CHAPTER 4

DESIGN

Objective of Chapter 4

By the end of this chapter you should be familiar with a series of tools and approaches to design a programme in a participatory manner, while paying attention to key cross-cutting issues (security and protection, discrimination and minorities, and respect for the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence).

4.1 BEFORE YOU BEGIN …

4.1.1 THE PROCESS

In current practice, final decisions concerning programme design, such as where to go, what to do and whom to target, are very seldom taken in a participatory way.

They are often the result of the application of a mandate—for instance, certain agencies focus primarily on handicapped people, while others systematically target children. Some choices are imposed as a consequence of top-down decisions taken by donors or aid agencies' headquarters.

> Hygienic kits were distributed under a humanitarian programme in former Yugoslavia. Yet a survey of the affected population revealed that food would have been the item that they would have mentioned first if they had been consulted. The choice, though, was made according to logistical considerations and to concern about completing the programme swiftly. The

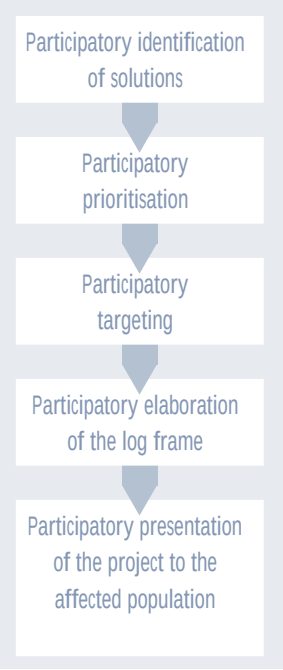
priorities of the donor and of the aid agency, therefore, overshadowed those of the affected population.

Other choices are the product of history, such as existing links between your organisation and a particular area, and the former presence in the region of your head of mission or the desk officer back at headquarters. Sometimes, the choice of 'where to go' is the end result of a coordination mechanism or, conversely, of a flag-planting strategy. Very often, it is also dictated by security and logistical considerations.

What matters most of all, is that you explain to the affected population in a transparent manner the choices that have been made and the rationale behind them. In most cases, people will respect this, as long as they believe that they do not conceal hidden agendas.

In many cases, however, there will always be room for affected populations and key individuals to contribute to the design process. How much will depend on you and your agency.

Participatory programme design is a challenging, yet exciting, exercise, which is easily manageable when broken down into several steps.



It is important to remember that programme design has strong links to the **assessment** phase. You may find that you have to go back to exercises described in the assessment phase, or to refine those that you have already conducted, to help you and the people you are working with make decisions on the future programme.

To be implemented fruitfully and meaningfully, this phase requires that you have read Part 1 of the handbook. This means that an acceptable level of clarity, transparency and understanding has been reached between you and your organisation on the one hand, and between you and the affected population and its associated structures on the other. Otherwise, you risk creating false expectations.

4.1.2 WHERE TO BE CAREFUL! KEY-CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

The most delicate steps in the design phase are **prioritisation** of activities and **targeting,** since, although many people can be involved in the assessment stage, not all will benefit equally from the programme. These steps can, therefore, be a source of conflict between your organisation and the affected population and/or within the affected population. This is where most attention must be paid to the following cross-cutting issues.

A Security and protection

Involving members of the affected population in decision-making processes can increase social tension and the risk of dispute. When decision-making is devolved to certain individuals or structures within the affected population, they can be put in jeopardy or threatened by other, discontented members of the population.

As an external stakeholder, your organisation may have to play the role of mediator. Lines of responsibility in regard to choices that have been made need to be clearly defined. Communication on the rationale for decisions taken is essential to avoiding or mitigating present and future tension. In fact, bringing people together to make decisions on prioritisation and targeting can be a very effective way of putting key concerns on the table, and resolving them collectively.

Participation of the affected population in programme design is also essential to ensuring that it takes into account protection issues.

