EVALUATION

◎ **Objective of Chapter 7**

By the end of this chapter, you should feel comfortable engaging in a participatory evaluation process, using a series of tools and approaches, and paying attention to key cross-cutting issues (security and protection, discrimination and minorities, and impartiality and independence).

7.1 APPROACHING PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Evaluation of humanitarian programmes is still a relatively recent feature; participatory evaluation remains the exception rather than the rule. This stage is essential, however, to extract the lessons to be learned, and to capitalise on them. They can concern both the project process itself, and the participation strategy that is being put in place.

There are various forms of evaluation, depending on who commissions it and who carries it out. Although a participatory approach can be adopted for all types of evaluation, it does not necessarily entail the same level of stakeholder involvement.

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A few examples from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

Evaluation of an international NGO's programme by a local organisation

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 Agro Action Allemande (AAA)'.

Focus groups and interviews (using a questionnaire) were among the various approaches utilised in the evaluation. The people who asked to attend the focus groups were 'people … who had a certain influence in the community leadership, notably local development committee members, traditional authorities and political-administrative authorities, teachers, nurses, health centre workers, church ministers, etc.'.

Evaluation carried out by head office

Oxfam carried out an evaluation of all of its activities established following the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano. Criteria included the use of participatory techniques and the results of participation. Coordination and cooperation with other organisations were also subject to review.

'The primary sources (for the evaluation) were notably interviews … with partners and beneficiaries [sic], (which were carried out) in the field with key participants (such as public health promoters, supervisors, health committees, volunteers, nurses and civil servants from the health zone (zone de santé), discussion groups, informal interviews with beneficiaries and site visits.'

Evaluation carried out by the donor

The Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB) funded the Volontaires Autochtones Solidaires (VAS), a Congolese organisation working with the Kalongue community. When the programme was complete, a NOVIB commission visited the Kalongue authorities, as well as officials and organised groups. One member of the participatory evaluation team spoke fluent Swahili and was thus able to communicate directly with the population.

7.1.1 A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION: KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

A   Security and protection

Evaluation processes, due to their retrospective and analytical nature, often lead to the identification of problems, errors and responsibility, all of which are delicate subjects, where potential danger may loom for those involved. As a result, they need to be handled with care. The lives of people in charge of evaluation processes through social-control mechanisms, for example, can be put in jeopardy, especially in contexts of political crisis or armed conflict. They must, therefore, be selected carefully and supported in this task. Being a source of information can also be risky. Preserving the anonymity of informants, during surveys of the population, can provide a certain amount of protection.

❷ KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I ensure that the evaluation process does not create security problems for the people involved?
- How can I ensure that the evaluation process takes programme-related security and protection issues into account?
- When necessary, how can I ensure that the anonymity of informants engaged in the evaluation process is respected?

B   Discrimination and minorities

Evaluation should pay attention to whether the programme has led to the inclusion or the exclusion of particular groups. This entails listening to those who are often 'voiceless', because they are marginalised, or because they cannot attend community assemblies, for instance. Creating the space for them to speak out is a delicate undertaking, which should consider the consequences that these people may face as a result, such as risks to their security or further stigmatisation. (See section 5.5.2.)

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I ensure that the evaluation process will record the views of marginalised groups?
- How can I ensure that poorly assisted groups will not be further marginalised or stigmatised due to the fact that they have complained openly during the evaluation?

C   **Impartiality and independence**

Being impartial and independent at this stage essentially entails listening 'to all sides' and gathering together the perspectives of different population groups, which may perceive an intervention in different ways. Conducting focus groups and interviews, in a range of areas that have been affected by the intervention, and being transparent throughout the process, is one possible way of reaching various parts of the population concerned.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I ensure that the views of all groups and stakeholders are taken into account?
- How can I ensure that, by acting on certain recommendations, I am not being manipulated by certain groups?

7.1.2   FROM CONSULTATION TO FACILITATION

Here, again, the different levels and forms of participation chosen will have a bearing on the operation. Three approaches to participatory evaluation are described below.

