



Method Brief P-FIM: People First Impact Method

The Challenge

Much of today's humanitarian assistance is still delivered in a top-down manner, where crisis-affected communities often have little or no say in decisions that directly affect their lives. This conventional approach tends to view communities as passive recipients rather than active agents of change. Consequently, humanitarian interventions frequently fall short in addressing people's most urgent needs and neglect locally rooted, community-driven solutions. Welthungerhilfe is committed in its strategy to a humanitarian system, which is people-centered, locally led and more localized. Therefore, Welthungerhilfe with its partners explores innovative methods and approaches in working with communities to ensure they have influence and agency over situations affecting them. P-FIM offers an alternative. It is built on the belief that communities know their context best and what

matters to them and should be engaged from the start, not just as informants, but as co-creators of solutions.

By creating space for open, respectful dialogue, P-FIM allows organizations to:

- listen **without bias**,
- **understand** the lived experience of individuals,
- **identify** needs, strengths, and locally-driven solutions directly from the community's perspective, and
- **together** with communities **understand and agree** the best way forward.

This results in responses that are locally grounded, timely, and relevant because they are shaped by the people who will live with the outcomes.

WHH's (Strategic) Approach through People First Impact Method (P-FIM)

P-FIM places people's lived experiences at the heart of planning, analysis, and action. It does so by equipping staff and partners with the skills to engage in meaningful, respectful communication with representative community members. This approach **builds mutual trust** and **fosters open, transparent relationships** laying a strong foundation for **meaningful insight and deeper contextual understanding**. Rather than beginning with predefined problems or project goals, the approach starts with a single, open-ended question:

"What are the most important things that have happened in your life in recent years?"

Through structured conversations and facilitated trust-building, P-FIM empowers community members to:

- Identify and reflect on the **most significant changes and their impacts** on communities;
- Analyze **causes, actors**, and those **responsible** for the **changes** positive or negative;
- Recognize and build on **local strengths** and **capacities** to empower **community-led solutions**.

Define the kind of additional support they need and from whom to strengthen their own initiatives and address remaining challenges.

This “**goal-free**” **method** enables organizations to understand local priorities **without project or agency bias**, laying the foundation for more meaningful, contextually appropriate, and accountable programming. Ideally, several organizations collaborate when using P-FIM: as an inter-agency method it further reduces the risk of bias towards organizational priorities (rather than people’s priorities) and ensures a more holistic approach.

Through **two-way engagement**, communities and agencies agree on potential actions, which are rooted in the community’s existing experiences, capacities, interventions and preferences. Community members explain what they are **already doing** to address these issues and **what kind of additional, external support may be needed**. Subsequently, both the community and the organizations agree on possible actions that reflect and build upon existing community-led interventions and preferences.

Why P-FIM adds value and what sets it apart?

No agency bias



The conversation is led by community members, not by project agendas or checklists.

Locally defined priorities



Communities describe what matters most to them—in their own words.

Actionable insights



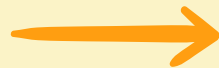
The process uncovers not only problems but also local capacities, solutions and innovations – the starting point.

Builds ownership



Communities are not consulted after the fact—they shape the issue and response from the start.

Strengthens accountability



Two-way engagement fosters trust, transparency, and mutual responsibility.

P-FIM complements existing tools and frameworks by grounding them in real-life experiences of communities, not external assumptions.

How can we check and align our current work with P-FIM principles?

Incorporating **P-FIM** does not mean abandoning your current tools or stopping existing work. Instead, it invites us to **reflect on how we use these tools** – most of which are traditionally agency-centered. We need to acknowledge limitations of many tools as they are shaped by:

- A focus on **challenges, needs, and risks**
- **Assumptions** made from an external perspective

So, before using any tool, ask yourself:

"How were these assumptions informed – and by whom?"

Step 1: Identify the Assumptions

To begin, make the underlying assumptions of your tools explicit.

Are they aligned with the realities of the community?

Step 2: Test Assumptions Using P-FIM

Use insights from a P-FIM exercise to see if your assumptions match the community's priorities. You may find that:

- Communities highlight the **same issues**, but with **different names, deeper meaning, or greater nuance**,
- Your tools gain **more relevance** and **value** when informed directly by community voices.

Incorporating the P-FIM approach opens the possibility to also include opportunities, innovations and solutions identified by the community – in effect, how it is turning a risk into an opportunity. Ultimately, the question of whether organizations **are doing the right thing – and in the right way** – is answered by the **quality of the engagement and the relationship** with communities. Do communities trust us? Do they feel free to share monitoring and evaluation responsibilities? And do they appreciate and agree with the roles played by organizations and other actors?

Key Interventions –WHH experiences with P-FIM

WHH is currently implementing P-FIM in various contexts, like **Zimbabwe**. There, WHH's Country Office Team explores how **P-FIM** can **inform Anticipatory Action initiatives**, especially the approach used to develop Anticipatory Action Plans (AAPs) for anticipatory action(s) identification and prioritization under WHH's Anticipatory Humanitarian Action Facility (WAHAFA) program as well as its potential contribution to ECHO proposal development.

More information can be found here: [Community-driven early action protocols: how P-FIM is unlocking locally led anticipatory action in Zimbabwe – Anticipation Hub](#) and [How P-FIM adds value to developing protocols for anticipatory action – Anticipation Hub](#). Further, **Ethiopia Country Office and CIFA** will now explore P-FIM for their WAHAFA project based on Zimbabwe experiences.

Also, the **ToGETHER program** with its German and local partners are pushing the approach across all partners. Within the program, P-FIM is primarily

If communities engage fully with the tools used to develop projects, it helps to ensure that these initiatives are truly locally led. The key lesson is: **Simple works, and complicated does not!**

Tools and approaches should be designed with clarity and usability in mind, enabling staff engaging with communities to confidently apply them and effectively communicate with communities in ways that support meaningful engagement.

P-FIM supports this by placing community concerns, **priorities, skills, and knowledge** at the center – from the very beginning.

applied in the so-called **Humanitarian operation and Innovation Facility (HOIFA)**, a **flexible funding mechanism** that enables local partners to lead timely and people-centered humanitarian action.

Partners are required to apply a community engagement approach – typically P-FIM, as all the partners were trained in its use during the first phase of ToGETHER. This ensures that interventions are rooted in local priorities, inclusive and accountable to affected population.

Malawi Country Office successfully applied P-FIM to **design a new integrated project** that brings together key components such as WASH, food security and nutrition, and home-grown school meals ensuring that each element is grounded in community priorities and local knowledge.

By leveraging P-FIM, we work towards **shifting power to communities, fostering trust, adding value** to community-led solutions and ensuring that our **interventions are shaped** not only for people but **with them**.

Contact and Resources

If you would like to learn more about P-FIM, please contact the People-Centred and Locally-Led Humanitarian Action Task Force at pcllha@welthungerhilfe.de, or explore our additional resources.

P-FIM Website
<https://p-fim.org>

Only accessible for WHH staff:

- [PCLL HA Operationalization in WHH COs](#)
- [NoFilterSession Recording P-FIM](#)
- [P-FIM Summary](#)
- [Material P-FIM](#)
- [WHH Localization Wiki](#)

