ANALYSIS OF FACTORS (chapter 2)

CONTEXT

AFFECTED POPULATION

AID ORGANISATION

DEFINITION OF PARTICIPATION STRATEGY (Chapter 1)
- WHAT?
- WHY?
- WHO?
- HOW?

IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

PARTICIPATORY METHOD AND TOOLS (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 11)

PARTICIPATION THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT CYCLE (Chapters 7 to 10)

EVALUATION OF PARTICIPATION STRATEGY (Chapter 6)
- WHO participated ?
- HOW did affected populations participate
- WHERE the objectives of the participation strategy met ?

Implementing
a participatory approach

Part 2 provides guidance on implementing the participatory approach at each stage of the project cycle. At the beginning of each stage you will be asked to examine your motivation and objectives for participation, who will participate and how. At the end of each stage in the cycle you will need to review and reflect on the participation process.

● Participatory assessment – understanding the context of the crisis (historical, geographical, economic, cultural and time-scale) of the crisis and its effects, who is who, local capacities and strategies and the needs of people who have been affected by the crisis (chapter 7).

● Participatory project design – defining the project strategy; setting objectives; deciding on the target group; and designing activities (chapter 8).

● Participatory implementation and monitoring – mobilising and managing resources; implementing specific activities; monitoring the project (chapter 9).

● Participatory project evaluation (chapter 10).

The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.

Sherry Arnstein, 1969.

Participatory assessment

The main objective of an assessment is to get a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the context, the crisis, the stakeholders involved, the problems faced by the people who are directly or indirectly affected and the strategies that they have put in place in response to the crisis.

The assessment informs programme design, and should thus provide information on the needs and demands to be addressed, the local capacities that can be supported, and the opportunities and constraints that will affect programme implementation.

How the assessment is conducted can make the difference between a meaningful programme and one that is of little value to the affected population. Too often, this phase is carried out using an extractive approach, leading to an incomplete or biased analysis of the situation and associated problems. This can undermine the population's own strategies and damage the agency's relationship with the people the programme is supposed to assist.

The assessment phase is often your first encounter with the population and should be approached with the following in mind:

● Openly engage with population members from the beginning, by introducing yourself and opening a space for exchange

● Analyse the context, the crisis and its effects collectively using a holistic approach

● Be open to existing local strategies, initiatives and strengths

● Analyse and discuss needs and demands with the population

An assessment is an essential part of planning a humanitarian response. However, there are a few factors that need to be considered before you start.

The information collected during an assessment needs to be continuously updated, complemented, and qualified

by other sources and types of information. Having good, active relationships with people makes this much easier to do well. Remember to stay flexible and open to what participants wish to discuss.

Try to coordinate and work together with other agencies when carrying out assessments in order to lessen the burden on the population. Share information, analysis and ideas.

The assessment should include the perspective of a variety of groups within the population. The exclusion of certain groups can bias the assessment and programme design. On the other hand involving them in the assessment can further stigmatise them or offend influential groups/individuals.

The population is almost certain to have an incomplete or biased perception of your organisation and its motives, especially when you arrive in an area where you have never worked before. This perception can be manipulated by people with particular political agendas. Communicate continuously about who you are and what principles you hold to. The mere presence of your organisation can entail risks for the population and individuals with whom you will interact, and your organisation can be suspected of collecting strategic data for an enemy or for a foreign power.

Your impartiality, neutrality and independence, and how this is perceived will depend on who you engage with, and in what way. Be aware that you might end up interacting with a particular group in a preferential manner. People's perception of your independence, neutrality and impartiality will be damaged if the information you use to design your programme is only based on the views of one part of the population. This can also be the source of security problems.

Carrying out the assessment

The assessment phase often represents the first encounter with the population. This is where the foundations of your relationship with the population are laid, and where

KEY
QUESTIONS
18: *Preparing*
your
participatory
assessment

1	**What** are the main motivations and objectives for doing a participatory assessment?
2	**Who** will do the participatory assessment? Will you do it directly with members of the population, in collaboration with local stakeholders, or will you support a local stakeholder who is already doing an assessment? Can you co-ordinate with other agencies?
3	**How** will the assessment be carried out? What data collection techniques will be used?

your legitimacy for engaging with the population during a project is determined.