Table 15 The instrumental, collaborative and supportive approaches to participation in the final evaluation

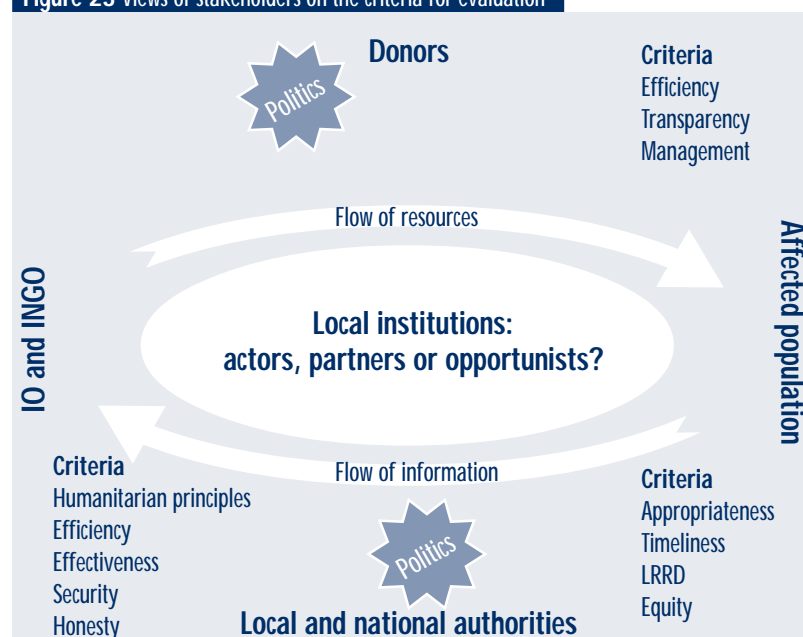| Description	Potential benefits	Risks	Reminder
Instrumental			
Consultation with various stakeholders	Taking into account the perceptions of the population Enhanced learning and accountability capacity for your organisation You can consult with groups that would be excluded in a participatory process	You can be exposed to many complaints and demands Low level of trust; people do not provide constructive information	Inform people of the objective of the exercise Provide feedback on the results of the evaluation Explain how the information will be used Be ready to deal with complaints
Collaborative			
Evaluation carried out jointly by your organisation and a structure associated with the affected population (local NGO or CBO, for instance)	Taking into account the perceptions of the population Reinforcing local capacities (good in situations where there are recurring crises) Consolidating trust; can strengthen opportunities to work together again in future	Loss of impartiality, depending on choice of partner Can increase cost and time required Transparency may be more difficult for a local institution to achieve Local institutions may be more reluctant to share negative results with the local population	If needed, train local partners, focussing on purpose and methods of evaluation, and the participatory tools that can be used The results of the evaluation should be shared and accepted by all parties involved Difficulties should be managed jointly
Supportive			
Evaluation carried out by the affected population or by an associated structure	Reinforcing the weight and recognition of local capacities Enhancing and strengthening the learning and accountability of the local structure Building of trust between the local structure and potential donors	Local structures and populations that initiate their own projects may not necessarily consider the need to engage in evaluation processes Local structures may be reluctant to share negative results with the population and with donors	Know the context and the people you are supporting well If needed, train people, focussing on the purpose and methods of evaluation, and the participatory tools that can be used As an external agency, your role may be one of facilitator, offering guidance on setting up and implementing participatory evaluation

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7.2 PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION: KEY PRINCIPLES

The evaluation process is a rich, yet risky undertaking for the affected population and local actors. The external aid actor has to be ready to be criticised!

In addition, it is important to accept that the population and their local representatives might challenge known 'good practices' in relation to evaluation. The typical criteria of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and connectedness, for example) might have to be reinterpreted to match the views of stakeholders involved in the participatory process!

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Figure 23 Views of stakeholders on the criteria for evaluation

Donors

Politics

Criteria
Efficiency
Transparency
Management

Flow of resources

IO and INGO

Local institutions:
actors, partners or opportunists?

Affected population

Criteria
Humanitarian principles
Efficiency
Effectiveness
Security
Honesty

Flow of information

Politics

Local and national authorities

Criteria
Appropriateness
Timeliness
LRRD
Equity

Key principles of participatory evaluation:

Principle 1   Participation in evaluation has little meaning if the population or local actors have not been involved much earlier in the project cycle—that is, in the assessment and implementation phases.

Principle 2   One has to be ready to accept that programmes will be measured against criteria put forward by the population and local actors. They do not necessarily fit neatly with criteria imposed by the donor or the aid agency's headquarters, or with internationally recognised standards.

Principle 3   If evaluation processes are just mechanisms to ensure compliance, then they will remain simple information-collection exercises. The frustration of local stakeholders can be great.

Principle 4   Transparency in evaluation processes has to be very high, from the drafting of the 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) to discussion of the conclusions and recommendations. It is thus important to communicate on all aspects of these processes and to try to engage in bottom-up, rather than top-down, dynamics.

Principle 5   It should be made clear from the outset that evaluation processes do not seek to apply sanctions—so that the process is based on trust and empathy, and to encourage participation.

7.3 THE PROCESS

Participatory evaluation is a three-step exercise, which normally occurs at the end of the project, or at key stages where reorientation is possible.

