

INTRODUCTION

Participation of Crisis-Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action

Go with the people. Live with them.
Learn from them. Love them.
Start with what they know. Build with what they
have. But of the best leaders
When the job is done, the task accomplished
The people will all say,
We have done this ourselves.

Lao Tse, circa 700 B.C.

A FEW ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Engaging affected populations in humanitarian action is a challenging endeavour. Before doing so, it is essential to ask a few questions.

Participation ... 'why?'

- Is it to make my work easier? To facilitate needs assessment and targeting? To decrease project costs by introducing a cost-sharing mechanism (with affected populations), or by using cheap local implementing agents or partners?
- Is it to reduce the level of insecurity to which humanitarian personnel are exposed, again through recourse to local implementing agents or partners?
- Is it to pay lip service to a paragraph requested by donors in the project formulation?
- Does it derive from consideration that participation can considerably improve the short- and the longer-term impacts of humanitarian action?
- Or is it based on genuine recognition that members of affected populations are not passive recipients of aid, but actors responsible for their own survival and future, with existing competencies and aspirations?

Participation ... 'who?'

- Who should I work with? Individual members of the affected population? Local political structures? Grassroots/community-based organisations (CBOs)?
- Should I form a partnership with other organisations to encourage participatory processes?
- What are the risks of becoming embroiled in local power struggles? In the case of conflict, can collaboration with certain stakeholders compromise my impartiality and independence?



- What is the chance of those engaged in the aid process suffering human-rights violations or being stigmatised as a result of participation?

Participation ... 'how?'

- How do I reconcile the need to respect humanitarian principles (impartiality and independence) with a participatory approach?
- What can be done to avoid participation leading to discrimination against certain participants?
- If participation means leaving space for affected populations to express their views, how can I avoid imposing my own vision of participation?
- How can the process be implemented in such a way as to ensure the safety of aid actors and members of the affected population? How should the security of humanitarian personnel be managed?

There is no single answer to many of these questions and no instant means of responding to the challenges associated with participation in humanitarian crises. The first step is to be aware of what we are talking about and who we are referring to when we are discussing 'participation of affected populations in humanitarian action'.

A PARTICIPATION ...

'There is a humanitarian response where the human aspect has been lost.'
Representative of an international NGO, **Angola**.¹

A DEFINING PARTICIPATION

Participation in humanitarian action is understood as the **engagement** of affected populations in one or more phases of the project cycle: assessment; design; implementation; monitoring; and evaluation. This engagement can take a variety of forms.

Far more than a set of tools, participation is first and foremost a **state of mind**, according to which members of affected populations are at the heart of humanitarian action, as social actors, with insights on their situation, and with competencies, energy and ideas of their own.

Participation is not something to be imposed but rather, the product of what you want to do and what the affected population wants to do, and what is possible in a given context.

B THREE APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATION

There are three main approaches to participation: instrumental; collaborative; and supportive.

- In regard to the **instrumental** approach, participation is a **means** of achieving programme goals. If applied in a relevant manner, in all phases of the project cycle, and in a way that

¹ Robson, P., The Case of Angola, monograph produced by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) in Humanitarian Action as part of its 'Global Study on consultation with and participation by beneficiaries and affected populations in the process of planning, managing, monitoring and evaluating humanitarian action', (London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2003), p. 43.



respects the rhythms and capacities of the affected population, it can lead to the strengthening of these competencies. But doing so is not an objective in itself.

One should be careful not to slip from the instrumental mode to outright manipulation of populations, CBOs or local committees, which might result in project failure, or even the weakening of local capacities and to security problems for aid workers.

- The **collaborative** approach is based on an **exchange**: both sets of stakeholders pool their resources to achieve a common goal. The aid organisation aims to build on the capacity of the affected population and to learn from it.

It presupposes a minimal social structure within the affected population. Collaboration can be informal, such as the delegation of certain tasks, or it can be formalised as partnerships between structures. It implies involvement of the affected population throughout the project cycle.

- In relation to the **supportive** approach, the aid organisation supports the affected population in carrying out its initiatives. This can encompass the provision of material, financial or technical support for 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, although some are more difficult to establish than others. To go from collaboration to supporting local initiatives is a logical and relevant step. But to move from a supportive to an instrumental approach risks undermining trust between partners and could compromise the future of the relationship.