When preparing the first field visit inform the population in advance and organise a meeting with community leaders or elders. Be careful about who you first engage with, and in your choice of intermediary, as this will determine who you have contact with and may restrict your access to certain groups throughout the rest of the project. Be sure to find out about and respect rituals and traditions, and follow the recognised social hierarchy.

During the first meeting you will need to introduce yourself, explain who you are, and what you have come to do. You may have to do this repeatedly with different people. Be careful about the messages you may be transmitting consciously or subconsciously and make sure your behaviour is conducive to mutual respect and open dialogue. Listen attentively to what people have to tell you. Give people a chance to ask you questions and respond to them clearly and openly.

Explain the purpose of the assessment and the techniques you may use. The people you meet will be able to advise you on what techniques are appropriate with that population.

Examples

In Guinée Forestière, the first encounter with a village must occur via the village chief and committee of elders. The tradition requires visitors to present themselves with a basket containing kola nuts wrapped in banana leaves. The visitors may address the population only after the presents are publicly offered to the elders, the basket has gone through the hands of all the elders and the chief has welcomed them.

Be careful about expectations you may be creating. Make sure that you clarify how you work and what you can and cannot do. Do not allow people to think that you are making promises that you may not be able to keep. Explain the project process and any constraints you feel you might encounter, for example, regarding co-ordination, or funding.

VII.1 Understanding the context

Understanding the context and how populations perceive and organise their own lives in a given environment provides fundamental information with which to analyse problems and identify causal relationships. What may be perceived as historical and cultural details by an outsider often fashion people's lives, the problems they face, and the way they respond to them. Before starting the assessment take time to do some background reading and draw on existing information available from other organisations, national staff and so on.

VII.1.1 ⊕ Collective history

Understanding a people's history entails identifying the historical events that have impacted on peoples' lives significantly, and have led to social, environmental, and geographical changes. The objective is to identify the most relevant events, dates, changes and issues and to understand why and how these have had an impact on peoples' lives, without getting lost in too much detail.

To avoid this, limit yourself to a few well-chosen questions to support the discussion, such as:

Tips & Warnings

Keep your eyes and ears open! Be ready to see or hear the unexpected. Be careful not to express yourself in a way that may appear 'superior', but rather in a way that encourages real trust.

Tips & Warnings

In conflict situations history has often been manipulated for political gain or to justify certain actions. Be aware that different groups will have different perceptions of what has happened in the past and that you are unlikely to find consensus about this. Your national staff or others familiar with the population should be able to alert you to key areas of contention that are best avoided.

#7
Assessment

● What main events have affected the community over the past 'x' years or months?

● What impact have they had on village life? On family life?

● What situation led to these events? How did the situation subsequently evolve?

Affected populations rarely have the opportunity to collectively discuss the events that have had an impact on their lives. This kind of discussion can be a positive experience for participants and can help to strengthen a community's identity.

Evoking historical events can make underlying conflicts, tensions, or traumas re-emerge. Do not do so unless you are ready and able to manage such situations. Individuals who have played or play a key role in a community's history are often present in focus groups and meetings, and they may hold important positions in the society. Be aware of this when forming groups and discussing certain issues.

> **Quote**
>
> **'We had never taken the time to recall and discuss collectively the events that have affected our community. Thank you for giving us this opportunity. It has helped us to understand our village history better and how each of us has experienced it personally.'**
>
> *Paramount Chief in Liberian village affected by the civil war.*

Evoking historical events can make underlying conflicts, tensions, or traumas re-emerge. Do not do so unless you are ready and able to manage such situations. Individuals who have played or play a key role in a community's history are often present in focus groups and meetings, and they may hold important positions in the society. Be aware of this when forming groups and discussing certain issues.