Members of the affected population know best what may put them at risk, and what can be done to reinforce their protection.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can participatory prioritisation and targeting be done in a way that minimises the risk of social tension and dispute?
- How can I ensure that the rationale for decisions is clearly communicated to all members of the affected population, and that the explanations are understood/accepted?
- How can the participation of affected populations in programme design help to ensure that programme activities do not generate risks for them? And how can it help to reinforce their protection?

B Discrimination and minorities

Prioritising and targeting entails certain risks related to discrimination.

- The type of activities chosen can sometimes *de facto* exclude certain groups (for example, training programmes excluding illiterate individuals), and favour others already privileged in some way.
- Yet, targeting an intervention at a marginalised group can result in further isolation or stigmatisation of its members.

Some programmes in **Sri Lanka** targeted widows. However, 'the term widow in the Tamil language implies that which is inauspicious and pitiable. In this manner, 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'.[7]

[7] Sachithanandam, S., 'Participatory Approaches to Development under Civil War Conditions. The Experience in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka 1991–95', in Bastian, S and Bastian, N. (eds), Assessing Participation, A Debate from South Asia, (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), p. 191.

Participatory programme design can serve to evade such difficulties. Activities that exclude certain groups can be identified collectively and either avoided or complemented with other activities, for instance. The rationale for targeting specific groups can be defined collectively or even reviewed, thereby precluding the risk of future tension and stigmatisation. In particular, those marginalised people being targeted by an intervention should, at the very least, be consulted on how they feel it would be appropriate to do so.

This issue is discussed further in the section on targeting.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can the participation of affected populations, especially marginalised groups, in the programme design serve to ensure that these groups are not wholly excluded from the programme?
- How can participation in programme design guarantee that programmes targeting marginalised groups do not further stigmatise them, but, rather, support them in a way that they find appropriate?

C Impartiality and independence

In the project design phase, be careful when defining project activities, selecting members of the affected population and staff, and choosing local partner(s) not to favour a particular group in a way that could result in you losing your impartiality and independence. In certain contexts, the donor you are working with will also strongly affect how the population perceives you.

It is important to ensure that various stakeholders and parties participate in the process to avoid bias. Decisions that have been made need to be explained clearly. An essential part of respecting these principles is to communicate and clarify them from the outset. And remember to ask yourself in relation to each decision you make, whether your actions are consistent with your principles.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How do I ensure that the design process is conducted according to the needs of the population and not in response to pressure applied by a particular stakeholder?
- Are various population sub-groups represented in the groups that are defining the programme, to avoid potential bias?
- Is my communication strategy adequate to ensure transparency and that the population understands the rationale behind decisions made, including my organisation's position on impartiality and independence?

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4.1.3 FROM NO PARTICIPATION TO SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

The processes and methods presented in this chapter can be used in various ways, depending on how your organisation positions itself with regard to participation. Each potential approach carries with it possible benefits, but also risks, which it is important to be aware of.

4.2 PARTICIPATORY IDENTIFICATION OF SOLUTIONS

> '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.'

Aid actors, especially if they have had no or little time to conduct a proper assessment, often arrive in theatre with pre-packaged sets of activities and standard programme content. In many instances, especially protracted crises, complex emergencies and immediate post-conflict situations, these kit-based approaches reveal their limitations and risks.

Table 8 The instrumental, collaborative and supportive approaches to participation in the design stage

