

## PBF Guidance Note<sup>1</sup>:

# Strengthening PBF project monitoring and implementation through direct feedback from communities: perception surveys and community-based monitoring



United Nations  
Peacebuilding

How do we know if the initiatives that PBF supports are making a positive difference in the lives of conflict-affected communities? At its heart, this is a question about accountability to PBF's ultimate stakeholders – youth who are struggling to secure dignified livelihoods, parents who want safe communities in which to raise their children, and women who expect that their distinct experience and voice will be included in peace negotiations. To address the accountability gap, PBF encourages project monitoring that captures stakeholders' perceptions and offers them a direct feedback mechanism to decision-makers. This guidance note outlines the rationale for these monitoring investments and provides some models and lessons from a number of pilots across the PBF portfolio.

The main objectives of this kind of monitoring include:

- Improved understanding of project progress and impact during implementation, which is especially important and relevant with activities as sensitive, subjective and qualitative as peacebuilding;
- Where possible, to have access to project feedback in real time and directly from stakeholders so that adjustments can be made before the project has ended;
- Greater ability to tailor current and future projects and policies to local needs, including ensuring respect of Do No Harm principles;
- To empower beneficiaries through greater involvement and participation into project implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The purpose of PBF Guidance Notes is to provide additional information to recipients of PBF funding and PBF Secretariats so as to help improve design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PBF projects.

## Perception surveys vs community-based monitoring:

There are different ways of including community members' views. Two approaches frequently implemented through PBF initiatives include: (i) *perception surveys* and (ii) *community based monitoring (CBM)*. While they both aim to give the community a voice, there are important differences in methodology and approach. As a result, PBSO has different expectations about their use: perception

*A Perception Survey is a formal collection of information from a randomly selected sample of respondents through their responses to standardized questions. Here, we understand these surveys to be driven primarily by national and/or international actors outside of the community of intervention.*

surveys are most frequently employed for data collection of project indicators to generate baselines and end lines, whilst CBM approaches are encouraged to track progress in between the start and the end of projects and with a view to enabling continuous program improvement and adjustment and strengthening community dynamics.

A schema comparing perception surveys and CBM is presented below although hybrid models have also been used. The specific approach chosen will very much depend on the context, the types of interventions

concerned, other data collection systems and coordination mechanisms, local capacities and extent of local presence/ deep knowledge by the PBF implementers and partners etc.

*Community-based monitoring is an organized system for communities of participants to monitor the local effects and impact of an intervention. Ideally, this system empowers the community to express whether their expectations are being met and to provide suggestions to decision-makers for possible (re)focusing. CBM may employ a range of data collection methods, including short standard surveys, rapid SMS surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, to name a few.*

	<b>Perception survey</b>	<b>Community based monitoring</b>
Purpose:	To collect views on specific issues (including specific qualitative project indicators) from a sample of the population from specified localities (ideally both target group and 'comparison' group, i.e. a group sufficiently similar to the target group but not affected by the interventions) to provide a snapshot of the situation and to help monitor progress and direct programming.	To collect views on specific issues from community members particularly those affected by project interventions (directly or indirectly) and use them as real time feedback mechanism on implementation as well as to promote downward accountability from project decision-makers/ implementers.
Usually implemented by:	A research/study outfit with expertise in survey design, data collection, sampling and data manipulation/ analysis; sometimes in association with local CSOs with experience in the thematic issues and surveys and with understanding of local context/culture.	A community based group of relevance to the project. This can include local peace communities, local leaders, women or youth representatives, heads of community associations, local council or government representatives, or interested individuals. The specific choice will depend on what already exists in the community and what makes most sense given the scope of the project/ issues being monitored and on the local context/culture and dynamics.
Approach:	A sampling which ideally includes target areas of the project as well as non-target but similar areas (called 'comparison'	Approaches vary but usually include a simplified set of questions related to key project interventions that need to be

