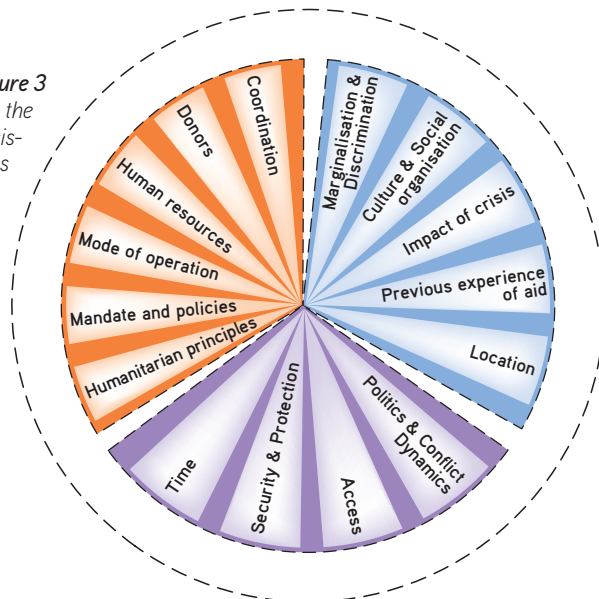chapter 2 #2

Factors Affecting

Participation in Humanitarian Responses

In order to improve participation in humanitarian responses one needs to understand the factors that mould, constrain, or support it.

In this chapter a variety of factors affecting participation are examined, including the need for a rapid response, political and conflict dynamics and the human resource policies of aid organisations. These factors have been organised into 3 categories depending on whether they relate to the context, the affected population, or the aid organisation. For each factor a series of questions is suggested. Answering these questions will help identify the opportunities and risks to be taken into account when adopting a participatory approach. They should be referred to regularly as knowledge of the operational environment improves, the external situation develops and relationships with stakeholders evolve. This will help to make the participatory approach dynamic rather than static. Further guidance on reviewing and adapting a participatory strategy is provided in Chapter 6.

Figure 3
Factors affecting the participation of crisis-affected populations

Before adopting a participatory approach it is important to collect information about factors that will influence crisis-affected people's involvement – the key questions in this chapter will provide some guidance on the information that you need to collect. Some techniques for collecting this information include:
● a review of key reference material (anthropology, political history), including 'grey' literature (mission reports, evaluations and personal accounts)
● interviews with people who know the context and/or have experience of aid programmes in the region
● attending planning or co-ordination meetings, briefing or debriefings

What other sources can you think of?

II.1 The context

II.1.1 ⊕ Time and the speed of response

A common concern about the use of participatory approaches in an emergency situation is that it takes too much time. This handbook argues that there are very few situations where time pressure truly prevents a participatory approach from being adopted.

It may not always be appropriate to adopt a participatory strategy when responding in the immediate aftermath of a devastating rapid-onset crisis such as an earthquake or hurricane. In such cases people may have other urgent priorities such as finding family members, many people may be in shock, and needs may be overwhelming. In situations of mass displacement where access to basic needs such as water is an urgent priority, the immediate need to save lives outweighs the benefits of participation.

Even if it is not possible to be fully 'participatory' during the initial emergency response, it is essential, to keep the affected population informed of what measures are being taken to meet their needs, and provide opportunities for these to be challenged, if necessary. Even at this stage, though, there are still ways of involving stakeholders in the humanitarian res-

#2

key factors

Example

To try to introduce participatory mechanisms at the border points would be impractical and maybe even dangerous. Indeed, if water points and sanitation facilities are not provided immediately, the risk of disease or even epidemics is extremely high. Also, the refugees have often walked for miles, are tired and traumatised. It wouldn't be reasonable to ask them to assist in the building of shelters, or defining their own needs. Their very survival is at stake at this point in time.

INGO worker, **Guinée Forestière.**

ponse. Being participatory does not imply that everyone has to be involved in the project but rather that everyone should at least be represented. When certain members of a specific group are unable to participate, it is always possible to consider involving others and to gradually broaden that involvement as appropriate. A project that gradually increases the involvement of those who are affected by the crisis or disaster needs to be planned in a particular way or it will simply continue as it was during the initial phase.

In other cases participation has proved to be a useful way of speeding up the pace of interventions, particularly because it brings to light methods, resources and ideas that otherwise would not have been identified. Participation does inevitably require a commitment from all stakeholders in terms of time, but this is easily made up through improved programme quality, increased impact and enhanced security.

In many emergencies, aid organisations arrive several days after the disaster, by which time local inhabitants or people from neighbouring areas have already mobilised themselves. When this is the case, it is important to establish a relationship with these structures and to support their initiatives. Aid organisations should seek out and recognise existing capacity and local initiatives and consider them in the planning of their own responses.

Participation requires confidence and trust. The amount of time needed to establish this largely depends on attitude, skills and the way in which project teams and aid organisations are perceived. Although time is often seen as being crucial in building confidence, the ability to listen and hear what people are saying, and keeping an open mind, have proven to be excellent 'door openers'. Finding the right intermediary with the affected population is also more important than time.

