

KENYA LANDSCAPE SCAN REPORT

Prepared for
Fund for Shared Insight

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Introduction

Fund for Shared Insight is a national funder collaborative working to improve philanthropy by promoting and supporting foundations and nonprofits to listen and respond to the people and communities most harmed by the systems and structures they seek to change with their work. They believe that those most impacted by the decisions made by foundations and nonprofits are often the least consulted and can offer unique and valuable insight into how to bring about lasting and meaningful change that improves lives in ways people define for themselves.

To date, Fund for Shared Insight has worked primarily in the United States. However, since 2015, they have engaged in conversations with funders and NGOs in different parts of the World and pursued a handful of projects which arose relatively organically and serendipitously. The common thread among them is that each seeks to build the infrastructure for high-quality feedback and engage a combination of nonprofits and funders in increasing and improving their listening practices.

With this handful of solid projects and a great committee of funders who work worldwide, Shared Insight would like to explore opportunities to work more deeply in a few places worldwide where people are already investing in infrastructure for feedback. Additional funds can accelerate the feedback ecosystem.

The purpose of this landscape scan is to explore the current state of the "feedback field" in Kenya and offer recommendations and insights into whether and how additional funding from Shared Insight may improve the feedback ecosystem.

Overview of Methodology

In preparing to undertake the research, several methods were considered, including the use of online surveys. After doing some online research to get contacts for several local NGOs, I sent out an introductory email requesting a survey or a meeting time. The response was dismal. Still, upon further reflection, I determined that tapping into human nuances, e.g., tone of voice, body language, etc. was necessary to gather effective feedback, and leveraging existing relationships would yield a better response. I, therefore, called on contacts for referrals and gathered all the information included in this report via telephone conversations and virtual meetings (Zoom and Google Meet).

The following are the questions used to guide the conversation:

- What does feedback look like between NGOs and the people they serve?
- What does feedback look like between funders and the people they ultimately seek to help?
- How common is it?
- What tools or infrastructure are used?
- What do those involved say is most needed to accelerate and improve high-quality feedback work?

- How does power operate in these relationships?
- Whose voices are least heard?
- How do issues of equity and justice play out in the particular context, and how could high-quality listening and feedback advance them?

Nonprofits/NGOs/CBOs

In your local country context, do people use the term "feedback" or some other term? And when they use whatever word, what do they mean by it?

The term "feedback" is used frequently in the professional space, and even then, it is interchangeable with "response." Feedback is often a question and answers session with the organization's mindset being – we already know the problem and have a solution. Therefore, the "feedback" conversation will be a check box activity to meet the funder's needs and identify who to partner with within the given project/activity/program. Feedback is more about telling than asking. The term "feedback" does not exist in most local languages, and if translated, it would be a sentence – I would like to ask you something; what do you think of this project? Depending on the power dynamic, you may receive the answer you are looking for or the reality.

Feedback is often gathered in Kiswahili and English – especially when using technology (SMS/an App). In face-to-face interactions, it will be in Kiswahili if the person does not come from a specific region and the region's language if the person collecting feedback is from the same area. In meetings or focus group gatherings, they use a translator with organizational representatives who don't speak Kiswahili or the local language.

What does feedback look like between nonprofits, community-based organizations, NGOs, the people they serve? And what tools and infrastructure do they use?

Feedback between nonprofits, CBOs, NGOs, and the people they serve is a mixed bag of good intent and funder requirements, listening to the impact stories and gathering data/metrics for the quarterly reports. Depending on the age, education level, access to technology, and type of intervention, feedback can be frequent and impactful, infrequent and transformative, impactful but not transformative, or a check box activity.

