

The Case of Colombia

Prepared for Groupe URD by

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Commissioned by ALNAP
Active Learning Network for Accountability and
Performance in Humanitarian Action

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FOREWORD

Since its foundation in 1997, the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) has consistently highlighted the relationship between humanitarian agencies and affected populations as critical to the accountability and performance of the Humanitarian Sector, and the active participation of affected populations as fundamental to their self-determination and dignity.

Although ALNAP member agencies share an understanding of the right of affected people to have a say in actions affecting their lives, given the difficulties in the midst of an emergency, many questions remain as to how, when and with whom. The debate on participation in humanitarian action, albeit well intentioned, has been characterised by assumption and expectation, with too little supporting evidence and too little participation by members of the affected populations.

The global study on the consultation with and participation by affected populations in humanitarian action is the first major effort to seek answers and increase understanding through a direct focus on current practice in the field – eg, how do agencies and affected populations interact? what are the opportunities for participation? why are such opportunities lost? – combining researcher, practitioner, national and international perspectives in each of the study teams. However, participation is not a simple matter of methodology, it requires a willingness to share power, to recognise and respond to the rights of affected populations and to support self-determination proactively.

While not expecting simple answers, the Steering Group has high expectations of the Global Study, which aims to provide humanitarian agencies and their personnel with guidance, insights and reference points to help determine, in dialogue with affected populations, how to maximise participation in a given situation.

The Colombia study is one of a series of six country studies and resulting monographs that, together with an extensive literature review, provide the basis for a Practitioner Handbook and Overview Book.

The Steering Group would like to thank Groupe URD and the Colombia Study team – Véronique de Geoffroy, Stella Rodríguez, Federico López and Karla Levy – for their extensive work; the Global Study donors – CAFOD, CIDA, Concern Worldwide, DFID/CHAD, ECHO, MFA Germany, MFA Netherlands, SCUK, Sida and USAID/OFDA – for their financial support; and all those who facilitated the team in-country.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Kate Robertson and the ALNAP Secretariat for keeping the Global Study on track.

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This document is the result of a collective work carried out over several months, which involved the consultation of a large sample of humanitarian actors and populations affected by the conflict. They, and in particular the humanitarian actors and CBOs, were our first readers and critics.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the interest shown in this project, their contribution and active participation.

The Research Team

COLOMBIA



ACRONYMS

ACADEY	Organisation for the Displaced Farmers of Yondó
ACIA	Organisation for the Atrato River
APALSA/ADEPALSA	Organisation of African Palm Growers in the municipality of San Pablo
AFRODES	Afro-Colombian Displaced Persons' Organisation
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (in Humanitarian Action)
AMURIBO	Bojayá River Women's Association
ANUC	National Association of Farmers
ASODESAMUBA	Organisation for the Displaced Persons of Barrancabermeja Municipality
AUC	United Self-Defence of Colombia
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CODHES	Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy
DMZ	Demilitarised Zone
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
ELN	National Liberation Army
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
ICBF	Colombian Family Welfare Institute
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OIA	Atrato Indigenous Organisation
OFP	Women's Popular Movement

OREWA	Embera Waunaan Regional Organisation
PBI	Peace Brigades International
PCS	Project Counselling Services
PDPMM	Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RSS	Social Solidarity Network
SENA	National System for Education
SJR	Jesuit Services to Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
URD	Urgence – Réhabilitation – Développement
USA	United States of America
USO-ECOPETROL	United Workers Union in the Oil Industry
WFP	World Food Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

The participation and consultation of affected populations in humanitarian action now seems widely accepted as crucial to effective social targeting, resource utilisation, accountability, sustainability and impact. Beyond operational considerations, for some, participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, essential to survival, self-protection and self-actualisation in humanitarian emergencies. It is also a means through which humanitarian actors can demonstrate their respect for disaster-affected populations. As such the participation of affected populations has become a central tenet of policy for a number of humanitarian agencies.

Despite policy level commitments, there remains wide variation in practice. It is against this background that ALNAP commissioned the Global Study on Consultation with and Participation by Affected Populations in the Planning, Managing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Humanitarian Action, seeking to understand how participatory approaches can be established in crisis contexts.

Colombia is one of six country case studies chosen on the basis of geographic and socio-cultural diversity within emergency contexts. It captures a protracted complex crisis (at various stages); a Latin American ethnography and culture; a broad variety of humanitarian actors; a highly organised (if abused) grass roots society; a 'citizen' component, where participation is seen as a right.

Key Characteristics	
Study Sites	Magdalena Medio
Criteria	
Stage of crisis	■ Protracted/complex crisis
Nature of crisis	■ Previous collective and individual displacements, from rural to semi-urban areas ■ Long-term displacements
Context	■ Oil-producing/commercial zone ■ Strong trade-union ■ Rural population, farmers/fishermen
Aid actors	■ International and national

Humanitarian action in Colombia takes place within a highly developed legal framework, where the rights of the displaced are enshrined in the country's Constitution and laws.

A focus on three separate study sites enabled a review of participation in humanitarian action at three different stages of the crisis: *acute*, illustrated by the Chocó massacre; *protracted* (forty years of conflict) illustrated by the case of Magdalena Medio; and *forgotten*, within the context of the Bogota megalopolis. Key characteristics of the study sites are shown above.

The aim of our research was to determine whether in Colombia: i) *the participation of the affected population in humanitarian action is both feasible and beneficial in terms of project outcomes and long-term social impact*; ii) *whether Colombia's turbulent social history and the high degree of political awareness have made participation possible (even in the midst of a crisis) and in consequence it exists in humanitarian action (and the extent to which the population's culture and*

Medio Atrato, Chocó	Altos de Cazucá, Soacha
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Acute (Bojayá massacre) ■ Collective displacements: rural to rural/rural to semi-urban ■ Recent displacements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Forgotten/hidden crisis ■ ‘Drip-feed’ displacements ■ Shanty towns ■ Urban begging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subsistence agriculture and fishing ■ CBOs ■ Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Megalopolis ■ Poverty belts ■ Uprooted people ■ Bogota suburbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the regional capital (Quibdo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HQ/main offices in Bogota but little implementation in Soacha

history are key factors); and, iii) whether development actors, working by necessity in humanitarian action, had a higher capacity to act in a participatory manner than their emergency counterparts.

PART 2

THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Colombia's history, its strategic position and its wealth make it a fertile ground for participation. The population is the product of European (colonisation) and African (slavery) migrations, and Indians (native people), a diversity (history, languages and beliefs) that endures to this day due to geographic conditions that protect it.

The growth of illegal drug production in the twentieth century and deepening inequalities, is the context in which the current conflict began.

Parties to the violence include guerrilla movements, paramilitaries, self-defence groups and the Colombian armed forces. The main consequence of the conflict has been the ‘taking hostage’ of the civilian population – illegal detentions, threats and continuous displacements. To protect the displaced, the government has developed one of the most elaborate legal frameworks in the world.

PART 3

FINDINGS

The study highlights a diversity of perception concerning participation. Local actors favour the ‘citizen’ conception whereby participation is the political right to affect the future of one’s municipality; international actors lean more towards more practical definitions, dealing with aid quality and mandate; whereas receiving populations see participation as a direct involvement in humanitarian action, through the hosting of displaced families or working for NGOs.

The discourse in respect of what drives participation is equally varied. Both ethical and political considerations can oblige actors to involve affected populations in decisions concerning their future (mandate, values); others are more pragmatic, seeking participation as a means to increase efficiency (costs, time), to overcome security concerns or to facilitate access to affected communities. Most of all, however, participation is sought because populations demand it and may even refuse to get involved in actions when they have not been consulted.

The different forms of participation were studied in relation to each stage of the project cycle:

- **the needs assessment phase** highlighted the importance of taking into account local actors, populations and traditional assemblies and, above all, the need to build trust;
- **the beneficiary selection phase** (targeting) revealed the limits of pre-determined targeting, the benefits and difficulties of joint

- selection, and external constraints (donor policies, aid specificities);
- **the project design phase** demonstrated the adaptability of development tools for participatory design and the usefulness of traditional structures. However, participation was often limited by the use of ‘standards’ and ‘kit’ approaches and other equalling limiting approaches relating to time constraints or the desire to replicate positive experiences from other contexts;
- **the implementation phase** raised the dichotomy of ‘delegation’ versus ‘workforce’, and the difficulties of managing those extremes. It revealed the issue of ‘over-participation’ and failures to adapt to local agricultural and cultural calendars. Support tools (tutoring or mentoring) were, however, found to be at their most effective during this stage;
- **participatory monitoring** proved to be a form of aid quality control for the beneficiaries, and an operational form of delegation, but also a function that humanitarian actors prefer to reserve for themselves.

The study was unable to review ex-post evaluation phases in any depth due to lack of material, but, did bring to the fore two cross-cutting elements, both fundamental to the development of participatory approaches:

- **inter-institutional coordination** clearly improved allocation of humanitarian aid, reduced ‘over-participation’ and increased the appropriateness of programmes at all stages of the project cycle, particularly when accompanied by a real commitment to coordinate; and,
- **institutional support** (eg, helping affected populations to organise themselves, provision of technical or economic support) proved central to the creation and strengthening of CBOs, and to the increased resilience of communities confronted by crisis. This area provided the best example of participation observed during the study. The investment, however, is one that is required before, as well as during and after the crisis.

Participation is clearly multi-faceted.

PART 4

CONCLUSIONS

The participation of affected populations in humanitarian action appears, in the case of Colombia at least, to be feasible, desirable and beneficial. However, the degree to which it is undertaken, its nature and its success, remain highly dependent on its three primary components and influencing factors: context (eg, security, access, political will); affected populations (eg, history and culture, degree of past organisation); and, humanitarian actors (eg, principles, field of expertise, internal mode of operating). Section 4.2 of the monograph details the influencing factors, identified during the study, as key information to be taken into account when developing participatory strategies in acute and protracted emergencies.

The most important component, however, remains the population. The weaker the community affected by the crisis, the more likely it is to become the object rather than the subject of aid, and while it can be supported by humanitarian actors' practices, participation remains a voluntary act of the affected population.

Above all, the study highlights the importance of taking into account the 'other' actors, understanding participation as an exchange, a two-way and not a top-down relationship. This cooperation frequently takes form of a partnership and provides one of the most useful ways to address insecurity.

PART 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Study recommendations emphasise four areas that address both conceptual and practical considerations:

- the need to consider participation as an approach rather than as a set of tools, an approach that needs to be reinforced by institutional values and mandates;

- the need to prioritise, understand, partner, coordinate with, support and strengthen local actors in each crisis or crisis area
- the need to understand the participation universe as unique to each crisis or crisis area;
- the need to understand that, although it may influence and constrain the nature of participation, security does not prevent it nor remove actors' responsibility to promote and engage in it; and,
- the need for flexible approaches to funding, programming, tools and approaches, to respond to changing context and needs.

Despite the evidence that the participation of affected populations is central to effective and relevant humanitarian action, it is equally important not to lose sight of the right not to participate.

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1

BACKGROUND

The participation and consultation of affected populations and beneficiaries in humanitarian action now seems widely accepted as crucial to effective social targeting, resource utilisation, accountability, sustainability and impact. Beyond operational considerations, for some, participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, essential to survival, self-protection and self-actualisation in humanitarian emergencies. It is also a means through which humanitarian actors can demonstrate their respect for disaster-affected populations. As such the participation of affected populations has become a central tenet of policy for a number of humanitarian agencies.

Despite policy level commitments, there remains wide variation in practice. It is against this background that the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), commissioned the Global Study on Consultation with and Participation by Affected Populations in the Planning, Managing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Humanitarian Action. This report on Colombia presents the findings from one of six country case studies that provide the empirical field data for the Global Study, with the core objectives to:

- assess current consultation and participation practice in a range of emergency contexts;
- identify examples of good practice;

- identify gaps or inadequacies in current practice and contributing factors; and,
- improve understanding of participation and consultation practice.

The Colombia monograph is one of a series of six country case studies that provide the empirical field data for the global project, seeking to reveal the mechanisms through which the voice of affected populations can be enhanced within the humanitarian system, while remaining alert to the difficulties of implementing aid interventions in emergency contexts. As the primary stakeholders in humanitarian action, affected populations are situated at the centre of the Global Study, which attempts to understand how they perceive and interact with the myriad of governmental, international, national, local and other institutions that manage, regulate, control and influence the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection. Wherever possible, successful consultative and participatory mechanisms and initiatives are identified and promoted.

In addition to six country monographs and a *Practitioner Handbook*, the wider issues raised by the country case studies (eg, the inherent challenges and contradictions that exist in attempts to engage in participative approaches and the steps needed to develop a more beneficiary-centred approach) are discussed and developed in greater depth in an *Overview Book*, in which the results of the theoretical and field research are compiled.

1.2

THE COLOMBIA CASE STUDY

1.2.1 Why Colombia?

Colombia is experiencing a protracted crisis for which the civilian population is paying too high a price. Perhaps the crisis is more 'silent' than those in other parts of the world. International media coverage is minimal and the effects of the crisis are less visible, less photographed. The

Colombian conflict masks complex situations that can't be measured using the standard 'African' criteria. The dynamics of displacement are far removed from the Rwanda camps and the mass waves of displaced¹. The people are not dying of hunger as in Ethiopia in the 1980s. The Colombian crisis is of a different nature where, every day, individual, family or small group displacements (sometimes entire villages) filter into neighbouring villages or the poverty belts that ring the large towns.

