

## FIRST PART

# Developing a participatory approach to involve crisis-affected people in a humanitarian response

Part 1 provides guidance on developing a participatory approach:

- The basics – what is participation and what are the benefits of participation (chapter 1)
- The factors that will affect how people participate (chapter 2)
- Building mutual respect (chapter 3)
- Developing and using different communication techniques, both informal and formal (chapter 4)
- Making partnerships work (chapter 5)

At the end of Part 1 the reader is asked to review their participatory approach (chapter 6).

*Participation is like a kaleidoscope: it changes colour and form depending on who is using it.*

Philip White, 1994.



chapter 1

#1

# Participation ?

what? why? who? how?

## 1.1 What is participation?

This handbook looks at ways of optimising the participation of crisis-affected people in humanitarian action. Humanitarian situations present particular challenges: the need

for a rapid response; the risks of working in insecure situations; and the potential for manipulation in highly politicised environments. It is therefore often difficult for people to participate as fully as they might in other situations. As a result, the definition of participation used here is quite broad.

In this handbook participation is understood as the involvement of crisis-affected people in one or more phases of a humanitarian project or programme: assessment, design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation. The degree of involvement will vary depending on the circumstances, and there will always be debate about what constitutes 'real' or 'meaningful' participation. However this handbook takes a very pragmatic approach to participation and encourages the reader to involve crisis-affected people in humanitarian responses *to the greatest extent possible*, and to constantly look for new opportunities to increase the level of participation.

It is important to define what participation is not: activities that are carried out in exchange for a salary or 'in kind' payment are considered to be employment rather than participation because the population itself is not involved in decision-making processes and the humanitarian organisation retains power. Many projects involve people in the execution of operational activities in return for money, seeds, food etc (e.g. cash for work programmes). This can have many advantages: cost reduction, increase of available resources and stimulation of the

local economy. However, this is not 'participation' unless the population itself is involved in decision-making processes and has an impact on decisions that affect them.

Tools exist for planning and managing humanitarian programmes, which can help to make sure crisis-affected people play a part (see Parts 2 & 3), but there is more to participation than a set of tools. It is first and foremost an attitude – a state of mind – that sees people affected by a crisis as social actors with skills, energy, ideas and insight into their own situation. Local people should be agents of the humanitarian response rather than passive recipients.

Crisis situations differ in terms of type, cause, speed of onset, scale and impact. They have different impacts depending on the context in which they occur – urban or rural, developing or developed country, in peacetime or during a conflict, and so on. Many situations are complex, with several crises affecting the same populations simultaneously or over a period of time (e.g. an earthquake in a country with a prolonged armed conflict). In protracted emergencies, humanitarian aid might be provided in the same region for years, sometimes even decades.

The idea of humanitarian response has broadened to include post-crisis interventions and prevention and mitigation activities both within 'traditional' sectors (community health, for example), and in new ones (like education and psychosocial programmes). This has resulted in an increasing emphasis on the links between relief and development, and the necessity of building on local capacities to respond to recurrent crises.

Participation provides the basis for a dialogue with people affected by a crisis not only on what is needed but also how it might best be provided. It can help to improve the appropriateness of the humanitarian response by, for example, identifying

## 1.2 Why 'do' participation?

**Examples**

*In Colombia, participation is considered to be both a duty and a right of citizenship. Civil society (e.g. community-based organisations, church organisations and committees for internally displaced persons) plays an active role in humanitarian action, whether by instigating and designing its own interventions or by participating in those of external actors. Some communities have been known to refuse assistance from international aid organisations in cases where they were not consulted.*

*When refugees first arrive in transit camps, they are not expected to participate in the provision of aid. Aid organisations aim to have the camps ready to accommodate often traumatised and exhausted refugees. However, some refugees arriving in Guinée Forestière proposed to help put up the tents. As one refugee explained:*

*“Even if someone scrubs your back for you, you still have to wash your own stomach.”*

priority needs, and by ensuring that local capacities are taken into account. It can reinforce the quality of assistance by stimulating exchange and feedback between aid agencies and affected people at all stages of the intervention.

Participatory methods also provide a structure for dealing with complaints if people feel that their needs are not being met, are being met badly, or that the assistance is causing more harm than good. Participation is an integral part of a humanitarian organisation’s accountability to those who are intended to benefit from their operations.

All the existing quality initiatives for humanitarian organisations – the Sphere Project, Quality Compass, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I), Synergie Qualité<sup>1</sup>, etc – as well as the

Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief underline the importance of participation. The improved practices that they have as their goal can only be achieved if humanitarian organisations are prepared to listen to, and take on board, the wishes and concerns of crisis-affected people.

Participation has its own inherent value, but is not a goal in itself; in humanitarian crises it serves a wider purpose. There are many reasons why an agency might adopt a participatory approach.

<sup>1</sup> For further information, please visit : [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org) ; [www.compassqualite.org](http://www.compassqualite.org) ; [www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org) ; [www.coordinationsud.org](http://www.coordinationsud.org).

## 1.3 What are the objectives of participation ?

### Objective 1 ☯ To prolong the impact of humanitarian assistance

Aid projects come and go, but local people often have to continue to deal with the effects of a crisis, either because it is protracted or recurrent, or because its consequences are felt long after the crisis itself has ended. Furthermore, international humanitarian organisations often function separately from local institutions and structures, but strengthening their capacity is essential in preparing for future crises and linking relief and development.

#### Participation can help to:

- strengthen the population’s resilience by supporting local strategies
- increase local capacity by working with local stakeholders
- strengthen the social fabric, thus laying the foundations for future collective action and development projects
- encourage crisis-affected people to be active in projects for their own benefit, thus making them look towards the future and overcome their trauma or feeling of helplessness
- shift power dynamics in favour of marginalised groups and individuals
- support project sustainability by encouraging programme ownership by local stakeholders and members of the population

### Objective 2 ☯ To make the project more relevant

Participation can help humanitarian organisations to understand crisis-affected people’s needs and priorities, and avoid the biases and assumptions that are often made by external organisations and individuals. On-going participation throughout a project provides continual feedback so that the necessary adjustments can be made to ensure it stays relevant to people’s real needs.

**Example**

Organisations involved in a resettlement programme in Huambo Province, Angola, engaged in extensive consultation with people that had been displaced. They discovered that people's pre-requisites for resettlement included the ability to live alongside members of their original community in conditions that resembled those of their home villages, and to have access to land in order to produce food. They were prepared to live in areas that were not completely safe in order to avoid living in camps.

Humanitarian organisations helped these displaced people to negotiate access to land in order to build 'temporary villages'. These were judged more successful than larger camps as they did require external management, had fewer social problems, and generated some food of their own.

Participatory techniques can bring in local networks, build on and support local capacities and take account of local culture. It is essential that humanitarian projects avoid duplicating or undermining local coping strategies.

**Quote**

"A foreigner sees what he already knows." African proverb

**Objective 3 ⊕ To avoid or reduce negative impacts of humanitarian responses**

Participatory processes give space for crisis-affected people to raise protection issues that can be tackled collectively, identifying and developing

"ways in which they can protect themselves and realise their rights to assistance, repair, recovery, safety and redress"<sup>2</sup>. Participation also helps humanitarian agencies to establish relationships with affected populations which, in turn, can ensure access to important security information and improve the management of security for humanitarian organisations.

People affected by a crisis often have the best analysis of the impact of an aid operation on their environment. Their knowledge of the ecological, economic, social and cultural environment can help them anticipate potential negative impacts that may not be perceptible to foreign eyes.

<sup>2</sup> Slim, Hugo, and Andrew Bonwick, *Protection: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005, p. 53.

**Objective 4 ⊕ To enhance project effectiveness**

One of the most obvious benefits of participation is that it can help a project achieve its objectives more effectively. It enables a project to work with local knowledge, expertise and resources to support the running of the project, and in particular to better spot and then manage constraints characteristic of the particular context.

The involvement of crisis-affected people can also improve access for humanitarian organisations. Delegating or engaging in partnerships with members of affected populations or associated structures can be a way of gaining access to areas or groups that are inaccessible to foreign organisations. However, participation is not about sending local stakeholders into dangerous areas in order to protect expatriates or the staff of an international organisation.

**Objective 5 ⊕ To help to establish a relationship based on respect and mutual understanding**

The dialogue and exchange that are central to any participatory approach can help strengthen the relationship between the aid organisation and population. Central to this is good communication, transparency, and having the appropriate attitude and behaviour. Respect for the customs and traditional beliefs of a population is particularly important.

**Example**

When Guinean authorities and the UNHCR approached the village of Lainé in Guinée Forestière to establish a refugee camp in the area, a process of consultation was initiated within the village. Decision-making was delegated to the youth council since "they represent the village's future". An agreement was signed between the UNHCR and Lainé district, in which the villagers' conditions were laid down. Before the refugees arrived, the elders requested that local traditions be respected so a sacrifice was made which was provided by the authorities. "We needed to ask our ancestors to protect us, to keep conflict out of the village, seeing as we were going to receive people who were fleeing war."

### Objective 6 ⊕ To make the project more responsive to changing needs

Flexibility is essential to ensure projects continuously adapt to the context and population as necessary. This entails a capacity to review priorities through dialogue and to be open to feedback and suggestions through participatory monitoring and evaluation.

#### Quote

“Lainé refugee camp is an example of just how swiftly needs can change and how programmes must adapt. Here, the first wave of refugees came from mainly rural communities and their priorities were basic education, reading and writing. When a second wave of refugees arrived in the camp, they had completely different needs. They already had technical skills and proposed tie-dye activities, soap making, among others. Some refugees were used to using telephones and sending emails! The urban women were interested in fashion and wanted hairdressers and therefore a training course in hairstyling. The young were asking for IT classes and electrical engineering. Each training course we offer responds to a request from the community, which is why some courses have closed down and other subjects have started up.”

*Aid worker, Guinée Forestière.*

### Objective 7 ⊕ To increase the resources available for the project

Many projects (agricultural rehabilitation, road reconstruction, shelter reconstruction, establishment and maintenance of refugee camps) require a considerable amount of labour. For such projects, it is essential for effectiveness and coverage that the local population contributes materials, labour,

knowledge and expertise. Although we have established that simply providing incentives in return for labour (e.g. Cash for work) is not in itself ‘participation’, once a participatory approach is used, people affected by a crisis will often bring in their own resources and capacities to complement those provided by the agency in order to achieve a mutually agreed goal.

It is one thing to have the necessary resources and expertise. It is another to have the capacity to manage them well. Sharing the responsibility for project management with local partners, committees, etc. can help manage the project, increase transparency, and build skills and expertise.

### Objective 8 ⊕ To improve project efficiency

Efficiency and speed are central to humanitarian culture, due to the pressures of emergency situations. They are often invoked as reasons why participation is impossible in crisis situations. However they can also be used to increase efficiency. For example, information can be collected in a short time through participatory assessment methods that often provide more detailed, context-specific information than long drawn out quantitative surveys. The quality of the information gathered through participatory methods helps to design more context-specific projects, and avoid solutions that may later prove irrelevant or impossible to implement. The contributions of local stakeholders and members of the affected population can help reduce project costs, increase coverage, and increase time-effectiveness.

### Objective 9 ⊕ To help everyone learn new skills

Participation is based on exchange. It is a learning experience for all those involved. Learning lessons from local people’s experiences, including previous aid projects, can help to avoid errors made in the past. Continuous dialogue throughout a project can help to learn lessons, build project memory and avoid repeating mistakes. It is a way for humanitarian workers to learn new skills and get new perspectives on their work, and for crisis-affected people to not

only learn about how humanitarian organisations work, but also to gain very tangible skills in project management and implementation.

### **Objective 10** **To respect your organisation's mandate and principles**

For many organisations, participation is one of their core principles, as well as a requirement of codes of conduct or quality proforma to which they are committed. Participation is also consistent with other principles, such as the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality. Participatory techniques can help to identify the real needs of different groups of people, thereby supporting the organisation's impartiality. If carried out carefully, participation can reduce the risk of aid diversion. Having good relations and contacts with a diverse range of local stakeholders can ensure better understanding of your organisation, its mandate and principles, and can reduce the risk of that the project will be affected by the conflicting interests of stakeholders.

Participation, therefore, can have a number of different objectives. You may wish to focus on specific objectives from the list above, or all of them as they are mutually reinforcing. In any case, it is important that you and your team are clear about your motivation and objectives regarding participation.

## **1.4 Who participates?** Participation is about the involvement of crisis-

affected people in one or more aspects of a humanitarian project or programme. Of course, not every single person affected by the crisis can participate. In using participatory approaches it is important to decide who participates. Every community has structures and representatives. Even though a humanitarian crisis may destroy or change the pre-crisis structures, new ones will quickly be established, and leaders will emerge. Humanitarian organisations will always

have to work with existing structures and manage the power relations within them. However, these may exclude or marginalise some people. If humanitarian organisations only work with local leaders – some of whom may be self-selected and not necessarily legitimate representatives of their constituency – there is a risk of simply not reaching the most marginalised and vulnerable people. In such situations, other means need to be found to involve these people as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so.

This does not mean that humanitarian organisations should routinely by-pass local structures. They should look for opportunities to build the capacity of local structures to meet the needs of the most marginalized people who are the hardest hit by crises and disasters.

Using participatory approaches will often involve the creation of a project committee or group, and this offers the opportunity to bring in a broad range of local actors, including those not normally represented in local structures – people from different castes, classes, ethnic or racial groups, disabled people, women, older people and younger people.

The need for broad and representative participation must be balanced by the practicalities of working with a large group of people. It is also important to avoid a 'tokenist' approach to the participation of the most marginalised people.

The participation of crisis-affected people can be either direct, or indirect.

### **1.4.1** **Direct participation**

Direct participation involves members of the affected population participating as individuals in the various phases of an aid programme: by attending focus groups, supplying labour for project implementation, voting or partaking in decision-making, and by suggesting ideas for interventions. Often it will be necessary to provide and facilitate particular opportunities for women and socially-marginalised groups to participate in decision-making processes and project implementation. If

cultural and social norms prohibit mixed-sex work groups, or women speaking out at meetings attended by men, specific arrangements will need to be made to ensure that not only male voices are heard.

### 1.4.2 ⊕ Indirect participation (or participation by representation)

Structures that represent the affected population (like community-based organisations and village committees) participate in humanitarian interventions by, for example, organising discussion fora, carrying out surveys, and selecting beneficiaries.

Both direct and indirect participation can be facilitated by various types of partnership: between international and local NGOs, between governmental and non-governmental organisations, between development and emergency organisations, etc. But to ensure that such alliances are effective, it is important to carry out a stakeholder analysis, paying attention to the constituency, membership and mode of operation of the structures you engage with.

Who you engage with and how you do so will depend on the situation. Humanitarian contexts often involve complex political dynamics, where the risk of manipulation and diversion of aid is high, and where collaboration with certain stakeholders (local *and* international) can compromise an individual's or an organisation's perceived impartiality and independence, as well as the security of the organisation and the people it seeks to assist. Identifying who is who is thus an essential step in the analysis that will inform the design and implementation of the strategy for participation. Specific guidance on partnerships is offered in Chapter 5: Making Partnerships Works.

### 1.4.3 ⊕ Working with crisis-affected people

Crisis-affected people are the people who have been directly and indirectly affected by a man-made or natural disaster, including the 'host' populations of displaced people. Different

individuals and groups are affected in different ways by each crisis according to their gender, socio-economic, environmental and cultural circumstances.

Working with crisis-affected people can involve interacting with a range of stakeholders. Figure 1 shows how the boundaries between the 'affected population' and 'aid organisations' overlap. For example, national staff represent the majority of aid agency staff even in international aid organisations. Members of affected populations are likely to belong to more than one group. They will have been affected personally, and may also be active in Community-Based Organisations or in Government Institutions responsible for delivering aid.

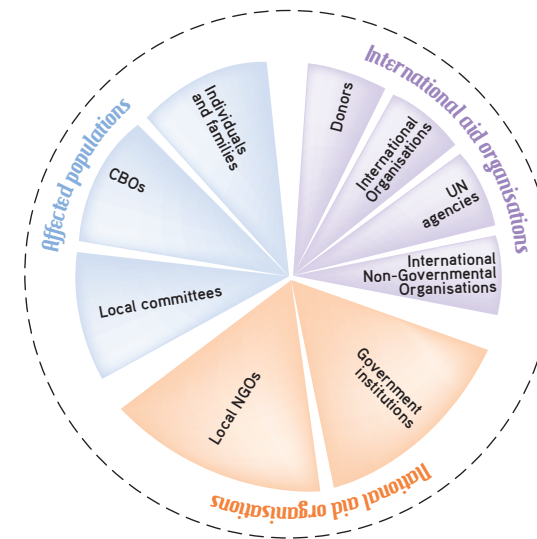


Figure 2  
Typology of stakeholders involved in participatory processes

### 1.4.4 ⊕ Power Dynamics

Power dynamics are always a key issue in relation to participation. They determine how difficult it will be to reach the poorest and the most marginalized and powerless people and encourage them to participate.



Participation involves giving power to certain people and therefore will always affect pre-existing power relations. While power relations are, to a degree, unavoidable and necessary, the key is to recognise, understand, and acknowledge them, and then to manage and moderate them. Power dynamics that benefit and empower those who are poor, weak and marginalized are easy to work with. However, where there are poor and marginalized people, this usually means that power dynamics are not in their favour and that at some point you will need to challenge them.

In emergencies, project objectives are rarely focused on giving power to the affected population. By definition, emergency programs try to respond to immediate survival needs. In such contexts, participation is often limited to a means of achieving emergency project objectives more effectively, a means of providing a better response to the affected populations' needs, even if this means working through the power structures that created and perpetuate social marginalization in the first place.

The phrase 'beneficiary participation' implies that participation is not possible before the intended beneficiaries have been identified (usually through the use of targeting criteria such as 'female-headed households', 'children under the age of 5', 'households with an income of less than x per capita' etc). However, participation can have a significant impact early in the assessment process and can influence this 'beneficiary selection'.

The participation of an affected population early in the assessment phase is essential to ensure project relevance. *Only* consulting beneficiaries you have already selected can cause a project to 'miss out' other affected groups. By involving affected-people in defining the criteria for beneficiary selection an organisation can increase its accountability, transparency, and respect the knowledge and understanding of the people affected by the crisis. In turn this will help build a stronger relationship that can be built on in later stages of the humanitarian response.

### 1.4.5 ⊕ 'Communities'

We know that communities are not homogeneous and harmonious entities, but the use of the term community often implies a shared identity or ethos. In reality, communities are often split into subgroups along power-related and economic lines. The way these subgroups are perceived in their local context, or that they perceive themselves, is often based on their shared history, some of which may be based on the subjugation of some groups by others. Participatory approaches often focus on 'community participation'. A community approach to participation raises the following issues:

- Identifying a particular community for participation can have political implications.
- A community approach often implies a collective approach, and participation does not necessarily imply working with groups.
- A community approach can imply that the members of a community have the same needs, objectives and culture, but this may not be the case.
- The existence of a community implies a minimum degree of structure and social fabric, and to encourage participation it is logical to call on these forms of social organisation. However, in crisis situations, these forms of social organisation may be lost or severely weakened, strained or in a process of change.
- Within a community, certain people may identify themselves as spokespersons or representatives of that community, and claim that they are able to speak for the community and represent its interests. Such representatives are often male and from a dominant caste, class, ethnic group or linguistic group. Therefore, they may have little understanding of the particular needs and interests of more vulnerable or marginalized people or of the skills and experience that they can bring to project implementation.
- Participation can help to understand the different agendas of subgroups within a community and to reach a consensus about what needs to be done to respond to the effects of a crisis.

### 1.4.6 ⊕ 'Minorities'

This term is often used to refer to those who are less powerful in a society, even at times to refer to women and girls who may, in fact, make up a numerical majority. The main point, though, is that societies are made up of many different groups with their specific interests and can be 'divided' in a variety of ways, both according to how people define themselves, how they are defined by others and the categories that are imposed on them.

In order to deal with this issue, it is essential to:

- disaggregate data by gender, age, ethnicity, caste etc
- ensure that those people who are being consulted or who are participating in humanitarian actions with you are not just the powerful, the visible, or the accessible;
- find out about and then use the categorisations people use themselves;
- be accessible to all people, not just the most powerful.

### 1.4.7 ⊕ The importance of human relationships

Participation is fundamentally about establishing relationships between different individuals or groups. It allows trust and mutual understanding to be established and encourages those involved to take into account each other's ideas and needs. Participation can also be an important means of rebuilding the social fabric which has been weakened by a crisis.

Human relationships are an important component of the quality of participation and the quality of a project as a whole. To establish good relationships, the most important (and often underestimated) factor is the behaviour of a humanitarian organisation's staff and their understanding of the specific culture, behaviour and beliefs of the local population. To engage in participation in an emergency context, you have to invest in relationship building and you have to recognise and acknowledge power. In many emergencies,

the key to successful interventions has been the relationship of trust between emergency actors and local actors and leaders.

To create mutual understanding one must recognise existing forms of social organisation and communication and provide information about aid actors and their activities. Participation requires a 'getting to know each other' process that may be lost if staff turnover is high or when the project is underway and participants are focused on activities.

Participation is above all about demonstrating respect for members of affected populations. It is about recognising their right to have a say in issues that impact on their lives, and showing due consideration for local capacities, ideas, and potential. This is central to respecting the dignity of individuals already affected by often traumatising events.

*You may need to repeat the 'getting to know each other' process during the course of a project. Time and resources should be dedicated to relationship-building and if staff turnover is high, ensure that links with stakeholders are not invested in a single staff member as the relationship may suffer if that person leaves.*

**Tips & Warnings**

There are many different views on what constitutes 'participation'. As stated above, in humanitarian situations, often only a very low level of participation is possible at the beginning. This is particularly so in fast-onset disasters where the priority is to save lives quickly and the use of some participatory methods may not be possible or appropriate.

In order to adopt a genuinely participatory approach, we must not think of those who are affected by a crisis as 'victims', 'beneficiaries, or 'recipients', but as dynamic social actors with capacities and ideas of their own who are able to take an active role in decisions affecting their safety and welfare. This shift in perception is of fundamental importance.

## 1.5 How to 'do' participation

**Table 1**  
A typology of Participation  
(Adapted from Pretty, J<sup>3</sup>.)

Type of participation	Description
Passive participation	The affected population is informed of what is going to happen or what has occurred. While this is a fundamental right of the people concerned, it is not one that is always respected.
Participation through the supply of information	The affected population provides information in response to questions, but it has no influence over the process, since survey results are not shared and their accuracy is not verified.
Participation by consultation	The affected population is asked for its perspective on a given subject, but it has no decision-making powers, and no guarantee that its views will be taken into consideration.
Participation through material incentives	The affected population supplies some of the materials and/or labour needed to conduct an operation, in exchange for payment in cash or in kind from the aid organisation.
Participation through the supply of materials, cash or labour	The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash and/or labour needed for an intervention. This includes cost-recovery mechanisms.
Interactive participation	The affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers.
Local initiatives	The affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organisations or institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community; it is the aid organisation that participates in the people's projects.

Table 1 outlines a typology of participation that reflects the different ways humanitarian organisations interact with crisis-affected people, from simply informing them about a humanitarian response, to providing support for local initiatives.

Analysis of current practice shows that different forms of participation are used during the different phases of a project. Though there are obvious variations between different agencies and contexts, the following patterns emerge:

- Consultation is very common in the assessment phase, but much less so in the design phase. Crisis-affected people are rarely involved in decision-making in project design.
- Participation through material incentives is one of the most common methods in the implementation phase, notably through Cash for Work or Food for Work programmes, or through the use of sub-contracting agreements.
- Crisis-affected people have much less involvement in programme monitoring and evaluation. Though participatory monitoring and evaluation is gaining importance, and people are increasingly *consulted*, they rarely receive feedback on the results of the evaluation, and on how their inputs will be used in later stages.
- There is very little evidence of support for local initiatives.

**Quote**

**“Our biggest handicap is the lack of support from INGOs. We don't understand why they don't support us when we are carrying out activities that complement their projects and sometimes we do their work for them.”**

*Representative of a refugee association, Guinée Forestière.*

*Different forms of financial incentive are used in refugee camps in Guinée Forestière - refugees or people from nearby villages are hired for specific tasks. For example, 'Food for Work' or 'Cash for Work' activities clearing or improving land for agricultural programmes or market gardening and planting trees for environmental programmes. Certain activities which are done on behalf of the wider community, such as security guard work or membership of certain committees are also paid.*

**Example**

<sup>3</sup> Alternative systems of inquiry for a sustainable agriculture', in the *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, vol. 25, (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 1994), pp. 37-48.

Experience shows that a participatory approach is more effective if used consistently throughout the project. Part 2 provides guidance on how to do this, taking into consideration the constraints and opportunities characteristic of crisis situations, and emphasising the need to work with local capacities and initiatives.

This book uses the words ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’ very often and in an apparently undifferentiated way. The typology of participation above demonstrates that participation is not static, but dynamic and changing – the level of participation in urgent humanitarian responses may be quite low initially, but can be increased and improved over time. It is possible to shift from one approach to another throughout the course of a humanitarian response. Some parts of the typology outlined above can best be described as ‘involving’ people; others would be considered ‘participation’. There is no fixed division between the two, and individuals will have different opinions on what constitutes ‘participation’. The purpose of this handbook is not to get stuck in rigid definitions, but to offer guidance for increasing involvement and participation as is appropriate and possible in any given context.

Different approaches and perceptions of the purpose of participation determine to what degree it will be possible to involve people in humanitarian responses. Three different approaches – ‘instrumental’, ‘collaborative’ and ‘supportive’ – are presented below:

**The Instrumental Approach** sees participation as a means of achieving programme objectives. If applied in a relevant manner in all phases of the project cycle, and in a way that respects the affected population’s rhythms and capacities, it can lead to the strengthening of these capacities, but doing so is not an objective in itself.

One should be careful not to slip from an instrumental mode to an outright manipulation of local actors, which might undermine a project, weaken local capacities or create security problems for aid workers. It is also important not to confuse this approach with local ownership of a project or programme.

**The Collaborative Approach** is based on an exchange where stakeholders pool their resources in order to reach a common objective. The aid organisation both aims to build on the capacity of affected populations and to learn from it. This pre-supposes that social structure has not been completely destroyed. Collaboration can be informal, e.g. the delegation of certain tasks, or formal partnerships between structures.

**The Supportive Approach** involves the aid organisation supporting the affected population in implementing its own initiatives. This can mean material, financial, or technical support to existing initiatives or strengthening the population’s capacity to initiate new projects. Crucial to this approach is the need for aid organisations to seek and recognise existing capacity and potential within the affected population.

There are bridges between these three approaches. Going from a collaborative approach to a supportive approach is logical and relevant. However, going from a supportive to an instrumental approach risks sapping trust between partners and can compromise the future of the relationship.

Developing a participatory approach essentially involves answering the three following questions:

- Why do I wish to adopt a participatory approach? What is my objective in doing so?
- Who will I work with?
- How will I put this participatory approach into practice?

The choices you make will depend on the context, the affected people and your aid organisation. These factors will be presented and discussed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 1 summary

### Participation: What? Why? Who? How?

- 1** In humanitarian situations, a participatory approach means involving crisis-affected people in the humanitarian response in whatever way, and to whatever extent is possible in a given context.
- 2** Participation can make a humanitarian response more efficient and effective, more relevant to real needs and can help identify the most appropriate way of meeting those needs.
- 3** Crisis-affected people can be directly involved in humanitarian responses on an individual level or indirectly via community representatives. In both cases, special care should be taken to ensure that the most vulnerable and socially marginalised people are involved.
- 4** There are different ways to involve people in humanitarian responses, and different approaches that can be used to continually improve participation throughout the life cycle of a project.



chapter 2

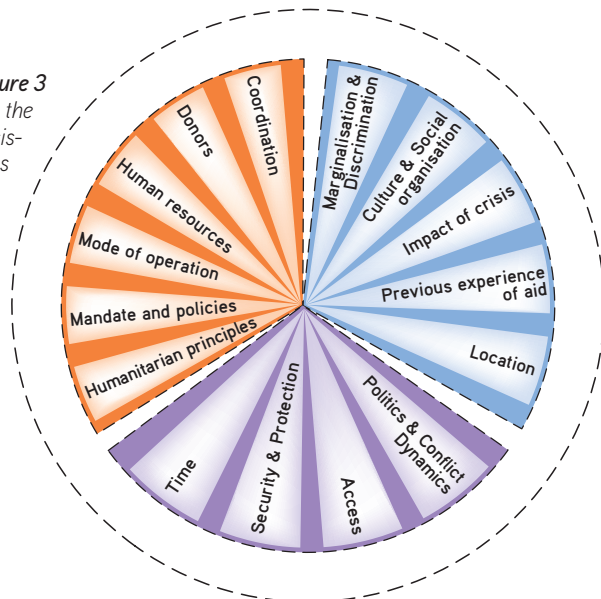
#2

# Factors Affecting Participation in Humanitarian Responses

In order to improve participation in humanitarian responses one needs to understand the factors that mould, constrain, or support it.

In this chapter a variety of factors affecting participation are examined, including the need for a rapid response, political and conflict dynamics and the human resource policies of aid organisations. These factors have been organised into 3 categories depending on whether they relate to the context, the affected population, or the aid organisation. For each factor a series of questions is suggested. Answering these questions will help identify the opportunities and risks to be taken into account when adopting a participatory approach. They should be referred to regularly as knowledge of the operational environment improves, the external situation develops and relationships with stakeholders evolve. This will help to make the participatory approach dynamic rather than static. Further guidance on reviewing and adapting a participatory strategy is provided in Chapter 6.

**Figure 3**  
Factors affecting the participation of crisis-affected populations



Before adopting a participatory approach it is important to collect information about factors that will influence crisis-affected people's involvement – the key questions in this chapter will provide some guidance on the information that you need to collect. Some techniques for collecting this information include:

- a review of key reference material (anthropology, political history), including 'grey' literature (mission reports, evaluations and personal accounts)
- interviews with people who know the context and/or have experience of aid programmes in the region
- attending planning or co-ordination meetings, briefing or debriefings

*What other sources can you think of?*

## 11.1 The context

### 11.1.1 Time and the speed of response

A common concern about the use of participatory approaches in an emergency situation is that it takes too much time. This handbook argues that there are very few situations where time pressure truly prevents a participatory approach from being adopted.

It may not always be appropriate to adopt a participatory strategy when responding in the immediate aftermath of a devastating rapid-onset crisis such as an earthquake or hurricane. In such cases people may have other urgent priorities such as finding family members, many people may be in shock, and needs may be overwhelming. In situations of mass displacement where access to basic needs such as water is an urgent priority, the immediate need to save lives outweighs the benefits of participation.

Even if it is not possible to be fully 'participatory' during the initial emergency response, it is essential, to keep the affected population informed of what measures are being taken to meet their needs, and provide opportunities for these to be challenged, if necessary. Even at this stage, though, there are still ways of involving stakeholders in the humanitarian res-

## Example

*To try to introduce participatory mechanisms at the border points would be impractical and maybe even dangerous. Indeed, if water points and sanitation facilities are not provided immediately, the risk of disease or even epidemics is extremely high. Also, the refugees have often walked for miles, are tired and traumatised. It wouldn't be reasonable to ask them to assist in the building of shelters, or defining their own needs. Their very survival is at stake at this point in time.*

INGO worker, **Guinée Forestière**.

ponse. Being participatory does not imply that everyone has to be involved in the project but rather that everyone should at least be represented. When certain members of a specific group are unable to participate, it is always possible to consider involving others and to gradually broaden that involvement as appropriate. A project that gradually increases the involvement of those who are affected by the crisis or disaster needs to be planned in a particular way or it will simply continue as it was during the initial phase.

In other cases participation has proved to be a useful way of speeding up the pace of interventions, particularly because it brings to light methods, resources and ideas that otherwise would not have been identified. Participation does inevitably require a commitment from all stakeholders in terms of time, but this is easily made up through improved programme quality, increased impact and enhanced security.

In many emergencies, aid organisations arrive several days after the disaster, by which time local inhabitants or people from neighbouring areas have already mobilised themselves. When this is the case, it is important to establish a relationship with these structures and to support their initiatives. Aid organisations should seek out and recognise existing capacity and local initiatives and consider them in the planning of their own responses.

Participation requires confidence and trust. The amount of time needed to establish this largely depends on attitude, skills and the way in which project teams and aid organisations are perceived. Although time is often seen as being crucial in building confidence, the ability to listen and hear what people are saying, and keeping an open mind, have proven to be excellent 'door openers'. Finding the right intermediary with the affected population is also more important than time.

Participatory processes also require a commitment in terms of time from the affected population. This factor can be especially important when populations are under severe economic or other forms of stress. By giving up their time, they may allow opportunities to pass - time spent in meetings with you is time not spent earning a living, collecting water or foraging for food, and so on. Successful participation activities take into account participants' own schedules and obligations, and successful participatory project teams demonstrate awareness of, and gratitude for, the time that people give to the project.

