

## FIRST PART

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

Part 1 provides guidance on developing a participatory approach:

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

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

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

Philip White, 1994.



chapter 1

#1

# Participation ?

what? why? who? how?

## 1.1 What is participation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1.2 Why 'do' participation?

**Examples**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1.3 What are the objectives of participation ?

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

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

#### Participation can help to:

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

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

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

**Example**

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

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

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

**Quote**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Objective 4 ⊕ To enhance project effectiveness**

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

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

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

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

**Example**

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

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

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

#### Quote

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

*Aid worker, Guinée Forestière.*

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

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

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

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

### Objective 8 ⊕ To improve project efficiency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.4.3 ⊕ Working with crisis-affected people

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

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

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

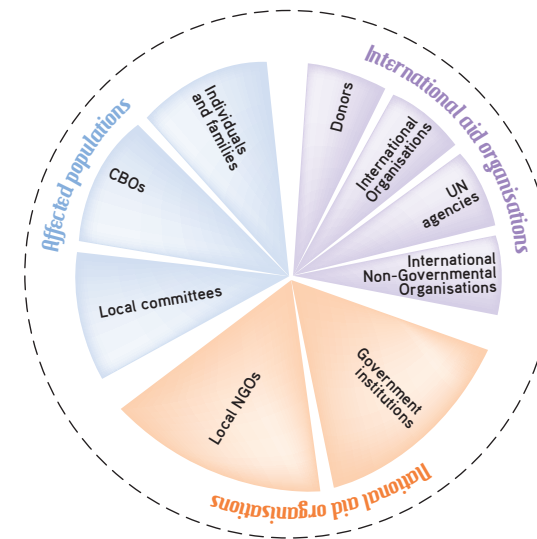


Figure 2  
Typology of stakeholders involved in participatory processes

### 1.4.4 ⊕ Power Dynamics

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



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

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

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

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

### 1.4.5 ⊕ 'Communities'

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

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

### 1.4.6 ⊕ 'Minorities'

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

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

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

### 1.4.7 ⊕ The importance of human relationships

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Tips & Warnings**

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

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

## 1.5 How to 'do' participation

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

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

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

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

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

**Quote**

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

*Representative of a refugee association, Guinée Forestière.*

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

**Example**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter 1 summary

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

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