VII.1.2 ⊕ The geography and environment

It is useful to get a general view of the geographical, social, cultural and economic environment that existed prior to the crisis. This should give you information on a wide range of issues, such as:

● production activities in the area and economic opportunities: the presence of factories, fields, grazing areas, markets;

● social and cultural features: religious sites, main gathering places;

● access to basic services: schools, health centres;

● constraints of the geography and the environment: relief, climate, access to land;

● connection to or isolation from other areas: road and transport networks, etc.

This information is important for understanding the population's environment, but also for identifying potential opportunities and constraints for a future programme (e.g. availability of local resources, constraints to access during wet season, etc.). Though you may feel that they are no longer relevant, issues such as the geographical relations which existed between groups before they were forcibly displaced may continue to be extremely relevant to the affected people.

Most participatory exercises concerning the geography of an area entail a collective mapping exercise or the use of techniques such as 'transect walks'. Other methods of representation can also be used, such as drawings, graphs, etc. of different styles and scales. (See Part 3 for further details on tools for participation).

In conflict areas, maps can provide militarily sensitive information such as locations of landmines, checkpoints, or training camps. Those who provide and those who collect this information can be suspected or targeted. Be careful about the information you collect, and how you collect and manage it. Avoid bringing with you, or ostensibly showing, sophisticated maps (e.g. satellite photos, detailed maps), as people may be uncomfortable with this 'high-tech material', or suspicious of you for having it.

#7
Assessment

VII.1.3 ✣ The society and culture

Understanding a population's social organisation and culture entails covering a wide range of issues, many of which will have changed or be changing as a result of the crisis.

● Cultural / religious values and practices

● Ethnic composition;

● Gender relations;

● The role of different age groups and the relationships between them (knowledge of age distribution is useful here);

● Social hierarchies (e.g. based on caste, religion, ethnicity, language and wealth)

● Languages (differences, potential tensions between different language groups, etc.)

It is important to understand attitudes towards participatory practices and whether participation is common in the management of public issues. If it is, find out what kind is used, what hierarchies are involved, and whether participation is affected by age, gender, etc.

Population groups are often riddled with conflicts, discrimination patterns, and rivalries. Participatory dialogue on a population's social composition necessitates a high degree of sensitivity and requires preparatory work with key stakeholders and informants.

Avoid generic and stereotypical notions of household, community, ethnicity, religion, class gender and generation. Be open to local subtleties and specificities. Even if you think you know a region well there are often strong variations within apparently homogeneous areas.

People's own way of describing their society and culture can be normative, that is, they describe how it ought to be, rather than how it actually is. It is important to know both how it is and how it is perceived to be.

Tips & Warnings

Try describing your own society and culture as a way to start the discussion. It will also help you understanding just how difficult it is to describe your society and culture to a stranger in a short period of time!

VII.1.4 ✣ The economy and livelihoods

Understanding a population's economy and socio-economic stratification as it existed prior to the crisis entails collecting information on:

● the main economic activities and income sources of the population;

● the availability of and access to resources;

● socio-economic differentiation within the population;

The question of socio-economic differentiation can lead to the discussion of sensitive political issues. Be aware of tensions that may emerge, and if necessary, do the exercise in different groups.

Be open to the participants' own ways of stratifying different social and economic groups (e.g. caste, economic status, clan, social relations, education, etc.).

Information collected at the village or local level cannot be fully analysed without collecting information on the wider economic and political context.

VII.2 Understanding the crisis

Aid agencies often tend to have a narrow, supply-driven view of the crisis and its impact that may be very different from that of the people affected. While aid workers, particularly expatriate personnel, are deployed for just a few months, the population often has to deal with difficulties and disasters on a regular basis or continuously.

It is helpful to analyse a crisis using a two-step approach:

● Establish a global picture of the crisis

● Go into detail, analysing the different stakeholders, local capacities and vulnerabilities and priority needs.

VII.2.1 ⊕ Establishing an overall picture of the crisis

In order to establish an overall picture of the crisis and understand the population's perception of it, you need to know about the following:

● Crisis trends in the area: types, frequency, scale and impact of previous crises, existing prevention and preparedness measures, structural vulnerabilities (geological, political, economic)

● The current crisis

● The impact of the crisis: what happened to members of the population, what happened in the village and in other areas?