### Quote

**"A long time we are sitting in discussion and winter is coming, and time is lost. If you are coming for humanitarian aid, please bring your aid."**

*Local inhabitant, Nahrin, Afghanistan.*

Effective participation will leave participants feeling that the time they invest in the process is worthwhile. People make active choices and their willingness to engage in participatory projects is likely to be influenced by perceptions of the potential impact on their well-being and survival. A lack of support can sometimes be attributed to a lack of confidence in the ability of aid agencies to make a difference. If power and decision making remain solely in the domain of humanitarian actors, there may be no perceived value in participating in a 'pre-determined' process.

### II.1.2 Security and protection

In crisis contexts, both affected populations and aid workers can be at risk. Conflict situations clearly present a range of security and protection risks, but even after natural disasters normal social protection mechanisms and the rule of law may break down, putting people at risk. The security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of affected populations are two facets of the same reality.



**KEY QUESTIONS**  
1: Time and the speed of response

- 1 In an acute crisis, what level of involvement is possible and how can a project be designed so that involvement is increased over time?
- 2 What local initiatives and capacity are there, and how can these be drawn into the planning process?
- 3 How can a relationship of trust be built in a short period of time?
- 4 How can participation be put into practice in a way that makes a project more efficient?
- 5 How can different agencies co-ordinate their assessment and planning processes to minimise the demands on the affected population?
- 6 What time constraints and other commitments do people have and how can participatory processes work around these?
- 7 What can be done to make sure that people have an interest in investing their time in a participatory process?

Humanitarian organisations need to take into account the effects that their presence and activities have on the protection of crisis-affected people. They must ensure that participation does not increase security risks for the affected population, and whenever possible, improves their safety. The planning of a participatory approach should therefore include an assessment of risk.

**Some participatory techniques and practises can create additional risk:**

**Inappropriate data collection:** Apparently harmless questions designed to elicit information that will be useful for programming may touch on sensitive issues, notably in conflict areas (e.g. What distance from the frontline are the wells that displaced people use to fetch water? Which roads can food convoys use to lower the risk of ambush?) Apparently benign Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) maps can suddenly be perceived as pieces of military intelligence!

In conflict situations, it may seem like a good idea to question women and girls about their experiences of sexual violence to ensure that appropriate health and support facilities are provided. But, unless confidentiality and discretion are assured, it may put women and girls in danger of further victimisation from within their own communities or from the original perpetrators. Such sensitive information should only be collected from individuals if really necessary. It may be more appropriate to ask about general trends of sexual violence rather than individual incidents unless there is a compelling reason for women and girls to describe their individual attacks.

As trust between your organisation and the affected population is built up through a participatory process, there may be a time when people will be more prepared to speak out about what is happening to them. The responsibility then falls on you to manage the information so as not to endanger the lives of informants, for example by numbering information sources rather than using names or details that will identify individuals etc.

**Engagement with aid agencies** (e.g. participation in focus groups): Armed factions may be suspicious of the motives of those who talk with aid agencies, particularly where such groups have accumulated (and presumably will continue to accumulate) political and economic benefit from conflict and disasters. In some situations having any kind of contact with aid agencies is considered subversive and puts people at risk of physical violence.

**Provision of resources:** Computers, money, vehicles etc provided to support the participation of a local committee or NGO in community consultations can become a target for looters or armed factions.

**Risk to women:** in communities where women are expected to remain within the home and not to participate in 'public' activities, women and girls participating in discussion fora and project implementation may face condemnation from within their own communities for stepping outside of culturally and socially-approved gender roles. NGOs need to be aware of this, and provide support to women who may be at

risk of violence and intimidation, and also need to make sure that men within the community understand why women are being included in the participatory process.

**Participation can also reinforce the security of affected populations:** Participatory techniques can be used to identify security risks, factors that make people vulnerable, and opportunities for mitigating them. As trust is built during a participatory process, the population is also more likely to provide information on sensitive protection issues. Working with members of affected populations (e.g. providing training, sharing responsibilities) can provide them with resources and support that enable them to protect themselves more effectively.

Protection programmes that specifically aim to improve the safety of civilians require suitably skilled staff with a good understanding of the relevant bodies of law: International Humanitarian Law, Refugee Law and Human Rights law. Risk assessments should always be carried out and aid workers need to use both tact and caution in situations where the lives of people are easily put in jeopardy<sup>4</sup>.

**Quote**

**“In carrying out their activities in refugee camps or resettlement areas, humanitarian personnel can protect refugees by engaging in participatory processes at all levels of management, from planning to the implementation of assistance programmes. The refugees will thus know their rights and their own communities better. This process will also create a feeling of mutual trust. As a result, aid personnel will have greater and richer access to the refugee population.”** (From *Protect Refugees: Field guide for NGOs*, jointly published by the UNHCR and NGO partners, training material for the Reach Out – Refugee Protection Training Project)

<sup>4</sup> See *Protection: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies* for further guidance on the relationship between humanitarian programming and the protection of affected people.

### 11.1.3 ⊕ Security of humanitarian personnel

Security risks can be a constraint on participatory processes, where access to the people affected by a crisis is limited or security conditions do not allow time to be spent (especially at night) in villages or camps. Engaging with specific groups can also affect perceptions of individual or agency impartiality, thus making you and/or the people you work with potential targets.

Security can also be a reason for using participatory techniques. The more a programme is seen as relevant and inclusive, based on mutual respect and trust, the more those who you seek to assist, and the structures with which you work, will be concerned with your welfare, and act to warn you when risks are heightened or threats are imminent.

In some circumstances, relationships built up with stakeholder communities through participatory exercises may also allow you to continue to provide assistance when security deteriorates and certain areas become inaccessible to foreigners.

- 1 What risks might members of the affected population face if they participate in humanitarian activities, and how can these be mitigated or avoided?
- 2 Can participation be used to reinforce the protection of affected populations, and, if so, how?
- 3 What capacity and expertise is required to carry out participatory activities that seek to reduce security and protection risks?
- 4 How can participation increase or reduce the risks to the safety and security of humanitarian field workers?

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
2: Security and Protection

### 11.1.4 ⊕ Access to crisis-affected people

#### Physical access

Access problems due to poor security, difficult geography and harsh climatic conditions can restrict opportunities to

**Example**

*UN agencies in Colombia, such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UNHCR, coordinate with the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network) and cooperate with the Asociacion Campesina Integral del Atrato (ACIA), a community-based organisation (CBO) representing Afro-Colombians in the Atrato region, and the Organizacion Regional Embera y Waunana (OREWA), a CBO representing indigenous groups, in order to get access to communities needing assistance. UN agency staff cannot travel alone along the Atrato River and its tributaries, so they take advantage of CBO infrastructure and information networks.*

engage directly with the affected population and to build the relationship of trust that is necessary for a participatory approach. However, access restrictions can also engender opportunities to collaborate with, or to delegate activities to, members of the affected population or structures that are part of it.

**Cultural access**

‘Cultural access’ concerns the difficulty that outsiders may have in relating to a local community as a result of linguistic, behavioural and other cultural barriers. This is of particular

importance for expatriate personnel and international aid organisations, but it is also relevant when national aid organisations come from a different area or social group than the affected population. Differences in social background, education, language and accent, for instance, can all serve to create distance between aid workers and members of the affected population.

It is essential, therefore, to work with one or more individuals who can not only act as translators, but also help you to interpret various signs and build ‘cultural bridges’.

It is important to have a good intermediary within the affected population who can assist in contacting key stakeholders and groups. This can be a colleague from the particular social group, the representative of an appropriate aid organisation or a respected elder. Bear in mind, though, that such intermediaries are often men or women of high social status, and while they may think that they can speak for the whole community, they may be unaware of the particular needs, interests and skills of marginalised groups within the community.

- 1 Does limited physical access affect the potential for participation by the affected population? If so, how can this be overcome?
- 2 What are the potential cultural barriers between you and the affected population, and how can they be overcome?
- 3 Who can you work with to build ‘cultural bridges’?

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
3: Access to affected population

**II.1.5 Politics and conflict dynamics**

Participatory processes always involve multiple stakeholders, and as such they run the risk of being taken over by particular interest groups. In conflict situations the credibility of local authorities may be questioned, or they may themselves be parties to the conflict, making participatory engagement problematic. Since exclusion and marginalisation are likely to have been among the drivers for conflict, it is critical that the “participation net” is cast as wide as possible not only to ensure representative views but also to demonstrate the inclusive nature of the process. Being aware of local social and political dynamics is the first step towards establishing the legitimacy of participatory processes and limiting potential for the project being manipulated by vested interests.

- 1 What are the key political dynamics and how will they affect participation?
- 2 Who do you need to work with and what are the benefits and risks of involving each stakeholder or stakeholder group?
- 3 What position does your agency take with regard to the political and conflict dynamics?
- 4 Who would gain and who might lose from the various types of participation?

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
4: Politics and Conflict Dynamics

## 11.2 The affected population

### 11.2.1 ⊕ Marginalisation and discrimination

In every human population some people are marginalised and as a result are often 'voiceless' within their communities and more vulnerable to crises. One of the risks of participatory processes is that they will perpetuate this social marginalisation by only working through established power structures, or by further stigmatising marginalized people.

On the other hand, participatory processes can be designed to support and strengthen the capacity and status of marginalised groups. Although both crises and subsequent humanitarian responses will inevitably change social dynamics, consciously trying to do so is a very delicate process and needs careful management. There is some debate as to whether humanitarian organisations should challenge social dynamics, and whether they have the competence to do this appropriately, so it is important to carefully consider action taken to improve the status of marginalized people.

In identifying marginalised or 'voiceless' groups, it is important to avoid basic, stereotyped or imported notions of ethnicity, religion, class, gender and generation, for example, and to be sensitive to the local dynamics, values and beliefs that emerge in relation to exclusion and social discrimination.

One of the basic principles of effective participation is the representation of affected populations and the creation of spaces for participation. Working only with existing leaders and organised groups can reinforce the marginalisation of those who are not represented in these organisations and those who are not organised.

Working with standard categories such as ethnicity, religion, class, gender and age can mask other categories, such as social or marital status, which may enhance or diminish an individual's position within a particular group. This may lead to less participation on the part of marginalised or less powerful groups.

Crises can lead to a loss of social cohesion, notably when communities are torn apart by conflict or separated by displacement. When traditional or established social structures break down, this can make collective action more difficult. Aid agencies can help to rebuild social structures and they can use this opportunity to try to encourage these to be more inclusive.

Using participatory techniques is easier with people who are used to participating in decisions affecting their lives and where participation is culturally acceptable. In some cultures promoting participation can be perceived as 'forcing' people to participate. In such cases, a population may participate in the short term but stop participating as soon as possible, thus reducing project sustainability.

Disabled people are marginalised in almost all societies and more people may become disabled as a direct consequence of a natural disaster or conflict. People with the most severe impairments, and particularly those that affect mobility and communication, will often be more marginalised than those with minor impairments. People with one type of impairment may not be able to represent those with different impairments – it is important to recognise that 'disabled people' are not a homogenous group.

The structures that supported disabled people and enabled them to participate in their society and culture before the crisis may have been destroyed (eg. specialised equipment such as crutches, ramps, hearing aids, and specific services including medical services). Similarly the structures

### Tips & Warnings

*The composition of a working/focus group can support existing dynamics of discrimination. If the group includes both the most powerful and the most marginalised people in a society, then it is unlikely that the latter will be able to fully participate. Sometimes it may actually be the actions of the most powerful that create the greatest problems for marginalised people. If this is the case, it is unlikely that they will talk about it in a mixed group. It can be useful to create smaller sub-groups in order to give individuals a chance to speak without the presence of more vocal participants.*

*The choice of working language for participation activities can reduce the access and input of certain groups. To address this problem you can offer translation into other languages, reduce the use of complex vocabulary and clearly define any new words.*

### Tips & Warnings

that prevented them participating may have broken down or been destroyed. This provides an opportunity to create new structures that are more supportive of disabled people and specifically designed to be inclusive both physically and socially. Like most marginalised groups, the biggest barriers which disabled people face are discriminatory attitudes.

Different people will be affected in different ways by a crisis – some may have been particularly targeted, others may have greater capacity to cope or more resources available to them. Some people may have already taken the initiative to help others or may be leading groups in some way. Understanding these differences within a society is fundamental to effective participation.

The choice of intermediary between a humanitarian organisation and the people directly affected by a crisis determines the level of access it will have to the population. Translators and interpreters have enormous influence on how the organisation is perceived and play a major role in building relationships. Facilitators who manage relations with members of the affected population, notably through assemblies, focus groups or individuals play a key role in facilitating the participation of ‘voiceless’ groups. More guidance on this issue is given in Chapter 4: Communication Techniques.

**KEY QUESTIONS 5:**  
*Marginalisation and Discrimination*

- 1 Which groups in the affected population are marginalised and discriminated against and how?
- 2 How can participatory methods be designed and used to include the most marginalized people?
- 3 Does the project risk exacerbating the marginalisation and stigmatisation of certain groups? How can this be avoided?
- 4 What opportunities are there for reducing discrimination, and/or empowering marginalised groups?
- 5 Do you consider that it is your agency’s role to challenge the local social and power structures? If so, what will this involve in practice?

## 11.2.2 ⊕ Culture and Social Organisation

It is important to take into account the population’s beliefs, behaviour, language, religion, history and other characteristics, which may affect how it will engage in a humanitarian response.

Whether the social structure is hierarchical or egalitarian, or whether it is organised around the nuclear family, the individual or the clan, will influence your approach to participation. The existence or absence of existing local community-based or non-governmental organisations will also influence how you proceed and who you engage with. Make sure you are aware of underlying social and political dynamics and the implications these will have for the selection of participants. Make sure also that you communicate the rationale for choices made, i.e. the process should incorporate a feedback loop to the participants.

**Example**

*In Sri Lanka some people perceive ideas about participation to be alien to their culture. Relations between people in different social groups and categories tend to be both prescriptive and hierarchical. Few people are accustomed to exercising choice, or to being involved in decision-making. Even the notion of consultation seems foreign, thus creating real challenges for using participatory approaches.*

#2  
Key factors

- 1 How is participation conceived and understood within the culture where you are working?
- 2 What characteristics of the culture and social system affect how the population relates to participation?
- 3 How will these two issues affect the possibilities for participation?

**KEY QUESTIONS 6:**  
*Culture and social organisation*

## 11.2.3 ⊕ Impact of the crisis on the affected population

The impact of a crisis on a population will directly affect the capacity of some individuals to participate in a humanitarian response, or to initiate their own response. This will differ depending on the population group involved. Depending on people’s social position, wealth, economic activities and

geographic location, they have different vulnerabilities and capacities.

### Physical impact

People may be physically injured as a direct consequence of a natural disaster or conflict, and in the initial phases will require medical care and rehabilitation, which will exclude them from participating. At a later stage special consideration will have to be given to how participatory processes can be designed to ensure they can take part – for example by ensuring that meetings are held in accessible locations, by providing facilities to aid mobility and communication and so on.

### Psychological impact

The emotional and psychological impacts of conflict or natural disasters are profound, often triggering despair, loss of confidence, and loss of one's sense of dignity. Repeated displacement and/or loss of assets, for example, can lead to reluctance to invest resources, time and energy in projects.

Crises affect individuals in different ways. For some individuals, crises may be a rallying point for compassion and action; for others a state of shock, or trauma may set in, making it extremely difficult for them to take part in emergency responses. Whilst reactions are highly individual, crises and disasters are also experienced collectively. It is possible to make some general points about normal reactions to specific types of crisis.

People who have experienced an earthquake are often very concerned about staying inside buildings, particularly whilst there are aftershocks; people who have been physically attacked in conflict may be very wary of other people – particularly strangers – and lose trust in other members of their community; women and girls who have suffered sexual violence during conflict situations may be par-

## Exemple

Following heavy rains along the Venezuelan coast in 1999, huge landslides washed away entire villages, killing around 50,000 people, and forcing others to flee their homes. Many men and women, having lost relatives and their homes, could not remain passive and volunteered to take part in aid efforts organised by the Venezuelan government and local NGOs. Other people, however, remained in a state of shock, bursting into tears or standing motionless and staring into the distance.

ticularly traumatised, due not just to the violence that they have experienced, but also to the fact that cultural and social mores may inhibit them from speaking about what has happened to them for fear of further victimisation from within their own communities.

Individuals are more likely to participate in projects if they have healed wounds from the past or overcome their trauma and are able to project themselves into the future. This may limit the initial participation of crisis-affected populations, but a participatory process can help people face issues, overcome their helplessness and encourage them to look to the future.

- 1 How has the impact of the crisis affected people's capacity to engage in the humanitarian response? How are/have different people been affected?
- 2 How can participation be tailored to suit what the affected population wants and can do? How can the types of participation be adapted to different groups and individuals?
- 3 What kind of support can be provided to facilitate the participation of particular groups within affected populations?

KEY  
QUESTIONS  
7: Physical and  
psychological  
impact

### Social breakdown

As a consequence of war or other crises, social systems can be fractured or significantly altered, e.g. through separation or displacement. Traditional consultation and dispute regulation mechanisms can be damaged. The loss of social cohesion can make collective action more difficult. But, participatory action can provide an opportunity to re-construct social ties or strengthen those that have survived.

Consultation is an inherent aspect of traditional regulation and decision-making processes in Afghanistan, notably through shuras (assemblies), in which all the men discuss issues that concern the community with elders and respected men playing a prominent role. These social mechanisms have been disturbed in many areas due to the war as young armed commanders have gained influence and people who would normally take part have been displaced. On the other hand, the presence of aid agencies and the need for spaces for discussion and negotiation has led to the revival of some shuras. However, women and girls continue to be excluded from decision-making processes.

## Exemple

## 11.2.4 Previous experience of humanitarian aid

People who have had previous dealings with aid organisations will engage differently from those who have not. A certain dependency, passivity or disinterest may have developed, especially where there have been top-down relief interventions. Past experiences may prejudice responses to consultation exercises: the population may identify priorities that it knows the organisation can provide and unfulfilled promises of the past are not easily forgotten.

Top-down, non-participatory processes are commonplace. They are often perceived as peripheral - people do not base their survival on such programmes, and may have been 'let down' in the past. If this is the case, it will be necessary to demonstrate commitment to these communities. Failure to honour such commitments can have a dramatic effect on social equilibrium and the security of aid actors. Once trust has been undermined it can be very hard to rebuild.

In cases where participatory processes have been used, people may feel more committed and place greater reliance on promises made, and may expect aid organisations to work in a participatory manner.

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
8: Previous experience of humanitarian aid

- 1 What previous experience has the population had of aid organisations? How will this affect how they relate to aid agencies?
- 2 Where trust has been undermined or people are passive, what can be done to build trust and commitment between the aid agency and the population?
- 3 What expectations exist and can you keep all the commitments you have made in the medium and longer-term?

## 11.2.5 Location, displacement, and migration

The implementation of a participatory approach will be affected by factors such as whether you are working with people in an urban or rural context, whether they have been displaced and whether they are nomadic or sedentary.

Below, we look at the issues of location, displacement and migration in detail.

### Location

Collective action can be more difficult in urban areas than in rural areas, due to weakened social cohesion. It may be more difficult to access key individuals, groups and networks, when they are spread out over a large area. It is easy for 'voiceless' groups to remain unheard, and for those who previously had a voice to become voiceless.

### Refugees and Internally Displaced People<sup>5</sup>

Forced population displacement can take various forms: one-off mass displacement, recurring displacement or gradual displacement over prolonged periods. People may have been displaced for years or they may have just been displaced recently. They may have been taken in by a host population, or they may have settled in camps. They can be internally-displaced, or if they have crossed an international border, they may be eligible for refugee status.

Some of the key factors to take into account in providing assistance to displaced and refugee populations are:

- **Population composition:** Displaced populations are rarely homogeneous. They are usually made up of groups of people with different origins, languages, religions, knowledge and skills. Communities and even families may have been split up. One result of this is that forcibly displaced communities often include many single women and unaccompanied children. Separated from their families and the support

<sup>5</sup> Issues of Participation in Refugee settings are covered in greater depth in the Global Study Case Study Monograph on Guinea.

Example

Many rural populations fleeing violence converged in Huambo, a medium-sized town in the centre of **Angola**. It was very difficult for aid organisations to implement participatory projects for several reasons: repeated displacements had led to families being broken up and survival strategies were individual rather than collective. Furthermore, situations of extreme poverty and the impossibility of engaging in agricultural activities or livestock rearing meant that the previous barter and exchange system was replaced by monetisation driven to an extreme. Finally, the civil war and the involvement of traditional leaders in the conflict led to the destruction of the social cohesion required to put participatory projects into practice.

#2  
Key factors

## Example

*The displacement of Afghan communities to refugee camps in Pakistan affected traditional patterns of authority. The influence of elders tended to diminish in relation to that of a younger generation who learned the ways of the humanitarian system and the Pakistani administration, spoke English and found ways of accessing resources in this new environment.*

and protection they would have provided, they can become marginalised and vulnerable. This can affect social cohesion, and communication within the displaced population, notably when living in camps. This also means new forms of authority, or social rules and organisation, may emerge as communities adapt.

- **The relationship between the local population and refugees/displaced people:** while in some situations the two populations share the same origins, culture, language, and background (e.g. rural or urban), in other situations they may be completely different. Furthermore, the presence of displaced people often puts considerable pressure on the local environment and economy, potentially leading to conflict within or between communities. The arrival of large quantities of aid has a significant impact on the local society and economy. It is essential, therefore, to work with both populations on the basis of both needs and fairness, and to attempt to maintain good relations between them.
- **The legal and regulatory framework for managing Displaced Persons camps:** the legal framework that regulates refugee status determines what participation mechanisms are used, as does UNHCR policy. For example, while refugees may select the individuals who represent them on Refugee Committees, the structure and role of these committees is largely defined by UNHCR. These mechanisms may exclude refugees who do not live in camps, refugee associations outside official committees and traditional organisational structures.
- **An 'artificial environment':** Refugee or displacement camps are artificial environments, where people are concentrated into one area and activities largely revolve around emergency relief operations and camp administration. This facilitates access to populations, and provides opportunities for participation in humanitarian projects, since

people's engagement in other activities is limited. On the other hand, given the importance of aid organisations in the management of most basic services (provision of food, health, sanitation, training programmes, etc.), the space for participation can be defined by aid organisations rather than populations.

- **Phases of displacement and time:** The nature of needs, the types of programmes and opportunities for participation are very different depending on how long the refugees or displaced persons have been in the camps. Things are particularly difficult when what was originally meant to be temporary displacement has become long-term or even permanent. Whereas participatory projects can help settled populations to plan for the long-term, people in camps may be psychologically unwilling to commit to long-term projects because of their desire to go home.

### Pastoral and agro-pastoral populations

Many humanitarian programmes seek to assist pastoral communities who are often affected by drought, political marginalisation or by conflict over resources.

The following characteristics of pastoral populations are likely to affect a participatory approach. While they represent potential constraints, they may also be considered as reasons for engaging closely with such populations, since managing these complex issues requires in-depth understanding of their situation and society.

- **Migratory movements:** while most humanitarian projects are conceived for sedentary populations, pastoral populations are, by definition, nomadic. This can affect access or regularity of contact with them. Understanding population movements and their rationale is thus central to any participatory approach.
- **Nomadic lifestyles** are generally organised around the search for pasture and water. Activity patterns depend a great deal on natural factors like rainfall and are thus somewhat unpredictable. This means that projects which aim to actively engage with pastoral populations must



plan in flexibility and take these constraints into consideration.

- **Political marginalisation:** in many (but not all) countries, pastoral populations are marginalised, and participatory approaches can therefore be perceived as having political implications for both the population and the aid organisation.

The level of participation that is possible can also be affected by conflict between agriculturalists and pastoralists over the use of land and water points.

Participation in humanitarian action requires detailed understanding and careful examination of the factors that can mould, limit and support participation. These factors need to be analysed regularly as their influence can change over time as the crisis develops.

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
9: Location, Migration and Displacement

- 1 In what way does the physical location of a population affect its ability to participate? Are its members grouped, or are they spread out over a large area?
- 2 If people have been displaced, what is their relationship to the local population? Has hosting displaced people and/or refugees created needs in the local population?
- 3 How can the local population be included as stakeholders in the project?
- 4 How can you engage with nomadic people? How will you adapt your way of working to take into account the nomadic way of life?

## 11.3 The Aid Organisation

### 11.3.1 Humanitarian Principles

The humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence are central to the mandate and operations of most aid organizations. While certain agencies' mandates require them to remain neutral (e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross),

many aid organizations feel compelled to denounce violence and acts of injustice perpetuated against civilians. Each agency will have its own position on this issue, which should be respected.

- **Impartiality** requires that humanitarian organizations make no distinction between people on the basis of gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, religious belief, class or political opinion. They endeavor to alleviate suffering, according to peoples' needs, giving priority to the most urgent cases.
- **Neutrality** means not taking sides in political, social, religious or any other conflict, whether that conflict is violent or not. It means being sure that sympathy with, or antipathy to, a particular cause does not influence how the affected people are treated.
- **Independence** necessitates that humanitarian organizations maintain their autonomy so as to act in a manner that is consistent with their principles and with the terms of their mandate—and not according to any external agenda.

One of the key difficulties of participation in a complex emergency is that it could compromise humanitarian principles, or could be perceived to do so by others, but we should not dismiss participation because people might misinterpret our actions. We should integrate these principals into every decision we make, including the choice of partners and intermediaries; and the type of participation we opt to engage in.

When making these decisions, in order to make a success of participatory action, you need to have good all round knowledge of the political situation, all the stakehol-

**Example**

*Among the principal commitments of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief are:*

- 'Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.'
- 'Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.'
- 'Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.'

## Tips & Warnings

*It is not because an organisation considers itself impartial, neutral and independent that it will be perceived as such by the local population, or other stakeholders such as armed factions, local authorities and other organisations. It will largely be because of how the organisation and its staff behave, and how it communicates its objectives and guiding principles.*

ders involved, the local culture and social systems.

In some situations, especially in areas of conflict, the population itself will be very careful to be seen as impartial by the warring parties, and may be reluctant to work with certain organisations, if this entails risks to its own security.

### KEY QUESTIONS 10: Humanitarian Principles

- 1 What are the risks that “participation” will compromise how the organisation’s impartiality, neutrality or independence will be perceived?
- 2 What strategic choices can be made to protect humanitarian principles whilst engaging with affected populations?
- 3 What can be done to ensure that the affected population and other stakeholders trust your organisation and recognise its commitment to humanitarian principles, so that they feel safe working with you?

## Example

*‘UNHCR is committed to the principle of participation by consulting refugees on decisions that affect their lives.’*

UNHCR mission statement,  
[www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)

*‘The displaced population must be involved in the decision-making, management, and organization of emergency humanitarian assistance.’*

Principles of the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network), Government of Colombia. (Decree 2569-2000.)

### 11.3.2 ⊕ Organisational mandate and policies

For certain organisations beneficiary participation is a fundamental component of humanitarian action. For others, it is less of a consideration, with more emphasis on speed of response and respect for humanitarian principles which they believe may be compromised by participation.

Some agencies will maintain long term involvement with the affected population from the outset of an emergency, with a commitment to consultation and participation.

Others see their role as an external relief actor, responding to crisis situations when the need emerges and then withdrawing as the needs reduce.

The organisational mandate does not so much determine *whether* it adopts a participatory approach (few, if any, mandates actually exclude participation), but *how* it does so. Clarifying policy with regard to participation is therefore an important step towards engaging with affected populations, who should be given a clear idea of the nature, limits and rules of your engagement and what to expect from it.

- 1 Do the organisational mandate and policies support and promote participatory practices? If so, how and for what purpose?
- 2 How does this influence the types of participatory approach and processes that can be used?

### KEY QUESTIONS 11: Mandate and Policies

### 11.3.3 ⊕ Organisational mode of operation and management

Organisational culture and expertise clearly influence the type of programmes that are undertaken and how they are implemented. Organisations with specific areas of expertise may use technical standards and protocols designed to facilitate rapid intervention and focus on specific sectors using pre-established techniques. However, these techniques can often reduce project flexibility, making it very difficult to integrate the concerns, capacities and initiatives of the people directly affected by the crisis.

Top-down relief programmes can be entirely appropriate at some stages of a crisis or disaster, but many relief organisations function in this ‘emergency’ mode even when opportunities to involve the affected population do arise.

When an agency has a clearly defined area of expertise (such as health, agriculture or construction), there seems to be less of a tendency to involve a community in project design, even though the agency encourages participation in other phases of the project. The fact that the agency has skilled and experienced technical staff should not reduce the possibility of the affected population being involved in the design process.

Possible reasons for a lack of participation in project design are:

- A lack of specific technical skills among the local population
- The fear of 'wasting time' explaining technical problems to 'non-specialists'.
- The organisation has a pre-determined 'kit' approach that must be applied.
- The organisation intends to reproduce an experience that was successful in another context.

Possible reasons for more participation in the later stages are:

- The organisation has limited staff and requires assistance to conduct the project.
- The local structure co-operating with the organisation is a known entity that is trusted.
- The funds for the project are from a private source permitting more flexibility.

There is likely to be a relationship between how 'participatory' an organisation is in its field operations, and whether it is 'participatory' in its own internal operations and management systems. In hierarchical and centralised institutions little decision-making power is delegated to lower levels, in particular at the field level. This attitude can effectively reduce the flexibility needed in participatory programmes.

- 1 How does the organisation's mode of operation support or inhibit opportunities for participation?
- 2 Is the organisation willing to review some of its practices to encourage the participation of affected people?
- 3 Are participatory principles applied within the organisation?

KEY  
QUESTIONS  
12: Operational  
methods and  
management

#2  
Key factors

### 11.3.4 ⊕ Human resources

Expertise in communication techniques is essential for people using participatory approaches, especially in volatile and dangerous environments.

Maturity and experience are vital for dealing with the demands and challenges associated with participation (including maintaining credibility with local leaders). Finding experienced aid workers is one of the main difficulties for organisations, especially people with both participatory and technical expertise.

Age, gender and experience may affect the ability of a person to approach particular groups, establish dialogue with them or gain legitimacy. For example, in many societies, female staff are required to run programmes which involve the participation of women. Many international organisations recruit local staff to work on emergency responses. Of course, who is recruited and how they are treated are sensitive issues. Even though this is not a form of participation, locally recruited personnel can help to establish bridges of communication with populations and provide crucial insights for the organisation. In this context it is very important to realise that local staff are *de facto* a continuous channel of communication between the organisation and the local population. Who is employed and how they are treated will contribute to setting the tone of the relationship between the organisation, local people and the affected population. This relationship will also be affected by the behaviour of local staff. They will therefore need to understand the

organisation's participation strategy and how they can contribute to it.

The most successful examples of participation often result from having the right person in the right place at the right time. Using a participatory approach therefore involves questioning the organisation's human-resource management at several levels.

- **Work load**

Aid workers in the field are often overworked, tired and stressed, causing openness and accessibility to affected populations or local partners to become more difficult. Participation takes time. Reviewing job descriptions, revising team priorities, and adapting work plans are measures that can help facilitate the interaction of team members with people from the affected population.

- **Training programmes and policies**

Participation is not about applying participatory tools and techniques in a mechanical way. It generally requires specific training in communication techniques, management of groups and meetings, and a capacity to adapt techniques to various circumstances.

An effective way of promoting the application of participatory techniques would be to establish a training policy at various staff levels (HQ, project managers, field staff, etc). It is also important to institutionalise the use of participatory approaches by supporting and rewarding them internally.

This should include investment in participation techniques and tools, the planning of training sessions and supporting ways to exchange and learn from existing experiences.

To promote beneficiary participation in projects, a facilitator or organiser should have strong interpersonal and communication skills and a full understanding of project aims, objectives and strategies.

Existing training courses rarely include participation as an approach, but sometimes include tools that can be used

in a participatory way (such as problem and solution trees or stakeholder analysis). Guidance on participation should be introduced to existing courses to promote participation in the field.

- **Contract length and delegation of responsibilities to national staff**

Meaningful participatory processes are always founded on a level of trust that depends heavily on continuity - having the same people from the organisation and the population working together over a certain period of time. However, aid operations are often affected by high staff turnover, especially of expatriate staff.

Aid organisations may wish to explore ways to retain both national and expatriate staff in the field for longer periods. International organisations may also assess how to give greater responsibility to national colleagues who can provide continuity in the humanitarian operation.

**Example**

*As part of its policy for promoting participatory techniques and giving increasing responsibilities to local colleagues, one international aid organisation implemented training on participatory methods for all senior programme managers, followed by similar training for national field staff in specific countries.*

#2  
Key factors

- 1 What team profile is necessary to support and carry out participatory processes?
- 2 Is it possible to recruit staff with the right attitude, skills and experience?
- 3 Is the organisation prepared to provide adequate training in participatory processes?
- 4 Is it prepared to employ expatriate personnel for humanitarian operations on longer contracts? Is it willing and able to delegate responsibilities to local people, and what steps does it take towards this?

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
13: Human Resources

### 11.3.5 Financial resources and donor policies

If the humanitarian response is dependent on resources from an institutional donor, this may reduce the amount of flexibility the agency has to implement a participatory approach.