Hunger does not kill in Colombia, or at least not in the way that it does in other parts of the world. In Colombia one dies from having spoken out, from having demanded one's rights. Reports of human rights violations are commonplace in the only national daily newspaper: attacks on civil servants and community leaders, threats to entire communities, frequent check points, abductions, targeted assassinations and clashes, in which the civilian population is used as a human shield.

Colombia presents a diversity of characteristics that make it a fertile ground for this study. The complexity and duration of the crisis, the Latin American ethnography and culture, the presence of a broad range of humanitarian actors, and the 'citizen' component often associated with participation. In Colombia, humanitarian action has particular characteristics that include an unusually high degree of 'listening to the population'; a national legal framework for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) that is among the most complete in the world; and an extremely high citizens' knowledge of International Humanitarian Law.

Participation? Yes, of course. It has enriched the research, providing new insights, as well as raising questions to which there are as yet no answers.

1.2.2 Hypotheses and Research Questions

The basic hypothesis of this study is that: *the participation of the affected population in humanitarian action is both feasible and beneficial in terms of project outcomes and long-term social impact.* To validate this hypothesis, it is necessary to observe the forms of participation that exist and analyse their impact on

the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability/connectedness and timeliness of humanitarian programmes.

The decision to include a Latin American case study was guided by a second hypothesis: *its turbulent social history and the high degree of political awareness in Colombia have made participation possible (even in the midst of a crisis) and in consequence it exists in humanitarian action.* From there, comes the hypothesis that *the Colombian population's culture and history are key factors that influence the degree of participation and could lead to the population demanding to participate.*

A third hypothesis involves humanitarian actors more than beneficiaries. In Colombia, a country where development actors have worked for a long time with local structures, we sought to verify whether *development actors, working by necessity in humanitarian action, had a higher capacity to act in a participatory manner than their emergency counterparts.* If so, it would mean that the participation of local populations depends on the nature of the organisation (development/humanitarian), as well as its existing presence, credibility and historical relationships on the ground.

In addition to these hypotheses, the research team established a series of questions².

Participation: why?

- Is it simply to facilitate the work of NGOs? To facilitate needs assessment, beneficiary selection, the reduction of project costs through beneficiary inputs or the use of cheaper local agents.
- Is it to reduce levels of insecurity to which expatriates are exposed by implementation through local partners?
- Is it to respond to donor requirements, and enable a paragraph on participation to be included in the project formulation?
- Does it result from consideration that the processes of consultation and participation can radically improve the short and medium-term impact of humanitarian action?
- Is it to respond to the specific demands of the affected population?

- Is it to have a long-term positive impact on the vulnerability and capacity of affected populations?

Participation: who?

- The individual beneficiary. Do an individual's characteristics – gender, age and social identity – impact on the process of participation?
- Local institutions. What kind of institution participates in humanitarian action: traditional, post-socialist organisations, institutions created following structural adjustment, associations formed to take advantage of the influx of humanitarian aid?
- Humanitarian aid organisations. Is it possible to use 'participatory techniques' throughout the project cycle if the organisation itself does not use the approach for its in-house operations?

Participation: how?

- Respect for humanitarian principles in the process of participation. Should the programme's efficiency be given priority over the principles of independence and impartiality? What should be done if participation contributes to discrimination against certain participants? How can we make sure that participation does not help certain groups to manipulate the aid for their own benefit? How can classic beneficiary selection processes, based on the vulnerability of individuals, be reconciled with collective group survival strategies?
- Security. How can we make sure the people involved and participating in the aid process won't be subject to human-rights violations or to another form of segregation or aggression as a consequence of participation?

It is to answer these questions and hypotheses that the research team developed a research method – both theoretical and practical – that takes into account the perspectives of the different stakeholders: local and national NGOs, international organisations, government, CBOs and affected populations.

1.2.3 Research Methods

To adapt the Global Study's broad research method to the specificities of Colombia, the research team adopted a multi-staged approach, as well as tools for the collection, analysis and exchange of data.

Study stages

- i. *Preparatory mission (14–28 June 2002)*: selection of the study sites and team members, and introduction of the study to key institutions.
- ii. *Field research (July–September 2002)*: collection and initial analysis of data.
- iii. *In-country feedback (10 September 2002)*: presentation of initial findings at workshop in Bogota, for discussion.
- iv. *Write-up and dissemination*: a first version of the monograph was sent to field actors for feedback, followed by presentation to the Global Study Steering Group for feedback.

Specific, simple, flexible tools

Interview and observation guidelines were developed, with four distinct areas of analysis:

- *Review of the different perceptions of participation*, through consultation with a broad range of actors and observation of examples of application and their advantages and limitations.
- *Identification of the degree of participation*, to understand the realities of consultation and participation, as well as their significance in the humanitarian projects visited.
- *Comparison of programmes 'with' and 'without' participation*, to determine whether beneficiary participation has a real impact on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and viability/feasibility of humanitarian programmes, the management of security and action within the crisis.
- *Analysis and explanation of the different results*, to try to identify causes or the key elements that make participation possible and effective, or not.

As with any research using social-science tools, there is a risk of 'bias', distortion and lack of objectivity. To limit this, in addition to a multidisciplinary team (national and international) we used techniques (observation, interviews, surveys, meetings) that addressed both the abstract and the concrete and ensured triangulation (the observation of a phenomenon from at least three different viewpoints).

The research team

A multi-cultural and multidisciplinary team was formed, composed of two professionals with humanitarian aid experience and two anthropologists with field experience in Colombia.

To reach the full diversity of actors in Colombia, the make-up of the team took into consideration:

- *gender issues*: to enable access to both predominantly male (calbidos) and female (women's associations) organisations;
- *technical issues*: to combine humanitarian and socio-anthropological approaches;
- *cultural issues*: to provide insider perspectives and interpretations (Latin America team members of which to Colombian) and comparators and reference points from other contexts (international team members); and,
- *language issues*: to ensure ease of communication (knowledge of the local languages).

It is with this team, these tools and this approach, that the research was carried out.

1.2.4 Selection of the Study Sites

The following matrix of characteristics was drawn up to inform the selection of the study sites:

Type of target population	Individual/collective displacements Displaced/residents/returnees/settled displaced/ temporary displaced Rural–rural, rural–urban or urban–urban displacements/Displaced returning to their territories Afro-Colombian/indigenous Presence of FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)/AUC (United Self-defence of Colombia)/ELN (National Liberation Army), others
Type of programme	Emergency humanitarian aid (food and non-food) Medium-term aid Return assistance Protection and accompaniment Others
Type of actor	Red de Solidaridad Social International Red Cross Movement International NGOs Local NGOs UN (United Nations) Agencies, eg, WFP (World Food Programme), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Church organisations CBOs Others

The selection sought to capture the diversity of Colombia, including cultural characteristics and the different stages of the crisis.

Study Site 1 Magdalena Medio

Background to the crisis The central section of the Magdalena River (referred to as the Magdalena Medio) links several departments whose main wealth is oil, with commercial activities in some urban centres. Its geographic location provides access to both the ocean and external borders. Magdalena Medio is an area of strategic value to the parties to the conflict. The region suffers the consequences of fighting between guerrillas, paramilitaries and armed forces, attempting to gain control of the area.

Magdalena Medio is the cradle for numerous forms of social organisation, among which organisations created to obtain housing through the illegal occupation of land. In the sixties, several unions were established: USO-ECOPETROL (United Workers Union of the Oil Industry), ANUC (National Association of Farmers); as well as OFP (Women's Popular Movement). The Catholic Church is deeply involved in the public life of the community.

In 1998 and 1999 the clashes between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and paramilitary groups increased in frequency and intensity, paralleled by an increase in anti-personnel mined areas (*quiebrapatas*), abductions, disappearances, and areas where the basis of social organisation (unofficial) is fear. In recent years, those collectively or individually displaced head towards the urban centres (Barrancabermeja and Bucaramanga).

The beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in the area are the displaced in urban areas, and several communities in the middle of the return process. In many cases, the aid has been prolonged over time and one can find people who have been displaced for several years, either unwilling or unable to return home. Many humanitarian actors arrived during the acute phase of the crisis. Many are still present, and although needs in the area are considerable, in a few cases this leads to an excess of institutional offers.

Organisations met/visited ICRC (International Committee for the Red Cross); *UN Agencies*: IOM (International Organisation for Migration), WFP (World Food Programme), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), UNDP (United Nations Development

Programme); *international NGOs*: MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières), Project Counselling Service (PSC), Peace Brigades International (PBI); *local/national NGOs*: Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme (PDPMM), Corporacion Compromiso, Cedavida, Legal Option, Social Solidarity Network (RSS); *the Church and its aid affiliates*: Social Pastoral, Jesuits Services to Refugees (JRS), Christian Service for Peace, Justice and Peace Commission); and *grassroots organisations*: Organisation of African Palm Growers in the Municipality of San Pablo (APALSA), Organisation for the Displaced Persons of Barrancabermeja Municipality (ASODESAMUBA), Community of Persons Displaced from the Normal, Women's Popular Movement (OFP), Association for the Displaced Farmers of Yondó (ACADEY), Associations of Displaced Persons from Villa Nazareth, La Semilla, Women's Prison.

Key characteristics Protracted complex crisis (post acute phase); continuous violence with parties to the violence established in several areas; and the 'drip-feed' phenomenon of individual and small group displacements.

Study Site 2 Altos de Cazucá, Soacha

Background to the crisis In the Bogota suburbs, a neighbourhood has emerged shaped by the different 'layers' of displaced. Every day, small groups arrive in Cazucá and move in with friends while they build themselves makeshift shelters.

In Cazucá, urban violence mixes with the violence of the conflict. Disappearances, threats and murders are an everyday occurrence. 'Social cleansing' is commonplace. Living conditions are not those of an urban environment. Neither services nor security is guaranteed. A newly arrived displaced person has often experienced multiple displacements. They do not want to be 'classed' as a displaced person and often forego the benefits offered to them by the Government out of fear of being identified and then harassed by parties to the violence.

Organisations met/visited The headquarters of most international NGOs in Colombia are located in Bogota, however, few conduct interventions in the area. The reasons are diverse: the drip-feed displacement phenomenon makes it hard to identify Cazucá as a displacement zone, particularly where

people don't wish to present themselves as displaced. In this area it is hard to distinguish between emergency and development. The programmes visited often encounter difficulties in achieving community integration and participation due to weak social organisation. We observed the work of:

- MSF-Spain, with health programmes and training of health advocates;
- the Church and other ecclesiastical communities that distribute food;
- WorldVision, with 'community cauldrons' and soup kitchens;
- RSS and the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF), responding to the (registered) displaced.

Key characteristics Protracted crisis; final stage of displacement; and the integration of the violence of the conflict into urban dynamics.

Study Zone 3 Atrato Medio, Chocó

Background to the crisis The central section of the Atrato River (referred to as the Atrato Medio) is located primarily in Chocó and part of Antioquia. Most inhabitants are indigenous communities (most notably, the Emberá ethnic group) and Afro-Colombian communities. The former settled in the area well before colonisation, and the latter initiated settlement on the riverbanks following the abolition of slavery. Three organisations represent these groups, created with the support of the Catholic Church: Organisation for the Atrato River (ACIA) *Afro-Colombian*, Embera Waunaan Regional Organisation (OREWA) and Atrato Indigenous Organisation (OIA).

Atrato Medio is difficult to access. Roads are very restricted, and the sole means of transportation for most communities is the river, which is expensive due to the price of fuel. The formal economy centres on forestry, but other forms of subsistence occupy most of the population: hunting, fishing, gold mining (alluvial deposits) and *tumbe y pudre* farming (a traditional form of mixed-crop cultivation that takes advantage of the seasons and plant nutrients from one season to the next).

The FARC controlled the area for 25 years when, in December 1996, the first clashes with paramilitary groups began, causing the displacement of 17,000 people and the 'siege' of 6,000 others who stayed

‘in resistance’. The area was subjected to an economic blockade that prevented the communities in resistance being unable to stock up on goods they couldn’t produce. In May 2002, Atrato Medio was the site of a massacre. In the village of Bellavista, civilians were caught in the crossfire between guerrilla movements and paramilitary groups. The population took refuge in the church, but bombs were thrown inside the building, causing the death of most of those inside. The clashes are ongoing and the communities are starting to move. A complex chain of displacements, shortage of resources, populations under siege and whole communities hiding in the forest have been the consequence. The Bojayá events (the massacre of over 100 people in the village of Bellavista, Bojayá, on the Atrato River) provoked the arrival of new humanitarian aid actors. Development actors with a long-term presence set up emergency projects with the organisations that had previously supported them.

Organisations met/visited RSS and Bojayá Reconstruction Programme; Project Counselling Service, Vigía del Fuerte Red Cross; *UN Agencies*: UNHCR, IOM; *the Church*: Pastoral Social, Hermanas Lauritas, Diocese; *grassroots organisations*: ACIA, OREWA, Afro-Colombian Displaced Persons’ Organisation (AFRODES) and the Chocó Women’s Network; leaders of the Bellavista and Napipí displaced; communities of displaced persons from Minercol, Vigía del Fuerte, Loma de Bojayá, Bellavista, Puerto Conto, San Antonio de Padua, Bevará.

Key characteristics Acute crisis; extreme violence and conflict-related factors; collective displacements and changes in the geographic disbursement of the population; and diversity of ethnicity and cultures.

1.2.5 Constraints

The broad diversity that characterises Colombia means that the Colombia study could not be exhaustive nor cover the entire range of ethnic, cultural, economic or social variants that exist. Certain areas might be of great interest to other studies on participation: Cauca and Valle del Cauca, Nariño and the south-western border, Florencia and the old demilitarised zone (DMZ)³ and the Norte de Santander. Moreover, it would be

interesting to increase the depth of understanding of participation by indigenous communities, which varies according to ethnicity.

