

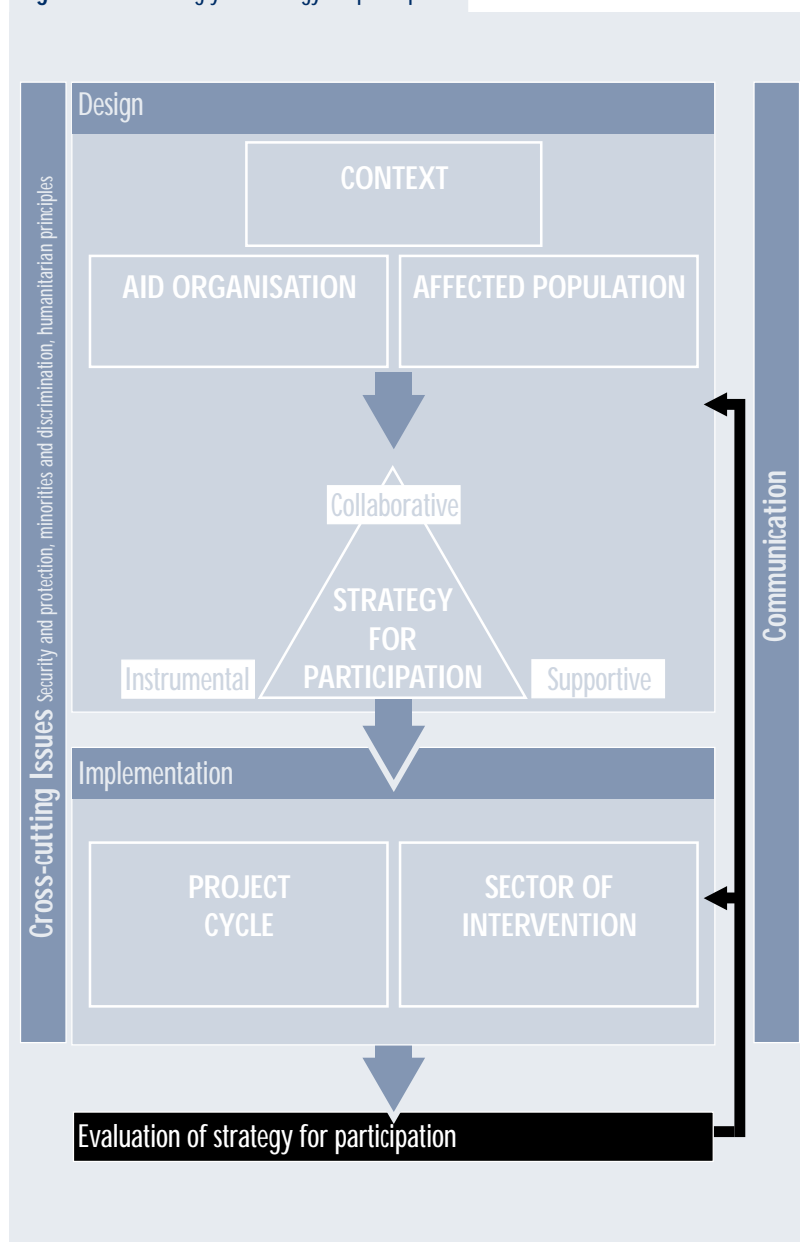
CONCLUSION

Evaluating Your Strategy For Participation

The last step, which is often neglected, is to evaluate the actual participation strategy that you have put in place. At the end of the programme, but also throughout the project cycle, choices and the modalities of your participation strategy must be continuously monitored and appraised. The evaluation focuses on two main elements: the participation process itself; and the impact that the participation process has had on the programme.

No practice exists that should not be evaluated. Every practice requires, on the one hand, design, and on the other, evaluation. Practice should be continuously reinvented, and it can be reinvented so long as it is continuously evaluated.

Paulo Freire

Figure 29 Evaluating your strategy for participation

The participation strategy is an inherent part of the programme process as a whole. It should be evaluated, therefore, like all other programme components in the final analysis. How and when this will be done must be defined in the ToR.

