services of partner organisation - Perception on outcomes This was compared with the partner organisation's own perceptions (Red een Kind) Surveys, focus group discussions and interviews with beneficiaries (ICAI, DFID evaluations various plus other evaluations reviewed)	Observation, surveys, focus group discussions to test findings from survey (Evaluation of the International Citizen Service for DFID by ECORYS).	All the enumerators for both the quantitative and qualitative aspect of the evaluation were members of the beneficiary community (World Vision various)
Validation and Analysis	No specific examples	Validation of quantitative surveys through qualitative discussions (DFID Helmund Monitoring and Evaluation programme and others)	Data analysis and validation was conducted with community mayors and community representatives. A participatory ranking exercise using sticky dots and flipchart paper was conducted to assess the perception of the participants on the process and accuracy of the data. (World Vision various)	Participatory video was used as part of a mixed methods evaluation to pull out the programme's contribution to social change. Beneficiaries were trained in the method and filmed and edited the videos themselves to reduce censoring of their voices (InsightShare with Impact Ready for UN Women).
Dissemination and Communication	Evaluation findings shared in youth friendly format in local language (French and Spanish) with all participants. Plan UK	No specific examples	Findings fed back to all local staff, including Board Members and senior staff. Local staff fed findings back to community level participants, including data included in excel spreadsheets. (People First Impact Method P-FIM used globally with International Red Cross Confederation, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme and Save the Children. Recently with DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund project in Cameroon)	A screening was held by the beneficiary participatory video team to share and discuss views with other beneficiaries and support transparency. Copies of the video were disseminated as were photo stories taken from the video. (InsightShare for UN Women).

Section Summary

This Section has:

- Noted that there has been a renewed interest in developing more systematic approaches to enhancing beneficiary voice in development efforts, through feedback as well as through other methods.
- Shown that despite a commitment to beneficiary feedback, there is still a way to go to make concrete efforts in the context of evaluation.
- Found that nearly all evaluation specific examples of current practice are limited to one-way feedback from beneficiaries and to the evidence gathering stage of the evaluation. This shows a very limited application of beneficiary feedback in the evaluation context, despite the potential for engaging both one way and two way feedback at the different stages of the evaluation process, as per the framework outlined in Part A of this paper.
- Revealed that evaluations analysed have frequently failed to line up with the beneficiary feedback principles of the programme being evaluated.

Part C: Enhancing Evaluation Practice through a Beneficiary Feedback Approach

In Part B of this report, we discussed how the most common interpretation of “beneficiary feedback” in evaluation practice is of a one-way, one-off method of data extraction that takes place at the evidence gathering phase of an evaluation. This limited approach to beneficiary feedback in evaluation has important implications- both methodologically and ethically. In this section, we explore how a beneficiary feedback approach can enhance evaluation practice.

C.1 How a beneficiary feedback approach can enhance evaluation practice

There are four ways in which a well implemented beneficiary feedback approach, as defined in Part A of this report, can enhance development evaluation practice and development outcomes. These include the potential:

- Generation of more robust and rigorous evaluations particularly to ensure unintended and negative consequences are understood;
- Reduction of participation fatigue and beneficiary burden through processes that respect participants and enable them to engage in meaningful ways;
- Supporting of development and human rights outcomes;
- Making programmes more relevant and responsive.

Generation of more robust and rigorous evaluations

This paper proposes that beneficiary feedback is a structured and systematic approach to managing information flows within an evaluation. It is an approach that requires careful assessment of the most appropriate methods for enhancing beneficiary feedback at different stages of the evaluation process³³. This enhances the rigour of the evaluation process. It can enhance the likelihood of informed consent to participate in the evaluation and of informed and relevant feedback, it can support the evaluation team to ask the right questions of the right people and it can support the validation of findings and the design of relevant and realistic recommendations.

A beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation does not in any way negate the need to give due consideration to the best combination of methods for collecting reliable data from beneficiaries on the one hand and sourcing evidence from other sources (Newman 2014). As with any evaluation, consideration will need to be given to how to: avoid elite capture and bias; develop a robust sampling protocol and; defend cost effectiveness proposals and the generalizability of findings³⁴.

Reducing participation fatigue and beneficiary burden

This paper suggests that ensuring that beneficiaries feel engaged and valued in evaluation will go a long way to reducing participation fatigue. Beneficiaries are often required to be present at a given hour in a given place to meet with the evaluation experts during data collection but are often unclear as to either the purpose of the evaluation or what will be done with the feedback they provide. They are also rarely informed of the results of or the follow up to the evaluation. This leads to participation

³³ Participatory methods may be one of a chosen set of methods. While these methods have been criticised as generating subjective, hard to aggregate data, there is an increasing body of evidence that shows ways of overcoming these criticisms (Holland, Chambers, Jupp, Ali and others). Commissioners and evaluators will therefore need to build on available learning to ensure that where participatory methods are used, steps are introduced to ensure that these generate rigorous data. It is also important not to undervalue what deep research with a small sample can achieve as part of understanding and analysing quantitative data or for highlighting questions that can then be followed up through a survey.

³⁴ There are numerous texts on evaluation methods and frameworks that are relevant to enhancing rigour and robustness in data collection with beneficiaries. See Garbarino and Holland 2009; Stern et al. 2012 and others for impact evaluation methods; Jupp and Ali 2010 for a methodology for quantifying qualitative outcomes obtained through the analysis of men and women living in poverty that meets the criteria for rigour and robustness and; Salmen 2002 for sampling for beneficiary assessment.

fatigue or beneficiaries feeling a bit “used” (Anderson et al 2012). Enhancing information flow at each stage of the evaluation process and engaging beneficiaries in meaningful ways could well reduce beneficiaries concerns in this regard.

Two contrasting cases of feedback are illustrative of the role of two-way feedback in reducing participation fatigue and enhancing ongoing beneficiary engagement in evidence gathering processes. Both cases involved the use of mobile phone technology to solicit the views of beneficiaries in programme performance. In Case 1, a real time evaluation of the Syria response in Lebanon, users were initially enthusiastic in providing feedback via mobile phone. However, after one year of not receiving any information about resulting actions, they stopped texting (pers.comm.interview with one of evaluation team). In Case 2, where the team is making a point of providing regular feedback to texters, beneficiaries have continued to provide their feedback and have in fact increased their feedback (interview with VotoMobile, a finding also revealed from interviews with CARE in Dadaab refugee camp).

In terms of reducing the beneficiary burden, engaging beneficiaries during evaluation design could well highlight which groups of beneficiaries are most frequently solicited and who are most frequently left out. This could inform sampling to ensure that beneficiaries who are least solicited may be engaged. It could also support evaluation teams in identifying whether beneficiaries have recently been involved in another evaluation, the results of which could be used by the evaluation team rather than duplicated.

Supporting development and human rights outcomes

It is important to consider the implications of one way feedback for supporting of development and human rights outcomes. Information is power and not sharing information is therefore, not only ethically questionable, but also disempowering. Beneficiaries can feel empowered through being engaged in the evaluation process (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). This is of value in and of itself if one expects international development to have empowerment as part of its broader goal. This aspiration was clearly articulated by the then UK Secretary of State for Development (DFID) back in 2012. More specifically, beneficiaries may learn skills relating to evaluation which may enhance their ability to monitor and evaluate programmes for themselves and feedback when services are not satisfactory.

