

Participatory Assessment: A methodology to Leave No One Behind Launching Webinar Event: Wednesday November 23, 2022

Questions and Answers from PA webinar

- 1) How do you deal with expectations that arise out of participatory assessments? Expectations on project interventions for example.

Firstly, the organizers and implementers of a participatory assessment must be clear among themselves about the scope and objective of the assessment as well as the expected follow-up and the use of the results. It will then be easier to clarify expectations with other stakeholders, also considering the programme/project framework (e.g., location, timeframe, budget, sector, key objective(s) etc.). Secondly, a solid communication strategy should help to convey the opportunities and boundaries to the various stakeholders, including interviewers and interviewees, on why and how the assessment is done, with a view to avoid misunderstandings and false expectations at all levels. Thirdly, the communications tools and messages need to be adapted according to user and/or audience. And finally linked to that, identifying the stakeholders to be interviewed can also play a role in managing expectations. Participatory does not mean everyone and anyone, everywhere has their say and way. A certain degree of prioritization which considers those with a direct 'stake' in the specific program/project, from primary stakeholders e.g., rights holders to system actors/stakeholders e.g. duty bearers and/or public/private service providers etc.

- 2) How to conduct a PA in a hard-to-reach areas, due to security such as Somalia. Some experiences?

A full-fledged participatory assessment as described will be, of course, more difficult to manage in a situation of armed conflict, due to security reasons and the lack of trust. This might be a reason for not choosing this methodology ([see the first step of the step-by-step guide](#)). However, a variety of participatory methodologies are increasingly used particularly in contexts where it is difficult to reach out directly to target groups. Remote management often implies the use of participatory approaches for designing, implementing and monitoring interventions, leveraging trusted local partners (who work in a participatory way) and using information technology such as web-based platforms and mobile devices (see, for example, UNHCR, Somalia Participatory Assessment, National Report, April 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/93923>). The increasingly fragile contexts we work in underline the importance of forging reliable partnerships with communities, local organizations etc. who are conflict-sensitive. In case of development projects where presence may be longer term, it is good to integrate participatory contingency planning from the outset, starting from/with the target communities, leveraging existing community structures to act as contacts/connectors/facilitators, in complement to local partners and other trustworthy counterparts. In case of humanitarian actors who are not well established in a context, coordinating with more established development/humanitarian actors can help bridge gaps. Joint contingency planning with likeminded organizations can also help bridge gaps in resources, access, data intelligence, and adaptation/response capacities etc.

- 3) On remote monitoring, how can it be done by a third party (because of risk in the context)? Any experience or suggestion?

See, for example, Richard Harrison, Research-based handbook for donors and practitioners on "Good practice in conducting Third Party Monitoring in conflict settings", https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-05/study_on_best_practices_in_third_party_monitoring_0.pdf

See also the GSDRC helpdesk research report on Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states, particularly on Third Party Monitoring, <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/1420-Remote-monitoring-in-fragile-states.pdf>

See also Cordaid's practical guide on context-sensitive remote monitoring, <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/practices/context-sensitive-remote-monitoring-a-practical-guide-ff06499b>.

Or the blog on the Worldbank's site: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/addressing-challenge-remote-project-monitoring-crisis-and-conflict-situations-mobile-data>.

- 4) It looks like the most examples relate to development action, what about humanitarian aid / contexts with conflicts, where participation may not be fully ensured, for various reasons including time / emergency / resources and doing no harm (to participants)?

Participatory methods are increasingly used in humanitarian contexts to generate knowledge about the situation from the perspective of those affected, especially women, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and to generate ideas for action and participatory indicators (e.g., WFP, Care International). Participatory activities and processes can be adapted and built into existing spaces/activities. Worth considering is that information is always being generated, and participatory assessments are not one-off exercises, but ongoing processes which can be followed up, continually nourished if/when the ebbs and flows of conflict situations allow for it. (See also above points 2 and 3 for more).

- 5) What would be minimal PA standards to be built into PCM to make PA more institutionalized as approach?