Let us take the example of Generations, the McKinsey-founded nonprofit. They have a robust feedback mechanism that leverages telephone (SMS), surveys (self-administered), focus groups, social media, coaches, and instructors. Over the years, they have learned that they need to establish a feedback mechanism with their staff to engage effectively with the people they serve. They now leverage the performance management system, check-in meetings, monthly townhalls (locally) to receive and give feedback. The value of this intentional engagement between supervisors and their staff is that everything (challenges and successes) is discussed, and information trickles down to all levels, ensuring timely response and resolution of issues from the people they serve. What is not evident is how this feedback impacts program design.

At One Acre fund, feedback is gathered predominantly through face-to-face interactions. They have approximately 3,000 field officers who are primarily men from the community. Most farmers are women, and a client protection policy exists to ensure there is no abuse. There is a team dedicated to investigating any unethical behavior reported.

Save the Children; a global nonprofit, has been in existence for over 100 years. They have a robust accountability framework focused on safeguarding children and leverage various mechanisms to gather feedback. These include suggestion boxes, focus groups, key informant interviews, hotlines, and youth reports. They also provide a voice recorder to facilitate privacy.

In the example of Busara, they are developing an app with the support of the feedback tools accelerator. They intend for this application to have one feature capable of many iterations.

Unfortunately, most feedback mechanisms do not meet the high-quality threshold and are usually a dance between viable and quality feedback.

- Areas of the feedback loop that need additional focus:
 - Designing for relevance: co-create with a focus on improvement.
 - Capturing the client's voice
 - Minimizing courtesy bias
 - Responding: engaging stakeholders and implementing changes, especially those affecting marginalized groups.
 - Communicating back: sharing survey findings with most clients, including respondents, non-respondents, and new clients

How are they acting on that feedback?

While most organizations admitted that opportunities exist to be more proactive in responding to feedback, they shared some great examples of responding effectively.

Eugene at *Innovate Now* is keen on user interaction. He sees this as an opportunity to gather stories for stakeholders (solution providers) – funders, private organizations, and advocates. For example, in 2019, after interacting with recipients of wheelchairs, he was given feedback that they were too heavy, and the users could not operate them independently (they needed someone to push). He gave this feedback to APDK (Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya) and UDPK (United Disabled Persons of Kenya), and they acted on it by providing lighter chairs in 2020. These chairs were cheaper to produce, and Eugene approached Citibank, who funded additional chairs resulting in a win-win.

At One Acre Fund, the field officer accused the supervisors of protecting clients more than staff. The organization responded to this feedback by reassigning one of the managers to implement a DEI initiative to make One Acre Fund more inclusive. This person focuses on actively listening to staff members seeking to make the organization a dignified workplace.

Save the Children has a tool – action tracker, where all feedback received is assigned to an individual who ensures it is essentially closed out. An example: the community complains that a community

worker does not show up to work. The senior management meets and reviews this grievance, and the individual assigned to it goes back to the community and communicates the outcome. In some instances, feedback has resulted in them needing to be more intentional in understanding how the community works, e.g., the community may not agree to work with a school's PTA (Parent Teachers Association) because they are corrupt. To effectively respond to this issue, they need to redesign the project.

At Busara, some feedback from clients included the need for co-creation (they do not ask the clients what they want) and an explanation of how they will use the information. They are leveraging the phone – voice and SMS to close the feedback loop.

One Acre Fund found that listening to farmer feedback enabled them to diversify their offering and review their risk appetite.

How does power operate in these relationships?

Power shows up in various relationships; between the field officers, extension workers, staff members, and the beneficiaries and power held by the funders over the organizations.

In the case of Busara, hiring for the community field officer pool is an attempt to reduce power distance as these are people familiar with the context and often speak the language of the area. Certain limitations continue to exist, though, e.g., how to control for effective translation and a tendency to filter out any negative information that may impact an outcome – provision of funding or services. There is intentionality observed in trying to reduce the power distance.