The right to participate in decisions which affect us is enshrined in numerous international rights conventions. Evaluations contribute to decision making, often very important decision making. The right to engage in evaluations is therefore basic rights based evaluation practice. The importance of ensuring evaluation findings are effectively responded to is stipulated in OECD DAC principles which all major donors have signed up to.

Enhancing Programming

A structured approach to beneficiary feedback in evaluation can provide important data for enhancing programme design and outcomes. It can:

- Identify who is and is not benefiting from the programme. This will enable staff to improve the targeting of, reach of, and impact of programme assistance where an evaluation is conducted mid-term, for example;

“When we listen to the people whose lives we hope will improve as the result of development interventions, they overwhelmingly tell us that we have not been listening to how they express their needs, taken into account their values and interests, or paid attention to their assessment of intervention success or failure”. Anderson et al (2012).

“There is an implicit and faulty assumption that in international development that we talk to beneficiaries all the time, but even partners don’t. We don’t even include partners”. (INGO staff member)

“We know far too little about the preferences and experiences of the intended beneficiaries of aid and we know far too little about what is reaching them and providing them with the services they need ... We should not rely on top down evaluations. We need to find out more from the intended beneficiaries, they are best placed to judge what is working and if it meets their needs. We need to make sure that our decisions are driven by that evidence. .. Put power in hands of people themselves. Given information people are able to demand better services”. (Barder 2010)

- Support course correction, where adaptive programming is feasible;
- Support learning about both success and failure. This can be shared with other communities engaged with the programme or with similar programmes to support the building on success rather than duplication of errors;
- Support oversight of how funds are being spent, preventing corruption, misuse or leakage of funds (DFID 2012) and improve organisational reputation and beneficiary satisfaction³⁵.

A beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation does require consideration of the flexibility in programme management to enable adaptive programming. For example, where there is no scope for adaptive programming, it may not be appropriate to engage a two-way participatory evaluation process or it would need to be done very carefully. Where adaptive programming is core to the programme design and implementation, or end term evaluations which will serve to inform future programme design, one might expect two way feedback as a minimum requirement of the evaluation process.

The matrix below highlights the specific ways in which different types of feedback at different stages of the evaluation process can enhance evaluation practice. The information has been synthesised from the literature review and interviews. As more organisations start to engage a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation, it will be helpful to build up the evidence base as to additional benefits to programming. For example, whether engaging a systematic approach to beneficiary feedback in evaluation leads to greater beneficiary engagement in programme implementation. **The collation of such evidence will be an important contribution to the work on beneficiary feedback, not only in evaluation but throughout the programme cycle³⁶.**

Box 2 Examples of outcomes from a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation

Beneficiary assessments conducted by the World Bank revealed information that would not have come up using a one way extractive method of data collection. The information led to the closure of major programmes. In one example in a central African state under a dictatorial regime, beneficiary assessment was used to evaluate an agricultural programme that was intended to increase farmers' income by providing subsidized seeds and fertilizer production. It was revealed that while the project did in fact augment production, it had little effect on the farmers' income because the country feeder roads were in such bad condition that the farmers could not get the product to market. Instead, a group of merchants with trucks became middlemen and gained the bulk of the increased income from the project. The value of the beneficiary approach is that, via conversational interviewing, focus groups and, where feasible, participant observation, trust is created between interviewer and intended beneficiary such that valid information is obtained. Source: Lawrence Salmen pers. comm.

In an evaluation of the work of another international organisation, beneficiaries were asked to rank how different donors they engaged with had contributed to meeting the outcome attributed to the donor being evaluated and how. This feedback revealed the important but unexpected finding that the donor providing the smallest amount of investment had been the most important contributor to the outcome (Groves et al 2012).

Box 2 highlights two examples of outcomes from a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.

³⁵ Research from the UK has demonstrated that listening to clients contributed to beneficiaries' levels of satisfaction with a charity's provision of services, enhancing organisational reputation (Bennett and Barkensjo 2005).

³⁶ In a separate piece of work, the author of this report has recommended that DFID might wish to consider collating examples of outcomes arising from beneficiary feedback as part of the monitoring function. For example as a result of beneficiary feedback during monitoring, World Vision has changed the way in which it rolled out one of its livelihoods programmes, the health care products being distributed and the criteria for their cash for work programme. IPPF received feedback that menstruation was one of the biggest issues amongst a group of beneficiaries, yet this was not a component of their programme. The programme was re-defined as a result. This illustrates the relevance of feedback for programme design and adaptation to best meet the needs of beneficiaries.

Matrix 2: Methodological and ethical advantages to engaging a structured, systematic approach to beneficiary feedback at different stages of the evaluation process

	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Two-way feedback - inter active conversation between beneficiaries and evaluators	Two-way feedback through participatory evaluation
Evaluation Design	Increasing informed consent Increasing beneficiaries' ability to consult and prepare so as to provide informed opinion and evidence	Validation or otherwise of evaluation questions, protocol or methodology to enhance design.	Potential for enhanced evaluation design through questioning and refinement of methodology and evaluation questions Potential for improving targeting of/ reach of evaluation informants and target audience, Including ensuring that excluded groups are included.	Potential for enhanced design through breaking down of power relationships between external evaluators and beneficiaries, and enhanced understanding of context.
Evidence gathering	Enhanced transparency of process Enabling beneficiaries to have the option of requesting that their views are sought	Beneficiaries may well be in the best position to judge how and the extent to which a programme has or has not affected their lives, as well as what is and isn't working and why (see Haddad et al 2010). In this way feedback can enable donors to be clear that they are not adversely affecting those they seek to serve (Threlfall 2013). Beneficiaries may well be involved with other donors and may be able to provide comparative analysis that could be greatly beneficial in responding to evaluation questions around effectiveness and value for money, for example ³⁷ . Beneficiary feedback methods are important for triangulating with other sources of evidence in order to better interpret findings.		
Validation and Analysis	Sharing of information behind evaluative judgements thus giving beneficiaries ability to question/ provide informed feedback on conclusions should they choose to	Beneficiary feedback can support evaluators to test whether their evaluative judgements and preliminary findings reflect the experiences of those they have collected data from or it can help dispel myths or inaccurate understanding by some beneficiaries Feedback can help to ensure that findings are acted on through informing the beneficiaries of recommendations being made so they can follow up themselves (Ticehurst 2013).		
Dissemination and Communication	Beneficiary feedback can support the sharing and uptake of learning. It can also enhance beneficiary ownership of the agency agenda (Barder 2010), even if the specific project or programme is closing. Ethically it is good practice to acknowledge any feedback that beneficiaries take time to provide and note if any recommendations made have been reported, let alone acted upon.			

Section Summary

This Section has:

- Highlighted four ways in which a well implemented beneficiary feedback approach can enhance development evaluation practice and development outcomes.

³⁷ Emmi et al (2011) discuss the importance of engaging beneficiaries in defining and measuring value for money, both from an effectiveness and ethical perspective.

- Suggested that, going forwards, it will be helpful to collate evidence of outcomes arising from a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation.
- Systematically highlighted examples of the methodological and ethical advantages to engaging a beneficiary feedback approach to the different stages of the evaluation process.

C.2 below provides some practical guidance for meaningfully enhancing beneficiary feedback in a way that adds value to the evaluation process.

C.2 Checklists for evaluation commissioners and practitioners

The section offers two tools for supporting beneficiary feedback in evaluation:

- A checklist of considerations for evaluation commissioners
- A checklist of considerations for evaluation practitioners.

