Reinforcing Adaptive Programming - the Feedback Day Method

2020

RESILAC project

Operational context

RESILAC project *"Inclusive Economic and Social Recovery of Lake Chad"* contributes to the economic recovery and the strengthening of the resilience of the territories of the Lake Chad Basin most affected by the security crisis and climate change. The Lake Chad is a complex and highly volatile context, and even more so since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The project embodies in a single large-scale initiative the multi-country, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach to strengthening the triple nexus of "humanitarian aid, development and peace".

The project implements activities to promote economic development, preserve social cohesion and strengthen the institutional capacity of the authorities in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad.

Co-financed by the European Union (Emergency Trust Fund for Africa) and the French Development Agency (AFD) for a 4-year period (2018-2021), RESILAC is implemented by an international Consortium (Action Against Hunger - lead partner, CARE and Groupe URD) in partnership with the CCFD network - Terre Solidaire, Search For Common Ground and local organizations in the four countries of intervention.

Case study

RESILAC's capacity to take community feedback into account is essential to operational quality and adaptiveness: the "Feedback Day" surveys quarterly assess the quality of the response, document expected and unexpected outcomes and prevent frustration. Halfway between Outcome Harvesting and real-time evaluation methods, the "Feedback Day" is part of a continuous learning process that complements traditional community feedback mechanisms.

Key steps:

1. **Field data collection**: regular exchange between the MEAL manager and project stakeholders about project implementation, combined with direct observations. Exchanges focus on the quality of information rather than on sample size, with a specific attention to engage individuals/groups who have difficulties in being heard.

2. **Internal workshop**: collected information is immediately presented to the implementation team, offering concrete examples of stakeholders' experiences to be confronted and clarified. Internal workshop aims to facilitate the team' understanding of the beneficiaries' experience and identify implementation improvements (if needed).

3. **Key results and recommendations** are synthetized in a short note. This report is shared with the team and consulted individuals in order to close the feedback loop. Consideration of recommendations are evaluated in the following survey.

> *Implementation teams quickly feel challenged and are reluctant to talk about what is wrong or what could be improved. Debriefing sessions have changed that. Now, everyone wants to publicly confront his ideas and learn from one another. – M&E Manager*

Opportunities

- **Building trust between** people and project teams create the conditions of an open and bilateral dialogue.
- **Saves time and project resources** through continuously learning and improving the intervention.
- **Desacralizes error and promotes a learning posture** among the M&E and the project team that work together in order to identify relevant and realist adjustment.

Hurdles

- **Unequal balance between open discussions** with overly closed or standardized questions **can be a barrier to collect credible and relevant information**.
- **Small sampling can undermine feedback** and **challenge the credibility** of the collected information.
- **Good communication about the survey process is crucial** not to raise additional expectations among beneficiaries.

Lessons learned

1. **Adapt to your field!** Your context and type of stakeholder will determine your data collection method: focus groups discussions create more dialogue but they can lack diversity and inclusion (preferred option in Niger); individual interviews provide access to a higher diversity of people but they are time-consuming (preferred option in Chad), direct observations are also useful to understand beneficiaries' experience.
2. **Debriefing sessions are considered as one of the most innovative aspect of the « Feedback Day »**. Including as much program units (from decision-makers to field agents and support unit) is crucial to promote collective reflection and learning.
3. **Transparent publication of results and adjustments follow-up builds trust** with stakeholders, engaging them into a bilateral communication process. Written report is published on line and shared with stakeholders, as well as orally transmitted with interviewees on the following quarter.

Recommendations

- **Joint M&E and implementation team meetings should also be organized before the feedback days** in order to review previous recommendations and identify hot and sensitive issues.
- **"Feedback days" should be part** of each team or sector **learning plan**.
- **Safeguard stakeholders' engagement** by letting them know that they are playing an active role in providing feedback and influencing the project.
- **Ensure formal sharing** (community workshop) to close the feedback loop.

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