	groups), subject to a consideration of Do No Harm considerations, to ensure objective and representative responses, followed by a questionnaire designed by the outfit (with input from PBF) so as to track relevant indicators from the project result framework, followed by statistical analysis and data cleaning, followed by a formal report, ideally including comparison between target and comparison zones/groups to allow comparison and more valid assessment of project contribution. Sharing and validation of the report findings will depend on each country context.	answered by the selected community representatives (either directly or following consultations within the community or within the identified entity e.g. youth or women’s association) and that need to be passed to a CSO or the PBF Secretariat for compilation and analysis. Visits by the Secretariat or mobile communications can be used for this purpose. Emphasis is on participatory approaches at all stages (including on the actual questions and definition of success) and regular feedback loops which accompany implementation.
Frequency:	Usually happens less frequently, with a focus on the baseline and the endline, but in some cases can be done annually.	Needs to happen more frequently so as to provide real time trends in opinions, so can be quarterly or six monthly etc, in agreement with the community to make sure it is feasible/ not an overload.
Setting up/ launching the tool:	Research organizations typically have large pools of trained interviewers and sufficient field experience and knowledge to organize logistics. It includes preparation of the questionnaire, identification of the interviewers, training in the use of the questionnaire and any cultural/ peacebuilding issues, and doing a small pilot to test the questionnaire.	Set-up heavily depends on local experience and capabilities and any existing CBM r local coordination mechanisms. It can be the most expensive component of a CBM as it requires identifying the right mechanism/ participants, taking measures to prevent bias, training them, potentially equipping them with mobile communication, and instructing them on data collection.
Cost:	Varies from country to country but is usually expensive as it involves a professional team and a large team of enumerators as well as complex travel logistics. Can be anywhere between \$20,000 and \$100,000 per survey depending on scope, accessibility and complexity.	Varies but usually lower cost compared to perception surveys, as the mechanism is community based and the participants are not usually provided with a salary for their work and may even be already involved in these kinds of activities for their communities (although this is not always the case). Apart from the cost of getting to know the community (which is ideally happening through existing presence of partners on the ground), the main costs usually include training, possibly some mobile communications and some travel by the PBF Secretariat/ external expert. In some cases, a CSO can be hired to help to establish and monitor the mechanism and train the local communities or to compile data. An M&E focal point or a UNV can

		also be hired to help support this work. At the same time, a number of follow-up issues can arise through CBM and ideally the organization doing the CBM should also have some resources to follow-up on such issues or at least ensure they are passed to the right entities.
Possible advantages:	Provides more robust and possibly representative (at some level) data, which can be quantitative and qualitative and directly linked to the project result frameworks, and can provide a good overall analysis of contribution towards results. Can allow for target and non-target comparison, so will help address the initiative's contribution to the result. Can be more objective as usually done by an outside entity, even if it can be supported by local organizations. Can provide statistically significant data and enable more methodologically sound comparisons over time.	Provides more frequent/ real time data on project implementation and can be used for course correction. Can reach remote communities or those that are difficult to access due to security issues and give them a voice. Can be more empowering for the communities as it uses their own structures and capacitates them to have their voices heard. Is usually much more affordable.
Possible disadvantages:	Can be costly and takes time to organize the whole process. The organizations which provide the service may not have all the right expertise, which needs to go beyond statistical capacity and include understanding of local context and culture (including languages) but also political and peacebuilding sensitivities and do no harm approaches. Asking the right questions in the right way can be a significant challenges when dealing with sensitive, intangible and subjective issues and creating a safe space with local communities that allows open/honest responses to such questions can be difficult. Perception surveys are useful in measuring attitudes and changes therein and but might not provide much insight into the causes.	Can be seen as less robust (especially in terms of quantitative results) as often done through more informal and insider means, as opposed to rigorous statistical design and analysis, but a lot of this can be minimized through careful design of the mechanism. Can lead to more misunderstandings as it relies on local data collection. Can have more interference as it passes through local bodies which may have a specific agenda – the role and position of the person asking the questions will have an impact on the findings. Can raise expectations of survey respondents that the concerns they raise will be met.