Many donors support or even request participation, at least in their policy statements. However, they often impose factors such as timeframes, budgets and regions of intervention. Such constraints reduce an aid agency's room for manoeuvre, particularly when there is competition between aid organisations and time is limited. Donors themselves are often under pressure from the general public and the media to get visible results in a short space of time.

Aid workers repeatedly describe short term projects (e.g. 3 to 6 months, or even 1 year) as a considerable obstacle to participation. Although aid organisations can approach several donors to ensure continuity between projects, this can be very time-consuming. Donors who claim to support participation could also contribute to exploring ways of alleviating these time and administrative procedures.

Some donors are reluctant to support participation, because of the potential risks and delays it can cause.

They restrict the amount of participation that can take place by insisting that international organisations oversee projects from start to finish, or refusing to allow the delegation of activities to local actors. But there is always a 'window' for negotiation. The key to successful negotiation is the ability to state the case for participation, based on sound knowledge of the situation, rather than ideology.

#### Example

*"Very few NGOs ask us what we want to do... We have a long-term outlook and they cannot look further than twelve, maybe even six months... We were only supposed to be here one year! When are they going to let us do something for ourselves? We've been here since 1993!"*

Sierra Leonean refugee living in Albadaria refugee camp, **Guinée Forestière**

- 1 Which donors support and promote participation (through their mandate, policies and procedures)?
- 2 With those who do not, what room is there for negotiation?
- 3 How do the policies and procedures of donors influence the type of participation envisaged and the choice of stakeholders that the organisation can work with?

### 11.3.6 Co-ordination with other organisations

The actions of one organisation will have an impact on what other organisations want or are able to do in the same context.

It is therefore extremely important to be aware of what other organisations are doing, to communicate about one's own activities, and to take every opportunity to exchange information and co-ordinate activities.

Often different aid organisations, each with expertise in a specific technical area, will be working with the same population. By coordinating their assessments and activities, they will not only gain a greater collective understanding of the situation, they will also reduce the amount of time spent in participatory meetings and exercises.

Although inter-organisation co-ordination mechanisms often focus on what kind of aid is provided and where, it is also vital to decide *how* it is done. For example, it may be difficult for an organisation to establish a working relationship with a community when another organisation is already offering the same assistance, but using a different approach.

In many humanitarian situations, coordination mechanisms and meetings tend to be dominated by international aid organisations, often excluding national aid organisations and/or structures formed by affected populations. It is essential that the local stakeholders are involved in coordination and their participation can be the key to creating bridges between international aid organisations and the affected people.

KEY  
QUESTIONS  
14:  
*Financial  
Resources and  
Donor Policies*

#2  
Key factors

**KEY  
QUESTIONS**  
15:  
*Co-ordination  
with other  
organisations*

- 1 What impact do the activities of other organisations have on your own activities and your ability to engage in participation? And what impact do your activities have on others?
- 2 Are you prepared to allocate time to co-ordination activities and to harmonise your activities and operational approach with those of other organisations?
- 3 How can humanitarian operations be co-ordinated in a way that promotes participation?
- 4 How can local stakeholders be better integrated in co-ordination mechanisms?

## Chapter 2 summary

### Factors Affecting Participation in Humanitarian Responses

*The extra time initially required to set up a participatory approach will be more than compensated for by better programme quality, greater efficiency and the advantage of having elicited local expertise.*

- 1** Successful participation can mean greater security for aid organisations and better protection for the affected population.
- 2** Cultural access is as important as physical access and local social and political systems may determine attitudes to participation.
- 3** A participatory approach needs to challenge the existing balance of power in order to reach the most marginalized groups.
- 4** The physical and psychological impact of a crisis will determine how people are able to participate.
- 5** The aid organisation's mandate, methods, and human resource policies are critical to supporting and promoting participation.



chapter 3

#3

# Building mutual respect

Before you can build relationships based on mutual trust, you need to take an honest look at your motivations for adopting a participatory approach. The following questions should be discussed with colleagues and management.

*Why am I adopting a participatory approach?*

Is it to make my work easier? To facilitate needs assessment and targeting? To reduce project costs by introducing a cost-sharing mechanism (with beneficiaries), or by using cheap local implementing partners?

Is it to reduce the level of insecurity humanitarian personnel are exposed to by using local implementing partners?

Is it because the donor asked for a paragraph on participation in the project proposal?

Is it because your organisation believes that participation can considerably improve the short and longer-term impact of humanitarian action?

Is it because your organisation recognises that people from affected communities are not passive recipients of aid, but actors responsible for their own survival and future who have skills and aspirations?

*Who will participate?*

Who should my organisation work with? Individual members of the affected population? Local political structures? Grassroots/community-based organisations (CBOs)?

Should my organisation form a partnership with other organisations?

What are the risks of becoming embroiled in local power struggles?

What risk is there that those we are trying to assist suffer human rights violations or stigmatisation as a result of their participation?

*How will I 'do' participation?*

How do I reconcile the need to respect humanitarian principles with a participatory approach?

What can be done to make sure that those who participate are not subsequently discriminated against?

How should participatory activities be implemented so that they ensure, or even enhance, the safety of aid actors and members of the affected population?

In humanitarian responses, there is often an imbalance of power between the humanitarian organisation (as an aid provider that holds access to key resources) and the affected population (as potential aid recipients). Terminology such as 'beneficiaries', 'the locals' and 'downward accountability', imply a certain degree of condescension, or hierarchy. Furthermore, the situations in which aid organisations work and their ways of working often create distance with the affected population which does not help to build relationships which are based on mutual respect.

**'Proximity: cornerstone of the humanitarian action of the future'<sup>6</sup>**

*Some aid workers are concerned that the attachment of emergency NGOs' to the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence, the growing size of projects, political and security issues, and greater focus on 'technical' aspects to the detriment of 'the human dimension', has created a certain distance between humanitarian aid workers and affected populations. White 4-wheel drive vehicles, radios, guards, aid workers on short-term contracts moving from one crisis to the next, all form a barrier between providers and receivers of assistance.*

*Some aid workers have called for greater "proximity" to affected populations, which is one of the cornerstones of Médecins Sans Frontières' approach. Whether one uses this term or not, this means developing a relationship with the community even if this involves certain risks. This approach may mean abandoning the "protective rituals" which keep the local community at a distance. It also means refusing to act as a substitute for local initiatives, respecting the ability of the affected population to determine their own fate, taking care not to make moral judgements and being available and willing to listen.*

<sup>6</sup> Chevalier, E., «Le travail de proximité comme point d'ancrage du travail humanitaire de demain», Cuadernos para el Debate no. 5, (Barcelona: Medicos Sin Fronteras, 2001).

Participation in the provision of aid can often create a certain bitterness and mistrust both among aid workers and members of the affected population. Some of the arguments put forward for 'non-participation' tend to reveal a wariness between humanitarian actors and the affected populations, which limits the exchange of information.

Communication is one of the keys to building bridges between affected populations and aid organisations. It



Examples

*"They only become involved if there is a financial incentive and will not hesitate to turn down an offer if they discover a higher bidder."*

Aid worker in refugee camp, Guinée Forestière.

*"They tell us that repatriation is voluntary but they also inform us from a certain date that there will be no more help for us here. We don't really have a choice." (...)  
"Here, all the decisions are made for us." »*

Refugees in Guinée Forestière.

is a two-way process which involves both giving and receiving information.

Chapter 4 looks specifically at communication techniques and how they can be used to support participation. Before using these techniques it is useful to reflect on two key elements of good communication:

- attitude and behaviour
- transparency and information-sharing

position vis-à-vis the population, how you may be perceived, and how you (with your appearance, origin, status, experience, personality, etc.) affect the process.

### III.1.1 ⊕ Outsider or insider?

Whether one is from the affected population or foreign to it will affect the relationship. Several characteristics can be associated with the status of 'outsider' and 'insider' that will influence a participatory process.

**Insider:** being very close to a community, or being from a community means having detailed knowledge and experience of how a community works and what it has been through. An 'insider' can see many things that are invisible to foreign eyes.

Furthermore, an 'insider' can be integrated in local networks, and already have established relationships of trust or distrust with community members.

**Outsider:** a newcomer in a community can bring a different perspective and ensure a greater degree of objectivity. An 'outsider' can help address problems without being influenced by local interests, or becoming emotionally involved in a way that may destabilise the project. An 'outsider' can mediate impartially when negotiations are held between different groups of the population. A newcomer can establish relationships without preconceived notions, thus avoiding conflicts and tensions that may be inherited from the past

However, the distinction between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' is delicate and many-sided. No one remains on the outside for long. Having arrived in a community, an "outsider" begins to have a role and to affect local social dynamics. The opposite can also be true. An 'insider' can sometimes be perceived as an 'outsider'.

*The UNHCR in Guinée Forestière had recruited refugees living in camps as 'focal points'. Even though these individuals were locals and lived among their relatives they were perceived as 'outsiders', and participants were reluctant to speak openly about their needs and concerns when the 'UNHCR staff' were present.*

Example

## III.1 The importance of attitude and behaviour

Participation is an encounter between individuals, cultures, values, beliefs and skills. Its success depends on the ability of those involved to understand and respect one another.

This means questioning one's own behaviour and, more profoundly, one's attitudes and mindset. Am I really ready to listen to what people have to say? Am I ready to review and possibly change our priorities? Am I paying sufficient attention to the projects, ideas and concerns of the affected population?

But also: Do people know me? Do they understand why I am here and what I am doing? How am I going to deal with the inevitable inequalities between myself and the affected population?

For all the importance of mandates, organisational strategies etc, individuals are at the heart of a participatory process. The personality, background, experience, and behaviour of those involved, and the way they interact is bound to shape the process. It is therefore important to be aware of your

Example

*In a training workshop on participatory methods organised in Liberia, many local participants happened to be former teachers, and were known as such by the population. This affected the behaviour of the participants in that a hierarchical teacher-student relationship tended to be reproduced, the teachers being considered as a form of intellectual elite.*

### III.1.2 ⊕ How does my status, experience and expertise affect my relationship with the population?

Regardless of whether we are considered 'outsiders' or 'insiders', our relationship with the population will be affected by issues of status, gender, age, past experience and expertise as well as the roles and responsibilities

that we have had. Being aware of how our own position and status affect the participatory process makes it easier to identify potential bias and pressure which may reduce the possibility of establishing open dialogue and trust.

### III.1.3 ⊕ How do other people see me?

While not necessarily being aware of it, humanitarian aid workers send out many signals, both verbal and non-verbal, which can create a distance between themselves and the affected population, and which can undermine mutual respect and trust.

Particular signals are sent out by behaviour such as driving fast in 4-wheel drive vehicles, using expensive technology ostentatiously (HF/VHF radios, mobile phones, laptop computers etc.), wearing certain types of clothing and using technical jargon and acronyms. The population may also have some pre-conceived ideas or prejudices about people from your country or place of origin, or based on your accent or physical appearance.

Example

*In Guinée Forestière, attempts to involve Refugee Committees in planning activities ran up against their lack of familiarity with the terms and tools frequently used by humanitarian actors (e.g. Logical Framework). Furthermore, while aid organisations worked mainly in French – the official language in Guinée Forestière – Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees spoke mainly English.*

The first step is to be aware of the kind of behaviour that creates distance and the kind that builds bridges and strengthens relationships.

As well as enabling communication, language can also create barriers if jargon and technical terms are used. These barriers should be overcome by adapting one's vocabulary, by working with translators, or even by providing some basic training on the terms commonly used in the humanitarian sector.

Even using tools intended to encourage or facilitate participation can result in members of the affected population feeling ill at ease. People are easily dazzled by high-tech procedures. Participants in workshops and focus groups may be embarrassed to speak or afraid of appearing ignorant or less 'knowledgeable' than aid workers, or they may simply not dare to contradict them out of respect.

Simplicity and respect are essential to creating space for communication and participation. You will often be asking people about many aspects of their lives, families and communities in the course of your work. Make sure that you also tell people something about yourself. People relate more easily to individuals they can identify with, and asking after each other's family members is a common part of greeting friends and acquaintances in many cultures – it is difficult to do this if you don't tell people about yourself.

Breaking down barriers involves adapting one's behaviour and dress to the local context and customs. This is a visible demonstration of respect. Try adopting traditional forms of dialogue and social interaction, and telling (culturally appropriate) jokes and anecdotes as a way to build relationships.

Do not be afraid to recognise your mistakes, or *faux pas*. They can offer an opportunity to enter into dialogue and to assess how errors are made and how they can be avoided in future. A community that gets to know you better as a person, rather than just as an aid official, will be more willing to forgive errors and mistakes, and in turn may feel more able to admit to errors on their own part.

KEY  
QUESTIONS  
16: The  
importance of  
attitude and  
behaviour

- 1 How does my position or status affect my relationship with the population?
- 2 Does the population have preconceived ideas about people from my country or culture? How can I work to overcome negative stereotyping?
- 3 Is my behaviour creating distance or improving the relationship? What do I need to change?
- 4 What should I be doing to make people feel comfortable and respected?

## III.2 Working with a translator or an interpreter

The terms 'translator' and 'interpreter' are often used interchangeably. In general a translator will work with written texts and provide an accurate, if not *verbatim*, rendering of written text from one language

to another. An interpreter provides an oral translation usually in real-time and therefore there is an element of interpretation of what exactly each party means. It is the interpreter's responsibility to translate the particular nuances of each language to the other party.

Professional interpreters are aware of potential difficulties and are trained to deal with them, but it is unlikely that you will be able to find one in an emergency situation. In the field, the person who is translating for you may need some help and advice to do their job well and you may need to adapt your behaviour and way of working to the interpretation facilities that are available. The guidance in this section refers primarily to oral translation and interpretation.

Choosing an interpreter or translator is a difficult task. In an ideal situation, the qualities of a good interpreter include:

- A sophisticated understanding of both languages
- An understanding of the subject of the discussion
- An ability to transfer ideas expressed in one language into an equally meaningful form in the other language
- An understanding of the cultures
- Sensitivity and attention to detail
- An understanding of specialised or technical terminology
- An ability to work impartially, without introducing any personal bias into the interpretation

You may need to ask a driver or a local schoolteacher to perform this function for you. In this case, it is your job to help them develop interpreting skills. It is important to take time to do this and to explain the issues involved. This will allow them to get used to the way you think and speak and is an opportunity to establish a way of working and ground rules.

Once you have found a suitable interpreter, it is important to build up a good working relationship with them. Give them as much information as you can before any activity. Unless and until you are sure about them in all respects, you must try to stay in control, and not let them have long exchanges which you are unable to follow. However, if this does happen, be sure to watch what is going on as you may learn a lot anyway.

The interpreter's gender and social status may determine how people express and present themselves to you. Women may feel uncomfortable and inhibited if they have to speak through a male interpreter, particularly in circumstances where they are not normally 'allowed' to speak out in front of men. Likewise, men may feel that certain topics are 'inappropriate' to discuss through a female interpreter.

*Your relationship with the individuals and groups that you are talking with is largely dependent on your interpreter providing an accurate representation of what is said. Within the limits of maintaining a good working relationship with any long- or short-term interpreter, don't be afraid to stop them and get them to tell you what is going on and what is being said.*

Tips

#3  
Mutual respect

### Guidelines for working with an interpreter<sup>7</sup>:

- Regular communication with the interpreter is necessary to make sure the goals and purpose of the interview or meeting are clear. Confer with the interpreter before the meeting whenever possible.
- Describe the respective roles of the people involved, including yourself, and any relevant background information, such as foreseeable problems or conflicts and details of any confidentiality issues.
- Explain what information you are seeking and what you want to convey to people. Include details of any technical terms or specialist vocabulary that may be used.
- Speak concisely and do not use long, complicated sentences. Avoid complex discussion of several topics in a single spoken paragraph.
- Avoid technical terminology, abbreviations and professional jargon, and if you do use it be consistent. Make sure that your interpreter knows what the terms mean ahead of time and agree in advance on how they should be translated in order to reflect their meaning accurately and meaningfully.
- Avoid idiomatic expressions, slang and metaphors. Use comparisons and similes only when necessary to clarify a point and choose them with care.
- Encourage the interpreter to translate people's actual words as much as possible rather than summarising, paraphrasing or 'polishing' it into professional jargon, so that you have the clearest picture of what is going on, the emotional state of the person speaking and any other important information.
- Make sure the interpreter does not insert his or her own ideas or interpretations or omit information.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from:

Randal-David, E (1989) *Strategies for Working with Culturally Diverse Communities and Clients*. Washington D.C.: Association for the Care of Children's Health.

Lynch, E (1992) "From culture shock to cultural learning" in EW Lynch and MJ Hanson (eds) *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Young Children and Their Families*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co., pp 35–62.

- During the conversation, look at and speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- Listen to the person speaking and watch their non-verbal communication – facial expressions, voice intonations and body movements.
- Be patient and allow for plenty of time. An interpreted conversation takes longer. Careful interpretation often requires the interpreter to use long explanatory phrases. Question the interpreter if given a very short translation of a much longer dialogue.
- Learn basic words and sentences of the language. Become familiar with special terminology used by people. Even though you can't speak well enough to communicate directly, the more you understand, the greater the chance you will pick up on misunderstandings or misinterpretation (accidental or deliberate).
- Debrief after each session so that any confusion or gaps can be cleared up while the conversation is still fresh in your memory.

Interpretation is extremely tiring. However well one or both languages is spoken, you will need to make sure the interpreter has more rest periods than you normally need, has had enough to eat and feels able to say when they are tired.

### Listening and taking into account what is said

Listening skills are essential to meaningful participation. Many 'participatory techniques' can become information extraction exercises, where field workers, preoccupied with their own intentions, unconsciously select or interpret information according to their own interests and level of awareness.

### Ask yourself:

- Am I really listening to the other person's concerns and ideas, or am I using participatory techniques to advance my own agenda or to validate decisions that I have already made?
- Am I ready and able to hear different points of view, and am I granting the other parties enough space to express themselves?

- Am I being approachable enough so that people feel free to speak openly and frankly to me?

Don't be afraid to remain silent and just watch what is happening. Looking at people as they speak enhances their confidence and helps you to listen. In group discussions pay attention to those who remain silent, try to include them by using your eyes and body language to encourage them to speak, or ask them questions directly when appropriate. Feel free to rephrase what has been said in order to check that you have understood correctly.

The next chapter looks at communication techniques. Mutual respect is fundamental to good communication. Communication is more than simply understanding what people say to each other, it is the exchange of ideas and negotiation in decision-making. To listen and to understand each other, with mutual respect, requires flexibility and adaptability.

**Quote**

'Solutions to problems are not the product of a consensus, but of a negotiation between the various groups... The wealth of solutions is found in their diversity rather than in their uniformity.'

Bara Guèye<sup>9</sup>

**Ask yourself:**

- Am I able to review my priorities and objectives according to what members of the affected population say and propose?
- Am I able to explain my position in a way that is understandable to them and does not hinder dialogue?
- Does the participatory process genuinely leave space for people to engage on their own terms, or is it tailored to suit my interests?

<sup>9</sup> in «La Methode active de recherche et de planification participative (MARF): acquis, limites et défis actuels», in Delville, L. et al (eds), *Les Enquêtes Participatives en Débat*, Paris: Karthala, 2000.

*The use of participatory approaches, in line with UNHCR principles and modes of operation, is an important element in the running of refugee camps. However, in camps in Guinée Forestière there is concern that the forms of organisation initiated by the UNHCR –Refugee Committees and tent/zone leaders – were largely prescriptive and did not take into consideration ethnic and cultural subtleties.*

**Example**

*Although necessary in ensuring effective monitoring and co-ordination of activities, prescriptive forms of organisation may not allow the refugees' own capacities to be recognised or provide a means of useful dialogue with them.*

*In addition, though there is communication between UNHCR, BCR (Bureau de Coordination des Réfugiés, representing the Guinean authorities) and Refugee Committees, there is concern that the opinions of the different parties are not given equal consideration. According to the refugees, the UNHCR and its implementing partners have the ultimate say in how operations are run in the refugee camps.*

### III.3 Transparency and information-sharing

In many instances, aid actors do not realise how frustrating their actions can be for members of the affected population. Large white cars come and go, notes are taken, questionnaires filled in, lists drawn up, and triangulation exercises carried out, while the people affected by the disaster or crisis wonder why, and to what benefit.

It is important to explain to the population why you are there, who you work for, what the organisation does, how it works, and what constraints it faces. This can go a long way towards establishing a climate of trust, and generating the will to work together. Failure to clarify these factors can create a sense of suspicion, anxiety and frustration especially amongst people who have been through difficult or traumatic events.

Transparency does not mean one has to communicate everything to everybody. In some circumstances, it is important to respect confidentiality or withhold information

that is not confirmed or is subject to change, for reasons of security and protection, or simply to avoid confusion and misunderstandings.

**Quote**

'We can't tell the refugees that we haven't yet received their food supplies (...) just as we can't talk about the possibility of transferring a population to another location in their presence (...) There are certain subjects that are extremely sensitive and need to be discussed internally before conveying the information to the refugee population (...) for their own security'.

*Aid worker, Guinée Forestière.*

However, these concerns should not prevent aid organisations from aspiring to greater transparency in their decision-making and operational choices.

Presenting yourself properly to the population with whom you wish to work is the first step to developing a relationship based on mutual respect and transparency. Explain the history, mandate and work of your organisation. Be precise in presenting your guiding principles. Tell people about yourself too, not just about your work role, but where you come from and about your family and country. Explain why you are visiting the community, but be careful not to create false expectations.

When engaging with a community, it is very important to clarify from the outset how you and your organisation function, the constraints under which you have to operate, and what you can and cannot do. This is equally

**Example**

*The Guinean Red Cross purchased food supplies locally and therefore was able to adapt the food rations provided to refugees based on their traditional culinary habits and preferences. The World Food Programme – which runs operations on a much larger scale – is reluctant to consult refugees on the composition of the food rations they receive, because this is largely determined by what is available on the international market and what can be transported to the area of operations. These constraints can be clearly explained to refugees.*

important with the administrative and government officials who have local responsibilities for the people too.

Certain project procedures, such as provision of supplies, are long drawn out affairs. The population might not understand why so much precious time is lost. It is important to explain these processes before people start to think that you are trying to make money out of their suffering. Involving a community representative in the development of a tender and the responses to it can be a good way of avoiding misunderstanding.

When using particular techniques (like mapping, triangulation exercises, and focus groups) be sure to give reasons for them. For instance, how the information collected will be managed; how it will be used, where it will be kept, who will have access to it, and so on.

Explaining the various stages involved in the provision of aid, from the donor to the NGO, can help to prevent misunderstanding.

Explain yourself using vocabulary and expressions that are accessible to your audience. Be open to questions, check that you have been understood, and do not hesitate to clarify the situation again and again.

Participation usually requires that the parties involved in a project provide resources such as time, labour, material input and so

**Example**

*In one part of Afghanistan, an organisation was so sure that it would get funds for a project that the team in the field informed the local population of it without first explaining that it was only in the assessment stage. The population in the affected area thought that the organisation had the means to implement the project and started to mobilise its own contribution in order to participate in it. However, in the end, the funding was not granted, creating significant tension.*

**Example**

*Without prior discussion, an aid agency determined the type and the level of assistance that it would provide for a shelter construction programme, as well as the contributions to be made by beneficiaries. Suddenly, the organisation had to reduce its level of assistance. Instead of negotiating a way out of the problem, it stubbornly maintained that 'nothing had been formally promised'. Members of the affected population, having provided sand and gravel, and therefore having kept their side of the bargain, believed that the organisation was trying to cheat them. The incident almost resulted in a violent confrontation and the organisation's personnel were expelled from the area.*

on. The nature and the amount of each party's contribution should be clearly stated and respected throughout the process. Commitments can be formalised through a contractual arrangement and should be realistic, creating an incentive for participation.

Chapter 5 looks at how to establish partnership agreements and how to work with partners.

**Example**

*During the preparation stage of a food distribution project in northern Afghanistan, the ICRC discussed the beneficiary selection criteria with village representatives. Once they were approved, it was announced widely in village assemblies that, if anyone were found to be cheating in regard to distribution, the entire village would be sanctioned. Village representatives found this to be a fair process. Social pressure within villages was enough to prevent abuse.*

**Example**

*Following large-scale floods in south-east Asia, an organisation tried to set up a programme to rehabilitate flood-control dykes and the irrigation infrastructure. Conflict between the local governor and the central ministry for irrigation, resulted in a stalemate that prevented the organisation from getting clearance to import some equipment. A meeting was held to explain the problem to the community. The level of trust that had been established with the villagers and their commitment to the project were so great that they decided to send a delegation to the capital and the matter was rapidly resolved.*

Of course, things do not always go according to plan, but as most societies have their own problem-solving mechanisms, it makes sense to use these as part of your programme.

For instance, public announcements at general meetings or on local radio, notice boards and leaflets are essential. They ensure that problem-solving mechanisms are transparent and give individuals the opportunity to complain or appeal. It is important to choose a media that is accessible to all in order to avoid discrimination. For example, all local languages should be used, messages should not only be communicated via written media if there are a lot of illiterate people and places should be chosen to which women as well as men have access, etc.

Such communication is central to social rapport, encouraging members of the population themselves to ensure that programme modalities are respected. This is an effective way of avoiding manipulation or diversion of aid, and discrimination.

Unforeseen difficulties due, for instance, to delays in acquiring funding, hold-ups in relation to shipments, the supply of insufficient, incorrect or spoiled goods, and problems due to the climate and insecurity are frequent. Members of the affected population and the structures with which you work will most likely be understanding if the risks and complications have been fully explained to them. What is totally unacceptable is not keeping them informed, as this is essential to establishing a relationship of trust. As in any relationship, failure to be consistent, to be true to your commitments or to hold others accountable for theirs will undermine the relationship and any trust you have built up between you.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Have I explained clearly why I am here, what my organisation does, how we work, and the constraints on our work? |
| 2 | Have I identified appropriate information-sharing channels and processes to ensure that all people are reached?  |
| 3 | Am I being consistent in what I say and do?  |

**KEY QUESTIONS 17:**  
*Transparency and information-sharing*

## Chapter 3 summary

### Building mutual respect

**1** If you decide to adopt participatory approaches despite the fact that your organisation does not routinely use them, assess your motives and goals regularly to ensure that you are not simply using them as a way of reaching your own pre-set objectives.

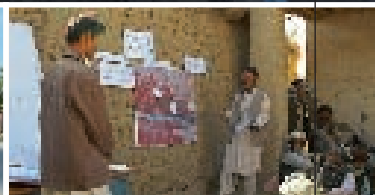
**2** It is important to be aware of your attitudes, behaviour and how other people's perceptions of you can either create barriers or build bridges.

**3** Adopting culturally appropriate behaviour and dress demonstrates respect for the people you are working with.

**4** Interpreters do more than translate words. To a large extent they 'translate' you to the other party. Time spent building understanding and developing ways of working with an interpreter is time well spent.

**5** Sharing information and being transparent about your aims, constraints and influences is a necessary part of a trusting, respectful relationship.





chapter 4 #4

**Communication techniques**

Effective communication is the fundamental building block of participation, and central to designing a strategy for participation. This chapter looks at formal and informal ways of communicating with crisis-affected people. Formal communication takes place through meetings, focus group discussions and so on, whilst informal communication is more opportunistic, for example simply chatting to people whilst you walk through a community. There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of communication: informal communication is often anecdotal and therefore can be biased, but is also less constrained and people are much more likely to say what they really think. However, it is easier to control communication in more formal settings. Both aid agencies and communities are more accountable for what they say during meetings when an official record is often kept. It isn't necessary to choose between one and the other – both should be part of your strategy.

The way in which you communicate – your attitude and behaviour – is as important as the method you choose, and is the key to successful participation. Your origin, status, gender, age, profession, experience or knowledge of the area all affect how you are perceived. See chapter 3 on building mutual respect.

## IV.1 Informal communication

It is important to take the time to speak informally with people. Opportunities to engage with people on a casual or informal basis are often missed, yet they constitute a rich source of exchange, which can complement formal events like focus groups and community assemblies. They are opportunities to gather information, to increase your understanding of the community and to be better accepted – in fact you may be thought “standoffish” if you fail to take up these opportunities.

There are many situations that offer the opportunity for informal communication:

- stopping at the bar or tea house
- going to the market and speaking with people in the street, or even just being seen there
- going to the bath house or washing point – both useful places for female aid workers to talk to women and girls
- attending public events, such as religious ceremonies and village gatherings
- taking advantage of minor incidents: fixing a flat tyre or repairing a car, for instance, can lead to an informal gathering
- speaking with the driver and with cooks or waiters/waitresses in restaurants
- stopping by the road and talking with farmers in fields or with herders at water points.

Formal communication with communities gives an opportunity for leaders and spokespeople to present information, policy or opinions to the aid agency. Often the people you communicate with on a formal basis will

have some official position or status within their community (village leader, government official, head of a women's group) or will be part of a formal structure of some sort such as the camp management team or the village council. Much of this section is about formal communication, but a great deal of it is also relevant to informal and casual communication methods.

Formal means of communication include:

- structured interviews
- focus groups
- traditional assemblies

*In many situations, if you start to converse with one or two people, you will find that others join in, and that a 'focus group' will take shape spontaneously. In a humanitarian crisis social dynamics change so look for new opportunities to communicate with different groups.*

**Tips & Warnings**

#4  
Communication

## IV.2 Formal communication methods

- organised discussions with targeted audiences like women's groups and children

### Tips & Warnings

*In humanitarian crises, new leaders may emerge. When dealing with formal representatives of a population, try to find out how they gained their position and the basis of their authority. Were they democratically elected or self-selected? Have they discussed the issue at hand with the people they intend to represent?*

You can consider using many different types of 'meetings' as part of your participation strategy including focus groups, large assemblies and smaller meetings or interviews. Whether formal or casual, all opportunities to exchange with people should be taken seriously. They are a means of gaining information, developing understanding and building mutual respect and they allow people to both influence you and hold you to account.

#### Planning meetings with groups

There are already many resources for guidance on facilitating meetings, running focus groups and using techniques such as participatory rural appraisal or participatory

learning in action. The aim of this handbook is not to repeat prior information, but to underline the main elements relevant to participation in humanitarian situations. Additional resources can be found in Part 3.

Although each meeting, interview, or event will differ in terms of objectives and participants, a number of basic principles and general guidelines should be followed:

#### Deciding on the purpose of the exercise

What do you want to achieve and how will you ensure real mutual communication between you and the people you talk to, rather than just extraction of information? In order to decide how you will communicate with different individuals and groups, it is useful to discuss this in advance with those concerned.

#### Gathering background information

In order to prepare for a group session you will need to collect some background information about the situation via key informants, observation and informal discussion. It is important to understand the security situation and the

potential risks to your team and the participants, to be aware of local social dynamics to avoid excluding or marginalising individuals or groups of people and to be informed about any political issues that might cast doubt on your independence, neutrality and impartiality. In humanitarian crises the situation can change very quickly - be prepared to update your knowledge on a regular basis.

#### Planning events with the community

Preparation is important for a group session such as a community assembly. Knowing in advance what methods you are going to use, where the event will take place and who the participants will be will help you to achieve your objectives for the meeting. Preparation can include a preliminary field visit to a possible venue and discussion of the purpose of the exercise, how it will be carried out and who should attend.

#### Keeping a record

Whatever your purpose or method, you are likely to want to take notes to help you remember what was said and to ensure accuracy later on. It is important to explain why you are doing this. Some people may be suspicious about what later use will be made of the notes, especially if they are concerned about their personal security. Avoid such worries by explaining how the notes will be stored, and how you will ensure confidentiality, for example, by not using real names or other information that might be used to identify individuals.

#### Their time...

Time is a precious resource, especially when people are struggling to survive. By informing people of what you are doing,

*In large, formal group sessions individual participation is determined by power relations within the group. Socially marginalized people such as ethnic minorities, disabled people or women may not feel they can contribute freely. By planning other smaller events or meetings you can provide these groups with an environment where they feel more comfortable expressing themselves.*

### Tips & Warnings

*Ask some of your key contacts for advice on how formal the meeting should be and any other cultural tips. Dress and behave as is necessary to be taken seriously and show respect to the participants.*

### Tips

and why, they can decide whether meeting with you is a priority. People affected by crises have needs that they hope you may be able to meet, and may be impatient of long drawn out processes for relatively simple and obvious matters.

Consider whether you can carry out joint exercises with other agencies to reduce the time-burden on the population and to make sure that they are not subjected to a stream of meetings and consultations.

Make sure that you don't plan meetings at inappropriate times such as during prayer hours, and think about who might be excluded at different times of the day because of their other obligations.

**...and your time**

Participatory processes seem time-consuming in the initial stages, when a speedy response to urgent needs is called for. However relationships built at the beginning can make the humanitarian response more effective and accountable. Even

fairly limited involvement of affected people at this stage is useful in building later participatory approaches.

Try to strike a reasonable compromise between your need to respond to the crisis and respect for the participants' rhythm. Without losing sight of the need to achieve results in terms of meeting their needs, try not to pressure them into making decisions.