There is no doubt that both the organizations and funders seek to do good and create impact, but their goals are not always aligned. Except for Meta Meta Foundation, which sources funding by crowdfunding (running campaigns on social media) and from friends and family, other organizations spoke of the tensions between what the funders and users want. Eugene, who works for *Kilimanjaro blind trust* and *Innovate Now*, shared that user testing and feedback are critical to balancing what the funder and users need. The unfortunate reality is that often your goal is not the goal of the funder. Eugene stated that he shares the facts and then aligns the solution to what the funder wants to resolve this tension. In some instances, he has proposed what he does not believe in because he has seen researchers removed from the ecosystem if they go against the funder's wishes.

Whose voices are least heard?

People living with disabilities stand out except in programs geared specifically to them. Still, even in these programs, those living in the rural areas are least heard.

Women and young people follow these. There is a conscious effort to include the voice of women and youth, especially in programs targeted to them and those in partnership with the government (the Kenya constitution requires representation of women, youth, and people living with disabilities). Unfortunately, the same group leaders/representatives often attend meetings/forums, limiting divergent views. One organization also shared that youth are not homogenous, and when treated as such, many of their voices go unheard.

It is, however, essential to note that most organizations inadvertently silence the voices of their beneficiaries when they determine to speak on their behalf to the key stakeholders. This may result from funder reporting guidelines that leave little space for stories even within the reports. One of the respondents shared that he sometimes uses video recording to share actual responses from the ground and, in so doing, goes against some funder wants. He stated that funders from the West give a script that does not solve their problems.

What do NGOs say about what is most needed to accelerate and improve high-quality feedback work?

- Diversify funders and stakeholders: having multiple stakeholders enables one to share stories of impact from different lens thus increasing the chances of getting appropriate interventions. FHI 360 says they unearthed a critical gap in their feedback – that they needed to engage women and youth more. They started working with a new set of partners who focus on this audience, enhancing their credibility.
- Recognize that the audience in the rural area is very different from the one in the urban areas. Power dynamics exist especially amongst men and women. FHI 360 resolved this by convening separate forums for men and women. The outcome was that in the women-focused peace dialogue forums in a region that had seen intertribal fighting, women for the first time spoke of the trauma of rape experienced when the men left to fight.
- Have a localized plan that includes engaging with the partners from the design stage.
- Meta Meta spends a lot of time within the community and in the girls' homes that she supports. She says NGOs need to avoid coming in with a savior mentality. She partners with the families and the community in determining which children require assistance and ensures balance across the four communities.
- Move from representative interviews (one-on-one or boardroom) to immersion by getting to know the people and fully understanding their context through a lived experience, almost like doing anthropological research. This point is best illustrated in the feedback I received from Al Kags. He is co-founder of Open Institute and a farmer who recently relocated from the city to his farm at the Kenyan coast. *See Insights below.*

Foundations

Like many other funders, Safaricom Foundation has a systematic reporting formula that it shares with implementing partners. The monthly and quarterly reports include feedback on beneficiaries, budget, challenges, plans for the coming quarter.

They proactively look for partners within their thematic areas but also have those that approach them. Having a footprint in each County is a crucial target for them and may determine the partners they select.

A few feedback gaps exist between them and their beneficiaries. Still, the more significant gap is between them and the public, who do not know where they are making a difference except for Mpesa academy. They need to tell the stories of the recipients better. Encouraging storytelling with

the partners would support the paradigm shift. They feel they could benefit from listening better and look forward to continuing the conversation.

Reducing power distance

Ory Okolloh, former Managing Director at Omidyar Network and Luminate Group, and current Board chairperson at Stanbic Kenya Foundation; offered some great advice on what foundations and funders can do to reduce the power distance that exists between them and their grantees:

- Have a mechanism for dealing with the challenge of people telling you what you want to hear because you hold the purse strings.
- Determine what to screen for during the hiring process, e.g., people who have some experience with being a grantee, have empathy for the grantee, etc
- Ask questions that challenge the why behind specific processes, e.g., what is the value of a particular report
- Be mindful of the feedback one gives to the grantee (the how and the what)
- Be responsive and transparent, especially about the process and the why of the process.
- Listen. Starting from the process design
- Train the team to "hear" where the real need is
- Have flexible funds that allow grant managers to offer portfolio support, including training in public speaking, communication, mental health for the founder, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning/sharing.
- Have provocative conversations with other funders.