Strategic choices should be made on the basis of an appropriate assessment of the context and of the capacities of the various actors; this evaluation should be continually revised and adjusted.

Table 1 A typology of participation in humanitarian action²

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 operationalise an intervention, in exchange for a 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 to operationalise 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 population's projects.

² Adapted from Pretty, J. '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.



Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)-Holland in Barrancabermeja, **Colombia**, supported the return of displaced persons to Ciénaga del Opon by offering a medical follow-up and by training community health workers. The project contained no political discourse on the future of this group of 'returnees', and MSF had no desire to strengthen its social organisation. The objective was 'purely health-oriented'.

The project was implemented in a participatory manner, with the training content shaped by participants, through meetings and according to the most common diseases prevalent in the community. Participants decided on training venues and dates. The trainees carried out the final evaluation of the results and of the trainers.

Although the programme did not set out to develop the group's social standing, following the departure of the MSF team, community health workers mobilised themselves and asked the government to establish a health post. MSF was invited to support them in their lobbying.

C A TYPOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION

An instrumental, collaborative or supportive approach is put into practice through a series of participatory activities, or types of participation.

Each is subject to risks and opportunities, which must be constrained or facilitated, respectively. It is important to understand these factors, and to be able to identify which type to use and when, where and how; in short, to comprehend their 'domain of validity'.

D THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Field research carried out as part of the Global Study highlights the reasons and motivations for engaging in participatory processes with affected populations.

Participation as a moral duty

Participation is, above all, about demonstrating respect for members of affected populations, by recognising their right to have a say in choices that impact on their lives. For some, participation of affected populations is defined as a right.

In **Colombia**, participation is considered to be both a duty and a right of citizenship. Civil society—via CBOs, church organisations and committees for internally displaced persons (IDPs), for instance—actively partakes in humanitarian action, whether by instigating and designing its own interventions or by participating in those of external actors. Local communities have been known to refuse to be involved in the activities of international aid organisations in cases where they were not consulted.

Article 12.1 of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (ratified by 191 countries)

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

Participation to improve programme quality

Humanitarian action formulated with affected populations is often better adapted to the needs and the local context. As a result, it is more relevant, efficient and effective. Involving the affected population from the outset establishes a level of ownership that will help to increase the intervention's chance of success and its longer-term connectedness and/or sustainability.

Organisations involved in an IDP resettlement programme in Huambo Province, **Angola**, held extensive consultations with people that had been displaced. They discovered that their primary criteria 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 even ready to live in areas that were not completely safe—to avoid living in camps.

Humanitarian organisations helped these IDPs to negotiate access to land so as to build 'temporary villages'. This was judged to be a successful experience, in relation to the larger IDP camps, since the 'new villages' did not require external management, had fewer social problems, and generated some food of their own.

Participation to increase security

Establishing relationships based on trust with affected populations can ensure access to important security information and increase the security of the organisation's personnel.

Participation to gain access

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. **But be careful!** Participation is not about sending a local stakeholder to dangerous areas in order to protect expatriates or the staff of an international organisation.

Participation to support and increase local capacity

It is common for humanitarian organisations, especially international bodies, to function separate to local institutions and structures. Working with them is essential, however, as they usually have genuine capacities on the ground and are often the first to respond. Strengthening their capacity is key in terms of preparing for future crises and for **linking relief and development**. It is also a matter of **respect**.

Participation to give a voice to traditionally marginalised groups and individuals

Engaging marginalised groups can help to increase their confidence to speak out, to take decisions and to act, as well as to reduce discrimination. Participation that empowers individuals to represent themselves can have a positive impact on their safety (knowledge of individual and collective rights and increased capacity to negotiate with authorities, for example).