Participatory processes also require a commitment in terms of time from the affected population. This factor can be especially important when populations are under severe economic or other forms of stress. By giving up their time, they may allow opportunities to pass - time spent in meetings with you is time not spent earning a living, collecting water or foraging for food, and so on. Successful participation activities take into account participants' own schedules and obligations, and successful participatory project teams demonstrate awareness of, and gratitude for, the time that people give to the project.

Quote

"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.

Effective participation will leave participants feeling that the time they invest in the process is worthwhile. People make active choices and their willingness to engage in participatory projects is likely to be influenced by perceptions of the potential impact on their well-being and survival. A lack of support can sometimes be attributed to a lack of confidence in the ability of aid agencies to make a difference. If power and decision making remain solely in the domain of humanitarian actors, there may be no perceived value in participating in a 'pre-determined' process.

II.1.2 ⊕ Security and protection

In crisis contexts, both affected populations and aid workers can be at risk. Conflict situations clearly present a range of security and protection risks, but even after natural disasters normal social protection mechanisms and the rule of law may break down, putting people at risk. The security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of affected populations are two facets of the same reality.

KEY QUESTIONS 1: Time and the speed of response

1	In an acute crisis, what level of involvement is possible and how can a project be designed so that involvement is increased over time?
2	What local initiatives and capacity are there, and how can these be drawn into the planning process?
3	How can a relationship of trust be built in a short period of time?
4	How can participation be put into practice in a way that makes a project more efficient?
5	How can different agencies co-ordinate their assessment and planning processes to minimise the demands on the affected population?
6	What time constraints and other commitments do people have and how can participatory processes work around these?
7	What can be done to make sure that people have an interest in investing their time in a participatory process?

Humanitarian organisations need to take into account the effects that their presence and activities have on the protection of crisis-affected people. They must ensure that participation does not increase security risks for the affected population, and whenever possible, improves their safety. The planning of a participatory approach should therefore include an assessment of risk.

Some participatory techniques and practises can create additional risk:

Inappropriate data collection: Apparently harmless questions designed to elicit information that will be useful for programming may touch on sensitive issues, notably in conflict areas (e.g. What distance from the frontline are the wells that displaced people use to fetch water? 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!

In conflict situations, it may seem like a good idea to question women and girls about their experiences of sexual violence to ensure that appropriate health and support facilities are provided. But, unless confidentiality and discretion are assured, it may put women and girls in danger of further victimisation from within their own communities or from the original perpetrators. Such sensitive information should only be collected from individuals if really necessary. It may be more appropriate to ask about general trends of sexual violence rather than individual incidents unless there is a compelling reason for women and girls to describe their individual attacks.

As trust between your organisation and the affected population is built up through a participatory process, there may be a time when people will be more prepared to speak out about what is happening to them. The responsibility then falls on you to manage the information so as not to endanger the lives of informants, for example by numbering information sources rather than using names or details that will identify individuals etc.

Engagement with aid agencies (e.g. participation in focus groups): Armed factions may be suspicious of the motives of those who talk with aid agencies, particularly where such groups have accumulated (and presumably will continue to accumulate) political and economic benefit from conflict and disasters. In some situations having any kind of contact with aid agencies is considered subversive and puts people at risk of physical violence.

Provision of resources: Computers, money, vehicles etc provided to support the participation of a local committee or NGO in community consultations can become a target for looters or armed factions.

Risk to women: in communities where women are expected to remain within the home and not to participate in 'public' activities, women and girls participating in discussion fora and project implementation may face condemnation from within their own communities for stepping outside of culturally and socially-approved gender roles. NGOs need to be aware of this, and provide support to women who may be at

#2
key factors

risk of violence and intimidation, and also need to make sure that men within the community understand why women are being included in the participatory process.

Participation can also reinforce the security of affected populations: Participatory techniques can be used to identify security risks, factors that make people vulnerable, and opportunities for mitigating them. As trust is built during a participatory process, the population is also more likely to provide information on sensitive protection issues. Working with members of affected populations (e.g. providing training, sharing responsibilities) can provide them with resources and support that enable them to protect themselves more effectively.

Protection programmes that specifically aim to improve the safety of civilians require suitably skilled staff with a good understanding of the relevant bodies of law: International Humanitarian Law, Refugee Law and Human Rights law. Risk assessments should always be carried out and aid workers need to use both tact and caution in situations where the lives of people are easily put in jeopardy[4].

Quote

"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)

---
[4] See *Protection: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies* for further guidance on the relationship between humanitarian programming and the protection of affected people.

II.1.3 ✛ Security of humanitarian personnel

Security risks can be a constraint on participatory processes, where access to the people affected by a crisis is limited or security conditions do not allow time to be spent (especially at night) in villages or camps. Engaging with specific groups can also affect perceptions of individual or agency impartiality, thus making you and/or the people you work with potential targets.

Security can also be a reason for using participatory techniques. The more a programme is seen as relevant and inclusive, based on mutual respect and trust, the more those who you seek to assist, and the structures with which you work, will be concerned with your welfare, and act to warn you when risks are heightened or threats are imminent.