A general discussion of the crisis can be carried out in a large, mixed group, as this can lead to interesting open debates and discussion. However, different groups will be affected differently by the same crisis, according to their age, gender and socio-economic position, and so on. Make sure all groups are represented, or organise separate group sessions if necessary, and triangulate information.

Be aware that people may be very uncomfortable talking about what has happened to them because they fear how other members of their community will react. In particular, women and girls who have experienced sexual violence may fear and be at risk of further victimisation from within their own community if they speak about what has happened to them.

Our perceptions of the crisis are often very different from those of the affected population, notably concerning its causes. Listen to the discussion, let people talk, and try to understand their views on the causes of the crisis. In the case of natural

disasters, this can also reveal local beliefs and traditions related to the event.

Each population group (according to age, gender, socio-economic class, livelihood, etc.) will have specific needs and priorities, leaving you with a complex picture of a multitude of needs. If only certain sections of the population are involved in the identification of needs, the process will be biased and certain groups may be excluded from the programme design. Furthermore, do not try to find a 'middle path' by attempting to define the 'average victim' who would then be entitled to receive a 'standard assistance kit'. It is important to identify group-specific needs.

VII.2.2 ⊕ Detailed analysis of the crisis

Once you have an overview of the effects of the crisis, it is time to go into detail, analysing the different stakeholders, local capacities and vulnerabilities, and priority needs.

Analysing stakeholders

A stakeholder is not necessarily an organisation. It can be a small group or even individuals, who play an important role in the community or have a stake in the potential project.

Understanding who is who in a given context serves various purposes, including:

● identifying local political dynamics, which is important with respect to protection and security issues.

● understanding who you should interact with throughout the course of the project, for coordination purposes, to seek authorisations, etc.

● identifying potential partners.

Make a comprehensive list of all stakeholders before starting to establish what the relationships are between them.

Carrying out a participatory stakeholder analysis makes it possible to understand people's perceptions of various stakeholders and how they relate to them (trust, suspicion,

Tips & Warnings

Organising small focus groups composed of individuals who have experienced the same trauma may be a way of encouraging discussion in a sensitive and supportive way. But beware of the psychological effects this may have, or of the underlying conflicts or tensions that it may trigger. You may not be equipped to deal with them.

Tips & Warnings

Stakeholder analysis raises political issues, and not all organisations will be willing to provide the information you seek. Be careful not to put yourself or your informants at risk by being "too curious"!

#7
Assessment

collaboration). This can help to identify interest groups and networks within the population, some of whom may not be obvious or visible to outsiders.

Discussing stakeholders can raise sensitive political issues that participants may wish to evade. It is important to carry out a preliminary stakeholder analysis before doing participatory exercises, through a literature review and key informant interviews for instance, to underpin discussions.

Use various sources of information, including key informants, focus groups with different compositions and literature, to understand the political dynamics between stakeholders. Different groups will have different opinions of stakeholders (e.g. rivalries), and focus group participants can be affiliated to the stakeholders being discussed. Be careful in the way you address certain issues and triangulate information.

You can also have a biased perception. Your mandate, origin and interest will probably lead you to pay more attention to some stakeholders than others. Try to be aware of the full range of stakeholders present in a given context. This is important for your impartiality and the perception of your neutrality.

There are several ways of identifying interaction between stakeholders and understanding the perception of affected populations. Choosing the tool that best meets your needs is therefore very important and will depend on whether it is important to understand:

● Power relations between stakeholders

● Relationships of proximity and distance and the existence of networks

● The relationships between various stakeholders and the affected population

● Existing conflicts

You (as an individual and as a representative of your organisation) are also one of the stakeholders; you may need to analyse your relationship with the local population and other stakeholders, and share this with them.

