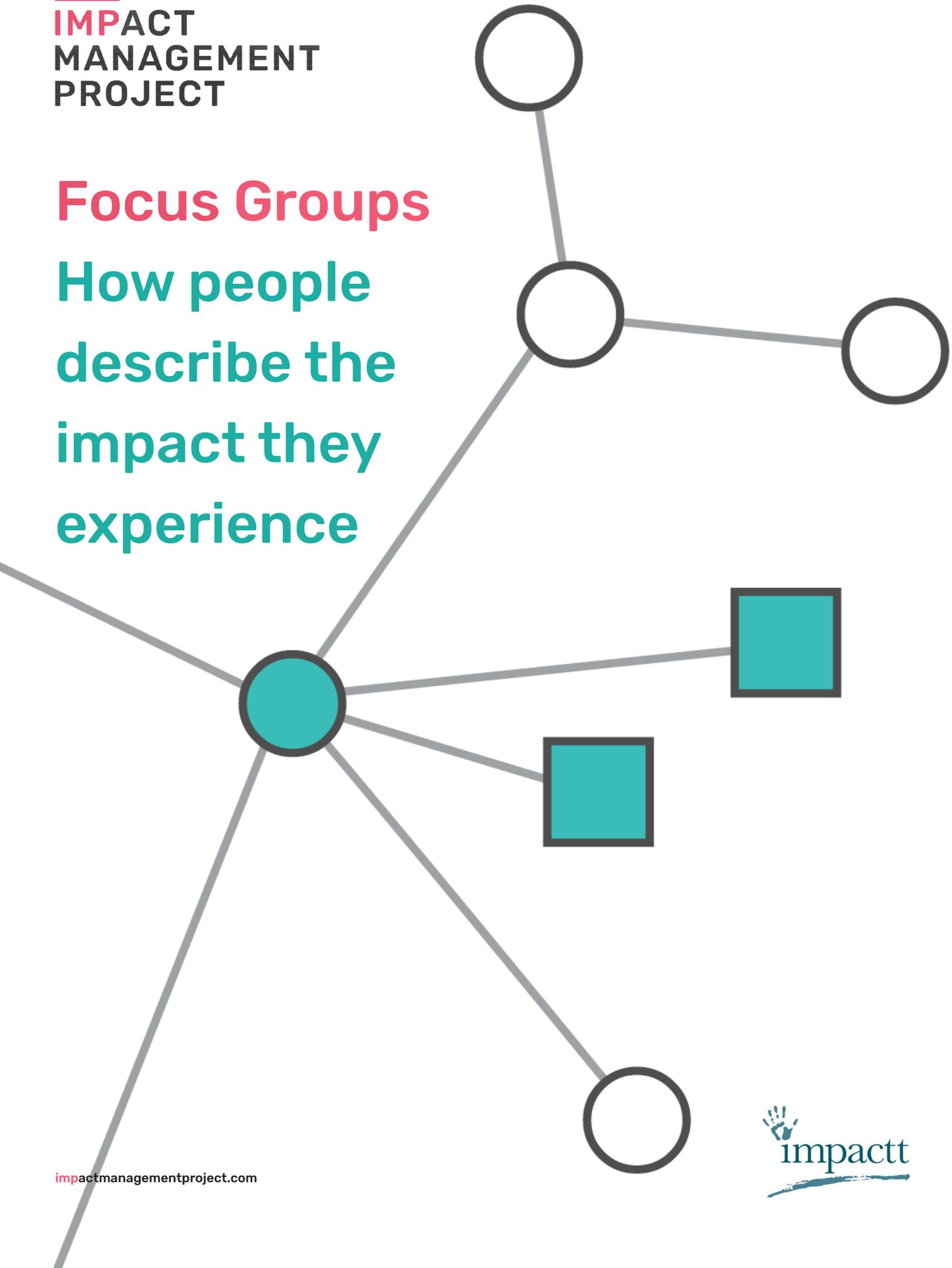


Focus Groups

How people
describe the
impact they
experience



INTRODUCTION

We delivered focus groups in Myanmar, Kenya, Belgium and Bolivia.

Impactt delivered focus groups in Myanmar, Kenya, Belgium and Bolivia to help the Impact Management Project understand what people's expectations are when buying from or engaging with products or services that they feel they need. This enables entrepreneurs and investors to understand what kind of impact they are having.

Ultimately, the Impact Management Project would like to understand how people think about themselves and their goals, as customers or beneficiaries¹. Together, we developed a series of related hypotheses to test in the focus groups and co-developed a series of questions to prompt responses from participants that helped test each hypothesis.

