Getting an Earful: 
A Review of Beneficiary Assessments of Social Funds

Daniel Owen 
Julie Van Domelen

December 1998

Social Protection Unit  
Human Development Network  
The World Bank

Social Protection Discussion Papers are not formal publications of the World Bank. They present preliminary and unpolished results of analysis that are circulated to encourage discussion and comment; citation and the use of such a paper should take account of its provisional character. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, to its affiliated organizations or to members of its Board of Executive Directors or the countries they represent.

For free copies of this paper, please contact the Social Protection Advisory Service, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, N.W., MSN G8-802, Washington, D.C. 20433 USA. Telephone: (202) 458-5267, Fax: (202) 614-0471, E-mail: socialprotection@worldbank.org. Or visit the Social Protection website at http://www.worldbank.org/sp.
Getting an Earful:
A Review of Beneficiary Assessments of Social Funds

Prepared by:
Daniel Owen and Julie Van Domelen

Social Protection Team
Human Development Network
World Bank*

December 1998

Abstract

Social investment funds account for a growing share of the Bank’s portfolio in the social protection and human development areas. Given the demand-driven nature of these social funds, systematic feedback from beneficiaries is an essential evaluation tool. This study reviews the experience to date with beneficiary assessments of social funds. The study is divided into two sections: (i) an evaluation of the use of beneficiary assessments as a monitoring and evaluation tool; and (ii) observations on social fund operations based on information from the end-users. The paper concludes with recommendations for improving the quality of beneficiary assessments as well as social fund performance across countries.

* This report was prepared with support from the Human Development Network, Social Protection Team: Steen Lau Jorgensen, Manager and Robert Holzmann, Director. Valuable peer review comments were received from Lawrence Salmen (SDV), Julianna Weissman (LACHD), Mary Barton-Dock (AFR7), and Patti Petesch (consultant, PRMPO). The views and interpretations expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and policies of the World Bank.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................... i
Part I: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
Objectives of the Study .................................................................................................... 2

Part II: Analysis of Beneficiary Assessments: a Monitoring and Evaluation Tool for Social Funds
   Getting the BA underway: Setting Objectives ................................................................. 3
   Who does what? Institutional Issues ............................................................................. 5
   Participation in Practice: Process Issues in Beneficiary Assessments ......................... 7
   BA in the field: Technical and Methodological Issues .................................................. 9
   General Issues in Social Fund Beneficiary Assessments .............................................. 15

Part III: Beneficiary Perspectives on Social Funds
   Issues Covered .............................................................................................................. 18
   Community Priorities and Social Fund Menu of Projects ............................................ 19
   Targeting .................................................................................................................... 21
   Beneficiary Participation in Identification and Preparation ....................................... 21
   Execution and Community Contributions .................................................................. 23
   Community Participation and Dynamics ..................................................................... 25
   Gender Dimensions .................................................................................................... 27
   Information Flows and Level of Knowledge of Beneficiaries .................................... 27
   Transparency and Accountability ................................................................................ 28
   Operations, Maintenance and Sustainability ............................................................... 29
   Perception of Quality and Satisfaction with Project Impacts ..................................... 30
   Institutional Arrangements and Roles ........................................................................ 32
   Do Social Funds Get Better Over Time? ..................................................................... 33

Part IV: Recommendations
   Recommendations for Beneficiary Assessments ......................................................... 34
   Recommendations for Social Funds ............................................................................. 35

Tables
   Table 2.1: BA Objectives ............................................................................................. 4
   Table 2.2: BA Institutions ........................................................................................... 6
   Table 2.3: BA Process ................................................................................................ 9
   Table 2.4: BA Sampling Frame .................................................................................. 10
   Table 2.5: BA Methods ............................................................................................. 12
   Table 2.6: A Typology of Participation ...................................................................... 16
   Table 3.1: Topics Addressed in BAs ....................................................................... 18

Annex A: List of Beneficiary Assessments Reviewed
Executive Summary

Social investment funds (SFs), or agencies that channel funds to small-scale projects in targeted poor communities, account for a growing share of the World Bank’s portfolio in the social protection and human development areas. Given the demand-driven nature of social funds, systematic feedback from beneficiaries is an essential evaluation tool. As such, beneficiary assessments (BAs) have been used extensively in social funds. This study reviews fifteen beneficiary assessments carried out in eight countries between 1989 and 1996. The study analyzes (a) the BAs as a monitoring and evaluation tool, and (b) the performance of social funds as perceived by their beneficiaries.

The review clearly shows that there is no one standard objective or design of a beneficiary assessment appropriate for all social funds. The objectives and topics covered should be consistent with the issues at various stages of a social fund’s evolution. The trend in more recent beneficiary assessments is toward a modular approach as opposed to blanket objectives and building in a series of iterative BAs rather than a one-time exercise. At the institutional level, almost all BAs are contracted outside of the social funds, most typically to consulting firms, and had an average cost of US$64,000. The Bank provided significant technical support in two-thirds of the cases reviewed. Although carried out by agents outside of the fund, the review found that buy-in and participation on the part of SF management was essential. This participation was most important in the drafting of terms of reference, selection of the sample, progress reviews during the fieldwork, and development of action plans to follow-up on recommendations.

In terms of technical and methodological issues, there was a wide variation in the quality and approaches of the BAs. One of the most important aspects of design is the selection of a sample framework that insures validity of data, both in terms of number of project sites and the number of beneficiaries interviewed at each site. Use of semi-structured conversational interviews was a base method common to all assessments, complimented with focus group discussions, participant observation and structured questionnaires. In addition, the better BAs solicited opinions from multiple perspectives, including a mix of skills and backgrounds of the interviewers, and selection of interviewees from different gender, age and institutional groups.

The BAs with more convincing analysis and presentation are those that blend and combine various methods - both qualitative and quantitative - and provide validity checks through triangulation. The final report was the primary tool for transmitting findings, although there were significant limitations in the documentation of the process itself as part of the reporting. While there was evidence of feedback and follow-up within the social fund, there was little dissemination of results outside of the social fund. On a more general level, the better the overall link with other methodologies and assessments, especially quantitative monitoring such as household surveys, the more convincing are the recommendations.

Based on the findings of the BAs across countries, there are several general conclusions about social funds that can be drawn. The BAs were most often used to probe community and
participation aspects and to assess the performance of social fund procedures and policies. BAs were less useful in measuring targeting accuracy or determining the relative poverty level of beneficiary communities. On the whole, they also shed little light on such issues as what types of investments should be eligible within a social fund’s menu, or aspects related to the institutional context of social funds (objectives, integration with local government, etc.).

The BAs were uniform in their finding that beneficiaries consistently felt that social fund projects reflected priority needs of the community, confirming the essentially demand-driven nature of social funds. This was true even with the insertion of intermediaries in the identification process. Direct beneficiary involvement in the identification of project proposals was better where there was both a formal mechanism (community assembly) and where beneficiary committees were eligible to execute projects directly. The BAs also revealed a high degree of beneficiary participation in the execution of projects, most typically in the provision of labor and materials. Regarding the level and type of community counterpart contributions, the BAs raised a series of concerns about potential unintended effects of current social fund policies.

Regarding the quality, sustainability and impact of social fund projects, overall beneficiary ratings were quite high, even for social funds during the early stages of existence. Consistent with the rating regarding quality, beneficiaries displayed a large degree of satisfaction with social fund projects. Impacts were concentrated mainly in improved access to and quality of basic services. There was also evidence of spillover effects in the strengthening of local capacity and the building of social capital. Potential income effects were less clear, or not explicitly explored in the BAs. The arrangements for operation and maintenance revealed weaknesses that may adversely affect sustainability of benefits over time, particularly the lack of training to communities regarding operations and maintenance.

The BAs provided key insights into community participation and dynamics useful in fine-tuning social fund operations. In general, social funds tend to reach poor sectors which exhibit active conduct in searching for solutions. Passive communities tended to remain relatively more inactive even during execution of social fund projects and tended to rely more on intermediaries. This was largely a function of the existence of effective leaders in the community. In addition, there were significant differences of opinions and preferences inside of communities, between different actors and between genders.

The review of BAs pointed to a series of recommendations valid across countries. These include: (a) the importance of improving information flows directly to beneficiaries, which was found to have a large pay-off in terms of ease of execution, quality of projects, transparency, satisfaction of beneficiaries, sustainability and spill-over effects; (b) the need for a more circumspect evaluation of community counterpart policies; (c) although achieved on a program level, the continued challenge of raising transparency and efficiency at the level of each microproject; (d) the creation of opportunities to incorporate beneficiary points of view in all aspects of social fund operations, with the weakest areas currently in the design and supervision stages; and (e) the importance of moving away from isolated projects to embed social fund investments in the local context and coordinate with other local initiatives and institutions.
I. Introduction

Background

1.1 Social funds are agencies that channel funds to small-scale projects covering a wide range of investments, including economic and social infrastructure, social assistance and microfinance. In response to demand from poor communities, social funds appraise, approve, and supervise the implementation of targeted small-scale investments executed through line ministries, local governments, NGOs and beneficiary groups. The World Bank has supported more than 50 such Funds around the world, and these agencies account for a growing share of the Bank’s portfolio in the social protection and human development areas.

1.2 Given the demand-driven nature of these social funds, systematic feedback from beneficiaries is an essential evaluation tool. The recent review of Beneficiary Assessments carried out in Bank projects\(^1\) found that “one exceptional area of project activity that has used beneficiary assessments is that of Social Funds. Over half of those approved by the end of Fiscal Year 1996 have involved a beneficiary assessment learning component, presumably because of the clear-cut demand orientation of this kind of initiative coupled with the little pre-existing information regarding the nature of demand, concentrated as it is at the grassroots level.” These exercises serve as an extremely rich source of information on, amongst other aspects, perceptions of quality and relevance of social fund projects, opinions on social fund procedures and processes, and insights to the nature and intensity of community participation. So far, their use and accessibility has been limited mainly to social fund managers and a small number of interested Bank staff. However, there are many valuable insights to be mined from these studies, insights which go beyond a specific fund in a given country and shed light on issues ranging from participation in general to overall design issues facing all social funds.

1.3 A beneficiary assessment (BA) has been described as a qualitative method of information gathering that assesses the value of an activity as it is perceived by its principal users. Its key features are an approach to information gathering that is qualitative, but quantified, systematic but flexible, action-oriented, and targeted to decision-makers. Its value-added derives from the contributions BAs can make to better project design, improved targeting, more effective programs, more informed policy decisions, increased likelihood of sustainable impacts, and strengthened dialogue with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Although the term “beneficiary assessment” is often defined in a more restricted methodological way, this study chose a more inclusive definition - any evaluation which sought the input of direct beneficiaries and was characterized by predominantly qualitative research methods.

1.4 Other reviews of BAs as evaluation instruments have, by and large, considered the BAs by their overall project impact, judged principally by the level of follow-up action within the project addressing recommendations from the BA. These reviews have been somewhat uncritical of the technical and process-related dimensions of designing and implementing a beneficiary

assessment. There is also some latent skepticism within the Bank that conventionally has placed a lesser value on qualitative evaluation methods and the departure from standard practice that they represent. Hence, there is a need for confirmation and justification of a more widespread use and application of BA-type approaches.

