

Part 1

Designing a Strategy for Participation in Humanitarian Action

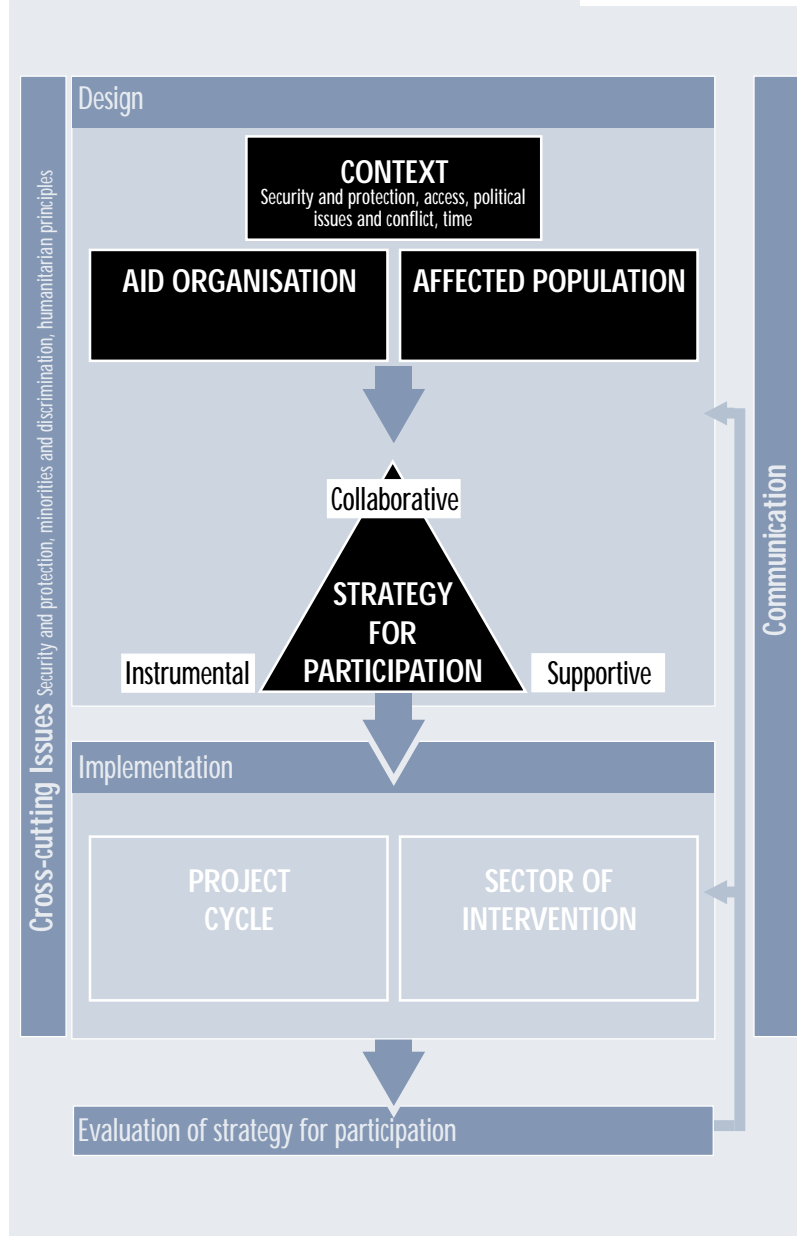
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© Objective of Part 1

By the end of Part 1, you should be able to clarify your objectives and be able to design a strategy for participation and a communication based on an 'opportunities-and-risks' analysis of the context, the affected population's features and competencies, and your organisation's mandate, expertise and capacity.

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

Philip White, 1994

Figure 3 Developing your strategy for participation: the context

Chapter 1

Factors Affecting Participation in Humanitarian Action

🎯 Objective of Chapter 1

To enable practitioners to design a strategy for participation by identifying:

- the reasons for, and the goals of, this strategy;
- the opportunities and risks arising from the characteristics of the context, the affected population and your organisation;
- those whom you might potentially wish to engage; and
- the type of participation you will employ.

1.1 A Continuous Process

Defining your strategy requires detailed understanding and careful examination of the factors that will mould, constrain and support participation. These factors, relating to the characteristics of the context, the affected population and of your organisation, are discussed in the following sections.

For each factor, **questions** are asked that should enable you to identify the **opportunities and risks** related to participation. Analysis of these opportunities and risks should guide the formulation of your participation strategy.