The tables below provide a checklist of considerations to support evaluation commissioners and decision makers in their integration of beneficiary feedback throughout the evaluation cycle. They draw on learning from DFID's beneficiary feedback pilots as well as learning obtained during the research for this paper. DFID may wish to consider how to operationalise such a checklist to avoid it becoming a tick-box exercise. For example, through dissemination, broader evaluation training conducted with the evaluation cadre, through sharing of experiences via yammer and through sharing the checklist with preferred suppliers or making it available as a link alongside tender documents.

Table 4: Considerations For Evaluation Commissioners

Evaluation Stage	Considerations
<p>Preparing for an evaluation:</p> <p>Developing the Terms of Reference</p>	<p>Is there a sufficiently strong commitment to beneficiary feedback in evaluation amongst the commissioning team? Have relevant stakeholders bought into this approach? If not, can you support them to do so?³⁸ Is adaptive programming a feature of the programme?</p> <p>Does the context section clarify who the beneficiaries are, programme relationship with beneficiaries, whether there has already been a process of beneficiary feedback during programme implementation and if so, what this was?.</p> <p>Are there other evaluations that you can link with/ build on to minimise beneficiary burden? Or programme level monitoring data or processes that could be used or built on?</p> <p>Does the methodology section require due consideration of different types of beneficiary feedback in each of the four stages of the evaluation process?</p> <p>Does the target audience section include beneficiaries,? Should it?</p> <p>Do the competencies required support meaningful and ethical beneficiary feedback?</p> <p>Would it be reasonable to include representatives of the beneficiary population (e.g. town mayor or other leaders) on the advisory group/ evaluation reference group?</p> <p>Have you required a dissemination and communication plan that includes beneficiaries/ beneficiary evaluation participants?</p> <p>Do the outputs include appropriate products for feeding back to beneficiaries living in poverty e.g. a youth friendly summary? Radio show? Poster?</p> <p>Will the evaluation questions include how well project staff listened and responded to feedback?</p> <p>Is there any scope for beneficiary input into the Terms of Reference?</p>
Design	<p>Do processes of quality assurance of inception reports and methodological papers:</p> <p>a) Assess whether beneficiary feedback has been considered in each of the four stages of evaluation design</p> <p>b) Verify that methodological choices enable meaningful beneficiary feedback in a way that adds value to the evaluation process and</p> <p>c) Validate choices made where there is a decision not to engage in beneficiary feedback in evaluation design, validation and provisional analysis, and dissemination and communication?</p>
Evidence gathering, analysis and validation	<p>Do processes of quality assurance of draft and final reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – monitor the quality of beneficiary feedback- both methodologically and ethically and – ensure that commitments made in design are followed through and that beneficiary feedback is not the first thing to “drop off” the list as often happens?
Dissemination and communication	<p>Are necessary resources invested in ensuring that dissemination and communication, including of management responses, occurs in a meaningful manner- including to beneficiaries and to decision makers within and outside of the organisation?</p> <p>Is there scope for supporting a commitment to ensuring that dissemination goes all the way down the chain, including beneficiary representatives who might have responsibility for feeding findings back to their communities? Are implementing or other partners prepared to support dissemination activities? If so, is it possible to agree a joint strategy?</p>

³⁸ Learning from DFID’s Beneficiary Feedback programmes is that there is a need for strong demand and commitment from partners from the outset.

Table 5: Considerations For Evaluation Practitioners

Evaluation Stage	Questions to consider
Design	<p>Are you sufficiently clear about who the beneficiaries are and their relationship with the programme to be evaluated? Have they previously been involved and how?</p> <p>Is design based on sufficient understanding of country context and local political economy to identify suitable feedback approaches and implementation arrangements?</p> <p>Are there existing beneficiary feedback mechanisms that you can build on? Are there community leaders that could be engaged, including outside of traditional structures?</p> <p>Is there existing beneficiary feedback data that you can use in the evaluation? If there have been prior evaluations, is it possible to identify different beneficiary groups i.e. in other regions or involved in a different aspect of the programme to reduce beneficiary burden?</p> <p>Have you thought about the different methods for enabling beneficiary feedback in the different stages of the evaluation process. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information is the feedback soliciting? • Who is most qualified to provide that information? What incentives do those people have to provide the information? What are the costs ? • How will people provide the information? Will the information be confidential? • Do you have appropriate sampling strategies for ensuring both breadth and representation of different social groups? <p>Feedback in design: Are you able to cross check evaluation questions and approach with a beneficiary representative or group? Do evaluation questions allow for beneficiaries to feedback on their experiences of the programme? How will you ensure that you are able to process all the information that you may gather?</p> <p>Have you justified choices made and put an ethical protocol for feedback in place?</p> <p>Your team: Have you got the most appropriate team engaging in the most appropriate methods? Do you have quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that your team has the skills to facilitate feedback processes appropriately?</p> <p>Are commissioning agents committed to the levels of beneficiary feedback they are requiring? If not, a discussion will be needed to match expectations.</p>
Evidence gathering	<p>Are beneficiaries sufficiently informed and prepared to be able to feedback in a meaningful, ethical way? Do they know what will be done with the information they provide?</p> <p>Are your methods enabling beneficiary feedback, as intended? If not, will you adapt your design?</p> <p>Are you building on existing data to avoid increasing beneficiary burden and participation fatigue?</p> <p>Are you able to maintain the commitments made in design? If not, why not? If feedback drops off the agenda, has this been negotiated, justified and clarified to all involved to date?</p>
Data analysis, validation and report writing.	<p>If your design factored in joint analysis and/or validation is this being conducted appropriately?</p> <p>Are expectations clear about what may or may not be included in the final report?</p>
Dissemination and communication	<p>If your design factored in dissemination and communication of findings and management response to beneficiaries/ beneficiary participants, is this being conducted appropriately? Is careful consideration being given to what feedback is relevant to which beneficiaries?</p> <p>Are commissioning agents or implementing staff clear about their responsibility for dissemination? Does this go all the way down the chain, including beneficiary representatives who might have responsibility for feeding findings back to their communities?</p>

The Section below provides additional information on some of the obstacles that are frequently cited as impeding a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation as well as some criteria for ensuring that feedback is meaningful and ethical. This analysis can support implementation of the checklists provided above.

C.3 What are the obstacles to beneficiary feedback in evaluation and how can they be overcome?

In view of the lack of clarity in the field of beneficiary feedback in evaluation, this section raises some of the obstacles frequently raised during the research and suggests a response to each.

Obstacle 1: Lack of incentives for evaluation commissioners and practitioners to enhance beneficiary feedback in evaluation processes.

In the private sector, client feedback is vital to organisational survival. The organisation is necessarily responsive, because its survival depends on client satisfaction and achieving appropriate results. In international development, beneficiaries, arguably the clients of development programmes, have few choices. This leads to a distorted power dynamic between funder and beneficiary and a lack of incentive for soliciting beneficiary feedback (Twersky et al 2013). Grant holders rarely have the resources required to answer the question of “What do the people you are trying to help actually think about what you are doing?” (Bonbright and Whittle (2014).

“My concern about ‘beneficiary feedback’ is that it is often gathered in a non-rigorous way simply to ‘tick a box’ and we don’t think carefully enough about what value it can (and cannot) add. I think considering beneficiary feedback as a more two-way interaction would be really valuable – but to be honest I think it is far beyond what we are achieving just now where we are probably not even managing to get one-way flow of information working well!”
DFID staff member.

