GLOBAL STUDY ON THE PARTICIPATION OF AFFECTED POPULATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Groupe URD Interim Report

(June 2002 - September 2002)

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INTRODUCTION

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This report present summaries of the Global Study activities and studies to date and related findings. These include the first four case studies (Sri Lanka, Colombia, Afghanistan and eastern DRC) and an initial review of anglophone literature.

The role of the “population in need” in its own survival is one of the most difficult and challenging facing the humanitarian world. Often referred to (in particular in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief), the participation of beneficiaries in humanitarian action remains elusive and most of the time extremely limited. Among the reasons for this:

- If the concept of “consultation” seems apparently to be relatively simple, “participation” carries several key development-related imperatives related to transformation and empowerment. The application of these concepts to humanitarian action is far from easy, and may be impossible or even potentially dangerous for humanitarian actors and principles.

- If the literature on participation is well established in the “development world”, only a few references exist in terms of recorded experiences, guidelines, and training modules in the “humanitarian sector”.

Yet several evaluations have highlighted many positive elements resulting from enhanced participation of the affected populations: from more refined analysis and more adapted programming, to more effective implementation and increased accountability of the project cycle management (what about empowerment and capacity building?). The operational perspective (whose?) derives from the hypothesis, so often but not always demonstrated, that the injection of the views, hopes, expressed needs, responsibilities, capacities and strategies of the beneficiaries and affected populations throughout the crisis response management cycle goes a long way to improving humanitarian response.

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) commissioned the Global Study in 2001 to:

- assess current consultation & participation practice in a range of emergency contexts;
- identify examples of good practice;
- identify gaps or inadequacies in current practice and contributing factors;
- improve understanding of participation and consultation practice within the 5 contexts;
- produce and disseminate the findings of 5 context case studies as monographs;
- produce and disseminate a published overview report;
- prepare a provisional Handbook of Good Practice; and,
- identify possible Phase 2 activities for testing and further developing the Handbook.
2. **ACTIVITIES AND STEPS UNDERTAKEN**

To achieve these objectives, URD is undertaking a series of steps:

### 2.1. STEP 1: Literature Review

Pierson Ntata, URD/Global Study Senior Researcher, undertook the initial anglophone literature review. Among the many very interesting points arising the following deserve to be underlined:

- it is not easy to define ‘consultation and participation”, given the many different cultural, political and operational connotations;
- one of the overarching conclusion is that consultation is probably a form, stage or level of participation but it doesn’t equate with participation;
- it is equally difficult to state ‘who should participate” : each and every individual ? community based organisations ? local elites, local NGO ? The politics of ‘participation’ is a complex issue;
- if there is acceptance that ‘consultation and participation”are theoretically ‘good things”, there are different views as to why;
- are there cases or situations where consultation or participation would be either impossible or detrimental to the survival or security of the affected populations?
- a lot of question marks on how to ‘do” participation and consultation in a meaningful manner can be identified, many of them originating from the ‘emergency to development” debate.

The hispanic and francophone literature reviews are currently ongoing.

### 2.2 STEP 2 : Case Studies

The case studies were launched with the Sri Lanka pilot followed by Colombia, Afghanistan, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, with Angola currently underway. The following table presents the diversity of characteristic now covered by the Global Study:

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<th>CASE STUDIES</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHY</th>
<th>POLITICAL</th>
<th>RELIGION</th>
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<th>1ST CRISIS</th>
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<tr>
<td>SRI LANKA</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Strong challenged state entering peace negotiation</td>
<td>Hindus Buddhists Islam</td>
<td>Tamul Singalese</td>
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<tr>
<td>COLOMBIA</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>Strong challenged state</td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>Afro-colombian Indios, Mestizos</td>
<td>Internal conflict</td>
<td>Drug war</td>
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<td>AFGHANISTAN</td>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>Weak state in post-Taliban/post war era</td>
<td>Islam Shites, Sunnis and Ismaelis</td>
<td>Pashtun; Tajik Hazara; Uzbek Tatar</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Complex post-crisis period following a protracted conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Africa, Great Lakes</td>
<td>Strong state with ineffective control over the study area</td>
<td>Christians Animists</td>
<td>Batwa; Bahunde; Bashi Bahutu; Banyamulengue</td>
<td>Internal Externalised conflict or reverse</td>
<td>Volcanic eruption Floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANGOLA</td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Strong state failing to meet its social responsibility in a post-conflict era</td>
<td>Christians Animists</td>
<td>Mestizos Ubungu</td>
<td>Internal Conflict</td>
<td>Famine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 allows for two levels of crisis since in several of the studies it was possible to study if the conjunction of two crises and whether the resulting complexity affected participatory practices, where these existed.