Description	Potential benefits	Risks	Reminder
Instrumental			
No or limited participation in design.	Can introduce new ideas/ techniques unknown to the local population Can target groups that would be excluded in the participatory process	Poorly adapted programme No adhesion between population and programme objectives and activities Low level of mobilisation in future stages Low level of trust building	Communicate clearly and frequently the rationale for the programme
Collaborative			
Design conducted jointly between your organisation and a structure associated with the affected population (such as a local NGO or CBO)	Reinforce local capacities (good in situations where there are recurring crises) Strengthen the link between relief, rehabilitation and development* Trust building	Loss of impartiality, depending on choice of partner Can increase the cost (time, staff, logistics) of design Design reduced to accepting 'shopping lists' if the population is accustomed to assistance	Know whom you are working with well If needed, train local partners in participatory design methods and other technical matters
Supportive			
Design carried out by affected population or associated structure.	Boost the weight and recognition of local capacities Increase the appropriateness and level of ownership of the programme Trust building	Respect for your organisation's principles? Are certain groups being excluded? Are activities supporting a warring faction, for instance? Local initiative can be poorly adapted or not feasible*	Know the context and the people you are supporting well Both sides conduct an institutional analysis, putting their strengths and weaknesses on the table If needed, train people in design methods and other technical issues

Sometimes 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. If you think this is not pertinent, not feasible or even dangerous, you have to be ready to enter into a dialogue and to explain your viewpoint. Participatory feasibility analysis is often the only way to prevent groups from engaging in inappropriate projects, which would raise many difficulties at a later stage.

The objective of this step is to identify the survival strategies or coping mechanisms that have helped—and often are still helping—the affected population to deal with adverse circumstances. A three-step exercise can prove useful in understanding and mainstreaming them in the overall participatory approach strategy.

4.2.1 **PHASE 1** IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION OF EXISTING SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

This can also be done in the assessment phase, such as during the CVA, when comprehending needs and demands. The aim is to identify existing options in regard to solutions and known strategies on which the affected population will attempt to rely, and to prioritise them. This can be done using relatively simple tools:

- classic focus groups, with boards, charts and pencils, or what you can find on the spot (stones, sticks and sand, for example); and
- specific group exercises aimed at elaborating the 'pillars-of-survival' diagram.

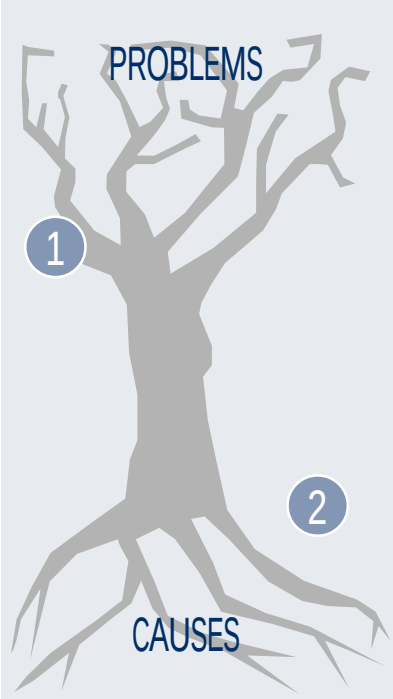
4.2.2 **PHASE 2** WHAT CAN BE DONE? IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS, CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

The issues to be discussed through out the participatory process should focus on how to turn the 'pillars-of-survival' diagram into options or opportunities for intervention. To do this, one should utilise a two-period timeframe.

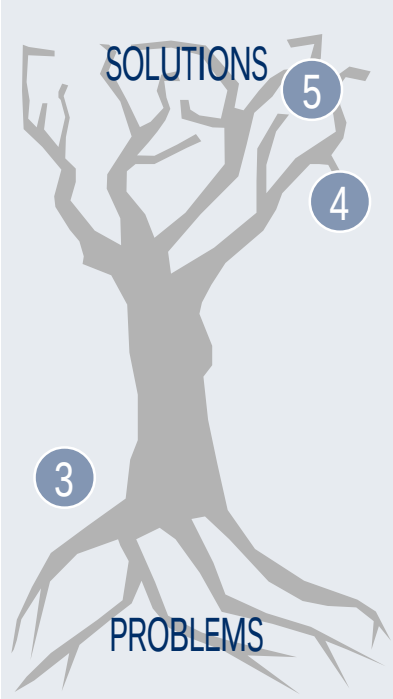
- What can be done to save and alleviate suffering **now**?
- What can be done immediately **afterwards**?