As mentioned, the PA should not be a standardized approach to be integrated in all PCMs, as it is not always appropriate to the contexts at stake ([see step 1 in the step-by-step guide](#)). However, participatory assessment should be on the standard menu as part of [context analysis](#). The assessment of needs and potentials when starting the project cycle, informs the Theory of Change, the objectives, and the intervention strategy. It should also be considered as a methodology later in the PCM, [for monitoring and evaluation](#) of the results and the working processes of the project or programme. This is particularly relevant for confirming and testing the logic of the intervention and its main assumptions as part of a midterm or end of year review, a next year planning and/or an end of project evaluation/next phase planning. These are done together with the identified stakeholders, e.g., participatory assessment continuum, participatory monitoring, evaluating, learning, adapting, and planning. Something to keep in mind is that stakeholders may also evolve over the lifespan of the project in each context, especially if more dynamic situations e.g., new political party takes over etc.

- 6) In which context the use of participatory method can be most efficient?

Participatory methods and approaches (processes) can be used in all contexts with adaptation. The process will need to be designed according to the scope of the assessment and the risks/challenges and opportunities of the context which can shift over the timeframe of the programme/project. Safety is paramount, but this does not mean that extremely vulnerable and/or conflict affected groups cannot participate – the need to hear their perspectives is

essential. They are well if not best placed to provide insight about the risks and ideas for risk management. The configuration of groups and activities for participatory activities may need to consider working with separate sub-groups, also considering gender, vertical/horizontal hierarchies in which trust can be established more quickly. Participatory methods can be adapted and combined according to the context – for example, rapid PRA methods can gather experiences and perspectives quickly in settings where people are transient and used repeatedly over time to build up a picture. Where groups are more stable, they can be engaged in longer processes, which open potential for deeper dialogue, analysis and catalysation. In all situations, the methods and process should be adapted and revisited considering local realities which may be dynamic.

- 7) PA requires that most vulnerable people dedicate a lot of resources in the assessment, monitoring, data analyses etc. without being remunerated, which is particularly difficult for most vulnerable persons, who live in poverty. How to best address this?

This speaks to assessment fatigue. Depending on the resources available, financial and/or in-kind remuneration should be planned for. This needs to be clearly pre-communicated, pre-agreed to manage expectations, ensuring local people can make informed decisions about their potential role/ responsibilities. Highlighting the broader benefits of such an assessment can also be helpful e.g., that the results can serve the local community and its leaders to develop their own plans and approach local authorities with their needs/priorities. Linked to this, validating, and sharing back the results with the local communities/participants is essential, so that they 'own' their inputs. This can only benefit any future implementation/intervention. In case of recruiting community members as Peer reviewers some form of remuneration/stipend needs to be accounted for in the budget for the PA.

- 8) What about political constraints (from local authorities) in a particular sensitive context?

First and foremost: Be aware of the political constraints and analyse its possible impact on the process. Design methods and processes in collaboration with trusted local partners, who can advise on safe or neutral places to hold activities where civic space for people to meet and discuss is limited. They can also advise on how to communicate activities in language which will not raise concerns with government. Conducting participatory [Political Economy and Power Analysis](#) can be helpful, in full or part. Familiarize yourself with the legal framework and the local authorities in place. In case of the latter, what are their priorities, mandates, interests which you can leverage, to be in a better negotiation/dialogue position with them.

- 9) What do "beneficiaries" themselves say about PA (and I am meaning the full cycle of PA), how do they perceive the process? What motivates them to continue? What are frustrations?

Some testimonies are collected on the PA webpage under [PA to leave no one behind.](#)

- 10) I think it would be helpful to differentiate between participatory methods to do an assessment and PA as such. At least I am confused, because I understand that PA is a long-term process where beneficiaries are involved in the whole PCM, not only initial assessment....

Participatory methods are practical tools which need to be embedded in a process and used following participatory principles. The process needs to be designed as appropriate to the context and challenges, and PA offers guidance for how to think through this process, how to apply participatory principles, and maximise meaningful participation throughout. (See also point 4 above)

- 11) Projects we support have log frames with specific outcomes to be tracked. If other achievements are established through participatory approaches, where can the other achievements that are achieved be recorded and reported in this situation.