Government

Context

In 2010, Kenya promulgated a new constitution. Creating a decentralized system of governance by the Constitution of Kenya 2010 was meant to ensure that citizens would be empowered through information and thus engage in the policy-making process on issues affecting their livelihoods. It sought to change the developmental imbalances that had hindered the country's social and economic development in the past through enhanced transparency, accountability, service delivery, equity, and inclusiveness. Article 232(d) has guaranteed the involvement of citizens in the policy-making process, with Article 196(1)(b) calling on the County Assemblies to facilitate public participation.

The spirit of the Constitution calls for public participation to occur and be meaningful to impact the policy-making process. Unfortunately, the presence of legally binding rules for public participation has not translated into meaningful practice. For instance, it has been found that 83% of Kenyans do not know the resources assigned to their County, with only 7% aware of their County's Fiscal Strategy Paper, 16% aware of the County's Integrated Development Plan, and 41% aware of the County's budget. This dismal performance is related to the finding that only 38% are aware of County meetings, and only 15% attend those meetings ([Transparency International, 2016](#)). In addition, the Policy on Devolved System of Government ([Government of Kenya, 2016](#)) acknowledges that the quality of public participation is low and has not been optimized due to low civic awareness by the citizenry, uncoordinated civic education, and challenges in accessing information.

Most County public participation processes take place as a formality to meet the minimum requirements of the Constitution (Judicial Review Miscellaneous Application 61 of 2014), thereby undermining the legitimacy of the public participation process as envisioned in the Constitution. This practice may lead to a general perception of such meetings as hollow rituals ([Adams, 2004](#)). Therefore, if this lack of meaningful public participation persists, the intention of the new Constitution with regard to ensuring that citizens are involved in the governance process through public involvement, and the promise it holds, will not be realized. Thus the need arises to investigate the determinants of meaningful public participation in Kenya's devolved units.

Determinants of Public Participation in Kenya County Governments

[Antony Mbithi](#), [Damiana Ndambuki](#), [Fredrick Owino Juma](#)

Relevance

The establishment of the county governments created opportunities for many development agencies to bypass the National Government and NGOs and work instead with County Governments. And large multilateral organizations like The World Bank restructured their agreements requiring execution via the county government mechanism. The lure of the county governments remains the promise of impact at scale. Effective public participation is crucial to the success of this approach.

The Kenyan society is highly politicized, and many citizens take their cues from political leaders. The new Constitution had an unintended outcome, the role of county leaders was elevated, and the role of civic organizations diminished.

In speaking to both Peter Nguire of Pathway Policy Institute and Abubaker of Uraia, it became clear that low trust in the government systems had a domino effect on the interactions between NGOs and the people they seek to serve. Lack of transparency in one area impacts the good intentions of another place. The government's approach to providing services is top bottom; they identify the issues and solutions and then seek feedback from the citizenry. There is a lot at stake by this time, especially funding, and people don't give negative feedback or enter accurate data. The perception towards feedback is it is synonymous with whistleblowing, and this results in victimization. An example is inputting a non-victimization clause that individuals who give negative feedback on work plan progress would not be punished.

Uraia (a civic education organization with expertise in governance) uses non-traditional approaches to engage stakeholders. For example, theater, IT, radio, cultural events, and in the times of Covid, key informant interviews via telephone. They also have biannual implementers' forums, undertake random M& E visits to the communities, and seek opportunities to interact with the program recipients. However, they need to create opportunities to listen more (hold listening only forums) and show stakeholders the path/ the journey by sharing how their input helped shape the plan. Consider reinstating peer educators who proved to be indispensable in the PEPFA funded HIV programs of the 1990s.