'The training has given us lots of skills ... Before, we didn't know about children's rights but now we can explain these things to other children; we can influence future generations. Now we have leadership in our villages ... The club has helped to reduce discrimination, especially caste discrimination'

Mixed-caste group of teenage girls who work as animators in a Save the Children UK club in Siruppiddy, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

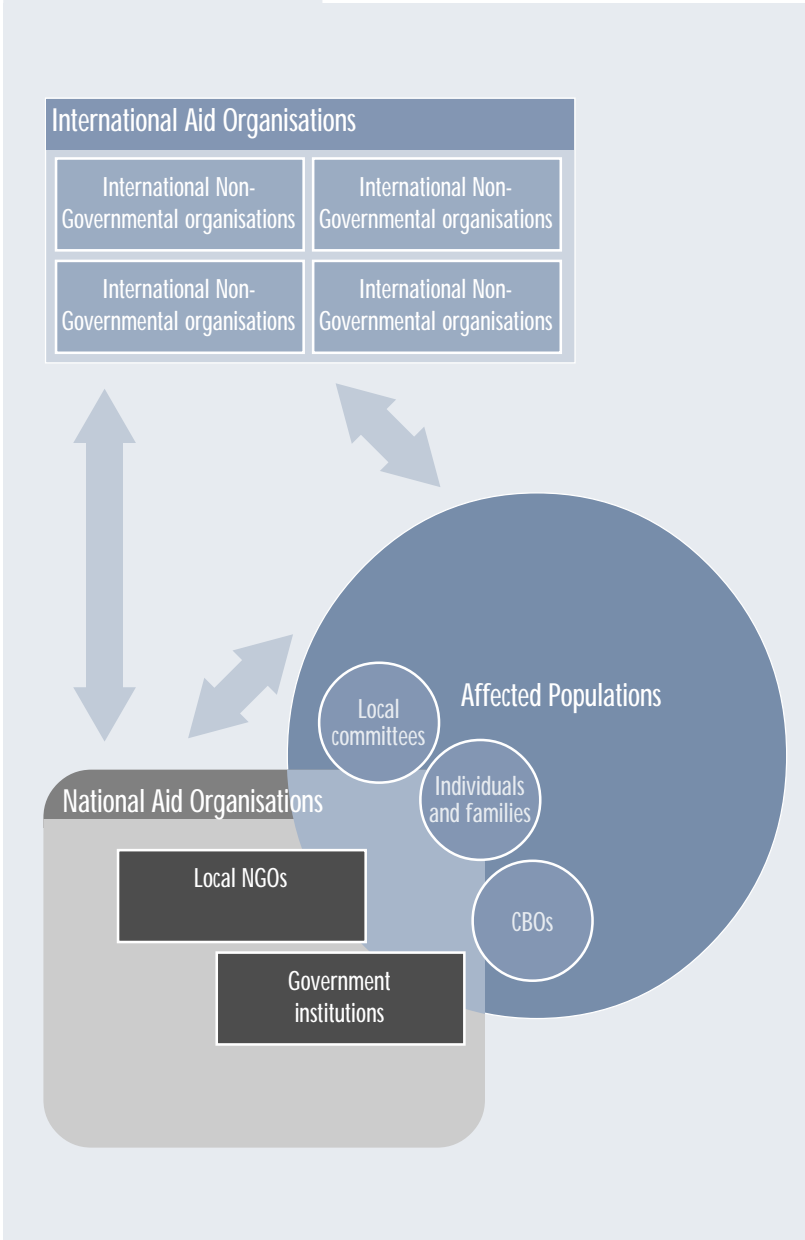
B ... OF CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS ...

A DEFINING A 'CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATION'

The term 'crisis-affected population(s)' or 'affected population(s)' is used throughout this handbook to refer to people that have been, or are, affected by a man-made or natural disaster, such as those who have been wounded or raped, those who have lost family members and personal assets, or those who have been forced to leave their homes. It also encompasses groups or individuals that have been or are indirectly affected, including host populations in situations of population displacement. How sub-groups or individual members of the population are affected will vary according to their socio-economic, environmental and cultural circumstances and to the type of crisis.



Figure 1 Typology of stakeholders



B A TYPOLOGY OF STAKEHOLDERS

Participation involves far more stakeholders than just the affected population and humanitarian organisations. A typology is proposed in Table 2.

Table 2 Typology of humanitarian situations

Type	Description	Speed of onset Predictability	Scale	Impact/ consequences
Natural disaster	Drought	Slow/rapid onset	Localised	Displacement
	Earthquake	Predictable/ unpredictable	Country-wide	Loss of life and disability
	Flood/landslide	Recurrent/rare	Region-wide	Loss of assets
	Volcanic eruption			Famine
	Hurricane			Epidemics
Conflict	Disease			
	Ethnic	Slow/rapid onset	Inter-/intra-state	Trauma
	Political	Predictable/ unpredictable		Social crisis
	Resource-based	Protracted/acute		Etc.