Before engaging in participatory exercises, you can begin by collecting background information on matters pertaining to these questions. This can be done, for example, via:

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- a review of key references in the literature (in the fields of anthropology and political history, for instance), including 'grey' literature, such as mission reports, evaluations and personal accounts;
- the holding of interviews with people who know the context and/or have experience of aid programmes in the region; and
- attendance at meetings.

Answering these questions is a **continuous process**. Your growing experience of the context, changes in the situation, and the evolution of your relationship with the affected population and other stakeholders, *inter alia*, all lead you continuously to **re-assess, re-fashion and re-negotiate your strategy for participation**.

Remember, when initially engaging in a participatory process, you know where you are coming from, and you may have a general idea of where you would like to go, but you do not know where you will arrive at!

1.2 Developing your strategy for participation: the context

1.2.1 SECURITY AND PROTECTION

In most crisis contexts, and specifically in situations of armed conflict, the population with which you work can be at risk, especially when gaining control over the population is a strategic objective of warring factions. Even after natural disasters, when law and order is disrupted or in instances where the population is unhappy with relief and rehabilitation activities, there can be high levels of tension, which can be extremely dangerous for the affected population, as well as for humanitarian actors. The security of humanitarian personnel and protection of affected populations are thus two facets of the same reality.

A The risks to the security of humanitarian personnel

Security risks can be a constraint on participation, where access to the field is limited and when security conditions do not allow time to be spent (especially at night) in villages or camps, for example. Engaging with specific groups can also lead parties to the conflict to perceive you as partial, thus making you and/or the people you work with potential targets.

Security, though, can also be considered a motivating factor. The more a programme is seen as relevant and participatory, based on mutual respect and trust, the more those who you seek to assist, and the structures with which you work, will care about your welfare, and, when danger arises, provide you with security-related information.

Collaborating with the affected population, or with stakeholders already engaged with it, can also allow you to intervene in areas that are inaccessible to foreigners for security reasons. And, *vice-versa*, collaboration with international or national aid organisations can enhance the safety of members of the affected population and/or local stakeholders (see below).

B The protection of affected populations

Although protection activities *per se* (such as the dissemination of international humanitarian law) remain the responsibility of legally mandated institutions—including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)—the vision now shared by the majority of humanitarian actors is much wider. Humanitarian organisations have a responsibility at two levels:

- ensuring that humanitarian interventions do not increase the security risks to the affected population—the '**do-no-harm**' approach; and

- integrating measures into technical programmes that **reinforce the protection of affected populations.**

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The following are all examples of how the protection of affected populations can be integrated into technical programmes: removing camps from areas close to fighting; ensuring appropriate lighting around latrines to avoid people (especially women) being attacked here at night; organising distribution sites in such a way as to prevent violent invasions; and taking account of issues concerning land rights in a shelter programme.

Participatory techniques can be used to assess security risks, vulnerability factors, and opportunities for mitigating these dangers. For instance, you can carry out a 'do-no-harm' analysis with the people

Focus group on 'doing-no-harm' in relation to specific technical sectors

Questions to be discussed include:

What are the potential risks associated with programme for marginalised groups (such as the poor, women or children)?

Would people targeted by the programme become a target for discrimination?

Have gender issues been approached in a sensitive manner?

Focus group on conflict analysis in relation to a particular technical sector

Might resources mobilised by the programme attract the attention of other parties who might try to access them in a violent manner?

Might the sharing of resources create tension in the community? If yes, what would be the best way to avoid it?

concerned, to ensure that, at the very least, programmes do not exacerbate security problems.

But before engaging in participatory techniques, it is important to bear in mind that **participation can entail risks** for the affected population. Collecting information in a conflict area, for example, can be extremely dangerous. Questions that seem anodyne can yield militarily sensitive information, such as: what distance from the frontline are the wells that IDPs use to fetch water? And 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! The people who supply this kind of data might be put in serious danger. In certain areas, participating in a focus group or responding to a questionnaire can be viewed as subversive. Providing resources (like a computer, money or a car) to support the activities of a CBO, for instance, can make the organisation a target of looters or armed factions.

In some instances, the population, fully aware of the risks, may be unwilling to provide information. However, as trust between your organisation and the affected population is built up through a participatory process, there is usually a time when people will speak out. The responsibility then falls on you to manage the information provided so as not to endanger the lives of informants. Levels of participation should be adapted and adjusted according to what people feel is possible and useful, as opposed to imposing our own participatory agenda to the detriment of those we seek to assist.

