



GOAL

LEARNING BRIEF

COMMUNITY FOCAL PERSONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

OBSERVATIONS ON SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES, AND
IMPACT ON COMMUNITY FEEDBACK IN GOAL ZIMBABWE

DATE

December, 2022

THEME

MEAL

LOCATION

Zimbabwe

SECTOR

UNICEF

DATEMarch 2021 to
August 2021**INTERVENTION****DATE(S)**November, 2021 to
November, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief outlines lessons learnt in Zimbabwe on the use of Community Focal Persons (FPs) as an additional channel for eliciting communications to the Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM). The brief demonstrates the added value of leveraging existing and trusted community structures as CFM channels, while also understanding that there may be limitations to this approach. Community FPs are a valuable additional CFM channel but should be activated alongside other CFM channels.

GOAL Zimbabwe has operated a Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) since early 2017. It recorded over 4,000 communications in 2021 alone. Affected persons can contact GOAL Zimbabwe via telephone, WhatsApp, in-person by visiting GOAL's offices or engaging with staff in the field. GOAL Zimbabwe's CFM has been successful in embedding community feedback in its operations and achieving buy-in and trust within the communities it works with.

While GOAL's CFM in Zimbabwe operates multiple entry points (including helpdesks, a toll-free hotline, field visits, and monitoring), the MEAL Team determined these may not be capturing feedback from some cohorts, particularly elderly persons, and persons with disabilities. Additionally, the CFM is only answerable so long as staff are available to answer. Participation and local ownership of communities are important for robust accountability mechanisms and including communities in handling their feedback helps ensure this. It was hoped that introducing Community FPs would create community-led channels more accessible to older and disabled persons and available out of GOAL hours.

In November 2021, GOAL trained Community FPs engaged in other GOAL activities on GOAL's Code of Conduct, principles and processes around community feedback and accountability, as well as on the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP).

Since February 2022, these Community FPs have been active in accountability, sharing information with communities, and passing feedback on to GOAL. FPs are given a monthly allowance from GOAL's Cash Transfer Project, funded by UNICEF. A total of 370 communications have been received and processed through this channel up to February 2022.

OBSERVATIONS

After receiving their training Community FPs began collecting community feedback in February 2022. In that month, five communications were received through this channel. This rose steadily to 70 by May 2022 and finally 114 by October 2022. A total of 370 were received by November 2022.

Over 73% (272) of users of this channel were female. Most communicants (77%) were from the 18 to 59 years age group. 86 (23%) of communications came from persons over the age of 60, while three came from persons under 18 years of age, one of which was female. 93 (25%) of users were observed by the Community FPs to have a disability. All communications received were classified as Requests for Information and Requests for Assistance.

STATISTICS:

GOAL Zimbabwe
CFM Communications
Feb-Nov 2022

All channels: 4,220

Community FPs: 370

Accountability is the means through which power is used responsibly. It is a process of taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of power.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) is an active commitment by humanitarian actors to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people they seek to assist.

The Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) is the primary means by which stakeholders can communicate with GOAL. It allows for requests, feedback, and concerns to be raised with GOAL and ensures that those who communicate with the agency either receive an explanation or sees it acted upon within a communicated timeframe.

LEARNINGS

Benefits

- **Low cost:** Costs associated with this activity included training and workshop costs to sensitise Community FPs on accountability and community feedback, combined with other trainings. Additionally, GOAL provided the Community FPs with notebooks in which to record community feedback they received. All considered, the costs to GOAL Zimbabwe of undertaking this initiative were low.
- **Substantial numbers:** The number of cases received through Community FPs are testimony to this being a viable communication channel that has enabled GOAL to capture critical requests.
- **Additional coverage:** As Community FPs live in and amongst communities, they are available to project participants at times not possible for GOAL, such as after hours, during weekends and holidays. Having them act as CFM channels gives GOAL additional coverage during these times.
- **Further trust built:** By utilising community-led structures and existing, accepted communication channels, Community FPs allow the community to feel that they have some ownership of the CFM itself, which is important for buy-in, acceptance, and usage.
- **Existing structure:** By using Community FPs already engaged in other GOAL work, and who were chosen from within their own community, GOAL leveraged existing structures in the community and within its programming.
- **Vulnerable populations:** Many community members do not have access to phones, meaning that using hotlines, email, and WhatsApp are not available. This can include older people and persons living with disabilities, A total of 93 persons with disabilities have accessed this community feedback mechanism.
- **Information provision:** Providing information to communities is a fundamental aspect of a robust accountability mechanism. This includes informing people about their entitlements, what they should do if they experience challenges, what to expect from GOAL staff, and how to contact GOAL. Community FPs are not only useful as an additional channel for receiving feedback from communities, but can also be used as a channel for providing information to communities.

Challenges

- **Failing to record:** Occasionally, it was noted that Community FPs fail to record feedback they receive from communities. This can be due to them forgetting or not having the logbooks provided by GOAL with them. This has led to some lost communications.
- **Representation:** As the Community FPs are chosen by their community and already engaged in other GOAL activities, the MEAL Team do not have an oversight when it comes to their selection. This means that assuring a gender, age, and ethnic/tribal diversity can be difficult.
- **Children and youth:** While the Community FPs have seen great success in eliciting communications from women, the elderly, and persons observed with a disability, less than 1% came from children (persons under 18 years of age). This is lower than the rate of communications from children more generally in GOAL Zimbabwe's CFM (2.44%).

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Conclusion

- Accountability to affected populations remains a critical component in humanitarian interventions. Any organisation which aims to have a robust accountability mechanism in place should make sure that focus is on information, participation, consultation, feedback, and action. In Zimbabwe, working with Community FPs for accountability has assisted GOAL in upholding participation of the community in ensuring the accountability of its programming.
- GOAL recommends other response to adopt the Community FP approach alongside other important and diverse feedback channels, including telephone lines and helpdesks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teams wishing to engage with Community FPs or other similar CFM channels are recommended to:

- As much as possible, **leverage existing reporting lines and structures** within their communities. If these do not exist already within GOAL programming, a mapping should be done of the community to determine what existing reporting structures are there and possible ways of harnessing these. This helps save the time it would take to sensitise community members to new structures, and helps ensure familiarity, buy-in, local ownership, and continuity.
- Ensure that Community FPs are aware of the need to be **available to record feedback at any time**. While this can be difficult, it will ensure that communications are not lost by a lack of recording.
- Teams should work with local authorities and leadership to ensure that the community members put forward as FPs are **representative of the diversity** in their community. This includes ensuring gender, age, and ethnic/tribal representation within the FPs.
- GOAL Zimbabwe should carry out an **assessment of the Community FP approach**, across all programmes, to ascertain any safeguarding, protection or inclusivity risks or barriers they may pose to communities, including children.





REFERENCES/ CITATIONS:

Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter, and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response
<https://www.unhcr.org/50b491b09.pdf>

SUPPORT

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