In some circumstances, relationships built up with stakeholder communities through participatory exercises may also allow you to continue to provide assistance when security deteriorates and certain areas become inaccessible to foreigners.

		KEY QUESTIONS 2: Security and Protection
1	What risks might members of the affected population face if they participate in humanitarian activities, and how can these be mitigated or avoided?	
2	Can participation be used to reinforce the protection of affected populations, and, if so, how?	
3	What capacity and expertise is required to carry out participatory activities that seek to reduce security and protection risks?	
4	How can participation increase or reduce the risks to the safety and security of humanitarian field workers?	

II.1.4 ✛ Access to crisis-affected people

Physical access
Access problems due to poor security, difficult geography and harsh climatic conditions can restrict opportunities to

Example

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 cooperate with the Asosiacion Campesina Integral del Atrato (ACIA), a community-based organisation (CBO) representing Afro-Colombians in the Atrato region, and the Organizacion Regional Embera y Waunana (OREWA), a CBO representing indigenous groups, in order to get access to communities needing assistance. UN agency staff cannot travel alone along the Atrato River and its tributaries, so they take advantage of CBO infrastructure and information networks.

engage directly with the affected population and to build the relationship of trust that is necessary for a participatory approach. However, access restrictions can also engender opportunities to collaborate with, or to delegate activities to, members of the affected population or structures that are part of it.

Cultural access

'Cultural access' concerns the difficulty that outsiders may have in relating to a local community as a result of linguistic, 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 work with one or more individuals who can not only act as translators, but also help you to interpret various signs and build 'cultural bridges'.

It is important to have a good intermediary within the affected population who can assist in contacting key stakeholders and groups. This can be a colleague from the particular social group, the representative of an appropriate aid organisation or a respected elder. Bear in mind, though, that such intermediaries are often men or women of high social status, and while they may think that they can speak for the whole community, they may be unaware of the particular needs, interests and skills of marginalised groups within the community.

1	Does limited physical access affect the potential for participation by the affected population? If so, how can this be overcome?
2	What are the potential cultural barriers between you and the affected population, and how can they be overcome?
3	Who can you work with to build 'cultural bridges'?

KEY QUESTIONS 3: Access to affected population

II.15 ⊕ Politics and conflict dynamics

Participatory processes always involve multiple stakeholders, and as such they run the risk of being taken over by particular interest groups. In conflict situations the credibility of local authorities may be questioned, or they may themselves be parties to the conflict, making participatory engagement problematic. Since exclusion and marginalisation are likely to have been among the drivers for conflict, it is critical that the "participation net" is cast as wide as possible not only to ensure representative views but also to demonstrate the inclusive nature of the process. Being aware of local social and political dynamics is the first step towards establishing the legitimacy of participatory processes and limiting potential for the project being manipulated by vested interests.

1	What are the key political dynamics and how will they affect participation?
2	Who do you need to work with and what are the benefits and risks of involving each stakeholder or stakeholder group?
3	What position does your agency take with regard to the political and conflict dynamics?
4	Who would gain and who might lose from the various types of participation?

KEY QUESTIONS 4: Politics and Conflict Dynamics

II.2 *The affected population*

II.2.1 ⊕ *Marginalisation and discrimination*

In every human population some people are marginalised and as a result are often 'voiceless' within their communities and more vulnerable to crises. One of the risks of participatory processes is that they will perpetuate this social marginalisation by only working through established power structures, or by further stigmatising marginalized people.

On the other hand, participatory processes can be designed to support and strengthen the capacity and status of marginalised groups. Although both crises and subsequent humanitarian responses will inevitably change social dynamics, consciously trying to do so is a very delicate process and needs careful management. There is some debate as to whether humanitarian organisations should challenge social dynamics, and whether they have the competence to do this appropriately, so it is important to carefully consider action taken to improve the status of marginalized people.

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

One of the basic principles of effective participation is the representation of affected populations and the creation of spaces for participation. Working only with existing leaders and organised groups can reinforce the marginalisation of those who are not represented in these organisations and those who are not organised.

Tips & Warnings

The composition of a working/focus group can support existing dynamics of discrimination. If the group includes both the most powerful and the most marginalised people in a society, then it is unlikely that the latter will be able to fully participate. Sometimes it may actually be the actions of the most powerful that create the greatest problems for marginalised people. If this is the case, it is unlikely that they will talk about it in a mixed group. It can be useful to create smaller sub-groups in order to give individuals a chance to speak without the presence of more vocal participants.

Working with standard categories such as ethnicity, religion, class, gender and age can mask other categories, such as social or marital status, which may enhance or diminish an individual's position within a particular group. This may lead to less participation on the part of marginalised or less powerful groups.

Crises can lead to a loss of social cohesion, notably when communities are torn apart by conflict or separated by displacement. When traditional or established social structures break down, this can make collective action more difficult. Aid agencies can help to rebuild social structures and they can use this opportunity to try to encourage these to be more inclusive.

Using participatory techniques is easier with people who are used to participating in decisions affecting their lives and where participation is culturally acceptable. In some cultures promoting participation can be perceived as 'forcing' people to participate. In such cases, a population may participate in the short term but stop participating as soon as possible, thus reducing project sustainability.