The affected population does not only comprise individuals or families. In most instances, local structures, such as CBOs and committees (IDP bodies, women's groups and councils of elders, for instance) emanate from, and represent, certain groups within the affected population.

National aid organisations include local NGOs and government institutions. It is important to stress that, in many crisis situations, there is considerable overlap between national aid organisations and the affected population. Local NGOs, for example, are composed of members of the affected population.

In Eastern DRC, the Programme d'Intégration et de Développement du Peuple Pygmée au Kivu (PIDP-Kivu) is an NGO, but it can also be

considered part of the affected population, since its members are Pygmies living in affected areas.

International aid organisations include international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, international organisations (IOs) and donor institutions (bilateral, multilateral and private).

Who, as an aid organisation, you can engage with, in order to facilitate or ensure the participation of affected populations, can vary. **You should thus be aware of the range of stakeholders that exist in a given context, and of their relationship with, and their proximity to, the affected population.**

The different types of relationships that can be established between stakeholders for this purpose are presented below.

C APPROACHING THE AFFECTED POPULATION

The participation of affected populations can be either direct, or indirect.

Direct participation

Members of the affected population participate as individuals in the various phases of an aid programme, such as by attending focus groups organised by your organisation, supplying labour for project implementation, voting or partaking in decision-making, and by suggesting ideas for interventions.

Indirect participation (or participation by representation)

Structures that represent or develop within the affected population (like CBOs and village committees) participate in humanitarian inter-

ventions by, for example, organising discussion fora, surveying villagers and selecting members of the affected population to be assisted.

In order to facilitate the participation of affected populations, whether direct or indirect, aid organisations can engage with other aid organisations. The potential combinations are numerous. For instance:

- an international NGO can work with a local NGO that represents the affected population or enjoys a close relationship with it—via a network of community workers, for example;
- a government institution can delegate activities to a local or an international aid organisation that has the resources (including skills and human capacity) to engage in participatory processes with an affected population;
- an international NGO can work through local government committees (such as health committees); and
- a local NGO with few skills or resources for participation can turn to an international aid organisation that can offer training in participatory tools and methods.

To ensure that such alliances are effective, though, it is important to conduct a precise stakeholder analysis, paying attention to constituency, membership and the mode of operation of the structures that you engage with.

Who you engage with and how you do so will depend on the situation, bearing in mind that 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 the impartiality and independence of an individual and an organisation, as well as the security of your staff and the people you seek to assist. Identifying who is who is thus an essential step in the analysis that will inform the design and the implementation of your participatory strategy.



C ... IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

A DEFINING HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In this handbook, humanitarian action is defined as the response to needs arising from a man-made or natural disaster.

B A TYPOLOGY OF HUMANITARIAN SITUATIONS

Humanitarian situations differ in terms of type, cause, speed of onset, scale and impact.

Humanitarian crises are often **complex**, with several disasters affecting the same population. This was the case in Nahrin, Afghanistan, where the population was the victim of earthquakes, while still suffering from the consequences of war (landmines and displacement) and drought.

C APPROACHES TO HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Humanitarian action is often referred to as emergency action, with 'traditional' humanitarian interventions consisting essentially of emergency medical assistance and relief (the free provision of food and non-food items). The largest sectors remain food security (food aid, nutrition and agricultural rehabilitation), health, shelter, and water and sanitation.

Humanitarian situations have revealed themselves to be far more complex, though, with many crises becoming '**protracted**' and with humanitarian aid being provided in the same region for years, sometimes decades. Humanitarian action has widened to include **post-crisis** interventions, and **prevention** activities, and responses have evolved, both within 'traditional' sectors (community health, for example), and in new ones (like education and psychosocial programmes).

The importance of linking relief and development and building on local capacities to respond to recurrent crises has thus been brought to

the fore. It is in this context that the participation of affected populations is assuming increasing importance in the field of humanitarian action.