Evaluation frameworks are currently driven by a focus on measuring results. This should make the engagement of beneficiaries in defining and measuring results essential. However, the necessary investment in enhancing beneficiaries at design and validation and early analysis stage, let alone in digging deeper with beneficiaries in order to understand survey or focus group discussion results or other evidence is not common practice-either for commissioners or evaluators³⁹.

As noted in Section 3, DFID’s current evaluation guidance does not provide a robust enough framework for a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation. Commitments are implicit rather than explicit. Quality assurance mechanisms are not picking up on a lack of beneficiary feedback. One implication of this is that the skill sets necessary to facilitate effective and meaningful beneficiary feedback are not included in Terms of Reference or valued by evaluation consultancies. Skills required would include listening skills, language skills, cultural sensitivity, facilitation, consensus building and collaborative problem solving (Brown 2013, see also Salmen 2002, Jacobs 2013, Threlfall, Twersky et al 2013). As well as organisational processes that allow for adaptive programming.

Encouragingly, it does appear that incentives might be changing with initiatives such as Bond’s Health Check to monitor beneficiary feedback in programming and ICAI’s regular scrutiny of DFID’s use of beneficiary feedback to inform programming. Furthermore, in 2013, the [World Bank](#) announced that it was committed to gathering participant feedback in all of its projects that have clear participants.

Recommendation: DFID should clarify its commitment to a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation and modify evaluation quality assurance mechanisms in line with this commitment. The Checklist in Section 7 will support evaluation commissioners in implementing commitments, at each

³⁹ Perversely, a focus on results driven evaluation also affects programme design incentives: “When the focus of evaluations is on quantitative measures, the incentives for aid providers follow. They plan more community meetings or other events where they can count heads to demonstrate engagement”. (Anderson et al 2012)

of the stages of the evaluation process. Commissioners may also wish to familiarise themselves and further use initiatives such as BOND's Health Check.

Obstacle 2: A beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation requires time money that is frequently not available in Terms of Reference.

Response: Where evaluations have tight, unrealistic timeframes it may well be impossible to integrate a structured approach to beneficiary feedback in a meaningful manner. A structured approach requires time to prepare the process and design and implement it appropriately. Commissioners and evaluators need to be realistic and honest about what can and cannot be achieved within the resources allocated and will need to decide whether additional time should be allocated to enable a meaningful process of beneficiary feedback in evaluation.

Obstacle 3: The potential cost of integrating a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation

Response: It is clear that obtaining rigorous evidence comes at a cost. Commissioners should be prepared for additional costs associated with beneficiary feedback. DFID could include costing of beneficiary feedback in the costing of evaluations exercise currently being carried out.

Cost should not, however, outweigh an understanding of cost-benefit whereby the benefits of beneficiary feedback in evaluation could include ensuring: the most appropriate design that asks the right questions of the right people; the most appropriate form of evidence gathering and; that results are validated with and communicated to those who may be best placed to have an opinion or to use learning. Evaluation design will need to select the most appropriate methods- some of these may be more or less costly and choices will need to be made.

No cost analyses have been made of a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation specifically. In a recent study for SIDA, Jupp and Ali (2010) did a cost analysis of a beneficiary feedback approach to monitoring and found that the robust and valid quantitative method used, based on qualitative self-assessment, cost less than 1% of annual programme expenditure. They compare this with the fact that monitoring and evaluation budgets together are often 5-10% of programme costs, concluding that the process was "*excellent value-for-money ... and arguably doing more than providing monitoring data as it also provided a focus for groups to reflect on progress and make action plans, which seem to have hastened the process of empowerment*". The World Bank estimated that the average cost of a beneficiary assessment was roughly \$70,000 -- for projects that were often over \$50 million and that the lessons learned were generally instrumental to the success or failure of the whole endeavour (Pers. Comm.).

Obstacle 4: DFID is often a commissioning agency working through partners and does not necessarily have the remit to require partners to ensure evaluations meet beneficiary feedback requirements.

Response: There are many mechanisms and agreed evaluation frameworks by which DFID influences evaluations conducted or commissioned by grantees. Beneficiary feedback mechanisms could be integrated into these and then monitored by the quality assurance mechanisms that are in place. Placing more attention on beneficiary feedback during the business case development for programme funding would also facilitate the requirement of beneficiary feedback during evaluation.

Obstacle 5: Incentives for accounting are not weighted towards beneficiaries as DFID is ultimately answerable to the British taxpayer. This concern was frequently raised in the course of the research for this report.

Response: UK bodies such as the ICAI and the Secretary of State for International Development are requiring DFID to demonstrate beneficiary feedback so while the balance may not be equal, there are requirements for enhancing beneficiary voice in UK taxpayer funded work. This response is in addition to the moral and enhanced development results arguments raised in Section C above.

Concluding thoughts: How reasonable are the proposals laid down in this paper?

This paper has explored definitional issues around “beneficiary feedback” in evaluation. It has proposed a working definition and framework for discussion. These have been situated within DFID’s own evaluation policies and systems as well as current practice, both within and outside of DFID. Various practical tools have been offered, as well as a response to some of the frequently expressed concerns. This paper is in no way exhaustive and aims to stimulate discussion and practice. It does not intend to judge or point the finger but to contribute to collective learning on improved development practice.

It is time to move beyond the normative positioning around beneficiary feedback as “a good thing” towards explicit and systematic application of different types of beneficiary feedback throughout the evaluation process. The current approach to beneficiary as data provider raises important methodological and ethical questions for evaluators. This paper has sought to highlight these and has shown that it is possible to adopt a meaningful, appropriate and robust approach to beneficiary feedback at key stages of the evaluation process, if not in all of them.

It is reasonable to expect evaluation commissioners and practitioners to give due consideration to beneficiary feedback in each of the four key stages of the evaluation process: design, evidence gathering, validation and analysis and dissemination and communication⁴⁰. Where decisions are taken not to solicit beneficiary feedback at one or more stages, it is reasonable to expect that this is justified in evaluation design to be clear that this decision to exclude beneficiaries from the evaluation process is one of design rather than of omission. The bottom line is that beneficiary feedback should be considered and explained in all methodological design and reporting.

⁴⁰ This was put to research participants and shared with the evaluation cadre. No objections were raised.

Annex 1: Inclusion of beneficiary feedback in selected Evaluation Policies and Standards

Name	Explicit inclusion of Beneficiary Feedback?	Implicit/ could be read as including beneficiary feedback requirements
DFID's Evaluation Policy (2013)		<p>Utility Principle: DFID evaluations are expected to be designed to be of use to all those affected directly and indirectly by findings and recommendations (p7) and must be accessible for the intended user (para 110).</p> <p>Transparency Principle: requires that an evaluation is undertaken with a view to sharing lessons learned publicly and enabling accountability, for example, through follow up of recommendations. This means publication of data, process and findings of evaluation. Data should be available, accessible and published on a website after an evaluation has been completed (p.6).</p> <p>Closing the Information Loop. Paragraph 104 on Stakeholder involvement notes that stakeholder involvement is critical to facilitate process and use. This is seen as necessary from the outset of the evaluation process. No explicit mention of beneficiaries.</p>
DFID Ethics principles for research and evaluation (2011)	All DFID funded research/ evaluation should have particular emphasis on ensuring participation from women and socially excluded groups. Consideration should be given to how barriers to participation can be removed (paragraph 10).	Paragraph 8 notes that DFID is committed to publication and communication of all evaluations and research studies. However, there is no mention of feeding back to beneficiaries.
Civil Society Challenge Fund Evaluation Guidelines (2014)	Section on Project Accountability (Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms) requires consideration of the following questions: Did the project collect feedback from beneficiaries? If so, describe how. Are there any examples of how the project changed course as a result of feedback from beneficiaries?	
Revised 2014 Programme Partnerships Arrangements (PPA) Evaluation Strategy (2014)		<p><i>"The primary research will also include both formal and informal feedback to inform learning for agencies, including an informal feedback presentation following completion of the research and individual reports summarising the key findings"</i> NB: This indicates a definition of beneficiary as implementing agency, rather than poor men, women, girls and boys.</p> <p><i>"The approach to the in-depth research conducted by the Evaluation Manager sets out the communication and feedback protocols that will be followed as part of any fieldwork that is undertaken to minimise the extractive nature of the research."</i> NB : protocols were not available for review.</p>
OECD DAC Quality Standards for Development	The Quality Standards can be read as requiring beneficiary feedback at all stages of the evaluation process. At some points, this is an explicit requirement. At others it is covered under inclusion of the broader term "stakeholders".	