Abubaker (Uraia) stated that our conversation had gotten him to think about more innovative ideas of closing the feedback loop with the community – enabling them to appreciate that what they

contribute makes a difference. His renewed mindset was that information sharing is powerful and should be encouraged because it allows one to grow and reflect on their work.

In speaking to Save the children, Generations, fhi360, and Safaricom foundation, I learned that almost all their sustainability strategies are linked to working with the county governments. Therefore, promoting public participation may result in win-win outcomes for citizens and the organizations that seek to help them.

Insights and recommendations

Three key sectors could benefit from Shared Insight grant investments

- Agriculture
- People living with disabilities
- Education

Agriculture:

The agricultural sector in Kenya is the backbone of the economy. It contributes 26-33 percent to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with small-scale farmers key to food security. Effectively listening to the farmers and co-creating solutions to their challenges is critical to the Kenyan population. FAO in Kenya ([fao.org/kenya/fao-in-kenya/kenya-at-a-glance/en/](https://www.fao.org/kenya/fao-in-kenya/kenya-at-a-glance/en/)) buttresses this point:

The dynamics of poverty within Kenya are changing and directly influence the country's agricultural sector. Currently, 46% of the population live on less than 1 USD a day, 36.5 percent are food insecure, and 35 percent of children under five are stunted (chronically malnourished)...

Given the importance of agriculture in rural areas of Kenya where poverty is prevalent, the sector's importance in poverty alleviation cannot be overstated. Strengthening and improving the performance of the agriculture sector and enabling the engagement of the poorest and most vulnerable in this process is, therefore, a prerequisite and a necessary condition for achieving recovery and growth in Kenya after recent years of drought and slow development.

Unfortunately, this is the one sector where the voice of the farmer is often overlooked. One Acre Fund admitted that they have not always been good at responding to farmer feedback. At the recent United Nations Food Systems Summit (September 23rd, 2021), the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) cited five reasons for boycotting. The second of these reasons stated: "*we reject the silence of those who feed the World. Small-scale food producers have a right to be heard, and the summit currently does not provide any meaningful space to the people who feed the World and the civil societies that amplifies their voices.*"

And the third reason – "*UNFSS failed to address imbalanced power structures in the global #food systems.*" They were rejecting corporate approaches to mapping out the bottoms-up approach towards food sovereignty.

Al Kags, who recently moved to Malindi at the Kenyan coast, spoke of his challenges as a new farmer navigating the terrain. He suddenly found himself at the mercy of the village agronomist when it came to an understanding of what inputs to buy and how to apply them. It struck him that on both fertilizer and seed packets, the instructions were in English. He was curious to know how the local people dealt with these issues, and he started walking around listening to people's stories and learning from them. He quickly identified some gaps in the lived experience where people were deciding between buying fertilizer and food. As a researcher, he formalized his listening by visiting several women's groups at their table banking meetings. This is what he learned:

- Of the 678 women he spoke to in 3 months:
 - 48 are under 18 years old
 - 246 are between 23-28 years
 - 197 are between 29-32 years
 - 12 of them have had no schooling
 - 394 dropped out at class 3 and 218 in class 7 due to pregnancy and lack of school fees
 - 54 sat the primary school national exam – KCPE
 - 6 sat the secondary school national exam – KCSE
 - 245 of them have a national ID card, but half of them do not know where it is
 - Most have a phone and access to Mpesa, but only 192 have Mpesa in their name. The others access via male relatives. (Mpesa is a popular mobile money wallet)
 - 5 have a SACCO account (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization)

This sample concluded that it was difficult to enhance farming without caring for peripheral services, including basic literacy (adult learning) and peer support. Through his organization, Open Institute, he would like to get reliable empirical data of 10,000 people.

He says, for NGOs to accomplish genuine impact, they need to enhance their listening. In the farming space, they should consider supporting the return of agricultural extension officers over digital tools.