During the focus groups, Impactt used appreciative enquiry. This approach promoted and ensured open discussions amongst all participants, and allowed for all voices to be heard.

This report summarises findings from the focus groups. Individual focus group reports are published separately. The insights from the individual focus groups are being published to gather feedback and comments, which will feed into the Impact Management Project.

We hope they will be further developed across disciplines and worldviews. If you have suggestions, expertise you wish to share or know of somebody else that should shape the conversation, please get in touch at team@impactmanagementproject.com.

¹ Some understand as financial beneficiary, but other stakeholders understand is "person benefiting from the service." From our work on the focus groups, participants identified beneficiaries as those receiving a product or service without paying for it, most often from the State and with little feedback loops, opportunities to choose provision of service or product or consultation processes. This is the definition we use.

SUMMARY

People know what is more or less important to them.

People want to be consulted or participate.

Across the four countries, we interviewed:

- 102 people as part of focus groups; 57 women and 45 men
- 13 people individually; 5 women and 8 men

In order to understand people's expectations when buying or engaging with products or services they feel they need, we developed conversations testing 15 hypotheses against 10 criteria, set out below.

#	HYPOTHESIS	OUTCOME
Criteria 1. Outcomes / challenges / solutions		
1	People have an understanding of what a good life means for them and this can be expressed by them as goals/outcomes/challenges/solutions	MIXED
2	People actively seek the best available ways to achieve their goals	AGREE
Criteria 2. Materiality of social / environmental outcomes		
3	People know what is more or less important to them, i.e. they perceive some outcomes as more impactful than others	AGREE
4	People know what products/services/types of job contribute more or less to the outcomes they care about, whether they know based on intuition or facts, i.e. they perceive some products/services/job types as being more impactful.	AGREE
Criteria 3. Beneficiary / Customer		
5	People aren't comfortable being considered beneficiaries; they prefer to be an active participant in achieving their 'good life'.	MIXED
6	When people are customers, they care less about participating and giving feedback (because their decision to spend their money signals their choice/participation) than when they are beneficiaries.	DISAGREE
Criteria 4. Vulnerability		
7	People have an understanding of who is more or less vulnerable and why and where they are in relation to that.	AGREE
8	People reposition themselves in terms of vulnerability depending on what outcome/area of their life they talk about.	AGREE

SUMMARY cont'd

People are willing to take higher risks when the potential gain is bigger.

9	People who consider themselves vulnerable in relation to an area of their life value the change in that area more than those who do not consider themselves vulnerable, i.e. the impact is greater.	AGREE
Criteria 5. Additionality		
10	A product/service is more valuable (i.e. more impactful) if it is the only option than if there are other available alternatives that are as good or nearly as good.	AGREE
Criteria 6. Attribution		
11	People care about who is providing the product/service/job. They care about this because it says something about other outcomes or values they care about.	MIXED
Criteria 7. Participation		
12	People want to be consulted	AGREE
Criteria 8. Cost-effectiveness		
13	People agree that financiers of products/services should try and create as much good as they can with the money they provide	AGREE
Criteria 9. Impact risk		
14	It matters to people whether or not a product/service/job creates the change they were looking for. People are willing to take higher risks when the potential gain is bigger.	AGREE
Criteria 10. Externalities, unintended consequences		
15	Every time an intended outcome is achieved, other outcomes occur as well – positive and negative. Intended outcomes and actual outcomes are different.	AGREE

SUMMARY cont'd

73% agreed

7% disagreed

20% had mixed

responses to

the hypothesis

Despite different socio-cultural, historic and economic backgrounds, in 80% of cases participants disagreed or agreed with hypotheses. This indicates that for the most part the hypotheses are understood globally and that most can be backed up with qualitative evidence.

- In the 73% of cases where participants agreed, the hypotheses either:
 1. Defended or improved the agency or decision-making abilities of participants. This created positive emotional responses.
 2. Required answers based on lived experience and knowledge, which participants found easy to respond to.
- Participants disagreed with hypothesis #6 concerning their agency / decision-making capabilities being reduced. This elicited a negative emotional response from participants.
- For hypotheses where there were mixed responses, often participants from 3 countries agreed, and 1 disagreed. The outlier would often cite a very local issue, either situational or relational, to defend their view point.

We explore mixed responses in more detail in the next section.

MIXED RESPONSES

In Myanmar, participants felt they are not able to access the products and services they need.