Tools available to address this issue include focus-group meetings to elaborate a grid indicating problems, options and constraints, and/or a problem/solution tree system. The latter is described below.

Development of the 'problem' tree



Development of the 'solution' tree



Exercise 17 Problem / solution tree

Objective

The goal is to identify cause–effect relationships and to stimulate debate to find solutions to a specific problem.

Participants

For this type of exercise, a small group is more efficient than a bigger one. Several sessions are recommended for different groups.

Do you need guidance?

This process requires time and preparation.

continued ▶

Exercise 17 Problem / solution tree continued

Step 1 Prepare your session. You will need paper and pens. If necessary, you can use pictures or drawings to illustrate ideas and points raised (such as if the participants are illiterate)

Step 2 Create a list of problems, and try to establish relationships between them. These will be the branches of your first tree

Step 3 Create a list of problems, and try to establish relationships between them. These will be the branches of your first tree

Step 4 Ask participants to identify the origins of the problems and to establish cause–effect relationships. At the end of this step participants will have painted a global picture

Step 5 Starting from problems as the roots of your second tree, ask participants to identify solutions to these problems. They will be the first level of branches of your second tree

Step 6 Open discussions on the impact of the proposed solutions. Add them to the picture as the second level of branches of your second tree

Step 7 Verify and validate the trees. One way to do this is to ask participants to explain the pictures. Share the results of these sessions

It is important throughout the process of identifying solutions to be open to suggestions from local people or affected populations, since they have precise knowledge of their situation. However, the organisation may also have expertise and knowledge to contribute to the process, and it can play a key role in examining the feasibility and the pertinence of solutions proposed by participants. As such, identifying adapted solutions rests on a balanced contribution from the affected population and the agency.

> Given the conflict and the level of displacement, civilians in Sri Lanka do not necessarily have the requisite expertise or insight to carry projects forward 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.

At this stage, what might emerge is a complex picture of a multitude of needs and solutions, each referring to a particular segment of the population. Do not try to find a 'middle path' by attempting to define the 'average victim' entitled to receive a 'standard assistance kit'. People of different age, gender and socio-economic status might have different needs.

Designing a programme is about making choices. Ensure that the process for doing so is as transparent and participatory as possible!

4.3 PARTICIPATORY PRIORITISATION

Participatory prioritisation includes:

- defining priority areas;
- defining priority action; and
- defining priority target groups.

The last point, which is very sensitive and more specific, is addressed in section 4.4.

4.3.1 DEFINE THE PRIORITY AREA

Geographic targeting at the macro-level (such as the choice of provinces) has often been done much earlier in the process. You will not be involved in a participatory process in an area that has not already been more or less identified.

At this stage, a more refined geographic targeting exercise (villages and neighbourhoods, for instance) will need to be conducted. This is also discussed in section 4.4.

4.3.2 DEFINE THE PRIORITY ACTION

After the list of potential solutions and interventions has been drawn up, the next step is to identify from among them the priorities for action. These will be determined not only by the nature of needs, but also by what the agency is able to do, and what local capacities exist. There are often constraints on what you and your organisation can or cannot do (including donor conditions and level of expertise). It is important to explain to the affected population in a transparent manner what you can and cannot do, and why.

The priorities established by the population may differ from those perceived by the agency. Listening to and understanding these requests are the first step in openness to expectations. Dialogue and negotiation are central to participatory prioritisation.

> Aid workers in Angola were surprised by the frequency with which IDPs request assistance to build an *ondjango* (the umbundu word for a simple 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.

Identifying priorities for action in a participatory manner can be done through focus groups and collective brainstorming. Do not be surprised, though, if, at the end of the process, you find yourself confronted with a range of priority actions, corresponding to the different vulnerabilities existing among the affected population. Each action can have the same amount of importance attached to it, but can target a different group. This situation can be summarised as follows.