As humanitarian crises move and change rapidly, you will have to be flexible about your time. Unexpected events often crop up and the people you hope to meet with can suddenly have another, greater priority. Likewise you might find yourself unable to attend a meeting at short notice, in which case try to send a message and apology by whatever means available and make a follow-up visit as soon as possible.

**Example**

An aid organisation wished to conduct a focus group in a Guinean village, and had agreed on a meeting time with the village elders. When the team arrived, somebody had died in the village, and the funeral was to take place at the same time as the meeting. Elders started dividing the participants who were present between those who would attend the funeral and those who would attend the meeting. But the aid worker proposed to postpone the meeting to enable all the villagers to attend the funeral. Grateful for the team's consideration and respect, the whole village held an assembly to meet with the aid organisation after the funeral.

**Group size**

The size of a group will determine the dynamics of the discussion. There are advantages and disadvantages to different types of groups (see Table 2) - some people may be more comfortable in a large assembly, while others will prefer smaller gatherings. In larger groups the most vulnerable and socially marginalized may not feel comfortable speaking.

	Large assemblies	Smaller groups
<b>Advantages</b>	Allow all stakeholders to meet each other in one place	Can be very specific and focussed
	Useful to communicate general information about the project and participatory exercises	Allow marginalised groups to speak out more freely
	A good forum for giving feedback to the local community	Give each participant more opportunity to speak
	Create a sense of transparency	Can be used to cross-check information gathered in other circumstances
	Allow debate between different sections of the population	
<b>Constraints</b>	Less chance for each participant to speak	Possibility of someone monopolizing the debate
	Some participants more reticent about expressing themselves in front of a lot of people	May go off at a tangent
	"Voiceless groups" may not be heard	

**Table 2**  
The roles and constraints of different group sizes

When first engaging with a community, it may be useful to organise a large assembly, where all are welcome, in order to present yourself, explain the reasons for your presence and outline how you are going to spend your time with them. You will be able to respond to any questions the population may have.

One seldom has control over the number of people who show up at an open gathering, particularly in the early stages of an emergency, so it is important to be flexible and to adapt to the number of participants present.

In large public events that 'encourage the expression of what is general and normative to the detriment of what is specific and real'<sup>9</sup>, you can expect an emphasis on generalised statements. Make sure that you organise other smaller meetings or events to communicate on more specific issues.

### Facilitating meetings

Be aware that your origin, status, gender, age, profession, experience or knowledge of the area all affect how you are perceived, and determine your legitimacy as a facilitator. The success of the discussion is often determined by the quality of the relationship between you and the group. As *de facto* facilitator you have a key role in ensuring the discussions and interactions are fruitful and positive, and enable maximum participation, especially that of socially marginalized people.

Keep the discussion to the point. However, if participants' main concerns lie outside the stated objectives and other important issues arise, do not be

afraid to stray from your planned agenda.

Remember - you do not hold the truth! Acknowledge participants' experiences and their knowledge of their own context and the crisis they have undergone. Show respect for their opinions (even if you do not necessarily share them).

You will almost inevitably find yourself at the centre of the meeting space. As this tends to be the focus of authority, be careful about how you use your status.

### Dealing with sensitive issues

In every culture there are issues that are difficult to discuss openly, and this is often exacerbated in times of crisis when situations can be very politically charged. There are some topics that shouldn't even be raised until you have built up a good relationship with a community or population. Some issues will create tensions between different groups or may marginalize some individuals, and in extreme cases can compromise people's physical security. Your key contacts should be able to give guidance on what these sensitive issues are and how and when they can be approached.

### Managing group dynamics and conflicts

Social dynamics inevitably change in crisis situations, and often the context becomes very politicised. If certain participants block the discussion or create tension in the group, encourage the group to solve the problem so that you do not get involved personally.

### Example

*An aid agency carrying out a participatory assessment in a Liberian village had previously announced that a meeting would take place to encourage the villagers to participate. They were so successful in gathering people that they feared the size of the group would be too large to manage and carry out focused discussions. When they suggested that some villagers went home, the villagers insisted that they wanted to participate, arguing that the agency had said they would be able to.*

*After initial presentations, explanations and discussions, the facilitators managed to split the assembly into smaller groups for focused discussions, and they gathered again afterwards for feedback and conclusions.*

<sup>9</sup> Delville, L. Mathieu, M. and Sellamna, N., "Living up to Ambitions: For a More Rigorous Practice of Participatory Appraisals and Enquiries", *Scientific Directorate working paper no. 28*, (Paris: GRET -Groupe de Recherche et d'Echanges Techniques-, 2001).

*The facilitator for group sessions in Afghanistan was a relatively young expatriate woman, while the group of villagers was mostly composed of Afghan elder men. Despite her experience of the area, her status as a young woman made it difficult to obtain the respect of the elders. She asked a male Afghan colleague to replace her as facilitator, as her position was constraining the interactions and discussions. It was only at a later stage, when mutual trust and respect had been established between the agency staff and the villagers that she was able to engage in discussions with the elders.*

### Example

*In many societies, older women can provide very useful information on issues that younger women cannot speak about, such as feminine hygiene and sanitary needs, or sexual violence. However the power dynamics within families, particularly between mothers and daughters-in-law, may mean that the interests of older and younger women do not always coincide.*

### Tips & Warnings

## Tips & Warnings

Make a point of observing how people interact during the conversation; this can help manage the group dynamics, and could provide interesting information on social relations within the community.

If a meeting has reached stalemate, if there is growing tension, if people are monopolising or sabotaging the discussion or if it simply is not moving forward, try changing the group configuration. Not every meeting will be successful. If nothing works, you can always call for a break and address the problem directly with the people involved.

Do not 'take sides' in a discussion but provide information if needed, and help "unblock" situations. Stay calm, even if you disagree with what certain participants say. If you think people feel threatened by a subject, change it, but

try to learn something from what happens as this may be relevant for your work.

### Responsibility and expectations

During group discussions with crisis-affected populations, individual or collective wounds, traumas, and conflicts may re-emerge. Be ready to manage such situations if they arise. If you feel unable to do so, try to avoid sensitive subjects. Remember that, though your stay in a village may be short, it will have lasting effects.

Find out in advance where to refer people for more specialised information or support as you might not be the most qualified person to manage issues that have arisen, or your organisation may not be able to deal with needs or issues that have been brought up during your meeting.

Bringing people together to discuss issues that affect their lives – and especially their practical needs – is likely to raise expectations. Explain clearly what you can and cannot do, particularly with regard to the delivery of aid supplies.

### Cross-checking information

The social and political dynamics among participants can sometimes mean that you get conflicting information from different sources. The triangulation of information, whereby you cross-check information collected in different

ways and from different groups of people, is essential. Work out the reason for any differences in your information as this can often give an insight into social dynamics and power relations. In conflict and disaster situations information is often manipulated in order to control, unduly influence or instil fear in people. Take this into account when communicating with people affected by a crisis.

### Using technical tools and methods

Be careful not to overwhelm people with sophisticated high-tech equipment, as these devices can create an undesirable distance between participants and yourself. Use what you find on the spot, including sticks, stones, sand and drawings on the ground.

Taking photos during the sessions and showing participants photos of themselves can be a strong motivating factor. However, make sure people feel comfortable with this. Also, be aware that a camera changes the dynamic in a meeting, which may not be helpful. Carrying a camera in conflict situations can also create a security risk for you or the people you meet.

There are many ways of collecting information on a single topic. Be ready to adapt your tools to suit participants. Let individuals express themselves in their own way according to their own practical experience and usual forms of dialogue. Some planning tools and methods may also create a distance – see what tools people already use and are familiar and comfortable with before introducing your own.

### Quote

'I have observed you when you use your calendar chart. I don't feel very comfortable with that tool. Please ask me questions directly, and I will explain to you everything that is happening on my farm.'

Guinean farmer.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Boulier, F., 'La diversité des stratégies paysannes dans la zone de Koba (Guinée)', in Delville, L. et al (eds), *Les Enquêtes Participatives en Débat*, (Paris : Karthala, 2000).

### Closing

Before moving on, summarize and clarify what has been said. This can be done by you, a participant, or collectively. Acknowledge the positive contribution of the meeting, interview, or event and let people know how they can continue to participate in the project and what will happen next. Take care to ensure that communication remains a two way process by letting people know how they can contact you in future, or when you will next visit them.

## Chapter 4 summary Communication techniques

- 1 Good communication is the basic building-block of participation
- 2 By using both formal methods and taking informal opportunities to communicate with people you will be able to improve your understanding of the situation and build the kind of relationships needed for successful participation.
- 3 Communication is a two-way process and involves listening, learning and adapting on your part.
- 4 Your personal behaviour and attitudes will determine the quality of the communication and your relationship to the people with whom you are communicating
- 5 Why, how, when and with whom you communicate should all be part of a participation strategy



chapter 5

#5

# Making Partnerships Work

#5  
Partnerships





Organisations often delegate project activities to, or share responsibilities with, local partner organisations. However, such 'partnerships' are not necessarily the result of participatory approaches – in many cases it may simply involve the sub-contracting of activities or services in return for payment. Likewise, working with a local partner does not necessarily mean that an inclusive, participatory approach is being adopted.

For many organisations it is a way to involve local groups and organisations in the response to a crisis and potentially a way for crisis-affected people to participate in a humanitarian response. Partnerships can be an opportunity to establish a more meaningful relationship between the organisations, jointly defining objectives and the means of achieving them, sharing responsibilities and learning from each other.

A partnership is far more than a simple contractual relationship; it is based on a number of ethical and practical principles. This chapter provides guidelines on how to make partnerships effective and how to make them work by building individual relationships, showing mutual respect, and taking into account the personal attitudes of all the people involved.

A partnership can be established at various phases of the project cycle, but if established at the beginning it is more likely to ensure that all partners have a shared understanding of the situation, jointly-agreed objectives, and a procedure to establish not only what they will do, but also how it will be done.

A 'partnership' involves two or more parties joining forces to achieve a common objective. Ideally, each partner should be equal, but in reality no partnership is equal, and does not necessarily need to be, as long as it is complementary. In a context where both material and non-material resources are exchanged, the objective is to find the right balance.

Partnership is based on two elements: friendship and trust on the one hand, and a contractual agreement on the other. The first entails building a relationship over time, the second aims to concretely define the terms of the agreement.

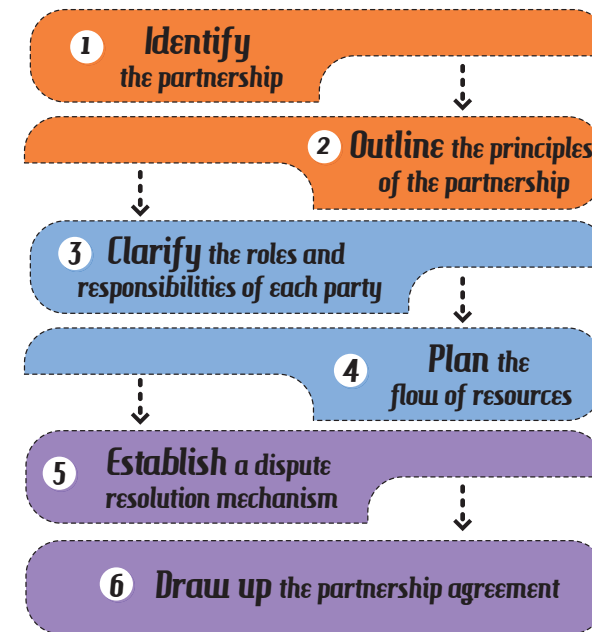


Figure 4  
Steps involved  
in establishing a  
partnership

The process used to choose a partner is the foundation on which the future relationship will rest. Although it can be time-consuming, it is useful to carry out a thorough analysis to identify reliable partners with whom you are likely to share common ground. This should include mapping the organisations which are active in the geographical area of operation and the relevant sector (e.g. public health, medical etc). Potential partners are not limited to local NGOs; they can also be informal social entities such as villages, women's groups, etc. Who you engage with will depend on each situation. International NGOs often work with local partners, but a partnership can also involve two international institutions with complementary expertise and capacity.

Where possible use NGO platforms and co-ordination mechanisms in order to get to know other organisations.

## U.1 Identify the partner

## Tips & Warnings

### *Beware of 'Mushroom' NGOs!*

*In situations where massive amounts of aid flow to a region, some organisations are created solely as a means of capturing available resources. These are known as 'mushroom' NGOs, because they grow like mushrooms after the rain, and may not have the capacity or expertise, or even the desire, to effectively assist the affected population.*

During the assessment of context and needs, or when identifying potential solutions on which to base project design, potential partners may emerge spontaneously. Community leaders, leaders of existing organisations, or other aid staff who have been in the area longer can give you information about the reliability and legitimacy of different organisations.

When analysing potential partners the following factors should be taken into account:

- The organisation's **impartiality or neutrality**: check whether the organisation or individuals within it are affiliated or associated with parties to a conflict or other political actors.
- The risk of **exclusion and discrimination**: for political, social, or cultural reasons, some organisations may engage preferentially with certain groups.
- **Access to the affected population**: the local institution may not have access to the affected population, or specific groups within it, for political reasons, or because of a lack of expertise or capacity to operate in certain areas.
- **The organisation's legitimacy among the population**: some institutions have no legitimacy due to their history, actions they are/were involved in, cases of corruption, etc.
- **Technical and methodological capacity**: be sure to assess the technical capacity of potential partners if that is going to be a necessary element in the partnership. Assess the possibility of specific technical training that could be included in the partnership 'deal'.
- **Administrative and financial indicators**: ensure that potential partners have the capacity and skills to manage

administrative and financial requirements, particularly if you have external donor funding.

Even if most international aid organisations would like to be able to claim that they can meet all of the above criteria, it would be difficult to find ones that can. This should not discourage you from establishing a partnership. Strengthening an organisation's management and governance system can be part of the partnership's objectives. In some areas, the motivation behind a partnership can be to support the creation of local organisations, as part of institution building or community development strategies.

Potential partners should agree on the main principles of any future partnership.

- **A shared interest in forming a partnership**. All parties should make their interest in the partnership clear, and if necessary be given support in doing this.
- **A shared understanding of the context and needs**. If possible, a joint assessment of this should be carried out with potential partners. If this cannot be done, perceptions of the needs and demands of the affected population should be harmonised.
- **Compatibility and complementary goals**, strategies, modes of operation and means. In spite of different levels of complexity, mutual transparency on these issues is something to work towards.

International aid organisations should take into account the following factors:

**Recognise and respect the autonomy of partners.** Be prepared to adapt your requirements to theirs. Accept their right to make (strategic, not financial) mistakes - to err is human - and errors can be a good source of learning.

## V.2 Outline the Principles of the Partnership Agreement

Develop one's capacity to propose innovative methods of support and co-operation, for example, by developing networks of expertise, or organising short technical support missions in the crisis area, rather than having to rely on the presence of permanent technical staff.

## Example

Following the earthquake that hit **El Salvador** in January 2001, a French relief NGO (Atlas Logistique), a Salvadorian NGO (Fundesyram) which worked on socio-economic development and environmental conservation, and a private Austrian development foundation based in El Salvador joined forces. The objective of their programme was to provide vulnerable and isolated families in two areas with permanent housing, made with local materials and earthquake mitigation techniques.

Analysis of the consortium showed that the partnership had had definite advantages for all the agencies involved:

- A more integrated, multi-sector perception of beneficiaries' needs and constraints
- A technically sound and innovative intervention
- Integration of emergency response and longer-term development
- Greater involvement of local communities (through Fundesyram extension workers)
- Enhanced credibility of the three agencies with the population and authorities

However, in this case the partnership in itself did not prevent difficulties in implementation, nor did it ensure the project's sustainability and guarantee a transfer of technology and competence from the foreign NGO to the Salvadorean NGO.

These weaknesses could have been avoided through a finer definition of objectives and responsibilities and through the elaboration of a common methodology, including a strategy for communication and co-ordination both between partners and with other organisations.

From 'Partnership as a quality tool?': Case study on the Consortium between Atlas Logistique, Fundesyram and Horizont 3000, El Salvador, Central America, by Gabrielle Savi (Groupe URD, 2001)

## U.3 Clarify the Roles and Responsibilities of each Party

Clarifying each partner's roles and responsibilities is essential. If they are not clearly defined from the outset, it can lead to misunderstanding, frustration and possible conflict.

A partnership requires that both or all of the parties share responsibility for managing and implementing the project. The following points should therefore be negotiated:

- Resources to be mobilised by each partner
- Who is involved in decision-making and on what issues
- Who does what during project implementation and monitoring
- Establishment of rules and sanction mechanisms

Ideally, each partner's roles and responsibilities should correspond to their area of expertise and their financial, managerial, and operational capacity. The commitment made by each partner should be realistic and should encourage participation.

A joint steering committee, with all partners represented, is a useful structure. It is important to clarify the following points:

- Who represents each partner on the committee?
- What decision-making power does it have?
- How often does it meet?

Continuous communication between partners is an essential component of a successful partnership. The steering committee can help to develop good lines of communication between and within partner organisations, provide a framework for regular reporting, and organise regular meetings and workshops.

Co-ordinating external communication, notably with donors, and communities and individuals targeted by the project, is

important to ensure consistence and avoid confusion. This includes management of the partnership's visibility and 'public image'. The partners should establish which individuals will represent them when negotiating with other stakeholders, sub-contractors, suppliers and members of the population.

## ***U.4 Plan the flow of resources***

Any partnership is likely to involve some resources moving from one partner to another. These can include funds, materials, technical expertise, training, or secondment of staff between the organisations. The resources that will be shared or exchanged should be defined at the same time as the principles of the partnership and the roles and responsibilities of each party, but what is often overlooked is *how* these resources will be exchanged. The flow of resources can be represented in a simple chart, diagram or table defining what each partner will contribute, when and how the resources will be transferred and the conditions of transfer.

If resources are being 'lent' to an organisation only for the duration of the project, establish the terms and conditions clearly. For example, if the aid organisation is to provide vehicles to a local partner, it is important to define who is responsible for insurance, maintenance and repairs, and issues such as whether these vehicles can be used for other projects.

Financial planning should also establish the dates and amounts of financial transfers, which party is responsible for bank charges or fees, and what factors are to be respected before each transfer can take place (e.g. the submission of a financial report for a previous instalment, or the completion of a particular set of activities).

The partnership may also involve technical support and institution building. In cases where a new organisation has

been established or existing organisations are very weak, another aid organisation can play a vital institution building role, particularly in the following areas:

- Improving the organisation's capacity to assess and analyse situations
- Improving administrative and financial management and stability
- Contributing to the partner's legitimacy and capacity for representation (reinforcing the partner's social grounding)
- Improving project management, proposal writing, and negotiation skills
- Strengthening the partner's visibility and integration in networks at the national and international level.
- Training or capacity building in specific technical areas.

These objectives can be attained through continuous technical support on the ground, such as regular visits by training staff, and so on. All activities must be planned and budgeted, and the necessary resources mobilised by all partners. Technical support should be seen as a reciprocal process, as a 'balanced' partnership is based on each party recognising the skills, expertise and experience of the other. International aid agencies should value their partner's resources, which will often include very valuable perspectives on the culture, and the political, social and economic system, and should seek to draw on these as well as the more obvious technical skills.

## ***U.5 Set up a Dispute Resolution Mechanism***

Although foresight in establishing roles and responsibilities and practical ways of working at the outset can reduce the chance of disagreements at a later stage, differences of opinions between the partners are still likely to arise. A dispute resolution

mechanism, agreed to by all parties, should be set up at the planning stage. This should be context-specific. Mechanisms which are innovative or adapted to traditional practices of consensus and engagement are very useful.

## U.6 Draw up the partnership agreement

In the case of a partnership between formally constituted organisations, the terms of the agreement between the partners should be put in writing in a contract specifying not only the usual requirements of a contract, but also the procedures when working in insecure environments, such as who is responsible for the security of project teams and equipment, common security rules and regulations, and so on.

### When there are no existing and recognised organisations

There are many situations where a formal partnership is not possible because there are no suitable institutions with which to join forces. In these situations it is possible to support the creation of new organisations or committees. As this will be a new entity, there will be opportunities to establish a high degree of participation and transparency, but there will also be constraints imposed by your role in 'setting it up'.

It is important not to impose a form of organisation that is foreign to the local culture and which will not be accepted by the affected population. If your project creates new forms of organisation that superimpose on those already in existence, there is a risk of undermining local strategies and damaging traditional relationships between various groups.

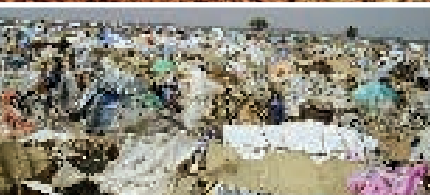
To encourage the creation of a new entity, it is important to draw on local cultural references, traditional consultation mechanisms or other structures that the population can identify with.

It is also possible to unintentionally reinforce discrimination patterns that are entrenched in a society. Dealing with

this issue requires good knowledge of the local society, diplomacy and judicious interaction with various people to see how the issue can be addressed in a culturally sensitive way.

## Chapter 5 summary Making Partnerships Work

- 1 Partnerships are not necessarily the result of a participatory process, but do offer the opportunity to increase participation.
- 2 A partnership is far more than a simple contractual relationship – it is based on a relationship of trust, shared values and principles and a desire to work together in order to achieve a goal.
- 3 A thorough analysis should be made before deciding on a partner.
- 4 An effective partnership will include agreements on the objectives of the partnership, mutual roles and responsibilities, resource transfer and how to deal with disputes.
- 5 Partnerships are based on mutual respect and recognition of the resources, skills, and experience that each party brings to the partnership.



chapter 6

#6

# Reviewing your participation strategy

## VI.1 Who participated?

The previous five chapters should have helped you develop a participatory approach and reflect on some of the factors that will affect how and why people participate in your projects. Developing a strategy for participation is only the first step. Participation is a dynamic process, which can evolve in various ways over the course of a project. It is inevitable that some of the choices you make will later prove difficult to implement or you may find that they are inappropriate. Therefore it is important to actively review your strategy and adapt it as necessary. This will also enable you to build project and institutional memory, share successes and deal with errors.

Your participatory approach should therefore be reviewed at several points in the project process as presented in this handbook:

- at the end of each project cycle phase (assessment, design, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation)
- as part of the project final evaluation

Reviewing your approach should not be seen as a laborious or burdensome undertaking. It can be done informally, e.g. through team workshops at the end of each project phase, to reflect collectively on how the phase was carried out. Reviewing may seem time consuming, but it can save you a lot of time later on by helping to identify and tackle problems before they arise, get blown out of proportion or lead to security and protection incidents.

When reviewing your participatory approach consider these three issues:

- 1 Who participated? Who did not participate?
- 2 How did people participate and how effective was their participation?
- 3 What is your motivation for using a participatory approach?

- 1 List the key individuals, institutions (government institutions, NGOs, CBOs...), or population groups (e.g. women refugees, adolescent boys, small land-owners, etc.) who were involved in the phase.
- 2 Were the individuals and groups involved representative of the wider population? Were any groups excluded from the process? Why?
- 3 Were some groups included unnecessarily? Remember, people may have time constraints and other responsibilities, including you!
- 4 Were you able to respect the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality? Participation often involves engaging preferentially with parts of the population or particular stakeholders. The important thing is to make sure you are aware of the implications of underlying political dynamics in the selection of participants, and that you communicate the reasoning behind your choices.
- 5 Were you able to gain access to minorities and work with them without stigmatising them further or posing threats to their security?
- 6 Were people from marginalised groups within the community able to participate?

## VI.2 How did people participate?

- 1 How were people involved? List the techniques you used: assemblies, focus groups, meetings with partners, participation in decision-making, etc.
- 2 Did you work directly with members of the population or in collaboration with another institution (NGO, CBO, etc.)?
- 3 Did people engage actively in the process? In what ways? If not, why not?
- 4 Did women and men participate in the same way? Were women and men equally able to actively engage in the process?
- 5 Were people from marginalised groups within the community actively engaged in the process?
- 6 How effectively was information transmitted? Did people understand the messages you shared with them, in particular concerning your organisation, the different stages of the project, potential constraints, etc.?
- 7 How effective was the consultation? Did people succeed in transmitting their ideas to you? Did they feel consulted and that their contributions were taken into consideration? How do you know? Ask them if they feel that they were consulted or involved in decision-making. If participants made requests or demands that couldn't be accommodated did they understand why?
- 8 What was the impact of participants' contributions in decision-making and in the project?
- 9 What was the impact of participation on the quality of the relationship between the aid organisation and the population and other stakeholders? Was mutual respect and trust established?
- 10 Were participants, other stakeholders, or other members of the population exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? If so, what did you do about it?

## VI.3 What is your motivation for using a participatory approach?

Remind yourself why you were motivated to use a participatory approach and reflect on this during the project – your main motivation may change at different stages in the project cycle.

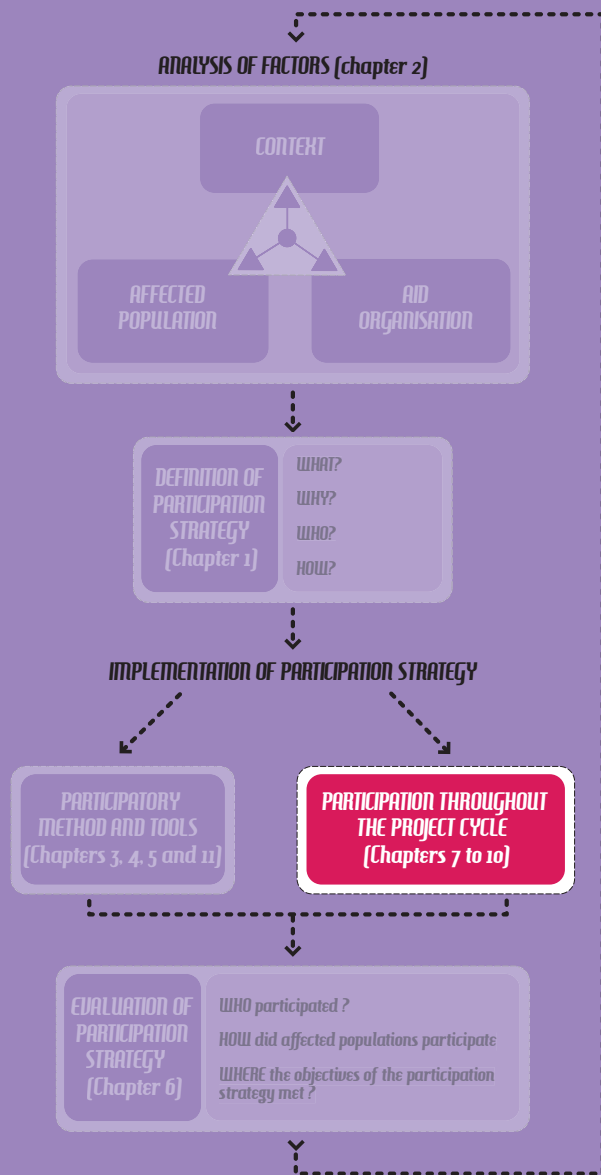
- 1 To ensure positive impacts beyond the project duration
- 2 To improve project flexibility
- 3 To help reduce or avoid negative impacts
- 4 To increase the resources and expertise available for the project
- 5 To enhance project relevance
- 6 To improve project management capacity
- 7 To enhance project effectiveness
- 8 To improve project efficiency
- 9 To build a relationship of mutual respect and understanding
- 10 To support lesson learning
- 11 To integrate the project in the social and institutional environment
- 12 To respect your organisation's mandate and principles

Measuring whether one has achieved one's objectives is, of course, very difficult before the project is completed. However, it is already possible to assess whether one is going "in the right direction" from the very earliest stages. It is good practice to include periodic reviews and time for reflection when using a participatory approach. This is the principle of 'quality assurance' as opposed to 'quality control': you anticipate potential difficulties and weaknesses, or at least identify them as soon as they occur, rather than wait till the end of the process to spot failures, by which time it is too late to make the necessary changes.



Remember that respect for the affected population should be central to any participatory approach. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether people can feel your respect for them, but generally this should be apparent from the respect they show you.

Before moving onto the next stage, use the answers from the questions above to adapt your participatory approach as appropriate. The questions listed above reveal how challenging it can be to adopt a participatory approach. But do not be discouraged! The following sections of the Handbook will guide you. They contain tips and warnings on how to manage a participatory approach step by step. Participation is a challenging enterprise, but one that is most rewarding.



## SECOND PART

# Implementing a participatory approach

Part 2 provides guidance on implementing the participatory approach at each stage of the project cycle. At the beginning of each stage you will be asked to examine your motivation and objectives for participation, who will participate and how. At the end of each stage in the cycle you will need to review and reflect on the participation process.

- Participatory assessment – understanding the context of the crisis (historical, geographical, economic, cultural and time-scale) of the crisis and its effects, who is who, local capacities and strategies and the needs of people who have been affected by the crisis (chapter 7).
- Participatory project design – defining the project strategy; setting objectives; deciding on the target group; and designing activities (chapter 8).
- Participatory implementation and monitoring – mobilising and managing resources; implementing specific activities; monitoring the project (chapter 9).
- Participatory project evaluation (chapter 10).

*The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.*

*Sherry Arnstein, 1969.*



chapter 7

#7

# Participatory assessment

The main objective of an assessment is to get a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the context, the crisis, the stakeholders involved, the problems faced by the people who are directly or indirectly affected and the strategies that they have put in place in response to the crisis.

The assessment informs programme design, and should thus provide information on the needs and demands to be addressed, the local capacities that can be supported, and the opportunities and constraints that will affect programme implementation.

How the assessment is conducted can make the difference between a meaningful programme and one that is of little value to the affected population. Too often, this phase is carried out using an extractive approach, leading to an incomplete or biased analysis of the situation and associated problems. This can undermine the population's own strategies and damage the agency's relationship with the people the programme is supposed to assist.

The assessment phase is often your first encounter with the population and should be approached with the following in mind:

- Openly engage with population members from the beginning, by introducing yourself and opening a space for exchange
- Analyse the context, the crisis and its effects collectively using a holistic approach
- Be open to existing local strategies, initiatives and strengths
- Analyse and discuss needs and demands with the population

An assessment is an essential part of planning a humanitarian response. However, there are a few factors that need to be considered before you start.

The information collected during an assessment needs to be continuously updated, complemented, and qualified

by other sources and types of information. Having good, active relationships with people makes this much easier to do well. Remember to stay flexible and open to what participants wish to discuss.

Try to coordinate and work together with other agencies when carrying out assessments in order to lessen the burden on the population. Share information, analysis and ideas.

The assessment should include the perspective of a variety of groups within the population. The exclusion of certain groups can bias the assessment and programme design. On the other hand involving them in the assessment can further stigmatise them or offend influential groups/individuals.

The population is almost certain to have an incomplete or biased perception of your organisation and its motives, especially when you arrive in an area where you have never worked before. This perception can be manipulated by people with particular political agendas. Communicate continuously about who you are and what principles you hold to. The mere presence of your organisation can entail risks for the population and individuals with whom you will interact, and your organisation can be suspected of collecting strategic data for an enemy or for a foreign power.

Your impartiality, neutrality and independence, and how this is perceived will depend on who you engage with, and in what way. Be aware that you might end up interacting with a particular group in a preferential manner. People's perception of your independence, neutrality and impartiality will be damaged if the information you use to design your programme is only based on the views of one part of the population. This can also be the source of security problems.

### Carrying out the assessment

The assessment phase often represents the first encounter with the population. This is where the foundations of your relationship with the population are laid, and where

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
18: Preparing your participatory assessment

- 1 **What** are the main motivations and objectives for doing a participatory assessment?
- 2 **Who** will do the participatory assessment? Will you do it directly with members of the population, in collaboration with local stakeholders, or will you support a local stakeholder who is already doing an assessment? Can you co-ordinate with other agencies?
- 3 **How** will the assessment be carried out? What data collection techniques will be used?

your legitimacy for engaging with the population during a project is determined.

When preparing the first field visit inform the population in advance and organise a meeting with community leaders or elders. Be careful about who you first engage with, and in your choice of intermediary, as this will determine who you have contact with and may restrict your access to certain groups throughout the rest of the project. Be sure to find out about and respect rituals and traditions, and follow the recognised social hierarchy.

During the first meeting you will need to introduce yourself, explain who you are, and what you have come to do. You may have to do this repeatedly with different people. Be careful about the messages you may be transmitting consciously or subconsciously and make sure your behaviour is conducive to mutual respect and open dialogue. Listen attentively to what people have to tell you. Give people a chance to ask you questions and respond to them clearly and openly.

Explain the purpose of the assessment and the techniques you may use. The people you meet will be able to advise you on what techniques are appropriate with that population.

**Examples**

*In Guinée Forestière, the first encounter with a village must occur via the village chief and committee of elders. The tradition requires visitors to present themselves with a basket containing kola nuts wrapped in banana leaves. The visitors may address the population only after the presents are publicly offered to the elders, the basket has gone through the hands of all the elders and the chief has welcomed them.*

Be careful about expectations you may be creating. Make sure that you clarify how you work and what you can and cannot do. Do not allow people to think that you are making promises that you may not be able to keep. Explain the project process and any constraints you feel you might encounter, for example, regarding co-ordination, or funding.