1.5 Relatively little learning appears to have taken place based on experience to date regarding how to design and undertake better beneficiary assessments. Much of the learning that has occurred again has most probably taken place within individual Social Funds and between the BA institution (in cases where the same institution has carried out more than one BA) and SF management unit. There has also been relatively little in-depth learning across social funds, particularly at the field level. This is all the more apparent as a natural adaptive process intensifies and social funds become more rather than less distinct from one another. Nor is there strong evidence to suggest that the iterative, hands-on skills upgrading around BAs has percolated up the system, into and across the Bank.

Objectives of the Study

1.6 To address these shortcomings and to take advantage of a relatively under-appreciated source of information on how communities and social funds work, the Social Protection Team of the Human Development Network undertook to review the existing experience with beneficiary assessments of social funds. This study looks at the experience to date from two angles: (i) what this says about beneficiary assessments as a monitoring and evaluation tool and (ii) what it says about selected aspects of social funds across countries.

1.7 There are obvious limitations to what has been strictly a desk study. Without recourse to verbatim insights from the people involved or direct feedback on process from those directly involved, this study has had to infer on the basis of written reports on a variety of aspects of beneficiary assessments, some of which have been very scantily documented. Nonetheless, the intention is to create a resource that would guide Bank staff in building better beneficiary assessments as well as present the collected wisdom of beneficiaries as to social fund design and operational issues. As a complement, insights from the field, from SF staff in the management units, from beneficiary assessment research teams, from communities at project sites where BA investigations have taken place, all need to be incorporated. Above all, closer attention must be devoted to documenting the process - the strengths and the pitfalls - in order to build on and put to good use the extensive base of empirical experience gathered to date.

1.8 The objective of this technical review of beneficiary assessments has been one of drawing lessons from completed assessments so as to improve future work. The study looks at fifteen beneficiary assessments carried out in eight countries between 1989 and 1996 (see Annex A for a list of the BAs reviewed). Part II analyzes beneficiary assessments as a monitoring and evaluation tool for social funds. Part III summarizes beneficiary perspectives on social funds. Part IV provides recommendations for improving both how beneficiary assessments are carried out and social fund design and operations.
II. Analysis of Beneficiary Assessments:
A Monitoring and Evaluation Tool for Social Funds

Getting the BA Underway: Setting Objectives

2.1 Table 2.1 summarizes information on the stated objectives of the BAs. The four most common areas for BA attention, as illustrated in the table, are: i) impact of SF-sponsored activities; ii) perception of SF approach and procedures; iii) community organizational capacity to carry out micro-projects; and; iv) sustainability of sub-projects, accounting for focal areas for assessment in 80%, 66%, 55% and 55% respectively of BAs included in this review. In roughly half of the BAs, improved targeting and better identification of beneficiaries was manifest as a primary objective, as was an overall assessment of community participation and overall beneficiary satisfaction with project interventions. Other thematic areas which were each covered by approximately 20% of the studies include: collection of baseline information; general perceptions of micro-projects; assessment of project knock-on or spill-over effects; selected policy themes; identification of community priority needs; familiarization of SF staff in evaluation methodology; and, using the BA as a basis to test out methodology for future assessments.

2.2 The important message from the BAs conducted to date is that of matching the stated objectives of the BA to the stage of the SF program cycle. The most obvious means of ensuring this is by situating the BA within the SF in its design stage and by placing responsibility with the SF management for drafting the Beneficiary assessment TOR. In such a way, the BA can fulfill the expected function of generating feedback on overall beneficiary satisfaction and can also focus on select themes of direct relevance and utility at the time. Hence, the initial assessment in Armenia was set up in such a way as to provide baseline socio-economic data to serve as a benchmark for future evaluations. In Peru and Zambia, BAs have been used to measure program effectiveness in addressing perceived priority community needs at a relatively advanced stage in SF implementation. In Bolivia, after seven years of SF activity, BA has been used to inform decisions over the future of the Fund. The trend in more recent beneficiary assessments is towards a structure of modular as opposed to blanket objectives and interview guides, and similarly, one of iterative as opposed to one-off assessments.
## Table 2.1: BA Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armenia</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Ecuador</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Peru</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Zambia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of projects</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve targeting of SF/ Identification of beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline data collection</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of SF approach and procedures</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spill-over effects of project</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community participation and organizational capacity</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assess quality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficiary satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on key policy themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Establish methodology for future assessments</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarize/train SF staff in Approach</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify priority community Needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future of SF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve interaction of FS with beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interrelation between actors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder coordination</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: this table summarizes stated objectives and aggregates information from all BAs under the same SF*
Who does what? Institutional issues

2.3 Institutional responsibility for BAs. The case studies included in this review provide examples of six different options for contracting BAs, as depicted in Table 3. By far the most prominent arrangement is the use of consulting firms, which account for all but two of the BAs under this review. Only one BA was undertaken by a university research institute (Zambia); two were contracted to NGOs (Ecuador, Zambia) and the remainder were carried out by a Government agency, internal SF team (both in Bolivia), and a Bank team (Senegal) respectively. The BA in Senegal was an OED audit of AGETIP and was primarily a Bank internal evaluation, enriched by qualitative assessment beyond that which is generally required for OED performance audits. In Bolivia, three separate BAs have been coordinated by three different entities.

2.4 It is perhaps surprising that university research institutions do not feature more extensively in these studies. Several explanations account for this. On the one hand, a tradition in Latin America that generally does not predispose universities to these types of contracts. Researchers often have ties to universities, but are contracted outside the institutions. Secondly, there is a greater universe of NGOs and research groups in Latin America that carry out development-oriented studies and evaluations. Thirdly, management-feedback orientation of BAs which possibly predispose SF managers more in the direction of consultancy firms than academic departments for BA coordination. And finally, Bank procedures for contracting may have an influence on these decisions.

2.5 Recommending one type of institution over another ultimately depends on capacity, expertise and experience accessible locally. However, in selecting an institution to conduct the BA, it is important to bear in mind the following considerations:

- what is the main interest of the institution in taking responsibility for the BA?
- does the institution have the capacity, expertise and experience to undertake the BA?
- does the BA team have a sound grasp of qualitative methodologies for evaluation?
- will the institution be using an in-house team of researchers or recruiting elsewhere?
- what is the likelihood that the same institution be used for future BAs?
- what is the likelihood of that institution contributing to capacity building within the SF?

2.6 Contracting. Where information on contracting was provided, there appears to be a roughly equal balance between direct solicitation to an institution and the drawing up of a shortlist of potential entities by the SF (see Table 3). General open tendering is not common and Peru is the only example of this practice. Again, there are good reasons for this. BA expertise is not widespread and putting a BA out to tender can be a time consuming and frustrating business where local capacity to undertake BA is limited. A quick local institution appraisal to establish a short list of potential organizations might be much more effective.
2.7 **Technical support to BAs.** In two-thirds of the cases included in this sample the Bank provided technical support. Although it is not made explicit in the documentation, it would seem that this support is concentrated at the design stage of the beneficiary assessments. The cost of frequent missions to continue that input through fieldwork, debriefing, analysis and presentation may be prohibitive, although there is experience of this kind of continual, long-term support in one of the early BAs (Zambia). Lessons from this experience underscore the importance of providing support at staggered periods throughout a BA, including at an interim stage, part way through fieldwork (for corrective purposes and to deepen management commitment to and ownership of the assessment) and at conclusion to assist with the preparation and dissemination of the final report and reporting workshop.

2.8 **The BAs are fairly evenly divided between those relying on local expertise for technical support and those contracting trainers from abroad.** In some cases, BAs have drawn on a combination of the two. The majority of the BAs in which international trainers have been contracted have either been supported by Bank consultants or by resource people identified and contacted by Bank staff working on social funds. There is a fairly clear distinction between the LAC and Africa SFs, with LAC BAs customarily relying on local resources for technical input.

2.9 **Funding.** Most BAs have been financed with project funds. In some cases, bilateral donors have provided important seed money. The fact that grant funding has been available has allowed for some considerable degree of experimentation with BA-type methodologies. Where cost details were accessible, the average financing requirement for a beneficiary assessment was approximately $64,000.

### Table 2.2: BA Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BA - INSTITUTIONAL</th>
<th>Armenia</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Ecuador</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Peru</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Zambia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University/research institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal SF team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank technical support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided to BA team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA initiated by Bank or SF</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SF,B</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>B, SF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender for BA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortlist for BA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct solicitation by SF for BA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF/project funded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded through other sources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NGO/consultancy distinction is often unclear. Some consultancy firms are very similar to NGOs in function.*
Participation in Practice: Process Issues in Beneficiary Assessments

2.10 Participation in design of beneficiary assessments. Buy-in on the part of the SF is essential for ownership of the results, just as participation by communities is taken as a prerequisite for local ownership of SF projects. Participation by SF management structures in a BA can assume various forms, ranging from periodic consultation to direct involvement in field teams. However, the following input from the SF should be considered essential:

- drafting of the terms of reference;
- identification of project sites for fieldwork;
- notification of communities before fieldwork;
- participation in progress review during fieldwork;
- regular briefings during fieldwork phase;
- critical review of draft report;
- action plan to follow up on recommendations.

2.11 Drafting the terms of reference. The drafting of terms of reference (TORs) should be prepared in light of relevant issues at the time for the social fund in question. Generally, the first BA under a SF will tend to be more broad and open-ended in an effort to assimilate baseline data on the characteristics of beneficiaries. However, future BAs should become progressively more focused on operational concerns, as the SF itself evolves. Understandably, the experience of iterative beneficiary assessments has shown much improved operational relevance as BAs have progressed from relatively less to relatively more focused.

2.12 The TOR drafting is a crucial step in the BA. The overall lesson from experience appears to suggest that where TORs are drafted by the Bank, the research agenda is liable to be overcrowded by issues not of direct relevance to SF implementation. Furthermore, if the TOR is not subject to review and critique by the team carrying out the BA, it runs the risk of containing a list of research topics that the researchers will be unable to analyze. Ultimately, having the TOR conceptualized, discussed and drafted by the principal users, the social fund, and subsequently refined by the executors, the BA team, makes best sense. It is also, in itself, empowering, as the following quote from a SF project coordinator vividly illustrates:

“We eventually found that the beneficiary assessment was the most useful evaluation, even the most useful management tool, that we had. The reason for this was that in designing the study along with the team, we were forced to identify the questions to which we needed answers in order to improve the project. The process of designing the study was almost as useful to us as the study results”.