<p>Evaluation (2010)</p>	<p>Paragraph 1.4 refers specifically to engaging beneficiaries as evaluation partners early in the process: <i>“In order to increase ownership of development and build mutual accountability for results, a partnership approach to development evaluation is systematically considered early in the process. The concept of partnership connotes an inclusive process, involving different stakeholders such as government, parliament, civil society, intended beneficiaries and international partners”</i>.</p> <p>Paragraph 1.6 refers to building the evaluation capacity of partners. Beneficiaries are included as potential partners under Paragraph 1.4. <i>“Positive effects of the evaluation process on the evaluation capacity of development partners are maximised. An evaluation may, for instance, support capacity development by improving evaluation knowledge and skills, strengthening evaluation management, stimulating demand for and use of evaluation findings, and supporting an environment of accountability and learning.”</i></p> <p>Paragraph 1.7 refers to quality control through setting up advisory boards or reference groups. Who should be on these groups is not specified but in line with the partnership approach, there is clear scope for engaging beneficiaries as part of quality control.</p> <p>Paragraph 2.5 requires that <i>“Relevant stakeholders are involved early on in the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute to evaluation design”</i>. Beneficiaries may well be relevant stakeholders and should therefore be involved in evaluation design.</p> <p>Paragraph 3.2 notes that evaluators should be independent <i>“from the development intervention, including its policy, operations and management functions, as well as intended beneficiaries. Possible conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly. The evaluation team is able to work freely and without interference. It is assured of co-operation and access to all relevant information.”</i> This has been interpreted by some as meaning that participatory evaluation with beneficiaries would jeopardise the principle of independence. However, this is a questionable interpretation as there is no accompanying restriction on participatory evaluation and indeed previous paragraphs refer to evaluation partnerships with beneficiaries.</p> <p>Paragraph 3.15 notes that <i>“Relevant stakeholders are given the</i></p>	
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	<p><i>opportunity to comment on the draft report.</i>” Depending on the evaluation, this may include beneficiary representatives.</p> <p>Paragraph 4.3 on dissemination notes that “<i>The evaluation results are presented in an accessible format and are systematically distributed internally and externally for learning and follow-up actions and to ensure transparency.</i>”</p>	
OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria (2000)		<p>The DAC criteria do not refer to beneficiary feedback. However, to fully address the criteria it could well be argued that beneficiary feedback is necessary in the following ways.</p> <p><u>Relevance:</u> Beneficiary feedback can help answer the questions of the extent to which the aid activity was/is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group i.e. beneficiaries</p> <p><u>Effectiveness:</u> Beneficiary feedback can support evaluators in assessing the extent to which objectives have been attained, as well as the factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives.</p> <p><u>Efficiency:</u> Beneficiaries are often part of interventions by different donors. They may therefore be well placed to provide a comparative lens on cost efficiency compared to alternatives.</p> <p><u>Impact:</u> Beneficiary feedback will enable understanding of the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended from the perspective of those in whose name the intervention is working.</p> <p>As Levine and Grino (2014) argue: asking beneficiaries about impacts may enable evaluators to find out that the project was successful in delivering seeds that increased crop yields, but that the seeds delivered are increasing the farmers’ dependence on large-scale agribusinesses, rather than supporting their ability to preserve local crop varieties. Or that, while women are spending more time on their own businesses and increasing their household incomes, their daughters are now staying home from school to take care of their siblings. Or that, yes, within a community, there are now members with greater conflict mitigation skills who are helping to resolve local conflicts, but this has disrupted traditional structures and therefore created new conflict.</p> <p>Beneficiary feedback conducted as part of a DFID supported programme in Ethiopia also revealed that food transfers would have been preferable to cash transfers as food was not available locally which placed an added burden on beneficiaries attempting to exchange their cash for food (pers. comm).</p> <p>See also ICAI focus on engaging beneficiaries in measuring impact e.g. 2014 Terms of Reference)</p>

		<p><i>Sustainability:</i> Beneficiary feedback can help us better measure whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. When triangulated with data from other sources it can help us understand the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the programme or project. However, it is rare for ex post evaluations to take place (for an example that engaged beneficiary feedback see Williams 2013).</p>
Plan International Evaluation Standards (2014)	Every evaluation must take account of feedback from the stakeholders who are intended to benefit directly from the programme being evaluated. This might include children and communities, partner organisations or government actors. The feedback should include comments on what value the stakeholders believe that Plan has added to their own efforts (Standard 3 Implementation).	
World Vision LEAP Learning through Evaluation with Accountability and Planning Evaluation Report Guidelines (2008)	<p>A draft or summary version of the findings and recommendations should be shared with the project staff and participants for feedback and discussion. Whenever possible, project participants and other stakeholders should be included in this process to build ownership of and verify the results. If the evaluation deals with a donor-funded project, it is advisable to invite donor representatives for a debriefing and share first evaluation results and findings with them. After gathering feedback on the summary report, the lead evaluator can leave the area/country to prepare the draft report, which is then sent out to the evaluation team members, the National Office and Implementing partner for comments.</p> <p>Evaluation objective: 5. Requires that the degree of involvement of girls, women, boys, and men in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is evaluated.</p>	
BOND Evidence Principles (2013)	BOND's Evidence Principles cover five principles designed specifically for NGOs to use when commissioning, designing and reviewing evidence-based work, including evaluation. The principles are Voice and Inclusion; Appropriateness; Triangulation, Contribution and Transparency . The principles require inclusive engagement of beneficiaries within evaluation design, implementation, validation and dissemination.	

Annex 2: Assessment of evaluations by feedback at evaluation stages and type of feedback

The table below highlights the evaluations reviewed for this paper. Evaluations are distributed according to the four evaluation stages used in this report. It also highlights whether feedback was

- One-way feedback to beneficiaries
- One-way feedback from beneficiaries
- Two-way inter active feedback between beneficiaries and evaluators in terms of a two way conversation, but with the evaluation team working independently and retaining power.
- Two-way feedback – participatory evaluation i.e. beneficiaries are part of the evaluation team.

The information is in no way exhaustive and further information would be required to test statements made by informants. Sources are available in the bibliography.