The log frames are identifying outcomes, outputs as well as assumptions and risks. It is true that indicators are often focusing on the expected outcomes – and unexpected results which may be negative or positive, risk to be lost. One possibility is to reflect on these in the reporting on assumptions and risks. The most important thing is, to from the outset monitor such changes/ new unplanned elements, which can have both positive and/or negative effects on the intervention, the stakeholders. The second is to have a knowledge management plan from the outset, on who and how to document as part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning system. Key is not to wait until the end of a project. Rather integrate as part of progress/ annual reporting. Where report templates indicate places to describe achievements, good practices and lessons learnt, these are all sections where one can add quantifiable/qualifiable 'unplanned' or added value information. Conducting short case studies or Capitalization of Experiences are also useful documents which can always complement a report as an annex. Finally use and share these documented learnings for planning next phases and/or new projects.

- 12) How difficult can it be to come to an agreement in the participatory approach? What is the best strategy to bring different ideas to an agreement?

As stated in point 1, key is to frame the scope, the opportunities, and boundaries, to manage expectations from the outset. How one organizes the groups to be consulted is also important, as are the methods used for joint restitution, consolidation and then prioritization considering gender, conflict, power, and hierarchal sensitivities. Participatory methods, embedded in a PA approach, invite different perspectives to be expressed and shared, and the facilitator holds the space to allow this to happen, moving the dialogue onwards to identify and leverage first common experiences and concerns, and value the causes/drivers behind these. This process helps to build a sense of common purpose in a group with divergent views and experiences.

- 13) What is your experience /stand on using lean data (phone surveys) for data collection? Any experiences of outsourcing lean data collection to organizations such as 60 decibels?

The lean-data-approach involving phone surveys (as promoted and practiced by 60 Decibels and others) may be a very appropriate approach in many contexts to find out about the views and needs of beneficiaries (if it is well conceived and done in a gender and context-sensitive way). However, in principle, it is based on standardized questions set by experts, project funders and implementers and their biases - tending to reproduce existing assumptions, logics of intervention and blind spots. In contrast to the PA, it is not involving the target groups (and their peers) in the process of setting the questions, collecting, producing, and analysing the data themselves. Digitalization can be very useful and empowering. If outsourcing means limiting adaptation and participation in the local context, best consider other digital options like [KOBO](#), or use a combination of digital and in person options.

- 14) Are there good practice examples of PA in (SDC) regional programmes or global programmes with multiple countries included (e.g. on Migration/ Forced Displacement) with rather limited overall budgets?

Here are a couple of ongoing and previous SDC funded global programs of HELVETAS where adapted PA was/is applied

- <https://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-projects/global/water-productivity-WAPRO>
- <https://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-projects/global/MCWIP-water-integrity-program-coordination>

We have a large youth/migration programme funded by the SDC covering several countries across West/North Africa, but it is still too early to share/report anything.

15) Could you say something about your experiences regarding capacity building, both of the "facilitators" as well as of the "experts (target group and peer individuals)"?

Firstly, it is important to have very clear selection criteria, and ensure those engaged are representational of the groups who will partake as stakeholders in the PA e.g.; gender, language, age, ethnicity etc. Secondly, ensuring basic understanding of and capacity to be inter-cultural, intergenerational, gender and conflict sensitive is key, this includes exercises to become aware of and more capable of managing own and others un/conscious bias. Thirdly, enriching their 'toolbox' by exchanging different consultation approaches/ strategies e.g., formal vs. informal, interactive, interview techniques like mirroring, is not only useful but can be fun e.g., role play possible/different scenarios according to stakeholder. In addition to having adapted tools/questionnaires depending on the stakeholder/group including sub-groups, be clear on the degree of adaption/ 'off script' allowed to ensure cohesion and sound analysis of results. Some familiarity with the sector/ topic focus of the project is helpful to not only shape the questions but frame the PA. This may require an external input/ a short learning session may be necessary. Otherwise, basic safety and security protocols should also be clear. For more you can also visit SDC <http://www.sdc-learningandnetworking.ch/>