PARTICIPATORY MONITORING FOR CASH PROGRAMS IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

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PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND CASH

Participation is a hot topic in humanitarian work; the word is tossed around frequently without a thorough understanding of its meaning and implications for programming. This report aims to briefly review key definitions and concepts related to participatory monitoring and then provide concrete recommendations for practitioners specifically focused on cash programming and emergency response. This report will not serve as a manual for participatory monitoring, as there are already a number of guides for participatory monitoring and monitoring cash.

There are myriad terms that have to do with participation. Here are a few of the key terms:

- **Participation**: Co-determination and power sharing throughout the program cycle.

- **Participatory**: Projects, programs, or processes that incorporate participation to varying degrees.

- **Participatory monitoring and evaluation**: A process through which stakeholders at various levels (i) engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project, program, or policy; (ii) share control over the content, the process, and the results of the M&E activity; and (iii) engage in taking or identifying corrective actions.

- **Participatory methods**: A range of activities that aim to increase participation. This could include everything from proportional piling to participatory rural appraisal.

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1 This short report is based off a longer report by Kathryn Johnson for her Master’s thesis at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. The research for that work was conducted through an extensive desk review and key informant interviews. The case study for the report was a monitoring pilot for cash programs in Ethiopia in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council as part of the Enhanced Response Capacity Consortium. For the full report, please email katyjohnso@gmail.com.

2 Kathryn is a Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant with the Danish Refugee Council for winter/spring 2018.

3 Helpful guides include those from the World Bank Group, the Institute of Development Studies, and Equal Access.


• **Community-Based Monitoring:** Community-based monitoring is similar to participatory monitoring, although it is generally used in situations of accountability or "watchdog"-type efforts.

Another crucial component of participation is the intensity, which can be understood as the amount of power shared or given up by the organization to the beneficiaries. This is crucial, as power and control over decisions and projects are at the heart of participation.

**Figure 1: Intensity of Participation.**

A simple way of understanding the difference between consultation (which is perhaps the most common form of engagement with beneficiaries in humanitarian work currently) and participation is this quote from an aid worker in Afghanistan: “Consultation is asking for an input from village elders of conducting an assessment with potential beneficiaries, prior to us making a decision. We will not necessarily do what they say, but we will hear them. Participation is when the agency acts as a facilitator and the people decide what to do.”

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7 Drawings in the graphic are used under a Creative Common license from Symbolon, Krisada, and shashank singh.

Moving on to participatory monitoring, it is helpful to examine Sirker and Ezemenari’s four principles for participatory monitoring:

1) Beneficiaries are active participants – not just sources of information.
2) Building capacity of local people to analyze, reflect, and take action.
3) Joint learning of stakeholders at various levels – and information is shared back with beneficiaries throughout the process.
4) Catalyzes commitment to taking corrective actions.\(^9\)

A participatory monitoring approach is different in each context, but often involves designing objectives and indicators with beneficiaries, collecting data in partnership with the community, sharing information back with all involved, and perhaps most importantly, using the data to improve programming. The key challenge in emergencies is condensing this process into an appropriately urgent timeline.

**Cash & Participatory Monitoring**

Cash programs provide one unique challenge for participatory monitoring in emergencies, in that they are often short-term. This limits the long-term impact that the intervention may have on the household, as well as the opportunities for monitoring. As Monitoring4CTP states, “in these circumstances, it is not realistic to measure the contribution of cash transfers/vouchers against

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achieving classic outcome indicators, e.g. crude mortality, wasting and other longer-term measurements. Working with mobile populations, particularly refugees and displaced people, also poses monitoring challenges where there may be few contact points between the beneficiaries and those monitoring the programme. These kinds of programming timeframes and operating contexts may mean that it is unreasonable to expect comprehensive measurements of how CTP has contributed to changes in household coping capacity.” However, while this may seem like a challenge, the difficulty in defining outcome indicators can also be reframed as an opportunity to work with the community to identify how they understand success in the short-term for the program.

Cash transfers also present strong opportunities for participation. First, community-based targeting is a common practice, and these mechanisms can be used for participation throughout the project cycle. Cash programs are also based in the idea of empowering beneficiaries with the right to choose, and therefore project managers of cash programs could be likely to have a more participatory mindset. One cash expert I spoke with asserted that cash programs are all about giving the power over to beneficiaries and trusting that they know best, which at least in theory coincides perfectly with participatory monitoring.

**RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION**

“The problem with participation is that the theory is written so well that the practice does not work.”

This section aims to help practice catch up to theory with recommendations for how to conduct participatory monitoring for cash programs in emergency response. The recommendations focus on specific actions necessary for monitoring cash in emergency response at the project level, as well as recommendations for the industry as a whole.

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12 Key informant interview, March 2018.
RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE PROJECT LEVEL

- Start with an honest examination of the constraints faced by the project (particularly time).
  - While acting urgently and efficiently is always necessary, it is time that humanitarians rethink their sense of urgency. Time is used as an excuse in order to avoid participation. Thus, the first question to consider is what the realistic time constraints are and what type of participation is feasible given the time constraints.
  - If there is no time at the outset of the project to incorporate truly participatory design and monitoring processes, then get creative about what can be done (more below).
  - Figure 3 highlights the contexts in which participatory monitoring may be more feasible, but it is also important not to over-romanticize existing relationships with the community and assume that a long-standing relationship means higher trust.

**Figure 3: Urgency and Relationships for Participatory Monitoring in Emergencies**

Regardless of time constraints, when designing the monitoring plan, it is crucial to consider the following key questions:

- What information is needed (and not just interesting)?