Yet, participation can also serve to reinforce the protection of affected populations.

'Women's rights training has been good because women have been given practical ways of resolving their problems . . . We've had lots of military round-ups. The men have been taken and tortured. One time, 11 men were held. The women's group reported this to the Human Rights Commission in

Colombo and the men were released. Before the Human Rights Commission got involved we were kicked and tortured for asking about detainees, but all this has stopped now.'

Women participants of an Oxfam GB and Social, Economic, Environmental Developers (SEED) project in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

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For the UNHCR, for instance, involving refugees in the management of camps is one of the best ways to ensure protection.

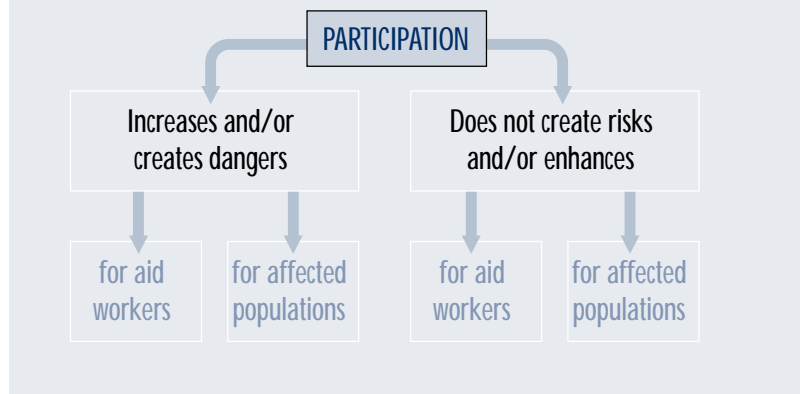
In carrying out their activities in refugee camps or resettlement areas, humanitarian personnel can protect refugees by engaging in participatory processes at all levels of management, from planning to the implementation of assistance programmes. The refugees will thus know their rights and their own 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)

In view of the dangers and the difficulties involved, however, protection *per se* cannot always be at the forefront of an intervention. In certain contexts, this would undermine the chances of involving the population in the programme from the outset, since protection is a sensitive issue, which the population might be reluctant to openly engage in.

Furthermore, aiming to reinforce the protection of the population through participation requires good knowledge of the law (international humanitarian law, refugee law and human-rights law), much tact and caution, and a very humble approach towards a sector in which the lives of people are easily put in jeopardy.

Figure 4 The relationship between participation and the security of aid workers and the protection of affected population



? KEY QUESTIONS

- How can participation increase or reduce the risks to the security of humanitarian field workers?
- What security risks might members of the affected population face if they participate in humanitarian activities, and how can these be avoided?
- Can participation be used to reinforce the protection of affected populations whose security is at risk, and, if so, how? Do I have the capacity and the expertise to engage in such activities?

▶ **THE QUESTION OF SECURITY AND PROTECTION WILL CONTINUE TO BE TACKLED THROUGHOUT THE HANDBOOK AS A KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE.**

1.2.2 ACCESS: PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL

A Physical access

Access problems, most notably due to the security climate, restrict opportunities to engage directly with the affected population and to build the relationship of trust that is necessary for participatory processes. As mentioned above, though, access restrictions can also engender a need to collaborate with, or to delegate activities to, members of the affected population or structures emanating from it. Depending on how it is conducted, such collaboration can create opportunities to strengthen local capacities and to improve relations between your organisation and the affected population.

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 have sought to cooperate with the Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato (ACIA) (a CBO representing Afro-Colombians in the Atrato region) and the Organización Regional Embera y Waunan (OREWA) (a CBO representing indigenous groups) in order to access communities needing assistance. Members of UN agencies cannot travel alone along the Atrato River and its tributaries, so they take advantage of CBO infrastructure and information networks.

B Cultural access

To the issue of physical access is added that of 'cultural access', which concerns the difficulty that outsiders may have in relating to a local community as a result of language, 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 collaborate with one or several individuals who not only act as translators, but also help you to interpret various signs. They will be your 'cultural bridge'.

One's behaviour, use of language and means of addressing people, for example, will all contribute to facilitating or hampering relationships with the affected population, thus creating or undermining trust. (This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.)

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? KEY QUESTIONS

- Do difficulties in terms of physical access limit the possibilities for the participation of affected populations? If so, how can they be overcome?
- What are the potential cultural barriers between you and the affected population, and how can they be overcome? Who would be an appropriate cultural bridge?