**Guidance on setting up and utilizing *perception surveys* for PBF:**

1) When are perception surveys useful

Perception surveys are useful when PBF support is focused on changing attitudes, beliefs, capacities or behavior of communities or state agencies which affect communities' lives. Perception surveys enable the

decision-makers to measure the kinds of and levels of attitudes and beliefs of community members as well as their perceptions of capacities and behavior of community members and/or state agents. Perception surveys are especially useful for interventions which go beyond 12 or 18 months and which expect to see a change beyond physical infrastructure. Depending on the types/ size of PBF interventions in the country, consideration should be given to whether a perception survey should be confined to a single project or should cover various PBF (and possibly non PBF) projects, especially if they intervene in same/ similar communities and if their interventions aim to affect same/similar high-level changes.

## 2) Who organizes/ leads and who needs to be involved

Perception surveys are complex and need to have a M&E expert to manage them. If the perception survey is deemed suitable to cover more than one project and if there is a PBF Secretariat and/or a M&E unit in the Resident Coordinator's office, then they are best placed to take the lead on organizing/ managing the perception survey and coordination between different implementing partners.

The survey mechanism needs to be designed by an expert statistician, ideally with strong experience in the thematic subject matter and post-conflict/ peacebuilding contexts. The survey needs to be conducted by local enumerators (male and female) who understand the local culture/ sensitivities and are trusted by the local communities, with some supervision from the expert (for testing the instruments, ensuring their validity and analyzing data). Often local CSOs are well placed to play a role in delivering the survey.

All implementing agencies of projects which are part of the survey need to be involved in the design of the survey, to ensure all key indicators are included and that agencies are well placed to use the survey finding. The Government needs to be on board from the beginning and interested in/ supportive of the survey and its objectives, with the findings hopefully also used by the Government for its broader planning/ programming. The development partners can also be useful partners/ stakeholders if they have an interest in the same issues and may want to come on board to use the survey. Finally, the communities which will be part of the survey need to be sensitized beforehand (through their leaders or representatives), so to understand the purpose of the survey, their role, the anonymous nature of the survey and the next steps. Ideally, this sensitization should be done with local authorities.

## 3) When to set it up

Before setting up a survey, some research should be made as to whether there are other similar surveys being undertaken or planned by other organizations to reduce repetition and to try to pool resources, if possible and not too onerous. Once it is decided that a perception survey will be used, it is important to set it up early. Surveys are most useful when they are done at least at the beginning and at the end of the intervention, so that there can be a comparison in findings. A perception survey also presents an opportunity to revisit the indicators and ensure they are SMART and will provide the information most relevant to the project. One should also keep in mind that designing and testing surveys and getting the right expertise takes time, so preparations should ideally start in the design phase so that such mechanisms are built into the project or into the broader peacebuilding strategy covering multiple projects and sufficient funds allocated to it from the project in question or the Secretariat project. The actual instrument design/ field work should start in the first 3-4 months of the project implementation.

#### 4) What kind of budget/ cost

Surveys are quite costly given the expertise required and the need to reach a statistically significant sample of respondents in different areas, which are often challenging to reach. The cost will depend on whether local expertise or international expertise is required (usually international), on the size of the country and the sample, the logistical issues and cost of transport. About \$100,000- \$130,000 per survey is a good ballpark figure to keep in mind but some surveys have been even more costly.