## VIII.1 Understanding the context

Understanding the context and how populations perceive and organise their own lives in a given environment provides fundamental information with which to analyse problems and identify causal relationships. What may be perceived as historical and cultural details by an outsider often fashion people's lives, the problems they face, and the way they respond to them. Before starting the assessment take time to do some background reading and draw on existing information available from other organisations, national staff and so on.

### VIII.1.1 Collective history

Understanding a people's history entails identifying the historical events that have impacted on peoples' lives significantly, and have led to social, environmental, and geographical changes. The objective is to identify the most relevant events, dates, changes and issues and to understand why and how these have had an impact on peoples' lives, without getting lost in too much detail.

To avoid this, limit yourself to a few well-chosen questions to support the discussion, such as:

*Keep your eyes and ears open! Be ready to see or hear the unexpected. Be careful not to express yourself in a way that may appear 'superior', but rather in a way that encourages real trust.*

**Tips & Warnings**

*In conflict situations history has often been manipulated for political gain or to justify certain actions. Be aware that different groups will have different perceptions of what has happened in the past and that you are unlikely to find consensus about this. Your national staff or others familiar with the population should be able to alert you to key areas of contention that are best avoided.*

**Tips & Warnings**

- What main events have affected the community over the past 'x' years or months?
- What impact have they had on village life? On family life?
- What situation led to these events? How did the situation subsequently evolve?

Affected populations rarely have the opportunity to collectively discuss the events that have had an impact on their lives. This kind of discussion can be a positive experience for participants and can help to strengthen a community's identity.

Evoking historical events can make underlying conflicts, tensions, or traumas re-emerge. Do not do so unless you are ready and able to manage such situations. Individuals who have played or play a key role in a community's history are often present in focus groups and meetings, and they may hold important positions in the society. Be aware of this when forming groups and discussing certain issues.

**Quote**

**'We had never taken the time to recall and discuss collectively the events that have affected our community. Thank you for giving us this opportunity. It has helped us to understand our village history better and how each of us has experienced it personally.'**

*Paramount Chief in Liberian village affected by the civil war.*

Evoking historical events can make underlying conflicts, tensions, or traumas re-emerge. Do not do so unless you are ready and able to manage such situations. Individuals who have played or play a key role in a community's history are often present in focus groups and meetings, and they may hold important positions in the society. Be aware of this when forming groups and discussing certain issues.

### VIII.1.2 ⊕ **The geography and environment**

It is useful to get a general view of the geographical, social, cultural and economic environment that existed prior to the

crisis. This should give you information on a wide range of issues, such as:

- production activities in the area and economic opportunities: the presence of factories, fields, grazing areas, markets;
- social and cultural features: religious sites, main gathering places;
- access to basic services: schools, health centres;
- constraints of the geography and the environment: relief, climate, access to land;
- connection to or isolation from other areas: road and transport networks, etc.

This information is important for understanding the population's environment, but also for identifying potential opportunities and constraints for a future programme (e.g. availability of local resources, constraints to access during wet season, etc.). Though you may feel that they are no longer relevant, issues such as the geographical relations which existed between groups before they were forcibly displaced may continue to be extremely relevant to the affected people.

Most participatory exercises concerning the geography of an area entail a collective mapping exercise or the use of techniques such as 'transect walks'. Other methods of representation can also be used, such as drawings, graphs, etc. of different styles and scales. (See Part 3 for further details on tools for participation).

In conflict areas, maps can provide militarily sensitive information such as locations of landmines, checkpoints, or training camps. Those who provide and those who collect this information can be suspected or targeted. Be careful about the information you collect, and how you collect and manage it. Avoid bringing with you, or ostensibly showing, sophisticated maps (e.g. satellite photos, detailed maps), as people may be uncomfortable with this 'high-tech material', or suspicious of you for having it.

### III.1.3 ⊕ The society and culture

Understanding a population's social organisation and culture entails covering a wide range of issues, many of which will have changed or be changing as a result of the crisis.

- Cultural / religious values and practices
- Ethnic composition;
- Gender relations;
- The role of different age groups and the relationships between them (knowledge of age distribution is useful here);
- Social hierarchies (e.g. based on caste, religion, ethnicity, language and wealth)
- Languages (differences, potential tensions between different language groups, etc.)

It is important to understand attitudes towards participatory practices and whether participation is common in the management of public issues. If it is, find out what kind is used, what hierarchies are involved, and whether participation is affected by age, gender, etc.

Population groups are often riddled with conflicts, discrimination patterns, and rivalries. Participatory dialogue on a population's social composition necessitates a high degree of sensitivity and requires preparatory work with key stakeholders and informants.

Avoid generic and stereotypical notions of household, community, ethnicity, religion, class gender and generation. Be open to local subtleties and specificities. Even if you think you know a region well there are often strong variations within apparently homogeneous areas.

People's own way of describing their society and culture can be normative, that is, they describe how it ought to be, rather than how it actually is. It is important to know both how it is and how it is perceived to be.

**Tips & Warnings**  
*Try describing your own society and culture as a way to start the discussion. It will also help you understanding just how difficult it is to describe your society and culture to a stranger in a short period of time!*

### III.1.4 ⊕ The economy and livelihoods

Understanding a population's economy and socio-economic stratification as it existed prior to the crisis entails collecting information on:

- the main economic activities and income sources of the population;
- the availability of and access to resources;
- socio-economic differentiation within the population;

The question of socio-economic differentiation can lead to the discussion of sensitive political issues. Be aware of tensions that may emerge, and if necessary, do the exercise in different groups.

Be open to the participants' own ways of stratifying different social and economic groups (e.g. caste, economic status, clan, social relations, education, etc.).

Information collected at the village or local level cannot be fully analysed without collecting information on the wider economic and political context.

Aid agencies often tend to have a narrow, supply-driven view of the crisis and its impact that may be very different from that of the people affected. While aid workers, particularly expatriate personnel, are deployed for just a few months, the population often has to deal with difficulties and disasters on a regular basis or continuously.

It is helpful to analyse a crisis using a two-step approach:

- Establish a global picture of the crisis
- Go into detail, analysing the different stakeholders, local capacities and vulnerabilities and priority needs.

## III.2 Understanding the crisis

### VIII.2.1 ⊕ Establishing an overall picture of the crisis

In order to establish an overall picture of the crisis and understand the population's perception of it, you need to know about the following:

- Crisis trends in the area: types, frequency, scale and impact of previous crises, existing prevention and preparedness measures, structural vulnerabilities (geological, political, economic)
- The current crisis
- The impact of the crisis: what happened to members of the population, what happened in the village and in other areas?

**Tips & Warnings**  
*Organising small focus groups composed of individuals who have experienced the same trauma may be a way of encouraging discussion in a sensitive and supportive way. But beware of the psychological effects this may have, or of the underlying conflicts or tensions that it may trigger. You may not be equipped to deal with them.*

**Tips & Warnings**  
*Stakeholder analysis raises political issues, and not all organisations will be willing to provide the information you seek. Be careful not to put yourself or your informants at risk by being "too curious"!*

A general discussion of the crisis can be carried out in a large, mixed group, as this can lead to interesting open debates and discussion. However, different groups will be affected differently by the same crisis, according to their age, gender and socio-economic position, and so on. Make sure all groups are represented, or organise separate group sessions if necessary, and triangulate information.

Be aware that people may be very uncomfortable talking about what has happened to them because they fear how other members of their community will react. In particular, women and girls who have experienced sexual violence may fear and be at risk of further victimisation from within their own community if they speak about what has happened to them.

Our perceptions of the crisis are often very different from those of the affected population, notably concerning its causes. Listen to the discussion, let people talk, and try to understand their views on the causes of the crisis. In the case of natural

disasters, this can also reveal local beliefs and traditions related to the event.

Each population group (according to age, gender, socio-economic class, livelihood, etc.) will have specific needs and priorities, leaving you with a complex picture of a multitude of needs. If only certain sections of the population are involved in the identification of needs, the process will be biased and certain groups may be excluded from the programme design. Furthermore, do not try to find a 'middle path' by attempting to define the 'average victim' who would then be entitled to receive a 'standard assistance kit'. It is important to identify group-specific needs.

### VIII.2.2 ⊕ Detailed analysis of the crisis

Once you have an overview of the effects of the crisis, it is time to go into detail, analysing the different stakeholders, local capacities and vulnerabilities, and priority needs.

#### Analysing stakeholders

A stakeholder is not necessarily an organisation. It can be a small group or even individuals, who play an important role in the community or have a stake in the potential project.

Understanding who is who in a given context serves various purposes, including:

- identifying local political dynamics, which is important with respect to protection and security issues.
- understanding who you should interact with throughout the course of the project, for coordination purposes, to seek authorisations, etc.
- identifying potential partners.

Make a comprehensive list of all stakeholders before starting to establish what the relationships are between them.

Carrying out a participatory stakeholder analysis makes it possible to understand people's perceptions of various stakeholders and how they relate to them (trust, suspicion,



collaboration). This can help to identify interest groups and networks within the population, some of whom may not be obvious or visible to outsiders.

Discussing stakeholders can raise sensitive political issues that participants may wish to evade. It is important to carry out a preliminary stakeholder analysis before doing participatory exercises, through a literature review and key informant interviews for instance, to underpin discussions.

Use various sources of information, including key informants, focus groups with different compositions and literature, to understand the political dynamics between stakeholders. Different groups will have different opinions of stakeholders (e.g. rivalries), and focus group participants can be affiliated to the stakeholders being discussed. Be careful in the way you address certain issues and triangulate information.

You can also have a biased perception. Your mandate, origin and interest will probably lead you to pay more attention to some stakeholders than others. Try to be aware of the full range of stakeholders present in a given context. This is important for your impartiality and the perception of your neutrality.

There are several ways of identifying interaction between stakeholders and understanding the perception of affected populations. Choosing the tool that best meets your needs is therefore very important and will depend on whether it is important to understand:

- Power relations between stakeholders
- Relationships of proximity and distance and the existence of networks
- The relationships between various stakeholders and the affected population
- Existing conflicts

You (as an individual and as a representative of your organisation) are also one of the stakeholders; you may need to analyse your relationship with the local population and other stakeholders, and share this with them.

Participants may be lacking information on some of the stakeholders, particularly concerning international organisations, the distinction between UN agencies and INGOs, donor agencies, etc. Do not hesitate to provide information on these institutions. Participants will most likely be very interested to learn more about organisations that are foreign to them and yet play a considerable role in their lives.

### Understanding capacities and vulnerabilities

Understanding a population's coping mechanisms and capacities and recognising local initiatives is essential in participatory approaches to humanitarian action. Designing a programme without considering what is already being done locally can undermine local capacities and lead to programmes that are of little interest to the population or that generate feelings of mistrust or frustration.

Different groups will have different sets of coping strategies, and will face different risks and opportunities. Be sure to address this diversity, for example, by carrying out separate focus groups. Again, care should be taken here as differences in vulnerabilities and capacities are likely to highlight social inequalities, and may lead to the re-emergence or exacerbation of tensions.

Make sure you do not forget marginalized groups, as they are often likely to be most vulnerable, and their exclusion from the process would bias the assessment and affect your impartiality. In situations where it is possible to have mixed groups, it is important to ensure that women and children or any unrepresented groups have an opportunity to express themselves. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to have separate focus groups.

Describing the "slope of destitution", showing the evolution of the crisis impact, and the coping mechanisms that are

*Many Afghans use the term "NGO" to designate any foreign agencies, including NGOs, UN agencies, the ICRC, donors, and even the Coalition Army's Provincial Reconstruction Teams (civil-military operations). A Venn diagram exercise carried out in a village provided the opportunity to clarify the distinction and relationships between these organisations. Village elders, who had been interacting with these organisations for years, found it very helpful to learn more about them.*

Example

**Tips and Warnings**

Some coping strategies and survival mechanisms can be illegal. Participants may be reluctant to discuss them. Also, doing so in public can be dangerous for participants or can lead to tension or conflict.

subsequently put in place, is a useful exercise, in particular when the impacts of the crisis are felt over a long period and evolve over time (see figure 5).

In order to understand needs and demands, it is necessary to analyse previously collected information. This will allow you to identify the needs that the population is unable to meet.

The fundamental purpose of an assessment is to acquire a 'holistic' view of the problems the population faces, and the needs that arise from these problems. However, there are a number of biases and challenges involved in identifying problems which need to be taken into consideration:

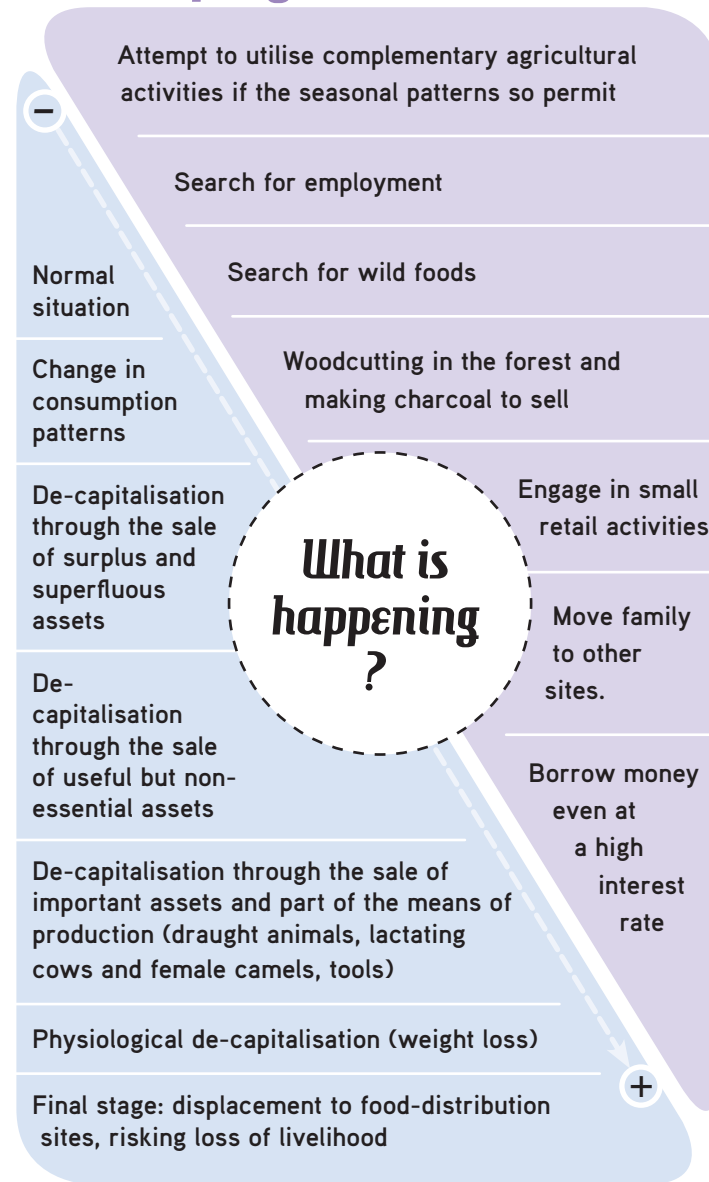
- differences in how needs are perceived by various stakeholders
- the distinction between expressed needs and non-expressed needs
- the distinction between structural, chronic needs and those that have been created by the crisis

**'Real needs' versus 'perceived needs'**

Your perception of needs is likely to differ from that of the population, as illustrated by Figure 5. The population may highlight certain problems that seem trivial or non-problematic. Likewise, you may perceive certain things to be a problem whereas they are not perceived as such by participants. For example, a common disease may be considered 'normal' or explained by cultural and religious beliefs, whereas a cure may be easily available. Discussion can help increase the overlap between real needs, the needs perceived by the population and those perceived by the agency.

A range of different factors influence how people perceive need. For people directly affected by a crisis, their culture and religion, their livelihoods and their perception of the environment may be the driving factors when expressing their needs. Their experience during the crisis and any previous

**Coping mechanisms**



**Slope of destitution**

Figure 5  
Example of a slope of destitution and associated coping mechanisms in an agro-pastoral population in the Horn of Africa.

experience of humanitarian aid will also play a role in how they express their needs. A typical scenario is that a population will express a need for medical care when visited by a medical organisation; for water or latrines when visited by a public health organisation, and so on. People will often articulate their needs according to what they know, or think, you can provide.

Similarly, a range of factors can influence how a humanitarian organisation perceives a population's needs: their culture, mandate and specific area of expertise may lead them to perceive every crisis as a 'medical crisis' or 'public health crisis'. Donor and media pressure can also have a great influence on how needs are perceived.

### Expressed needs and unexpressed needs

Some needs may not be expressed, either because participants do not perceive them as needs, do not think they can be met, or because they are embarrassed or do not

dare to do so. For example, women may feel embarrassed to talk about needs relating to menstruation or people may not want to talk about HIV and AIDS. It is important to have a balanced assessment team, which should always include a woman. It may also be necessary to use euphemisms in order to talk about particularly stigmatising issues – for example, talking about the impact of chronic illness without actually using the term HIV or AIDS.

Furthermore, people may have expectations that they do not express. For example, if you work for a health organisation, they may expect you to address all medical problems. Try to be aware of what populations expect from you. Make sure you explain what you can and cannot do to avoid future frustration and disappointment

### Example

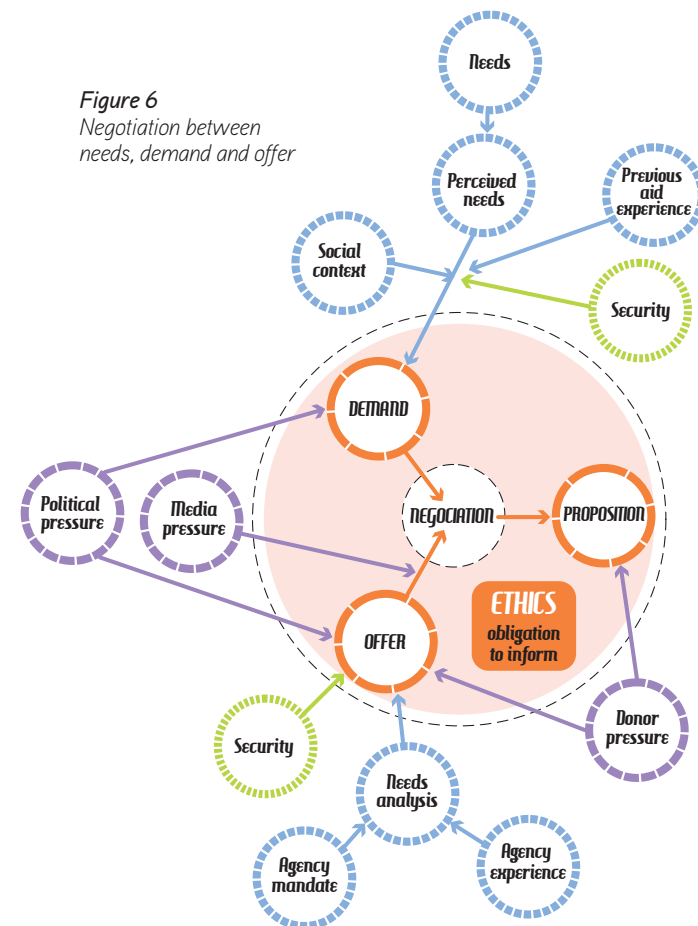
*In Haiti, people who were resettling in a new area used materials that had been distributed for building a school to build a big wall at the back of the village instead. The aid organisation responsible for the school programme was concerned about this 'diversion' of aid. But when the field teams discussed this with members of the population, they realised that there was a large cemetery behind the village. The population felt haunted by the spirits and this was the source of much tension, distress and illness. Once the wall between the village and the cemetery was built, the living conditions in the village greatly improved as the population felt safer and comforted.*

If you have identified problems which have not been expressed by participants, present them for discussion. Try to do so in a way that does not bias the discussion towards your concerns only or that imposes a subject considered of small importance by participants.

### Prioritising problems

It is unlikely that an aid organisation will have adequate resources to respond to all needs. Therefore, the next step is to establish priorities among the problems to be

Figure 6  
Negotiation between needs, demand and offer



addressed. This is not an easy exercise, as a population is rarely homogeneous, and is generally composed of groups and individuals with diverging interests and priorities. Your own perception of needs may be different - sometimes very different - from that of the population you are dealing with: an agency's expertise, experience, financial independence will also bias the process

The process of reaching agreement about priorities may entail long debate and even argument. Allow enough time for participants to discuss the various priorities, and the consequences of addressing them or not addressing them.

When population members gather to prioritise problems to be addressed, they may be convinced that the project will be implemented. If funds for the project are not yet secured, or if other constraints or factors are likely to affect the programme design (such as your technical expertise and operational capacity), be very clear that establishing priorities does not necessarily entail that they will be addressed. Clearly explain the various constraints that restrict opportunities for action and make sure that population members and representatives have understood

that though a list of priorities has been established, you will not necessarily be able to address them all.

Prioritisation entails making choices. Participants (members of the population and the aid organisation) who make and promote these choices should take responsibility for their decision.

Make sure that all participants understand the priorities that have been set, and the rationale behind these choices. Providing feedback to a large group of people is a good way of validating the choices made and ensuring that they are accepted by the population.

## VIII.3 Concluding the assessment

Just as introducing oneself at the beginning of the assessment is essential, so is concluding the process properly. Throughout the entire assessment process, you have probably raised expectations: people will have attended focus groups, seen you in meetings with their leaders, seen you walk across fields and sit in the village square. Your mere presence will have created expectations among the population and other organisations working in the area.

If you need to leave the field to design the project or if there is a delay between the assessment and design, visit local authorities, partners, and population groups you have met to present the conclusion of the work that was done collectively, and explain the next steps in the project process.

The issues that should be discussed include:

- the results of the assessment
- how different stakeholders have been involved in the process (population groups, authorities, other organisations)
- what you will presently do with the results (present results to your headquarters, seek funding possibilities, etc.)
- when you expect to return - be realistic!
- the purpose of your next visit - do you plan to do a participatory programme design or will you come for the implementation of the project?
- ways for population representatives and the aid organisation to stay in touch until a team returns

## VIII.4 Reviewing participation in the assessment

It is important to review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. The purpose of these periodic reviews

### Examples

*Aid workers in Angola were surprised by the frequency with which displaced people request assistance to build an ondjango (community meeting place), even when they appear to have other, more pressing, practical needs. Constructing an ondjango means that a community has somewhere to convene, and thus to re-establish its identity as a community (in a new place or when it returns to its old location). Dignity and identity are important considerations for an affected population after a crisis has peaked.*

is to reflect on your original motivation and objectives for using a participatory approach and to make any necessary adjustments in order to achieve these objectives.

### Who participated and how?

The following table will help you to describe how the participatory assessment was conducted, by recording who participated and how for each step of the assessment process.

STEP	WHO?	HOW?
Initiating the assessment		
Understanding the context		
Understanding the crisis and its effects		
Understanding who is who		
Understanding local strategies, capacities and vulnerabilities		
Understanding and prioritising needs		
Concluding the assessment		

In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to consider whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, that they were able to express their concerns, that the appropriate environment was provided so that they could speak openly and that they were genuinely able to participate.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the assessment. This should preferably be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

### Was participation successful?

At the very beginning of a project it is very difficult to measure whether you will achieve the objectives that you have set yourself in terms of participation. However, at this stage, you can already assess whether you are “on the right track”, and make any necessary adjustments.

Here are some of the questions you need to answer in order to judge the extent to which you have successfully used participatory methods and thus started to implement your participation approach:

- Were participants, other stakeholders or other population members exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? What measures did you take to ensure participants were not exposed to risk? Did participation help address protection and security issues?
- Did people understand your principles and mandate? Were you able to respect the principles of independence and impartiality, by being careful about whom you engaged with and communicating your principles?
- Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security problems for them?
- Have you identified local strategies and capacities that could be strengthened? Have you strengthened the capacity of local stakeholders to carry out assessments?
- Did the participatory assessment enable you to do a holistic and integrated identification of needs, based on the perceptions and priorities of different groups within the population?
- Did you identify constraints that could affect project effectiveness? Have you identified local knowledge and resources that could improve project effectiveness?
- Do you feel you have been able to establish a relationship based on mutual respect with population members and/or local stakeholders? Is this feeling shared among all concerned? Do people understand

who you are, what you have come to do and what you can and cannot do?

- Have you reviewed or adapted your priorities in accordance with the perceptions and priorities of the population? Have you been able to understand and adapt to the cultural and environmental context?
- Were local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience) used during the participatory assessment? Have you identified local resources (including time!) and expertise that could contribute to a participatory project?
- Have you identified structures that could potentially contribute to managing the project (including logistics and administrative management)?
- Were you able, through participatory exercises, to collect a considerable amount of in-depth information in a relatively short space of time and using relatively few resources? Did it take longer? Was the quality and quantity of information worth it?
- Was the assessment able to draw on lessons learned by the population and aid agency from previous aid projects?
- Has the participatory assessment allowed you to establish a clear understanding of the political context and the role and agendas of stakeholders in order to protect the future project from potential manipulation?
- Did you implement the participatory approach as planned? Are the objectives of participation being met? What adjustments are needed to improve participation in the next phase?

## Chapter 7 summary

### Participatory assessment

**1** Participation in a humanitarian response begins at the assessment phase, with the people affected by a crisis taking a leading role in identifying their own needs.

**2** Understanding how populations perceive and organise their own lives, their coping mechanisms and capacities, is essential when using participatory methods.

**3** In most cases aid organisations are not able to meet all the needs generated by a crisis and therefore have to work with the affected population to establish which priorities should be addressed.

**4** The participatory approach should be reviewed at the end of each stage of the project cycle to assess how successful it has been.



chapter 8 | **#8**  
**Participatory  
project design**

Ideally, a humanitarian response which has been designed in a participatory way should be better adapted to the needs, culture and capacities of the affected population. Participatory design ensures that existing knowledge, ideas, and experiences are taken into account, and that the operational choices make sense.

It is particularly difficult and even inappropriate to do a participatory design if you have not engaged with the people to reach a common understanding of the situation and problems to be addressed. If your assessment was not participatory, it is important to at least go over the conclusions with all the relevant stakeholders so that they have an opportunity to validate or question them.

Even where a participatory assessment has taken place, be aware that project design is an iterative process. You may have to look again at potential solutions when discussing targeting, or modify your objectives as you discuss the resources needed. You may even find that you have to refine the analysis made during the assessment, to help you and the people you are working with make decisions on the future programme.

There are certain risks involved in carrying out participatory design. Involving members of the affected population in decision-making processes, particularly regarding priorities and targeting, can increase social tension and the risk of dispute, since different parties will have different interests and priorities. As an external stakeholder, your organisation may have to play the role of mediator

When decision-making is delegated to certain individuals or structures within the population, this may put them at risk or expose them to threats from other discontented members of the population. The type of activities chosen can *de facto* exclude certain groups, and favour others already privileged in some way (e.g. training programmes with written materials can exclude illiterate individuals). However, the participation of population members in programme design can help ensure the programme does not create risks for them, but rather reinforces their protection.

When analysing and choosing among potential solutions, be careful not to be manipulated by specific interest groups (local companies, suppliers, parties to the conflict). Choices made, in terms of priority interventions, targeting, selection of partners, recruitment of staff, and even donors, can compromise your impartiality, independence and neutrality, or how these are perceived. A project which targets a marginalised group can result in further stigmatisation of its members.

This chapter will help you to understand the risks of participatory project design, and the processes to be used to ensure that it is beneficial for the people affected by the crisis and for other stakeholders, including the aid organisation.

- 1 **What** are the main motivations and objectives for doing a participatory project design?
- 2 **Who** will participate in the design process? Will you manage it? Will you work in collaboration with local stakeholders? Or will you support / integrate your activities in a project that has already been designed by local stakeholders?
- 3 **How** will the design be carried out: through meetings, or focus groups? Who will have decision-making power?

**KEY QUESTIONS**  
19:  
*Preparing your participatory project design*

The project design phase involves turning the priority problems identified during the assessment into potential programme objectives. It is a very straightforward exercise in which each 'problem statement' is turned into a 'solution statement' as illustrated in Figure 6. Do not forget to refer to the problem tree that was established during the assessment! The two exercises (problem tree / objective tree) can be done at the same time. For further guidance on turning problems into objectives, see resources on project cycle management outlined in Part 3.

## VIII.1 Designing the Project



Identifying potential project objectives and solutions is likely to raise expectations, so make sure that you continually remind participants that the programme is unlikely to respond to all the objectives listed!

Some “objective trees” may undermine participants’ motivation, if the objectives presented seem too ambitious. This may indicate that you are working at an inappropriate scale by tackling problems which are too general. Try to focus on more specific, approachable issues. Transforming problems into specific and achievable objectives is likely to mobilise participants and encourage them to take part in the project as it allows them to look ahead to an improved situation in the future.

**Tips & Warnings**  
Be imaginative! Bringing together the knowledge, experience and expertise of various stakeholders, including your agency, can encourage collective creativity. The larger the range of options considered, the more likely you are to find an appropriate solution.

### VIII.1.1 Prioritising Solutions

There is seldom only one way of solving a problem or achieving an objective. The prioritisation exercise will analyse a range of possible solutions in a given context, and identify the options that can most effectively address the stated objectives with the greatest positive impact.

The success of the project largely depends on this step, since the project objectives and implementation strategy will be defined according to the analysis made here. Choosing an inappropriate solution can lead to many difficulties in later stages. Analysing and prioritising a range of solutions collectively can help prevent this from occurring.

#### Prioritising solutions involves:

- obtaining a range of potential solutions
- analysing and comparing each solution in the light of several criteria (presented below)
- collectively establishing priorities among the potential solutions that could be retained for the project.
- identifying potential solutions

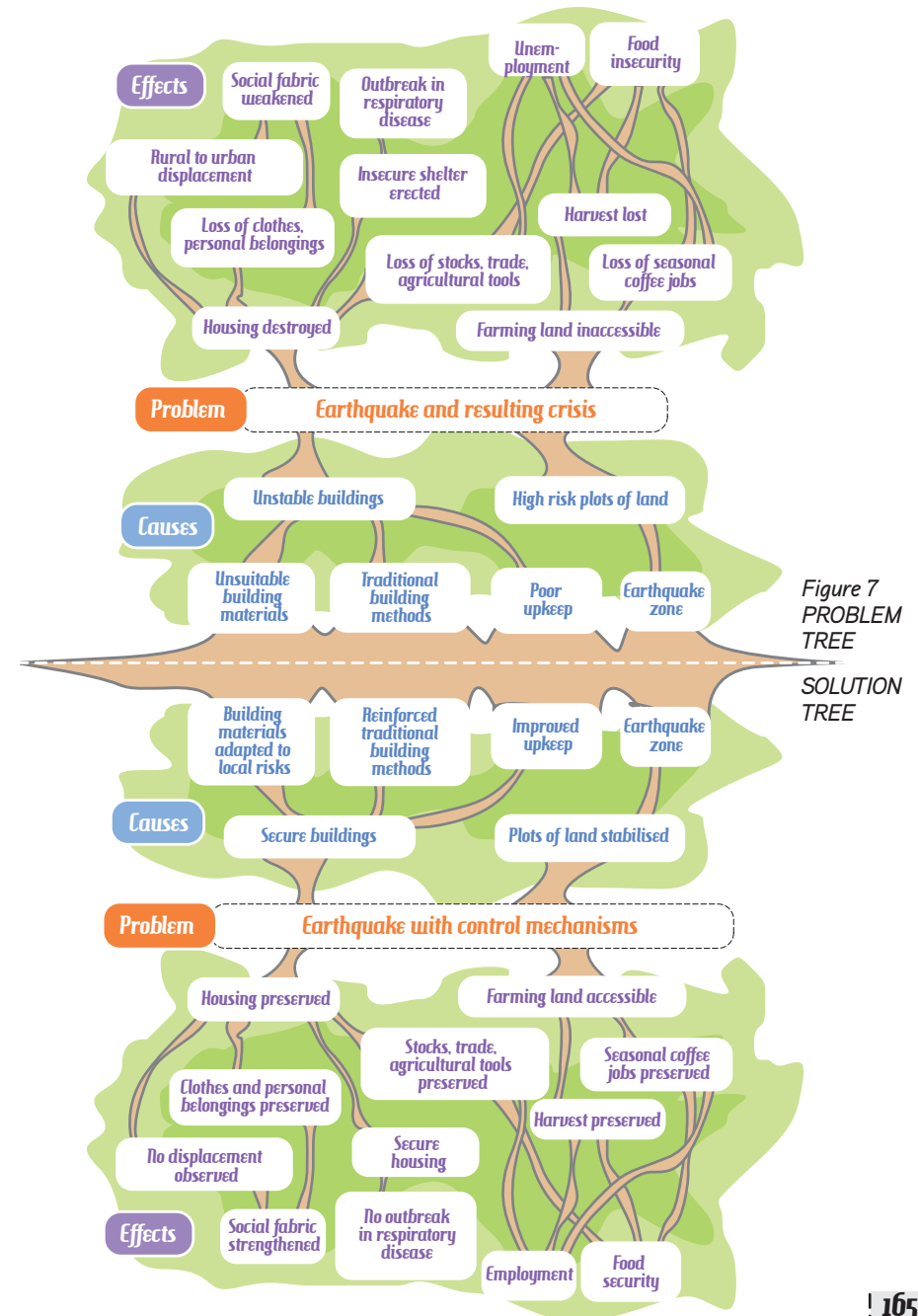


Figure 7  
PROBLEM TREE

SOLUTION TREE

Collectively establishing a list of potential solutions is a useful way to ensure that the project is relevant to real needs. The failure of many aid projects can be attributed to the use of imported solutions that are determined by the agency mandate and expertise, rather than by a careful analysis of needs, opportunities and constraints on the ground.

