

Accountability Session 3 – Commitment 4



4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.

Time **45'**

LO **Enable meaningful participation to increase acceptability, impact and resilience**

Output

- Understand power differentials within our work environments
- Understand what are the challenges and benefits for meaningful participation (for the community, for the organization, for others)
- How does improved information contributes to informed and participative decision making
- What key information is necessary for communities to participate in decision making and lower risks to vulnerable community members

Source **Musili Nzau, UNDP Liberia, 2008 / Adapted by Ester Dross, 2021**
With additional information and materials for participatory approaches from Chiara Garbelotto

Notes for the facilitator:

For participation to be meaningful, it is essential to ensuring the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of interventions and to respecting individual dignity and the fundamental right of people to determine their own lives.

Main external trends that will have an impact on crisis-affected people and humanitarian aid in the future:

- technology (interconnectivity, new technological solutions for aid and technological empowerment)
- urbanization
- youth and education
- environmental change
- international migration
- changing nature of conflict and violence
- resurgence of sovereignty and nationalism

The goal is to amplify effectiveness of choice-enabling approaches through transformative participation increasing acceptability, impact and resilience. The approach also aims to get to more genuine power-sharing partnerships with local actors and more effective programming.

Crisis-affected people and communities are heterogeneous groups of individuals with intersectional identities and diverse interests. There may be different and overlapping communities living within a single geographic area (for example a refugee community and a host community), and people within any given *community* will have different capabilities to exercise their individual agenda and to participate in group decision-making.

Even the most robust processes for participation rarely involve every relevant constituent. Aid actors make decisions about who to engage with and at what depth. All leadership and social structures are subject to power dynamics, and most of these structures intentionally or unintentionally exclude certain groups of people. It is therefore generally recognized, if not always practiced, that aid actors need to ensure that the ‘who’ does not only include elites and that marginalized groups within the community need to be specifically involved.

The following exercise aims to demonstrate the different level of participation amongst a group of stakeholders.

Task: The Powerwalk

This exercise can be adapted to the number of participants; the main criteria will be available space for standing and spreading out the group as per questions and statements.

The exercise serves both as an energizer as well as to amplify the concept of the power differential leading to meaningful participation (or apparent participation not including voices through participation). The measure of power in this case is symbolized by the position of the characters at the end of the exercise:

Examples of characters:

- ◆ District Chief or government official
- ◆ Village Health Worker (male)
- ◆ Traditional Birth Attendant (female)
- ◆ Orphaned boy, aged 13
- ◆ Grandmother, caretaker of orphans
- ◆ Uncle, caretaker of orphans
- ◆ Primary school girl, aged 12
- ◆ Girl with physical disability, aged 12
- ◆ Unemployed boy, aged 17
- ◆ Girl looking after her sick mother and younger siblings
- ◆ International humanitarian worker
- ◆ Religious leader (male)
- ◆ Community leader (female)
- ◆ School Teacher (female)
- ◆ Medical doctor, employed by an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO)
- ◆ University professor
- ◆ Female vegetal seller
- ◆ Mother of 5 small children, living in an IDP (Internally Displaced Person) camp
- ◆ School Teacher (male)
- ◆ Security Guard, employed by a Community Based Organization (CBO)

Statements:

- ✓ I get to meet visiting government officials when they visit our community.
- ✓ I can influence decisions made at community level.
- ✓ I get new clothes on religious holidays.
- ✓ I can read newspapers regularly.
- ✓ I have time and access to listen to the radio.
- ✓ I would never have to queue at the dispensary.
- ✓ I have my own bank account.
- ✓ I can speak in extended family meetings.
- ✓ I can afford to boil drinking water.
- ✓ I can negotiate condom use with my partner.
- ✓ I only have sex when I want to.
- ✓ I went to secondary or I expect to go to secondary school.
- ✓ I can pay for treatment at a hospital if necessary.
- ✓ I can speak at a village meeting.
- ✓ I eat at least two full meals a day.
- ✓ I sometimes attend workshops and seminars.
- ✓ I am not afraid of walking on my own at night.
- ✓ I can question expenditure of household funds.
- ✓ I am not afraid of violence in my home.
- ✓ I have never had to line up or beg for food.

Activity Instructions:

- ◆ Bring the participants to a large space (empty conference room or outdoor space) where they can form a big circle.
- ◆ Give each participant one card with one of the characters written on it. Ask the participants not to let anyone else know the character that they are representing.
- ◆ Tell participants to listen to the statements you read out loud. For every statement to which the character they are representing could answer “yes”, they should take one step forward towards the center of the circle. This is also an

exercise about trying to stand in somebody else's shoes, participants must therefore adapt their answers to how their character would feel in terms of potential and possibilities.

- ◆ At the end of the exercise, participants should remain in place and in character for a debriefing. The visual should be with some few characters in the center, looking at each other and others scattered outside the center at various stages from the initial circle.
- ◆ Give some time to participants to debrief, why are they standing where they are? How can they link this to their character?
- ◆ Use the debriefing to demonstrate power differences and why these represent barriers to meaningful participation and information. Point out the importance of age and gender in relation to those barriers. Most probably, in this walk, the ones outside the circle will be the powerless (women, children, poor, etc.). Explain that differences in power always exist but they represent important barriers. How will a very poor old woman, speaking only her local dialect, be able to come to your organization and have her voice heard? Underline that assumptions related to power, influence and status represent very important barriers.
- ◆ Point out as well that as humanitarians, our work should be people centered, meaning that our beneficiaries should be at the center of our work. When looking at this circle, the people in the center are the most powerful. What does this mean in relation to our work and accountability? Whom do the people in the center look at (other powerful people)? Visually they turn their back to the people they are supposed to support and invite to participate.
 - ➔ Wrap up the session by reinforcing the importance of being conscious of these barriers and power relations when implementing accountability measures. For our organization, this means to analyze and carefully keep in mind all those barriers in order to create systems which empower people and help them participating in designing projects and implementing them. To enable people to do this, we need to create a 2-way dialogue and ensure good information sharing with communities so that they have access to the information they need to enable them to participate meaningful, have their voices heard.
 - ➔ Remind participants that sharing information and knowledge gives power to people and improves their own decision making power.
 - ➔ Knowledge = Power!!!

Additional materials – optional and for background reading

- Report *From Voices to Choices, IARAN Paris 2018*
- Muslim Aid Shelter program case study
- Encourage participants to read both background documents for personal reflection and more comprehensive understanding of issues related to participation and information
- Additional participatory tools and information