Because it is a multi-stakeholder, complex exercise, it is important to define clearly a navigation process for the evaluation as a whole. This can involve, for instance, a steering committee, composed of representatives of different stakeholder constituencies.

The three steps are set out below.

Step 1 **Design of the evaluation process.** This entails:
- defining the object (programme, strategy or process, for example) to be assessed and the aims of the evaluation;
- identifying the stakeholders who will be involved and delineating their role;
- outlining the methods that will be used;
- identifying the means available and determining how they will be distributed; and
- deciding how the process results will be utilised.

Step 2 **The actual evaluation process.** This includes:
- field work;
- consultation with the various stakeholders; and
- collective debate and discussion.

Step 3 **The feedback (to stakeholders) process.** Questions can include:
- how can a steering committee be established to oversee final feedback?
- how can we ensure proper feedback to the affected population?

These steps are usually described in the ToR, which can be elaborated in a participatory manner.

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7.4 DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Participatory design of the evaluation, and participatory elaboration of the ToR that result from the design process, are not necessarily complex. They should occur in a focus group, during which brainstorming generates ideas.

Table 16 Elements that need to be defined in the ToR for the evaluation

Elements	Key questions
Definition of the purpose of the evaluation	Is it to assess the programme's relevance from the perspective of the affected population, and to gauge whether needs have changed or not? Is it to identify the effects of the intervention on a specific set of problems? Is it to be informed of the quality of the programme? Is it to be aware of the programme's impact? Is to adapt the intervention to the actual situation? Is it to compare how activities have evolved in relation to the initial action plan? Is it to initiate a learning process, aimed at preventing errors from being repeated? Is it to discover the population's level of satisfaction?
Identification of the different stakeholders in a participatory evaluation	Are there local mechanisms or institutions, accepted and recognised by the population, which could play the role of 'intermediary' between the population and the aid organisation in the evaluation process? Is it preferable to engage directly with the population? Will it be necessary, for practical reasons, to engineer the emergence of local intermediaries?

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Table 16 Elements that need to be defined in the ToR for the evaluation continued

Elements	Key questions
Definition of methods to be used	Is it possible partly to incorporate the evaluation within traditional decision-making and problem-solving mechanisms? Are there existing and known social-control systems and is it possible to use them in the evaluation process? Is it possible to identify collectively an analytical framework for the evaluation, including the identification of evaluation criteria, indicators and benchmarks?
Definition of how the evaluation will be implemented	Will the process be implemented directly or in partnership with a local actor? In the latter case, what will the terms of the contract be? Which participatory tools will be used? How can we ensure that certain 'voiceless' groups are not excluded from the process? Will the process be credible and safe enough for the 'discontented' to express themselves without fear? Will the process be perceived as rigorous enough for its conclusions to be credible?
Feedback	Will feedback be provided to the affected population at the end of the evaluation? Will a specific session(s) be organised for this purpose? Will there be enough time for people to assimilate the findings and to react?
Use of the results	How will participants be informed of how their views have been taken into account? Is it possible to set up a participatory system to follow up on implementation of the recommendations produced by the evaluation? How can the safety of those groups involved in the evaluation process be guaranteed, and the risks of stigmatisation or social tension be minimised?

7.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVALUATION

7.5.1 THE TOOLS AVAILABLE

Certain tools have been experimented with and are seen as potentially useful and effective for participatory evaluation. They are listed below, along with their specific objectives and advantages, as well as their limitations and constraints.

Table 17 Tools available to conduct a participatory evaluation

Objectives and advantages	Limitations and constraints
Focus groups, roundtables and meetings	
Enable open discussions to take place	Sometimes these techniques can lead to the masking of the views of those who do not dare to speak
Help to reinforce links with the community and to create a climate of trust	Special skills in observation, social analysis and group management are thus required
Depending on the issue, it is necessary either to have good representation of different segments of the population (in terms of age, gender, activity and social group) or to have strata-specific groups	In many situations, the results of the focus groups have to be triangulated through other participatory mechanisms
Note that sensitive subjects like HIV or breastfeeding practices are not discussed in the same fora as road building and security!	
Individual interviews	
Individual interviews and the collection of eyewitness accounts allow for the development of a more intimate view of the issues at stake and engender awareness of ideas that might not be easily expressed in larger groupings or in public	It is rather time-consuming and requires both discretion and sensitivity, given the protection issues that could arise from this practice
Surveys	
Participatory surveys are an essential tool. A prerequisite for their success is joint elaboration of objectives, the drafting of questionnaires, and collective identification of the quantitative sample	Questionnaires have to be simple and culturally adapted. The survey team has to be chosen in a participatory manner in order to avoid post-survey claims of bias and complaints
Mechanisms to protect anonymity	
In some contexts, certain issues (such as human-rights violations, especially against women or children) may require participatory mechanisms that protect anonymity. Anonymous questionnaires, for example, which can be collected discreetly and put back in public boxes or sent through the mail, can be used in certain situations	Discretion and caution are sometimes vital to the survival of those individuals who have been ready to participate. Unfortunately, this hinders double-checking and the triangulation of certain information