Given the objectives of the study, it would also be interesting to review the participatory practices and experiences of those actors that we did not meet in the field, such as the lower Atrato peace communities.

In many cases, security conditions made it impossible to hold meetings. Likewise, access to certain communities (due to the condition of roads or of the conflict) limited the duration of the research in certain areas.

2 THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

2.1 COUNTRY PROFILE

2.1.1 Colombia: A Land of Contrasts

With a surface area of over one million square kilometres and 42 million inhabitants, Colombia is the second largest country in South America. Its geographic location gives it advantages, since it has a long coastal border along the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. It is considered the gateway to South America.

A complex, diverse topography

Colombia is made up of three, very different geographic regions: the coast, the plateaux and plains, and the Andes. Its vast hydrographic network includes three major drainage basins: the Pacific basin; the Atrato and Magdalena valleys; and the Eastern plains through which the Caqueta, Amazon and Orenoque rivers flow. The southern part of the country is made up of a vast, scarcely inhabited forested area.

Access is sometimes very limited due to the complex topography. A large part of the country lacks tarred roads and there are still places where the rivers provide the sole means of communication.

A multi-ethnic and multicultural community

The Colombian population is characterised by its multiple ethnic groups: Indigene, Creoles, Afro-Colombians and Mestizos. The origin of this diversity dates back to European migration (that slowly established a Creole middle class) and the arrival of African slaves.

Currently, ethnic minorities are protected by specific laws, which grant them (at least in theory) rights to land and respect for their ethnic identity:

- *Indigenous communities* (over 70 ethnic groups) are protected by laws, established in 1890, to grant rights to pre-Hispanic cultures; laws enshrined in the 1991 National Constitution and decrees. The indigenous '*cabildos*'⁴ are officially acknowledged as the communities' General Assemblies, while *resguardos*⁵ are the property of organised indigenous communities.
- *Afro-Colombian communities* are protected by Law 70. It gives them ownership of territories where local committees are established, as an organisational form also recognised in law.
- *Other, less numerous, ethnic minorities* (such as the Raizales living in the island territories) are equally protected by laws and special decrees.

To this cultural and ethnic diversity is added a wide range of languages and traditions.

2.1.2 A History Marked by Violence

The documented history of violence in Colombia dates back to the discovery of America in 1492 and to the annexation of the territory by Spain in 1717, with the status of vice-kingdom. The emerging Creole middle class, sensitised by the ideas of the French Revolution, rejected Spain's authority and in 1810 the Revolt of the *Comuneros* took place, which was to contribute to the First Declaration of Independence.

In 1815, the Spaniards attempted a reconquest and the War of Independence began. The liberation campaign of Simón Bolívar (the Liberator) started in 1819. During the nineteenth century as many as 52 civil wars erupted, to which was added the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902). The tradition of violence had been established.

The twentieth century marks the beginning of a complex crisis, ongoing to this day. The assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1948) provoked a violent popular insurrection, *la Violencia*, which was to kill close to 200,000 in 10 years.

A conflict of increasing complexity

The prolongation of the crisis has produced an increasing the number of actors, as well as in the type of armed party involved. In 1948 the country's first and main guerrilla group was born: FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), with a Marxist-Leninist ideology and, in the 1960s, the ELN (National Liberation Army) came into being. The 1980s witnessed a further growth of contingents, in response to a new component: the drug economy (first, marihuana then coca).

In the 1990s, paramilitary and self-defence groups assumed an importance in the conflict. These are private militias originating in the initiatives of large landowners seeking to counter guerrilla groups and ensure their own protection.

This period also saw the drug cartels became stronger. Self-defence groups organised and gained autonomy and the AUC (United Self-Defence of Colombia) was founded. In 1998, the government created a 'DMZ'⁶, a demilitarised safe haven as the basis for a political dialogue with the guerrillas, and later repealed.

The twenty-first century began with the election of a government, headed by Alvaro Uribe Velez, and the adoption of the Plan Colombia (US military and economic aid for the fight against drug trafficking, which took the shape of a reinforcement of the Colombian Armed Forces and a small social budget).

The Colombian crisis continues, becoming increasingly complex and corrupt. Ideology is each time less of a determining factor and economic interests each time of increasing importance. The war is becoming a source of profit in which the civilian population is a resource and a pawn, abused and besieged.

2.1.3 The Humanitarian Crisis

The main consequence of the political crisis, that has plagued the country for more than 50 years, is the taking hostage of the civilian population. It is caught in the crossfire of the different warring factions: guerrilla movements, paramilitary forces and the national armed forces.

The armed factions confront each other across the entire national territory, but in a dispersed and relatively unstructured manner, trying to take or keep territory to acquire and gain negotiating power; control illicit

Box 1 Witness Accounts of People Displaced by Violence: The Complexity of the Problem

(1) “We come from the Pablo Acuña neighbourhood, in Barrancabermeja, which we had to leave due to threats ... [B]efore we lived in Cimitarra, in a place called Los Mangos. The entire hamlet had to run away in 1989 (...) we, the 89 families that lived in the shelter, decided to occupy land. We established a neighbourhood, we presented a housing plan and all that (...) but when we were forced to leave, we left alone, who could have known that we were being thrown out? Repression has always plagued us. We, [the displaced] are like sailors – every day a different port.”

(2) “Since 1985 I have not stopped. I went to a sister in Barrancabermeja, then I went to Puerta del Once and after to Campo Izama, where I guarded farms. There, there were bombardments in 1988. I ended up again in Barrancabermeja, where I had the same experience as my friend, we founded the neighbourhood and you already know the rest. We ended up here in Bucaramanga. My friends, who were active in the OFP, had to leave also; now they are also targets [of parties to the violence]. Go back? It’s impossible. Besides, go back to where?”

production; control means of access and strategic corridors; and, to that end, seek to control the population in those territories.

The population suffers intimidation, threats, individual or collective illegal detentions, murders and massacres and blockaded zones. Individual or collective displacements (estimates range from 1,500,000 to 2,700,000 according to Human Rights and Displaced Consultancy [CODHES]) create imbalances in host areas, delay returns, already problematic after months or absence.

Nature of the violence⁷

Colombia has a long tradition of organisation inspired by multiple ideologies, but primarily 'liberation theology' and Marxist-Leninist and Guevarist ideas. This is reflected in the diversity of community organisation (trade union, political, religious, non-governmental, revolutionary). However, the main aim of the parties to the violence is the disintegration

Box 1 continued

(3) "I lived and worked in La Azufrada. We were in a cooperative. Once, when going to work, they [parties to the violence] stopped us and made us get out of the truck on the basis of the colour of our shirts. After that, they machine-gunned us. I saw two of my brothers die there. It was a priest who helped us.

After, I arrived from the countryside to settle in Barrancabermeja. I knew nothing about the city. I started a welding course at SENA [a public professional training school] and, helped by friends, I found a daytime job at ECOPETROL. It is after that, that I joined in the neighbourhood project and, although I already had my little house, the [parties to the violence] threw us out.

I do not feel safe in Barrancabermeja. It is full of 'paras' (...) They have threatened us, several times. One person was permanently disabled following the attacks (...) They want to destabilise our organisation but we denounced them. We prefer to die speaking than to die in silence. The result? We already have two dead."

of all forms of community participation, the destruction of existing social fabric and the dispersal of organised groups.

Community-based organisations (CBOs) are frequently subject to threats and their leaders pursued, intimidated or illegally detained. Communities are under surveillance and, in the worst cases, used as human shields by the parties to the violence, resulting in massacres.

Being the leader of a local NGO or CBO in Colombia is a high-risk activity.

Nature of displacements in Colombia

The chaos and disorder that is characteristic of the Colombian crisis creates a displacement phenomenon that is itself chaotic and unpredictable. Traditional group displacement patterns are not applicable in this country, which is why even if the figures appear low (a collective displacement can be 50 people in Colombia and 70,000 in Africa), the diversity and quantity of displacements complicates the humanitarian landscape.

During collective displacements, rural groups head towards other (potential host) agglomerations, generally department capitals, which are also rural, so that a displacement can sometimes lead to a doubling of the host population.

These drip-feed displacements involve small groups, generally a family unit or individuals. This type of displacement is silent and usually goes unnoticed in the statistics. A major consequence of this type of displacement is the creation of neighbourhoods that form poverty belts around the country's larger urban areas.

The prolongation of the crisis increases the complexity of the displacements. Diverse 'layers' of displaced add to the poverty belts and each passing day makes their return less and less likely. It is common to have family units and individuals who have been subjected to several displacements, leading to a total uprooting of the individual.

A contextual crisis combined with a structural crisis

The case of Colombia is characterised by the active role of host populations, where (mainly in rural areas) the displaced are often housed by local families. This has positive consequences in the short term, since the displaced receive immediate assistance, but it also leads to the structural impoverishment of the host families, who share their limited resources. In a few cases, the eruption of episodic violence is observed.

Refugee-camp type scenarios are not necessarily applicable in a reality where the population is dispersed within the community. Moreover, a new issue arises: who should be helped? the displaced population? the host population? both?

Return and resistance

Return is not frequent. In some cases, it takes place a good while after the displacement, which means a loss in terms of harvests, animal rearing and property. In addition, the land has to be prepared before it can be cultivated again, and belongings lost during the looting have to be reacquired, which extends the resettlement period for families.

In Colombia, one sees groups or communities that declare themselves 'in resistance', that is, who did not flee from the threatened or conflict zones. The consequences are serious: blockades and limited access to products, trade, means of communication, agricultural activities, and limited movement.

2.1.4 A Mosaic of Humanitarian Actors: A Diversity of Approach

The legal framework of assistance for the displaced

Colombian laws for the protection of individuals displaced by violence are among the most complete in the world, and follow the guiding principles for assistance to displaced populations (the Deng Principles). The two main legal instruments are: Law 387 (1997) '*via which measures are adopted to*

prevent forced displacement: assistance, protection, and socio-economic consolidation and stabilisation of internally displaced persons as a result of violence' and decree 2569 (2000), through which the law is regulated and the functions of the implementing authorities (in this case the Social Solidarity Network [RSS]) are defined.

The State authority: Social Solidarity Network (RSS)

The government recognises the state of internal conflict and plays a fundamental role in humanitarian action. To respond to the crisis situation, Colombia has developed a solid legal framework, which regulates emergency assistance and the rights of the displaced.

RSS, as *'the coordinating body for the national system of information and assistance integral to the population displaced by violence'*, is responsible for assistance to citizens who fit the definition of 'displaced by violence', as outlined in the Law 387. This assistance is described as emergency aid and provided during the first three months following displacement. There is limited coordination between RSS and the ICRC, the ICRC intervening in areas to which RSS does not have access.

2.1.5 Organised Civil Society: CBOs, Local NGOs and Other Forms of Organisation

Forms of organisation in Colombia are increasing. Numerous Colombian NGOs and CBOs have involved themselves in this problematic crisis. The origins of these structures are diverse, but, the importance of political and legal discourse, deeply rooted in the organisational initiatives of the 1970s, is visibly shared. The expressions 'building a life project' and 'citizen's participation' are fundamental ingredients of these structures.

CBOs (community-based organisations)

They have no single unique definition. Some are based on ethnic or gender criteria and others on regional connections. Many were formed with the support of the Church, but they share a discourse on participation in regional or national projects.

- ***Organización Femenina Popular (OFP)***. OFP defines itself as ‘a dynamic and permanent life project for more than 1,200 ordinary women, who, as Subjects of the law, see organisation as one of the possibilities available to the poor to change that reality’.
- ***Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato (ACIA)***. Established in 1987, with the purpose of defending the rights of Atrato communities, it brings together 120 Afro-Colombian communities. Its main achievement was the passing of Law 70 (1993) and Decree 1745 (1995), which give them official participatory bodies named ‘Community Councils’ (*Consejos Comunitarios*). The process of participation starts in the traditional assemblies, which are today unified under the ‘Greater Community Council’ (*Consejo Comunitario Mayor*). ACIA was able to obtain collective title deeds to 800,000 hectares of land.
- ***Organización Regional Embera Waunaan (OREWA)***. Established in February 1980 in Quibdó (Chocó), it groups the region’s indigenous communities. Its authority is that of the indigenous *cabildos* (traditional assemblies). OREWA’s activities focus on the defence of the rights of indigenous communities and their culture. The indigenous *resguardos* (territories bestowed to the organised indigenous communities) provide the basis for this organisation.

IDP (internally displaced people) organisations

Displaced communities have organised to demand that their needs be met, claim their rights as established in law, or to recreate a ‘life project’.

- ***Asociación de Afrocolombianos desplazados (AFRODES)***. AFRODES brings together displaced Afro-Colombian communities.
- ***Asociación de desplazados del Municipio de Barrancabermeja (ASODESAMUBA)***. ASODESAMUBA brings together around 12,000 persons, and coordinates reconstruction, economic rehabilitation and assistance projects for displaced communities.

- ***Asociación de desplazados del Municipio Yondó (ACADEY).*** ACADEY's objective, enshrined in its Charter, is '*to satisfy the wellbeing of its members and of the displaced population in general*'. Its activities focus on '*demand that national authorities (...) promote processes of organisation to facilitate the reconstruction of social networks*'.

Local NGOs

A wide range of local NGOs has emerged to respond to the crisis in distinct ways, many also born with the support of church organisations or trade unions and even government organisations.

