

Mexico Feedback Field Exploratory Landscape Scan 2021

Executive summary



This research, carried out by *NOS Catalyst & Incuba ONG* and commissioned by the *Fund For Shared Insight*, aimed to deliver an analysis of the landscape of feedback systems that exist among funders, organizations and beneficiaries in the Mexican context. The scope of the scan was limited to programmatic work on the following thematic issues: a) Gender, b) Peace & Security, c) Human Rights. The results are expected to contribute to the understanding of the collaborative environment in terms of multi-stakeholder feedback mechanisms in Mexico. In the last section of the full report a set of recommendations is provided for routes and actions with specific stakeholders for further implementation of feedback initiatives in Mexico .

The methodological framework intended to understand and critically analyze the existing feedback practices contextualized in the very terms of the participants' cultural values, perceptions, and quotidian realities concerning feedback and programmatic work in the field.

Participants¹

- ❖ 73 unique participants among: a) Civil Society Organisations (CSO), b)Beneficiaries/Users/victims/Communities, c)Donors, d)Consultants & Specialists
- ❖ 36 Individual participants completed on-line surveys (2 out of 3 were from the CSO sector)
- ❖ 4 Collective Focus Groups with 21 participants were held (3 with Beneficiary Communities + 1 of Consultants & Specialists)
- ❖ 16 In-depth individual interviews were held with Donors and CSO actors

The meaning of Feedback in the Mexican context

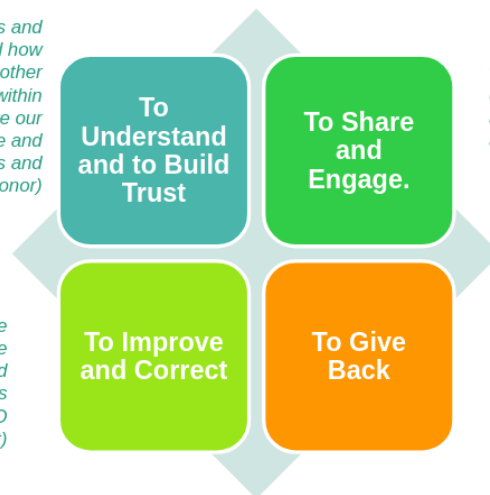
Throughout the investigation, common approaches were identified about the meaning of feedback between different stakeholders of the ecosystems. In broad terms, feedback is conceived by the participants of the scanned ecosystems as a collective listening exercise in programmatic work that implies: a) to understand and to build trust, having greater knowledge about the contexts and needs of the actors involved; b) to share and engage, allowing participants to exchange opinions and experiences; c) to improve and correct, identifying areas of opportunities to make adjustments in strategies; and d) to give back to the communities inputs and outputs that allow them to strengthen capabilities so that they communicate in an accountable and sustainable way regarding the impact of their opinions and the decisions taken.

Trends regarding feedback

- There is no ample consensus or knowledge about “High-Quality Feedback”. More than 80% of the survey participants have not heard about it.
- Overall a lack of knowledge of formal methodologies for High Quality Feedback in the country, particularly, the L4G methodology was not known for most of the participants.
- There is evidence that feedback is considered as something important. At the aggregated level most of the respondents of the survey across sectors consider relevant (14%) or very relevant (83%) to implement feedback.
- Mexico survey respondents consider either viable (53%) very viable (42%) or “somehow” viable (6%) the implementation of feedback systems.

¹ Despite including stakeholders with work across different regions, given the number of organizations, donors, and beneficiaries with programmatic work across the vast Mexican geography, the participants of this study are not to be taken as a representative cohort of the diverse ecosystems across the predefined working thematic lines.

"Dialogue and exchange with organizations and activists on accompaniment, strengthening and how we link and link them with each other and with other movements; joint reflection and subsequently within the team on these exchanges to improve our processes, making them more accessible and responsive to the needs of organizations and movements." (Donor)



"Procedure through which we compile successes, errors, strengths, and weaknesses of the various actions that we do such as workshops, meetings, accompaniments, advocacy, etc." (CSO participant)

"A tool to evaluate the activities, especially the impact for the allied people with whom we work. It allows us to continue improving and strengthening our work, focusing on the needs of the communities and allied people." (CSO participant)

"Give back to the communities and beneficiaries elements that are useful to them and that allow them to continue enhancing the development of their capacities so that they are maintained over time." (Specialist Consultant)

Main mechanisms and tools for feedback in the Mexican context

Most organizations and donors identified their feedback practices in the first three stages of the feedback loop (designing, collecting and interpreting); while responding and closing the loop, can present more challenges. For example 1 out of 10 respondents of the survey mentioned that feedback “always” led to programmatic changes.

Donors tend to perceive organizations as their main beneficiaries, so their methodologies are developed, almost exclusively, to obtain feedback regarding the implementation of the projects and activities that are funding. One of the main findings was that informal consultations are privileged over formal methodologies and strategies to develop feedback among stakeholders. This can be conditioned to the relationship between the parties. Often feedback consultation mechanisms were tailored by donors to fit the needs of each project.

At the formal level, the mechanisms most commonly used for this purpose are reports (mid-term and final), field visits, and surveys with different levels of engagement. Also one of the key aspects of program design is context analysis, where interviews are conducted with other foundations, organizations, specialists, and community leaders to better understand and respond to funding needs.