Evaluations reviewed	Evaluation Stage	Type of feedback	Additional Information
World Vision World Vision livelihoods programme evaluation Niger Source: World Vision 2008, 2011 and 2014. Interview.	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two-way feedback – participatory evaluation	Global guidelines require joint validation and appropriate dissemination of findings to beneficiaries. These are not applied universally but good practice examples found. All the enumerators for both the quantitative and qualitative aspect of the evaluation were members of the beneficiary community.
	Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information	Two-way interactive conversation	Data analysis and validation was conducted with community mayors and community representatives. A participatory ranking exercise was conducted to assess the perception of the participants on the process and accuracy of the data. Ranking used sticky dots to show the perception of the participants on the process and accuracy of the data.
Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank. Afghanistan Country Program Evaluation, Evaluation of World Bank's Youth Employment Programs and Evaluation of the World Bank Group Experience with Targeted Support to SMEs Source: World Bank 2011, 2012, 2013 and email exchange.	Feedback as part of evaluation design	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	Social media channels and ICT were used to reach out to beneficiaries in remote areas and on a larger scale. According to one of the evaluators: "Beneficiary feedback was used to a) give us a better understanding of local issues and further explore them on the ground; b.) make our evaluation process more transparent and reach out to those who we normally can't reach out to due to budgetary and time constraints; and c.) gather local knowledge to triangulate some of our findings from document research, surveys, etc. Each outreach campaign lasted somewhere between 3 months to a year (the longest), after which we always shared our final report findings with the beneficiaries who engaged with us. In some cases, we were also able to reach out to country beneficiaries before our field trips to ask for their preliminary questions and invite to meetings." However, it is not clear what proportion of beneficiaries had access to ICT and therefore which beneficiaries were excluded from feeding into the evaluation.
	Feedback on end product/ response and/or follow up	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	Sharing of report findings. No further information provided.

<p>Restless Development with ODI: Comic Relief evaluation Uganda</p> <p>Source: Email exchange.</p>	Feedback as part of evaluation design	Two- way interactive conversation	The evaluation team had an initial set of in-country meetings with community members to gather information and to discuss/agree the draft research questions and tools. These informal, guided conversations with beneficiaries (and programme staff) used tools such as life history interviews identifying changes in individuals' lives and drivers of those changes, to be able to understand the effects of the project on their current situation. It isn't clear to what extent the conversations informed design.
	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two- way inter active conversation	PRA and other methods used.
	Feedback on end product/ response and/or follow up	Two- way inter active conversation	Ran two feedback workshops on the report findings/recommendations. It isn't clear to what extent the conversations informed the final report.
<p>Plan UK with IDL Group Global PPA Evaluation</p> <p>Source: Groves 2010.</p>	Feedback as part of evaluation design	One-way feedback to beneficiaries One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Draft evaluation questions were shared with groups of young people prior to field visits. This was to ensure that a) consent to participate was informed and b) to provide young people with the opportunity to comment on/ modify the proposed questions. In some countries, the protocol was followed prior to the evaluation team's arrival. In others it wasn't.
	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two- way inter active conversation	PRA methods were used.
	Feedback on end product/ response and/or follow up	One-way feedback to beneficiaries	Sharing of Youth Friendly Summary, designed specifically for dissemination with young people. Translated into French and Spanish and distributed widely among young people involved in the programme.
<p>VSO</p> <p>Source: VSO 2014, Interview.</p>	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two-way feedback – participatory	Participatory ethnographic evaluation and research. Peer researchers trained.
<p>Insightshare Participatory Video for Evaluation for UN Women in Moldova</p> <p>Source: Insightshare 2014 plus Interview</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p> <p>Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information</p> <p>Feedback on end product/ response and/or follow up</p>	Two-way feedback – participatory	Participatory video was used as part of a mixed methods evaluation to pull out the programme's contribution to social change. Beneficiaries were trained in the method and filmed and edited the videos themselves to reduce censoring of their voices. A screening was held to share and discuss views with other beneficiaries and support transparency. Copies of the video are disseminated as are photo stories taken from the video.
<p>SIDA</p> <p>Source: IDS, IOD-PARC, and SIPU, (2014) plus Interview</p>	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two-way feedback – participatory	Reality Check methodology, including Immersions. Goal free.

<p>Red een Kind NGO in Rwanda, India and Zambia</p> <p>Source: Rijnveld, W with Geert de Jonge, (2014) plus email exchange.</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p>	<p>One-way feedback from beneficiaries</p>	<p>A series of Client Satisfaction surveys were used to evaluate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How people view changes in lives and livelihoods generally - Importance and quality of services of partner organisation - Perception on outcomes <p>This was compared with the partner organisation's own perceptions.</p>
<p>People First Impact Method P-FIM used globally with International Red Cross Confederation, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme and Save the Children. Recently with <u>DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund project in Cameroon</u></p> <p>Source: Email exchange plus multiple documents available on http://p-fim.org/reports/.</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p> <p>Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information</p> <p>Feedback on end product/ response and/or follow up</p>	<p>Two-way feedback – participatory</p>	<p>Participatory and goal-free evaluation. Evaluation judgements cross checked with beneficiaries during a second field visit. Updates on the process were also included in local radio shows. Findings fed back to all local staff, including Board Members and senior staff. Local staff fed findings back to community level participants, including data included in excel spreadsheets.</p>
<p>DFID with ESRC funding-University of Bath</p> <p>Source: Copestake, J., and Remnant, F., (2014) plus email exchange.</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p>	<p>One-way feedback from beneficiaries</p>	<p>Qualitative impact assessment protocol</p>
<p>ICAI</p> <p>Source: ICAI 2013 a, b, c and d. 2014 a, b, c, d and e.</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p>	<p>One-way feedback from beneficiaries</p>	<p>4 examples: Sudan, Ghana and Malawi, Burma, Anti-corruption (global)</p>
<p>DFID</p> <p>Yemen, Ethiopia,</p>	<p>Feedback as part of evidence gathering</p>	<p>One-way feedback from beneficiaries</p>	<p>Annual review of PATHS 2 in Nigeria showed no indication of any beneficiary feedback. This was confirmed by staff.</p>

<p>India, Nigeria (Annual review only for Nigeria, no evaluation available)</p> <p>Source: Recovery and Development Consortium (2010). ECORYS, Oxford Policy Management, the Policy Practice and Philips Consulting (2014). plus email exchange.</p>			
<p>DFID Evaluation of the International Citizen Service for DFID</p> <p>Source: ECORYS (2014)</p>	Feedback as part of evidence gathering	Two- way inter active conversation	Observation, FGDs, interviews, survey.
<p>DFID Helmund Monitoring and Evaluation Programme</p> <p>Source: Interview.</p>	Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Perception survey followed up with qualitative interviews to validate survey findings.
<p>DFID commissioned (The Chars Livelihoods Programme (Phase I) Bangladesh)</p> <p>Source: Ticehurst (2010) plus email exchange.</p>	Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information	One-way feedback from beneficiaries	Validation of quantitative surveys through qualitative discussions
<p>Oxfam America</p> <p>Source: pers. comm.</p>	Feedback as part of joint validation and or/ analysis of information	Two- way inter active conversation	Stakeholder validation of high value evaluations every three years.

Annex 3: How to ensure that beneficiary feedback is meaningful and ethical?

There are ethical considerations surrounding the use of beneficiary feedback, as with any method that seeks to engage the voice of the less powerful. Concerns relate to how data is collected, who uses the data collected and for what purposes. The approach suggested in this paper will ensure that due consideration will be given to these questions systematically at each stage of the evaluation process. This will enhance the chances of moving from extractive data collection to ethical and meaningful feedback.