1.2.3 POLITICAL ISSUES AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS

As participatory processes in essence involve multiple stakeholders, they run the risk of being drawn in to local politics. Being aware of local, social and political dynamics is the first step towards limiting potential manipulation of the project.

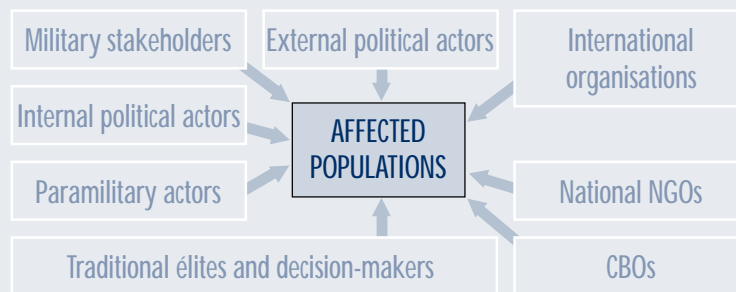
The direct role of political actors in the provision of humanitarian assistance in some countries is highly detrimental to civilian participation. This is because official measures, couched in terms of humanitarian aid and civilian protection, often serve political and/or security interests.

The following illustration should help in understanding who is who, who gains and who loses from the crisis, and why. In both humanitarian and developmental situations, it is essential to be fully aware of the power relations in a given context to ensure sound, effective and

sensitive implementation of a participatory approach. In turbulent environments (the chaos after a large-scale natural disaster or an armed conflict), this is not just crucial with regard to the operation, but it can also be a matter of life or death.

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Figure 5 Political dynamics and participation



Who gains and who loses as a result of participation?

? KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key political dynamics, and who are the primary stakeholders involved in the intervention? How do they affect the way that I can engage in participatory processes and with whom?
- Who would gain and who might lose from the various types of participation?
- What are the risks to, and/or the opportunities for, myself and my colleagues and the people I plan to work with?

1.2.4 TIME

There are three main elements related to time.

A Time and acute emergencies

Time constraints, notably in the case of rapid onset (natural) disasters (such as floods and earthquakes), are often evoked by aid organisations as reason why engaging in participatory processes is difficult, or even impossible. There is a limited number of situations, however, where time pressure is such that it truly prevents opportunities for participatory measures: in situations, for instance, where people are buried and rescuing them within a few hours is critical to their survival. In most other cases, there is enough time to engage in at least some type of participation (like consultation).

In many emergencies, aid organisations often arrive several days after the disaster, by which time local inhabitants or people from neighbouring areas have already mobilised themselves.

During the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano in Goma, **Eastern DRC**, in January 2002, international aid organisations evacuated the area. Meanwhile, the neighbouring population opened its doors to the victims and local NGOs called on local shopkeepers, entrepreneurs and individuals to provide, *inter alia*, water, food and cooking utensils.

It is thus important for aid organisations, upon arrival, to become aware of what local initiatives are in place, and to consider them in the planning of their own response. Even if it is not possible to be 'participatory' during the initial emergency response, it is essential, at the very least, to keep the affected population informed of what measures you are taking to assist it.

B Time and trust

Participation requires confidence and trust. The amount of time needed to establish this largely depends on attitude and skills, and the way in

which you, your team and your organisation are perceived. In some areas, people tend to extend trust immediately to newcomers, but, in most instances, this is not the case. Although time is often seen as a central tenet of confidence building, listening capabilities and a humble and open attitude are excellent 'door openers'.

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A key factor is your cultural bridge. For expatriates, this can be a national colleague, the representative of a local aid organisation or a respected elder. For national aid workers who are not from the affected population, it is also important to have a good intermediary who can assist in contacting key stakeholders and groups. Choosing the right person will probably be more important than time.

C Time and effectiveness

Participatory processes seem to take more time than expert-driven ones. But is this always the case? Are there shortcuts? Is the time invested in a participatory process not regained later, through, for example, improved programme quality, increased impact and enhanced security of aid actors?

It is also necessary to remember that participatory processes are time consuming, not only for you, but also for the participants, especially when they are under severe economic or other forms of stress. It is important, therefore, to ensure that activities take into account participants' own schedules and obligations, and to demonstrate that you are aware of, and thankful for, the time that they dedicate to the community through the programme.