#### 5) Key steps in setting up the mechanism:

- a. Start with ensuring buy-in of various stakeholders (including representatives of target communities) and having an M&E expert that can oversee/manage the process (consider if such experts exist already within the system and if synergies can be made)
- b. Prepare ToRs for the survey with clear objectives and broad methodology (and share for comment and endorsement with stakeholders and PBSO) and find out available expertise/ procurement options and timeline
- c. Proceed to contract partners and ensure that any existing experts are contacted in advance to make sure they are aware of the task and ready to apply. If there is only one organization capable of designing and conducting the survey, consider entering into a grant mechanism, rather than a lengthier competitive process. Consider if two separate contracts are required – an international design expert to help design and quality assure the survey and a local outfit to deliver it and have its capacity strengthened in the process
- d. Once the contracts are in place, ensure that the first step is reviewing the results frameworks and indicators and revisiting/ strengthening methodology, followed by sensitization of all stakeholders, training of any enumerators and detailed planning of roles and timelines
- e. Once the survey is ready to commence, make sure that it includes a field testing phase to check the clarity and catch potential sensitivities of questionnaires and methodology before the full roll-out
- f. Once data gathering is completed, it is time for analysis and reporting. Whilst this should be done by the expert outfit, the PBF Secretariat or the UN M&E manager should also be involved in quality assurance
- g. Once findings are completed, there should be a presentation/ validation exercise with the key stakeholders to make sure that the findings make sense and to promote discussion of the issues.
- h. The M&E Manager should also make sure that findings are summarized in a user-friendly format and used for a variety of purposes, including as baselines/ endlines, as feedback to implementing agencies and stakeholders on project implementation, as input to Government, UN and development partner policy and programming. The more detailed technical information on methodology should ideally be provided in annexes
- i. Any methodological issues with the first survey should be noted so that necessary adjustment can be included for the second round.

## 6) Methodology

Specific and detailed methodology will depend on the country and project context and will need to be developed by the expert consultant/ outfit. Below are some methodological issues to keep in mind:

- The following principles should guide the survey methodology:
  - o Inclusivity and participation in the survey design, involving a wide variety of stakeholders (including targeted communities) to get their inputs and ownership;
  - o Transparency about the purpose and use of the survey and about the survey findings (if possible, these should be made public, should be shared widely and should also be fed back in some way to the communities which participated);
  - o Conflict and gender sensitivity are paramount in designing survey questions and in selecting the survey enumerators as well as in the way that survey findings are presented;
- Where feasible, the survey should be carried out in both a selection of target communities (that is, those communities which are directly targeted by the project interventions) and a selection of similar but non-target communities known as ‘comparison’ groups, to enable a comparison of the two. In making a decision on the ‘comparison’ group, one should consider both practical implications (the ease of finding and accessing such groups) but also potential sensitivities and Do No Harm implications in contacting a group in a conflict situation with high needs but without receiving project benefits.
- The sample for the survey (the number of people or households interviewed) should be large enough, given the size of communities targeted, to provide at least some statistically significant findings. The sample usually needs to be disaggregated according to some key variables such as gender, age and possibly ethnicity or geographic location. Setting the right sample size is a methodological exercise that requires some knowledge of statistical science. It is a balance between the level of confidence in the findings that is required, the margin of error accepted and the size of the overall population surveyed. A number of tools online can help determine the sample size. For example: <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/determining-sample-size/>. When engaging with different potential implementing partners or during the call for proposals, it is important to ask organizations to explain the methodology to be used to establish the sample size.
- Another important issue relating to establishing the sample, relates to the identification of individuals to answer the questions. Ideally, some kind of randomization in sampling is necessary. In developed countries, this is frequently done using phone books or official census to identify individuals to be interviewed. In most countries where PBF intervenes, such tools will most probably not be available. Establishing a reliable, randomized and reproducible sampling methodology isn’t easy. Option to consider are going door to door, possibly to every third house, or interviewing people from markets or other public places – all depending on the context. Also, given the scope of PBF interventions, the sample may not be completely randomized but limited to specific geographic zones or types of respondents. At any rate, when asking for a proposal, special attention should be given to the proposed methodology for sampling.
- The survey should be written in a simple and clear language and not take more than 30 minutes to complete to ensure that people are likely to give their time. Questions need to be simple and

the survey concise to ensure shared understanding and that the survey is fully completed and completed to a good quality. This can mean compromising on the level of qualitative detail and nuance that is captured. Care should be taken with how the survey is explained to potential respondents and their informed consent should be obtained (whether in writing or verbally).