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Table 17 Tools available to conduct a participatory evaluation continued

Objectives and advantages	Limitations and constraints
Evaluation days	
Visits to programmes, 'open days' and field trips to different communities, followed by discussion and social events, are very interesting ways to stimulate exchanges and to extract opinions	While these are both time- and resource-consuming initiatives, they are very effective (if not necessarily efficient)
Social audit by an external evaluator	
Social audits, *inter alia,* are a very useful way of garnering the views of stakeholders. Although not always very 'participatory' in terms of implementation, they can be very participatory at the time when the findings are released and discussed	These exercises are not necessarily cheap and quick. It is recommended, therefore, that you include a line in the budget. They are totally useless if conducted only for public-relations reasons and are not followed by action. Their design and implementation require special skills in the areas of sociology and anthropology
Feedback mechanisms	
Providing feedback to stakeholders is central to participatory evaluation. The groups, committees and mechanisms established for the evaluation constitute very good channels for providing either an oral or written response. In most instances, a preferred option is to hold a meeting where there can be discussion about the exercise, its methodology, its findings and how the recommendations will be implemented	Feedback is a risky endeavour if the capacity to implement changes required as a result of the evaluation process is low Both successes and failures have to be acknowledged All stakeholders should be formally invited

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7.5.2 PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION … WITH WHOM?

A   Choosing your partner

In regard to evaluation, it is very important to choose the most appropriate partner. Control of, or involvement in, an evaluation process can be a source of power. Certain choices can have detrimental consequences. Structures that are perceived as non-representative, or are known to have inappropriate past records, have to be avoided at all cost. Structures that cannot access key segments of the population (women and other ethnic groups, for instance) should be utilised in conjunction with other structures, which do not suffer the same limitations.

In addition, care should be taken to ensure that structures involved in the participatory evaluation do not abuse the opportunity in order to gain power over the population or other institutions; structures that

might have vested interests or hidden agendas should thus be avoided. This is an especially sensitive matter in a context of armed conflict.

Where acceptable intermediaries do not emerge or cannot be identified, it is necessary to identify what culturally and socially acceptable collective problem-solving mechanisms exist, and to negotiate how to work with them.

B   Working through traditional assemblies
This is extremely useful to ensure that the population can be informed through existing communication channels. Hence, information should be available in local languages and in culturally acceptable media.

In such cases, the role of your cultural bridge—for expatriates, this can be a translator—is essential. His/her personality, the way he/she is perceived, and his/her capacity to create empathy will significantly affect the quality of the dialogue and the reality of local stakeholder involvement in the evaluation. It is vital that these fora are also used for feedback exercises throughout the evaluation process.

⚠ Last, but not least, working through these traditional mechanisms implies a commitment that conclusions and recommendations will have a visible impact on the project. Otherwise, people can feel betrayed.

C   Social control mechanisms
Social-control mechanisms are important in validating choices, ensuring opportunities to control corruption and inequity, and in limiting the risk of nepotism and patronage. Full transparency, from the design to the evaluation phase, is critical for social-control mechanisms to function effectively.

⚠ Security and protection issues that might affect those in charge of the promotion of social-control mechanism are the main potential counter-indicators to the stimulation of social control.

7.5.3 LISTENING … TO THE VOICELESS, THE DISCONTENTED, THE 'COMPETITORS'

In the midst of participation, certain groups tend to be overshadowed. These usually comprise the poor, the landless, the discontented and people of the 'wrong' age, gender, cast and ethnic group. It is important to ensure that the entire participatory process takes into account their existence, their needs and their views, notably in the evaluation.

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■ **The voiceless** These people are not represented in the leadership; they are often not, or only loosely, organised; they are simply too afraid to speak. Make sure that the process does not leave them behind! But think of their security and protection before encouraging them too strongly to go public. If this precaution is not straightforward and clear, people are likely not to get involved, or they may be taking risks if they do so.

■ **The voice of the 'discontented'** This group usually has two types of reaction: 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 the silent group.

