Transversal factsheet 4 - Participatory approach

What is it?

A participatory approach is one in which everyone who has a stake in the intervention has a voice, either in person or by representation. For instance, staff of the organisation that will run it, members of the target population, community officials, interested citizens, and people from involved agencies, schools, or other institutions, all should be invited to the table. Everyone's participation should be welcomed and respected, and the process shouldn't be dominated by any individual or group, or by a single point of view.

What for?

The use of the participatory term does not stop at asking for others’ opinion. Participation implies involving a large range of stakeholders, including first of all beneficiaries, as contributors for assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. The added-value of a participatory project is its ownership by the 3 types of stakeholders (population, decision makers and service providers), its sustainability (exit strategy) and its relevance (better impact). Such project then respects everyone’s intelligence, values everyone’s ideas and experience, and empowers the community. A participatory process might take time; yet, overcoming this challenge may tremendously increase the impact and efficiency of the intervention.

How?

There is different level of participation. Each of these levels may be appropriate in different circumstances, or with different groups:

Mandatory:
- Information - The least we can do is telling people what is planned.
- Consultation - Offering a number of options and get feedback.

Actually participatory:
- Deciding together - Encouraging others to provide additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.
• Acting together - Not only deciding together, but also forming a partnership to carry it out.
• Supporting independent community initiatives - The project becomes a facilitator to help others do what they want.

➔ See Tool 8 - Day 2: Participatory documents

Standards and policies

➔ See Synthesis of the review of participatory approaches used in Handicap International’s programmes (HI, 2015)
➔ See Participation by crisis-affected populations in humanitarian action (ALNAP, 2009)
➔ See the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) dedicated website: http://www.participatorymethods.org