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13 Original Graphic.
For whom is this information needed?
How will it be collected?
How will it be incorporated into project implementation?
How will it be shared with beneficiaries? ¹⁴

In the most urgent of cases:

Develop objectives together: If there is no pre-existing relationship with the community or there truly is little time for planning, conduct consultation in whatever form is possible – whether it is a few community group discussions or staff walking around and talking to people – with the goal of developing the objectives of the program that will be monitored together.

- There will likely be no time to develop the indicators together, but objectives should be prioritized at the very least.

Consider the current touchpoints with beneficiaries and how to integrate participation into these processes: Minimize time burden on beneficiaries and staff by utilizing pre-existing processes such as regular field work or other monitoring exercises.

Abandon the all-or-nothing mindset: If there is no time to conduct a truly participatory process, think creatively about ways to include elements of participation with the understanding that something is better than nothing. For example, communicate findings from a monitoring exercise with the targeting committee even if there is no time to communicate with the whole community. Importantly, be sure to iterate the approach over time with learning throughout the project.

Share information back with beneficiaries in whatever format is possible, while considering the accessibility for beneficiaries. Whether it is a town hall meeting or feedback community group discussions, it is crucial that the feedback loop is closed no matter how urgent the situation is. It is also helpful to ensure there are multiple methods for closing the feedback loop, which is vital for making the information more accessible to a larger number of beneficiaries.

If it is longer than a one-off program, **continuously revisit the idea of participatory monitoring later on in the project.**

Finally, **consider the ethics of asking for beneficiaries’ time in a true emergency.** This is not an excuse to not provide opportunities for participation, but simply a reminder that we must question the assumption that beneficiaries always want to and/or have the time to participate.

When there is slightly more time (more than three months):

- **Identify and establish the participatory body.**
  - Work with community leaders, but be cognizant of community politics.
  - Ensure representation; consider gender, age (especially youth and the elderly), ethnicity, area of origin (for displaced populations), religion, sexual minorities, those with disabilities, etc. It is also important to keep in mind each group’s needs and desires – for example, women or youth might prefer to have their own participatory body that feeds into the broader representation, rather than be representatives in a larger committee.

- **Develop objectives and indicators to monitor the project with the community.** This can take time, but it is at the heart of participatory monitoring. The methods outlined in traditional participatory rural appraisals are a good place to start, but the best ways to do so will vary by context.

- **Pilot the approach with members of the community and ask for their feedback.** Test out the tools with members of the participatory body and get their views on the tools and the overall process before using the tools with the larger community.

- **Share findings back with the community – and communicate how the agency will utilize the findings.** There is ample guidance for how to share information back with the community and ‘close the feedback loop,’ but perhaps what is less often discussed is the need to be open and transparent with the community about what will be done with the information. This is also critical for managing expectations with the community. Options for this include feedback group discussions with community members or sharing with the participatory body.

- **Pilot “Fix-Rates” for cash:** As discussed in the literature review, Fix-Rates were created by Integrity Action to measure transparency and accountability to the
affected populations; they are the percentage of resolved problems.\textsuperscript{15} While they have never been used as such in the humanitarian world, there is an opportunity to use them as a simple metric in participatory monitoring.

- For example, if a MPG cash program is designed to help communities meet their basic food needs within a certain time frame, then a Fix-Rate metric could be designed to understand if beneficiaries are meeting that objective or not. Importantly, it is also about the ongoing adaption of programs to ensure that issues identified by the community are addressed to their satisfaction. The Fix-Rate should be designed \textbf{with} the community.
- This may feel uncomfortable to practitioners, as it gives beneficiaries the power to say if the program is successful or not. However, participatory monitoring is all about handing over the power.
- This is a new idea that would need to be piloted to see how it works in practice.

- \textbf{Create a plan for measuring participation.}
  - It is crucial to create a measurement plan for participation, in order to learn which aspects of participation are going well and which could be improved.
  - Example indicators should be contextualized and developed with the community, but could include:
    - Number of participants consulted during project design and implementation.
    - Percent of grievances related to delivery of cash that are actually addressed.
    - Percent of beneficiaries that feel their feedback is valued and used by the organization.
    - Percent of beneficiaries that are confident their views will be responded to.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

The following recommendations are for the humanitarian field, not project-specific.

- **Develop standards for participation:** While the humanitarian field is more and more frequently labeling their programs participatory (at least anecdotally, there is no hard evidence of this), it is time for their field to create standards. There should be minimum requirements that must be met in order to label a program participatory. However, this runs the risk of becoming a tick-box process, and thus must be carefully considered.

- **Areas for future research:**
  - The impact of participatory monitoring, and participation in general.
    - The time and cost of participation versus its impact.\(^{16}\)
  - Donors’ stances on funding participatory programs.
  - Beneficiary views on participatory monitoring and participation; what is of interest, what time commitment is reasonable, what do they understand as participation?
  - Participatory monitoring for mobile populations in emergencies – a clearer understanding of what participation can look like for mobile populations is needed, particularly around new technologies.
  - Methods for incentivizing using community voice for project improvements.
  - Organizational culture/readiness as it relates to participation – what organizations are more likely to engage in participation and how can this be replicated? And the extent to which humanitarian organizations are agile, responsive, and learning organizations.

- **Sharing of experiences for learning:** It is critical that more organizations document their experiences, positive or negative, of participatory monitoring for cash so others can learn from their trials. Importantly, donors must create a safe space for people to talk openly about failure.

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