'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.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- In acute emergencies, what opportunities exist to engage with the affected population? How can I take the time to recognise existing initiatives and to explain assistance measures to those concerned?
- Have I identified the cultural bridges and intermediaries who can facilitate the building of trust with affected populations? Is my behaviour and that of my team, and the perception that the affected population has of us, conducive to building trust?
- How can participation be put into practice in a way that supports programme efficiency?
- How can the participation process respect the time constraints on all stakeholders?

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1.3 Developing your strategy for participation: the affected population

1.3.1 THE LOCAL CULTURE AND SYSTEM OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Understanding the local population, its culture and its system of social organisation, is fundamental to identifying the opportunities and the risks involved in participatory processes.

A The local culture

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.

B Social organisation

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 choice of participation strategy.

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Many in Sri Lanka perceive ideas about participation to be counter-cultural. Relations between people in different social groups and categories tend to be both prescriptive and hierarchical. Very few civilians are accustomed to exercising choice, or to being involved in decision-making. Even the notion of consultation is foreign.

The situation is very different in **Eastern DRC**, where civil society is extremely active, as evidenced by the strong network of local NGOs that play a key role in humanitarian and development initiatives. International organisations, however, often fail to recognise the value of local NGOs and appear to work directly with civil society, which is a source of frustration for local NGOs.

It is vital, therefore, to understand the local culture and the system of social organisation. However, these are dynamic, subtle and complex areas, so **generic and stereotypic notions of household, community, ethnicity, religion, class, gender and generation should be avoided.**

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How is participation conceived and understood within the local culture?
- What characteristics of the local culture and the system of social organisation affect how the population relates to participation?
- How do these features impact on the possibilities for participation?

1.3.2 SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALISATION

In every population there are minority or marginalised groups, which, as a result, are more vulnerable to crises and are often 'voiceless' in regard to local social dynamics. One of the risks of participation is that,

by permitting the expression of local perspectives, these groups will remain excluded from projects.

Working to prevent this, or specifically targeting marginalised groups, can be an objective of a participatory project. But one must be careful not to stigmatise such groups in the process and create or exacerbate social divisions.

Experience shows that it is necessary to work not only with targeted groups, but also with influential members of society and communities as a whole, since empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised groups implies major changes in attitude and behaviour by the wider population. (See the section on targeting.)

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

? KEY QUESTIONS

- Which groups in the affected population are marginalised and discriminated against (women, lower castes, elderly and people affected by illness, for instance) and how?
- How can participatory methods be employed to ensure that such groups are not excluded from the aid process, and contribute to reducing discrimination, and/or empowering marginalised groups?
- What are the risks that participation will play a part in or exacerbate the marginalisation and stigmatisation of certain groups? How can this be avoided?

▶ THE QUESTION OF MINORITIES AND DISCRIMINATION WILL CONTINUE TO BE TACKLED THROUGHOUT THE HANDBOOK AS A KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE:

1.3.3 IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON THE AFFECTED POPULATION

The impact of a crisis on a population will directly affect its capacity to participate in a humanitarian response, or to initiate its own response. It will differ according to the population group involved, and, for instance, its social position, wealth, economic activities and geographic location, leaving different groups with different vulnerabilities and capacities.

A crisis can impact on three levels:

A Physical

Members of the population are physically disabled as a direct consequence of a natural disaster or conflict.

'Ninety percent of the people were victims. In some families, all members were wounded. The people are busy with themselves, I don't know if they can do something.'

Afghan doctor who was part of the emergency response to the earthquakes in Nahrin, Afghanistan, in spring 2002.

B Psychological

The emotional and psychological ramifications 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.

*Individuals who are depressed or who suffer other detrimental psychological and emotional effects may not be motivated to think about, or to work for, their betterment or the future of their families and communities. Sri Lanka has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, particularly in the north and the east, and abuse of illicit alcohol (*kassipu*) is widespread, especially by men.*

Following severe crises, individuals may be in a state of **shock**, or **trauma**, making it extremely difficult to partake in emergency responses.

Following heavy rains along the **Venezuelan** coast in 1999, huge landslides washed away entire villages, burying 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, volunteering to participate in aid efforts organised by the Venezuelan government and local NGOs. Many were in such a state of shock, though, that they would burst into tears or stand motionless with empty gazes.

C Social disintegration

As a consequence of war or other crises, the local population's system of social organisation can be seriously altered, and traditional consultation and regulation mechanisms can be damaged.