Table 9 Priorities for action and different vulnerabilities

Vulnerable groups	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Options for action	Action set 1	Action set 2	Action set 3	Action set 4

Choosing between these groups and the corresponding action is done through the targeting process.

4.4 PARTICIPATORY TARGETING

Participatory targeting aims to ensure an optimal level of culturally acceptable equity and to limit possible security incidents, while trying to respect the overall programme objectives—that is, to assist those affected by the crisis. It involves:

- refined geographical targeting (micro-level); and
- targeting of population groups that will benefit and/or participate in the programme.

4.4.1 REFINED GEOGRAPHICAL TARGETING

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In certain situations, there is a need to refine geographical targeting: where the scale of the disaster is considerable; when needs overwhelm existing resources; or when needs are spread unevenly across a very large area.

Where the objective is to select a restricted number of villages, for example, you can organise a discussion group with village chiefs or representatives, and conduct proportional-piling exercises to identify those areas in the greatest need of assistance.

Given the importance of humanitarian assistance to the population as a whole, the transparency and communication strategy pertaining to geographical targeting is vital.

Large meetings to present the results of proportional-piling and ranking exercises are among the few known and tested tools available for conducting refined geographical targeting. Issues are extremely sensitive, centring on impartiality, independence and capacity to resist all kinds of pressure.

4.4.2 TARGETING OF THE POPULATION TO BE ASSISTED

Four main considerations, which have to be shared at length with the population, local authorities and other stakeholders, lie behind the 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 take all possible action to avoid aid dependency.

Remember, targeting is a very sensitive exercise, socially and politically. It can create a great deal of tension between your agency and the population, and/or within the population. As an external actor, you will probably be playing the part of a **mediator and facilitator** in a participatory targeting process.

Experience shows that completely devolving the process to the affected population can cause serious problems.

> In Afghanistan, an organisation attempted to devolve the selection of female participants in a relief project 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, while the latter claimed that they were excluding them from the selection process to avoid accusations of nepotism! Furthermore, actual fighting erupted between women over the question of who was most vulnerable. The agency had to abandon this approach, as it was undermining its community-development efforts.

If carefully managed, however, delegating responsibility for selecting those to be assisted to community members can be a successful process, and it can enhance the commitment of the affected population.

In the case of an agricultural rehabilitation programme for the displaced communities of Kalongue (Bukavu), 'the smallholders were chosen by the community of smallholders'.

The objective is to allow smallholders to re-plant crops and to build up their livestock via a rotating credit system. Given that the majority of the population is short of food, the first smallholders to benefit from this scheme are responsible for planting crops and 'repaying their debt' by making their grain and animals available to their neighbours. Consequently, the initial participants must not eat either the grain or the animals that were given to them.

During a public meeting, names were put forward to determine who should benefit from the project. Some of the smallholders withdrew because they felt that they could not satisfy the stipulation not to eat the grain. Those present at the meeting selected participants, while bearing in mind that the most vulnerable families should not be chosen.

Designing a participatory targeting process involves two main steps.

A Step 1 participatory identification of targeting criteria

Identification of criteria is a complex and very sensitive exercise, where the vision and experience of aid agencies may not match the traditional understanding of aid provision.

This is where participation can become tricky. Is it a process to negotiate vulnerability criteria? Is it a process to promote internationally accepted vulnerability categories? Is it a way to make people commit to our agenda? Is it acceptance of what is seen to make sense in a given cultural context? Or is it just recognising our incapacity to meet fully our objective of assisting the most at risk, and transferring responsibility for this to local actors?

Aid agencies' conception of vulnerability may not correspond to the actual situation. Our focus on children and mothers, for instance, often disguises the dire conditions in which the older segment of the population barely survives. In many societies, it is not exceptional for a pregnant woman to be very rich. Also, in war-torn countries, conflict veterans are often listed as people to be assisted, even if they are young and healthy.