Education:

Kenya is currently in the process of implementing a new educational curriculum – competency-based curriculum (CBC). This implementation was interrupted by the shutdown of schools in 2020 due to Covid. With schools back in session this year (2021), many issues surfaced and communicated via various social media platforms – TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. A huge debate is raging on the virtues and vices of the system, with one parent suing the Ministry of Education.

The perception is that education is the sole pathway to success and self-sufficiency. The new curriculum aims to take the focus away from a purely academic endeavor to one where life skills are incorporated. Some of the pathways to this include increased parent involvement – this has caused an uproar in the various social media outlets. In giving this feedback, parents and the general citizenry highlight the assumptions made, the voices least heard, and the challenges of implementing a competency-based curriculum as a one-size-fits-all.

In their online magazine, Nairobi Garage (a co-working space in Nairobi), on August 27th, 2019, featured *10 EdTech companies changing the face of Kenya's Education Sector*. They talked of these companies leveraging the mobile penetration in the country to "*build new models for students to learn through mobile phones, tablets, and apps with digital content, gamified learning, and even personalized learning driven by largely artificial intelligence.*"

In speaking to one of these organizations, it was evident it has not been smooth sailing. Things have changed significantly, and nobody knows what is happening as most organizations are very immature in the industry. In a tool prepared for teachers, they can receive some perceptual feedback, but the uptake has been slow. Collecting data from school management systems has been a challenge, and feedback from parents is fragmented.

The Covid year 2020 revealed the inequities within the Education sector. Most public schools could not run virtual classes, and in private schools, most parents had to share their phones, tablets, and laptops with their children.

Improving and increasing listening practices in this sector offers an opportunity to course-correct by making critical improvements to the education system.

People living with disabilities

Issues for equity and justice play out the most within this sector. While the 2010 constitution acted as a catalyst for strengthening the legal provisions catering to persons with disabilities in Kenya, the implementation is very slow. It is critical to amplify their voice and facilitate access to goods and services that enable them to participate fully in society. Designing solutions for this audience requires effective listening practices, tools, and infrastructure that co-create processes that yield the intended outcomes.

Conclusion

This scan of the current state of the feedback field in Kenya was both challenging and exciting, revealing my perceptions and reaffirming my beliefs. Initially, I had assumed that getting people willing to give feedback would not be a problem. This was not the case, and it took leveraging my relational and reputational capital to connect with a diverse group of respondents.

Issues of trust surfaced early, with one organization expressing suspicion at my offer of an honorarium, an individual who did not think her bosses would appreciate her talking to me, and the low trust between Nonprofits, NGOs, and CBOs, the organizations that fund them. It was curious to observe the non-verbal responses to the question on the relationship between funder and partner, which ranged from heavy sighs, exasperation, covering of the face, etc. Building a high trust relationship would significantly lower costs and increase speed (Stephen MR Covey – author of *Leading at the Speed of Trust*). Still, it would take frequent communication, integrity, and good intent.

Appendix

List of interviewees

Anisha Singh - Busara Center for Behavioral Economics
Tonee Ndungu - Kytabu
Peter Ngure – Pathway Policy Institute
Abubaker Said – Uraia Trust
Corinne Ngurukie – Head of Partnerships, Generations
Sharmi Surianarain – Chief Impact Officer, Harambee
Sophiah Onyango - Program Manager, Safaricom Foundation
Al Kags – Farmer and Co-founder at Open Institute
Githaka and Kai – farmers (agroforestry)
Ory Okolloh Mwangi – former Managing Director at Omidyar Network and Luminate Group
Phyllis Ombonyo - Chief of Party, SADES-K (Safeguarding Democratic Space in Kenya) FHI 360
Caroline Makena – Disability Inclusion Advisor, Riziki Source
Eugene Maina – Market Research, Kilimanjaro Blind Trust and Program Manager, Innovate Now
Lisa Parrott – Senior Director, Save the Children
Sharon Muhwezi – One Acre Fund
Jane Mwikali – Meta Meta Foundation
Andrew Goto – Kenya Climate Innovation Center (KCIC)