- There need to be several checks and balances to ensure that the process is conducted well methodologically and from the Do No Harm perspective, including a percent of interviews that are accompanied by a supervisor, spot-checks of certain surveys including possibly call backs to some respondents etc.
- The survey methodology needs to consider the best way of finding a varied cross-section of people in a moment that allows them to respond to a serious survey. It needs to take into account local and cultural dimensions and so might include door to door visits or meetings in public places like markets. It is important to ensure that respondents are selected with a certain degree of randomness. At the same time, the methodology also needs to ensure that special measures are taken to target women and youth and any other groups (especially minority groups) for the survey and to provide them with the requisite environment (e.g. same sex enumerators) to make them comfortable and safe to respond to the survey.
- The methodology needs to include appropriate ways of capturing and safeguarding data including appropriate use of technology, especially given that some questions may be quite sensitive.
- Potential response bias needs to be identified and considered at all stages (design/sampling/ administration/ analysis) and considered in the interpretation of the data.
- The methodology should consider if individual interviews are the best and the sufficient ways of capturing the information required or if focus groups may also be helpful.
- Analysis of data needs to be sophisticated, include triangulation of data from different sources/ respondents and possibly consider weighing different questions or indicators differently.

### **Guidance on setting up and utilizing *community based monitoring (CBM)* for PBF:**

#### 1) When is CBM useful and what are basic PBF requirements

CBM is useful for PBF programs which are implemented at community level. CBM allows PBF (and other stakeholders) to get real-time and two-way feedback on project progress and community views in a relatively informal cost-efficient way. It can also be an additional means of empowering a community and strengthening mutual accountability between communities and governments/ donors. CBM should ideally be set up for any significant PBF investment (such as the PRF portfolio) which is more than 18 months in duration. In some cases, the set-up of a CBM may become a mini project in itself with community empowerment, participation and accountability objectives, but all depends on the local context and needs and on any other local information/ coordination mechanisms that may exist.

#### 2) Who organizes/ leads and who needs to be involved

An M&E expert generally needs to manage and oversee the set-up and functioning of CBM. If several PBF projects are concerned and a PBF Secretariat is in place, then they are probably best placed to take this



role. Nonetheless, outside expertise in setting up such systems is often very useful and often CSOs with experience in community-based work are best placed to provide it. Just like for perception surveys, it is important to spend time with all the implementing agencies, Government representatives and community members/ leaders as part of setting up the system, to ensure buy-in and understanding.

### 3) When to set it up

Before setting up a CBM, some research should be made on existing CBMs/ coordination mechanisms in the zones, which may be in place through other implementing partners or through the UN peacekeeping operations where those exist. It is important to take stock of those and see if they can be built on, to avoid unnecessary duplication or confusion, to align them or at least to ensure a clear differentiation. Ideally, a CBM system should be included in the project design or the design of the peacebuilding strategy so that sufficient funds can be allocation to it. The actual set-up should take place relatively early in the project implementation cycle so that it can be the method of collecting project data after the conduct of the initial baselines perception survey.

### 4) What kind of budget/ cost

CBM cost is usually much lower than that of perception surveys and usually involves the following costs: (i) a contract with a CSO to scope up the best CBM method, to identify and train the community champions who will collect the data and possibly to provide some supervision; (ii) costs towards a training of the community champions; (iii) small fee paid towards the costs of the CBM champions such as any travel or communications costs. Depending on the number of communities involved and the travel required by the CSO, the cost might be about \$10-20,000 at the beginning and then about \$5-10,000 per year.

### 5) Key steps in setting up the mechanism:

- a. Understand the local context and needs and ensure buy-in of various stakeholders
- b. Ensure there is an M&E expert that can manage/ oversee/ assist the process
- c. Prepare ToRs for CBM with clear objectives and broad methodology which needs to be context specific (share for comment and endorsement with stakeholders and PBSO) and find out available expertise/ procurement options (if outside expertise is needed) and timeline
- d. Consider which community level body or mechanism would be best placed to be the champion/ cornerstone of CBM and what access they have to the community and how large should the community representation be. This can be existing peace clubs, youth clubs, women's groups, village elders or any kind of association or body which is well recognized and spread within the targeted communities and potentially already has an interest in and community recognition concerning peacebuilding and governance issues. But it will depend on the analysis of the local context including of local political and social dynamics. If needed, this can be further determined by the outside entity hired to set up the CBM. On selecting the body/ mechanism, attention should be paid to its membership and how it affects the information collected. Also, even though specific champions/bodies

may be needed, it is important to ensure that other members of community (including voices of women and youth and any minorities) are included as much as possible.