In fact, most societies tend to promote equality (everybody should receive the same) **as opposed to equity** (people obtain assistance according to their needs, level of distress or level of commitment). In addition, **targeting is often not socially acceptable,** especially in societies where the social contract, based on equal allocation of external resources, is central to ensuring that people remain within reach of the social-security net ('you share with me when you have, I share with you when I have', for example). It is not surprising, then, to see people sharing what they have received a few hundred meters from the distribution site. Cultural and societal sensitivity is crucial in this exercise.

If you have a certain amount of room for manoeuvre in regard to defining targeting criteria, there are several ways of conducting this process. Two approaches are presented below.

- **Economic targeting.** In this case, you establish targeting criteria in relation to real vulnerabilities. To do this, you can undertake a participatory 'wealth- and vulnerability-' ranking exercise, as well as proportional-piling exercises.

Maybe you will have already carried out such an exercise in the assessment phase. If you are working with the same population, you can go back to the results of the previous wealth-ranking exercise, and refine them further. If you have narrowed down the area that you will be targeting, you can conduct a new wealth-ranking exercise in a more geographically circumscribed space.

- **Social targeting.** Another way of proceeding is to target particular social groups, such as women or children. But this is also a sensitive matter. Power dynamics at the family, household and community levels are often highly entrenched and complex. 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 cooperating with the likes of parents, teachers and religious and community leaders.

For this type of exercise, it is probably necessary to carry out a **gender analysis,** or **equity analysis,** of the social and economic situations of particular social groups.

> Experience in Sri Lanka shows that projects targeting women, children or young people have been more successful in fostering participation than generic schemes that affect whole population groups or are directed at men. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that men are at work, or by the fact that alcohol consumption among them is higher in certain regions. Agencies also noted that women worked together more effectively, especially when organised into groups based on different caste and socio-economic status, which men find difficult to deal with.
>
> Agencies also noted that children seemed to engage more effectively with participatory projects. They were eager to initiate activities that would enhance the quality of life in the community. In addition, youth involvement in community work led to a commitment from adults to undertake community-development projects, as well as a noteworthy reduction in the consumption of alcohol.[8]

[8] Hart, J., Participation of Conflict-Affected Children in Humanitarian Assistance Programming, Learning from Eastern Sri Lanka, report for CIDA, Colombo, 2002.

Useful tools to help people understand the plight of various groups, and thereby to identify which ones may be in most need of assistance, are **role-playing games** and **small theatre plays**. These can take time to set up, but they are very effective and popular in refugee camps, for instance, where people have the time to invest.

B Step 2 participatory information-sharing processes

The key word here is 'transparency'. It is vital to guarantee that a few individuals or groups do not control information, which, in turn, is essential for **social control** to be effective. Social control is the process whereby members of the affected population themselves ensure that targeting procedures are respected, but this requires that they know what they are entitled to and why, and how they go about getting it.

At this stage, one should also be ready to receive and respond to claims and complaints, since even the most effective targeting process always excludes some potential targets.

Information sharing can take various forms: public meetings; notice boards; distribution of leaflets; and public announcements through the media.

4.5 THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK: A TEAM-BUILDING MECHANISM

Development of a logical framework can be viewed as a bureaucratic, laborious, donor-imposed, time-consuming exercise. Yet it has the potential to become a key team-building mechanism if done in a timely and proper manner. Behind it is a very simple idea: two minds are better than one.

Organising a small workshop with a team that is in charge of project identification or will be involved in project implementation is a very powerful way of bringing everybody into line, and making sure that