Participants may be lacking information on some of the stakeholders, particularly concerning international organisations, the distinction between UN agencies and INGOs, donor agencies, etc. Do not hesitate to provide information on these institutions. Participants will most likely be very interested to learn more about organisations that are foreign to them and yet play a considerable role in their lives.

Understanding capacities and vulnerabilities

Understanding a population's coping mechanisms and capacities and recognising local initiatives is essential in participatory approaches to humanitarian action. Designing a programme without considering what is already being done locally can undermine local capacities and lead to programmes that are of little interest to the population or that generate feelings of mistrust or frustration.

Example

Many Afghans use the term "NGO" to designate any foreign agencies, including NGOs, UN agencies, the ICRC, donors, and even the Coalition Army's Provincial Reconstruction Teams (civil-military operations). A Venn diagram exercise carried out in a village provided the opportunity to clarify the distinction and relationships between these organisations. Village elders, who had been interacting with these organisations for years, found it very helpful to learn more about them.

Different groups will have different sets of coping strategies, and will face different risks and opportunities. Be sure to address this diversity, for example, by carrying out separate focus groups. Again, care should be taken here as differences in vulnerabilities and capacities are likely to highlight social inequalities, and may lead to the re-emergence or exacerbation of tensions.

Make sure you do not forget marginalized groups, as they are often likely to be most vulnerable, and their exclusion from the process would bias the assessment and affect your impartiality. In situations where it is possible to have mixed groups, it is important to ensure that women and children or any unrepresented groups have an opportunity to express themselves. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to have separate focus groups.

Describing the "slope of destitution", showing the evolution of the crisis impact, and the coping mechanisms that are

#7 Assessment

subsequently put in place, is a useful exercise, in particular when the impacts of the crisis are felt over a long period and evolve over time (see figure 5).

In order to understand needs and demands, it is necessary to analyse previously collected information. This will allow you to identify the needs that the population is unable to meet.

The fundamental purpose of an assessment is to acquire a 'holistic' view of the problems the population faces, and the needs that arise from these problems. However, there are a number of biases and challenges involved in identifying problems which need to be taken into consideration:
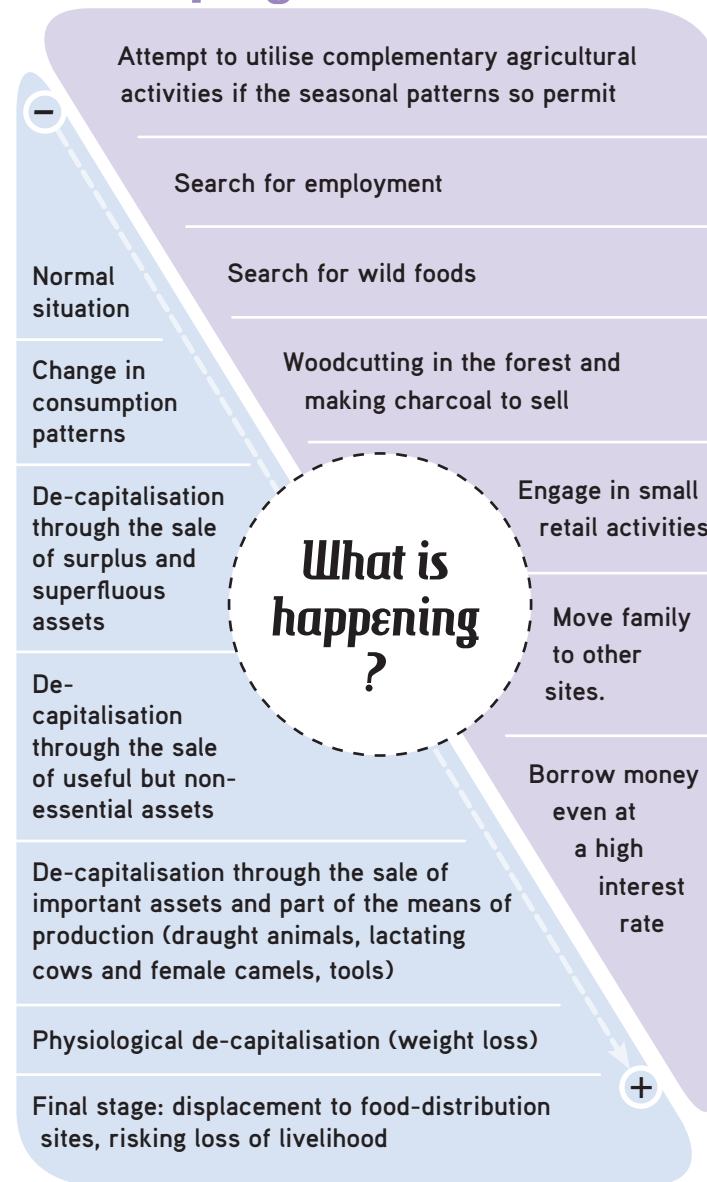
● differences in how needs are perceived by various stakeholders

