

Moments that Matter: Community Insights

Short concept note for exploratory pilots

The idea

Humanitarian and development organisations invest considerable effort in understanding needs, designing interventions and measuring results. Yet programme frameworks inevitably reflect organisational assumptions about what matters, what works and how change happens. Communities also hold knowledge: about what change matters most in their lives, what has worked, what has failed, which conditions make change possible, and, importantly, what outsiders may be missing.

This raises a simple but important question: are our efforts contributing to the results that matter most to the people we seek to serve, and what can their lived experience teach us about how to do this better?

Moments that Matter: Community Insights uses structured reflective conversations to surface that lived-experience knowledge. The conversations are not primarily project satisfaction interviews. They create space for people to describe meaningful moments of change in their own terms and explore what made those changes possible.

Value proposition

Structured reflective conversations that uncover what meaningful change looks like from the perspective of people closest to the issue, what they have learned about what works and does not, and what organisations can learn from their lived experience.

What we want to learn

- What changes do community members themselves consider most meaningful?
- What moments or experiences helped create those changes?
- What conditions, relationships, actions or forms of support made a difference?
- What tends not to work, or creates unintended difficulties?
- What locally held knowledge could make humanitarian or development efforts more relevant and effective?
- Where do these perspectives reinforce or challenge what organisations already understand?

What makes the conversations different

The intention is not to replace needs assessments, community engagement or evaluation. It complements them by starting, as far as possible, **outside** the project framework: creating space for people to identify what matters most to them before translating their experiences into programme categories. Even when conversations are initiated in relation to a particular project or programme, the issue to be discussed should be left as open as practicable. This helps reduce the risk that organisational priorities or assumptions determine in advance which experiences and insights become visible.

Questions invite reflection on meaningful moments, change, causality and meaning, while careful follow-up explores why a moment mattered and what can be learned from it. Diverse perspectives are important because people may experience the same circumstances very differently.

Listening is followed by validation. Participants are given the opportunity to respond to the interpretation of their contribution: "This is what we heard. Is this what you meant?" This provides a further safeguard against bias by reducing the risk that outside analysts translate people's experiences back into their own assumptions. It also demonstrates that participants and the knowledge they share are being taken seriously. By helping people feel seen, heard and respected, the process can contribute to building trust.

Illustrative questions

- Thinking about your community, what moment do you feel is most important to tell others about?
- What made that moment important to you?
- What helped make that change possible?
- What usually gets in the way of this kind of change?
- What have organisations or others done here that genuinely helped?
- What has been tried that did not work as expected, and why?
- What do people here know that outside organisations sometimes miss?
- If support could be organised differently, what would make the greatest difference?

A small pilot

A pilot could involve a deliberately diverse group of community members within a defined community or context. To limit potential bias in participant selection, the local community and local organisations The exact number and format would depend on context, language, access, safeguarding and connectivity. The purpose would be exploratory: to test whether this form of conversation surfaces useful knowledge that normal programme processes may not capture.

Possible outputs

- Edited individual conversations or stories, where appropriate and consented.
- Concise insight extractions for each conversation.
- A cross-interview Community Insights synthesis of valued outcomes, enabling conditions, barriers, locally held knowledge, recurring patterns, differences and assumptions challenged.
- Validation of the interpretation with participants.
- A short set of questions or implications for the organisation to consider in its programming.

Potential value

The pilot can create value at three levels: **voice**, by creating space for people to articulate what matters in their own terms; **insight**, by analysing their experiences for patterns and practical knowledge; and **learning**, by helping the organisation consider what those insights mean for its work.

The process also has value in itself. By listening carefully, taking people's experiences and knowledge seriously, and returning to them to validate what has been heard, it can help **people feel seen, heard and respected**. This can contribute to building trust between communities and the organisations working with them.

Further programme adaptation is possible where findings warrant it, but it is not a precondition for the pilot.

Central question

Are our efforts contributing to the results that matter most to the people we seek to serve, and what can their lived experience teach us about how to do this better?