- ***Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio (PDPMM).*** PDPMM was born from a USO and ECOPETROL initiative. It is funded by the government and international organisations. It has set itself a priority '*to identify and seek solutions to the political dynamics and practices of exclusion that pervade the region.*'⁸ Its work extends over 29 municipalities.
- ***Corporación Compromiso.*** '*Promotes the participation and organisation of men and women to facilitate the emergence of democratic forces, strengthen the capacity of organisations and civil society, as the subject of development, to contribute in public policy (...).*' Its main activity centres on supporting the creation of structures organised to '*enhance the participation of communities in the process of local development.*'⁹

Catholic Church

'Liberation Theology', a 1970s theo-political movement that preaches the participation of the oppressed in their own liberation by fighting against injustice and the oppressive classes, profoundly inspired the Colombian Catholic Church. Pastoral Social is the social wing of the Catholic Church. Its capacity to organise, its neutrality in relation to the parties to the conflict and its history of support in the creation of CBOs (ACIA, OREWA, OFP, PDPMM), make it a fundamental player in humanitarian action in Colombia.

2.1.6 The International Community

The ICRC works in agreement with RSS on emergency aid, with the Colombian Red Cross and other National Societies implementing emergency and reconstruction programmes.

WFP, UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and other UN agencies work in joint agreement with the ministries of Health and Social Wellbeing. UNHCR activities integrate with national interventions to assist the displaced and IOM implements projects of a diverse nature.

The international NGOs (INGOs) undertake activities independently or in cooperation with Colombian NGOs.

Donors

Via 'Plan Colombia', the USA allocates emergency and post-emergency funding to RSS, with Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and other Scandinavian countries the other main bilateral donors. ECHO, whose activities centre on emergency intervention, is the main donor for the International NGOs of European origin.

Church networks, mainly through Caritas, providing fundamental support to the ecclesiastic movement and its humanitarian action.

3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

3.1 DEFINITIONS AND PERCEPTIONS: THE DISCOURSE OF PARTICIPATION

Humanitarian actors, government, host populations, the displaced, street dwellers, slum communities, populations forgotten by aid, grassroots communities, communities that conduct *de facto* actions, all have a discourse on participation. What does it mean to participate? Definitions often take on political overtones, which is mainly a reflection of the country's solid legal foundations. Participation is perceived as a duty and right of citizenship to influence actions and/or decisions that concern them. They speak of 'citizen participation', 'political participation', 'community participation' and 'participation in humanitarian action'.

In the field of humanitarian action, there is unanimous agreement as to the importance of participation. The discourse, however, can take on various forms and be justified in different ways. There are numerous manifestations of the discourse in practice: round tables, workshops, illegal occupations of buildings, joint-implementation. Each actor perceives and acts in a different way.

This study presents two levels of observation, one abstract and one concrete. The former outlines the different perceptions of participation, relative to the context and the actors involved. The latter proposes a classification of existing forms of participation and the tools that have been put into place.

Each of these sections is enriched by case studies and examples from the field. It is crucial that each is located within its context.

3.1.1 Why Participation?

Various factors encourage the use of participatory tools or approaches in emergency and post-emergency situations: ideological, political, ethical and pragmatic reasons.

Participation to improve the quality of aid

The affected population wants to avoid the problems of quality and adaptability encountered with earlier aid (see Box 2).

The aid actors, for their part, want to improve the project cost/time ratio, refine assessments, set up a reliable communications network with the community, and increase their impact on the crisis situation.

Participation for reasons of security

Humanitarian actors gain easier access to communities if they work in cooperation with grassroots associations. As such, grassroots associations obtain support and recognition by coordinating with closely related associations, the Church or recognised neutral actors.

For example, ACIA, OREWA and the Quibdó Diocese coordinated to present the needs of the area, to declare and denounce the crisis situation after the Bojayá massacre and to solicit international assistance. “United, our testimony has more weight.”¹⁰

Box 2 ‘Quality Control’ by Returnees in the Opón Marshland

The community of fishermen and small farmers in the Opón Marshland, who had been displaced towards Barrancabermeja, had already started the return process. However, to avoid the issues faced by the first returnees (poor quality, poor linkage to the agricultural calendar in the distribution of seeds and tools), the community formed a control committee that has demanded to be consulted and informed of the process.

As a result, the research team turned to ACIA, OREWA and the Quibdó Diocese to gain access to the communities affected by the crisis, in conditions of minimal security. Without them, it would have been impossible to access those affected zones. Faced with similar constraints, this clearly demonstrates at least one of the incentives aid agencies have to participate with CBOs.

UN agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR, coordinate with the Social Solidarity Network and seek the participation of ACIA and OREWA in order to access the communities that need them. They cannot travel alone along the Atrato River and its tributaries, so take advantage of the infrastructure and information of CBOs.

Food distribution by the Social Solidarity Network and WFP is implemented through 'Noah's Arc' (a boat belonging to ACIA). Local committees from each community provide the links to undertake the distribution. ACIA's own benefit is two-fold: distribution to the communities and the reputation gained from working with the UN, primarily one of neutrality in relation to parties to violence.

These examples show that participation can be a means to overcome security conditions. However, participation can also have the opposite effect. Colombia is currently the country with the largest number of illegally detained people. Parties to the conflict often prevent them from organising or use the population as human shields. Leaders, the target of threats, are 'invited' to leave their communities. Some receive protection from organisations like the Peace Brigades International (PBI), some forgo taking on responsibilities, while others die or disappear.

The OFP president is accompanied 24 hours a day by a Peace Brigades International expatriate, following a series of threats from parties to the conflict. Her position as the leader of this association that supports organising activities in working-class neighbourhoods (and therefore resistance activities) places her on the 'front line'.

Participation driven by organisational principles

*'The displaced population must be involved in the decision-making, management and organisation of emergency humanitarian assistance.'*¹¹

At first glance, the concept of participation appears two-fold: ideological (based on the ethics and philosophy of each actor); and practical, imposed by the context (insecurity, access) and interests (costs, efficiency, effectiveness). But, how does one put these theories and arguments into practice?

Participation driven by demand

During the research, few actors mentioned that they used participatory tools and approaches as a result of requests from the population, but observations prove the contrary. Communities used to participating and with a history of organisation (community associations, CBOs, unions) seek to be involved in the programmes and will even refuse to get involved in activities if they have not been consulted.

3.1.2 Whose Participation?

The definitions of, and motivations for participation vary according to the actor: populations affected directly or indirectly by the crisis, national or international aid actors.

Host communities

The two forms of participation observed on the ground and/or described during the interviews were i) the receiving of displaced families into homes and ii) voluntary assistance.

In the cases observed, it was in rural and semi-urban contexts that the larger influxes of displaced were received. Most resident families welcomed the displaced into their homes. In such contexts, the populations see themselves as 'participative' citizens of humanitarian action, and without the absorption capacity demonstrated by the host families, the quantity and complexity of population movements would rapidly unbalance host towns.

This phenomenon is clearly seen in the role played by the Quibdó and Vigía del Fuerte populations after the Bojayá massacre (see Box 3).

By receiving displaced persons in their homes, host families run the risk of aggravating their poverty and increasing their own vulnerability, since they do not receive humanitarian aid and may have to share their limited resources with one or even two displaced family units.

This type of active participation is not recognised by aid actors, which leads to major frustration on the part of the communities. “They didn’t help us (...) when there were jobs available, they didn’t give us work, and there are lots of unemployed professionals here (...).”¹²

The second form of participation by host communities is volunteer action/voluntarism, which consists of groups of people who come to offer help, but whose lack of coordination risks hindering the effectiveness of their actions.

This can be observed in the initial stage of the emergency, when the individuals or groups without professional experience in humanitarian aid get involved without integrating themselves into existing activities. Uncoordinated, this humanitarian and charitable initiative can have

Box 3 The Participation of Host Communities in the Case of Displaced Persons From Bojayá

The Bojayá massacre provoked a genuine spider’s web of migrations between communities. 7,000 displaced families arrived in Quibdó of which 5,000 families (over 70% of the total number of displaced) were housed by family members or friends resident in the town. Quibdó inhabitants are aware of the savings that this represents for the State, the NGOs and international organisations.

In Vigía del Fuerte, during the first few days of the emergency, the community took the initiative and responsibility for coordinating food distribution, cleaning and rehabilitating empty houses, accommodating the people arriving from Bellavista and other villages.

negative consequences. Participation does not seemingly form part of voluntary action strategies.

Beneficiaries

Communities that are the victims of violence have a discourse that varies, depending on whether the communities are organised or not.

If it involves individuals, the definition of participation is understood mainly as 'being supported', 'being listened to'. The individual wishes to be helped in finding solutions to the problems faced, whether in the simplest sense of hosting (a form of participation which in the best of cases includes provision of food) or in the sense of host-action ('that they organise us').

When individuals are already organised into CBOs, the discourse on participation changes radically. Initially, participation is synonymous with organisation. People look for a structure, a representative, a more or less specific common objective. One frequently observes a sense of belonging to an association and often its members adopt the same discourse on the subject of participation.

CBOs, for their part, hold polyphonic discourses which are reflected in their 'Founding Articles', 'Charters', 'Mission', 'Vision', 'Aims', 'Values' (see Box 4). Many borrow articles from the 1991 National Constitution or laws such as Law 70 or Law 387. Others base themselves on the ideals expressed

Box 4 CBO Perspectives on Participation

Women's Popular Movement, Barrancabermeja

"Train individuals about rights (...) that assume organisation to be one of the responsibilities of the poor in order to change their reality." *Mission statement*

ACIA, Atrato Medio

"Participation is a community right. They must take charge of their future by organising themselves." *Interview with the leader of ACIA in Quibdó*

in the liberation theology of the 1970s, proposing that individuals take control of their future, by getting involved in their community's decisions.

For these organisations, participation in humanitarian action is a support function. They make sure communities are assisted, in compliance with their mission, their vision and their values.

Displaced people's associations often conceive their definitions of participation within the frameworks established by Law 387. For example, the Association for the Displaced Farmers of Yondó (ACADEY), has set itself, among other activities, to 'promote the processes of organisation, (...) promote communication spaces and life projects for the displaced community'. Likewise, ASODESAMUBA, Association of Displaced from Barrancabermeja Municipality, focuses mainly on the displaced population.

These definitions, much more precise than the previous ones, raise questions: when does one cease being displaced? When does one stop belonging to the association?

De facto action ('*acción de hecho*'¹³), whether authorised or not, corresponds to another definition of participation. A few groups of displaced have had recourse to this means in an attempt to satisfy their needs, among which, the occupation of ICRC headquarters in the heart of Bogota (see Box 5), the invasion of land in Bogota and Bucaramanga, and public demonstrations or illegal occupation of offices (eg, former Women's Prison in Bucaramanga).

Box 5 The Occupation of ICRC Head Office

In December 1999, a group of displaced decided to storm and take over the ICRC reception centre. In the days that followed, the building was almost completely occupied. The families instituted proceedings against the State for non-respect of its constitutional duties towards them, and won. There are still displaced living in the former ICRC headquarters.

Humanitarian actors

Variety seems to be the norm. Among the factors that appear to guide the definitions of participation held by humanitarian actors must be included their nature, origin and profile.

International organisations, such as the Red Cross and the different UN humanitarian agencies, feature participation in their mandate and engage

Box 6 Participation, A Matter of Ethics and Mandate

1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief: 'Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.'

"It is an ethical issue (...) I cannot make a decision for someone else, especially when it may involve his life [in reference to the decision to return or to stay]" *Interview with UNHCR delegate in Barrancabermeja, June 2000.*

Box 7 MSF-Spain and MSF-Holland Approaches

"Participation is a prerequisite to be incorporated into all projects. We use participatory tools throughout the programme, which enables better programme management. It is necessary to consult beneficiaries, to know what they want, to try and put into practice the comments that seem pertinent to us, to listen to their views on outcomes. Our discourse is completely impartial, which is why, at our meetings, we avoid raising sensitive topics, for example politics, which could endanger neutrality." *Interview with the Head of Mission MSF-Holland in Barrancabermeja*

"Using participatory tools provides better security conditions for the expatriate team, facilitating the implementation of the project. Moreover, better communication with the community is achieved. We have a high percentage of Colombian personnel in the project team." *Interview with Head of Mission MSF-Spain, Bogota*

in a strong ethical discourse that insists on the importance of 'the involvement of the other'.

INGOs, for their part, have a more pragmatic vision of participation. When they have experience in the field of development, development approaches are adopted and participation takes the form of 'participatory planning'. International relief NGOs seem to adopt an 'operational' approach to participation, based on: 'who implements', 'who proposes recommendations' and 'education'.

Local NGOs have a discourse that is closer to that of 'citizen participation'. As with CBOs, the word organisation recurs frequently word, as do the notions of the 'delegation of power' and 'proper distribution of power'.

Corporación Compromiso, Bucaramanga

Mission: (...) promotes the participation of men and women to strengthen local democratic powers, strengthen organisations, social movements and civil society as subjects of development (...)

Aim: (...) Empower community organisations (...) to increase the participation of communities in local development processes.¹⁴

Peace and Development Programme, Magdalena Medio

"Humanitarian support, without losing sight of our mission to strengthen local powers: contribute to making the community participate directly in its region's project."¹⁵

Summary 1 Participation: The Discourse**Affected Populations****Host Populations**

- Housing the displaced, listening to them, helping them

Volunteers

- Charity, compassion

Unorganised beneficiaries

- To be supported, to be helped in getting organised
- ‘They should ask us what we want, what we know how to do, how we want to do it and how they can help us.’