Of course, as described in chapter 7, the evaluation of the participation strategy can be carried out using participatory methods, too.

A EVALUATING THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS ITSELF

The participation process can be evaluated according to a number of qualitative and quantitative criteria.

- The number and characteristics of the people participating in the programme, and the evolution of these criteria.
- The number and characteristics of the people participating in the various events relating to the programme (such as meetings, focus groups, workshops and discussion groups).
- The quantity and types of problems encountered, nature of complaints and how these have been managed. It must be noted that, at the beginning of a participatory process, an increase in the number of complaints is not necessarily a negative sign: it may be a positive indication that a space has been opened up for dialogue.
- The quality of the relationship between the agency and the representatives of the affected population (whether individuals or local structures), as shown in the minutes of meetings, for instance.

B EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION ON HUMANITARIAN AID

The quality and pertinence of the participation strategy is measured according to its **impact on the local population** and its structures, as well as on the basis of **programme results**.

If the objective of adopting a participation strategy is to strengthen local capacity (collaboration strategy or support for local initiatives), evaluation of the strategy relative to this goal is essential. Even where you have opted for an instrumental approach—either by choice, or as a result of constraints imposed by influencing factors—evaluating the strategy and its impact on local capacities could be a very useful way of increasing your understanding and that of your organisation of participatory strategies and of informing future strategies.

The impact of the participation strategy on **populations** should be assessed at various levels. The following questions can be asked.

- Has the participation strategy led to better organisation of populations (in terms of decision-making mechanisms, problem solving, and the emergence of recognised leaders, for example)?
- Has the participation strategy enabled access to resources and mechanisms that will be useful to the affected population in relation to other types of action?
- Has the participation strategy reinforced the protection of the people involved, or has it increased the risks to which they are exposed?
- Has the participation strategy favoured the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups? Has it contributed to their exclusion? Or has it had no impact on their status?

Finally, the choice of participation strategy can be evaluated according to its **impact on the programme** itself, as defined in the first part of

this handbook. Participation is meant to improve the quality of programmes, their pertinence, their effectiveness, their sustainability, and, eventually, the speed of their implementation. All of this can and should be monitored and evaluated in the short and long terms, using classical tools.

C USING THE RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR PARTICIPATION

Evaluating your participation strategy makes sense only if results are used to inform and adapt current and future participatory approaches. It can also enable questioning and analysis of influential factors.

- Was our understanding of the situation correct? Was our understanding of the society, the political, economic and cultural environment, and the impact of the crisis on the population, for instance, adequate?
- Did the agency have the capacity to attain its objectives? Were its practices appropriate, and its logistical and financial means, and its human resources, for example, sufficient?
- Was the choice of approach (instrumental, collaboration, supportive) relevant and appropriate?
- Was implementation of this strategy, throughout the project cycle appropriate?

Such reflections might lead to minor programme adjustments, to alterations in the strategy or might indicate more complex changes. Introspection can also lead to radical questioning of your modes of operation and that of your agency, in cases where they are revealed to constrain the adoption and implementation of successful participatory approaches.

In order to address such fundamental findings, it may be helpful to adopt a participatory approach in this final evaluation stage, involving not just local stakeholders, but, in the case of international organisations, in particular, headquarters representatives and donors!

This handbook has sought to present an approach, tools (recognising their limits and 'domains of validity'), and examples of good and poor participatory practices, coupled with warnings and words of caution. It adopts a reflective framework rather than offering clear-cut formulae, in order to whet your appetite, while recognising factors that may considerably limit the extent to which you are able to embrace participatory strategies in certain circumstances. Highlighting both operational and ethical incentives to adopt participatory strategies, it leaves you free to create your own participatory recipes, acknowledging the specificities of each humanitarian situation across a range of sectors and project phases.

'It is not important that you came and asked us what we need. It is not important that you cannot solve our problems. Just we are happy that you came to discuss with us.'

Shura member, Nahrin (Afghanistan)