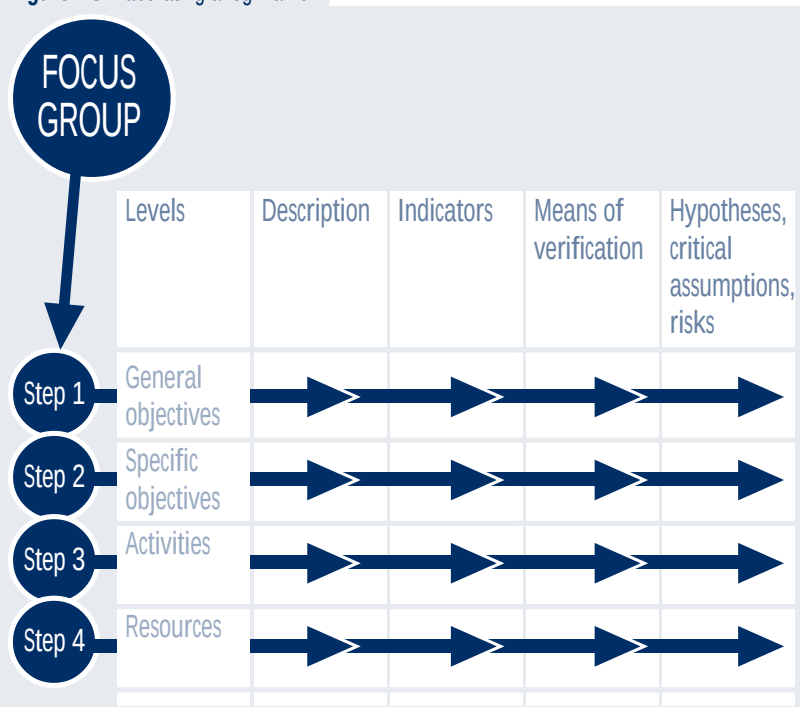
everyone is working together. This will prove particularly valuable when the team confronts difficulties.

The various steps involved in elaborating a log-frame are presented in the table below:

An important step is to define who will do what (among the activities), and who will contribute which resources. Again, exercises like proportional piling can be useful here.

Defining the indicators and the means of verification entails designing a monitoring and evaluation system. Participatory design of the monitoring and evaluation system is discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

Figure 19 Elaborating a log-frame



4.6 PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION TO THE AFFECTED POPULATION

Creating a forum where all elements of the programme can be presented and discussed with a broad section of the affected population is a challenge rarely undertaken. However, it has been shown in several instances to be a powerful tool in creating a collective sense of working together, and establishing mutual respect between the agency and the affected population.

It often only requires one session to share, debate and validate hypotheses, ideas, objectives and strategies.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The quality of the assessment and of the design - complementary and interconnected steps in the project cycle - is likely to be seriously affected by the level and degree of participation of the affected population, its institutions, its economic actors and its representatives.

The assessment and programme design stage is one of the most crucial steps, where pressures, power games and cultural bias, for instance, can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful programme, and sometimes between life and death.

The key issues raised in this chapter, and the tools available to address them, are summarised below.

PARTICIPATORY IDENTIFICATION OF SOLUTIONS	
What are the main problems that the population is facing?	Focus groups
What are the causes?	Pillars of survival/fishbone
Which coping strategies can be built on?	Problems/causes tree
What are the possible solutions?	Problems/solutions tree
	Analysis of problems

PARTICIPATORY PRIORITISATION	
What are the priorities in terms of action? For which groups?	Focus groups

PARTICIPATORY TARGETING

Where to target? Who to target? How to target? How can I ensure that those who are targeted are not made more vulnerable or stigmatised? How can I ensure that those who are not targeted understand the rationale behind the chosen targeting criteria? How can social-control mechanisms serve to ensure that the process is fair and respected? Equity issues Gender issues	Focus-group exercises Social-control mechanisms Proportional piling Role-plays/Games Theatre Gender analysis Equity analysis

PARTICIPATORY ELABORATION OF THE LOG-FRAME

Definition of general and specific objectives Definition of activities Definition of who does what Design of the resource mobilisation strategy (human, financial and material resources) Design of a monitoring mechanism Design of an evaluation mechanism	Focus-group exercises and workshops Proportional piling

PRESENTATION TO THE AFFECTED POPULATION

Validation of objectives Validation of action plan (activities, who does what and who contributes what)	Meetings, debate and clarification of questions raised

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