CBOs

- Coordination of activities, organisation
- Demand or impose actions

Humanitarian Actors**International organisations**

- Mandates/missions require it
- It is ethical

International NGOs

- Suggest and listen to recommendations
- Training, workshops
- Education, support
- Joint-implementation
- Implementation
- Hiring of local staff

Local NGOs and CBOs

- Interpret people’s needs
- ‘Help build a life project’
- Support

3.2 Current Practice: Participation and the Project Cycle

The typical characteristics of an emergency situation should, at least in theory, define the ways in which participation is put in place. The ‘theory’, however, loses substance in the Colombian context, and, although outbursts of violence (like the Bojayá massacre or the threats in Nariño) require immediate assistance, the Colombian crisis and displacements have been ongoing for 40 years. This juxtaposition of displacements and protracted crisis means that communities develop more or less continuous survival strategies. In addition, cultural and socio-economic diversity mean that needs change according to the group displaced. One cannot therefore speak in terms of a simple form of emergency and in consequence there is no simple form of participation.

To help structure the analysis in this complex context, we established two major variables: i) the phase of the project and ii) the degree of


participation. For the former, we used the project phases established in the Project Cycle manual, with a few adjustments. For the latter, we adopted the ‘typology of participation for development projects’¹⁶, again with a few adjustments. Two additional elements (outside the project cycle) also emerged as central in our study: coordination and institutional support. (see Table 1)

Throughout the study, it became evident that putting theories of participation into practice in humanitarian contexts is an approach, an intention, rather than a hard and fast technique. Only a few tools borrowed from development programmes appear to be used, and during each phase of the project cycle, the tools and approaches observed varied according to the nature of the crisis, actors and intervention. These are captured in a summary form at the end of the following sections, and questions raised for which in some instances answers have yet to be found.

3.2.1 Participation in the Assessment Phase

This phase involves clarifying the situation and identifying the nature of the community’s needs. Humanitarian actors are confronted with an immediate dilemma: should a formal survey be undertaken? should traditional structures already in place be adopted?

Table 1 Two Major Variables: Phases of the Project Cycle and Degree of Participation

Phase of the Project Cycle	Degree of Participation
A Needs assessment	 7 Local initiative
B Selection of beneficiaries (targeting)	6 Interactive participation
C Project planning and design	5 Functional participation
D Implementation	4 Participation through material incentive
E Monitoring/Evaluation	3 Consultation
F Ex-post Evaluation	2 Supply of information
■ Inter-institutional coordination	1 Passive participation
■ Institutional support	

In an acute emergency

A generally accepted hypothesis is that, during an acute emergency (requiring immediate action), humanitarian actors tend to favour formal, less participatory methods. Various examples observed demonstrate that this does not apply in all cases. Following the Bojoyá massacre, the Bellavista displaced were consulted by the Committee for the Reconstruction of Bojoyá (a special authority of the Presidency of the Republic) through community meetings, meetings with leaders and a formal opinion poll. Findings were then presented and discussed in two open inhabitants' assemblies (*cabildos*). The decision was taken to move the entire community and reconstruct the village, and the conditions of the move approved by the community.

The original idea for the move had come from former inhabitants of Bellavista (living in Bogota), who had sent a letter of proposal to the government. The poll results and the assembly meeting reports, provide evidence of this decision-making process.

In response to the same acute emergency, other communities and aid actors used different approaches. ACIA, OREWA and the Quibdó Diocese developed a formal document (based on information provided by the population in the affected area) and sent it to the humanitarian community.

Box 8 Questions Remaining

- *How to undertake a good, participatory needs assessment, if the people are hiding?* Participation is a voluntary act, a social act; in the absence of personal safety and with uprooted populations, social fabric is very weak.
- *How to accept the assessment of a CBO when one doesn't know the area and in consequence the reliability of local organisations?* NGOs who have no prior experience in an area face a reference void that leads to a preference to undertake assessments themselves.
- *How can one ask people who are not organised to participate?* It appears that the level of local organisation has direct impact on participation.

The document presented an inventory of needs disaggregated by community, as well as the scale of the damage, the concentration of needs in certain areas and certain characteristics of the products being sought. The report, presented just days after the crisis was triggered, enabled a timely assessment process. For such a crucial piece of participation to occur, a high degree of trust is required among the actors, usually established thanks to long-term shared working relations.

In a protracted (permanent) crisis

During a protracted crisis, the acute emergency gives way to other needs, and approaches differ. In the region of Bojayá, for example, IOM conducts meetings with the communities it helps. The meetings led to a project to clean up small waterways: “for us, the channels are our roads, they have to be clean, free of bits of wood, they have to be safer to allow us to go fishing, to conduct trade or to take our sick to the hospital.”¹⁷

IOM had no prior experience in this field. The project was born of the communities themselves and as IOM testifies: “Without their help, we would never have conceived a project like this one”. The implementation of the project required a small budget, and was founded on the ‘*mingas*’¹⁸ system by which each community exchanged tools in rotation to clean up its waterways. At the end of each working day, they met with the IOM representative, providing a good opportunity to discuss other specific needs of the group.

In a combined contextual and structural crisis

Where the humanitarian crisis is lost from sight in the urban poverty of a major city, participatory approaches appear to be much more complex. In Soacha, the community of Altos de Cazucá is made up of a mix of various displacement flows that arrived at different periods of the crisis. The displaced population does not wish to be identified. So how then can one ask them to participate?

According to an MSF-Spain study, 24 per cent of the Soacha inhabitants are displaced persons but only 2 per cent are registered with RSS. A major part of the displaced community is afraid and some have received threats.

The newspapers talk of 'social cleansing'. In this kind of context, how can one undertake an assessment? MSF's solution was to adopt integrated approaches that incorporate both displaced and non-displaced.

This strategy helps the integration of the displaced into the host community, and makes it possible to provide integrated aid that benefits other members of the community and reduces the 'stigmatisation' of the displaced.

Summary 2 Needs Assessment: Participative processes and tools

Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Ask the community	Survey	(2) Supply of information
■ Consult the community	Meetings	(3) Consultation
■ Use traditional mechanisms	Assemblies ' <i>cabildos</i> '	(6) Interactive Participation
■ Delegate to an existing CBO	–	(6) Interactive Participation
■ Accept a pre-established list	–	(7) Local Initiative

3.2.2 Participation in the Selection Phase: Participatory Targeting

The selection of those who are going to benefit from humanitarian assistance is one of the most complex stages of the project cycle. Should one adopt a unilateral approach to selection? a joint approach? leave it to others? How can one discern who really has been affected by the crisis rather than the country's structural poverty?

Targeting can be defined by static frameworks (eg, laws and internal or national regulation) and though, in certain cases, this may constitute a means to prevent other individuals from benefiting from the aid given that their participation is *de facto* forbidden regardless of their vulnerability, in other cases, it enables a clearly defined approach to the action with a pre-established, integrated group. However, one question persists: Are these groups the most vulnerable?

However, the majority of humanitarian actors are faced with a two-fold dilemma: firstly, the need to marry donor and humanitarian actor criteria with those of the affected population; and secondly, the need to define the scope/limits of aid under offer.

Participative approaches

RSS and ACIA agreed to a joint implementation of the reception process (ie. emergency assistance, registration and interview) for victims arriving in Quibdó to escape the Bellavista and Bojoyá conflict zone. A team, made up of members from the two organisations, was set up on the banks of the Atrato River in Quibdó to greet the displaced families. RSS developed a tool and successfully conducted the first part of the survey; ACIA established contact, conducted the interviews and provided basic assistance and MSF provided medical help. Since the Afro-Colombian displaced from Atrato

Box 9 Pre-Determined Targeting

ACADEY is an association of the displaced from Yondó that implements projects exclusively for its members, so that those who are not members do not benefit from the action.

MSF-Spain, as note above, conducts projects in which it integrates the displaced and non-displaced, reducing the stigmatisation of the displaced.

ACIA, OREWA and Quibdó Diocese programmes generally target displaced persons.

RSS's beneficiary group is defined through legal instruments, Decree 2569, Title II, Status of Displaced: '(...) *The National Government (...) declares that the status of displaced is held by all displaced persons who request to be recognised as such within the conditions established by Article 32 of Law 387 (1997), namely: 1. Declare these facts before the authorities of the Nation's Public Prosecutor, the Defender of the People, before the municipal or district legal officers or any other judicial office; and 2. Request submission for registration purposes, to the Directorate General for Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior or to the office that the latter designates at the departmental, district or municipal level, a copy of the declaration of the facts mentioned in the preceding paragraph.*'

were ACIA members, and knew those greeting them, there was a high level of confidence in the process, and the survey provided a better understanding of the nature of the crisis. This relationship also enabled the displaced to visit the ACIA headquarters and obtain information in person.

In another context, in the community of La Loma de Bojayá, one of the distributions of humanitarian aid was undertaken on the basis of an out-of-date census. As a result, at the time of the distribution, a few vulnerable families (elderly and handicapped among them) did not receive aid. The community, through representatives, complained to the association undertaking the distribution that an aid worker had failed to listen to their concerns. They requested his removal from the aid process and a speedy resolution of the census and public interest problems. As a result of the

Box 10 Beneficiary Overload: The Result of Non-Participatory Targeting

ADEPALSA, Association of African Palm Growers from the municipality of San Pablo, was implementing an African palm cultivation project, funded by the Plan Colombia. One of the three groups of cultivators consists of seventeen associates (sixteen men and one woman), mainly former farmers affected by the fumigations and Pozo Azul community members.

Of the two types of organisation proposed to structure the cultivation project (on the one hand, a cooperative, where ownership would be collective, and on the other, an association where ownership would be individual for each associate), associates chose the second, providing greater independence and clarity of ownership.

In this context, during the period when there is a high labour demand for the upkeep of the land, the group was also selected to benefit from a housing construction project. This is a group of families who each have a house in Pozo Azul or San Pablo and whose current priority is to ensure the productivity of their cultivations.

The housing programme was underway with the families being asked to supply wood and labour. In the medium-term, time constraints and associates' priorities could impact on the implementation of the project.

request, the aid was adapted at the time of the second distribution, the census updated and the person complained about was relocated to another area.

It would appear that communities organised into committees or small CBOs tend to have a greater influence on selection. In addition, we observed that projects financed with funds from groups less restricted by financial regulation, tended to be more open to the participation of these organised communities, with greater margin for manoeuvre.

Although clearly one of the phases of the project cycle that require the highest degree of beneficiary consultation, it is the one most framed by prerequisites and standards, and in reality the least participative.

Summary 3 Targeting: Participative Processes and Tools		
Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Pre-established: members only	–	(1) Passive participation
■ Pre-established by law	–	(2) Supply of information
■ NGO selects a pre-established group	–	(3) Consultation
■ NGO selects unilaterally	–	(3) Consultation
■ Community adjusts proposed list	–	(3) Consultation ¹⁹
■ NGO and CBO jointly draw up list	Questionnaire	(6) Interactive Participation
■ Integrated approach	–	(6) Interactive Participation

3.2.3 Participation in the Project Planning and Design Phase

It is when defining terms of reference for the project that technical requirements arise and the presence of qualified personnel becomes necessary. This is one of the greatest constraints to participation, and the issue, therefore, is how to ensure participation when it is technical development that one needs?

Where the humanitarian actor has a clearly defined area of expertise (eg, health, agriculture, construction), although it may use very participatory approaches in other phases of the project, it would appear that there is a lesser tendency to actively involve communities at the planning and design stage. Seemingly logical, since the organisation has qualified experienced personnel, it nevertheless reduces opportunities to involve the affected population, or risks reducing participation to its minimum (consultation or provision of information). However, in some cases, community members have a particular know-how (construction or agricultural) that can be used advantageously for the project, and this is when participation becomes essential.

Box 11 Possible Reasons for Lesser or Greater Participation in Planning, and Questions Arising

Reasons that may explain a lesser degree of participation in this phase:

- the absence of specific technical competencies among the beneficiaries;
- time that is wasted (according to some) explaining technical problems to ‘non-specialists’;
- the actor has a pre-determined ‘kit’ and applies it;
- the humanitarian actor seeks to reproduce a successful experience from another context.

Reasons for a greater degree of participation in this phase:

- the humanitarian actor having few personnel to implement the project and needs a larger team;
- the local structure cooperating with the NGO is a known entity and inspires trust; and
- the funds financing the project come with greater flexibility.

Questions Arising:

How can the ‘blueprint’ reflex be controlled, when driven by the desire to reproduce a successful experience? How can the temptation of not consulting the population be avoided because in-house experts are available? What is the balance between applying lessons learned and reproducing experiences?

Due to limited human resources at the agency level, ICRC's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) at the moment focus mainly on infrastructure. The tools used are questionnaires, to be filled in by community members to inform the preparation of project proposals. The system simplifies enormously the overall conceptualisation of a project for people unused to working with the project cycle, and is supported by specialists who advise requesting organisations and ensure the process is monitored. QIPs provide a good example of how the community can be involved in the planning process, although it doesn't guarantee participation in the later stages of the project.

Where humanitarian actors or donors have less clearly defined areas of technical expertise, or where the availability of personnel for operational work is limited, the process of project development appears to be more open to consultation and participation.

Humanitarian actors frequently rely on existing networks, to increase their quality and speed of response in the face of an emergency. Networks also hold information that would be very difficult to obtain independently.

A good example is that of the humanitarian aid distribution undertaken by the Bojayá River Women's Association (AMURIBO) and by the Chocó Women's Network. This grassroots association, taking advantage of the departmental women's network, itself dependent on the national women's network, was able to respond very quickly to the emergency. The contents of the 'kits' to be distributed were developed taking into account gender criteria (eg, sanitary towels, underwear, children's nappies, plastic sandals), avoiding duplication of articles previously distributed by RSS, while adding items not included (eg, perishable food, such as fruit and meat). The funds to finance this programme were allotted by an association that had not dictated where, to whom, or how the resources should be used, simply asking to be kept informed.