The numerous guidance notes on ethical and participatory research and evaluation should be used to inform beneficiary feedback processes⁴¹. This sections highlights some of the key non-negotiables of ethically implementing a beneficiary feedback approach to evaluation:

The one principle that supersedes any consideration of beneficiary feedback is the “do no harm” principle. Badly designed and implemented beneficiary feedback brings with it a number of risks- both to the individuals involved; to the quality of the evaluation itself and to future evaluations.

Beneficiaries operate within power structures, in which they are often those with least power and where power is not exercised equally amongst beneficiaries. Understanding and being responsive to these will minimise risk to individuals. It is important to note that *not* enhancing soliciting beneficiary feedback also poses important risks to individuals. This may include missed opportunities for adaptive programming that best supports beneficiaries in coming out of poverty. Or that the programme sustains existing discriminatory power structures by omitting to engage the poorest and/ or most excluded (see also DFID 2012). This can send a message to those in authority that donors/ implementers accept existing systems of discrimination and exclusion, where only those in power are provided a voice in designing, validating and seeing the results of evaluations.

The purpose of feedback should be clear and communicated to all involved. If the purpose of the feedback is to extract data in a one-off, one-way manner this should be made clear so as to manage participants' expectations. If however, the aim is to do *more than just solicit feedback and is to focus decision makers' attention on beneficiaries own experiences and perspectives* (Jean 2012) then decision-makers need to be clear of their responsibilities and engage fully in the process.

Prepare beneficiaries for meaningful feedback. When interviewing government or other staff, evaluation teams often share interview questions in advance to enable interviewees to do the research that they might need to do to meaningfully engage with the evaluation questions, including consulting others. This very rarely happens when it comes to intended beneficiaries i.e. poor women, men and their families. Reasons given include that this will jeopardise the independence of the evaluation or that there isn't time (see commonly cited obstacles above). In practice, it is usually because no one thought to do so. This leads to lost opportunities for a) obtaining informed feedback and b) relationship building and beneficiary engagement in broader processes both within and beyond evaluations.

Principles of inclusion should guide design. As part of stakeholder analysis, it will be important to consider exactly who is going to be engaged in beneficiary feedback as well as who is not. This will be guided by questions of methodology, evaluation purpose, practicalities as well as ethics. It may well not be possible to be as inclusive as one would like but reasons for lack of inclusion should be justified in methodologies.

The level of inclusion may well be different for the different stages of evaluation. For example:

- In evaluation design, it may be that only one or two beneficiary representatives are engaged as part of the evaluation reference group and that they are tasked with seeking feedback from members

⁴¹ For example, Guijt (2014); Option (undated) Keystone (2009).

of their community, bearing in mind that “community” encompasses many different social groups and interests. Or it may be that design is participatory.

- In evidence gathering, disaggregation of “beneficiary” by sex and social group, as relevant to context (it may be ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, level of ability etc.) is a basic requirement of good evaluation practice. Evaluation teams should also explore the use of inclusive methods and practices: such as women only focus groups, power analysis, use of male/female interviewers, use of evaluators with local/minority language skills and ensuring inclusive facilitation skills.
- In validation and early analysis, it may be that it is possible to have community level discussions before leaving the field, or it may be that validation takes place with beneficiary representatives included in the evaluation reference group.
- In dissemination, DFID guidance on accessibility should be followed (see Evaluation Policy) and creative thinking can be used to explore the most inclusive methods for dissemination of findings in a particular context. It may be a radio spot, a poster in a health centre, a summary flyer in a local government office, part of a community newsletter. It will depend on the purpose of the dissemination, as defined in the evaluation dissemination and communication plan.

ICTs and mobile phones may support inclusion through being a more anonymous tool for giving feedback and for managing people’s fear of reprisals. However, this will depend on who local evaluation teams represent as well as whether data protection standards are adequately applied. They may also increase exclusion, where women, for example, may not have access to the household telephone.

Annex 4: List of people who contributed to the findings (email/telephone/face to face)

	Surname	First name	Position	Organisation
Group A: Department for International Development (DFID) and other government bodies				
	Arnold	Catherine	Social Development Adviser, Civil Service Dept.	DFID
	Bevan	Nathanael	Deputy Team Leader, Evidence into Action Team, Research and Evidence Division	DFID
	Cran-McGreehin	Alexandra	Head of Secretariat	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
	Curran	Zaza	Research	DFID
	Henttinen	Anna	Head of Profession for Evaluation	DFID
	Hinton	Roopa		DFID
	Hoy	Caroline	Evaluation Advisor Civil Society Department	DFID
	Newman	Kirsty	Team Leader, Evidence into Action Team, Research and Evidence Division	DFID
	Patrick	Morag	Policy Adviser, Improving Aid Impact	DFID
	Payne	Lina	Evaluation and Social Development Advisor, Evaluation Department	DFID
	Schuler	Nina	Social Development Advisor, Finance Performance and Impact Department	DFID
Group B: International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)				
	Clark	Janet	Project Manager - Monitoring and Evaluation	VSO International
	Jacobs	Alex	Director, Programme Effectiveness	Plan International
	Ghaye	Tony	Director	Reflective Learning - International
	Groves	Adam	Learning Group Chair	BOND
	Haikin	Matt	ICT expert	Aptivate
	Hénon	Sarah	Analyst & Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) Coordinator, Learning Group Chair	Development Initiatives c/o Development Research and Training (DRT)
	Mills	Pete	Senior Evaluation Officer (Donor Accountability)	International Planned Parenthood Federation Central Office
	Munyiri	Simon	M & E Officer, Refugee Assistance Programme, Dadaab	CARE International in Kenya
	O' Donnell	Michael		BOND
	Williams	Hilary		World Vision
	Winder	Yo	Global Partnerships and Accountability Advisor	Oxfam
Group C: Private Sector Organisations				
	Baptist	Carrie	Evaluation Consultant	Coffey
	Gorrie	Jon	KPMG ICAI team leader	KPMG
	Holland	Jeremy		OPML
	Kaybryn	Jo	Principal Consultant	IOD PARC consultancy
	Lloyd	Rob	Principle Consultant	ITAD
	Muñiz	Soledad	Head PV M&E Programme	InsightShare
	O'Reilly	Sheelagh	Director	IOD PARC consultancy

	Seibold	Juliette	Senior Consultant	Triple Line consulting
	Watson	Sadie	Director	IOD PARC consultancy
Group D: Other (e.g. academic, individuals)				
	Chapman	Jenny	Evaluation Consultant	Independent
	Mancini	Antonella	Consultant	Independent
	Wilson	Pauline	Consultant	Independent
	Youker	Brandon	Assistant Professor, School of Social Work	Grand Valley State University
Group E: Beneficiary Feedback Learning Partnership				
	Akhvlediani	Ana	Action Aid	
	Ashton	Tom	Care International	
	Benham	Carla	World Vision	
	Budziszewski	Tala	Plan UK	
	Damji	Yasmin	Action Aid	
	Francis	Ed	Restless Development	
	Gannon	Kate	Plan UK	
	Harrison	Eleanor	Global Giving	
	Hart	Kate	DFID	
	Hettiarachchi	Madara	World Vision International	
	Hinds	Ruth	Water Aid	
	Jean	Isabella	CDA Collaborative	
	Jones	Harriet	CAFOD	
	Langdon	Kat	Development Initiatives	
	Macdonald	Daisy	Sightsavers	
	Mahoney	Siobhan	Plan UK	
	Milesi	Cecilia	Independent	
	Mills	Pete	IPPF	
	Munyas	Burcu	Save the Children	
	Muyumbu	Gilbert	Care International	
	Opiyo	Naomi	World Vision	
	Quevedo	Gabriela	Progressio	
	Rana	Laura	Youth Business	
	Roxberg	Marta	Care International	
	Saikia	Mousumi	Islamic Relief Worldwide	
	Williams	Adelaine	University of Warwick	
	Winder	Yoma	Oxfam	