Consultation is an inherent aspect of traditional regulation and decision-making processes in **Afghanistan**, notably through *shuras* (assemblies), in which the all male members discuss issues that concern the community; elders and respected men play a prominent role. By increasing the influence of young armed commanders and generating population displacement, the war has resulted in the dismantlement of such mechanisms.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How has the crisis impacted on the population's capacity to engage in the humanitarian response? Was everybody affected in the same way?
- Which aspects of participation can be tailored to suit what the affected population wants and can do? And how can the types of participation be adapted to different groups and individuals?
- What kind of support can be provided to facilitate the participation of affected populations?

1.3.4 PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF HUMANITARIAN AID

A population that has been previously exposed to aid will engage differently with aid organisations than one that has not. A certain (aid) dependency, passivity or disinterest may have developed, especially when top-down relief interventions have occurred recurrently. Past experiences may also prejudice responses in relation to consultation exercises: the population gearing them in line with what it knows the organisation can provide.

Affected populations and local actors also have a long memory when it comes to unfulfilled promises, which can impact differently depending on the type of programme. Top-down, non-participatory processes are numerous, and are often perceived by the population as peripheral—‘a goody you might get’. People do not base their survival on such programmes. In cases where a participatory process has been initiated, however, people feel more committed and place greater reliance on promises made. Thus failure to honour these can have a dramatic bearing on the social equilibrium and the security of aid actors. (Beware of participants who expend energy on participatory processes and feel betrayed!) Once trust between aid organisations and a community has been undermined it can be very hard to rebuild.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How does the population's experience of humanitarian aid affect the way in which it engages with humanitarian aid organisations?
- Where trust has been undermined and a certain amount of passivity has set in, or where the commitment of the affected population is low, what can I do to restore the foundations for successful participation?
- Am I aware of what expectations I am raising in the process, and is my organisation ready to take responsibility for promises it makes in the medium and long terms?

1.4 Developing your strategy for participation: the humanitarian aid organisation

1.4.1 ORGANISATIONAL MANDATE

The organisational mandate has an important bearing on the extent to which you can engage in participatory processes and how.

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

UNHCR mission statement, www.unhcr.ch

'The displaced population must be involved in the decision-making, management, and organisation of emergency humanitarian assistance.'

Principles of the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network), government of Colombia.

'Criterios Generales de la Red de Solidaridad Social para la prestación de atención a la población desplazada; Decreto 2569-2000. ('General Criteria of the Social Solidarity Network for support to the displaced population'; Decree 2569-2000.)

Clarifying your organisation's policy position with regard to participation is thus the first step towards engaging with affected populations, since it will determine the nature and rules of your engagement and the level of expectation that you can raise.

For certain organisations (such as signatories to the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*) participation by affected populations is an inherent component of humanitarian action. For others, it is less of a consideration, and emphasis is instead placed on speed of response and respect for the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence, which might be perceived as being 'put at risk' by participatory processes.

Some agencies are committed to the longer term, accompanying affected populations from the emergency to the development stage, with an implied commitment to participation. Others, though, see their role as that of an external relief actor, responding to crisis situations as and when the need emerges.

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Your organisation's mandate will not so much determine *whether* you engage in a participatory process (few or no mandates actually *exclude* participation), but *how* you can do so. Many relief agencies that work in accordance with humanitarian principles in insecure areas strive to involve affected populations in their interventions.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- Do my organisational mandate and policies support and/or promote participatory practices? If so, how and for what purpose?
- How does this influence the types of participation that can be put in place?

1.4.2 HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES OF IMPARTIALITY AND INDEPENDENCE

Respect for the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence is central to the mandate and operations of most aid organisations engaged in humanitarian action.

Impartiality requires that humanitarian organisations make no distinction between nationality, race, religious belief, class or political opinion. They endeavour to alleviate the suffering, guided solely by needs, giving priority to the most urgent cases. **Independence** necessitates that humanitarian organisations maintain their autonomy so as to act in a manner that is consistent with their principles and with the terms of their mandate—not according to any political agenda.

Having a clear humanitarian mandate is what confers humanitarian organisations with the **legitimacy** needed to engage with affected populations. Respect for the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence, in particular, is what enables aid agencies to have **access** to affected populations on all sides of a conflict and to ensure the **safety** of their personnel and the people they are engaged with.

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

2 '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.'

3 'Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.'

7 'Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries [sic] in the management of relief aid.'

Are these incompatible in complex emergencies?