2.13 Participation in beneficiary assessment implementation. It is important to make a distinction between evaluation as an ex-post, periodic activity and monitoring as a permanent activity that a social fund should carry out itself. Almost all beneficiary assessments have been contracted to external agencies in order to ensure independence as well as access skills and experience no available in-house. However, even though the work is the responsibility of an
external agency, the execution of BAs should be done in close coordination with social fund staff. BAs carried out to date exhibit differing tendencies towards integration in social funds. One measure of this integration is the extent to which SF staff have been incorporated into the BA and degree to which the SF management have been kept informed of progress and results. For SFs at an advanced stage of evolution, in-house capacity to undertake monitoring and evaluation might be such that part of the BA work can be internalized, as Bolivia and Chile exemplify. At the very least, where a BA is fully contracted out, the SF should designate key staff to act as counterparts/focal points to follow progress in the assessment. For the social fund management, the following decisions should be taken on the desired integration of the BA:

- should SF staff (central and/or regional) participate on the field teams?
- would this compromise the neutrality/objectivity of the BA?
- is institutionalization of the evaluation as an internal process to the SF an objective of the exercise?
- what form of involvement in the BA by SF staff could contribute to learning in the social fund beyond solely that of digesting results from the beneficiary assessment?
- would an objective external presence (technical support) boost quality and credibility?

2.14 Participation in progress review during fieldwork and briefings during fieldwork phase. Few of the BA reports reviewed mention monitoring and supervision of the BA during fieldwork, although much greater emphasis should be directed towards this. Interim reviews of preliminary findings from fieldwork have proved to be of substantial value. Such a review might be established after a week or 10 days of fieldwork (one or two field sites) to bring together the BA team(s) and SF staff to discuss emerging issues. On the question of substance, this review can provide an opportunity to restructure or revise unclear questions in the interview guide and refocus principal themes. On the methodological, it serves as a valuable opportunity to adjust methods that are problematic in application or to rethink the use and utility of others. On the logistical side, it may give rise to a more realistic work plan for the BA with hindsight gained from fieldwork experience. The absence of an interim review often indicates a lack of supervision of BA progress.

2.15 In Ecuador, Chile and Zambia, the BAs have been well integrated into the work programs of the SFs, with regular formal and informal briefings both at central and regional level. In Chile, a component of the TOR for the BA was that of training FOSIS staff in monitoring and evaluation. In Malawi, all Regional Officers of MASAF participated in a meeting to review and give feedback on BA objectives.

2.16 Action plan to follow up on recommendations. By its very nature, a BA will report a broad array of information back to project management. It has not been possible within the scope of this review to fully assess the degree of follow-up on recommendations arising through the beneficiary assessments. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence of the use of BAs as management tools. However, if the BA is to be used effectively, the SF must be well prepared to turn BA findings into action. Accounting for this task in planning a BA should be required. Simply in terms of timing, it can help to plan ahead on i) how and when to determine the series
of changes to SF implementation called for by the BA, and; ii) how to monitor the impact of those adjustments. If the SF managers constitute the primary audience of BA findings, then the extent of their involvement in the process, from design to review and final presentation of results will have a major bearing on their overall responsiveness for follow-up. World Bank staff supervising social funds should structure a formal discussion of BA results and development of an action plan to implement agreed upon recommendations as part of routine project supervision.

**BA in the field: Technical and Methodological Issues**

2.17 **Duration of the BA.** Table 2 indicates the duration of the beneficiary assessments, where this information is available. The total duration of a BA exercise ranges from 6 weeks to 7 months and depends on preparation and training needs, complexity of BA, size of sample, scope, coverage and accessibility of field sites, logistical organization of fieldwork, and requirements for analysis and report preparation. In Malawi, the MASAF BA was completed in one and a half months and comprised one week of induction/training, one month of fieldwork and two weeks of writing up. The majority of the team had previous experience of the pre-BA client consultation exercise in Malawi the previous year. Similarly, in Zambia, with a core team returning each year to conduct the BA under the SRP, the process of preparation and presentation of findings has sped up considerably. In Ecuador, the BA was divided into two phases, each lasting 3 months to accommodate a doubling of sample size for projects under the assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.3: BA Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia – Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia – Impact assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – BA 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – Sept 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – Water 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru – I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru – II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* information presented in this table is based on available material from the BA reports and is incomplete.
2.18 **Sampling.** An important aspect of sampling decisions is that of ensuring that the sample size reflects implicit expectations of what the BA is to achieve. In other words, that the sample pool is of adequate density to address the principal themes and questions established in the TOR and interview guides in terms of coverage, representativeness, diversity and depth. There is a tendency to downplay the importance of rigorous sampling and validity checks in qualitative research exercises although this can seriously undermine the results. Although BAs by nature do not involve particularly complex or sophisticated statistical sampling methods, it is important to get the sample design right, so as to uphold the overall validity and reliability of findings.

2.19 As illustrated in Table 4, the BAs under this review show that on average 25% of the respective SF project portfolio have been taken as a sample size for beneficiary assessments, although there is much variation (3% of community sub-projects included in the MASAF BA sample; 47% of projects included in the Armenia Baseline Survey). The number of project sites covered in BAs ranges from 12 in Zambia IV to 300 in Peru. There does not appear to be a strong case for positing a target in percentage terms, as this depends very much on BA objectives, stage in the SF cycle and overall portfolio characteristics. However, for reasons of validity, a sample representing less than 10% of total SF project portfolio would need strong justification. In addition, several BAs included a control group of non-project areas.

### Table 2.4: BA Sampling frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample as % of projects</th>
<th># rural</th>
<th>% non project sites</th>
<th># ongoing</th>
<th># completed</th>
<th>Total # interview</th>
<th>% women</th>
<th>beneficiaries</th>
<th>intermediary organizations</th>
<th>Service providers</th>
<th>Local government</th>
<th>SF staff</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia – Baseline</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia – Impact assessment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – BA 1988</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – Sept 95</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>3,608</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – Water 1994</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia – OED audit 1996</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3% of CSP 20% PWP</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase I</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase II</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase III</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia – Phase IV</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>750</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.20 Input from the SF is critical for the drawing up of a study sample. Only the SF management has knowledge of characteristics of the global coverage of SF projects and of how these projects might be classified according to sector, region, type of project, and stage of implementation. The standard criteria for a BA sample are the selection of a representative sample of projects at different stages of progress in the SF project cycle in several instances only completed projects were reviewed. The final sample will be contingent on the specific focus of the BA: an assessment more oriented to impact and sustainability will need to include a substantial number of completed projects in the sample frame. Conversely, a BA established around issues of BA promotion and project initiation will need to include a sufficient number of projects in early stages of planning or implementation (as well as non-project control sites). The BA team also has an important contribution to sample design by assisting the SF in stratifying the sample according to other variable factors such as urban/rural, ethnic/group, poverty quintile so as to ensure a satisfactory degree of validity across the sample.

2.21 Selection of interview groups. As depicted in Tables 4 and 5, the BAs have been developed in such a way as to gauge opinions from various different levels of informants. Naturally, the standard features in terms of groups of respondents are beneficiaries. Beyond this heterogeneous category, the BAs present various composite forms. Intermediary implementing organizations and local government each figure in 60% of cases; in a little under half, service providers are included as an interview group. 40% of the BAs incorporate SF regional staff into the ambit of the assessment. In one case, donors and NGOs as a category were part of the sample. The Senegal evaluation identified seven different groups for interviews: AGETIP directors, “notables”, municipal representatives, enterprise managers, workers, members of associations and local residents. Broadening the BA to include representatives of service providers, intermediary organizations, local government, NGOs and other local institutions can throw light on the important institutional dimensions of SF activities taking place at the level of the community. Furthermore, involving the spectrum of different players in the BA has positive spin-offs by virtue of the communication links it establishes with these people and institutions and possibly improved coordination between stakeholders.

2.22 Ensuring that the BA sample is adequately stratified according to different social, economic, occupational, gender, age and ethnic group criteria is important. Within the sample, ensuring a basic minimum statistical confidence in responses means establishing appropriate coverage and depth in interview groups. Since the Beneficiary Assessments are primarily concerned with the perceptions of beneficiaries, the sample size of beneficiary interviews must be large enough to substantiate findings. In several of the BAs, a very small number of beneficiaries were interviewed - in some cases as few as two per project site. A limited sample of this nature naturally raises questions about the representativeness of “beneficiary perceptions” gleaned from such a study. Adequate coverage of households/individuals per project site is as important a parameter in BA design as percentage of projects in portfolio for the BA. The ultimate sample size depends largely on contextual diversity in project areas.

2.23 Selection and application of research methods. Table 5 summarizes information provided on methods and techniques used for information gathering in the BAs. Semi-structured
conversational interviewing is a base method common to all assessments. Focus group discussions have been applied in 60% of cases; observation in 40%, and structured questionnaires in 30%. In terms of interview guides, the BAs range from fairly simple, open and loosely structured short thematic guides to those more highly structured, with direct closed questioning (in several cases with up to 80 questions) and occasionally multiple choice questionnaire forms.

Table 2.5: BA Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SSI</th>
<th>FGD</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>PRA</th>
<th>Secondary source review</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Interview Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia - Baseline</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia - Impact assessment</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia - BA 1988</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia - Sept 95</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia - OED audit 1996</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>workshops</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia - Phase I</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia - Phase II</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia - Phase III</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia - Phase IV</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.24 In terms of discrete methods, the issue is the question of facilitation and application and sequencing of methods in the field. It is not possible to comment on the quality of facilitation in this review, since almost no documentation of the research teams’ practice is available, except in the case of Zambia, where much critical awareness is directed towards facilitation skills and application of Participatory Rural Assessment methods. Experience suggests that designing only tightly structured, closed questions preempts “real” findings from emerging during fieldwork and perhaps results in neglecting issues which should be further probed. On a general note, although closed questions make coding and quantification a much easier task, open interviewing - letting the interviewee decide what to talk about and which criteria to use to judge SF activities - has to be allocated ample space in the research design.
2.25 From the BA final reports, it is often unclear how particular questions were posed and upon what understanding and interpretation responses were given. This is most obvious in the priority needs assessments. An important factor that BAs need to take account of is the fact that poor communities often do not measure their collective needs in term of discrete priorities. More often than not, the tendency is towards a general assessment of what is needed across the board to bring back a degree of normalcy to community social and economic relations. The way in which a question is posed to community members to assess “real” needs has a direct bearing on results.

2.26 Analysis and recording. Conventional research quality is often assessed using four criteria and future BAs would benefit from the same critical reflection for the purposes of analysis and recommendations:

- how can we be confident about the ‘truth’ of the findings (internal validity)?
- can we apply these findings to other contexts or other groups (external validity)?
- would the findings be the same if the inquiry were repeated (reliability)?
- have the findings been determined by the subjects and context of the enquiry, rather than the biases, motivations and perspectives of the investigators?

2.27 Although there is evidence of increasing, there remains a general concern over the use of analytical frameworks in recording and reporting BA findings. This applies to field site reporting as well as overall syntheses of findings. The BAs under review portrayed a wide range of analytical approaches, from very basic coding at one end to advanced database management on the other. Highly complex analysis is not a prerequisite and some of the most effective BAs have been those in which the field data has been subject to relatively simple analytical review. However, the lesson from experience is one of understanding that which is necessary to inform management decisions. Highly descriptive, anecdotal evidence does not readily translate into policy recommendations. For management utility, BA findings have to demonstrate sufficient quantification, disaggregation, substantiation and validity to serve their purpose.