OUTCOMES / CHALLENGES / SOLUTIONS

Hypothesis: People have an understanding of what a good life means for them and this can be expressed by them as goals/outcomes/challenges/solutions

Participants in Bolivia, Kenya, and Myanmar were able to define what a good life is and expressed their good life outcomes as outcomes/challenges/solutions.

In Belgium, participants were able to define what their good life but only expressed it in terms of outcomes. They did not express challenges or solutions. See section 'DIFFICULT QUESTIONS' for further insights into why this was the case.

BENEFICIARIES / CUSTOMERS

Hypothesis: People aren't comfortable being considered beneficiaries; they prefer to be an active participant in achieving their 'good life'

Participants in Bolivia, Kenya, and Myanmar disagreed with this hypothesis, although in most instances they did not feel they were beneficiaries as they ended up having to pay for most products and services, even governmental ones.

In Belgium some participants disagreed, but most felt this status undermines their prerogative to give feedback, be consulted and interact with the providers of goods and services. They therefore would prefer to be considered as clients, customers or citizens as these words allow for this dynamic interaction.

ATTRIBUTION

Hypothesis: People care about who is providing the product/service/job. They care about this because it says something about other outcomes or values they care about.

Participants in Belgium, Bolivia and Kenya agreed with this hypothesis.

In Myanmar, although participants agreed in principle with the hypothesis, ultimately they felt that at the moment they are not able to access the products and services they need. This led to these participants declaring that in the end it does not matter where products and services comes from and stressing that they would accept them from anyone as the need is so great.

This finding would seem to indicate that people only start to care when their very basic needs are being met. However, in

MIXED RESPONSES cont'd

From our findings, why participants agreed or disagreed with hypothesis is determined by economic factors.

Bolivia people agreed with the hypothesis not because their needs were met but because the basic products and services provided by certain stakeholders were so poor they would prefer to have these provided by other stakeholders. The hypothesis could be updated as follows:

People care about who is providing the product/service/job. They care about this because it says something about other outcomes or values they care about or the quality of products and services provided by certain stakeholders over others (good or bad). Participants care more about this when very basic needs have been met.

DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

As noted above, the broad agreements and disagreements demonstrated by participants show that socio-cultural, historic and economic circumstance are not determining factors in how people judge hypotheses or what they ultimately vote for.

From our findings, why participants agree or disagree with specific hypotheses is determined by economic development of the countries where focus groups took place. In fact, in most instances, Bolivian, Kenyan and Myanmar participants agreed or disagreed with hypotheses for the same reasons, whilst Belgian participants agreed or disagreed for different reasons.

The three key examples below demonstrate this stark contrast. In two of these, participants agree.

Example 1 Agreement with hypothesis – Vulnerability

Hypothesis: People have an understanding of who is more or less vulnerable and why and where they are in relation to that.

All participants were able to understand who is more or less vulnerable and why, and where they themselves are in relation to that. The key difference here was the breadth of knowledge taken into account in order to come to terms with understandings of vulnerability.

- In Bolivia, Kenya and Myanmar individual vulnerability was primarily driven by an understanding of the local context. This could in some circumstances extend to neighbouring countries but more often than not was limited to the community, town or village and the vulnerabilities associated with those local contexts.
- In Belgium, participants understood their vulnerability based

MIXED RESPONSES cont'd

In Belgium,
with good
provision of
services and
products,
participants
compared
their lives
with those
at home and
abroad.

on the global context. With good provision of services and products at home and a greater understanding of local and global contexts, participants compared their lives to those living at home and abroad (with particular examples picked from Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and India). The knowledge of the global was instrumental in determine how vulnerable they felt.

Example 2 Agreement with hypothesis – Additionality

Hypothesis: A product/service is more valuable (i.e. more impactful) if it is the only option than if there are other available alternatives that are as good or nearly as good

Participants from Bolivia, Kenya and Myanmar agreed with this statement. All participants said they would be satisfied as long as the service or product met their needs; the number of same services on offer was insignificant. Their main requirement was to have at least one good option and the respective value of options does not change once your first option is available.

In Belgium, the response was more mixed driven by a much greater lived experience and wide-reaching knowledge of the impacts (perceived or real) of competition. They felt that competition was good at providing choice and hence pressure to give the best price and service. However, if unregulated/ uncontrolled, competition could lead to exploitation of people, animals and/or environment and this needs to be prevented. They saw it is a consumers' responsibly to consider the impact of products/services and costs when deciding purchases.

Potentially the hypothesis could be rephrased as:

A product/service is most impactful if it is the only available product or service meeting a need. A product/service does not immediately lose its impact value if other products/ services meet the same need, although it might become less impactful but does promote competition and choice in the market which can have *positive and negative impact* to people, communicates and environment.