Another important element, in respect of participation in the design phase, emerged during the new Bellavista housing development and distribution process. This programme, attached to the Presidency of the Republic and managed by a professional highly experienced in this type of project, used

workshops-meetings to which the future inhabitants were invited. At the workshops, they designed model houses and plans of the community (eg, where the port would be, where to store the barges, where to locate the church, what materials to use, where house windows and doors would be located). The inhabitants plans were reviewed by construction professionals and the options that emerged presented at two 'open assemblies' (*cabildos*), before the choice of new housing plan was voted on. The project manager's experience and the fact that the Presidency of the Republic took ownership of the programme were two elements contributing to the adoption of effective participatory tools.

In situations, where organisational mandates are stretched (in terms of territory) and they adopt 'kit' strategies, there is a risk of standardising action across very different contexts and preventing participation in the planning phase (see Box 12).

In these cases, to ensure participatory practices during the planning phase, it is imperative to favour decentralisation, giving each region an acceptable margin of independence in the choice of products and in the development of strategies.

Box 12 The Risks of 'Kit-Based' Approaches

RSS, whose objective is to respond to the needs of the displaced on a national scale, designed a kit for returnee families. It contains 15 chickens, 5 hens, manioc, banana-plantain and maize plants, and foodstuffs, but appears not to be adapted to certain local contexts. The battery chickens are of a commercial type. They have clipped beaks that prevent them from eating naturally (like free-range chickens) and consume more water. The seeds and a few of the plants are apparently different from the species grown in the Medio Atrato area and, therefore, less accepted by the community and less adapted to the climate. In consequence, some families feed the chickens and hens the foodstuffs provided for human consumption, and in a few villages one observes numerous manioc and banana-plantain plants abandoned unused on the river banks.

The complexity of the crisis may push towards the development of integrated mechanisms, to deal with the problematic of displacement, but integrated should not signify standardised.

Summary 4 Targeting: Participative Processes and Tools

Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Propose, communicate the technical design	–	(1) Passive participation
■ Use standards	Pre-designed kit	(2) Supply of information
■ NGO/donor pre-established guidelines/procedures	Standards	(5) Functional participation
■ Take advantage of pre-established CBO networks	–	(6) Interactive participation
■ Gather ideas and to pass them on to specialists	Workshops	(6) Interactive participation
■ Negotiate the design on the basis of demand	Meetings	(6) Interactive participation
■ Accept a technical design proposed by the population	–	(7) Local initiative

3.2.4 Participation in the Implementation Phase

In the projects visited, we were able to observe that when a project is in its implementation phase participation becomes almost indispensable. The national and international humanitarian teams seek to involve aid beneficiaries directly. In some cases, they adopt a ‘workforce’ approach based on the implementation of predetermined activities and, in other cases, an approach that favours self-management. These two forms of population involvement coexist, to varying degrees, throughout the project.

Knowing that humanitarian aid is a short-term solution seeking to re-establish a community’s minimum conditions, does one need to consider

the transfer of power that might lead to a prolonging of the activity? Does one need to consider cost/time relations? Is it possible to respect the time constraints and the imperatives of speed set down by the donors?

Joint implementation? Support? Functional delegation? Our research reveals forms of participation that vary according to the type of actor involved.

International and national NGOs

International and national NGOs seem to share two main tendencies. On the one hand they focus on capacity building through training, seeking to increase community member management and implementation skills. They receive a certain amount of instruction and techniques, which they apply as a member of a programme committee. This involves a much greater time investment by participants than is necessary in directly operational situations, so that in some cases trainees receive compensation in kind (food-for-training).

On the other hand, agencies use participatory tools to implement project activities that they manage (see Box 13). The objective is not capacity building per se (although it might be a side product) but to deliver on programme objectives. This 'operational' vision seems to prove effective for NGOs specialising in particular sectors, such as health, where the humanitarian actor can't easily delegate. It also facilitates self-management in the medium-term. In this case, the time investment is much better defined in the activity chronology, thanks to participatory techniques that include a measure of 'direction' (questionnaires, brainstorming, etc.).

Over-participation

We observed a phenomenon of 'over-participation', where several humanitarian actors, active in the field at the same time, choose the same representatives within the community. In many cases this means work overload and a decrease in the effectiveness of the person involved. It is also likely to give rise to problems of neutrality, given the distinct concentration of power among a limited number of people. This phenomenon can also take on wider dimensions, when the entire community is worn out from

'too much participation' because a large number of projects seek the community's involvement. Communities really can have calendars in which every day corresponds to a community meeting to decide on something.

NGOs have to take into account the projects the community is already implementing to enable coordination of activities and avoid work overload,

Box 13 Operational Participation in the Implementation Phase

- *MSF-Spain* is implementing a project to set up health committees in Altos de Cazucá, on the outskirts of Bogotá. The team running the project is mainly made up of local personnel, some of which are community members. Training is an integral part of this process. The committees are given lessons and participate in the supervision of the activity, for which their committee has particular responsibility, and in the management of a small sum that functions like a revolving fund. The committee has total freedom as to decisions on the use of that money.

Community members participate extensively in the meetings and have a discourse that indicates a sense of 'belonging to the team'. The workshop system seems to be the norm and participants also get involved in more theoretical training such as on Law 100 (which regulates the national health system, citizens' rights and aid organisations). At the time of the research, the project was proposing 'cutting loose' certain committees so that they could operate independently.

- *MSF-Holland*, for its part, is undertaking a 'health multiplier' project for the displaced community that has returned to the Opón marshland. Participatory techniques are being used throughout the process. The content of the training is discussed with the community, as well as the training schedule and delivery location. Questionnaires are used and meetings held.

- *Jesuit Service to Refugees (SJR)* has a manual of participatory tools called 'tool box', inspired by long-term and development planning. Communities are encouraged, even during emergencies, to have a long-term vision of projects.

Box 14 Examples of Over-Participation

- The San Pablo Association of African Palm Growers, Magdalena Medio (see Box 10, Section 3.2.2), felt overloaded with activities because the housing construction project for which they had been selected, began in a period when the workforce was needed for farming. In some cases, it was necessary to hire people from outside to do the work necessary in the fields.
- The group of displaced persons settled in the former institution 'La Normale' in Barrancabermeja, is busy all week with community meetings and activities. It wasn't possible for us to make an appointment with them due to their lack of time.

Box 15 Examples of Support Activities

- *PCS* undertakes community-support activities during the implementation of projects. The whole implementation is handed over to local actors and a system of visits and meetings put in place to coordinate and delegate. To achieve this, an agreement is reached establishing each party's responsibilities and mechanisms by which the project can be modified, if conditions require.
- *Misereor* accepted an ACIA and Quibdó Diocese proposal for the purchase of a boat to be used to help Atrato River communities.
- *OFP* conducts projects through its network of Women's Centres, which serve as bases and provide a monitoring mechanism. The relationship with funding partners is strictly limited to a presentation of results.

in those periods when intensive engagement by the people is required for other activities.

Support activities: a reversal of roles

A common form of 'reverse' participation (used by some local and international agencies) is where, the organised community (CBOs or less structured groups) is implementing a project in its entirety. The humanitarian actor becomes an outside element that guides, remains present, but neither obliges, nor controls. The humanitarian representative/

adviser establishes modes of operation through meetings, periodic visits and verbal or written agreements that outline ways to refocus the project if need be. In this case, it would appear that the roles of participation are reversed, with the humanitarian actor participating in the project. For this kind of participation to succeed, it is fundamental to be able to rely on forms of local organisations that are sufficiently mature and sound.

Operational participation

The most common form of participation is 'operational'. Beneficiaries carry out activities (whether on the agency's or community's initiative) to benefit the individual or community such as food distribution, censuses, stock inspections, cleaning of public roads/waterways, the cooking of food and other activities. These may also be subject to remuneration in the form of food-for-work.

Although delegation has been clearly perceived as a means of improving participation, cases have presented themselves in which delegation requires an increased level of support (because the community does not have the technical skills required). Coordinating delegation and technical support seems to be a key component, which can lead to a programme's success or diminish its effectiveness.

The experience of ACADEY and Legal Option in the papaya plantation project shows to what extent the delegation process is fragile. In the first phase, delegation was total. However, due to ACADEY's lack the expertise

Box 16 Examples of Operational Participation

- The collective centres for the displaced from Minercol (Quibdó) and the former women's prison (Bucaramanga) have formed committees to respond to site needs (sanitation, safety, food).
- Community kitchens are run by many organisations in the three study sites. They consist of bringing several families together around a kitchen. Groups share the duties of preparing food, but families can then take the cooked food home.

the first planting of papaya died. A second planting was then undertaken, but this time with considerable technical support from Legal Option. In this instance, delegation required increased and improved technical support, for an agricultural species that was unknown to the farmers.

ASODESAMUBA, for its part, manages the Barrancabermeja displaced persons' resettlement programmes directly, by including a specific sum in the budget to pay professional staff to supervise chicken raising, for example.

One of the elements, which usually have a determining influence on participation at this phase of the project, is the level of security, including the security of leaders, those that set themselves apart due to their association with committees or work teams. The absence or limited availability of spaces/venues for participation tends to reduce the community's interest in this type of activity.

According to our research, participatory approaches seem to be most used in this phase, and while it is important not to demonise utilitarian approaches which are effective in different situations, a balance needs to be sought to enable the community to learn something, make it less vulnerable if the same situation reoccurs, and enable the humanitarian actor to respond in a timely, opportune manner, taking advantage of the resources available on location.

Summary 5 Implementation: Participative Processes and Tools		
Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Activity implementation	Food for work Committees	(5) Functional participation
■ Project teams with local personnel	–	(5) Functional participation
■ Education, training	Seminars, workshops Food for training	(5–6) Interactive participation ²⁰ (4) Material incitement
■ Formation of committees	Workshops Food for training	(5–6) Interactive participation ²¹ (4) Material incitement
■ Technical approach	Forms Brainstorming Tool boxes Long-term planning	(6) Interactive participation
■ Joint-implementation	Agreements/contracts	(6) Interactive participation
■ Technical Support/ delegation	Workshops Agreements/contracts Advisory/consulting Visits	(6) Interactive participation
■ Accept CBOs proposition	–	(7) Local initiative
■ Direct implementation and decision-making with external funding	Budget Committees Workshops	(7) Local initiative

3.2.5 Participation in the Monitoring and Real-time Evaluation Phase

Monitoring appears to be an activity that humanitarian actors prefer to keep for themselves, which would seem logical if you consider the strong probability that either the aim or the project funds will have to be modified to adapt to situations beyond the programme's scope.

Nevertheless, in the field we identified some organisations that achieve, if not total delegation of monitoring, then at least shared monitoring functions and, in some cases, the CBOs or the host population demand to participate in monitoring to avoid a repeat of quality issues or distribution errors.

For humanitarian actors, the advantage is two-fold. As in earlier phases of the project cycle it can reduce the workload and as a consequence costs, but it can also establish an element of social control that increases the humanitarian actor's credibility.

Conducting monitoring with participatory approaches entails the creation of a climate of mutual trust between the actor and the population, where the benefit reaped in terms of the adequacy of the aid from one becomes a benefit, in terms of effectiveness, for the other.

Box 17 Examples of Participatory Monitoring Approaches

- WFP observation committees are made up of members of the population who monitor the food distribution process, the list of beneficiaries, product quality, quantities distributed, equity in the distribution process, product delivery dates, storage in the centres, and distribution timeframes and dates. This work method has allowed WFP to reduce its monitoring efforts and strengthen its bonds with the community. Members of observation committees frequently call or correspond with WFP.
- ICRC's QIPs, thanks to their pre-established formats and the designation of advisers, allow the project teams to monitor themselves.
- A less formal, but equally effective monitoring approach, was observed in the engagement of existing networks in the progress of projects. For example, Social Pastoral, thanks to its support groups in the various communities, can promote the initiatives and keep itself informed of their progress, with local committees providing field-level monitoring mechanisms.

Summary 6 Monitoring: Participative processes and tools

Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Operational self-monitoring	Questionnaires and procedures Advisors	(3) Consultation
■ Monitoring delegation	Monitoring committees Pre-existing networks Companion/assistance	(5) Functional participation

3.2.6 Participation in the Ex-post Evaluation Phase

This appears to be the forgotten phase of the project cycle, but we were not able to observe many projects in this stage, so that it is hard to draw conclusions.

The only two cases of participatory evaluation observed were: MSF-Holland, which used an evaluation tool at the end of a training session, and the Jesuit Service to Refugees, which was in the process of conducting an evaluation of a programme for the displaced (however documents were unavailable at the time of the study).

The benefits observed in the case of MSF were the immediate feedback from participants with respect to the quality of the training and trainers, and a sense of the knowledge acquired as revealed by participants' academic results. The tools used were meetings and surveys.

At another level, UNHCR and RSS conducted an evaluation of government policies on assistance to the displaced, which, even if not in the category of humanitarian projects, used participatory tools involving a variety of NGOs, CBOs and other actors in round table meetings.

WFP undertook an audit of its activity followed by publication of a report. We do not know what participatory methods were used.

Summary 7 Evaluation: Participative processes and tools

Action	Technique/tool	Degree of Participation
■ Active assessment	Opinion poll	(3) Consultation
■ Policies assessment	Round tables	(6) Interactive participation

3.2.7 Cross-cutting Activities

As noted earlier, in addition to the typical stages of the project cycle, we identified two cross-cutting areas in which participatory approaches exist: coordination and institutional support. They appeared central to and ever present in contexts where the level of community involvement is high. Those two areas are inter-agency coordination and institutional support.