2.28 There is an inherent logic in encouraging as much analysis in beneficiary assessments to be carried out on site, during fieldwork, with preliminary site reports prepared before moving on to the next study area. An additional benefit is the opportunity this offers to cross-check, verify, triangulate and feed back information whilst still in the community. In order to do so, team members need competence in field data analysis.

2.29 Developing sound analytical frameworks to guide the fieldwork can also greatly facilitate the presentation of results. Several of the BAs stand out by the ease with which information is communicated. The BAs from Ecuador, Chile and Zambia exploit a multitude of forms of presentation of analysis, including charts, tables, ratings, and graphs and include a mix of direct analysis generated through the BAs and ex-post analysis of findings.

---

2.30 **Reporting and dissemination.** The final written BA report is often the only output seen by all other than those closely associated with the exercise. On the basis of this review of 16 written reports, there arise several key concerns around reporting and dissemination of findings. First, to whom should dissemination of BA findings be directed and what form of presentation is most effective in communicating the messages? Feedback to SF is considered to be the prime obligation. Feedback to communities in particular, and other stakeholders in general is often neglected. The later Zambia BAs made an effort to improve dissemination to district-level government and to communities, especially after complaints from these groups on repeat visits for successive BAs of not having seen results of earlier ones. In terms of style of reporting, those BAs that have combined written with verbal and made use of formal and informal reporting have been most effective. The work in Ecuador and Senegal was disseminated through a series of meetings and workshops with the SF central and regional offices. In Chile, the BA was part of a FOSIS strategic planning exercise.

2.31 The second concern is to do with acceptability and quality assurance and is posed as an open question for SFs to address in BA planning: what are the standards by which to judge the quality of outputs of BAs? A related issue is the matter of comprehensiveness of documentation. This assessment of how BAs have been undertaken has suffered from the extreme paucity of documented information on processes of design, methodology, training, fieldwork, recording, analysis and write-up. For improved learning, it is essential that these aspects be covered in reporting and that more precise analysis of what works in which situations and identifiable areas of weakness can be reflected on constructively in future design.

2.32 **Beneficiary assessment team composition, expertise and training.** The better BAs suggest that a mix of institutional background in the research teams alongside a mix of disciplines, gender and qualifications can make a very positive contribution to outcomes. The size of a beneficiary assessment team obviously depends on the TOR, duration of study and coverage. BAs teams consisted of between 8 and 36 members. Generally, these researchers were sub-divided into several smaller research teams, and study sites split accordingly between teams for fieldwork. Probably the most important lesson from fieldwork experience is that of a gender balance in research teams and a minimum composition of three team members to allow adequate triangulation of exercises and analysis of results in the field.

2.33 As discussed above, if skill upgrading of SF staff is an objective of the BA, SF personnel may be directly integrated into the research teams. In Chile, over 30 FOSIS staff were trained and exposed first-hand to the BA though their participation in the research. This was done in such a way as to not compromise the integrity of the results, always an important concern when SF staff are involved in evaluations.

2.34 **Skills and Training.** Unlike quantitative data enumerators, a BA interviewer or facilitator is expected to analyze as the research is ongoing. The most taxing skill is that of resisting the temptation to second guess responses and to cut corners to reach a community consensus. BA teams also have to maintain awareness of the danger of inducing community wish lists through vague and ungrounded questioning in addition to the perennial problem of raising expectations.
Training is an essential ingredient of good research. Yet there appears to be significant variation in the emphasis lent to training inputs across the BAs. Overall, technical support appears very much front-loaded, with scarce attention paid to skills required beyond the data collection phase. From information reported, training inputs for BAs have ranged from 2-10 days. Only two of the cases reviewed mention organized debriefing post-fieldwork. This is reflected in weaknesses in the analysis and recording of BA material, with too little provided by way of skills upgrading for analytical tasks.

2.35 The Zambia BA is the only case to document aspects of the match between changing expertise demands of BAs over time and corresponding research team composition and skills. The Participatory Assessment Group (PAG), a university-based NGO that conducts the annual BAs for the Zambia SF, has stressed the need for regular refresher training and upgrading of research skills. With the shift from interviews to facilitation by mode, and from verbal to visual in terms of participatory method, skill requirements for the team have also changed.

General Issues in Social Fund Beneficiary Assessments

2.36 Beneficiary assessments in the context of other evaluations. Beneficiary assessments should not be understood as offering an opportunity to supplant or shun quantitative surveys. Out of the BA exercises reviewed, one third were undertaken in conjunction with other types of survey methods. In Bolivia, the BA has been linked to other baseline surveys. In Zambia, several BAs have been carried out in parallel with technical audits. In Ecuador, BAs were commissioned as part of a mid-term review exercise which included other areas of analysis. In the case of other evaluations being carried out, it is extremely useful to link project sites chosen for the beneficiary assessments with projects, households and communities surveyed in these other evaluations. This allows for a cross-check of results, and more importantly, integration of information from BAs with other types of information such as impacts on households, technical quality of works, and household and community characteristics. The impact of recommendations from BAs is enhanced when generated in complement with other survey instruments.

2.37 Institutionalization. The BAs included in this review range from those used simply to gathering the perceptions of the beneficiaries of SF-supported activities to the more dynamic BA geared to ongoing participatory evaluation in the respective social fund. In more developed BAs, the actual notion of a time-specific “assessment” is played down in favor of its continual management feedback function, as part of an ongoing process of communication between communities and the management structures in the SF. In this advanced stage, the participation orientation embodied in the BA becomes much more than simply developing facility with qualitative research methods. Participatory learning becomes the critical issue, and this learning is produced through an ongoing and systematic process of dialogue, action, analysis and change which goes far beyond the mechanical application of tools and techniques.

2.38 In recent years, there has been a very rapid expansion of participatory methods and approaches for development. However, there is still much to learn from the practice of rapid scaling up. The term “participation” itself is open to various interpretations. How the term is
used in conjunction with the BA and what the ultimate expectations are should be made explicit in the early stages of beneficiary assessment planning (see Table 6).

2.39 For BA to take maximum effect in institutional terms, there has to be a clear understanding of the policy context and organizational culture within which the BA takes place, including management structures, professional norms and field practices. If institutional change is to occur, structures and procedures need to be simultaneously assessed, alongside perceptions of beneficiaries. In terms of outputs and impacts, there is a need to focus attention on who in the SF needs to learn what, and whether the well-institutionalized practice of textual reporting precludes other ways of increasing effectiveness.

Table 2.6: A Typology of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Beneficiary Assessment type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive Participation</td>
<td>Participation by virtue of basic knowledge around activities or events. Extractive.</td>
<td>Lesser participatory BAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in</td>
<td>People participate by response to questionnaire type solicitations, with no opportunity to influence proceedings. Results not shared with participants for validity.</td>
<td>Standard semi-structured BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>External “professionals” determine problems and solutions, but listen to views. No concessions in decision-making and no obligation to modify interventions on basis of people’s expressed opinions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation for</td>
<td>People provide resources such as labor in return for food or other incentives, but have no stake in sustaining activities when incentives terminate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material incentive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Participation</td>
<td>Generally through the use of facilitators, participation by groups to meet predetermined objectives relating to a project.</td>
<td>Participatory pre-project Planning (i.e. Zambia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Participation</td>
<td>People participate in joint analysis, leading to action planning and formation or strengthening of existing local institutions.</td>
<td>“ “</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2.40 The institutional process of consultation -&gt; action -&gt; assessment -&gt; program response -&gt; procedural change -&gt; project impact -&gt; evaluation can only develop gradually, over time, based on a learning process internal to the SF. In Zambia, it occurred in conjunction with dramatic gains in quality of product on the part of the team carrying out the BA. The most important link in this chain is that of the SF management unit taking on board the necessary program response in light of BA findings. The SF management structure has to be flexible enough to respond quickly to suggestions from communities regarding SF processes and procedures, articulated though the Beneficiary Assessments. As described by the Zambia SF Technical Advisor, “without this fairly rapid response, the BAs would not have been so worthwhile”. In Chile, the BA has played a key role in the institutional restructuring of FOSIS. In Peru and Ecuador, significant changes were made to project processing and content.

2.41 Iterative Beneficiary Assessments. In Bolivia, Zambia and Peru, BAs have been used on a regular basis. In Zambia, the early BAs were commissioned to assess the capacity of communities to undertake projects; subsequent BAs looked more closely at the particular
strengths, constraints and problems faced by communities during project implementation. From BAIII onwards, they also began to assess the impact of changes introduced by social fund management in response to recommendations from earlier BAs. This has served as a useful mechanism by which to monitor the accuracy of the BAs in determining principal operational limitations, since improvements in project performance can be measured against recommendations from the beneficiary assessments.
III. Beneficiary Perspectives on Social Funds

Issues Covered

3.1 As described in the previous section, beneficiary assessments of social funds are carried out for different objectives and at various stages in the experience of social funds. Accordingly, topics and issues covered in the evaluations vary across countries and over time in the same social fund. The principal areas covered by the BAs in this study, even if they were not an explicit objectives of the BA, are summarized in the table below. For certain countries where more than one assessment has been carried out, the issues covered varied over time and were not all contained in a single report. Zambia, Armenia and Peru have the most complete coverage in terms of topics included. All of the countries’ BAs probed community priorities, issues of operations, maintenance and sustainability, and social fund procedures and mechanisms. It is worth noting, however, more does not necessarily mean better. Tight, focused beneficiary assessments were often better at probing details of specific issues than those that tried to cover everything in a more superficial way.

Table 3.1: Topics Addressed in BAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armenia</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Ecuador</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Peru</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Zambia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community priorities</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiary participation in Identification and preparation</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiary participation during execution and community contributions</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations, maintenance and sustainability</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social fund procedures and Mechanisms</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information flows and level of knowledge of beneficiaries</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency and Accountability</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of quality and Satisfaction with project Impacts</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional arrangements and roles</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in general and Community dynamics</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender dimensions</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: this table summarizes stated objectives and aggregates information from all BAs under the same SF.

3.2 Despite the extensive coverage of the beneficiary assessments, there were certain areas and topics which were either omitted or not fully addressed in the reports and would have
provided useful information. For instance, the beneficiary assessments were rarely used to explore the institutional context of the social fund as a poverty alleviation mechanism. In only one case was the future directions of the social fund explored. There was scant coverage of such topics as the sustainability of the social fund itself or the integration of its activities with line ministries and local governments. In general, the BA’s tended to focus solely on how to improve the functioning of the social funds. In terms of beneficiary perceptions on social fund requirements and operating procedures, questions tended to focus on how things were currently being done, but did not follow-up with what changes to these procedures and requirements would beneficiaries have preferred. In addition, there was scant probing for reasons behind variation in answers between types of beneficiaries, such as women versus men, and urban versus rural residents. BAs made little progress in clarifying issues regarding willingness to pay and community preferences for operations and maintenance arrangements. And finally, with a few notable exceptions, most BAs did not explore community viewpoints on types of eligible projects, including areas of community needs that should be added to social fund menus.