■ **The voice of the 'competitors'** Knowing what other agencies and actors in the same field think of the programme is another very useful component of participatory evaluation. It is crucial to incorporate their views into the debate with the main stakeholders - that is, those assisted by the programme. Sometimes, the fact that one point has been raised by another agency, can open up new avenues of debate and prevent what could have been a dangerous 'face-to-face' confrontation between the aid provider and aid recipient.

7.6 THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

7.6.1 INFORMATION SHARING AND TRANSPARENCY

Given the fact that participatory evaluation is a time-consuming undertaking, the population will be willing to commit itself on a continued basis only if the flow of information is fluid, the data are relevant and consistent, and proper feedback on the results occurs at the end.

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

The key question concerning the organisation of feedback mechanisms is:

- how can I ensure that feedback is provided to all key stakeholders involved in the programme and evaluation process?

Maintaining a transparent flow of information on evaluation is not without certain dangers. Indeed, it publicises errors and failures and constraints and difficulties, as much as it does successes! It might also underline certain responsibilities and specific attitudes of key stakeholders. Putting this in the public arena can be risky. So be careful and do not be 'over-communicative'!

7.6.2 LESSONS LEARNED HAVE TO BECOME LESSONS USED

A basic piece of advice is: do not get involved in participatory evaluation if your organisation is not ready to take it seriously, to listen to the results, and to act on them.

Key questions include:

- how will participants be informed of how their views have been taken into account?
- will there be a 'post-evaluation' participatory programme review and will adjustments to planning be made?
- is it possible to set up a participatory system to follow up on implementation of the recommendations produced by the evaluation?

7.6.3   TIME MANAGEMENT

Participatory evaluations can be extremely time-consuming for aid actors, for local leaders and for the population. Furthermore, although the population's enthusiasm for the project and its willingness to be involved is strong in the early phases, momentum is gradually lost. At the end of the programme, when people expect less input from the aid agency, they may question whether it will have an interest in spending time on a participatory evaluation.

So make sure that you use participants' time effectively, and that they clearly understand why their input is important!

7.7   CONCLUSION: ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Participatory evaluation involves complex processes that require time and humility. It processes can bring about amazing results, if implemented in a way that takes into account all the characteristics of the crisis and the post-crisis situation.

Key questions concerning the three steps of a participatory evaluation are presented below, along with the tools available to tackle them.

DESIGN AND ELABORATION OF THE ToR

Did you involve the various stakeholders in the design of the evaluation process, including elaboration of the ToR, in order to define:
- the objectives?
- the stakeholders involved?
- the methods to be used?
- the means required?

Focus group on the ToR and design of the evaluation methodology

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVALUATION

Did you manage to involve all of the stakeholders?

Did you manage to hear all of their voices?

Did you inform people sufficiently and at the apposite time?

Were the participatory tools appropriate?

Are the quantity and quality of the information collected adequate for the evaluation exercise?

Establishment of a steering committee
Focus group on impact analysis
Structured and semi-structured interviews
Surveys
Institutional analysis
Storytelling
Box for the collection of complaints
Social audit

FEEDBACK TO THE AFFECTED POPULATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EVALUATION

Was the exercise satisfactory in view of the ToR?

How will the evaluation results be fed back to the population?

Is the evaluation exercise a time-effective process that leads to changes where necessary?

Focus groups
General meetings with larger groups from the affected population
Communication and information tools
Surveys

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CONCLUSION OF PART 2

Participation can trigger major quality improvement mechanisms in regard to humanitarian action. But it has to be done with the utmost care, sensitivity and sense of responsibility, in often turbulent, sometimes dangerous, and, in most instances, complex crisis and post-crisis contexts. There is room for participatory practices in all phases of the project cycle.

There are tools to achieve this. Some can be used only in a specific phase of the project cycle, while others have a much broader field of application (see the table below). The main tools available have been described in the second part of this handbook. A specialist on participation can most likely identify more tools, and even make highly original use of the toolbox presented in this handbook. Once you feel comfortable using these tools, feel free to experiment! Participation is a state of mind, which entails sensitive creativity.

Table 18 The range of tools presented and their application in the project cycle

Tools	Assessment	Design	Implementation	Monitoring	Evaluation
Historical timeline	●				
Mapping	●	●	●	●	●
Transect walk	●	●			●
Seasonal activity calendar	●	●	●	●	●
Daily schedule	●	●			●
Institutional analysis	●	●		●	●
Crisis analysis	●				
Wealth-ranking analysis	●	●	●	●	●
Economic process analysis	●	●		●	●
Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis	●	●		●	●
Proportional piling	●	●	●	●	●
Storytelling	●			●	●
Role play	●			●	●