The following people also contributed to the debates around this paper via Blog, email and Pelican and MandE list-serve contributors:

Judi Aubel	Claudia Fumo	Stephen Porter
Jacqueline Berman	Irene Guijt	Fiona Remnant
Francesca Bonino	Nathan Horst	Jess Romo
Daniel Buckles	Brian Lencd	Shibashish Sahoo
Jindra Cekan	Haneen Malallah	Bahar Salimova
Paula Claycomb	Gerry McCarthy	Lawrence Salmen
Tim Conway	David J N Musendo	Kevin Schuster
Rick Davies	Paul O'Hagan	Sarah Stachowiak
Geer De Jonge	F C Page	Daniel Ticehurst
David Devlin-Foltz	Davel Patel	Tina Wallace
Charles Dewa	Jake Phelan	Bob Williams
Jessica Greenhalf	Frank Page	Penny Hawkins

Annex 5: Terms of Reference: Beneficiary Feedback in evaluation and Research

Purpose

To improve understanding and use of beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research programmes, within DFID and amongst other development practitioners.

To produce a short practical note that summarises the literature on beneficiary feedback, its current and potential use within evaluation and research, and provide recommendations for future DFID guidance on incorporating beneficiary feedback within evaluation and research programmes.

Introduction

DFID is seeking a contractor to provide an analytical report that summarises and analyses the literature on beneficiary feedback within evaluation and research programmes, looking at definitional issues, identifying and synthesising lessons about what works, where, when and why, challenges, and issues to consider when using beneficiary feedback within evaluation and research.

The main purpose of the study is to set out the existing literature on, and examples of, beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research programmes, to assist DFID and other donors and commissioners of evaluations and research to improve their use of beneficiary feedback in evaluation.

Audience

The primary audience for the report is DFID staff and other development practitioners who commission or provide advice on research and evaluation products. Within DFID this includes Research and Evidence Division (RED) staff, and evaluation advisers working at country level. The note will also be of wider interest to development practitioners with an interest in participatory development approaches.

Objectives and scope

The contractor is expected to deliver a short report (maximum of 30 pages, excluding annexes) that should identify and synthesise the existing literature on beneficiary feedback in research and evaluation. The work should inform DFID and other development agencies about:

- how beneficiary feedback differs from other forms of participatory methodologies and/or stakeholder engagement in evaluation and research;
- how well conducted beneficiary feedback can be situated within principles of good evaluation and research;
- any relevant minimum standards necessary to separate beneficiary feedback from more extractive methods of evidence gathering;
- issues to consider in avoiding bias and elite capture, and
- how to ensure rigour and robustness when using beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research.

The report should identify the main rationale for using beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research, and identify any current obstacles in expanding the use of beneficiary feedback in international development evaluation and research, particularly in relation to DFID evaluation policy and practice, including any evaluation and research uptake guidelines.

The report should recognise both the similarities and the differences between evaluation and research in relation to beneficiary feedback. This will include recognising features that distinguish evaluation from research, particularly the fundamental importance of the involvement of stakeholders in evaluative activities.

The scope of work will include theoretical literature on the scope and purpose of beneficiary feedback, identification of any good practice using beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research, and recommendations for expanding/systematising the use of beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research.

The study should include the following:

- a) Identify development partners, academics and evaluation practitioners interested in the use of beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research in order to map current beneficiary feedback practice and identify potential future partners
- b) Identify and assess different definitions of beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research, including situating beneficiary feedback within the broader realm of participatory evaluation and operational research, and any definitional requirements separating beneficiary feedback from extractive data collection, real-time and participatory monitoring etc.
- c) Review the selected bibliography attached and additional publically available material where this will add significant value
- d) Engage in dialogue with development practitioners using beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research, including liaising with the Bond beneficiary feedback group and existing Research Programme Consortia
- e) Systematically assess and analyse the methods, and approaches for carrying out beneficiary feedback in evaluation and research, taking into account, timing, cost, type of programme etc., and addressing issues such as rigour of evidence, bias, generalizability and cost effectiveness/proportionate approaches
- f) Provide an overview of where and how beneficiary feedback is currently being used within evaluation and research, both within DFID and externally, highlighting and emerging best practice, innovative techniques, challenges and opportunities
- g) Identify issues for consideration in commissioning evaluations and/or research programmes using beneficiary feedback, including scope, content, cost, process, timing, and use
- h) Provide recommendations for future DFID guidance on beneficiary feedback, including a review of any existing guidance

The contractor will also be expected to support the dissemination of report findings. This will include preparation of an article and presentation at an evaluation conference, but may also involve drafting and sharing a report summary, additional engagement with DFID events, particularly professional development conferences or other seminars. This will be agreed in advance between the contractor and study manager.

DFID will establish a small internal steering group consisting of advisers working on beneficiary feedback. This will be led by Lina Payne (evaluation and Social Development Adviser) with support from Zaza Curran (Social Development Adviser in RED) additional members of this group may include social development advisers in Civil Society Department and the Improving Aid Impact Team.

Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected as part of the project:

- An inception report/analytical framework for the report (of no more than 4 pages) to include a detailed work plan. This is expected to include any inclusion criteria of what will be covered as well as draft timeline for activities. Due by 26 September 2014. DFID will provide any comments by 22 September with the final work plan to be approved by 10 October.
- Draft final report. Due by 17 November 2014. DFID will collate and share steering group comments on the draft report by 1 December 2014.
- Final report, taking on board suggestions to the draft final report. Due by 15 December 2014. The final report should not exceed 30 pages, excluding annexes.
- Recommendations for DFID evaluation Guidance, Research Uptake and Ethics Guidelines on the use of beneficiary feedback. Due by 22 January 2015.
- (Future deliverable subject to discussion) Dissemination: preparation of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal, presentation of the report at an evaluation conference, and support for other dissemination activities including sharing of the report or report summary. To be confirmed but it is anticipated all activities be completed by 13 March 2015.

Methods

The analysis and conclusions contained in the report should be based on the following:

- Desk review of available literature on beneficiary feedback mechanisms, drawing on the bibliography attached
- Desk review of a selected number of evaluations and research programmes using beneficiary feedback mechanisms in development, humanitarian or conflict settings. The rationale for the selection of evaluations and research programmes should be outlined in the inception report.
- Telephone or video interviews and fact checking with relevant staff from DFID, bilateral and multi-lateral agencies, and NGOs (we do not envisage any field visits as part of this work).

Contracting Arrangements and Timeframe

This contract will be milestone based, with payment on delivery of key outputs which must be completed and agreed by 31 March 2015.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| ○ Inception report | 15% |
| ○ Draft report | 60% |
| ○ Final report and guidance recommendations | 25% |
| To be confirmed - subject to contract amendment | |
| ○ Journal article and conference presentation | |

The study manager for technical issues will be Lina Payne (l-payne@dfid.gov.uk), with support from Zaza Curran (z-curraran@dfid.gov.uk) all contracting issues will be dealt with by Carol Travers (c-travers@dfid.gov.uk). The successful consultancy is expected to undertake an internal QA product process prior to submission to DFID”.

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