**You can share ideas starting with the following elements:**

- solutions that people are familiar with, some of which may have been used in the past but are no longer implemented;
- solutions that have been used by other organisations to tackle similar problems;
- solutions you have used previously;
- solutions suggested by participants;
- solutions based on an alliance of traditional and modern expertise, local and foreign techniques, etc.

**Example**

*For an agricultural rehabilitation programme in Guinée Forestière (Parrot's Beak), an aid organisation worked with Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees who had expertise in preparing land for paddy fields. Traditional techniques for paddy field preparation were then complemented with inputs from an agronomist, who helped to improve the sowing process. It was hoped that this project would also be an opportunity to transfer these skills to Guinean farmers who have little experience in paddy field cultivation.*

A great deal of local technical and organisational knowledge is often overlooked by aid organisations. Aid actors often arrive in the field with pre-packaged sets of activities and standard programme content, particularly in fast-onset emergency contexts. Showing these kit-based approaches in focus groups or any other group session can bias participants' inputs or even discourage them from sharing their ideas. Furthermore, affected populations have the most accurate knowledge of their situation. So be modest, be curious, and listen!

Sometimes addressing one problem entails working on another one. Or

the problem of one population group can entail working with another population group. Try to keep a holistic view of problems and objectives when seeking solutions. The branches of the problem and objectives trees should help you

in this regard, by illustrating the relationships between objectives.

**Analysing potential solutions**

Having established a list of solutions, you should analyse and compare them so as to select the most appropriate way to address the problem. Sometimes members of your team or members of the affected population would like to implement ideas that they have heard about or have seen in local newspapers or during visits to other areas. But the solutions may prove poorly adapted to the population's situation. Your organisation can play a role in weighing up the potential effectiveness of solutions with participants.

**Feasibility**

The first element to consider is if the solution being discussed is feasible in the light of available resources, and in the given context.

This entails estimating:

- the resources needed to implement the solution, including time, money, expertise, materials and management capacity.
- The resources that can be mobilised by the stakeholders involved (population members, aid organisation, partner institutions, etc.).
- The characteristics and constraints of a given environment.

**Complementarity with local knowledge, practices and techniques**

Failure to take into consideration local strategies and techniques, know-how and resources can lead

*Split participants into small groups, and ask them to imagine "how" they would solve a given problem. You will be surprised at how many ideas can be generated! Changing the group composition can help mix ideas and generate new ones.*

**Tips & Warnings**

**Example**

*Given the conflict and the level of displacement, civilians in Sri Lanka do not necessarily have the requisite expertise or insight to carry out projects successfully in situations where the location, soil, flora, fauna, climate and market conditions are unfamiliar and where there have been major changes in relation to commodity and labour demands. An elderly man in Kalkulam explained that a consultation process led by an agency was effective but that village inhabitants had made poor decisions, asking for goats that died due to adverse local weather conditions and pumps that they did not know how to operate.*

## Example

*In Afghanistan, villagers collectively manage the rehabilitation and maintenance of karez (underground water channels dug in the sides of mountains to procure water for irrigation networks), irrigation systems and roads. In areas where aid agencies repeatedly engaged in cash-for-work or food-for-work programmes, involving the rehabilitation of karez, irrigation networks and roads, villagers would no longer carry out this work spontaneously but would wait for an agency to propose an arrangement of this kind.*

*In one village, an elder complained: "Why do NGOs always support us in building canals. We have been doing this for centuries! They should help us in other areas for which we do not have the knowledge. Now the youth has become lazy. They do not do the work unless they receive their 50kg of wheat."*

to duplication, undermining of these strategies, loss of effectiveness, poor sustainability, and lack of interest on behalf of the population.

Collectively projecting what the potential impacts of the solution may be can contribute to the anticipation and reduction of negative impacts, and the maximisation of positive impacts.

When envisaging solutions that entail beneficiary participation in the implementation phase, be careful not to exclude those who are not able to contribute their time or labour to the programme, such as widows, single mothers and the elderly, and others (mainly women and girls) who can only contribute a limited amount of time, due to other household and caring respon-

sibilities. It is possible to find ways in which they can also benefit from, and contribute to the project.

### Sustainability of the solution

All too often, projects end up with broken and abandoned equipment (e.g. hand pumps) or buildings (e.g. empty clinics) that can lead to public health or security problems and a feeling of disappointment on all sides.

For some projects, especially those concerning water or health, sustainability rests on cost-recovery mechanisms, whereby the users contribute to the running costs of the service by paying a small fee. When envisaging a cost-recovery system, it is important to assess whether people have the means to pay, whether they are interested enough to pay for this service, and what amount of money they are willing to pay. Working with stakeholders who already have res-

possibilities and experience in these services (especially in education, water and sanitation, infrastructure and health) can provide insights on how to best ensure project sustainability.

### Prioritising solutions

Once you have carefully analysed each solution according to the criteria, the next step is to prioritise them by bringing together all the elements that were discussed, and weighing up the different criteria in relation to them. To avoid problems in later stages of the project, it is essential for this decision to be taken collectively. However, different groups will have different priorities. So do not be surprised if, at the end of the process, you find a range of priority actions, corresponding to the different population groups. At this stage, do not choose between specific groups or needs; but establish different priorities for each group, as illustrated below. The priorities established by the population may differ from those perceived by the agency. Be ready to leave the solutions you had in mind aside.

## VIII.1.2 Defining the project

Once a list of priority solutions has been established, the project strategy can be determined collectively. This step is one of the most delicate stages in the project cycle, and can be difficult to do in a participatory manner, as this is when you clearly define your commitments vis-à-vis the population.

Defining the project entails clarifying:

- the project objectives, i.e. the problem(s) that will be addressed by the project
- the results or outputs of the project
- the target group
- the activities that will be put in place to achieve the project results
- the resources needed to put these activities in place

- who will do what and who will contribute what
- the institutional set-up, management and communication strategies.

## Tips & Warnings

*When making these decisions, remember to take into consideration the strategies of other aid organisations and stakeholders, to ensure that they do not clash.*

Involving crisis-affected populations in this process is a powerful team-building exercise and an effective way of mobilising participants. It is essential that each party's contribution (families, leaders, local structures, NGOs) is established early in the design phase through negotiation and dialogue. In the case of a participatory project, this also includes determining how the population and local stakeholders will participate in the project implementation, and who implements what.

Humanitarian projects need to be flexible and responsive to often fast-changing situations. This is particularly the case in a participatory project, when inputs from various stakeholders can make project implementation a very dynamic process. Try to allow for flexibility in the project design, to facilitate adjustments and to avoid being tied to fixed operational methods. You may wish to discuss with participants how the situation might evolve over the next few months, establish different hypotheses and scenarios, and different strategies accordingly (e.g. plan A, plan B).

### Defining objectives and results

The project **objective**, or its key aim, is what that project intends to have achieved by the end of its implementation. For example, that people affected by an earthquake in region X have their basic needs covered for 6 months.

The **results** are what has been achieved once the activities have been carried out. For example if a water point is set up, the **result** might be that people have adequate safe water or if tents, plastic sheeting, mats, and blankets are distributed, the **result** should be that people have adequate shelter, even if providing particular inputs will not necessarily result in the expected outputs and results. The population's basic needs are met when a certain number of such results are achieved.

It is important, first, to decide what the objectives of the project are, then, what results are necessary to achieve this objective, and finally, what activities will give the desired results. This is called the project logic, and more information about this planning process can be found in resources on project cycle management in Part 4. One of the reasons for planning in this way is to make sure that organisations do not repeat the same standard activities in each situation regardless of actual needs. The participation of affected people is one way of ensuring that this is achieved.

Defining objectives and results involves selecting one or more of the priority solutions. This should be done with a broad range of stakeholders. Given that different population groups will have different priorities and will benefit differently from each solution, defining the project's objectives and results is also a way of choosing the target group. This point is discussed in the next section.

By defining the project's overall and specific objectives, you are making a form of commitment. Expectations therefore need to be managed with care and you need to be clear about the limits of what you are able to do. Explain that there are still numerous procedures to follow before the project can be implemented and many constraints to overcome to achieve the stated objectives.

Specific interest groups may attempt to influence the formulation of objectives and results. Be careful about who participates in the project design. Analysing and prioritising potential solutions in a systematic way (as described in the previous section) is one way of protecting the design phase from such manipulation.

Often there is a loss of momentum between the assessment/design phases, when there is collective enthusiasm, and the implementation stage, when the challenges to be overcome and the commitments to be made become reality. It is important, therefore, to be both realistic and pragmatic.

In addition to the services rendered to the population, your project may have other objectives, such as protecting women who are at risk from violence, or setting up a base in an area

where human rights are regularly breached. If, for whatever reason, you are unable to mention these objectives in the project description, your team must be made aware of them, so that they can take these issues into account when defining project objectives and results. If you can not be completely transparent, you should at least be able to justify this to yourselves.

Choose the design team carefully: when identifying solutions in the previous step, you may have identified stakeholders that could play a key role in the project. Be sure they participate in the design process.

### VIII.1.3 Targeting

Related to the definition of objectives and results, is the definition of the **target group** - the group who will directly benefit from the project. 'Macro-level' targeting (such as the choice of provinces or villages) will already have been done much earlier in the process, often before the assessment has even taken place.

Targeting is one of the most sensitive steps in the project cycle, one where the cross-cutting issues of security and protection, discrimination, and the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence must be carefully taken into consideration.

It is therefore important to share with the population, local authorities and other stakeholders the four main considerations that lie behind the targeting process:

- the need to be as efficient as possible in alleviating suffering (to have a real impact with available assistance);
- the need to work within resource constraints;
- the need to ensure that the most vulnerable people are assisted; and
- the need to make sure the aid does not have any distorting effects

Participatory targeting aims to ensure an optimal level of culturally acceptable equality and to limit possible security incidents, while trying to respect the overall programme objective.

Targeting also involves addressing the difficult question of coverage. Will you aim to cover as large a group or area as possible, or focus on a smaller group but improve the quality of the service provided? This question can be discussed collectively, by clearly explaining to participants the limits of your capacity.

#### The targeting process involves two steps

1. The participatory definition of targeting criteria
2. Communicating about the targeting process

#### Participatory definition of targeting criteria

The identification of criteria is a complex and very sensitive exercise. The vision and experience of an aid agency may not correspond to potential beneficiaries' understanding of aid. Defining the targeting criteria can, therefore, create a great deal of tension between the agency and the population. Transparency and communication are the best tools to avoid this. Bringing people together to make decisions on prioritisation and targeting can be an effective way of resolving this challenge openly, thus preventing tension and disputes.

#### Physical targeting

Many humanitarian projects, notably in health and nutrition, target groups defined by physical criteria, such as children whose weight-for-height is under 80% of the median, or pregnant and lactating women, etc.

Population members usually have little say in the definition of these criteria, which

*Targeting is often not socially acceptable, especially in societies where the social contract is based on the notion that those who have should share with those who don't. In such contexts, it is not unusual to see people sharing what they have received a few hundred meters from the distribution site. Socio-cultural sensitivity is therefore crucial in this exercise.*

Example

*In Colombia, an aid organisation started distributing hygiene kits in a village of Bojaya, without having communicated its targeting criteria to community members. Furthermore, they failed to include a group of vulnerable families in the distribution (notably elderly people). The population considered the organisation's behaviour disrespectful and refused its assistance.*

Example

#8

Design

are generally determined by fixed health protocols. In such cases, it is important to explain the rationale behind the criteria or to review the targeting process when the criteria are socially unacceptable. This would be necessary, for example, if malnourished children were being targeted for food rations in contexts where food was usually shared amongst all the members of a family. Another example would be to target pregnant women for nutritional assistance in contexts where women and girls are expected to eat after male members of the family. Balancing respect for local norms with effective programming in such contexts is by no means simple. Involving men in setting the targeting criteria is one way of getting them to 'buy into' it.

### Economic targeting

Economic targeting involves the establishment of criteria on the basis of economic vulnerability. Wealth-ranking and proportional piling exercises can be useful for this. Be sure to take into account local criteria for wealth and vulnerability, as they are likely to differ from your perceptions and definitions.

### Social targeting

Another way of proceeding is to target particular social groups, such as single women with children. But this is also a sensitive matter. Social targeting may lead to resistance from powerful members of society and cause difficulties for

the targeted group. It is important, therefore, when targeting a specific social group, not to isolate it, but to work with other groups with which it is in contact. Working with children, for instance, involves co-operating with parents, teachers and religious and community leaders.

Failing to establish criteria *with* the population can lead to discontent and even to security problems for the aid organisation. But experience has shown that handing over the process entirely to the affected population can cause serious

problems. As an external actor, the most appropriate role for you in a participatory targeting process is that of mediator and facilitator.

Targeting marginalised groups can further stigmatise them. When marginalised people are due to be targeted by a programme, they should, at the very least, be consulted about how this should be done.

The targeting process can have major consequences for social relations: it can increase the relative importance of a group, it can increase the legitimacy of leaders involved in the project vis-à-vis the beneficiaries or it can increase targeted people's sense of responsibility in relation to project implementation.

If you are working with the same population you worked with in the assessment phase, you can use the results of exercises carried out during the assessment (e.g. wealth-ranking, proportional piling, mapping) to support the definition of targeting criteria.

### Communication about the targeting process

The targeting process should be highly transparent; the selection criteria and details of who will benefit from the programme should be circulated widely using various means. Redress and sanction mechanisms should also be discussed and established as part of the participatory process.

In some situations, once actual beneficiaries have been selected, social control mechanisms can be used in the project implementation phase to ensure that targeting procedures are respected. Such mechanisms, which function on the basis of peer pressure, require that beneficiaries and members of the

*Organise a meeting on targeting with members of the affected population and other key stakeholders. Ask them to consider the following questions in order to help define target groups:*

- *Why is targeting being used?*
  - *Who will be targeted? (Identification of targeting criteria)*
  - *How should the targeted families be informed?*
- *How should the frustration of non-targeted families be dealt with?*
- *How should complaints be managed?*
- *How should social pressure and the risk of incorrect attribution be dealt with?*

## Tips & Warnings

## Example

*Some programmes in Sri Lanka targeted widows. However, the term 'widow' in the Tamil language implies 'that which is inauspicious and pitiable'. As a result, any assertion of self-will or display of self-confidence by these women was squashed from the very beginning. Women in some instances refused this classification.*

population know what they are entitled to and why, and how they are supposed to go about getting it.

This information can be shared using a variety of channels:

- Notice boards
- Public meetings
- Distribution of leaflets
- Posters
- Public media: radio shows, newspapers, magazines etc.

## Tips & Warnings

*Large meetings to present the results of the various exercises used to define the targeting criteria (proportional piling, wealth-ranking, mapping exercises, etc.), and to explain the rationale behind the targeting process are a good way of discussing questions and complaints openly, and of reducing the likelihood of tension at later stages.*

Your choice of information sharing mechanisms (including the language(s) used) is the key to ensuring transparency. It is vital that information is not controlled by only a few individuals or groups. You should expect some claims and complaints as even the most effective targeting process will exclude some potential recipients.

### VIII.1.4 Defining activities and identifying the resources needed

Activities are the tasks that should be carried out to produce the desired results and therefore achieve the stated objectives. A project work plan should be defined with the relevant stakeholders. This should specify the resources required to implement each activity, who provides which resources and who does what.

Coordination with other organisations and local initiatives is particularly important at this stage, especially when defining the kind of participation which will take place during the implementation phase. This is both to ensure you do not undermine others' activities, and that your project will not be weakened by others' strategies.

Participatory activities, such as capacity building, also require resources such as time, training and specific skills. This is true for both population members and aid workers. Do not forget to plan for these.

## Defining who does what and who contributes what

How the affected population and local stakeholders will participate in project implementation should be decided during the design phase. Questions to be addressed include:

- Who will participate in the implementation of the project?
- Will members of the affected population such as the project's direct beneficiaries, people close to the target group (e.g. parents of targeted children), local leaders or representatives designated by beneficiaries participate directly?
- Will participation be indirect, via organisations that represent the affected population in some way: local NGOs, CBOs, government institutions, etc.?
- Will participation take place through existing committees, or will new committees be established? Who will sit on them, and how will they be managed?
- Will external stakeholders participate, such as service providers and sub-contracted organisations, and what will their role be?
- Which activities will be carried out by whom?
- What will be the material contributions of each stakeholder?
- Who will participate in decision-making processes and how?

Make sure that population members and stakeholders have a genuine will and desire to participate. In some cases, their participation is almost imposed upon them by the aid organisation – or can be perceived as such – particularly if people feel the aid is conditional on their acceptance. During the process, ask yourself who really decides how people will participate?

**Example**  
*In Guinée Forestière, an NGO had been running a project to create paddy fields, where the land was prepared by members of the population. When other organisations arrived in the area and started carrying out the same activity, but without the population's participation, the project fell through.*

## Example

*A habitat project implemented in El Salvador had as its objective the re-building of houses damaged or destroyed in the 2001 earthquake. The project also aimed to encourage the population to participate in the workshops, building activities and sourcing of building materials. However, these activities were scheduled at harvest time, which led to delays and prompted some participants to withdraw.*

Do members of the population and local stakeholders have the capacity (in terms of time, material resources, know-how, etc.) to participate? What effects will participation have upon them, what sacrifices will they have to make with regard to their other activities, notably economic and social activities?

Individuals play a key role in determining the success of operations. But it is often the same individuals who are involved in several initiatives. Be careful not to overburden those who are already most active in the community!

How will the timing of the project affect the ability of the population to participate and what will be the consequences for their own activities?

When planning to work with committees for project implementation (e.g. refugee committees, water committees, etc.) make sure not to impose a structure that is foreign and which will not be embraced by the participants. It is important that these committees have good relationships with and strong legitimacy among the target group.

If you are working in partnership with another organisation, it is essential to manage this process together. It may be preferable to work with a small group and then communicate the decisions made and their rationale to other population members.

The implementation strategy should specify how project implementation will be managed and the mechanisms which will ensure effective collaboration between stakeholders.

### Decision-making and project management

It is important to specify who will have decision-making power. If members of the population are expected to partake in decisions throughout the project, how will this be done?

The project design should stipulate who is responsible for overall project management and which organisations are to be closely involved. For instance, it may be necessary to work closely with local authorities. It is necessary to establish how this relationship will be maintained while the project is being implemented.

In some cases, setting a joint steering committee composed of various stakeholder representatives may be an effective way of ensuring joint management.

### Defining responsibilities

Central to collaboration is regular communication, between all stakeholders (affected populations, partner organisations, local authorities, etc.). Defining lines of communication (who communicates what to whom) and communication mechanisms (regular meetings, village assemblies, notice boards, etc.) is therefore an essential aspect of project management.

Having defined who does what and who will contribute what, and having assigned specific responsibilities, it is important to make sure the agreement is clear to everyone involved. This can take the form of a contract. Contracts can be oral, in which case it is important to have witnesses, but putting an agreement in writing can help avoid or solve future disputes.

### Setting up the monitoring system

In the design phase, you also need to design your participatory monitoring system. You should first clarify the purpose of monitoring and then define criteria and indicators, monitoring methods and ways of integrating feedback into the project design. At a later stage you may need to make some adjustments to your method, timetable, etc. especially if considerable time has lapsed between the design and implementation phases. This also provides an opportunity to remind everyone of the purpose of monitoring.

The monitoring process must be explained to the population, including the purpose of the exercise, who is responsible for monitoring the different aspects of the project, what



monitoring activities will be carried out, how these results are integrated into the project design and the impact that this may have on project activities and beneficiaries.

For details on participatory monitoring, see Chapter 9.

### VIII.1.5 Closing the design phase

The last step of the design process includes the following:

- presenting and validating all the choices made concerning the future project with affected population members and relevant stakeholders
- writing up and finalising the project document
- communicating about the next steps to be taken before the implementation phase, notably the resource mobilisation process.
- creating a forum where all elements of the programme can be presented and discussed with a broad section of the affected population

It is rare for an aid organisation to present a project design to the people affected by a crisis in a public forum. However, this has been shown on several occasions to be a powerful tool which helps to create a sense of common purpose and establish mutual respect between the agency and the affected population and mobilises participants for project implementation.

Participatory design processes require transparency. At the end of this phase, you will have generated expectations, even more so than during the assessment. Be sure to keep population members and other stakeholders informed about the resource mobilisation process, notably when long drawn-out procedures with donors are underway.

It is important to make sure that participants (including the aid organisation) who were involved in the design phase and made a commitment to participate in the project are fully aware of what this implies!

If you need to leave the field to seek funding and mobilise resources, be sure to communicate to the population the amount of time this will take and the constraints you might encounter. All too often, humanitarian organisations come across populations that feel let down because they are still waiting for a response from another project that failed to materialise and that failed to communicate sufficiently as to why resources were not forthcoming.

If the project document is written, it can be useful to show or provide a copy of the document to population representatives and to go over it with them. This can be useful for future reference, notably when initiating the implementation phase, as proof of the terms of agreement and commitments that were made by the various parties.

If you are working with partner organisations that are now in direct contact with the population, you need to ensure that they have the tools and capacities to communicate correctly and transparently about how the fund raising situation is evolving and the steps to come.

It is important to review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. The purpose of these periodic reviews is to reflect on your original motivation and objectives for using a participatory approach and to make any necessary adjustments in order to achieve these objectives.

#### Who participated and how?

The following table will help you to describe how the participatory assessment was conducted, by recording who participated and how for each step of the assessment process.

## VIII.2 Reviewing participation during the project design

STEP	WHO?	HOW?
Initiating the project design		
Transforming problems into objectives		
Prioritising solutions		
Defining the project		
Defining the monitoring system		
Closing the design phase		

In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to consider whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, that they were able to express their concerns, that the appropriate environment was provided so that they could speak openly and that they were genuinely able to participate.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the assessment. This should preferably be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

#### Was participation successful?

- Were participants, other stakeholders, or other population members exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? What measures did you take to ensure participants were not exposed to risk?
- Were you able to be independent, neutral and impartial, by being careful about who you engaged with and the manner you communicated with them?
- Did people understand your principles and mandate, and did they help you to identify ways of integrating and respecting these in the project design? Do you feel that people understand who you are, what you have come to do and what you can and cannot do?

- Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security problems for them?
- Does the project aim to support local strategies and capacities? If so, which ones, and how? How have you incorporated capacity building in the project objectives and activities? Have you, through the design process, contributed to strengthening the capacity of local stakeholders in the preparation of a project design?
- What measures are being taken, in the project, to avoid or reduce potential negative impacts? Did participation help address protection and security issues during the design phase? How will they be taken into consideration in the project?
- Has the input of local people helped to ensure project relevance, by taking into consideration context-specific issues, needs and their origin, and local strategies and priorities?
- Has the input of local people helped to find ways of overcoming constraints that could affect project effectiveness? How will local knowledge and resources improve project effectiveness?
- Do you feel you have been able to establish a relationship based on mutual respect with population members and/or local stakeholders? Is this feeling shared among all concerned?
- How will the project be integrated in local strategies and networks? Is there potential for synergy and, if so, how will this be incorporated into the project? How will the project avoid undermining or duplicating existing interventions?
- Have you reviewed or adapted your priorities in accordance with the perceptions and priorities of the population? Has input by participants helped to identify ways of making the project flexible?

- Does the project allow for flexibility during implementation, so that adjustments can be made in response to changes in the context and stakeholder feedback?
- How will local stakeholders contribute to the project during its implementation (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience)? Were they involved in defining the project strategy in order to increase their motivation? Have you ensured that they have the capacity to contribute effectively?
- How will responsibility for project management be shared? How are each partner's strengths and weaknesses combined to achieve optimal project management?
- Have participants' inputs helped to identify ways of improving project efficiency (e.g. time-effectiveness, cost-effectiveness), for example, by identifying resources and techniques that can be mobilised or purchased locally?
- Was the participatory design able to draw on lessons learned by the population and aid agency from previous aid projects?
- Did the project design phase involve mutual learning (e.g. when collectively analysing potential solutions)?
- Have participants' contributions helped to find ways of protecting the future project from potential manipulation?
- Did you implement the participation strategy as planned? If not, why not? Are the objectives of participation being met? Why/why not?
- How can you review the strategy and communication techniques accordingly for the next project cycle phase? What means could you put in place to help improve participation in the next phases (e.g. training, change in team composition, etc.)?

## Chapter 8 summary

### Participatory project design

**1** Participatory project design can help make projects more effective, efficient and appropriate.

**2** Projects are more relevant when crisis-affected populations help define the solutions to their needs and when their own actions and capacity is taken into account.

**3** Aid organisations cannot meet everyone's needs. Defining targeting criteria with the affected population itself helps reduce potential conflict and increases transparency and accountability.

**4** Participatory monitoring of a project not only ensures that it is being implemented properly, but also that it can be adapted in response to changing situations.

**5** Implementing a participatory approach requires regular reviewing of how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle.



#9

chapter 9

# Participatory implementation and monitoring

#9  
Implementation

The implementation and monitoring of humanitarian aid projects is a vast subject. This section does not, therefore, attempt to be all-encompassing. Instead, it focuses on activities that are common to many humanitarian projects.

Most aspects of a participatory implementation and monitoring process will have been planned during the design phase. In particular, the roles and contributions of members of the population, of any partners and of your aid organisation, should have been collectively discussed and decided. It is very difficult, and even disrespectful, to expect people to participate in a project when they have not been able to contribute to the design process. Without their involvement in the project design, people are less likely to be interested in participating, and may feel angry or resentful towards the aid agency (which in itself can have security implications).

Humanitarian projects rarely go exactly according to plan and situations are always subject to change, sometimes very suddenly, therefore monitoring is very important. Members of the population, however, are seldom genuinely involved in the monitoring process. Participatory monitoring is essential to support good communication and relationships between all stakeholders and to make necessary adjustments to the project in a timely manner.

Transferring resources to local organisations can put them under pressure or can make them the targets of parties to a conflict. Monitoring can highlight problems related to mismanagement or abuse, as well as errors in the initial design or difficulties that were not taken into account.

Participation in implementation and monitoring can help identify security and protection issues (e.g. human rights violations, gender-based violence, etc.) and can contribute to better security for both the participants in the project, and the aid organisation itself.

Although participatory implementation and monitoring has clear benefits, there are also a number of potential negative factors to which you should remain alert. If the project is being implemented with or through a local partner, local

hierarchies and socio-political dynamics can reinforce and perpetuate existing patterns of discrimination. The type of activities chosen can *de facto* exclude certain groups, and favour others already privileged in some way. The views of minorities and marginalised groups can be overlooked during the monitoring process if, for example, they are unable to attend community assemblies or meetings in public places. Some groups may attempt to manipulate the monitoring process in order to orientate the project in ways that benefit them, at the expense of other groups.

Participation often entails working with existing structures or supporting the establishment of new institutions or social entities. These activities are rarely without political consequence. Different population groups may perceive an intervention in different ways: some may consider that it supports a particular group, thus demonstrating partiality or political affiliation.

- 1 What are the main motivations and objectives for engaging with populations in project implementation and monitoring?
- 2 How will the implementation and monitoring be carried out? What tasks does it entail?
- 3 Who will do what? How are responsibilities distributed among the different stakeholders?

**KEY QUESTIONS 20:**  
*La préparation de la mise en œuvre et du suivi participatifs*

When the project is ready to be implemented, some time will have passed since the design phase. The situation may have evolved and participants' needs may have changed, so it may be helpful to hold a meeting or event to remind everyone of the key project components. Reviewing project content with stakeholders and members of the population ensures that everyone is 'on board' and that there are no misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations.

## IX.1 Implementing the project

It is important to discuss whether or not the project strategy is still valid in light of changes in the situation. If there are real discrepancies between the planned project and the current situation, discuss potential changes that could be made to the project, bearing in mind the resources available.

Important issues that should be discussed include:

- project content and strategy
- commitments made by the various stakeholders
- responsibilities of each stakeholder
- implementation procedures including the work plan

It may be difficult to discuss potential changes to the project at this stage. There is a risk of entering into a new round of negotiations - including with donors - which can be very time consuming. However, if the situation has drastically changed, reviewing the project may be the only way of ensuring that it meets real needs in an appropriate manner.

When meeting with stakeholders to review the project you will need to bring the project document - if possible, the same document that was discussed when closing the design phase - and other documents such as contract agreements, as these common references can help resolve disputes over what was agreed.

Between the project design and implementation phases, all the parties involved (partner agencies, members of the population, etc.) should have started mobilising the resources they made a commitment to provide during the project design and negotiation phase. For the aid agency, this essentially entails mobilising donor funds, technical expertise, materials, etc. For local partners and/or population members, this can be financial resources, labour, and/or materials.

It is important for each party to inform the others about how the resource mobilisation

process is progressing before launching the implementation. Failing to do so, especially when resources are not mobilised according to the planned time frame, can lead to a breakdown of trust before the project has even begun.

When population members, in particular, project beneficiaries, made a commitment to contribute materials and/or labour during the design phase, the questions to address at this point include:

- Do they have the capacity to fulfil their commitments?
- Has their situation changed so that they are no longer able to provide the resources?
- If they are having difficulties, how can the project be adapted to support them?

There is a tendency for all stakeholders to be very enthusiastic and ambitious when designing a project, leading to a tendency to promise (and expect!) too much. There is often a loss of momentum over the course of the project implementation phase. It is better to not be too ambitious, and to achieve what you set out to achieve rather than to aim too high and create disappointment on all sides.

It is crucial that the aid organisation also fulfils its commitments to the population. Failing to do so can lead to disappointment, loss of trust, and even security incidents. If it is not able to do so, it is crucial that it explains the reasons for this.

### IX.1.1 Managing human resources

The first step in project implementation is establishing the general management framework and relationships between the stakeholders involved. This should have been defined as part of the project strategy and is now put into practice during the implementation phase.

This involves reviewing the terms of the contracts that have been made between various stakeholders, such as between partners and between the aid organisation and

## Tips & Warnings

*Negotiation with potential donors or with the aid organisation's HQ, can lead to changes being made to the project design that was agreed with members of the population. It is important to communicate these changes to the population and provide a rationale for them or people may think you are trying to 'cheat' them, by making changes behind their back.*

## Examples

1. Following the earthquakes in Nahrin, Afghanistan, aid organisations launched shelter reconstruction programmes, introducing earthquake mitigation techniques into the design. While the aid agencies provided technical supervision and wooden beams for roofs, beneficiaries were expected to build their homes in accordance with these earthquake mitigation techniques, make bricks and gather stones.

Having been enthusiastic during the assessment phase, by the implementation stage, some beneficiaries were experiencing difficulty in making bricks or gathering stones. Furthermore, others were too busy earning a living to take part in the construction work. The situation was particularly difficult for households with no able-bodied men. Tension and anger rose, as autumn drew near. People's main concern was to finish their shelter using traditional techniques – walls made of dried mud and straw (highly vulnerable to earthquakes) – in order to be protected from the cold. This was a very difficult situation for the agencies to manage.

2. There is solid evidence from the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan that relying on male family members to rebuild homes massively reduced cash in the economy as the men would normally have been working overseas and sending back remittances.

3. A community in Guinée Forestière had agreed to receive a population of refugees. It laid down conditions that were included in the agreement signed between the UNHCR and district authorities on issues such as use of water points and the health centre. The agreement also set out the obligations of the villagers, such as the amount of land to be made available for the refugee camp and for how long.

However, the camp remained in place much longer than was originally planned. The villagers were very bitter about this, saying "At first, they came to talk to us, the elders, they even carried out sacrifices in our sacred forests (...) then they broke their promises (...) very few of our requests have been granted." Better communication and involvement of the villagers as the situation evolved could have reduced the resentment on the part of the villagers.

relevant authorities (traditional leaders, elders, government institutions, etc.). The roles and responsibilities of each party in terms of project management and supervision should be clearly set out and understood.

Many participatory projects rest on the establishment of committees for the implementation phase, such as steering committees for overall management, or water committees, community health worker teams, refugee committees, etc. This is the point at which the members of the committee should be identified and a working agenda should be decided. Be careful not to impose forms of organisation that are foreign to the local population as this can lead to lack of ownership, and hinder the integration of committees in the population. When possible, it can be useful to work through existing networks.