D YOUR STRATEGY FOR PARTICIPATION

Your strategy for participation is composed of all of the elements that have been described in the introduction. Elaborating your strategy will require, therefore, that you ask yourself, and members of your organisation, the following questions:

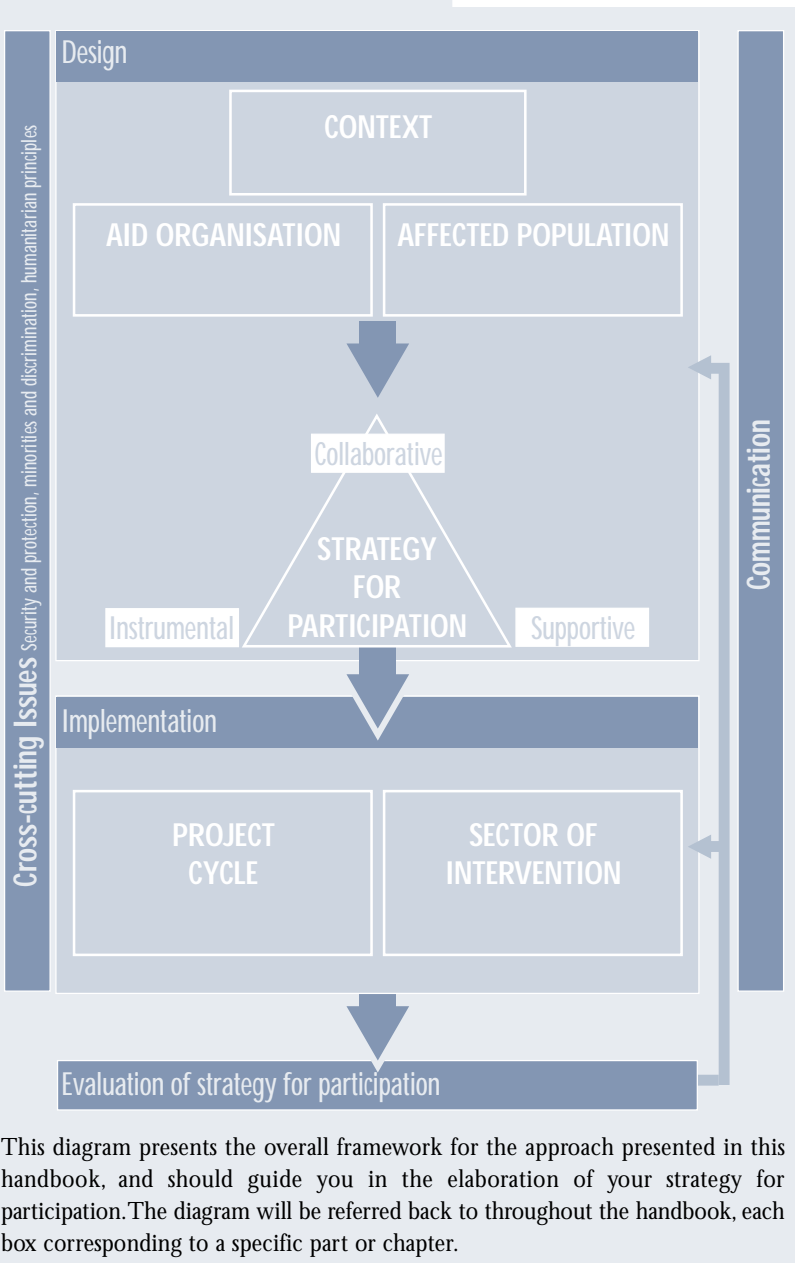
- What **types of participation** would be most appropriate?
- What overall **approach** (instrumental, collaborative, supportive) is most suitable?
- Which **tools and methods** can I use in the field?
- Should I engage **directly** with individual members of the affected population, or **via existing structures** that emanate from it?
- Should I engage with **other aid organisations** or government institutions to facilitate the participation of affected populations, and, if so, with which ones?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to analyse the factors that will constrain and support participation, in the specific environment in which you are planning to act. These factors are related to three key elements of any humanitarian situation:

- the **context**;
- the **affected population**; and
- your **aid organisation**.

Analysis of these factors will highlight the opportunities and risks that will inform the design of your strategy (see chapter 1).

Figure 2 Developing your strategy for participation



This diagram presents the overall framework for the approach presented in this handbook, and should guide you in the elaboration of your strategy for participation. The diagram will be referred back to throughout the handbook, each box corresponding to a specific part or chapter.

Regardless of the choices that you make, there are a number of prerequisites for successful participation that relate to the building of trust between your organisation and the affected population: communication and transparency. (See chapter 2.)