● the distinction between expressed needs and non-expressed needs

● the distinction between structural, chronic needs and those that have been created by the crisis

'Real needs' versus 'perceived needs'

Your perception of needs is likely to differ from that of the population, as illustrated by Figure 5. The population may highlight certain problems that seem trivial or non-problematic. Likewise, you may perceive certain things to be a problem whereas they are not perceived as such by participants. For example, a common disease may be considered 'normal' or explained by cultural and religious beliefs, whereas a cure may be easily available. Discussion can help increase the overlap between real needs, the needs perceived by the population and those perceived by the agency.

A range of different factors influence how people perceive need. For people directly affected by a crisis, their culture and religion, their livelihoods and their perception of the environment may be the driving factors when expressing their needs. Their experience during the crisis and any previous

Coping mechanisms

Attempt to utilise complementary agricultural activities if the seasonal patterns so permit

Search for employment

Normal situation

Search for wild foods

Change in consumption patterns

Woodcutting in the forest and making charcoal to sell

De-capitalisation through the sale of surplus and superfluous assets

What is happening ?

Engage in small retail activities

Move family to other sites.

De-capitalisation through the sale of useful but non-essential assets

Borrow money even at a high interest rate

De-capitalisation through the sale of important assets and part of the means of production (draught animals, lactating cows and female camels, tools)

Physiological de-capitalisation (weight loss)

Final stage: displacement to food-distribution sites, risking loss of livelihood

Slope of destitution

Figure 5
Example of a slope of destitution and associated coping mechanisms in an agro-pastoral population in the Horn of Africa.

experience of humanitarian aid will also play a role in how they express their needs. A typical scenario is that a population will express a need for medical care when visited by a medical organisation; for water or latrines when visited by a public health organisation, and so on. People will often articulate their needs according to what they know, or think, you can provide.

Similarly, a range of factors can influence how a humanitarian organisation perceives a population's needs: their culture, mandate and specific area of expertise may lead them to perceive every crisis as a 'medical crisis' or 'public health crisis'. Donor and media pressure can also have a great influence on how needs are perceived.

Expressed needs and unexpressed needs

Some needs may not be expressed, either because participants do not perceive them as needs, do not think they can be met, or because they are embarrassed or do not dare to do so. For example, women may feel embarrassed to talk about needs relating to menstruation or people may not want to talk about HIV and AIDS. It is important to have a balanced assessment team, which should always include a woman. It may also be necessary to use euphemisms in order to talk about particularly stigmatising issues – for example, talking about the impact of chronic illness without actually using the term HIV or AIDS.