- e. If necessary, proceed to contract partners that can assist in the set-up of the CBM and ensure that any existing experts are contacted in advance to make sure they are aware of the task and ready to apply. If there is only one organization capable of conducting the survey, consider entering into a grant mechanism, rather than a lengthier competitive process. If a perception survey is also being contracted, consider if the same organization can do both the perception survey and the initial set-up of CBM.
- f. Once the contracts are in place, ensure that the first step is reviewing the project objectives and how they lend themselves to CBM, and can be translated into clear, easy and relevant questions and can be tracked by communities directly (the questions do not necessarily need to be linked to specific project indicators or technical in nature).
- g. The next steps are the design of simple community surveys with no more than 5-10 questions, identification of champions, training of champions, sensitization of communities about CBM and provision of technology/ means and frequency of feeding back the data to a central place (for example, every 3 or 6 months). The central place can be the PBF Secretariat, the implementing agency itself, the CSO hired to assist or another relevant and independent M&E entity that can gather and analyze the data incoming from various community (there are pro's and con's with the various approaches).
- h. After each round of CBM data gathering is completed, it is time for analysis and reporting of the findings by the focal point selected for this purpose. A brief report needs to be prepared and shared with key stakeholders, including project managers, to make sure that the findings are acted upon. There is no standard report format but it needs to be geared towards the audience and user friendly. The same focal point should also feed back any actions/ reactions to the communities and ensure there are no expectations that cannot be met.
- i. Any methodological issues with the first survey should be noted so that necessary adjustment can be included for the second round of CBM.

## 6) Methodology

- The following principles should guide the CBM methodology:
  - o Inclusivity and participation in the design, involving a wide variety of stakeholders (including targeted communities) to get their inputs and ownership;
  - o Transparency about the purpose and use of the CBM and the findings (if possible, these should be made public, should be shared widely and should also be fed back in some way to the communities which participated);
  - o Conflict and gender sensitivity are paramount in designing CBM questions and in selecting CBM champions as well as in the way that survey findings are presented.
- Given the nature of CBM, it should be carried out only in target communities (that is, those communities which are directly targeted by the project interventions).
- The CBM survey should be written in a simple and clear language and focus on the project vision and a few key issues that can be handled and recorded simply by community members. The CBM

System then needs to have a simple and cost efficient way for the CBM champions to record, compile and transmit that information for their community back to the M&E manager (or the supporting CSO). This can be done through mobile technology or more traditional means.

- An important aspect to be mindful about is to ensure that the mechanism designed will bring forward the voices of all strata of communities including women of different social groups, youths, refugees and any other minority groups. If the mechanism relies too much on local elite, there is a danger that the elite would control the message going back to the project, the government and the donors.
- There need to be several checks and balances to ensure that the process is conducted well, including some spot checks, extra training for the champions and possibly additional visits by the M&E manager to ensure the process is running smoothly. Potential response bias needs to be identified and considered at all stages (design/ sampling/ administration/ analysis) and considered in the interpretation of the data.
- The CBM methodology needs to consider the best way of finding a varied cross-section of people, including women and youth.

#### **Minimum PBF requirements for perception surveys and CBM and role of PBSO:**

Perception surveys (in target and non-target communities) and CBM systems are generally required for PBF PRF interventions, especially where more than one community-focused project is being implemented. In those cases, the requirements are a baseline and endline survey and a CBM system which provides additional data from communities every 6 or so months. Individual IRF projects can also have perception surveys if they intervene at community level, but given the short time span for the intervention, these need to be more simple.

Beyond that, the specifics are context driven and this Guidance Note is intended as a resource to help colleagues consider options and better understand the various approaches and their pro's and con's.

PBSO provides quality assurance and technical support to the PBF Secretariat and/or UN M&E Manager on the ground in setting up the perception surveys and CBM and should be consulted on methodology and contracting as well as given a chance to review draft reports and provide comments.