One of the key difficulties of participation in a complex emergency is that it can compromise the humanitarian principles of **impartiality** and **independence**, or at least it can be viewed by others as compromising your impartiality and independence, thereby **endangering** not just you and your colleagues but also the very people with whom you wish to engage.

However, participation cannot simply be dismissed for fear of not respecting these humanitarian principles. Rather, they must be taken into account in each decision that you make, including in regard to: the

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donor and the population groups that you choose to cooperate with; the geographic area(s) you select to become involved in; your choice of partners and intermediaries; and the type of participation you opt to engage in. The choices you make can either help to defend your impartiality and independence, or they can constrain you in a way that may force you to compromise on these principles. These decisions require that you have good knowledge of the political situation, local culture and system of social organisation.

The impartiality and independence of your organisation can be key in certain contexts in facilitating the participation of affected populations. In some situations, especially in conflict settings, the population itself will be very careful to be seen by the disputants as impartial, and may be reticent to work with certain organisations, if this entails risks to its own security. (See section on security and protection.)

In Colombia, individuals benefiting from, and involved in, 'Plan Colombia', a programme funded by the US administration, are included in a database that is publicly available on the Internet. In zones occupied by guerrilla groups (opposed to Bogotá and thus to US support for the government), people refuse to participate in these activities, fearing rebel reprisals.

Remember, it is not because you think that you are impartial and independent that you will be perceived as such by the local population or other stakeholders (armed factions, local authorities and other organisations)! Transparency and communication in respect of your principles and strategy are thus essential. (See chapter 2.)

? KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the risks that participation will compromise my impartiality and independence?
- Which strategic choices (such as the type of participation and the stakeholders that I become involved with) will enable me to protect my impartiality and independence while engaging with affected populations?
- How can I ensure that the impartiality and independence of my organisation is recognised and trusted by the affected population and other stakeholders, so that they feel safe in working with us?

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▶ THE RESPECT OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES IS A KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE THAT WILL CONTINUE TO BE TACLED THROUGHOUT THIS HANDBOOK.

1.4.3 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE, EXPERTISE AND MODE OF OPERATION

Organisational culture and expertise clearly influence the types of programmes that are put in place. Organisations working in the relief field often tend to implement standard protocols, designed to facilitate rapid intervention, and to focus on specific sectors, using particular techniques. The use of such programme techniques makes it very difficult to integrate affected populations concerns, capacities and initiatives into the programme.

While top-down relief programmes might be appropriate temporarily and in certain circumstances, many relief organisations continue to function in this 'emergency' mode even when opportunities to involve the affected population arise.

In Angola, humanitarian organisations and donors have treated the situation as an acute emergency rather than as a chronic crisis, thus mainly providing funding for emergency programmes. Some interviewees from aid organisations felt that opportunities for other types of activity were missed due to the momentum of food-aid and emergency health interventions.

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Furthermore, humanitarian actors' mode of operation and institutional culture—particularly those of international aid organisations—are often based on a rapid turnover of technical staff (medical staff, logisticians and water engineers, for example). This is unlikely to promote participation. Meaningful participatory processes are always founded on a level of trust, requiring the identification of common ground and at least some degree of continuity in regard to the interface between the organisation and the population.

In some situations, if your organisation and colleagues do not have adequate knowledge of the population and the context, or lack the expertise to conduct certain interventions, especially participatory ones, your organisation could consider forming a partnership with another aid organisation (including 'development' NGOs) that has been working in the region for a long time, or that is skilled in participatory techniques. This can be a good way to enhance the pertinence of interventions, and to engage more closely with the affected population.

In response to the earthquake that hit **El Salvador** in January 2001, a French emergency NGO (Atlas Logistique), a Salvadorian development NGO (Fundesyam) and an Austrian donor NGO (Horizont 3000), joined forces to provide emergency relief, and then to engage in a shelter reconstruction programme. The marriage of Atlas' technical and logistical expertise, Fundesyam's knowledge of the region and Horizont 3000's funding flexibility made the programme more relevant and efficient, and enhanced community involvement and sustainability.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- How does my organisation's mode of operation support or constrain opportunities for participation?
- Is my organisation ready to review some of its practices (the nature of protocols and the length of programmes, for instance) to encourage the participation of affected populations?

1.4.4 HUMAN RESOURCES

In most instances, successful participation is the result of having the right person in the right place at the right time. Engaging in a participatory process, therefore, involves questioning your organisation's human-resource management at several levels.