Furthermore, people may have expectations that they do not express. For example, if you work for a health organisation, they may expect you to address all medical problems. Try to be aware of what populations expect from you. Make sure you explain what you can and cannot do to avoid future frustration and disappointment
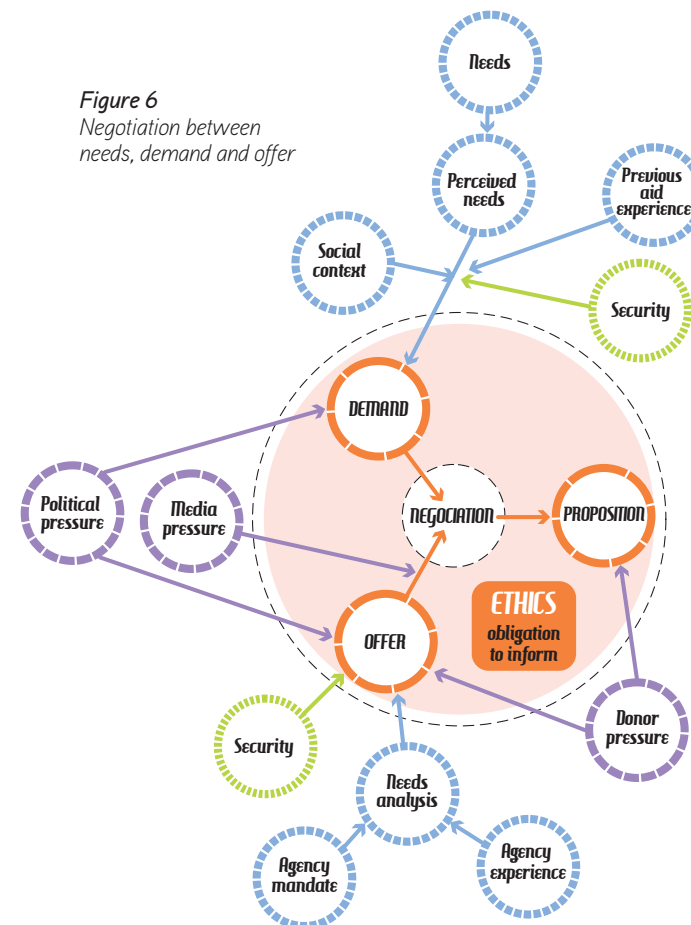
Example

*In **Haiti**, people who were resettling in a new area used materials that had been distributed for building a school to build a big wall at the back of the village instead. The aid organisation responsible for the school programme was concerned about this 'diversion' of aid. But when the field teams discussed this with members of the population, they realised that there was a large cemetery behind the village. The population felt haunted by the spirits and this was the source of much tension, distress and illness. Once the wall between the village and the cemetery was built, the living conditions in the village greatly improved as the population felt safer and comforted.*

If you have identified problems which have not been expressed by participants, present them for discussion. Try to do so in a way that does not bias the discussion towards your concerns only or that imposes a subject considered of small importance by participants.

Prioritising problems

It is unlikely that an aid organisation will have adequate resources to respond to all needs. Therefore, the next step is to establish priorities among the problems to be

*Figure 6
Negotiation between needs, demand and offer*

#7
Assessment

addressed. This is not an easy exercise, as a population is rarely homogeneous, and is generally composed of groups and individuals with diverging interests and priorities. Your own perception of needs may be different - sometimes very different - from that of the population you are dealing with: an agency's expertise, experience, financial independence will also bias the process

The process of reaching agreement about priorities may entail long debate and even argument. Allow enough time for participants to discuss the various priorities, and the consequences of addressing them or not addressing them.

When population members gather to prioritise problems to be addressed, they may be convinced that the project will be implemented. If funds for the project are not yet secured, or if other constraints or factors are likely to affect the programme design (such as your technical expertise and operational capacity), be very clear that establishing priorities does not necessarily entail that they will be addressed. Cleary explain the various constraints that restrict opportunities for action and make sure that population members and representatives have understood that though a list of priorities has been established, you will not necessarily be able to address them all.

Prioritisation entails making choices. Participants (members of the population and the aid organisation) who make and promote these choices should take responsibility for their decision.

Make sure that all participants understand the priorities that have been set, and the rationale behind these choices. Providing feedback to a large group of people is a good way of validating the choices made and ensuring that they are accepted by the population.

VII.3 Concluding the assessment

Just as introducing oneself at the beginning of the assessment is essential, so is concluding the process properly. Throughout the entire assessment process, you have probably raised expectations: people will have attended focus groups, seen you in meetings with their leaders, seen you walk across fields and sit in the village square. Your mere presence will have created expectations among the population and other organisations working in the area.