In order to get the best results, remember to listen to unrepresented groups. Create a space in which they can express themselves in a way that protects them and does not expose them to further stigmatisation, and make sure that you listen 'to all sides', e.g. by conducting a variety of focus groups and interviews in a variety of areas.

Create a space for 'unofficial' discussions. Sometimes relevant information regarding your project will only surface during informal chats.

If you are working directly with members of the population, it is important that:

- the person(s) acting as an intermediary with the population should be clearly identified
- the group or assembly that the agency deals with is clearly identified (council of elders, village assembly, etc)

It is particularly important to clearly define who will be responsible for supervising each aspect of the project implementation.

**Tips & Warnings**

*A variety of communication methods can be used, including regular meetings, notice boards, announcements, etc. Generally, the most effective means of communication are those suggested by the population. Be aware that certain means will exclude particular groups: the illiterate if it is a written medium; women if it is in public spaces where they have restricted access; ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, etc.*

**Example**

*In Albadariah refugee camp (Guinée Forestière), the UNHCR and NGOs use a radio system to communicate with refugees. Zone leaders (selected among refugees) are supplied with radios and given information about distribution days and times, for example. Though this is an effective communication method, it is rarely used for transferring information back from refugees to humanitarian agencies. Establishing technical means of communication is one thing. Using them in a participatory manner is another.*

**IK.1.2 ⊕ Communication**

Poor communication is the main source of tension and conflict between parties, so make sure that there is agreement amongst all parties about lines of communication (e.g. meetings, reporting, etc.) and that they are clear and function according to plan.

This includes communication:

- within the agency
- directly with project beneficiaries and members of the population
- between partners
- with relevant authorities and stakeholders
- between the aid agency/agencies and representatives of the population

The means of communication should be culturally acceptable, effective and accessible to the whole population. Pay special attention to language, the way in which the information is being presented, where and how often information is circulated and the amount of detail that is supplied.

Information is a source of power - make sure the right information is provided to those concerned, and that certain individuals or population

groups are not excluded from the project process through lack of information.

The means of communication that you select can give the impression that you are taking sides politically in relation to the crisis. For example, organisations displaying information in local administrative offices may well be seen as allies of

the local administration. Be careful about where and how your information is circulated, especially in conflict or post-conflict situations.

Lines of communication should be clear for all those involved in the project, especially representatives of the population and beneficiaries, so that they know who they can speak to.

**IK.1.3 ⊕ Recruiting and organising the project team**

Putting together the project team is an essential step since the quality of the relationship that is established between the team and the population can determine the success of a project.

The high staff turnover that is commonplace in international aid organisations can reduce participation levels in a project by weakening cohesion between team members and the population. Organisations looking to promote staff loyalty must be prepared to invest in or encourage the project team, especially national staff members and those with participatory skills.

When recruiting team members, you need to ensure that people are well informed about the skills you are looking for, such as participatory skills, and the ability to listen to and communicate with the population. Speaking the population's language can go a long way towards facilitating dialogue and establishing a relationship of trust, and should be valued in potential staff members.

**IK.1.4 ⊕ Managing project resources: setting up the logistical and administrative system**

The administrative system covers the management of funds, cash flows, purchases and accounts. The logistical system includes stock management, transport, vehicles

*When you have put together your project team, providing training on participation techniques can be a good way of sensitising them to the basics of participation and ensuring that all staff share a common approach.*

**Tips & Warnings**



and their maintenance, buildings and their maintenance, etc. Together they cover the management of all the resources mobilised for the project.

Transparent and effective logistical and administrative management are essential to a project's success. They are also essential ingredients for trust and motivation: if one party is seen as wasting resources or as not being sufficiently accountable, it can create tension and even conflict.

In some situations it may be more appropriate for international staff or outsiders to take responsibility for the logistical and administrative system for the following reasons:

- giving responsibility for resource management to members of the population can increase their exposure to looting and violence
- accusations of nepotism, corruption, theft, and profit making are common in any social group, due to individual rivalries and underlying conflict. Giving an outsider the responsibility for these resources can defuse such accusations
- members of the local population are more likely to be subject to pressure from relatives, influential members of the population, etc. to use the resources for other purposes.

The transparency of the system should be ensured by clearly explaining to stakeholders how resources are managed. For example, members of the population can be invited to witness how certain procedures are implemented (e.g. how a tendering process is won, how stock safety is ensured, etc.). Involving the population in logistics management, such as stock management, dealing with the arrival of new beneficiaries or distributing certain types of aid can help stimulate or reinforce social control mechanisms.

### **IK.15** *Mobilising local resources*

Local resources can include both material resources (such as medicines, building materials, vehicles, food, etc.), as well as services (such as construction workers, transport, etc.). While some resources can be mobilised from outside the region, mobilising resources locally can stimulate the local or regional economy. Using local suppliers and service providers is also a way of recognising that the region has a role to play in the post-crisis strategy and to promote ownership of the project.

Whether local or otherwise, service providers and suppliers who are involved throughout the programme and who understand the importance of the project for the affected populations are more likely to be able to adapt their approach or products to specific needs and timeframes. Subcontracting services to local businesses, NGOs, or training groups, can be an opportunity to enter into 'small partnerships' or to build local capacity. When subcontracting services to local businesses, it is important to be aware that they will gain economic power from the project.

If large amounts of resources need to be mobilised and local resources are overstretched, the positive effects for the economy in the short term can be outweighed by a number of negative impacts.

These include:

- undermining local purchasing power by driving prices upwards;
- upsetting regular supply and demand equilibrium: the project can increase demand over a short period, encouraging local suppliers to invest in a sector, but this then collapses once the project has been supplied.

*An INGO working in South Sudan was planning to distribute seeds and tools for an agricultural rehabilitation programme. Instead of buying tools abroad, it realised that some were available on local markets, but not in sufficient quantity to cover the beneficiaries' needs. The NGO traced the tools to where they were being made in a nearby village. Having consulted the blacksmiths in this village, it proposed to support local tool production and develop networks for the supply of metal from nearby regions.*

**Example**

### IH.1.6 ⊕ *Selecting project beneficiaries*

You will now need to select the individuals, households or groups that will benefit from the project according to the targeting criteria established during the project design phase.

While in some projects the process of beneficiary selection is integrated in the activities (e.g. patients attending a clinic, malnourished children who meet anthropometric

criteria admitted in a feeding centre, neighbourhood dwellers who benefit from a well, etc.), in other projects, selecting beneficiaries is a very delicate process, particularly when it entails distribution of valuable items such as food, seeds and tools or building materials for house reconstruction.

Involving members of the population in beneficiary selection can help save time, facilitate access and coverage, increase the affected population's confidence in the aid organisation and ensure that

undue tension is not created within the population due to inappropriate targeting. However, there are also potential risks involved.

Careful assessment of the social and political situation is necessary before you engage in this kind of participation and your approach should be adapted accordingly.

Beneficiary selection involves three key elements:

- clearly established selection criteria
- extensive communication regarding selection criteria
- a mechanism for managing complaints

Be careful when communicating the names of direct beneficiaries. In some contexts, they may be subject to looting or aggression. They may also be seen as affiliated to parties to a conflict by other population members or armed factions.

The simplest yet most risk-prone procedure is to entrust the drawing up of lists to the affected population's local representative(s). However the legitimacy of these institutions and individuals is sometimes in doubt and there is a risk of nepotism. In some contexts, not delegating the selection of beneficiaries can lead to inefficient targeting that excludes the most vulnerable. In many situations, local people know best who needs assistance the most.

If doubts are voiced regarding the legitimacy or objectivity of the local authorities, it may be appropriate to organise the beneficiary selection differently, notably via institutions that have less political or economic interest in distributing assistance. In addition, you can introduce other mechanisms, like social control mechanisms or a 'complaints office' to monitor how satisfied the population is with the way local authorities handle the selection process, although this too needs to be handled very sensitively.

One way of avoiding the diversion of aid for political or economic interests is to delegate the selection of beneficiaries directly to community members. This can be a successful process if carefully managed.

It is especially useful when beneficiaries selected for the project have been given certain responsibilities or must accomplish certain tasks. If these responsibilities are made common knowledge, this can help increase the sense of commitment to the project.

In certain situations, delegating this responsibility to community members can lead to tension and even conflict within the community. It can also mean that existing gender and social hierarchy relations are unchallenged. For example, male children may be prioritised for feeding assistance over female children.

Someone from outside the population (e.g. a member of staff from the aid organisation) can also facilitate the selection process and beneficiaries can be selected through group exercises and discussions. If similar methods were used in the design phase to establish targeting criteria, the results of these can be referred to.

#### Tips & Warnings

*If you have chosen to delegate the selection process to local authorities, you have to respect the decisions they make. Try to share and communicate the selection criteria as frequently and as extensively as possible to enable the population to hold the local authorities to account for beneficiary selection.*

## Examples

*In Afghanistan an organisation attempted to devolve the selection of female beneficiaries to members of the consultative boards of local community assemblies (the community forums). This put considerable pressure on the board members, who were accused by community members of favouring their relatives. The board members then said that they would exclude their relatives from the selection process to avoid accusations of nepotism! Fighting erupted between women over the question of who was the most vulnerable. The agency had to abandon this approach.*

*In Guinea, refugee committees established lists of beneficiaries and handled distribution lists. This ensured that the beneficiary identification process was subject to social control and was acceptable to the population. The involvement of respected elders and dynamic younger committee members, including women, was crucial to the whole process and by and large reduced sources of tension and discontent.*

Working with local partners or delegating the responsibility for selecting beneficiaries to them can help refine the targeting and identify the households with the greatest needs. To do this, the local partner needs to have a good relationship with the population and be respected by them. It may be necessary to involve other parties, e.g. representatives of the population or leaders, to cross-check the process.

Social mechanisms, where community members themselves ensure that the targeting process is respected and well-implemented, can have various positive effects. They can ensure that the process is fair, help in reducing abuse of the system and even reduce conflict and tensions within the population. This takes place when the population feels that it is in their interest to make sure the rules for targeting are respected. To encourage this, it is essential to:

- reach agreement on the targeting criteria with members and/or representatives of the population
- communicate about the rationale behind the targeting process via community assemblies, notice boards, radio, etc.
- establish sanctions to discourage potential abuse

Other examples of social control mechanisms include posting lists of beneficiaries in a public place, so that everybody knows who should or should not receive assistance. However, social control mechanisms may be inappropriate when there is a lot of tension in a community as they can

add to it or where social order has broken down. Social control mechanisms can be difficult to implement in certain contexts, notably when fear of retaliation prevents community members from complaining.

Any targeting and beneficiary selection process should include a mechanism for managing complaints in a timely way. This should be one of the key communication mechanisms between the population and the aid organisation. Failing to manage complaints as they arise can lead to a loss of legitimacy, loss of trust, anger and even security incidents.

Managing complaints does not mean that you have to comply with all demands, but that you have to consider the complaint being made, make a judgement on whether it should be upheld or not, take the necessary action or explain the decision. In some cases, the most suitable person for resolving conflicts may be an 'outsider', especially if the person is perceived as impartial. In other cases, complaints may be more efficiently resolved through local mechanisms (e.g. council of elders). The participatory nature of the process should ensure that the community can take responsibility for, and play its part in, solving problems that arise through targeting and responding to complaints related to the list.

You may be asked to set up a system that enables people to voice complaints anonymously. You need to ensure that people are aware that this system exists and that anonymity is indeed preserved and respected.

Make sure that the complaints system that you have set up is accessible to vulnerable population groups and to minority groups. For example, if the complaints box is placed in

*During the drought that hit Afghanistan between 1999 and 2002, the ICRC organised large food distributions in the north of the country. To ensure the distribution was fair, they defined the targeting criteria with elders representing all the villages of the concerned area who then drew up beneficiary lists according to these criteria. It was agreed that the ICRC would do a random crosscheck of beneficiaries, and that if anyone in a village was found cheating, the whole village would be sanctioned. The social pressure within villages was strong enough to prevent abuses of the system.*

## Example

## Tips & Warnings

*When a distribution is planned, it is better to put in place a mechanism for managing claims and complaints before the distribution, to avoid setbacks and disputes during the distribution (see section on 'pre- and post- distribution monitoring' below).*

a village, can it be used confidentially and is it accessible to all members of the population, including more geographically remote families or extremely vulnerable people? If women in the community are usually prevented from appearing in public, is there some mechanism by which they can make complaints without leaving their homes? If complaints are generally written down, what option is available to illiterate members of the population?

### 1K.1.7 Managing participatory distributions

Many humanitarian projects involve the distribution of goods, most commonly food, but also seeds, building materials, personal hygiene products, tools, etc.

In most situations, especially in refugee camps or areas where the risks of manipulation and diversion of distributed material are perceived as high, distributions are anything but participatory and are marked by suspicion of the affected population and local stakeholders. People are simply called to the distribution point, sometimes with very little notice.

Such approaches can generate a sense of defiance among beneficiaries, and can foster a desire to 'cheat the system'. This results in a need for more stringent controls, which can be distressing for the affected populations. This is highly demanding in terms of labour and can degenerate easily, since local authorities and organisations are given little, if any, responsibility.

Although there are challenges in carrying out participatory distributions, they are likely to be rewarding in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, and the quality of the relationship between the affected population and the aid organisation.

There are several ways that crisis-affected populations can be involved in the distribution process:

#### 1. Involvement of population members in specific tasks

Here, the population provides personnel to clean distribution sites, unload trucks, transport food to nearby storage facilities and participate in the distribution itself. This has to be controlled in a relatively strict manner.

#### 2. Delegation and sharing of responsibility for the distribution

Local institutions or structures can ease distribution logistics, facilitate access to the population, and enhance social control. However, this approach needs to be used judiciously. When the society concerned is of an oppressive nature, giving certain stakeholders control over distribution can reinforce their power. There is also an increased risk that assistance will be diverted or misused.

#### 3. Support for locally managed distribution

This approach to distribution is very rare, because organisations want or need (due to obligations to donors) to keep control of the process. However, there have been programmes where local structures carried out the assessment, the programme design and its implementation, and where the external organisation only provided the items to be distributed. Although the resource provider was involved in the monitoring, the local structure was mostly responsible for implementation.

<sup>11</sup> Borton, J., Brusset, E., Hallam, A., et al., "The international response to conflict and genocide: lessons from the Rwanda experience", Steering committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, Copenhagen, 1996.

## Example

*In all the refugee camps in Goma (DRC, former Zaire) for Rwandan refugees, commune heads actively participated in food distribution, preparing lists and assisting in the distribution itself. While this meant that distributions started very quickly and required fewer agency staff, it also meant that distributions in large camps were more open to abuse by commune leaders, who could influence the size of the rations received by particular groups and potentially divert a proportion of the food for their own use. Furthermore, given the context that produced the refugee exodus, i.e. the call for Hutus to "leave the country and continue the struggle from across the border"; the role of the militia in instigating and spreading the genocide; and the involvement in the militia of many commune and prefecture leaders, the use of commune leaders to distribute food was politically charged and potentially beneficial to the militia and those who had been involved in the genocide.<sup>11</sup>*

Your choice of approach should be based on the following considerations:

1. Which local stakeholders could potentially take part in implementing the distribution or could execute carry it out themselves?
2. What capacity do they have?
3. What are their agendas?
4. How are they perceived by the population?

Members of the affected population who are responsible for the distribution of goods can be put under considerable pressure to favour family, friends and community. As an external stakeholder, you should be prepared to give them support.

The very least you must do is inform the affected population as widely as possible about how the distribution will occur and the rationale behind the procedures. Failure to do so can create tension within the population and between you and the stakeholders involved.

If you cannot delegate the distribution to a local actor, you can invite representatives of the population to oversee the

distribution with you, which enhances your level of accountability to the population, supports information sharing, and can increase trust between you and the population.

You should be prepared to train the people you are working with in the various procedures involved in the distribution.

#### Pre- and post-distribution monitoring

Distributions are often difficult due to the inherent risk of diversion, inappropriate distribution, and misallocation of assistance.

Monitoring before and after the distribution is a way to maintain trust between the affected population and the aid organisation, and to avoid or manage tensions within the population.

Monitoring in a participatory manner can enhance the efficiency and reliability of the process. It can also strengthen local capacity and the relationship between your organisation and the affected population.

Pre- and post-distribution monitoring can be carried out:

4. by your agency (although not very participatory, accountability to donors often requires it);
5. by your agency in collaboration with local actors and population representatives;
6. by the population itself, through social control mechanisms.

One way of managing a participatory monitoring process is to form a monitoring committee composed of representatives of the various stakeholders involved.

Pre-distribution monitoring involves checking that the beneficiaries on distribution lists correspond to the targeting criteria. This should be done whenever possible, since it is far easier to deal with errors and complaints before the distribution than during or after it!

In order to verify beneficiary lists, a team designated by potential beneficiaries can carry out house-to-house verification. In addition, information about targeting criteria and lists of potential beneficiaries can be displayed on posters or announced at public

#### Example

*In Colombia, World Food Programme observation committees, made up of members of the population, monitor the food-distribution process, the list of beneficiaries, product quality and the quantities distributed, the level of equity in relation to the distribution process, product arrival dates, storage in centres, and the time and date of the distribution. This allows the WFP to reduce its inspection efforts and to strengthen its bonds with the community.*

*Just outside the distribution sites situated close to airstrips in South Sudan, it is common to see women lay out all that they have just received on nets or directly on the soil, and to share it with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Although there is no doubt that taxes are probably levied by local institutions, the main reason for this phenomenon is the need for each woman to remain within the social security net. 'You share when you have, so that the day you have nothing people will share with you'.*

*Failure to understand this fact can be a source of considerable frustration, or even of security problems for aid agencies. It requires going back to the assessment and deepening one's understanding of the social and cultural context.*

#### Example

meetings, so that people not on the list can understand why they were not included or take necessary measures to be included if they meet the criteria. It is also important to put in place a mechanism for receiving claims, complaints or queries and dealing with them.

A variety of tools is available for this undertaking:

- A survey conducted at the gate of the distribution point (questions, checking bags, weighing goods) by designated representatives of the population and members of the agency.
- Simple focus groups to get rapid feedback (proportional piling and ranking exercises are very useful).
- House-to-house random surveys carried out by the same teams.
- More elaborate systems based on questionnaires.
- Specific studies carried out by external actors

In a participatory post-monitoring process the results should be fed back to the main stakeholders, particularly those involved in the monitoring process. In this way everyone shares the responsibility of finding solutions. In the interest of accountability, results should also be shared with the population at large to demonstrate the efforts being made to achieve a fair and appropriate distribution process.

Be careful to ensure that the representatives of the population involved in the monitoring process are in a position to be fair and impartial. Try to ensure that the monitoring process includes 'voiceless' groups, giving them an opportunity to speak out or complain without exposing them to security risks.

An important advantage of making the monitoring process participatory is that it means the community can take responsibility for, and play its part in solving problems that emerge.

## IX.2 Participatory Monitoring

Monitoring project implementation is absolutely essential to ensure that the project is being implemented properly and necessary adjustments can be made. In order to monitor the project in a participatory manner, it is necessary to define how the various stakeholders will be involved. In order to define a monitoring system, you must:

- Clarify its purpose
- Establish monitoring criteria and indicators
- Decide what methods will be used
- Decide how feedback will be given and how the monitoring results will be used

Participatory monitoring means that the crisis-affected people, local stakeholders and agencies decide together how they will measure results and what action to take once this information has been collected and analysed. It is a monitoring system in which all stakeholders involved, from project team members to population members, have an opportunity to provide feedback on the project as it is being implemented and to influence its development.

Participation in monitoring has much less meaning if population members and local stakeholders have not been involved much earlier in the project cycle. It is important to accept that what aid organisations generally consider 'good practice' in monitoring may be challenged by members of the population - be ready to be flexible.

Participatory monitoring requires a commitment that recommendations from the monitoring process will have a visible impact on the project, and that when recommendations cannot be put into practice that an explanation is given. Otherwise, participants can feel betrayed.

There can be many different reasons for monitoring a project, but it is always essential to gauge the population's level of satisfaction with the project.

## Tips & Warnings

*Make it practical! Data collection and analysis is costly and time-consuming, and excessive data collection can lead to “monitoring fatigue”. Select a limited number of relevant, simple, and concise indicators that provide a lot of information, with limited data collection.*

### IX.2.1 ⊕ Setting the monitoring criteria and indicators

Defining criteria and indicators for a participatory monitoring process is challenging, since population members and aid organisations may have different perceptions as to what criteria and indicators are appropriate.

Criteria are values that are used to define the quality of an intervention, for example: effectiveness (the project objectives are

met), relevance (the project responds to the population’s needs), adaptation to the context, efficiency (effectiveness related to the time and resources spent), sustainability, impact, etc. Monitoring a project enables the actor to assess the progress a project is making in relation to the quality criteria that have been set.

Make sure that you use terms that have the same meaning for everyone involved. Even if the group shares a common language, cultural differences and nuances in the language can complicate communication or even give rise to misunderstandings.

If a participatory workshop is being held to decide upon project objectives, it may be useful to take the opportunity to determine quality criteria at the same time. This will promote ownership of both these elements amongst the stakeholders. If your project intends to be participatory, do not forget to include tools to assess participation.

Population members may be unfamiliar with the language of ‘criteria’ and ‘indicators’. Furthermore, it may be difficult to reach an agreement on indicators, since perceptions of what a “finished house” or a “productive harvest” is, can differ between different stakeholders. The process of defining indicators may require negotiation and flexibility, in light of what is feasible in a given project.

When and how regularly an indicator is measured will depend upon the nature and importance of the information it

supplies, and the population can participate in establishing where the priorities lie.

Do not hesitate to use information from another source to supplement your monitoring system, if it appears trustworthy and transparent. If it conflicts with data collected using methods that were decided in a participatory manner, you will have to explain this to project stakeholders.

Having defined your project’s quality criteria and indicators, the basis for your monitoring system, you are now in a position to decide what method you are going to use to monitor the project and situation.

In order to select the most appropriate monitoring method, four questions must be addressed.

- Who will manage the monitoring process? Who will set it up? How will the population be involved in the monitoring process?
- Who will participate in the monitoring process?
- What methods will be used to collect monitoring information?
- What resources will the monitoring process require?

### IX.2.2 ⊕ Who will manage the monitoring process?

Monitoring can highlight errors or publicise abuse in the management, design and implementation of the project. This can place the people who detect these problems and those who are responsible for them in a difficult or even unsafe situation. Be careful about security and protection issues when deciding who will be responsible for the monitoring process.

While some aspects of project monitoring can be delegated to members of the population or partners, some issues may have to be monitored directly by your organisation.

Working through traditional assemblies or certain local institutions can lead to certain groups remaining excluded

## Tips & Warnings

*Take into consideration the time needed for participatory monitoring, discussion and making modifications, when defining job descriptions and organising the team.*

*Listen to the 'discontented'. This group may react in two ways: either they are forcefully vocal, or they discretely leave the programme. Even if a group of unsatisfied stakeholders tries to monopolise the discussion, do not forget to include those who may be silenced by this group's vociferousness.*

or unrepresented. Creating the space for them to speak out is a delicate undertaking which should take into account the consequences they may face, such as risks to their security or further stigmatisation.

### IK.2.3 Who will participate in the monitoring process?

Participatory monitoring should aim to collect the perceptions of a range of stakeholders, from those responsible for implementing the project (aid organisation staff, implementation committees, sub-contracted organisations, etc.), to beneficiaries, other population members and local authorities.

The idea is not to identify as many people as possible, but to consult a representative sample of these stakeholders.

Make sure that unrepresented groups are taken into account in the monitoring process, but consider their security before encouraging them to speak out, as this may expose them to risks, or may discourage them from getting involved. You may have to consult them separately, respecting their anonymity.

Wherever possible, monitoring should be carried out with a variety of population groups (different families, different regions, different population members, leaders, indirect beneficiaries, etc.).

Listen to other organisations. Knowing what other agencies and actors in the same field think of the programme can provide interesting insights. It is crucial to incorporate these views into the debate with programme beneficiaries. Sometimes, the fact that one point has been raised by another agency can open up new avenues of debate and

prevent dangerous 'face-to-face' confrontations between the aid provider and the recipients.

Be ready to listen to information transmitted via 'unofficial' monitoring channels such as complaints voiced to field workers or comments from other organisations. This type of information may reveal problems that your current monitoring system is unable to detect, and often proves extremely useful with regard to monitoring security and project relevance.

### IK.2.4 Deciding on the methods to be used

Participatory monitoring can be done in various ways. The choice of method will depend on the issue that is being monitored. Some methods to consider are:

- incorporating monitoring into existing decision-making and problem-solving mechanisms (e.g. traditional assemblies);
- social control mechanisms and peer pressure;
- participatory tools and exercises;
- specific monitoring committees or groups;
- existing monitoring systems (e.g. other NGOs or UN agencies);
- one-to-one consultations (e.g. surveys, interviews, questionnaires, witness accounts, life story accounts);

Social control mechanisms require that corrective action is taken against those who break any rules that have been established collectively. The population should be informed about the nature and conditions of this corrective action, and whose role it is to apply sanctions, to ensure that tensions do not break out between population members. Social control mechanisms are more effective when there has been transparency from the beginning of the project (design) and when project ownership among the community is strong.

Social control mechanisms can be difficult to implement in certain contexts, notably when making a complaint exposes a



## Tips & Warnings

*Some methods that respect anonymity include individual interviews in private settings, and questionnaires that can be collected and put back in public boxes discreetly.*

person to the risk of violence and when fear of retaliation prevents community members from making complaints.

If monitoring is carried out via traditional assemblies and other traditional structures, it is important to ensure that these bodies have the necessary legitimacy, that they do not reinforce discrimination against minorities and that there is little risk of them being manipulated by other interests. In cases where certain groups are marginalised, you may need to organise separate focus groups to ensure their views are heard.

Some subjects are extremely sensitive and cannot be discussed in public assemblies, such as monitoring birth control methods, protection issues, etc. You will need to organise private sessions for sensitive topics and ensure that appropriate interviewers are available. This is one way of showing respect towards the local population.

A participatory monitoring process should provide feedback to participants on monitoring results and involve them in decision-making. Failing to do so can lead to a loss of trust and motivation and can be interpreted as a lack of respect. Consulting the population and measuring indicators will also have been a waste of time.

### **IH.2.5** *Defining feedback methods and how the results will be used*

Questions to address when setting up feedback mechanisms include:

- How will feedback be given about results, changes and adjustments? Will a specific session be organised for this purpose? Will enough time be set aside for people to digest the findings and to react? Will they take part in decision-making concerning changes to be made?
- How will participants be informed of how their views have been taken into account?

- Is it possible to establish a participatory system to follow up the implementation of recommendations?

Setting up a feedback system implies having the flexibility to modify and adapt your programme. If you are monitoring elements that you cannot change, especially those related to internal project management, you should communicate this at the design phase of the monitoring system.

A certain amount of flexibility is necessary in the project design so that any necessary changes can be made. This may have to be discussed with donors prior to project implementation. You can put forward different scenarios and hypotheses regarding ways in which the crisis and context might evolve, for example if a new wave of refugees were to arrive, or access to populations became limited, and so on.

At this point, it will be necessary to recruit the monitoring teams. Involving the population in nominating the individuals, teams or committee members who will carry out the monitoring activities has the advantage of added transparency and may also help reduce the risk of bias. It is necessary to ensure that the monitoring teams have the appropriate skills, especially in participatory techniques. If this is not the case, you will need to provide the necessary training and support. Managers should make it their responsibility to observe the behaviour of the teams and take any necessary corrective or supportive action.

### **IH.2.6** *Data collection, analysis and feedback*

Although it is important that your teams respect the monitoring timetable as much as possible, flexibility is also required in case the context changes or some of the methods that you had planned prove to be unrealistic.

The monitoring system should include sufficient time and resources for processing and analysing data. Once the results have been presented to the population for discussion, group decisions can be made about whether the project needs to be amended, and if so, how.

Participatory monitoring takes time and too much discussion can hold up the project and lead to frustration. Try to find a balance between efficiency/effectiveness and discussion.

**Quote**

“Consultation is harder to do during the implementation phase. You need to have a plan and you need to carry it out. You cannot discuss it all the time. Often people want somebody who says, ‘This is how it’s going to be!’”

*Aid worker, Nahrin, Afghanistan.*

When processing monitoring results and feedback, it is unlikely that you will be able to take every recommendation into consideration. Explain clearly why this is the case with regard to constraints and project capacity. Create a space for ‘unofficial’ and informal discussions. Sometimes relevant information only surfaces in exchanges of this kind.

**Quote**

“We surveyed 7,000 families, and then 10,000 families and we distributed as much as we could. And at the end, the only thing we got was complaints... When we have a lot of complaints, we gather everybody at the mosque. Everybody talks, and in the end, they control themselves. There are always people who complain and others who are happy.”

*Afghan project supervisor, Nahrin, Afghanistan.*

### IX.2.7 ⊕ **Monitoring and evaluation with formal partners**

If there is already an agreed formal relationship, joint monitoring of a programme generally requires the following:

- Clear written contractual agreements between all partners. These can take two forms: a general framework

laying down the general objectives and conditions for the partnership or specific agreements for particular actions.

- Appropriate means and lines of communication with beneficiaries and all those affected by the crisis.
- Regular meetings between the partners, where monitoring information is gathered and discussed, and decisions are made about how the project will continue.
- A shared understanding of the criteria and indicators used in the monitoring
- Project monitoring should be complemented by evaluations, such as mid-term and final evaluations. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for evaluations should be drawn up together by the partners. An external evaluation will ensure neutrality and objectivity.

Monitoring and evaluation can focus on:

- The project itself (objectives, process, results, impacts).
- The partnership (objectives, process) and whether it has contributed to project activities positively or negatively.

This involves defining criteria and indicators for the partnership and capacity/institution building for each partner. These should be defined together by the partners.

Though in many situations, closing down a project is limited to ‘packing up and leaving’, it should be considered an integral part of the project cycle and should be handled with care. Failing to do so can have a negative effect on:

- people’s confidence in the aid system as a whole
- positive impacts produced by the project
- the sustainability of project investments, such as buildings, stock, training and networks
- members of the population who were involved in the project

## IX.3 **Project closure**

- security
- the local economy

Involving the community in decisions relating to project closure, or at least informing them can help reduce these negative effects. Participation in the project closure phase implies communicating with the community and stakeholders about your organisation's departure and preparing for the subsequent transfer of activities to stakeholders (local committees, individuals, local NGOs, etc) when this is possible and appropriate.

Ideally, project closure should be planned during the design phase, although in reality it is rarely taken into account in the work plan. If the time is approaching for your organisation to cease its activities you will need to prepare the community and the stakeholders for this eventuality. The further upstream in the project cycle this is carried out, the more time stakeholders will have to prepare themselves for the impact that this will have on their community. The involvement and participation of the population in the project may lead to natural handover mechanisms, as it encourages ownership of the project from the outset.

### IX.3.1 ⊕ Transition process

Activities or tasks can be incorporated into another project, or the project itself can be taken on by stakeholders. In either case, establishing each party's responsibilities is a collective process. It is important that the stakeholders who take over responsibility for the remaining activities and services reach agreement about activities, responsibilities, partnerships, outputs, objectives and how the assets that are being left behind are to be used. This will help alleviate potential tensions and clarify the situation for the project's future.

A written contract can also help clarify the different roles that various stakeholders will be undertaking and the commitments of all the parties involved. The question of continuity is particularly difficult in refugee camps: they receive a great amount of aid, and then this suddenly stops. However, the

capacity of certain local structures may have been strengthened during project implementation so that they are able to take responsibility for activities and services when the aid agency leaves.

### IX.3.2 ⊕ Communication

All decisions related to project closure should be communicated to the community via the communication channels that you have been using throughout the project cycle. This means communicating extensively with the population about the following:

- when you are leaving - the date and / or the stage in events or activities
- why you are leaving
- what will happen next
- what effect this will have on the community
- what will be done with resources
- who is taking over

At this point, it is very important to ensure that you have kept all the promises that you made at the outset and during the project implementation. A hasty departure or a departure that is not concluded correctly can dramatically undermine a population's confidence in the aid system.

### IX.3.3 ⊕ Learning from the project experience

Before you leave, it may be useful to hold a meeting with the different stakeholders in order to formally close the project. During this meeting, aid actors have the opportunity to give a summary of the project objectives, methodology, achievements and impact and where the future of the project lies. This provides the community with an opportunity to voice any complaints or recommendations and to discuss the positive and negative points of the programme.

This is also an opportunity for the project team to draw lessons and to manage questions and misunderstandings. It is

also an opportunity for the local community to say goodbye in a way that feels appropriate to them.

During this meeting, it is both practical and symbolic to physically hand over the project documents to those who will be responsible for managing it in the future. This gives them a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of the population and clarifies both their position and yours.

## IX.4 Reviewing participation in the implementation and monitoring phase

When adopting a participatory approach it is important to regularly review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. In this section, we look at whether participation has contributed to improving the quality of implementation and monitoring.