Disabled people are marginalised in almost all societies and more people may become disabled as a direct consequence of a natural disaster or conflict. People with the most severe impairments, and particularly those that affect mobility and communication, will often be more marginalised than those with minor impairments. People with one type of impairment may not be able to represent those with different impairments – it is important to recognise that 'disabled people' are not a homogenous group.

The structures that supported disabled people and enabled them to participate in their society and culture before the crisis may have been destroyed (eg. specialised equipment such as crutches, ramps, hearing aids, and specific services including medical services). Similarly the structures

Tips & Warnings

The choice of working language for participation activities can reduce the access and input of certain groups. To address this problem you can offer translation into other languages, reduce the use of complex vocabulary and clearly define any new words.

#2 *key factors*

that prevented them participating may have broken down or been destroyed. This provides an opportunity to create new structures that are more supportive of disabled people and specifically designed to be inclusive both physically and socially. Like most marginalised groups, the biggest barriers which disabled people face are discriminatory attitudes.

Different people will be affected in different ways by a crisis – some may have been particularly targeted, others may have greater capacity to cope or more resources available to them. Some people may have already taken the initiative to help others or may be leading groups in some way. Understanding these differences within a society is fundamental to effective participation.

The choice of intermediary between a humanitarian organisation and the people directly affected by a crisis determines the level of access it will have to the population. Translators and interpreters have enormous influence on how the organisation is perceived and play a major role in building relationships. Facilitators who manage relations with members of the affected population, notably through assemblies, focus groups or individuals play a key role in facilitating the participation of 'voiceless' groups. More guidance on this issue is given in Chapter 4: Communication Techniques.

II.2.2 ⊕ Culture and Social Organisation

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.

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 approach to participation. The existence or absence of existing local community-based or non-governmental organisations will also influence how you proceed and who you engage with. Make sure you are aware of underlying social and political dynamics and the implications these will have for the selection of participants. Make sure also that you communicate the rationale for choices made, i.e. the process should incorporate a feedback loop to the participants.

> **Example**
> #2 key factors
>
> *In **Sri Lanka** some people perceive ideas about participation to be alien to their culture. Relations between people in different social groups and categories tend to be both prescriptive and hierarchical. Few people are accustomed to exercising choice, or to being involved in decision-making. Even the notion of consultation seems foreign, thus creating real challenges for using participatory approaches.*

KEY QUESTIONS 5: *Marginalisation and Discrimination*

1	Which groups in the affected population are marginalised and discriminated against and how?
2	How can participatory methods be designed and used to include the most marginalized people?
3	Does the project risk exacerbating the marginalisation and stigmatisation of certain groups? How can this be avoided?
4	What opportunities are there for reducing discrimination, and/or empowering marginalised groups?
5	Do you consider that it is your agency's role to challenge the local social and power structures? If so, what will this involve in practice?

KEY QUESTIONS 6: *Culture and social organisation*

1	How is participation conceived and understood within the culture where you are working?
2	What characteristics of the culture and social system affect how the population relates to participation?
3	How will these two issues affect the possibilities for participation?

II.2.3 ⊕ Impact of the crisis on the affected population

The impact of a crisis on a population will directly affect the capacity of some individuals to participate in a humanitarian response, or to initiate their own response. This will differ depending on the population group involved. Depending on people's social position, wealth, economic activities and

geographic location, they have different vulnerabilities and capacities.

Physical impact

People may be physically injured as a direct consequence of a natural disaster or conflict, and in the initial phases will require medical care and rehabilitation, which will exclude them from participating. At a later stage special consideration will have to be given to how participatory processes can be designed to ensure they can take part – for example by ensuring that meetings are held in accessible locations, by providing facilities to aid mobility and communication and so on.

Psychological impact

The emotional and psychological impacts 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.

Crises affect individuals in different ways. For some individuals, crises may be a rallying point for compassion and action; for others a state of shock, or trauma may set in, making it extremely difficult for them to take part in emergency responses. Whilst reactions are highly individual, crises and disasters are also experienced collectively. It is possible to make some general points about normal reactions to specific types of crisis. People who have experienced an earthquake are often very concerned about staying inside buildings, particularly whilst there are aftershocks; people who have been physically attacked in conflict may be very wary of other people – particularly strangers - and lose trust in other members of their community; women and girls who have suffered sexual violence during conflict situations may be par-

Following heavy rains along the Venezuelan coast in 1999, huge landslides washed away entire villages, killing 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 and volunteered to take part in aid efforts organised by the Venezuelan government and local NGOs. Other people, however, remained in a state of shock, bursting into tears or standing motionless and staring into the distance.

Exemple

ticularly traumatised, due not just to the violence that they have experienced, but also to the fact that cultural and social mores may inhibit them from speaking about what has happened to them for fear of further victimisation from within their own communities.

Individuals are more likely to participate in projects if they have healed wounds from the past or overcome their trauma and are able to project themselves into the future. This may limit the initial participation of crisis-affected populations, but a participatory process can help people face issues, overcome their helplessness and encourage them to look to the future.