Inter-institutional coordination: a form of participation

When coordination involves beneficiary representatives (eg, displaced persons' organisations, local committees, CBOs), it can be considered a form of participation. In Colombia, there are bodies responsible for assistance to the displaced (RSS, Ministries, Town Halls) and a complex and widespread network of local, regional and national committees, in which NGOs (local and international) and CBOs are invited to participate, and in which they often have very important roles.

In effect, displaced persons' associations, women's groups and ethical CBOs have their own coordination mechanisms. Round tables, brainstorming and coordination groups, communication activities and community awareness-raising strategies are all well developed.

These forms of information exchange, and thus participation, enable a better use of resources. They increase the response capacity of the communities and have proven themselves to be an effective conflict 'monitoring' mechanism. Furthermore, coordination allows the actors to have an integrated vision that reduces the risk of excess participation and of over-concentration of aid.

Box 18 Examples of Inter-Institutional Coordination Strengthening Participation

- In Barrancabermeja, the Jesuit Service to Refugees is a member of the municipal committee for assistance to the displaced. It is within this committee that the different programmes are discussed; that the committees for each case of displacement, resettlement or return are formed; and that efforts are made to improve coordination.
- In Bogotá, AFRODES has recently withdrawn from a departmental works committee. Coordination and efficiency are apparently harder to achieve in the capital.
- In Quibdó, ACIA and OREWA coordinate with the Quibdó Diocese and the bodies that progressively integrate into the activity.
- The National Women's Network coordinates actions with various departmental networks and their local CBOs, to bestow one-off aid grants in response to specific needs.

The actions of the Chocó actors in the context of the Bojayá massacre provide a useful example of this. OREWA, ACIA and Social Pastoral had warned of indications of a possible degeneration of the conflict situation. Although the risks had been identified in time, that did not prevent nor in any way reduce the impact of the confrontations. This failure was condemned by the group of associations in an open letter released to the media and available on their website. It appears therefore that coordination, although useful, is not sufficient. Without a real will to act and the necessary resources, its benefits can be limited.

Institutional support

Beyond the project context, one observes support activities, which consist primarily of implementing and financing activities aimed at strengthening CBO structures. This sometimes takes place within the framework of a development programme, but at other times the institutional support is provided independently. In a few cases, it involves the financing of the structure or the financing of equipment, facilities and transport. In other

cases, it consists of training, permanent support and the financing of participation in coordination meetings.

The most important element is that it involves a progressive and continuous process, where the donor and/or humanitarian actor have a long-term commitment to the CBO structure, and seek to guide it through to autonomy. This type of support, which appears long before an emergency, provides the basis for a rapid response in many situations, and a real capacity to coordinate efforts – elements observed in different study sites.

Successful experiences, like those of OFP, ACIA and OREWA, supported and financed by Misereor, Christian Aid, Project Counselling Services, Caritas and Diakonia, make it possible to believe in the effectiveness of preparedness.

Another form of institutional support, that has demonstrated positive results, is in the creation of displaced persons' organisations. Carried out following an acute emergency, it aims to structure the displaced, train them and inform them of their rights and available mechanisms for action. It also enables communities to reconstruct life projects and develop strategies for resettlement.

Box 19 Examples of Institutional Support

ACIA, through institutional financing, trained its leaders, established a head office (that served as a reception centre for the displaced following the Bojayá massacre) and coordinates activities with the local committees.

OREWA, through institutional financing, trained its leaders, established a head office and assists displacements through to the different shelter areas.

OFP, through institutional financing, established a structure that is currently autonomous.

The Quibdó Diocese, a key actor of humanitarian aid in the area, provide humanitarian assistance and maintains a support network with churches as the basic unit, using institutional support.

Corporación Compromiso, Bucaramanga, has contributed to the training of a long list of associations currently developing participatory programmes. It offers training to help set up associations of the displaced and takes charge of supporting these in their process of development. The research team visited three of these communities, all of which were well organised with structured programmes. The Magdalena Medio Peace and Development Programme has also established committees and teams to promote the involvement of communities (some of which are displaced).

Institutional support has a major impact on the population's participation. It reduces vulnerability, increases the community's resilience and response capacity in the face of crisis and, as a result, facilitates humanitarian action. Institutional support to local actors (CBOs and local NGOs) is equally important and effective, and essential in the context of an acute crisis where access to affected populations is constrained.

Whereas development actors (who have been conducting institutional support activities for a long time) have seen the results of that investment, in humanitarian action, cases in which institutional support is used effectively are rare. A percentage of budgets is often reserved for the provision of such support, but is not sufficient. This type of relationship is difficult to establish in the midst of a crisis.

We have brought to the fore the different forms of participation used during the project cycle, as observed in the three study sites, and also highlighted the importance of factors that have proved themselves crucial in the choice of participation strategies adopted.

4

CONCLUSIONS

Colombia has revealed itself to be not just rich in respect of the many examples of participation in humanitarian assistance that it offers, but equally rich in respect of the diversity of concrete and abstract elements found within the aid processes. Having reviewed current practice in each of the study areas, we attempt in the following to offer answers to the hypotheses and questions put forward for the research, and outline key factors that may have influenced the types of action observed in the field and through which it may be possible to define the nature and scope of participatory approaches.

4.1 HYPOTHESES AND QUESTIONS REVISITED

Hypothesis 1

The participation of the affected population in humanitarian action is both feasible and beneficial, in terms of project outcomes and long-term social impact.

The study has demonstrated that the use of participatory tools is not only possible, but has a distinct positive impact on the outcomes of humanitarian action. However, certain factors limit or enhance certain forms of participation, as well as determining the degree of participation possible.

The three core components, to be taken into account when defining participation strategies: i) context; ii) affected population; and iii) humanitarian actor, and each can constrain or promote participation.

The context becomes a constraint, most notably in situations of insecurity that place both affected populations and humanitarian actors in danger, a constraint that an affected population with a history of organisation can overcome. The factors that impact on each of the core components, and make participation less or more likely, are developed in Section 4.2.

Hypothesis 2

Its turbulent social history and the high degree of political awareness in Colombia have made participation possible (even in the midst of a crisis) and in consequence it exists in humanitarian action. From there, comes the hypothesis that the Colombian population's culture and history are key factors that influence the degree of participation and could lead to the population demanding to participate.

Participation relies, in the first instance, on the inclination of the participant. Participation is a social and voluntary act. If the community has a participatory social history, it will have an increased tendency to participate.

In Colombia, political awareness (in the broadest sense) associated with participation, promotes the use of democratic tools, consultation and consensual decision-making, in respect of group activities. The nature of decision-making and exchange in ethnic, social and political groups in Colombia is rooted in national culture, and has clearly led to communities using forms of participatory action that extend beyond demanding the right to participate and be consulted, to the refusal to participate in humanitarian action where there has been insufficient consultation.

Hypothesis 3

In Colombia, a country where development actors have worked for a long time with local structures, we sought to verify whether development actors, working by necessity in humanitarian action, had a higher capacity to act

in a participatory manner than their emergency counterparts. If so, it would mean that the participation of local populations depends on the nature of the organisation (development/humanitarian), as well as its existing presence, credibility and historical relationships on the ground.

One can't assert that development actors have a greater capacity to act in a participatory manner in humanitarian action, although they frequently draw on their development tools. What can, however, be asserted is that the local and international actors, that have been settled in the area for a long time, have a greater knowledge and understanding of the context and have established relationships of trust, two elements essential to acting in a participative way. These elements result from years of investment in strengthening local organisations, an investment that has born fruit, with the better organised and stronger structures responding quicker in the face of an acute emergency.

In a crisis, it appears that credibility is an essential factor in programme implementation. International actors generally call on local actors on the ground to access local communities, and benefit enormously from their increased insights into needs. The proximity of those on the ground to the context also enables a better understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and changes in security conditions and, more important still, in community needs.

This study has highlighted the potential importance of governmental humanitarian actors – in this case the RSS – in facilitating a citizens' constitutional right to participate, and demonstrated that even in crisis contexts civilian participation is possible, although subject to the same constraints as other actors.

In addition to the three hypotheses, the study posed a series of questions.

Participation: why?

Is it simply to facilitate the work of NGOs? Is it in order to reduce levels of insecurity? Is it to respond to donor requirements? Does it result from consideration that the processes of consultation and participation can

radically improve the impact of humanitarian action? Is it to respond to the specific demands of the affected population? Is it to have a long-term positive impact on the vulnerability and capacity of affected populations?

Widely addressed in the study's findings, both ethical and pragmatic considerations arise in relation to participation. However, ethical and political considerations, which present participation as the right and responsibility of citizens' to influence their community's future, are the most prominent.

Participation: whose?

Do an individual's characteristics – gender, age and social identity – impact on the process of participation? What kind of institution participates in humanitarian action: traditional, post-socialist, institutions created following structural adjustment or associations formed to take advantage of the influx of humanitarian aid? Is it possible to use 'participatory techniques' throughout the project cycle if the organisation itself does not use the approach for its in-house operations?

It is fundamental to understand the importance of the unique character of each context. The elements to be studied and the questions can be the same, but the answers change in each context, at each stage of the crisis, for each group affected by the crisis. The person and their characteristics, gender, age, the strength gained from social belonging, all influence participation. Although we saw many cases of participation, we did not encounter any examples of participation by children, and yet more than half of the displaced are under 18.

CBOs are the actors that most solicit participation in humanitarian action. The international actors for the most part adopt technical approaches, although one can't generalise. The local structures that are most participative tend to have a history of social struggle in defence of social rights or the rights of ethnic group, frequently supported by the Church.

The analysis of participation throughout the project cycle allowed us to conclude that it is possible to apply participatory techniques at each stage

of the project cycle, although there needs to be more in-depth study of the ex-post evaluation phase, given the limited number of cases encountered during the study.

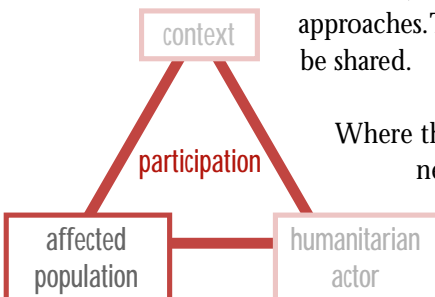
Participation: how?

Should the programme's efficiency be given priority over the principles of independence and impartiality? What should be done if participation contributes to discrimination against certain participants? How can we make sure that participation does not help certain groups to manipulate the aid for their own benefit? How can classic beneficiary selection processes, based on the vulnerability of individuals, be reconciled with collective group survival strategies? How can we make sure the people involved and participating in the aid process won't be subject to human-rights violations or to another form of segregation or aggression as a consequence of participation?

The following details the factors identified as key information to be taken into account when developing participatory strategies in acute and protracted emergency contexts, and go some way to answering the 'how' questions.

4.2 FACTORS DETERMINING PARTICIPATION

The understanding that each actor has of the others, and the interest – and consideration – given to mandates, technical specialities and available resources, are central to establishing participatory approaches. There must be a genuine will, which must be shared.



Where the will exists, participation appears to be a negotiation process between two parties: those offering the aid and those receiving it. The more equal the relationship, the more the use of

Box 20 Examples of Institutional Support

The communities of the Pató River, a tributary of the Atrato River, receive almost no humanitarian aid. To reach the closest town (Bevará), a two-hour trip on a small barge has to be made. Only small craft can navigate the narrow channels. Despite support from OREWA, distributed goods are rare.

participatory tools will become necessary. This balance, however, depends on various factors related to the context, the humanitarian actors and the affected populations.

4.2.1 The Context

The environment in which the crisis develops determines the forms of participation possible. Access to the victims depends, for the most part, on the mobility of humanitarian actors, the positioning of the parties to the conflict and the degree of respect granted to human rights. It can also be affected by geographical conditions and the security, or otherwise, of roads/waterways. In Colombia, such factors reduce the possibilities for encounter between humanitarian actors and affected populations.

Local structures can become the target of violence for one of the parties to the conflict. That party can turn into a ‘controller’ of community activities and limit movement, meetings and local activities. Without meetings, there is no group work, without group work there is no common project, nor reason for participation.

The security of the leaders influences the number and continuity of community leaders and CBOs. Threats, illegal detentions and selective assassinations limit people’s motivation to offer their services as community representatives.

People’s availability and ability to hold meetings is another element to take into consideration. Communities that lack physical (community centres)

and organisational (groups, committees, associations) space for participation, participate less.

The impact of the crisis is a determining factor in participation. If the crisis produces deaths in large numbers, it can affect the community differently to a mass displacement or selective assassination. The same crisis may however have a different impact on different groups, in some cases emotionally destabilising individuals so that they can no longer assume responsibility for themselves, while pushing others to act. What is clear, however, is that communities with a history of organisation are less vulnerable.

The stage of the crisis is another key factor, and the impact on participation varies accordingly. In Colombia, groups that participate are warier in the third type of situation, and humanitarian action decreases progressively.

The number of projects and actors present can be excessive in some areas, reducing the community's ability to participate, however, we also visited areas where there has been no aid for eight years. What is the saturation point that should not be exceeded? Why concentrate aid in some zones and leave others by the wayside?

The political will to act affects the community's degree of participation. When decisions are supported and areas become strongholds of aid, it creates a favourable climate for participation. Whereas, if there is a lack of

Box 21 A Lack of Will to Participate

In the shelter centres set up following the Bojayá massacre, some people had lost a large part of their family, their land and their home, with little prospect of work. These people had no plan for the future and no will to construct one. They did not want to participate, so let themselves be carried by the group, showing no interest in the construction of a house, in farming or returning to their homes. The trauma caused by the massacre has uprooted them.