**Main Findings**

3.3 In reviewing the analysis and findings of the beneficiary assessments, certain common observations appear as well as areas that point to the need for more research. Unfortunately, in no cases was the exact same question or topic probed in the same way in all the reviews. This does not permit a straight-forward aggregation of data across country. However, there are many instances where general conclusions about social funds can be drawn. This section analyzes what the beneficiaries say about key issues pertinent to social fund performance, and provides illustrations from various countries to preserve the nuances and contextual flavor intact.

**Community Priorities and Social Fund Menu of Projects**

3.4 Relevance of social fund projects. According to the BAs, social fund projects overwhelmingly reflect felt needs of poor communities. This is a significant finding and one that confirms the demand-driven nature of social funds. Most beneficiary assessments covered the issue of community priorities in some way and the responses were consistently very high that projects indeed reflected pressing needs of the community. In Armenia, 93 percent of respondents felt the project reflected priorities of community, within the range of eligible projects. In Ecuador, 92 percent of beneficiaries said that the project was necessary. In Peru, 96 percent of respondents felt that the projects financed were a priority for the community at the time they were chosen, and only one percent characterized the project as not necessary. In Bolivia (Emergency Social Fund), 80 percent of beneficiaries felt they benefited greatly and the works were needed. In Bolivia’s subsequent Social Investment Fund, on a composite score of four questions regarding relevance/importance of project, 84 percent of indicators received a yes/favorable response. In Zambia, 83 percent of respondents felt the priority needs of the community were identical with the project chosen, and 92 percent felt that projects corresponded with general community needs.
3.5 However, there are some intrinsic problems with querying community needs. In some cases, the BA asked whether or not a specific project that the community had implemented was a priority. Asking this of direct beneficiaries and project committee members, rather than community members at large, is likely to yield positive results. In cases where general community priorities were explored, the problem is the ex-post nature of the question. For instance, after a school project, education may not be as high a community priority as before. If it remains a priority, it begs the question of the effectiveness of the intervention itself. In addition, in poor communities that lack access to most basic services and infrastructure, the list of ‘priorities’ may be extensive. In no cases did the BAs probe in lieu of the project selected, what else would beneficiaries have preferred or whether the project selected was the best use of the funds for the community. Moreover, the types of questions regarding community needs indicate an explicit or implicit bias towards what is eligible for SF financing. Rarely mentioned by beneficiaries were such obvious needs as increased income or employment, communications, access to credit, agricultural technical assistance/inputs, etc. which one might expect to see if questions had been structured in a more open way.

3.6 Beneficiaries usually felt that projects reflected their needs and priorities even when they had not been involved in identification. There was not evidence that the fact that projects reflect community needs was necessarily a function that they were identified by the communities themselves. In all cases, the level of correspondence of projects to community needs was higher than the observed participation of the community in identifying the project. For instance, in Armenia, while 93 percent of beneficiaries felt projects reflected community priorities, only 54 percent said micro-projects were selected by communities, 28 said projects were selected by local authorities and 7 percent by the social fund. Similarly, in Peru, where 96% of respondents said the project was a community priority, 66 percent of beneficiaries said the project was prioritized by the community itself, 7 percent by mayor, and 6 percent by either the promoter, project sponsor, or contractor. On the whole, the insertion of intermediaries, be they local governments, NGOs, promoters or private contractors, did not adversely affect the relevance of the project to the community. This may be due, in part, to the basic types of investments eligible for financing by social funds and the large range of unmet needs existing in poor communities.

3.7 Although social fund projects appear appropriate to community needs, there is some indication that the menus of eligible projects may not be inclusive enough and projects may be too narrowly defined. In selected cases needs were identified which were not eligible. For instance, the Armenia Baseline Survey found that in 40 percent of cases, communities identified problems outside of the mandate of ASIF. It is worth pointing out that relatively few BAs explored beneficiaries’ perceptions as to what else should be included on the menu of social funds. Not asking what else should have been financed misses an opportunity to adjust investments more closely in alignment with true demand. One exception is the Peru BA which did ask what else should be included in the menu. As a result, the need for a more expanded array of productive projects was identified and an effort is being made to increase access to this type of project.
3.8 Several beneficiary assessments (Ecuador, Armenia, Peru) pointed out the need for complementary actions within types of projects, such as educational material, equipment and other inputs in tandem with infrastructure in school projects, or training within water and sanitation projects. In the Peru assessment, 22 percent of beneficiaries said projects were not ‘complete’ largely because equipment was lacking. Several of the BAs pointed to the need to consider more integrated projects. This should be a concern to all social funds. As cited in the Ecuador assessment, ‘if the parameters of the social fund do not permit financing of complementary works, it is worth reflecting seriously on whether the project should be financed, or analyze other possibilities to open the menu to include other financeable items. The lack of integration and attention to complementary requirements can have a negative effect and put at risk the impact of the project, not to mention the satisfaction with, use and maintenance of projects.”

**Targeting**

3.9 Most of the community profiles and beneficiary characteristics confirmed social funds reach poor communities. Because of the reliance on qualitative assessment and the lack of comparator information on non-beneficiaries, BAs are inherently less useful in measuring targeting accuracy or determining the relative poverty level of beneficiaries. Even in those assessments that generated quantitative information on beneficiary characteristics (Peru, Zambia), the BAs failed to link this information with national indicators of poverty and living conditions to see how social fund beneficiaries compared to the greater population. In several cases, BAs noted that the worst off communities in targeted regions had not always presented projects, which was largely attributed to a lack of effective leadership or isolation of these communities, particularly in rural areas. Again, the BAs were less helpful in identifying mechanisms to reach the poorest communities and households.

3.10 One exception in terms of coverage of the targeting issue was the Chile assessment, which classified projects according to observed poverty levels of beneficiary communities. The assessment confirmed that 48 percent of projects reached poor beneficiaries, 10 percent extremely poor, 10 percent a mix of extremely poor and poor, and 15 percent in heterogeneous communities. The remaining 20 percent of projects could be considered mistargeted as they benefited the non-poor. The Chile report went on to compare this outcome with other national social programs, including health, education and social assistance and found that the social fund was better targeted than other programs in the country. Moreover, targeting problems were closely linked to the type of project, particularly micro-enterprise, irrigation and support to the rural economy, where beneficiaries typically had assets and organizational levels (i.e. consolidated peasant organizations for productive rural projects, creditworthy micro-entrepreneurs) that placed them out of the higher poverty categories.

**Beneficiary Participation in the Project Cycle: Identification and Preparation**

3.11 **Identification.** Beneficiary participation in the identification of projects varied widely across funds, with better performance where there is both a formal mechanism (community assembly) and where beneficiary committees are eligible to execute projects directly. In social
funds that allow for direct execution by some form of beneficiary committees, such as Peru, Armenia, Zambia, Malawi and Chile, formal participation in this phase through community assemblies and other mechanisms was common. For instance, in Peru 67 percent of beneficiaries affirmed that they had participated in the assembly to choose the project and 98 percent affirmed that the selection was by majority vote. In Armenia, 56 percent of beneficiaries responded that the community had elected implementing agencies. In Zambia, over time the Social Recovery Fund has encouraged democratic election of project committees and the holding of regular meetings, both of which have been linked to improved community organization and better project implementation. In Chile, participation of beneficiaries in the definition of projects was most frequent when beneficiaries themselves executed projects rather than when an intermediary interceded. In terms of social funds that rely more heavily on the involvement of intermediaries, participation was slightly lower. In Ecuador, 45 percent of beneficiaries went to preparatory meetings and 50% of community leaders said they discussed the project with the community. In Bolivia (SIF), which does not permit direct execution by community project committees, only 31 percent of questions probing participation in the conception and definition of the project received favorable responses by beneficiaries.

3.12 Design and Preparation. In all social funds, community participation levels were higher during identification than in the actual design of projects. Beneficiary assessments point to a fairly common trend of broader participation in the identification of needs and project ideas, then a narrowing participation of beneficiaries in the preparation and design of the project itself. At this stage, intermediaries such as ministries, NGOs, local governments, private contractors and in certain cases local project committees step more fully into the process of technical design. Weaker or less inclusive participation in this phase lead to several problems during execution, such as the generation of community disputes, improper siting of projects, lack of clarity on the community counterpart obligations, lack of confidence in selection of contractors, etc.

3.13 Institutional Roles During Preparation. The characterization that communities organize, enter into direct communication with the social fund and prepare their own projects was not fully borne out in the BAs. In actuality, beneficiaries perceived a more complex web of actors inserted between the social fund and their community in terms of promoting and preparing projects. For example, in Senegal, all projects pass through municipal council. In several cases this resulted in political interference and inconsistency between community needs and projects presented by local governments. The beneficiary assessment found significant differences between answers when asked to municipalities versus beneficiaries and users. In Chile, FOSIS publishes calls for proposals via newspapers, radio and TV, posters in public places, and distributes formats for project presentation through municipalities. The BA found that, in the opinion of FOSIS regional staff interviewed, that diffusion strategy is good since they always get more projects than they can finance. However, beneficiaries found shortcomings in this strategy, namely weak communications with municipalities, insufficient outreach by municipalities, and a bias towards neighborhoods and social organizations which maintain contact with municipal and regional governments, these being not usually the poorest beneficiaries. In Malawi, the most common way of finding out about MASAF was the radio and political rallies. In 60 percent of communities, beneficiaries said the prime facilitators were local politicians, despite not having a
clearly established role in the project cycle. In Peru, although three-quarters of beneficiaries said projects were selected based on majority decision of community, in 30 percent of cases the project was suggested by a promoter or contractor. These findings paint a more complex view of who is involved with project identification and preparation.

**Beneficiary Participation in the Project Cycle: Execution and Community Contributions**

3.14 Beneficiary communities participated to a high degree in the execution of projects. Of the various types of participation - definition of problem, identification of solutions, provision of money/labor, attendance at meetings - beneficiaries often defined participation only in terms of resources given. Community counterpart requirements varied between countries, with levels reaching 25 percent in Zambia, Malawi and Armenia. However, in almost all countries (with the exception of Senegal where counterpart contributions are made solely by local governments), beneficiary communities participated extensively in execution. For instance, in Peru 83 percent of beneficiaries said the local population participated in the execution of the work; 67 percent said they collaborated directly in execution. The most frequent participation was manual labor, followed by money and then materials. In Ecuador, 46 percent of beneficiaries interviewed said they participated in execution, usually manual labor.

3.15 Cash versus in-kind contributions appear to be largely a rural versus urban phenomenon and may have different effects. In rural areas, beneficiary assessments often found that participation involved labor rather than money; whereas cash contributions were more common in urban areas. The Zambia assessment found that community participation, especially in the form of in-kind contributions, enhances sense of ownership. Cash contributions, as found in urban areas, are more like impersonal business transactions.

3.16 Beneficiary assessments picked up forms of beneficiary contributions often not recognized or valued. Beneficiaries cited a larger range of contributions than are often recognized as part of project costs. Communities provided cash for leaders to travel to the capital city to fulfill administrative requirements during processing, organized obtaining necessary legal documentation, prepared lunch for workers, and dedicated time to attend meetings and participate in project committees.