1	How has the impact of the crisis affected people's capacity to engage in the humanitarian response? How are/have different people been affected?
2	How can participation be tailored to suit what the affected population wants and can do? How can the types of participation be adapted to different groups and individuals?
3	What kind of support can be provided to facilitate the participation of particular groups within affected populations?

KEY QUESTIONS 7: Physical and psychological impact

Social breakdown

As a consequence of war or other crises, social systems can be fractured or significantly altered, e.g. through separation or displacement. Traditional consultation and dispute regulation mechanisms can be damaged. The loss of social cohesion can make collective action more difficult. But, participatory action can provide an opportunity to re-construct social ties or strengthen those that have survived.

Consultation is an inherent aspect of traditional regulation and decision-making processes in Afghanistan, notably through shuras (assemblies), in which all the men discuss issues that concern the community with elders and respected men playing a prominent role.
These social mechanisms have been disturbed in many areas due to the war as young armed commanders have gained influence and people who would normally take part have been displaced. On the other hand, the presence of aid agencies and the need for spaces for discussion and negotiation has led to the revival of some shuras.
However, women and girls continue to be excluded from decision-making processes.

Exemple

II.2.4 ⊕ Previous experience of humanitarian aid

People who have had previous dealings with aid organisations will engage differently from those who have not. A certain dependency, passivity or disinterest may have developed, especially where there have been top-down relief interventions. Past experiences may prejudice responses to consultation exercises: the population may identify priorities that it knows the organisation can provide and unfulfilled promises of the past are not easily forgotten.

Top-down, non-participatory processes are commonplace. They are often perceived as peripheral - people do not base their survival on such programmes, and may have been 'let down' in the past. If this is the case, it will be necessary to demonstrate commitment to these communities. Failure to honour such commitments can have a dramatic effect on social equilibrium and the security of aid actors. Once trust has been undermined it can be very hard to rebuild.

In cases where participatory processes have been used, people may feel more committed and place greater reliance on promises made, and may expect aid organisations to work in a participatory manner.

KEY QUESTIONS 8: Previous experience of humanitarian aid

1	What previous experience has the population had of aid organisations? How will this affect how they relate to aid agencies?
2	Where trust has been undermined or people are passive, what can be done to build trust and commitment between the aid agency and the population?
3	What expectations exist and can you keep all the commitments you have made in the medium and longer-term?

II.2.5 ⊕ Location, displacement, and migration

The implementation of a participatory approach will be affected by factors such as whether you are working with people in an urban or rural context, whether they have been displaced and whether they are nomadic or sedentary.

Below, we look at the issues of location, displacement and migration in detail.

Location

Collective action can be more difficult in urban areas than in rural areas, due to weakened social cohesion. It may be more difficult to access key individuals, groups and networks, when they are spread out over a large area. It is easy for 'voiceless' groups to remain unheard, and for those who previously had a voice to become voiceless.

Refugees and Internally Displaced People[5]

Forced population displacement can take various forms: one-off mass displacement, recurring displacement or gradual displacement over prolonged periods. People may have been displaced for years or they may have just been displaced recently. They may have been taken in by a host population, or they may have settled in camps. They can be internally-displaced, or if they have crossed an international border, they may be eligible for refugee status.

Some of the key factors to take into account in providing assistance to displaced and refugee populations are:

● **Population composition:** Displaced populations are rarely homogeneous. They are usually made up of groups of people with different origins, languages, religions, knowledge and skills. Communities and even families may have been split up. One result of this is that forcibly displaced communities often include many single women and unaccompanied children. Separated from their families and the support

#2
key factors

Example

*Many rural populations fleeing violence converged in Huambo, a medium-sized town in the centre of **Angola**. It was very difficult for aid organisations to implement participatory projects for several reasons: repeated displacements had led to families being broken up and survival strategies were individual rather than collective. Furthermore, situations of extreme poverty and the impossibility of engaging in agricultural activities or livestock rearing meant that the previous barter and exchange system was replaced by monetisation driven to an extreme. Finally, the civil war and the involvement of traditional leaders in the conflict led to the destruction of the social cohesion required to put participatory projects into practice.*

Example

*The displacement of Afghan communities to refugee camps in **Pakistan** affected traditional patterns of authority. The influence of elders tended to diminish in relation to that of a younger generation who learned the ways of the humanitarian system and the Pakistani administration, spoke English and found ways of accessing resources in this new environment.*

and protection they would have provided, they can become marginalised and vulnerable. This can affect social cohesion, and communication within the displaced population, notably when living in camps. This also means new forms of authority, or social rules and organisation, may emerge as communities adapt.

● **The relationship between the local population and refugees/displaced people:** while in some situations the two populations share the same origins, culture, language, and background (e.g. rural or urban), in other situations they may be completely different. Furthermore, the presence of displaced people often puts considerable pressure on the local environment and economy, potentially leading to conflict within or between communities. The arrival of large quantities of aid has a significant impact on the local society and economy. It is essential, therefore, to work with both populations on the basis of both needs and fairness, and to attempt to maintain good relations between them.