Example 3 Mixed responses – Outcomes / challenges / solutions

Hypothesis: People have an understanding of what a good life means for them and this can be expressed by them as goals/ outcomes/challenges/solutions

All participants were able to define their outcomes.

There are very real and tangible challenges participants face and can define in Myanmar, Bolivia, and Kenya.

- In Bolivia, Kenya and Myanmar participants were also able to define challenges and solutions to achieve those outcomes. This is because their good life outcomes are most often tangible and necessary products and services, including education, earning sufficient income to survive, land or building a business. There are very real and tangible challenges that participants face to achieve these.
- In Belgium, participants' outcomes did not include challenges and solutions. Impactt believe this is due to Belgian outcomes being less tangible. For example, they talked of achieving spiritual awakening, of understanding the meaning of life, of making the world a more positive place.
 1. Participants noted they could have these because even those with the least material wealth were guaranteed a comfortable lifestyle by being citizens of Belgium. This gave them the space to think about life in a more existential way.
 2. In addition, these outcomes were all achievable by the individual and each person could develop their own journey to achieve them.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Participants in Belgium found it very difficult to think about products and services that currently help them.

We asked facilitators in each country which hypotheses participants found the hardest to answer and which they found the easiest.

We have presented our disaggregated findings below:

- Across countries, participants differed on easiest and hardest hypotheses.
- Even where countries matched, participants did not find hypotheses easy or hard to answer for the same reasons.
- Drivers for finding questions easy or hard are driven by local context and lived experience.
- Only in Myanmar did participants find the same question easy AND hard

BELGIUM
Which ones did they find hardest?
People know what products/services/types of job contribute more or less to the outcomes they care about, whether they know based on intuition or facts, i.e. they perceive some products/services/job types as being more impactful.
Why?
Participants found it very difficult to think of the products and services which currently helped them to achieve their good life. Participants found the question easier to answer when it was reversed : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What products and services would you miss if they were taken away?
Participants found this very easy to answer. Further conversations demonstrated that the difficulty was driven by the fact participants were so used to receiving some essential products and services they could not think of other products and services that would add additional value to those.
Which ones did they find easiest?
People care about who is providing the product/service/job. They care about this because it says something about other outcomes or values they care about.
People want to be consulted

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS cont'd

People in Bolivia were very aware of what made their lives easier or harder compared to their neighbours.

Why?
Participants in Belgium had already considered these hypotheses and acted on them in their day to day lives. They therefore had very clear ideas on what to answer.
BOLIVIA
Which ones did they find hardest?
People have an understanding of what a good life means for them and this can be expressed by them as goals/outcomes/challenges/solutions
Why?
Participants could not imagine their future very easily as most participants lived day-to-day and did not plan for the future. Surviving was the foremost goal.
Which ones did they find easiest?
People have an understanding of who is more or less vulnerable and why and where they are in relation to that.
Why?
People were very aware of their local circumstances and what made their lives easier or harder compared to their neighbours. It was the reality they lived every day and therefore it was evident.
KENYA
Which ones did they find hardest?
People aren't comfortable being considered beneficiaries; they prefer to be an active participant in achieving their 'good life'.
People care about who is providing the product/service/job. They care about this because it says something about other outcomes or values they care about.
Why?
Participants felt they varied between being beneficiaries, customers and citizens, and that the idea of being a beneficiary alone was not usual and not one they had ever considered. They did not feel being a beneficiary was bad, just that it did not happen very often.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS cont'd

In Kenya,
some
participants
had never
really
thought
about
how they
consume.

Participants had not really ever thought about attribution and were able to answer the questions once the facilitator explained in more detail and asked questions about how they make the choices they make. For some it was the first time they had ever considered how they consume or why they make the choices they do.

Which ones did they find easiest?

NA

Why?

Participants found the other hypotheses easy to answer.

MYANMAR

Which ones did they find hardest AND easiest?

People have an understanding of what a good life means for them and this can be expressed by them as goals/outcomes/challenges/solutions

Why?

In Myanmar, participants were split. Some found this question very easy, others very hard. It was by far the most divisive. Participants who found it easy had thought about this question previously and knew which goals they wanted to achieve. Others were on the opposite end – they lived day-to-day and therefore to think of goals was a new experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drivers of participants' reasoning are varied and context-driven.

Knowledge is developed through lived experience and access to information.

CONTEXT, DRIVERS AND GOOD DECISION-MAKING

Topline analysis of findings would indicate that participants across countries all agree or disagree on the same topics for the same reasons. For example, on the positive side, these include good health care, social status, access to education, entrepreneurship and good infrastructure. On the other hand, poor government policies and corruption are negative drivers that hinder the achievement of desired outcomes.