Others from the same area that suffered fewer losses were integrated into groups to reconstruct a life project.

interest in resolving the problem, the participation mechanisms are limited or become inoperative.

The ability to have a real impact where in situations of political crisis, the humanitarian community is powerless. Food distribution, for example, is often ranked as secondary, since if the population's security were guaranteed it would be able to harvest its fields. Participatory methods and in-depth participation inevitably throw up needs and causal factors to which humanitarian actors are unable to respond, leading to a sense of frustration, failure and/or ineffectiveness. This does not signify that participation should be limited, but rather that this reality should be taken into consideration.

4.2.2 The Affected Populations

Affected populations provide the base material for participation. The more affected the community (little organised, without life projects, total loss, uprooted) the greater the likelihood that it will become the object rather than the subject of aid. If, however, the crisis-affected population's structure, level of organisation and training is strong enough, it can reverse traditional participation relationships, inviting humanitarian actors to participate in projects that the population has itself conceived, and, as with OFP in Barrancabermeja, refuse to participate in projects in which it has not been consulted. Other factors, influencing the degree and nature of participation by affected populations, are captured below.

A history of organisation Pre-crisis forms and degrees of organisation (syndicats/unions, political, ecclesiastical and revolutionary initiatives) have an important influence on future participation.

Culture Religious beliefs, ethnic goals (eg, preserving the land of the ancestors, protecting the community's future) and cultural groups (Afro-Colombians, indigenous peoples) committed to a dedicated social struggle with traditions and a common history. All these factors unite the group and can contribute to the formation of participatory structures (local committees, CBOs, *cabildos*).

Socio-economic structure Forms of survival and economic activity can stimulate participation. Groups of fishermen, used to living on their own and fishing for consumption or trade, have weaker forms of participation than farmers who live as a community and have a longer-term vision, shaped by the harvest cycle.

Experience and training of leaders We observed that lots of the current leaders already had experiences as leaders in other contexts or in other local organisations. The lessons learned concerning the way to structure groups, make decisions and coordinate activities, have an impact on the community's participation.

Community reaction in the face of a crisis The community can decide to flee *en masse*, to hide temporarily in the village surroundings, to coexist with the crisis, to move to the towns, or form a peace community. The humanitarian actors' strategies are founded on those decisions. Each of these ways of acting shows a degree of belonging and link to the community, a resource that can be used to support it during humanitarian action.

The host community's reaction The humanitarian community has to take into account the ways in which host populations behave. In many cases, those populations prove to be pillars of aid, and approaches to humanitarian programmes can be adapted accordingly.

The community's humanitarian history When communities are weak, and in addition subjected to several displacements or human-rights violations, they can lock themselves into a role of victim, giving rise to a 'handout' behaviour among humanitarian actors.

A genuine possibility of participation In some cases, the community does not participate because it really cannot. This happens in cases of project overload for a beneficiary group, or activity overload. This can also happen because the person feels obliged to choose between survival activities (trade, farming) and the project. A third reason is when the person has neither the knowledge nor the necessary capacities to participate.

The cost/benefit relationship Humanitarian action is not necessarily the only way to resolve the problem. A person may be able to meet their needs in another way and might prefer not to participate in the project, deciding simply to undertake an activity on their own.

When the future is not easily discernable The presence or absence of a personal or family life project affects participation. The elderly and those who do not see any possible solution to the problem see little point in participation.

Losses, the situation before the crisis When a home has been lost, there are motives for organising to reclaim that loss, but where there is little hope of regaining the status quo, participation decreases.

Negative experiences of humanitarian action Broken promises mean that the community can have increased or decreased interest in participating, or even rise up against the project.

The trust of the population in the humanitarian actors Existing relations, preconceptions about certain actors or forms of aid, the absence or not of transparent clear information on who the aid is being provided to and what it will achieve can, depending on the case, limit or contribute to a participatory atmosphere.

The fear of stigmatisation The population may prefer not to participate and not to be called displaced when in some cases it would lead to discrimination when applying for a job or for resettlement.

4.2.3 Humanitarian Actors

Participation is, above all, a matter of trust, trust based on transparency and a mutual respect for different approaches, mandates and opinions. To strengthen that trust, it is necessary for each to know the other. Other factors influencing the degree and nature of participation by humanitarian actors:

Principles of action The inclusion of participation in mandates obliges and motivates actors to use participatory approaches.

The capacity of the organisation/individual implementing the action The presence of experienced teams, familiar with participatory techniques, stimulates the inclusion and application of those techniques in programmes.

Programme flexibility: the rhythm of activities and the timing of their implementation This concerns mechanisms for evaluating whether the programme is on the right track, and within the margin for manoeuvre authorised by the donors; and for redefining and adapting project activities. The programmes must take into account the rhythm of a community and adapt to those rhythms and local calendars.

The organisation's field of expertise This determines the type of participation that is possible. In some cases, the technical complexity of the services offered by the organisation prevents some forms of participation while favouring others.

Programme resources/donors Programmes financed with internal funds or by donors who impose few restrictions as to the use of resources, make it easier to introduce mechanisms to facilitate engagement by the population.

Knowledge of the region where the action is to be carried out This concerns primarily the degree of knowledge of local actors/spokespersons or potential implementing partners. It has implications for communication with the affected population and its leaders, and the ability to take into account local culture and history.

The actor's internal modus operandi The organisational culture of the humanitarian actor also has implications. For instance, it influences the level of centralisation in decision-making and the degree of delegation and of flexibility given to project managers.

Standards Certain types of standard can prevent the programme adapting to the unique characteristics of a situation and consequently limit

possibilities for participation. The problem of adopting a 'standards' or 'kit' approach was raised on numerous occasions and in each phase of the project cycle we witnessed such approaches limiting participation to its most fundamental: imparting information and consulting (see Box 12 Section 3.2).

The quality of technical support Where the affected community lacks technical capacities, support needs to be more significant.

The will to participate in inter-institutional coordination Inter-institutional coordination enables an integrated vision of the humanitarian activities being established in the region.

The summary tables presented for each of the phases of the project cycle in Section 3, outline the participatory tools that tend to be applied in current practice, with a clear trend towards operational approaches, centred on implementation. The above factors in relation to each of the three core components: context, affected population and humanitarian actor, help determine the possibility of applying participatory tools.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Participation is more than a tool for improving the quality of humanitarian action. Participation is a means of obtaining long-term results that can strengthen social fabric and therefore communities. Actors (national and international) may encounter both advantages and disadvantages in participation. That is why setting up participatory strategies entails, above all, respect for those involved. Participation is first and foremost a state of mind, a set of operationalised values rather than a set of technical tools. Participation can become institutionalised. Within this framework, the following recommendations have been formulated:

5.1 PRIORITISE LOCAL ACTORS

- It is essential that international actors learn to understand the universe of participation in each context, the dense network in which committees, local NGOs and CBOs, formed before, during and after the crisis, are intertwined. They represent a source of energy that will enable more integrated and relevant humanitarian action.
- The study was able to highlight how important it is to stimulate the creation and strengthening of CBOs. In many cases, it is they who have the fastest response capacity when the crisis breaks with others intervening later. A key issue therefore is that of institutional support to these structures.
- The importance of taking account of local populations emerged from the study, whether host populations or those affected directly by the crisis.

They proved themselves very effective in setting up aid, notably in respect of the welcoming of the displaced by host populations.

- As for volunteer associations, so keen to help, a certain number of questions arise. How can one channel these often well-resourced groups, that without good coordination, risk jeopardising the effectiveness of their action? Finding room and ways to facilitate their participation in the overall action, could contribute to the quality of the response as a whole.

- Humanitarian programmes should allow for partnerships with local actors. The programmes jointly implemented with local actors proved to be more effective and relevant overall, with positive results in terms of the strengthening of the resilience of populations.

The complexity of this network of local actors (eg, affected populations, CBOs, associations) and the long list of key elements to be taken into account to understand each context, explain the need for work prior to the crisis, for preparedness. Knowing the difficulty of predicting the crisis, actors have to look for mechanisms through which they can gain a better understanding of the context, identify partners in a quicker and more efficient manner, and coordinate with other actors in a more timely fashion.

One mechanism that showed itself to be effective was work on coordination with established NGOs, in particular development NGOs. They know the context in which they are already working with local actors and can guide the humanitarian actors in their choices, or even work in partnership with them.

5.2 PARTICIPATION: AN APPROACH MORE THAN A SET OF TOOLS

- It has been demonstrated that the higher the degree of population participation, the fewer the technical tools required. Participation is more about values than techniques, and primarily institutional values. It is therefore within institutions that the participatory approach is structured.
- Nevertheless, the more technical participative tools also contribute to structuring and creating the environment so that in the medium or long-term, participation will be strengthened. A reinforcing of humanitarian NGO personnel training in participatory techniques is necessary.

Finally, it is achieving a balance between technique and philosophy that is key to reinforcing participation. Tools borrowed from the fields of development or training have proven to be effective, when a technical vision of the programme is being developed. The more political approaches, closer to the notion of citizen participation, have proven to be effective in structured communities. The Manichean discourse, seeking to oppose political and pragmatic visions of participation, is unfounded, since each approach is able to promote genuine capacity building of populations.

5.3 SECURITY: MORE A KEY CONTEXTUAL ELEMENT THAN AN EXCUSE

Security has considerable influence over the nature of participation. Certain participative approaches can become a source of danger for the population or humanitarian aid workers. It could, therefore, be considered a constraint, a limitation to participation. However, Latin America has built its (more or less stable) democracies with participatory initiatives, in mainly crisis contexts. Participation was the choice of the citizen, a voluntary act,

with or without the presence of international actors. The historical influences detailed in Section 2 are, for the most part, at the root of that choice.

In terms of participation in humanitarian action, security appears to provide an additional element, influencing the nature of participation, rather than providing an insurmountable obstacle to all forms of participation and removing humanitarian actors' responsibility in this area.

5.4 THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY IN THE APPROACHES OF HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

In the end, whatever the type of participation envisaged, flexibility appears to be the crucial element, enabling or preventing open dialogue, and essential to all forms of participation at all stages of the project cycle.

- Programmes must be flexible and able to adapt to changes in context. Participation of affected populations makes it easier to observe and identify changes in context and in the community's needs.
- Donors must be flexible. Programmes accompanied by open reflection, involving donors and the communication to them of the local imperatives of each context, make it possible to increase the relevance of the action. As a result, the donors must be open to reflection on the adaptability of their financing policies.
- Tools must be flexible. Although having kits and the lessons learned from previous actions is necessary, it is not enough. It is essential that the use of these tools does not blind humanitarian actors, who should give themselves sufficient room for manoeuvre to be able to adapt those tools to each action.

- Approaches must be decentralised since centralised programmes and actions, in situations as dissimilar as an acute crisis, a forgotten crisis or the end of a crisis, reduce flexibility of action. Reflection on the subject of greater independence for regional actions and the freedom to change approaches according to context, could contribute to increasing the participation of communities and local actors.

Box 22 Important Issues for Consideration

It is important to stress once again, in closing, that participation is a voluntary act and that the population may simply not want to participate in the way suggested by the actor. To what extent does the desire to foster participatory approaches come from the action itself? To what extent does it come from a collectivist dream by one of the actors? Where does the freedom of the individual sit if collective participatory programmes are applied to groups who are not collective? Where does the freedom of the individual sit if the participatory approaches applied are contrary to those usually applied in the community? It is respecting others, listening to them and considering them (actors and communities) as equals, that makes it possible to create space for exchange and balance.

Notes

- ¹ 280,000 according to UNHCR figures (UNHCR Colombia National Report, 2000).
- ² See Global Study Terms of Reference, www.globalstudyparticipation.org
- ³ DMZ is a zone in the south of the country under guerrilla control since the 1998 peace negotiation. It has been taken back by governmental troops in 2002.
- ⁴ Local government traditional indigenous council.
- ⁵ Type of collective ownership of property given to the native Indians.
- ⁶ See endnote 3.
- ⁷ Review “Mujer Popular” March-April 2002, Barrancabermeja – Colombia.
- ⁸ Interview with PDPMM leader in Barrancabermeja.
- ⁹ In “Compromiso”, publication of Compromiso, n°1, Bucaramanga-Santander-Colombia, June 2002.
- ¹⁰ Interview with ACIA leader in Quibdó.
- ¹¹ RSS principles for the provision of care to displaced populations.
- ¹² Interview with host families in Vigía del Fuerte and Quibdó.
- ¹³ The action, generally illegal, of forcing the government or other actors to make decisions, in respect of illegal occupation of land, homes and buildings, unauthorised public demonstrations etc.

- 14 In *Compromiso*, publication of *Compromiso*, n°1, Bucaramanga-Santander-Colombia, June 2002.
- 15 Interview with PDPMM leader in Barrancabermeja.
- 16 *Les Enquêtes Participatives en Débat* (Debate on Participatory Surveys) Editions Karthala – ICRA – GRET, Paris 2000. p. 38-39.
- 17 Interview with an IOM employee in Quibdó.
- 18 Form of community organisation used for conducting an activity from which all the inhabitants benefit, such as cleaning up, building, painting. This approach is also applied to harvests.
- 19 Following a community complaint.
- 20 Training and workshops are not a form of functional participation. Focused primarily on implementation, they cannot be considered as interactive participation. The procedures are more Maieutic than bilateral interaction. In this case, it would appear necessary to introduce a classification that falls between the two typologies.
- 21 See endnote 14.

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