● **The legal and regulatory framework for managing Displaced Persons camps:** the legal framework that regulates refugee status determines what participation mechanisms are used, as does UNHCR policy. For example, while refugees may select the individuals who represent them on Refugee Committees, the structure and role of these committees is largely defined by UNHCR. These mechanisms may exclude refugees who do not live in camps, refugee associations outside official committees and traditional organisational structures.

● **An 'artificial environment':** Refugee or displacement camps are artificial environments, where people are concentrated into one area and activities largely revolve around emergency relief operations and camp administration. This facilitates access to populations, and provides opportunities for participation in humanitarian projects, since

people's engagement in other activities is limited. On the other hand, given the importance of aid organisations in the management of most basic services (provision of food, health, sanitation, training programmes, etc.), the space for participation can be defined by aid organisations rather than populations.

● **Phases of displacement and time:** The nature of needs, the types of programmes and opportunities for participation are very different depending on how long the refugees or displaced persons have been in the camps. Things are particularly difficult when what was originally meant to be temporary displacement has become long-term or even permanent. Whereas participatory projects can help settled populations to plan for the long-term, people in camps may be psychologically unwilling to commit to long-term projects because of their desire to go home.

Pastoral and agro-pastoral populations

Many humanitarian programmes seek to assist pastoral communities who are often affected by drought, political marginalisation or by conflict over resources.

The following characteristics of pastoral populations are likely to affect a participatory approach. While they represent potential constraints, they may also be considered as reasons for engaging closely with such populations, since managing these complex issues requires in-depth understanding of their situation and society.

● **Migratory movements:** while most humanitarian projects are conceived for sedentary populations, pastoral populations are, by definition, nomadic. This can affect access or regularity of contact with them. Understanding population movements and their rationale is thus central to any participatory approach.

● **Nomadic lifestyles** are generally organised around the search for pasture and water. Activity patterns depend a great deal on natural factors like rainfall and are thus somewhat unpredictable. This means that projects which aim to actively engage with pastoral populations must

plan in flexibility and take these constraints into consideration.

- **Political marginalisation:** in many (but not all) countries, pastoral populations are marginalised, and participatory approaches can therefore be perceived as having political implications for both the population and the aid organisation.

The level of participation that is possible can also be affected by conflict between agriculturalists and pastoralists over the use of land and water points.

Participation in humanitarian action requires detailed understanding and careful examination of the factors that can mould, limit and support participation. These factors need to be analysed regularly as their influence can change over time as the crisis develops.

KEY QUESTIONS 9: Location, Migration and Displacement

1	In what way does the physical location of a population affect its ability to participate? Are its members grouped, or are they spread out over a large area?
2	If people have been displaced, what is their relationship to the local population? Has hosting displaced people and/or refugees created needs in the local population?
3	How can the local population be included as stakeholders in the project?
4	How can you engage with nomadic people? How will you adapt your way of working to take into account the nomadic way of life?

II.3 The Aid Organisation

II.3.1 ⊕ Humanitarian Principles

The humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence are central to the mandate and operations of most aid organizations. While certain agencies' mandates require them to remain neutral (e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross),

many aid organizations feel compelled to denounce violence and acts of injustice perpetuated against civilians. Each agency will have its own position on this issue, which should be respected.

- **Impartiality** requires that humanitarian organizations make no distinction between people on the basis of gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, religious belief, class or political opinion. They endeavor to alleviate suffering, according to peoples' needs, giving priority to the most urgent cases.

- **Neutrality** means not taking sides in political, social, religious or any other conflict, whether that conflict is violent or not. It means being sure that sympathy with, or antipathy to, a particular cause does not influence how the affected people are treated.

- **Independence** necessitates that humanitarian organizations maintain their autonomy so as to act in a manner that is consistent with their principles and with the terms of their mandate—and not according to any external agenda.

One of the key difficulties of participation in a complex emergency is that it could compromise humanitarian principles, or could be perceived to do so by others, but we should not dismiss participation because people might misinterpret our actions. We should integrate these principals into every decision we make, including the choice of partners and intermediaries; and the type of participation we opt to engage in.

When making these decisions, in order to make a success of participatory action, you need to have good all round knowledge of the political situation, all the stakehol-

Example

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

- *'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.'*

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

- *'Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.'*

#2
key factors

Tips & Warnings

It is not because an organisation considers itself impartial, neutral and independent that it will be perceived as such by the local population, or other stakeholders such as armed factions, local authorities and other organisations. It will largely be because of how the organisation and its staff behave, and how it communicates its objectives and guiding principles.

ders involved, the local culture and social systems.

In some situations, especially in areas of conflict, the population itself will be very careful to be seen as impartial by the warring parties, and may be reluctant to work with certain organisations, if this entails risks to its own security.

KEY QUESTIONS 10: Humanitarian Principles

1	What are the risks that "participation" will compromise how the organisation's impartiality, neutrality or independence will be perceived?
2	What strategic choices can be made to protect humanitarian principles whilst engaging with affected populations?
3	What can be done to ensure that the affected population and other stakeholders trust your organisation and recognise its commitment to humanitarian principles, so that they feel safe working with you?