3.17 Beneficiaries expressed certain views regarding community contributions, which raises legitimate concerns about the practice. In general, social fund and donor staff have tended to view counterpart contributions as unambiguously positive. The beneficiaries were more circumspect. Questions which probed the nature and effects of community contributions generated a series of potential concerns, such as:

- **Skewing the choice of project** - For instance, beneficiaries in Malawi felt that it is difficult to demonstrate community counterpart on some types of projects. Since it is easy to count bricks, there is a tendency for communities to go for school rehabilitation projects.
- **Possible regressive effect** - for instance the Zambia assessment found that rural beneficiaries donated on average twice the level of cash to project execution than did urban beneficiaries.
This was largely due to the presence of stronger intermediary organizations such as churches and NGOs in urban areas which could provide funds to fulfill the counterpart requirement. Regressive effects may be more of a concern between communities than within them. The BA in Armenia found that in all communities there was a significant effort to exempt poorer members of a community from making contributions that they could not afford.

- **Possible negative effects.** BA found that obligatory manual labor contributions generated cases of foregone income among the poor, less time tending fields, and in certain cases a perception of unequal cost sharing within community. In the case of the involvement of school children in Zambia, the increased manual labor for pupils during project execution was seen as taking away from essential study time. In cases where manual labor was unpaid, this was seen as unfair when other projects paid for labor, therefore workers viewed themselves as penalized for participating for free in social fund projects. In several BAs, respondents expressed relief afterwards that they no longer had to do manual labor.

- **Ultimate responsibility of community as co-financier questioned.** In many instances, beneficiaries felt that community contributions were simply filling in for what government should be providing. For instance, in Armenia, communities expressed preference for local government to resolve infrastructure problems.

- **Unclear relation between community contribution and impact on project quality and sustainability.** Contributions are often viewed as a proxy for ensuring participation and ‘ownership’ of the project. However, this may be too simplistic. For instance, in Bolivia and Peru beneficiaries perceived their participation in the project when they were involved through labor, paid or donated. When contractors brought in their own workers, there tended to be a lack of sense of ownership. In Chile, which has no hard and fast rules about counterpart contributions, 59 percent of projects had leveraged other resources, either in terms of equipment or infrastructure. In the review of impact and sustainability of projects, there was no observed association between leveraging resources and a positive impact and sustainability at the project level. On the other hand, in Zambia there was a clear reduction in vandalism in schools that had been rehabilitated using community participation.

3.18 Despite social funds’ reputation for efficient execution, beneficiaries commonly cited problems experienced during execution, many of which were due to social fund capacity or procedures. To illustrate, in Peru, project committees reported problems in 47 percent of cases and execution periods had to be extended in 69 percent of cases. In the Chile social fund, three-quarters of surveyed projects had experienced some type of problem during execution, of which 58 percent had problems associated with FOSIS (supervision, ex-ante evaluation, administrative and financial delays, cost of projects not revised after delays, etc.); 51 percent had problems with the executor (most frequently due to weak local insertion, inadequacy of human resources, administrative weaknesses); 41 percent had problems in the relationship between beneficiaries and executor (weak involvement, inappropriate work methods out of context with beneficiaries); and 28 percent had problems due to beneficiaries (lack of leadership, pre-existing conflicts in community, lack of motivation, emigration). In the BAs in general, the most common problems cited by beneficiaries concerning social fund performance were centered around delays in disbursements and lack of adequate supervision. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that in social funds which had stronger supervision arrangements in place, the latter was not seen as a
problem. To contrast, in Malawi only 12 percent of communities felt supervision was adequate while in Peru, where local inspectors and FONCODES supervisors are contracted, in 76 percent of cases communities reported sufficient supervision.

**Community Participation and Dynamics**

3.19 In general, social investments tend to reach poor sectors which exhibit active conduct in searching for solutions to their problems. Communities displayed either passive or active characteristics, with the more active communities better able to access and implement social fund projects regardless of poverty levels. Intrinsic tendencies of some communities to organize and work toward solving problems distinguishes the success stories from those communities that either could not effectively express their demands to social funds or were not good at implementing projects. Moreover, success breeds success. For example, in Chile the most important exogenous factor in the positive impact and sustainability of projects are characteristics of the beneficiaries, particularly the degree of entrepreneurial spirit, pre-existing leadership, and previous experience with social projects. This is particularly true in the case of beneficiary-executed projects. In the Chile case, intermediaries, particularly municipal governments, were better able to reach the poor passive population (i.e., organize projects for them). In Armenia, the report found that the most active implementing agencies and beneficiaries were those that in the past had shown a high degree of involvement in community initiatives. Conversely, those with a low level of involvement perceived the social fund as an outside intervention. In all communities, a high degree of participation in the social fund project correlated with a high degree of overall community participation. Passive communities tended to remain relatively more inactive even during execution of social fund projects. The same held true in Zambia, where 86 percent of communities had undertaken self-help measures in the past. This was particularly dependent on the presence of capable leaders, availability of retirees with leadership and technical skills, the presence of an urgently felt need and a high degree of literacy and homogeneity in the community.

3.20 Behind a community’s more passive or active posture in the world is the existence of effective leaders. Community leadership was a crucial factor in being able to effectively present and execute projects. In Chile, the BA observed that the true focus of promotion were the leaders and not the community at large. In Malawi, poor leadership was seen as a handicap. Communities without effective leaders could not unite for joint action to meet local counterpart requirements. In Ecuador, leaders knew a lot more about projects than general beneficiaries and tended to participate more. In an earlier BA in Zambia, all but two projects in the sample of sixty were conceived and initiated by one or two prominent persons in the area. Moreover, the type of leadership was important. A later Zambia BA found that 43 percent of projects had politicians involved (e.g. visited sites, provided materials, etc.) which often had a negative impact. However, traditional leaders’ involvement has relatively more constructive, especially in organizing community work. Village headmen and chiefs were vital in mobilizing communities. And in Armenia, one-third of communities had respondents who said they did not want to get involved in order to avoid stepping on the prerogatives of a strong leader.
3.21 Several funds have begun to address community leadership as part of local capacity building. In the Chile fund, a separate line of financing is targeted to communities not able to organize and present projects, in the form of a facilitated community development process to identify community resources and build eventual project teams. In Argentina, projects to train community leaders and build local organizational capacity are an integral part of the social fund menu and are often seen as precursors in communities which lack the basic skills to present other types of projects.

3.22 The beneficiary assessments also revealed that inter-community dynamics are complex and heterogeneous. Communities cannot be looked at as a single entity. Beneficiary assessments allowed for opening the ‘black box’ of community dynamics, with several of the reviews probing into how decisions are made, who is involved in what aspect of projects and how communities differ among each other. For instance, the structure of the Peru evaluation permitted differentiating responses between members of project committees and general beneficiaries. In many instances, there were significant differences in perception between the two, even though they are members of the same community. Moreover, several BAs found a differentiation between male and female participation and views on social fund projects (see below).

3.23 The various inputs from beneficiaries highlight the dynamic nature of participation. Participation is complex and heterogeneous. It varies by type of project, type of community, and type of institution involved. It can be effective or not, formal versus informal, coerced to fill a requirement or used to build local capacity which lasts after the social fund intervention. There were instances of effective participation in projects executed by municipalities and other instances where municipalities had little contact or interest in collaboration with community residents. Participation, as measured by beneficiary involvement during execution, tended to be higher in rural areas than in urban in almost all funds. This seemed to be influenced by factors such as the opportunity cost of voluntary labor, the availability of local materials, the lack of financial resources of rural institutions, the homogeneous and ‘intimate’ nature of rural communities, and the moral authority of traditional community leaders, rather than any intrinsic preference or enthusiasm for participation on the part of rural inhabitants. In Bolivia, beneficiaries perceived their participation in the project when they were involved through labor, whether paid or donated. Moreover, there were examples of formal mechanisms, such as in Ecuador with the appointment of a community representative to sign the project on behalf of the community, which ended up being a mere formality and in practice lent virtually nothing to the involvement of beneficiaries in the project. On the other hand informal information channels proved extremely important in incorporating beneficiaries into the project preparation and execution process. Participation has specific moments and spaces in which it can develop with more intensity than others. And ultimately, participation was a function of the availability and interest of the beneficiaries.

Gender Dimensions

3.24 Increasing women’s role in social fund projects has been quite difficult to effect, largely because gender involvement tends to cling to traditional patterns and roles. In general, women
have been under-represented in formal participation in projects, particularly in management and decision-making around projects. Where project committees are formed, women make up relatively small percentages, such as 21 percent in Armenia and 18 percent in Peru. In addition, women tended to participate less actively in meetings. Where funds have sought to generate more female participation, it has often been by regulating a minimum number of women to be named to project committees, such as the case of Zambia. However, even by the fourth Zambian beneficiary assessment, women continued to play a limited role in project implementation, especially in the decision-making processes. In general, beneficiary assessments, with some notable exceptions, did not fully exploit their potential to further understanding of gender roles and preferences in the social fund context.

Information Flows and Level of Knowledge of Beneficiaries

3.25 The assessments point to a significant and fairly universal problem with the lack of information and/or misunderstanding on the part of beneficiaries about the role and rules of the game of the social funds. This finding calls into question both the quality and level of effort of social funds in informing beneficiaries as well as the apparent lack of communication between community leaders or institutions in the sector and the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were often unaware of the other types of projects eligible for financing by social funds, which raises concerns about the level of ‘informed choice’ in the identification of projects. There were also indications in certain cases of beneficiaries not knowing how contractors were selected, how funds were managed or the community’s commitment to maintain works afterwards. To illustrate, in Armenia, forty-eight percent of beneficiaries asked did not know about the project; only one-third could correctly identify the social fund as the financier of the project; and only 17 percent were personally familiar with an ASIF employee. In Ecuador, only one-third of beneficiaries could identify the social fund as the financing agency of the project and less than half knew how financing was obtained. An alarming 90 percent of beneficiaries did not know who the ‘witness of honor’ was that signed the contract on behalf of the community. In Peru, although almost all beneficiaries knew of FONCODES, only 16 percent could cite more than 5 types of eligible projects (out of a list of 19 eligible types presented to interviewees). Less than half could correctly identify the number of members in the local project committees. About one-third were not aware of the community’s commitment to maintain the works afterwards. Similarly, in Chile, the vast majority of interviewees knew only of the type of project in which they participated and did not know the menu of FOSIS. The overall findings point to the importance of communicating information directly to beneficiaries and not just through intermediaries and community leaders.

3.26 There is some variation between types of projects, however. For instance, the Ecuador review found that there was more knowledge on the part of beneficiaries observed in water and latrine projects, probably due to the more direct household location of services, and slightly more in rural than urban-based projects. There was less knowledge of health and training programs, either because projects were requested by more distant intermediaries (ministries) or corresponded to supply-driven NGO training programs.
These information gaps were closely associated with negative outcomes, including lower levels of participation and sustainability, problems of transparency and reduced satisfaction by the beneficiaries. However, in several cases social funds have adopted successful strategies to remedy these weaknesses. In Zambia, the third beneficiary assessment carried out highlighted the information problem: 43 percent of individuals characterized information flows as adequate, 31 percent as inadequate and 27 percent as lacking altogether. Government and council officials did not appreciate being left out of the loop and community members complained about a lack of meetings. In response, a serious effort was launched to improve the level of information to stakeholders, particularly beneficiaries. Project manuals were printed and distributed to beneficiary groups to guide them through the project cycle. A mandatory project launch workshop was instituted to bring together social fund staff, project committees, local officials and community members at the moment execution was to begin in order to explain procedures, roles and expectations. The Beneficiary Assessment IV sought to measure the difference between pre- and post-procedural changes. To gauge information flows, beneficiaries were asked about their knowledge of project components and activities and were asked to recall what transpired at meetings. On a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 representing fully-informed participants, projects initiated prior to the changes averaged 3.8 while those initiated after the changes averaged 7.1.