### Who participated and how?

This section gives guidance on how to review your participatory approach during the implementation and monitoring phase. The following table will help you to analyse how you carried out the participatory implementation and monitoring. Chapter 10 gives guidance on how to evaluate the whole project from needs assessment through to project closure in a participatory manner.

En plus de décrire ce qui a été fait, il est essentiel de In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to find out whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, were able to express their concerns, were able to speak openly – in short, that they truly participated.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the design process. Preferably, this should be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

STEP	WHO PARTICIPATED?	HOW DID THEY PARTICIPATE?
Initiating the implementation		
Starting up the monitoring system		
Managing project teams and committees		
Managing resources		
Selecting beneficiaries		
Managing participatory distributions		
Project closure, transition or handover		

### Was participation successful?

The following questions will help you analyse how successfully you applied your participatory approach.

- Were people exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? What measures did you take to reduce and manage risks?
- Were you able to uphold the principles of independence and impartiality, by being careful about who you engaged with and by communicating your principles?
- Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security risks for them?
- Have you succeeded in building the capacity of stakeholders and the population since the beginning of the project?
- Have you provided enough support to those who will be responsible for the project or project activities after your

departure? Have you supported and strengthened the population's coping strategies?

- Have you succeeded in avoiding or reducing negative impacts on the affected population, their environment and aid workers?
- Did you succeed in preventing security and protection risks for the people who participated in your project? Did you face any security incidents or protection problems?
- Did participation allow you to take into account the viewpoints of a variety of different population groups? Did this enable you to focus on priority needs and target groups more effectively? Were you able to detect if needs changed over the course of project and did you revise your project accordingly?
- Did participation allow you to use local knowledge and resources to achieve project objectives and overcome context-specific constraints?
- Did you achieve the degree of participation that you set out to achieve? Are people satisfied that they have been sufficiently involved in the project?
- Did you succeed in communicating and informing people over the course of the project? Do people feel that they were well informed on a regular basis over the course of the project?
- Did the project take into account the population's cultural, social and religious characteristics?
- Did participation facilitate the hand-over of responsibility for the project to a local organisation, stakeholder or group of people?
- Did participation and local knowledge allow you to anticipate changes in the context and/ crisis? Did participants' feedback and input allow you to adapt the project appropriately in relation to developments in the context and/or crisis?
- Did participation allow you to identify and incorporate local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience, etc.)?

- Did local knowledge allow you to estimate the resources (quantity and quality) required by your project with greater accuracy?
- Did the presence of national staff in your team increase your capacity to fulfil project objectives?
- Did you establish partnerships or subcontract work to local organisations or groups (e.g. logistics, administration) which allowed you to reduce the pressure on management teams?
- Did you listen to lessons learnt by the population, your organisation and other aid agencies? Were these lessons taken into account over the course of the project?
- Is a member of the population, local organisation or stakeholder responsible for recording and transmitting the history of the project and lessons learnt at project closure/handover?
- Did participation help to clarify your mandate and principles in the eyes of the population and stakeholders? Did it reduce the risk of project activities being manipulated by stakeholders? Were there any cases of project activities being manipulated by other actors?
- Did you implement the participatory approach as planned? If not, why not? Did you meet the objectives of participation? If not, why not?
- What lessons have been learnt? How can you help stakeholders and other organisations benefit from the lessons you have learnt?

## Chapter 9 summary

### Participatory implementation and monitoring

- 1 Participatory project implementation can help keep the project relevant and adapted to a changing situation.
- 2 Participatory implementation makes use of a wider range of resources, skills and expertise, and acknowledges and supports local capacities and expertise.
- 3 For participatory project implementation, it is essential that the roles of all the different parties should be clear and that there is effective two-way communication.
- 4 Involving crisis-affected people in beneficiary selection can make a project more effective, and can reduce tensions between those who will benefit directly from the project and those who will not.
- 5 Participatory monitoring is essential for accountability and transparency, and also builds capacity within crisis-affected populations.



chapter 10 | #10

# Participatory Evaluation

## 8.1 *The evaluation process*

As with the rest of this Handbook, this chapter does not purport to provide a complete guide on how to carry out the relevant tasks, in this case evaluations; its aim is to provide guidance on aspects of evaluation practice as they relate to participation. There is a great deal of guidance on good practice in evaluation elsewhere, and this chapter assumes that the evaluator and the evaluation manager will be designing, managing and carrying out the evaluation in accordance with good practice.

Participatory evaluation is defined as an evaluation in which stakeholders involved in the project, from project team members to members of the concerned population, have an opportunity to provide feedback on the project and, if appropriate, to influence its development and/or future projects. Beyond this, it also assesses how stakeholders have been involved in the project and how the participatory approach has been implemented.

The amount of extra time and effort required to carry out an evaluation in a participatory manner should not be underestimated. There is a risk of unrealistic expectations both within the agency and among the population about how much participation will really be possible, given the constraints of time and resources and the the purpose of the evaluation. This chapter assumes that a fairly complete type of participation is being implemented. However, even limited participation and consultation can be valuable as long as there is transparency about these limits. Also, it is still possible to consider an evaluation to be participatory even if the affected population is not involved at every stage.

While it is not essential to have used participatory methods during earlier phases of the project, having done so will significantly increase the possibilities of the participatory evaluation. If participatory methods have not been used in earlier phases, this should not preclude participation during the evaluation, but it will limit its effectiveness.

While this Handbook assumes that the reader wants to use participatory methods, other approaches and methods may be more effective depending on the objectives of the evaluation and the context. In the context of an ongoing conflict, a critical weakness of a participatory evaluation is that even 'private' participation can compromise the safety of those who participate. Issues like these should determine which overall evaluation method is chosen and the degree of participation that this involves.

The evaluation of impact is both hard to define and hard to achieve. It requires a specific methodology. However, the participation of the affected population in an evaluation is also a very useful way to assess a project's impact. Participation is a way of gathering a diversity of views, helping to triangulate both quantitative data collected by other means, and to ground qualitative assessments in local realities. This does not achieve objectivity on its own, but can contribute to it.

Lessons can be learnt from the project itself, and also from the participatory approach that is adopted. The participation of the affected population in an evaluation and the incorporation of their opinions and concerns is central to assessing whether the project has had a positive impact for population members. Participation is also a way of ensuring that a diversity of views is considered and contributes to making the evaluation more objective and impartial. What is more, the results of a participatory evaluation tend to be more grounded in field realities.

It is important to ensure high levels of transparency in evaluation processes, from the drafting of the Terms of Reference' (TOR), to discussing conclusions and recom-



mendations. Effective communication is one of the main methods for achieving transparency, and for promoting 'bottom-up' as opposed to 'top-down' dynamics.

## Tips & Warnings

*People who have been excluded from the programme may complain openly and this may lead to further stigmatisation and discrimination.*

*Evaluation results can exclude certain minority groups depending on the population sample, method and/or tools.*

*The composition of the evaluation team can exclude certain groups from participating in the evaluation. For instance, in some societies, women may be reluctant to or prohibited from interacting with male evaluators.*

*Evaluations are often perceived as an opportunity to make judgements about a project, or to point out and even punish guilty parties. It is therefore essential to communicate that the primary purpose of an evaluation is to learn from the experience of the project rather than to punish.*

*It is essential that the evaluation is objective and is perceived as such. Evaluations that are not perceived as objective can endanger the evaluators, project teams and affected populations. If the evaluation team is perceived to be lacking in objectivity, this can also compromise its ability to gain access to, process and analyse information.*

Participatory evaluation entails:

- *listening* to all parties in order to improve objectivity
- focusing on *triangulation* (cross-checking) and *validating* information
- ensuring the *transparency* of the process
- informing everyone involved when planning your evaluation, and communicating your objectives and results
- ensuring that the conclusions and recommendations of your evaluation will have a *visible impact* on the project. If this is not the case, the risk is that people may feel betrayed.
- recruiting *evaluators* who have the necessary communication skills, are trained in participatory techniques, and are objective.

Participation in an evaluation has much less meaning if the population or local actors have not been involved in the assessment, design and implementation and monitoring phases.

Evaluation processes can vary. The step-by-step process proposed in this chapter should help you include participatory techniques in your own evaluation methods.

- 1 What** are the main motivations and objectives for doing a participatory evaluation?
- 2 Who** will conduct the participatory evaluation? Will you conduct it directly with population members, in collaboration with local stakeholders, or will you support a local stakeholder who is already in the process of conducting an evaluation? Who will be consulted?
- 3 How** will the evaluation be conducted? Which data collection techniques will be used?

**KEY QUESTIONS 21:**  
*Preparing your participatory evaluation*

Different perceptions and different ideas and beliefs about the purpose of evaluations can make people very suspicious or wary of evaluations. A participatory evaluation, if carried out carefully, can often allay people's concerns and ensure that it is a valuable learning process.

In order to reduce the risk of frustration and misunderstandings, it is important to present the Terms of Reference and the principles behind the evaluation to the population.

A participatory approach can be used for all types of evaluation, regardless of the level and type of stakeholder involvement.

Participation in the evaluation depends strongly on:

- how the decision to carry out an evaluation was taken
- who commissioned the evaluation
- who carries out the evaluation
- the project cycle phase the project is currently in
- where the project is being implemented
- how the crisis is affecting the project

ISSUE	WHERE TO BE CAREFUL
<b>Security and Protection</b>	The evaluation process may arouse suspicion among external parties, particularly if they are involved in some way in the crisis. If people are well-informed about evaluation objectives and sectors under evaluation, misunderstandings are less likely to arise.
	The evaluation team may be perceived as having links with a specific group, thus placing them at risk.
	An evaluation can highlight problems related to mismanagement, abuse, as well as errors in the initial design or difficulties that were not taken into account. Decisions have to be made and actions taken that may endanger those who detected the problem or those who were responsible for it.
	In some contexts, meeting and talking with affected populations places them at risk. Discussions, especially individual interviews, may be seen as an occasion for handing over 'strategic' information.
	Evaluations may be seen as 'sanctions' and as a threat to employees and other people involved in the project.
	Your principles and your mission can place you at risk as an evaluator, for example, if your mission involves convincing people to bear witness of human rights violations.
<b>Humanitarian Principles</b>	Some groups may wish to manipulate the process in their interest and make recommendations that benefit them at the expense of other groups.

### K.1.1 ⊕ What prompted the evaluation, who took the decision and who will carry it out?

Ideally, an evaluation should be planned during the project design phase and the affected people should be involved in deciding when and where data will be gathered. However, these conditions are rarely met. An evaluation might be carried out because monitoring has revealed a specific area that requires more detailed analysis or it might be requested by the affected population, local or international stakeholders, donors or agency headquarters who wish a certain area to be evaluated.

*If the evaluation has been commissioned by an external agency, be ready to provide information about their mandate, mission and strategic goals.*

*Participation in an evaluation is especially useful when people understand the benefits for the affected population.*

*Whether it is an internal, external or joint team of evaluators, it is important that they are perceived to be 'independent', i.e. as a separate entity from the project team.*

*Find out what people's perceptions are of the commissioning agency and whether this presents any specific security or protection issues in this context.*

*You need to ensure that you do not place informants, aid workers and/or evaluators at risk.*

*If the evaluation is likely to touch upon sensitive issues such as mismanagement, corruption, loss of assets or other problems related to resources management, be careful not to be 'over communicative', or to be perceived as 'looking for the guilty party'.*

*The reason for carrying out an evaluation may be related to the crisis (e.g. security concerns, new vulnerable groups) or to the demands of a specific population (e.g. complaints about targeting procedures, products and services being misused or exchanged). Be careful when you communicate this information, that you are not compromising people's safety.*

*Evaluators are often mistaken for 'other INGOs', raising the population's expectations. Be ready to communicate to the affected population that the evaluators will not directly provide any new projects, products or services.*

*Be sure that you use the correct translation of 'evaluator' in local languages. In some circumstances, the term evaluator may carry another hidden meaning, such as 'investigator' or 'intelligence agent'.*

In all of these cases, the reasons for carrying out the evaluation should be communicated to the affected population. The greater the degree of transparency, the more willing they will be to participate.

### Tips

*You may ask participants to propose dates and times for evaluation activities. You can make use of participatory techniques such as timelines and daily calendars to identify when the affected population is available to participate in your evaluation (days and also times of the day).*

*Be aware that women and girls may have far less free time and freedom than men and boys in a community, due to their household and caring responsibilities, and that there may be restrictions on their movement outside the home, particularly after dark. Try and arrange for evaluation activities to be at a time when it is acceptable and convenient for women to attend, and make sure that evaluation activities are not too lengthy.*

### Tips

*A focus group can be held where participants are encouraged to take part in brainstorming activities to generate ideas for the ToR.*

Evaluations can be carried out by an external group of evaluators, a team of stakeholders or joint teams. The evaluators are not necessarily employees of the commissioning agency. An important issue at this stage is to clarify who is who, and who will be conducting meetings and focus groups 'in the field'.

#### Why launch an evaluation now?

The time when the evaluation takes place will affect both:

- the motivation of population members to participate.
- their availability to take part.

Communication about the pertinence of the evaluation and the reason why it is carried out at a particular time is of key importance in motivating people.

### K.1.2 ⊕ Drawing up Terms of Reference (ToR)

Involving the population in drawing up the ToR can encourage their involvement in the evaluation and

increase their sense of ownership of the results.

#### Defining the objectives of the evaluation

It is fundamental to define the evaluation objectives collectively with the affected population. Possible objectives include:

- to assess the programme's relevance from the perspective of the affected population and to gauge whether needs have changed or not
- to identify the effects of the intervention on a specific set of problems
- to evaluate the programme's impact
- to adapt the intervention to the current situation
- to compare how activities have evolved in relation to the initial action plan
- to initiate a learning process, aimed at preventing errors from being repeated
- to assess the population's level of satisfaction

Evaluation objectives should respond to specific needs, should be perceived as useful and/or necessary for the programme and, if possible, should be related to specific benefits to the population.

It should be made clear from the outset that the evaluation does not seek to apply sanctions. In this way, you can encourage participation and develop a process based on trust and empathy.

#### Working with partner organisations and other organisations

Establishing a partnership in order to carry out an evaluation requires time and implies shared responsibility for the evaluation. At the same time, evaluations of this kind tend to be richer and can provide an overall view of the situation that goes beyond the project scope and limits.

It is very important to clarify each stakeholder's role and field of responsibility, and to ensure that they have the capacity (e.g. resources, time, know-how) to fulfil these commitments. If you intend to establish a partnership to carry out the evaluation, you will find some advice in *Chapter 6: Making partnerships work*. You may have to draw up a contract and clarify each party's commitments, especially in terms of communication, who is responsible for the evaluation results and other issues such as confidentiality, independence, etc.

## Tips & Warnings

*Potential partners include traditional assemblies and local institutions. It may be useful to ask the population to identify existing collective problem-solving mechanisms, providing they are culturally and socially accepted, and to try to work with them.*

*Given that an evaluation is a complex multi-stakeholder exercise, formal procedures are important. For example, a steering committee, composed of representatives from the various stakeholders, can be very useful.*

*It is very important to identify the most appropriate partners for the evaluation. Being in charge of or involved in an evaluation can be a source of power. To ensure objectivity, organisations that are perceived as non-representative or have an inappropriate history must be avoided. If one organisation is unable to gain access to a key population group (women and other ethnic groups, for instance), it may be possible to work with several organisations to ensure that a representative sample of the population is consulted.*

*Take care to avoid the risk of being manipulated or instrumentalised by actors with a hidden agenda or by actors involved in the crisis, especially in armed conflicts.*

*It is essential to ensure that once you have initiated a participatory approach, traditional assemblies and local institutions continue to be involved in feedback exercises throughout the evaluation process.*

## Defining evaluation criteria and indicators

Quality criteria are principles or standards that are used to assess the quality of a project. Indicators are variables used to measure whether quality criteria have been met according to specific thresholds.

Involving stakeholders (primary stakeholders and/or partners) in designing the evaluation criteria and indicators will enhance their motivation and facilitate the process of adapting indicators to the local culture and capacities.

If evaluation criteria and/or indicators differ from the project quality criteria, it may be useful to assess in what way they are complementary before engaging in the evaluation.

If stakeholders were involved in the design phase, they will already have participated in designing project objectives, quality criteria and indicators (see *Chapter 9 Designing a participatory monitoring system*).

If participation is one criterion or objective of the project, it must be evaluated as such (see *Review of participation sections at the end of each project cycle phase*).

image, attitude and objectivity of those conducting the evaluation are key factors in rapidly establishing a relationship based on empathy and understanding.

## Defining the methods for gathering and analysing data

Methods for gathering information can be defined with the participation of the population. This can add a further dimension to the evaluation process and the recommendations which are produced and can increase the population's ownership of the evaluation results.

## Communicating and validating the Terms of Reference

### To stakeholders

Once the ToR are complete, it is useful to present them to the stakeholders. This will allow everyone to publicly validate the responsibilities of the different parties, the objectives and expected results of the evaluation and the resources required by the team.

### To the affected population

You can present the ToR to representatives of the affected population during a traditional assemblies, workshops or focus groups. When the evaluation covers a large region, it is important to validate the ToR in each area that you visit.

*Goal Team Consult (GOTEC), a Congolese organisation, was asked to 'evaluate the socio-economic impact of the reconstruction of the Sake-Masisi trunk road and other interventions in favour of populations of this region, undertaken by German Agro Action (GAA)'.*

*Focus groups and interviews (using a questionnaire) were among the various methods used in the evaluation. The people who asked to attend the focus groups were 'people who had a certain influence in community leadership, such as development committee members, traditional authorities and political-administrative authorities, teachers, nurses, health centre workers and church ministers.'*

## Example

*If you carry out a participatory evaluation, you have to be ready to measure the programme against criteria and indicators put forward by the population and local actors. They will not necessarily fit neatly with criteria and indicators set by the donor or agency headquarters, or with internationally recognised standards, but may reflect more adequately local realities and priorities.*

*You may need to explain the terms 'quality criteria' and 'indicator'. If so, make sure your explanation is clear and simple.*

*Try to "translate" the meaning of the criteria put forward by donors or headquarters, bearing in mind they may have to be adapted or revised to match the views of stakeholders involved in the participatory process.*

## Tips & Warnings

## The profile of the evaluation team

An evaluation is generally a fairly brief intervention (in relation to the project itself) and as such the personal skills,

## Tips & Warnings

When composing your evaluation team, it is important to pay attention to the sensitive issues related to accessing different population groups (notably male and female roles) and local customs.

Try to get an insider-outsider balance when composing your team. For example, you can recruit:

- a local evaluator, who knows the region, understands the conflict and how it has affected the population and who will engage with the population with the necessary sensitivity;
- an external evaluator, with a global vision and previous experience in other contexts.

Depending on your evaluation objectives, the evaluation team can also include population representatives selected by members of the population. The legitimacy of these representatives is essential to ensure that the evaluation process and its results are accepted by the population. The potential disadvantage of this approach is that population representatives may be reluctant to raise problems that are specific to a given group, but this can be overcome by involving several stakeholders.

At least one member of the evaluation team must speak the local language and dialects fluently to ensure subtleties and nuances are truly captured.

When working with a translator, make sure that s/he also has some understanding of participatory methods.

The distinction between the evaluation team and the project team should be explained to the population. This is important to ensure they are comfortable pointing out project weaknesses with the evaluation team.

Try to ensure that the team composition does not automatically exclude certain population groups or raise the likelihood that some minorities will not be heard. In conflict zones in particular, there is a risk that evaluators will be perceived as biased or at least not entirely neutral (because of their nationality or profile).

Remember that “too much information kills information”: try to identify which information is essential to collect and what are the most suitable means of collecting this information, in relation to your time and resource constraints. Discussing this with participants can help identify original ways of focusing on and obtaining essential information.

Local stakeholders can help you determine what is feasible and adequate, in line with the budget and time you have available. Furthermore, they may be able to contribute resources and time to facilitate the process, for example by proposing venues for discussions with population members, organising feedback sessions, providing access to certain groups, etc.

Do not forget to budget and plan for the activities that take place before and after participatory exercises, such as contacting populations before the meeting, confirming the meeting, planning a meeting to present results, etc.

## K.1.3 Gathering and analysing data

### Getting going

Before starting the evaluation, questions to be raised include:

- Are partners prepared and do they fully understand their role in the process?
- Do all the team members understand the ethical issues involved in the evaluation, as well as the importance of confidentiality and avoiding taboo subjects?
- Has the population been informed about the evaluation, where it will take place and why?
- Has the population expressed any expectations or concerns regarding evaluation outputs and how can the evaluation team take these into consideration?

### Gathering data

At this point, we strongly recommend that you re-read Chapter 4 (*Communication techniques*) and Chapter 5 (*Making partnerships work*). However, below are some of the key points related specifically to evaluation.

Be prepared to introduce yourself and go over the ToR with the population every time you are in a new group. Make sure that the population knows who you are and what you are doing here. Remind them of your role and that it differs from the project team.

Ensuring that the population is informed about the ToR using existing communication channels can have a very positive effect on your evaluation. Information should be available in local languages and in a medium that is culturally accepted.

Be ready to adjust the ToR based on feedback from stakeholders and population members. Failing to do so can lead to a loss of participant motivation before the evaluation has even begun.

During a general meeting, the project team introduced the evaluator as ‘someone from head office’. The evaluator intervened to clarify his role, that he was an external evaluator and not an ‘insider’, thereby inviting population members to speak more openly about certain issues concerning the programme and implementing agency.

## Tips & Warnings

## Example

### Triangulation as a rule

Remember that the aim is both to gather opinions and also to achieve a reasonably objective view. Therefore it is essential, when gathering data to:

- triangulate facts, opinions and rumours, that is, verify what you hear by checking it with more than one source
- provide evidence for findings or statements.

### Participatory data analysis

Data analysis is rarely done in a participatory way. The evaluation team is often left to collate the information it gathers and to analyse it by itself. Participatory analysis can help provide multiple views and analysis of the same information. It also supports ownership by relevant stakeholders of the evaluation results and recommendations.

Data analysis often starts when gathering data, especially when doing participatory exercises, as participants are likely to express their views and analysis. But data analysis continues throughout the evaluation process, as new information and opinions are gathered, until the final report is written and disseminated.

### Continuously review the methods used

Methodological choices made when defining the Terms of Reference may prove inadequate when putting them into practice. You may find, for example, that you are not accessing the right groups, or that some of the analysis is biased, preventing you from obtaining comprehensive and reliable information.

Despite time constraints, it is important to regularly take a step back and see the overall picture during the data gathering and analysis process. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the methods being used effective? (e.g. are participants really being able to express their opinions?)
- Is the composition of focus groups and assemblies appropriate to address important issues and ensure participants are really involved?
- How can we revise our methods in accordance with the above observations?

### K.1.4 Validating and communicating results

During an evaluation, there can be a particular focus on extracting information: the population is consulted and their opinions regarding programme quality and relevance are recorded. The evaluation team then withdraws to prepare the report and often very little feedback is subsequently given.

Participatory evaluation is time-consuming. The population is unlikely to commit itself to the evaluation process unless information is readily accessible, data is relevant and consistent, and they receive proper feedback on the results.

## Tips & Warnings

*Make sure that, where possible, meetings and/or workshops are organised in advance and that the necessary materials are available.*

*To a large extent, translators and local staff will determine the quality of your relationship with local assemblies. Their personality, the way they are perceived by the community, and their ability to create empathy will significantly affect the quality of dialogue.*

*You do not necessarily have to conduct the evaluation workshops yourself! Set aside times when you can remove yourself from the group to observe and listen. This is often very useful as you are less likely to influence the content of the discussion. However, be careful that participants are fairly represented.*

*During workshops, interviews, focus groups or other types of meeting, bear in mind ethical issues, particularly the question of confidentiality and anonymity.*

*When collecting information via group sessions, you can analyse the information that is being gathered with the group (e.g. analysis of a map that is collectively drawn).*

*You can support analytical discussions by asking questions such as, "Why do you think this happened?" and "How did this occur?". However, participants must also feel free to express their point of view as they wish.*

*You can play with group size: e.g. small groups can present their evaluation of specific issues for discussion before a larger assembly.*

*It may be useful to organise participants into small groups and ask them to present their observations regarding specific issues.*

*Take care to differentiate between fact, opinion and rumour. Try to validate the facts, justify the opinions and understand the rumours.*

*Try to discuss preliminary findings with key stakeholders as the evaluation progresses. This is also an opportunity to ask them whether they are satisfied with your methods.*

## Tips & Warnings

## Tips

## Warning

*Maintaining transparency by communicating regularly about the evaluation is not without certain dangers. Indeed, it publicises errors and failures, constraints and difficulties, as well as successes! It might also highlight certain responsibilities and specific attitudes of key stakeholders. Placing this information in the public arena can be risky. Be careful not to be 'over-communicative'!*

## Tips

*Try to find the right balance regarding language, tone and the quality of presentation.*

*Try to have a version of the report translated in the local language(s).*

*When writing your evaluation report, try to follow the same structure that was proposed to the population in the Terms of Reference to make the report easier to understand.*

*Involving too many people in report writing can be difficult. It may be more productive to consult key individuals on specific sections of the report. For example, a group of women shopkeepers can participate in writing up results relating to women's participation in economic rehabilitation programmes.*

*Take into account the feedback and summaries presented at the end of workshops and meetings, and refer to them as such in your report, as this will add to the legitimacy of your findings.*

Communicating evaluation results and recommendations can take place in three stages:

- 1) informally validating the results
- 2) writing the report
- 3) formally communicating the results and the main recommendations, and disseminating the report

### 1. Informally validating results

Validating results is particularly important if you intend to quote comments made by participants to support evaluation results.

### 2. Writing the report

One of the difficulties arising from participatory approaches involves analysing and presenting the data in such a way that the wealth of perspectives and involvement of different stakeholders is not lost in the final report. Too often, one person, or at most, a few people are responsible for the almost impossible task of synthesising the mass of raw data and presenting it in a report.

Report writing can be done in collaboration with key stakeholders and population representatives. This exercise can lead to highly stimulating debate, and innovative ideas and recommendations.

### 3. Formally communicating results

Formally presenting the results of the evaluation to the population is just as important as consulting them. This is your opportunity to give the

*Try to make the distinction between your observations and your opinions. Participants will not necessarily share your point of view, but they can validate the relevance of your observations. In this way, you will be able to gain their support for findings and conclusions.*

*Try to avoid providing information the population already has. Be prepared to give more detailed information, if requested.*

*Try to present the results in a way that is interesting and clear for the participants. Avoid overly statistical or academic presentations.*

*If you have analysed the evaluation results in a participatory manner and included the population's recommendations in your report, you may want to refer to this input in your presentation and thank the participants for their support.*

*A lot can be at stake when tackling evaluation results. There may be tension and disagreement among participants regarding which conclusions should be retained. Try to stay calm and objective, avoid pointing fingers and getting personally involved in the discussion.*

*One way of handling disagreement is to remind affected populations that the evaluation report represents the recommendations of the evaluators.*

*Even if the population expresses satisfaction with the way the evaluation team has understood and represented their points of view, it is by no means responsible for the evaluation results and report. Make sure that you have fully clarified this point.*

*Be sure to respect promises of confidentiality or discretion you have made before quoting specific observations in public meetings.*

*Remember that presenting evaluation results in traditional assemblies makes them 'official', thus harder to modify after the event.*

*The participatory evaluation, and any rumours it may have generated, may have raised the population's expectations. Your formal presentation is a good opportunity to clarify that not all recommendations can be immediately implemented.*

population feedback on what has been done and how. In this way, you can defuse any rumours that may have arisen during the information gathering process. Presenting your observations in public also gives you the opportunity to express your own opinions about the project.

In addition to making a formal presentation, make sure the report is disseminated to the relevant persons and institutions, and in the appropriate language.

## Tips & Warnings

## K.1.5 From lesson learning to lesson using

### Quote

“Learning is not so much an additive process, with new learning simply piling up on top of existing knowledge, as it is an active dynamic process in which the connections are constantly changing and the structure reformatted.”

K. Patricia Cross

Whereas aid workers come and go, population members remain and witness the same errors being made again and again. To learn lessons and change a project accordingly is to show respect for the affected population, and is extremely important in building an organisation’s legitimacy and credibility.

Furthermore, an evaluation is a waste of time unless recommendations are implemented to improve the project. This is particularly important when population members have been involved in the evaluation, as this will have raised their expectations. An evaluation which only assesses compliance or is limited to information collection can be extremely frustrating for local stakeholders.

Implementing recommendations should involve the following steps:

1. reviewing the evaluation results to select and prioritise the recommendations that can be acted upon
2. defining mechanisms for putting these recommendations into practice

It is rare for these steps to be put into practice and even more so for it to be done in a participatory manner. Involving population members and local partners in this process can strengthen the relationship between the affected population and the aid organisation and can build programme ownership among population members.

### 1. Prioritising recommendations

Key local partners should be involved in deciding which recommendations are the most important as their opinions may differ from those of the agency. Representatives of the affected population can also provide insight into how certain recommendations can be put into practice. Involving the local population is a good way to ensure there is transparency and communication about which recommendations have been retained and why.

### 2. Implementing recommendations

Again, involving population representatives in the process can enhance collaboration, ownership and communication.

## K.2 Reviewing participation in the evaluation

It is important to review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. The purpose of these periodic reviews is to reflect on your original motivation and objectives for using a participatory approach and to make any necessary adjustments in order to achieve these objectives.

### Who participated and how?

The following table will help you to describe how the participatory assessment was conducted, by recording who participated and how for each step of the evaluation.

*It is important that the project team communicates transparently about which recommendations can and cannot be taken into account. It should explain why some recommendations will not be put into practice and how the recommendations have been prioritised.*

*Avoid “pointing fingers” when highlighting errors and planning corrective actions. This is demotivating and can lead to tension between those involved in the project.*

Tips & Warnings

*When involving population members in the implementation of recommendations, try to respect their time constraints and commitments they have elsewhere. It is best to avoid delegating activities or encouraging participation in activities that are too abstract or too far removed from project outputs.*

Warnings



STEP	WHO PARTICIPATED?	HOW DID THEY PARTICIPATE?
Initiating the evaluation process		
Drawing up the evaluation ToR		
Gathering and analysing data		
Validating and communicating results		
Learning from the evaluation		

In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to consider whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, that they were able to express their concerns, that the appropriate environment was provided so that they could speak openly and that they were genuinely able to participate.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the assessment. This should preferably be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

#### Was participation successful?

You might like to consider some of these questions:

- **Security and protection:** Was the security of evaluators, project team members, participants, other stakeholders, or other population members threatened as a result of the participatory evaluation process? What measures did you take to ensure this did not happen?
- **Impartiality and independence:** Were you able to respect the principles of independence and impartiality? Were you careful about whom you engaged with? Did you communicate about your principles?

- **Discrimination and marginalisation:** Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security problems for them?
- Did participation enable you to consult a variety of stakeholders and provide clear and objective evidence for the facts you presented in the evaluation report?
- Has participation increased the affected population's ownership of recommendations and thereby facilitated the implementation of corrective measures?
- Has the evaluation had a negative impact on the security of those involved in the evaluation and/or project (e.g. by highlighting errors and abuses), and on the project (e.g. by highlighting failures and weaknesses)?
- Has participation and close communication enabled you to avoid or reduce any potential negative impact that the evaluation may have had on affected populations, on the project, on the project team and/or the evaluation team?
- Did participation allow you to take into account the key concerns of the affected population when defining the objectives and Terms of Reference of the evaluation?
- Did participation allow you to take into account the viewpoints of different population groups during the evaluation and to make relevant and comprehensive recommendations?
- Did local knowledge, expertise and resources help to achieve the objectives of the evaluation, notably by highlighting local opportunities or helping to identify and overcome constraints?
- Did participation reduce the risk of the evaluation process and recommendations being manipulated by stakeholders? Did the fact that you consulted a variety of groups allow you to remain objective and impartial?
- Do local people feel that they were sufficiently involved in the evaluation and sufficiently informed about its objectives, how it would be carried out and its results?

- Does the population feel that the evaluation has taken their cultural, social and religious characteristics into account?
- Did participation allow you to identify and make use of existing information and resources for the evaluation (e.g. previously collected data) and therefore avoid undermining or duplicating activities?
- Did participation allow recommendations to be made that were coherent with other projects and activities, in particular the activities of the local population?
- Did participation promote ownership of the evaluation results by local networks and members of the population?
- Did participants' feedback and input allow you to adapt the evaluation in a timely manner to developments in the context and/or crisis?
- Did participation allow you to identify and use local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience, logistics, etc.) to carry out the evaluation?
- Did the use of local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience, etc.) increase the efficiency of the evaluation, e.g. quantity and quality of information collected (and/or coverage) versus time and resources available?
- Have members of the population contributed to the lesson-learning process and the building of project memory to avoid the repetition of errors?
- Have members of the population been involved in the implementation of key recommendations?
- Did members of the population participate in the evaluation as much as you had planned?
- Did the participatory evaluation achieve its objectives? Why/why not?
- If objectives were not met with regard to participation, is this attributable to poor communication or ineffective management of the evaluation?

- What lessons have the evaluation team and the project team learned with regard to the participatory evaluation process?