Example

'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 organization of emergency humanitarian assistance.'

Principles of the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Solidarity Network), Government of Colombia. (Decree 2569-2000.)

II.3.2 ⊕ Organisational mandate and policies

For certain organisations beneficiary participation is a fundamental component of humanitarian action. For others, it is less of a consideration, with more emphasis on speed of response and respect for humanitarian principles which they believe may be compromised by participation.

Some agencies will maintain long term involvement with the affected population from the outset of an emergency, with a commitment to consultation and participation.

Others see their role as an external relief actor, responding to crisis situations when the need emerges and then withdrawing as the needs reduce.

The organisational mandate does not so much determine *whether* it adopts a participatory approach (few, if any, mandates actually exclude participation), but *how* it does so. Clarifying policy with regard to participation is therefore an important step towards engaging with affected populations, who should be given a clear idea of the nature, limits and rules of your engagement and what to expect from it.

KEY QUESTIONS 11: Mandate and Policies

1	Do the organisational mandate and policies support and promote participatory practices? If so, how and for what purpose?
2	How does this influence the types of participatory approach and processes that can be used?

II.3.3 ⊕ Organisational mode of operation and management

Organisational culture and expertise clearly influence the type of programmes that are undertaken and how they are implemented. Organisations with specific areas of expertise may use technical standards and protocols designed to facilitate rapid intervention and focus on specific sectors using pre-established techniques. However, these techniques can often reduce project flexibility, making it very difficult to integrate the concerns, capacities and initiatives of the people directly affected by the crisis.

Top-down relief programmes can be entirely appropriate at some stages of a crisis or disaster, but many relief organisations function in this 'emergency' mode even when opportunities to involve the affected population do arise.

When an agency has a clearly defined area of expertise (such as health, agriculture or construction), there seems to be less of a tendency to involve a community in project design, even though the agency encourages participation in other phases of the project. The fact that the agency has skilled and experienced technical staff should not reduce the possibility of the affected population being involved in the design process.

Possible reasons for a lack of participation in project design are:

- A lack of specific technical skills among the local population
- The fear of 'wasting time' explaining technical problems to 'non-specialists'.
- The organisation has a pre-determined 'kit' approach that must be applied.
- The organisation intends to reproduce an experience that was successful in another context.

Possible reasons for more participation in the later stages are:

- The organisation has limited staff and requires assistance to conduct the project.
- The local structure co-operating with the organisation is a known entity that is trusted.
- The funds for the project are from a private source permitting more flexibility.

There is likely to be a relationship between how 'participatory' an organisation is in its field operations, and whether it is 'participatory' in its own internal operations and management systems. In hierarchical and centralised institutions little decision-making power is delegated to lower levels, in particular at the field level. This attitude can effectively reduce the flexibility needed in participatory programmes.

		KEY QUESTIONS
1	How does the organisation's mode of operation support or inhibit opportunities for participation?	*12: Operational methods and management*
2	Is the organisation willing to review some of its practices to encourage the participation of affected people?	
3	Are participatory principles applied within the organisation?	

#2
key factors

II.3.4 ⊕ Human resources

Expertise in communication techniques is essential for people using participatory approaches, especially in volatile and dangerous environments.

Maturity and experience are vital for dealing with the demands and challenges associated with participation (including maintaining credibility with local leaders). Finding experienced aid workers is one of the main difficulties for organisations, especially people with both participatory and technical expertise.

Age, gender and experience may affect the ability of a person to approach particular groups, establish dialogue with them or gain legitimacy. For example, in many societies, female staff are required to run programmes which involve the participation of women. Many international organisations recruit local staff to work on emergency responses. Of course, who is recruited and how they are treated are sensitive issues. Even though this is not a form of participation, locally recruited personnel can help to establish bridges of communication with populations and provide crucial insights for the organisation. In this context it is very important to realise that local staff are *de facto* a continuous channel of communication between the organisation and the local population. Who is employed and how they are treated will contribute to setting the tone of the relationship between the organisation, local people and the affected population. This relationship will also be affected by the behaviour of local staff. They will therefore need to understand the

organisation's participation strategy and how they can contribute to it.

The most successful examples of participation often result from having the right person in the right place at the right time. Using a participatory approach therefore involves questioning the organisation's human-resource management at several levels.

● **Work load**

Aid workers in the field are often overworked, tired and stressed, causing openness and accessibility to affected populations or local partners to become more difficult. Participation takes time. Reviewing job descriptions, revising team priorities, and adapting work plans are measures that can help facilitate the interaction of team members with people from the affected population.

● **Training programmes and policies**

Participation is not about applying participatory tools and techniques in a mechanical way. It generally requires specific training in communication techniques, management of groups and meetings, and a capacity to adapt techniques to various circumstances.

An effective way of promoting the application of participatory techniques would be to establish a training policy at various staff levels (HQ, project managers, field staff, etc). It is also important to institutionalise the use of participatory approaches by supporting and rewarding them internally.

This should include investment in participation techniques and tools, the planning of training sessions and supporting ways to exchange and learn from existing experiences.