Concerning organizations, the predominant methodology for feedback processes applied with communities is associated with Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL). It was also identified the importance of participatory methodologies both in the preparation of diagnoses, activities, and return of results, but also recognized that it is complicated to respond to funding demands while co-designing with the community.

Both organizations and donors reported the use of standardized tools such as surveys, inquiries and questionnaires; different modalities of individual or group dialogue sessions, highlighting focus groups, semi-structured interviews, workshops, forums, conversations, dialogue circles, working tables, and field visits that include participant observation strategies and the generation of informal spaces for dialogue (talks or direct conversations). In addition *ad hoc* specific adjustments, methodologies or initiatives were found relevant for feedback practices in Mexico (e.g. Peace Circles, peer support, popular education, involving beneficiaries to decision making processes or in direct programmatic leadership and implementation, etc.)

Top priorities for investment and implementation of feedback strategies in programmatic work according to CSO survey respondents:



Feedback in practice from the perspectives of Beneficiary Communities

The consulting team carried on three focus groups with 18 beneficiaries, users, or participants of funded CSO projects related to the thematic areas of this study, specifically with groups of relatives of people deprived of liberty, relatives of enforced disappearance victims and women with disabilities. In terms of good practices it was found that the use of feedback methodologies with the beneficiary communities' was perceived as a strategy that brought more willingness to participate, and positive changes in the self-perception and empowerment of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, feedback was perceived as a key factor for promoting greater confidence in programmatic sustainability and the recognition of CSOs legitimacy by beneficiaries in Mexico.

The beneficiaries identified the necessity to be included, not only by giving feedback on the services provided by organizations, but also by being part of the entire process of programmatic implementation, from the design of the strategy, to the validation of results and impacts. It was critically recognized that communities don't always feel included in the projects that aimed to benefit them. In terms of gaps in practice, there are perceptions that sometimes beneficiaries' needs are not listened to, and that organizations design projects according to donor requirements and funding opportunities which do not necessarily reflect the priorities of BCs. In some cases BCs highlighted that CSOs implementing projects do not adequately respond to their needs, this in turn created alienation and lack of trust in the communities.

Main challenges to obtain High-Quality Feedback

It was recognised that the power dynamics between foundations, organizations and communities, can make it difficult to obtain high-quality information. Communities may fear losing the services provided by the organizations if they provide negative feedback. Although organizations report having relationships of trust with donors, there is always the latent fear that they may stop financing a project. In that power relationship, feedback is sometimes perceived as a factor that could have negative effects in terms of the financial sustainability of programs.

There are salient barriers to the full inclusion of perspectives, opinions, and voices of the communities served by their projects. Digital gap, access to knowledge, access to human and economic resources, and exclusions related to risk and security among others matter for full feedback inclusion in the Mexican context. Another difficulty is creating mechanisms that incorporate all voices, since reaching a consensus between the organization's strategies, the demands of donors and the different perceptions on communities' needs can be a challenge.

For donors, particularly those which don't have offices in Mexico, reaching primary feedback information from communities and final beneficiaries of programmatic work is a prominent challenge. In addition, not all the foundations have staff dedicated to feedback processes, while many operate in Mexico through one in-country external consultant or one single project officer managing multiple portfolios.

Conclusive insights

High-Quality Feedback is considered necessary, viable, and relevant. There is a positive predisposition to accept methodologies and exploring processes for feedback across sectors. Participative and inclusive methodologies for diagnosis, design of projects, activities, and project accountability could find fertile soil in Mexico.

The existent used approaches, such as MEL mechanisms, could be taken as a base for further implementing high-quality feedback methodologies in Mexico. The allocation of resources across programmatic MEL initiatives and participation of donor focal points in local initiatives with CSOs and BCs could increase the chances of integrating feedback methodologies in Mexico.

Foster trust-building and power balance processes as cement is key for collaboration on Feedback. For developing feedback initiatives it is crucial to listen to beneficiaries and communities at “safe and trust” spaces along with sufficient allocation of resources by donors and guarantees of participatory decision making processes involving all the parties.

Implementing high-quality Feedback requires “out of the box” strategies to address multidimensional threats and human insecurities such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The sanitary emergency exacerbated negative dynamics of financial exclusion and workloads for CSOs therefore feedback initiatives need to address the current problems faced in the pandemic context.

The increasingly constrained civic space and structural violence against communities highlight the need to incorporate risk analysis for feedback to succeed. This is specially important for closing the loop between CSOs and beneficiary communities working on issues related to human rights violations, security, impunity, or Violence Against Women.

The feasibility of Feedback processes lies not only in the technical dimension of its methodologies but in the ability to identify and address the complexities of Mexican ecosystems. Often in Mexico, the blurry frontiers between beneficiaries, victims, program managers, activists, and CSO staff constitute a complex puzzle that should be solved before understanding the role those specific actors can fulfill in the feedback loop.

Feedback cooperation among diverse actors in Mexico ought to deal with competing expectations and interests; consensus building, accountability, transparency, and agile devolution are key for positive conflict transformation. Diverging expectations could represent an unreachable situation on what feedback can plausibly “solve” according to different values and interests of the variegated actors involved. Closing the loop with communities is a sine qua non condition for cooperation across sectors.

Addressing barriers of access in a straightforward and intersectional way will make feedback inclusive and pertinent to communities. Gaps and barriers on native language, cultural ethnic sets, technology, gender, disability, and rural cleavages are an everyday challenge in the reality of Mexican fieldwork. Those challenges are to be addressed with local counterparts to design, adapt and pilot sustainable and inclusive feedback tools.