A Staff skills and experience

What skills should I look for when recruiting staff and what kind of training should I provide? An understanding of the social sciences and expertise in communication techniques are essential for the implementation of meaningful participatory approaches, especially in volatile and dangerous environments. They are important for expatriate and national staff alike. Also, a certain level of maturity is needed to cope with the demands and challenges associated with participation (including maintaining credibility with local leaders and behaving appropriately).

Finally, the staff profile (age, gender and experience) should be adapted to suit engagement with particular groups. For instance, programmes involving the participation of women in Afghanistan called for the employment of female staff.

B Training

Is my organisation prepared to train expatriate and national staff to ensure that they have an appropriate mindset and collection of skills to engage in participatory processes?

C Contract length and delegation of responsibilities to national staff

In the case of international aid organisations, one must ask whether my institution is ready/able to maintain expatriate staff in the operation for longer periods? Is it willing to give greater responsibility to national colleagues who can act as a continuity factor in the humanitarian operation, and serve as a link between the community and the organisation?

? KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the staff profiles needed to engage successfully in participatory processes? Does my team have the right attitude, skills and experience, and apposite knowledge of the context?
- Are there possibilities to recruit staff with appropriate experience and skills?
- Is my organisation prepared to provide adequate training for participatory processes?
- Is my international aid organisation ready to keep expatriate personnel engaged in humanitarian operations for longer periods? Is it ready to delegate responsibilities to nationals?

1.4.5 FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND DONOR POLICIES

Participation requires flexibility in programming and in funding. This is much more difficult if your organisation is dependent on donor resources.

Donor policies and procedures (in regard to timeframes, budgets and regions of intervention, for example) often represent a constraint that is difficult to overcome, especially when competition for funds between organisations is high and limited by time. Some donors restrict participatory processes in humanitarian interventions (by requesting that international organisations monitor the entire process, or by refusing the delegation of activities to local actors, for instance), while others are more reluctant, given the risks and potential delays that participation might engender. But there is always a 'window' for negotiation, as long as your arguments are robust and based on sound knowledge of the situation, rather than on ideology.

? KEY QUESTIONS

- Which donors support, promote and/or require participatory processes (via their mandate, policies and procedures)? For what purpose? In regard to those who do not, is there room for negotiation?
- How do the policies of my donor influence the type of participation I can engage in, and the stakeholders that I can work with?

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1.4.6 COORDINATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Like it or not, the actions of one organisation will impact on what another one does, wants to do, or can do in the same context. It is extremely important, therefore, to remain informed—by participating in formal and informal coordination mechanisms—and to identify negotiation fora.

Whereas inter-organisation coordination mechanisms often focus on what aid is provided and where, it is also vital to address the question of *how* aid is supplied. It is difficult for an organisation to establish a partnership with a community when another organisation is offering the same assistance for free in the same area.

In Afghanistan, community participation is one element of the standard approach defined by organisations working in the area of water and sanitation to facilitate the coordination of activities. It stipulates, for example, that villagers must help with the digging of wells and are responsible for their maintenance. When an organisation dug wells without requiring any input from the affected population, it made it more difficult for other actors to engage in a participatory process with villagers, and compromised the sustainability of the programmes.

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 (like displaced persons' committees in Colombia and the 'association de sinistrés' – associations of disaster victims in the DRC). Engagement in coordination efforts is an essential way for local actors to participate in the humanitarian initiative, and it can be key to creating bridges between aid organisations and the affected population.

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? KEY QUESTIONS

- How do the activities of other organisations impact on the way that I can work and engage in participation?
- Am I ready to allocate time to coordination activities and to synchronise my actions and mode of operations with those of other organisations?
- How can humanitarian operations be coordinated in a way that promotes participation?
- How can coordination mechanisms be organised so as to facilitate the participation of local stakeholders (translation, invitation lists and transparency procedures, for example)?

1.5 BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Designing a strategy for the participation of affected populations in humanitarian action involves analysing the risks and the opportunities that arise from the process, taking into consideration all of the factors discussed above.

Remember that defining a strategy for participation is an ongoing process. These factors, and your understanding of them, will evolve, continuously moulding and fashioning a unique participatory strategy.

Even the most careful analysis of factors affecting participation, however, will not guarantee that a participatory strategy is successful. Two ingredients are essential: communication and transparency.

Figure 6 Factors affecting the participation of affected populations in humanitarian action