To promote beneficiary participation in projects, a facilitator or organiser should have strong interpersonal and communication skills and a full understanding of project aims, objectives and strategies.

Existing training courses rarely include participation as an approach, but sometimes include tools that can be used

in a participatory way (such as problem and solution trees or stakeholder analysis). Guidance on participation should be introduced to existing courses to promote participation in the field.

● **Contract length and delegation of responsibilities to national staff**

Meaningful participatory processes are always founded on a level of trust that depends heavily on continuity - having the same people from the organisation and the population working together over a certain period of time. However, aid operations are often affected by high staff turnover, especially of expatriate staff.

Aid organisations may wish to explore ways to retain both national and expatriate staff in the field for longer periods. International organisations may also assess how to give greater responsibility to national colleagues who can provide continuity in the humanitarian operation.

As part of its policy for promoting participatory techniques and giving increasing responsibilities to local colleagues, one international aid organisation implemented training on participatory methods for all senior programme managers, followed by similar training for national field staff in specific countries.

Example

#2
key factors

1	What team profile is necessary to support and carry out participatory processes?
2	Is it possible to recruit staff with the right attitude, skills and experience?
3	Is the organisation prepared to provide adequate training in participatory processes?
4	Is it prepared to employ expatriate personnel for humanitarian operations on longer contracts? Is it willing and able to delegate responsibilities to local people, and what steps does it take towards this?

KEY QUESTIONS 13: Human Resources

II.3.5 ⊕ Financial resources and donor policies

If the humanitarian response is dependent on resources from an institutional donor, this may reduce the amount of flexibility the agency has to implement a participatory approach.

Many donors support or even request participation, at least in their policy statements. However, they often impose factors such as timeframes, budgets and regions of intervention. Such constraints reduce an aid agency's room for manoeuvre, particularly when there is competition between aid organisations and time is limited. Donors themselves are often under pressure from the general public and the media to get visible results in a short space of time.

Aid workers repeatedly describe short term projects (e.g. 3 to 6 months, or even 1 year) as a considerable obstacle to participation. Although aid organisations can approach several donors to ensure continuity between projects, this can be very time-consuming. Donors who claim to support participation could also contribute to exploring ways of alleviating these time and administrative procedures.

Some donors are reluctant to support participation, because of the potential risks and delays it can cause. They restrict the amount of participation that can take place by insisting that international organisations oversee projects from start to finish, or refusing to allow the delegation of activities to local actors. But there is always a 'window' for negotiation. The key to successful negotiation is the ability to state the case for participation, based on sound knowledge of the situation, rather than ideology.

Example

"Very few NGOs ask us what we want to do... We have a long-term outlook and they cannot look further than twelve, maybe even six months... We were only supposed to be here one year! When are they going to let us do something for ourselves? We've been here since 1993!"

Sierra Leonean refugee living in Albadaria refugee camp, *Guinée Forestière*

	KEY QUESTIONS 14
1	Which donors support and promote participation (through their mandate, policies and procedures)?
2	With those who do not, what room is there for negotiation?
3	How do the policies and procedures of donors influence the type of participation envisaged and the choice of stakeholders that the organisation can work with?

II.3.6 ⊕ Co-ordination with other organisations

The actions of one organisation will have an impact on what other organisations want or are able to do in the same context.

It is therefore extremely important to be aware of what other organisations are doing, to communicate about one's own activities, and to take every opportunity to exchange information and co-ordinate activities.

Often different aid organisations, each with expertise in a specific technical area, will be working with the same population. By coordinating their assessments and activities, they will not only gain a greater collective understanding of the situation, they will also reduce the amount of time spent in participatory meetings and exercises.

Although inter-organisation co-ordination mechanisms often focus on what kind of aid is provided and where, it is also vital to decide *how* it is done. For example, it may be difficult for an organisation to establish a working relationship with a community when another organisation is already offering the same assistance, but using a different approach.

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. It is essential that the local stakeholders are involved in coordination and their participation can be the key to creating bridges between international aid organisations and the affected people.

KEY QUESTIONS 15:
Co-ordination with other organisations

1	What impact do the activities of other organisations have on your own activities and your ability to engage in participation? And what impact do your activities have on others?
2	Are you prepared to allocate time to co-ordination activities and to harmonise your activities and operational approach with those of other organisations?
3	How can humanitarian operations be co-ordinated in a way that promotes participation?
4	How can local stakeholders be better integrated in co-ordination mechanisms?

#2
key factors

Chapter 2 summary
Factors Affecting Participation in Humanitarian Responses

The extra time initially required to set up a participatory approach will be more than compensated for by better pro-gramme quality, greater efficiency and the advantage of having elicited local expertise.

1 Successful participation can mean greater security for aid organisations and better protection for the affected population.

2 Cultural access is as important as physical access and local social and political systems may determine attitudes to participation.

3 A participatory approach needs to challenge the existing balance of power in order to reach the most marginalized groups.

4 The physical and psychological impact of a crisis will determine how people are able to participate.

5 The aid organisation's mandate, methods, and human resource policies are critical to supporting and promoting participation.