Looking at the findings in more detail though shows that even when participants agreed or disagreed on key issue areas, the drivers behind these agreements / disagreements are varied and context-driven. These drivers are only uncovered and understood through gathering of qualitative information from concerned individuals. Furthermore, decisions made without looking beyond the topline would most likely not have the reach of desired impact. Understanding context and drivers beyond the topline is therefore essential to good decision-making.

EACH PERSON HAS THEIR OWN HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Each participant's personal situation and relationships changes the relative level of importance of each their needs. To overcome this, stakeholders collecting user-voice should establish clear parameters over space and time to ensure the right information is being collected from the right people over the right amount of time in order to be useful to the end data-user. For example, it is of little use to collect user-voice for one month over the whole of Kenya, if a project will impact one specific village over ten years. Conversely, if voices from the whole of Kenya need to be heard for a short period of time, then it is of no use to speak to one village for ten years. Setting parameters from the outset is a necessary step.

PEOPLE ONLY KNOW WHAT THEY KNOW

When Impactt work in-factory, we will engage with workers before, during and after projects. Often, workers at the end of the project expect more from their workplace than they did before. This is because throughout the course of the project their understanding of the rights and their expectations grow. This matches with finding from our focus groups. Knowledge is developed through lived experience and access to information, demonstrated starkly by the respondent's from Belgium

RECOMMENDATIONS cont'd

An absence of an answer is not an absence of opinion or feeling.

People want to be able to speak and be listened to.

who had wide knowledge of global events and could place themselves amongst these.

In short, people only know what they know. When user-voice is developed and rolled out, it is essential to consider that participants might not be able to answer questions for many reasons, and an absence of an answer is not absence of opinion or feeling if the issues were to be raised. This is where stakeholder expertise is essential to differentiating between the “I haven’t given an answer because I don’t have an opinion” and the “I haven’t given an answer because I don’t have any knowledge or experience of this issue.”

CONSULTATION IS GOOD, PARTICIPATION IS BETTER

In all contexts, people want to be able to speak and be listened to. However, often they are not given the appropriate opportunities or supporting environment to do so. In Belgium people felt opportunities to participate come too late, whilst in Kenya people are worried about giving feedback in places where they consider themselves less important. Therefore, to gather user-voice, a varied approach to consultation is important. We recommend shifting the paradigm and talking about participation.

Sit-down focus groups work, but people also need to be able to participate in other ways. From suggestion boxes to hotlines or contact point, only through varied approaches can extensive, useable feedback be obtained. Participation must also occur as early as possible, and throughout a project life-cycle in order for a project to be successful and sustainable.

THE VALUE OF AN (UN)HAPPY VOICE

People are more likely to voice negative opinions than positive. In addition, unhappy voices have the tendency to ripple across families, friends and communities with more vigour than happy voices. Does this mean that negative feedback is more valuable than positive feedback?

At Impactt, unhappy feedback from workers is weighted more heavily than happy feedback. It is more important to address the needs of an exploited worker than a happy worker. If the voice of disenfranchised worker is not weighted properly, it might get lost in the data. Over time, as exploitation becomes less severe, the weighting will gradually drop.

It could be assumed that negative opinions usually come from

RECOMMENDATIONS cont'd

Negative feedback from vulnerable participants should be weighted more.

more vulnerable people. However, this is not always the case.

For example, in Kenya, our focus groups showed that a person of lower social status (perceived or real) would not necessarily complain in large shops as they feared negative outcomes for speaking out. This person would have a relatively high level of vulnerability. If in the same context someone was complaining loudly, they would most likely be someone of higher social status and lower vulnerability.

In this fictional example, if the protagonists were asked to offer feedback to a third party about their experiences in order for the third party to develop a programme to improve positive social impact of supermarkets, the voice of the former (the more vulnerable party) would need to be weighted more heavily. This is because their voice:

- Is rarer and harder to be heard.
- Represents the more vulnerable party who should benefit most from any intervention.

Of course, in some instances the opposite might also be true – the more vulnerable might also be the loudest.

The simplified assumption is:

Level of vulnerability + level of "voice" = relative weighting of user-voice

There is no hard or fast rule to this: it will depend on what the aims of each project are. It is essential to consider this before collecting user-voice to understand what relative value voices are given and which voices shout loudest. Following this, user-voice can be collected properly and happy and unhappy voices, their level of severity and the drivers behind them can be weighted, prioritised and addressed.