If you need to leave the field to design the project or if there is a delay between the assessment and design, visit local authorities, partners, and population groups you have met to present the conclusion of the work that was done collectively, and explain the next steps in the project process.

The issues that should be discussed include:

● the results of the assessment

● how different stakeholders have been involved in the process (population groups, authorities, other organisations)

● what you will presently do with the results (present results to your headquarters, seek funding possibilities, etc.)

● when you expect to return - be realistic!

● the purpose of your next visit – do you plan to do a participatory programme design or will you come for the implementation of the project?

● ways for population representatives and the aid organisation to stay in touch until a team returns

#7 Assessment

VII.4 Reviewing participation in the assessment

It is important to review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. The purpose of these periodic reviews

is to reflect on your original motivation and objectives for using a participatory approach and to make any necessary adjustments in order to achieve these objectives.

Who participated and how?

The following table will help you to describe how the participatory assessment was conducted, by recording who participated and how for each step of the assessment process.

STEP	WHO?	HOW?
Initiating the assessment		
Understanding the context		
Understanding the crisis and its effects		
Understanding who is who		
Understanding local strategies, capacities and vulnerabilities		
Understanding and prioritising needs		
Concluding the assessment		

In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to consider whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, that they were able to express their concerns, that the appropriate environment was provided so that they could speak openly and that they were genuinely able to participate.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the assessment. This should preferably be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

Was participation successful?

At the very beginning of a project it is very difficult to measure whether you will achieve the objectives that you have set yourself in terms of participation. However, at this stage, you can already assess whether you are "on the right track", and make any necessary adjustments.

Here are some of the questions you need to answer in order to judge the extent to which you have successfully used participatory methods and thus started to implement your participation approach:

● Were participants, other stakeholders or other population members exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? What measures did you take to ensure participants were not exposed to risk? Did participation help address protection and security issues?

● Did people understand your principles and mandate? Were you able to respect the principles of independence and impartiality, by being careful about whom you engaged with and communicating your principles?

● Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security problems for them?

● Have you identified local strategies and capacities that could be strengthened? Have you strengthened the capacity of local stakeholders to carry out assessments?

● Did the participatory assessment enable you to do a holistic and integrated identification of needs, based on the perceptions and priorities of different groups within the population?

● Did you identify constraints that could affect project effectiveness? Have you identified local knowledge and resources that could improve project effectiveness?

● Do you feel you have been able to establish a relationship based on mutual respect with population members and/or local stakeholders? Is this feeling shared among all concerned? Do people understand

#7
Assessment

who you are, what you have come to do and what you can and cannot do?

- Have you reviewed or adapted your priorities in accordance with the perceptions and priorities of the population? Have you been able to understand and adapt to the cultural and environmental context?

- Were local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience) used during the participatory assessment? Have you identified local resources (including time!) and expertise that could contribute to a participatory project?

- Have you identified structures that could potentially contribute to managing the project (including logistics and administrative management)?

- Were you able, through participatory exercises, to collect a considerable amount of in-depth information in a relatively short space of time and using relatively few resources? Did it take longer? Was the quality and quantity of information worth it?

- Was the assessment able to draw on lessons learned by the population and aid agency from previous aid projects?

- Has the participatory assessment allowed you to establish a clear understanding of the political context and the role and agendas of stakeholders in order to protect the future project from potential manipulation?

- Did you implement the participatory approach as planned? Are the objectives of participation being met? What adjustments are needed to improve participation in the next phase?

Chapter 7 summary
Participatory assessment

1 Participation in a humanitarian response begins at the assessment phase, with the people affected by a crisis taking a leading role in identifying their own needs.

2 Understanding how populations perceive and organise their own lives, their coping mechanisms and capacities, is essential when using participatory methods.

3 In most cases aid organisations are not able to meet all the needs generated by a crisis and therefore have to work with the affected population to establish which priorities should be addressed.

4 The participatory approach should be reviewed at the end of each stage of the project cycle to assess how successful it has been.

#7
Assessment