Transparency and Accountability

The beneficiary assessments showed a mixed picture in terms of issues related to transparency and accountability. The BAs did detect, in selected cases, a significant lack of transparency and accountability. In terms of outright misuse of funds, this was often related to such things as district councils siphoning off funds, other local agencies commandeering materials, or contractors not paying workers correctly. There was little direct evidence of corruption on the part of SF officials or community committees themselves, though the formats of the BAs were never explicitly structured to probe this. Rather, the main issues of transparency and accountability had more to do with either the lack of information available to beneficiaries or cases of political interference at the local level during execution. For instance, in Ecuador, over 60 percent of beneficiaries did not know who managed project funds. At the same time, 54 percent felt that the management was good and honest and 65 percent said there had not been any complaints. In Malawi, the BA reported that in 65 percent of cases, community project committees did not report to the community what was being procured, leaving the impression of misuse of funds or overcharging. In Zambia, almost half of individuals said there was accountability/transparency, one-third said there was not and 17 percent said they were not sure. For those that said no, most would not cite a reason. Those that responded said it was due to a lack of meetings and financial statements from the executing committees rather than outright dishonesty. In term of outside interference, in Armenia the BA found that most of the rejected proposals were submitted by local government officials in urban areas who had forged community support letters and presented proposals that favored only their narrow interests. In Senegal, the BA found anecdotal evidence of political interference during execution.

After the Social Fund Intervention: Operations, Maintenance and Sustainability
3.29 BAs generated surprisingly little data as to whether projects were being operated and maintained as planned. In general, beneficiaries noted their willingness to pay for and/or contribute to operations and maintenance even though there were limits as to the extent of community responsibility to maintain investments. In Peru, almost three-quarters of beneficiaries knew of commitment to carry out operations and maintenance afterwards; half said they had collaborated in operations and maintenance; and well over half of beneficiaries expressed their willingness to pay for better water, electricity, education, roads and health services. In Malawi, 71 percent of communities foresaw maintenance by community committees. And in Ecuador, 95 percent of beneficiaries felt some type of maintenance was needed and 60 percent were willing to participate in maintenance.

3.30 The beneficiary assessments revealed that, while some efforts are bearing fruit, social funds still have a long way to go in effectively organizing and training beneficiaries to take up operation and maintenance responsibilities. To highlight some of the shortcomings, of those beneficiaries in Ecuador that said that the responsibility for maintenance was the community’s, only 5 percent said their community had already named the responsible party for maintenance. In Zambia, at project completion, 30 percent of project committees had formed maintenance committees and another 25 percent planned to do so. In one-quarter of completed projects, the community had established a maintenance fund and another 25 percent planned to do so. The the Peru case, almost half of beneficiaries said they had not received training in operations and maintenance of project. In addition, there were wide differences in arrangements, with 40 percent saying that maintenance was done a voluntary basis while 30 percent said services were remunerated.

3.31 Two of the beneficiary assessments sought to specifically link observations about sustainability with the contributing factors. The fourth Beneficiary Assessment for Zambia concluded that the factors which contribute to sustainability are as follows: information flows, community organization, type of participation, whether or not the project responded to a felt need, district involvement in implementation, timeliness (as in efficient execution), and capacity building at both the community and district levels. In the Chile study, sustainability of impact was the highest when projects had participation of beneficiaries in defining the project, when the appropriation of results is by the collective (as opposed to the individual), when beneficiaries execute projects directly and when the technical quality of the project is good. In general, it appears that sustainability is related to a set of fairly common conditions across countries and projects. Moreover, sustainability is as a much a function of how the project is carried out as the actual arrangements for operations and maintenance afterwards.

**Beneficiary Perception of Quality, Satisfaction and Project Impacts**

3.32 The overall beneficiary ratings of project quality were consistently high, even for funds during their early stages of existence. In Ecuador, 88 percent of beneficiaries said the projects
well located, 76 percent said the quality of materials used were good or very good and 81 percent said the project was very useful. In Peru, in terms of quality of the infrastructure, 77 percent characterized the quality as very good or good, 18 percent as average, and only 1 percent as bad. When asked whether project was functioning adequately, 73 percent said adequate, 6 percent said inadequate and 4 percent said it was not functioning, with the negative responses reflecting a lack of complementary equipment or personnel. And in Zambia, based on a visual appearance, the quality of workmanship was rated very good (28%), good (28%), fair (32%), poor (7%) and very poor (6%).

3.33 Consistent with the ratings regarding quality, beneficiaries display a large degree of satisfaction with social fund projects. In Armenia, 64 percent of beneficiaries were absolutely satisfied with social fund project and 26 percent were partly satisfied, leaving 10 percent that either did not comment or were not satisfied. In Ecuador, 31 percent of beneficiaries stated they were very satisfied, 55 percent were satisfied, and 14 percent were not satisfied. In the Bolivian Emergency Social Fund BA, when asked if they were satisfied with the projects, 80 percent of community members and 70 percent of workers of infrastructure projects said yes. An additional 72 percent of social welfare beneficiaries were satisfied. In Ecuador, beneficiary satisfaction was correlated with projects which perceived to benefit all and were well located, had good materials and good management of funds. In addition, the BA observed that project quality was closely associated with a high degree of knowledge about the project by beneficiaries, participation before and during execution, general satisfaction with the project, a positive disposition toward maintaining the work, and community management in the execution and maintenance of works.

3.34 The beneficiary assessments consistently found that the impacts of social fund interventions were largely positive. Moreover, the assessments were able to identify factors that contributed to these results. Impacts were concentrated mainly in providing access to and improving the quality of basic services with some evidence of ancillary capacity effects (both at the community and individual level). Potential indirect income effects were less clear, or not explicitly explored in the BAs. To illustrate, 97 percent of Peruvian beneficiaries said the projects had a positive impact and 99 percent said they were useful or very useful. When asked if the project had contributed to improving living conditions in the zone, 91 percent of beneficiaries said yes. However, 72 percent said they did not know if income had increased and only 17 percent felt it had some income effect. In the Chile evaluation, which extensively reviewed impacts, based on various indicators of impact, 60 percent of projects had a positive impact, 8 percent had mixed results, 12 percent had no impact and 6 percent had a negative impact. In the remainder (14 percent), there was not sufficient evidence to determine impact. Of those projects with positive impact, 60 percent had an impact on the satisfaction of material needs, 43 percent in personal development (self-esteem, etc.), 41 percent in capacity building (labor market skills, management skills, etc.), 31 percent in non-material needs (improved hygiene, more space, artistic expression, etc.), 34 percent in strengthening social organization, 28 percent increased opportunities and 22 percent improved social integration/reduced marginalization.

3.35 Regarding direct benefits of social infrastructure, in general, there were high ratings in terms of improved education and health conditions. In Zambia, an impact assessment of
education projects revealed that the predominant effects cited by beneficiaries were the improved learning environment, better hygiene facilities, better student performance, an increased influx of teachers and students and better teacher morale. In health projects, beneficiaries felt that the primary impact was on increased admissions to facilities and improved medical services, including the availability of food at the clinics. In Bolivian health clinics receiving social fund support, beneficiaries and staff perceived a rise in attendance after the intervention, in fact much higher than in centers which did not receive social fund support. Reasons cited include better quality infrastructure, community pride, availability of medicines and equipment, existence of internment facilities/beds, extension of office hours, attraction of community meeting room, and infrastructure for emergency and outreach. The benefits of education projects were perceived as more regular attendance, greater interest in studying and general impression that learning levels had improved. There was no evidence of increased enrollment or changes in the drop-out rate.

3.36 While a few of the beneficiary assessments probed spill-over effects and the strengthening of local capacity, no clear picture emerged. Beneficiaries in the Zambia and Bolivía BAs provided feedback that it was not just the project itself that had impact, rather it served as a focal point to get the community together and develop itself. However, how this increased capacity was manifest was not clear. For example, in Peru only about 20 percent of those interviewed said that the group formed for a FONCODES project has continued to work on other projects. But 97 percent of beneficiaries said they would collaborate in future projects. Therefore, in that case the fund may have generated a significant willingness and interest in participating in addressing local needs, though the mechanism of project committees appear to outlive their usefulness once a specific project is concluded. The longer-term effects of social fund projects on community capacity are little understood and deserve further research.

3.37 It is worth pointing out that, in a very small number of cases, not only were impacts minimal, there were negative effects. In Chile, negative impacts consisted primarily in the generation of conflicts at the community level. This was most apparent in the case of FOSIS’s community organizing and capacity building area of projects which in selected cases exposed and may have exacerbated longstanding community schisms and conflicts. In the case of Zambia, the perceived negative effects of school projects include increased manual labor for pupils during project implementation, increased school fees, as well as certain instances of a creation of divisions and animosity among the beneficiary community. Although these cases are rare, nonetheless it is important to bear in mind that communities can potentially be left worse off in certain aspects.

Institutional Arrangements and Roles

3.38 Because social funds do not directly execute or ‘own’ projects, the role of the intermediaries between the social fund and the beneficiaries is crucial. These intermediaries can have a significant influence on projects, especially in terms of technical quality, ownership, transparency, accountability and sustainability. There is no single model of how institutional
arrangements should be orchestrated. The roles and implementation arrangements of social funds vis a vis municipal governments, NGOs, line ministries and local communities can take many forms and depend in large degree on both the objectives of the social fund and the evolving institutional arrangements in the country itself. For instance, in Bolivia the process of integrating social fund activities more closely with municipal governments has come about as a result of the national decentralization process which permitted municipal governments to be a more effective partner to SIF strategies and investments. Most funds have allowed for a variety of actors to enter as intermediaries. This in itself has permitted the strengths and weakness of various institutions to be better understood. In addition, social funds have been innovative in creating mechanisms for beneficiaries to enter directly as executors, managing funds and making decisions for their communities.

3.39 In reviewing the beneficiary assessments of social funds, there was significant evidence that impact and project quality vary by type of intermediary. For instance, in Zambia the strong presence of an ‘external’ intermediary (line ministries, churches, NGOs, etc.) tended to reduce the sense of community ownership. In addition, participation and transparency was relatively low in NGO-implemented projects (compared to beneficiary-implemented projects). NGO-implemented projects scored high on workmanship and accountability. Conversely, local school associations were strong in participation and weaker in workmanship and accountability. District councils were fairly good on participation, but low in accountability, transparency and workmanship. In Ecuador, the highest quality ratings went to projects requested by local governments, with NGOs second, public institutions third and the lowest quality projects were requested by grassroots organizations. In Chile, the share of projects with a positive impact, by type of executor, were: municipalities 67 percent, beneficiaries 65 percent, NGOs and private organizations 58 percent and public institutions 23 percent. The reason posited for the municipal result was the presence of technical teams in communities beyond the lifespan of the project. With beneficiary executed projects, the advantage lay in the beneficiary participation in the definition of the project and the fact that the project meets the felt needs of the community. The weak result from private/NGO organizations was usually due to the complexity of the type of project, for instance training programs, and the lack of continuity. Deficiencies perceived in interventions through line ministries pointed to their lack of participatory practices and lack of resources (staff and budgets) to effectively supervise sector interventions and work more closely with beneficiaries.

3.40 Beneficiary assessments have revealed that even though projects are discreet interventions, it is important that these investments be imbedded in local development strategies and coordinated with other efforts. For example, regarding the synergy between projects in Chile, even though 62 percent of FOSIS projects were in localities that had more than one project, there was little observed connection or coordination between projects. Over half of projects do not coordinate their activities with FOSIS or others. This appears to have had an effect on the outcome. For those projects which had some degree of coordination, 81 percent were ranked positive, versus 59 percent for those without coordination. On the basis of this finding, FOSIS was subsequently restructured along regional rather than sectoral lines, and mechanisms for local consultation and coordination were put into place. In Zambia, the similar
lack of coordination with local authorities led the fund to develop a series of mechanisms which increased the involvement of local institutions and in turn improved the quality and impact of the microprojects, including inviting district staff to sit on a District Appraisal Committee and participate in the field appraisals and project launch workshops and well as on-going monitoring during execution. Even in funds that do not have an explicit goal of building the capacity of local authorities, as some now do, coordination mechanisms are important to the quality of the social fund investments themselves and are best carried out at the local level. There was little evidence that any coordination efforts at the central level had much effect on project quality or outcomes.

Do Social Funds Get Better Over Time?

3.41 There is evidence that beneficiaries feel that social funds get better over time, though even in the longest surviving social funds, challenges remain. In the Chile evaluation, in looking at projects approved over a four year period, there was some evidence that project quality in terms of impact and sustainability has improved over time, though not in a directly linear fashion. In the case of Zambia, procedural changes, including project implementation workshops, improved facilitation of participatory field appraisals, project launch workshops and district workshops were instituted after 1994 based in large part on findings of previous beneficiary assessments. A follow-up beneficiary assessment found significant improvements in project quality and implementation. In addition, quality and impact can improve for reasons not directly linked with social fund policies and procedures. In Bolivia, beneficiaries felt strongly that community participation and project impact have improved significantly since the introduction of the nation’s Popular Participation and Decentralization Laws, which decentralized public resources, created annual municipal operating plans with local input and brought more local control over resources.
IV. Recommendations

Recommendations for Beneficiary Assessments

4.1 **Ensure quality and validity of the information generated in BAs.** Paying attention to sample size and design as well as methodologies to choose interviewees is crucial to the quality and validity of BA results. Some of the BAs revealed significant weaknesses in these areas. Many other BAs reported that the size of sample and coverage were established within the confines of considerable time constraints for completion of the BA.

4.2 Notification of communities before fieldwork is advisable in order to maximize fieldwork time spent effectively. Staying in the community during the BA is preferable for obvious reasons, but not always practicable. If the team is not residing in the community, it is important that adequate time be allowed in BA planning for basic familiarization and necessary courtesy visits. In terms of the actual fieldwork, several BAs revealed unsystematic and ill-matched use of research methods. For example, one BA mixed focus groups of men and women, whereas focus groups tend to work more effectively when composed of one homogeneous group of informants.

4.3 In terms of the analysis of results, in many instances there is a lack of quantification of data. This appears to be more a concern with the early generation of BAs, although even in more recent assessments, there is a tendency for conclusions to slip into the anecdotal, where field site material to back up conclusions is weak. Even where data is quantified, it is often at very general levels such as ‘beneficiaries’, with interesting insights lost by not breaking down aspects of difference due to type of project supported, social category of beneficiary, and differentiation by rural/urban, region, gender, age, ethnic group, and poverty ranking. In these cases, possibilities for targeted response and follow-up by the SF are restricted. And finally, attention should be made that observations and recommendations fit the data. There were too many instances of examples in the analysis presented of inaccurate generalizations unsupported by reported findings.

4.4 **Ensure that the beneficiary assessment solicits opinions from multiple perspectives.** This should occur at three levels: (a) incorporation into the BA team of people from a mix of backgrounds, disciplines, sectors and professions; (b) selection of participants in the communities from a mix of occupation, gender, age, wealth and status groups; and (c) the solicitation of views and opinions from a variety of different institutional actors.

4.5 **Allocate sufficient resources to carry out the BA.** Under-budgeting for a BA tends to constrict sample size below desirable levels and/or reduce the time needed to effectively carry-out and analyze the results of a beneficiary assessment. In particular, planning for pre-test and pre-fieldwork training, budgeting sufficient time per project site and allowing time for analysis of results and writing up would correct some of the shortfalls discovered in BAs done in several of the countries reviewed.
4.6  **Involve management in the design, process and recommendations to improve the use of BAs as a management tool.** Including social fund managers has been shown to increase acceptance and ownership of findings. In addition, involving social fund staff will increase the likelihood of the operational utility of the BA findings. BA reports need to present conclusions to SF in a form that is useful and relevant to management. Clear recommendations for SF changes to improve effectiveness are far more helpful than a list of criticisms.

4.7  **Link the beneficiary assessment to other ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.** BAs should be designed and analyzed taking into consideration household surveys, technical audits or other national level surveys to reinforce findings and complement other data sets. Beneficiary assessments need to be placed within a broader learning process. The coupling of qualitative and quantitative surveys is, however, difficult and requires highly orchestrated coordination in sampling, elaboration of instruments, and logistics.

**Recommendations for Social Funds**

4.8  **Evaluation that includes systematic feedback from beneficiaries is an essential tool in the monitoring of social fund performance.** The beneficiary assessment has proven to be an indispensable tool in monitoring SF performance. At its best, it has been used as a learning device, to make adjustments to SF procedures and to subsequently evaluate the impacts of these adjustments. Because of the importance of getting good feedback from beneficiaries in the initial stages of a social fund, it is recommended that a beneficiary assessment be carried out within the first 18 months of operations. Subsequent assessments can be done on an annual or biannual basis, as appropriate for each individual fund. It is worth pointing out that beneficiary assessments alone are insufficient to effectively evaluate SF performance. Technical audits, reviews of targeting performance and impact evaluations are necessary complements that require different methodologies and technical skills. It is recommended that each social fund designate a specific department or professional to be responsible for coordination of the various evaluation efforts, including development of terms of reference, supervision of external contracting and the development of action plans to implement recommendations.

4.9  **Improve information flows directly to beneficiaries.** A well-informed beneficiary population is probably the most important and overlooked aspect of participation. As the BAs have confirmed, this has a large pay-off in terms of financing priority investments, ease of execution, quality of projects, satisfaction of beneficiaries, sustainability and spill-over effects. At the very least this should include four aspects: (a) promotional information and community facilitation to ensure that beneficiaries are making informed choices about the types of eligible projects based on transparent, consensus-based mechanisms; (b) ex-ante appraisal which probes beneficiaries’ specific knowledge of the activities and components of projects as a quality screen; (c) a project launch process which clarifies roles and responsibilities to the broader community; and (d) formal mechanisms for two-way information flows between the social fund and the beneficiary community during execution.
4.10 **Revisit arrangements and requirements for community counterpart contributions.** There is no dispute of the positive aspects of community counterpart contributions in building local ownership, making optimum choices in investments, and allocating resources more widely across poor communities. Nonetheless, the perspectives of the beneficiaries are important in terms of fine-tuning counterpart requirements in order to minimize negative effects including the skewing of investment choice, regressive effects between urban and rural communities, or the exclusion of the neediest beneficiaries. Beneficiary assessments can be used to develop appropriate policies and monitor their implementation.

4.11 **Raise transparency and efficiency at the local level.** At the national level, social funds have long enjoyed a reputation for transparency and efficiency. As a program, the ability to disburse funds quickly and effectively use management information systems to provide an accurate and timely reporting of information on program activities has been widely noted. The beneficiaries did not give such high marks to social fund interventions at the local level. While overall program disbursements have flowed efficiently, at the individual project level beneficiaries often noted shortcomings in the timely flow of funds, supervision arrangements and transparency in the use of project funds. To address these issues, social funds should streamline and/or decentralize procedures and requirements to minimize disruptions and delays in the flow of funds, ensure that sufficient amount of social fund staff time as well as externally contracted resources are available for supervision, and increase the level of transparency through more open information flows to and from beneficiaries, as noted above. The specific measures to adopt will vary by fund.

4.12 **Create opportunities to incorporate the beneficiary points of view in all aspects of social fund operations.** The weakest links in the chain appear to be the involvement of beneficiaries in the design phase as well as in the formal supervision arrangements during execution. At the front-end, almost all social funds reviewed need to look at how to incorporate beneficiaries during the actual design of the project, the moment which is often turned over to technical staff to handle, be they from intermediary organizations or private contractors. Issues of location of project, community commitments, type and level of services, and optimal implementation arrangements are all better dealt with in discussion with community members. In terms of supervision, formal mechanisms to incorporate beneficiaries (and not just committee members) into monitoring the execution of projects should be explored. Building in MIS indicators in this regard will ensure that this is adequately tracked by social funds.

4.13 **Beneficiary groups make very effective executors of small-scale projects and should be encouraged to do so.** For funds that have experimented with project committees and direct execution by beneficiaries, the increased relevance and quality, improved transparency and local capacity-building effects of this experience have been confirmed across countries. Social funds not currently providing for this option should seriously consider adding it to the menu of possible institutional arrangements.
4.14 **Move toward better local planning and integration of projects.** Many social funds are making moves away from isolated projects to embed their activities in the local context and coordinate with other local initiatives. This includes building synergy between social fund projects within a community and supporting local planning and coordination efforts with local governments, ministry staff and civil society to insure coherence of social fund interventions. Since this has been shown to improve the quality and sustainability of social fund investments, building in this more integrated perspective should be a priority for social fund managers and Bank staff, even in the early stages of a social fund’s experience.
Annex A

List of Beneficiary Assessments Reviewed

Armenia:

Bolivia:
“Percepcion de Beneficios de Proyectos FIS, Ramiro Coa/UDAPSO” September 1995.

Chile:
“Proyecto de Fortalecimiento Institucional del Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversion Social (FOSIS) de Chile, Componente 2: Evaluacion y Redisenio de Programas, Informe de Avance “1, August, 1995; and “Informe Final”, January 1996.

Ecuador:
“La Participacion de los Beneficiarios en los Proyectos FISE’, Documento de Trabajo No. 7”; and “Satisfacion e Impacto de los Proyectos, Desde la Perspectiva de los Beneficiarios”, Documento de Trabajo No. 8, April, 1996.

Senegal:

Malawi:

Peru:

Zambia:
Beneficiary Assessment Phase I, 1993
Beneficiary Assessment II 1995
Beneficiary Assessment III 1996
Beneficiary Assessment IV, 1997