The final case study – the second of the two sudden-onset natural disasters – has yet to be identified. URD is establishing a roster of possible team leaders and secondees to be able to cover the next large scale sudden-onset natural disaster.

Two URD workshops enabled case study team members to meet with the Global Study Steering Group following the Sri Lanka pilot, a synergetic system to allowed feedback and exchange between the different study teams and guidance from the Steering Group.

2.3 Next Steps
The completion of the field work (Angola and the second sudden-onset disaster) is expected to take place in the coming months. The Country Monographs on each of the case studies are currently being drafted and will be published as they are completed.

At the same time, exploratory work for the preparation of the Practioner Handbook is being done. The Handbook will be finalised in early spring for presentation at the April 2003
SRI LANKA
CASE STUDY
1. CONTEXT

This case study focuses on humanitarian action in the context of a long-term, intra-state conflict.

The conflict has its origins in the colonial policies of the 1930s. Following Independence in 1948, the state has been dominated by the majority Sinhalese population and has introduced discriminatory measures limiting Tamil political representation, education and access to land. For their part, the Tamils have consistently sought a share in power. The failure of successive Sinhalese-dominated governments to resolve their political differences with the Tamils has led to a marked deterioration in relations between the two populations. With time, the demands of the Tamil community have become more fundamental and the means of achieving these demands, more violent. The claim was for a separate state, Tamil Elam, in the north and east of the island.

The ethnic violence has been at its most extreme in the last two decades. The 1983 communal riots against the Tamils led to full insurgent warfare. Several militant Tamil groups emerged in the North and East in opposition to the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and there followed a process of continuous repression and unrest with three major periods of mass violence, known as the Elam Wars. India was heavily involved in brokering a settlement to the first of these conflicts, instigating the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) acted as mediators, arriving in the country the first time in 1987. Followed an alternation between quiet periods and resumption of war (Elam War 1, 2 and 3).

The armed confrontation between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka may have been intermittent, but it has lasted for almost twenty years, cost an estimated 60-100,000 lives, and caused the multiple displacement (prior to the Cease-fire) of around 800,000 people. The economic costs of maintaining the armed forces as well as bolstering systems of public security has been extremely high. This, in turn, has caused a further drain upon resources needed for the provision of basic government services and for the development of the economy and the country’s infrastructure.

Throughout the conflict, Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim ethnic and religious identities have been manipulated by various leaders for political ends. Yet, contrary to popular stereotype, the conflict has not produced a clear and straightforward division between groups. For one thing, the Muslim community has also been profoundly affected, although normally this is little acknowledged. The conflict in the North and in the South showed that both the Sinhalese and the Tamils are seriously divided. Thus, stark distinctions based on ethnicity often mask internal political divisions and caste/class differences that are extremely powerful and have the potential to seriously undermine the participatory efforts of the humanitarian community.

The present cease fire (December 2001), the signing of the Cease-fire Agreement on the 23rd February 2002 and pending talks between the government and the opponent forces have brought about major changes in the lives of civilians and in the operational environment for humanitarian actors. Nevertheless, at the time of field research Sri Lanka could by no means be described as ‘post-conflict’.

A number of international humanitarian agencies have been present in Sri Lanka since the onset of fighting and many of the local and national organisations that were engaged in development activities prior to the conflict subsequently became involved in humanitarian aid. The diversity of humanitarian programme types and approaches is great and this was reflected in the interventions reviewed by the research team. While some of the projects investigated can be clearly defined as emergency relief, others focused more on reconstruction, rehabilitation, or development in support of resettled populations and others exposed to protracted political conflict.

2. METHODOLOGY

This short paper is a summary of a comprehensive report prepared by the Sri Lankan Team based on nine weeks of fieldwork between February and April 2002. The research drew primarily on qualitative data derived from primary stakeholder (beneficiary) and secondary stakeholder (agency)
perceptions and to a far lesser extent from secondary sources. The literature on Sri Lanka, the conflict and responses to it, was consulted and a range of project documents reviewed. Interviews were conducted in Colombo with representatives of humanitarian agencies and with key academics and consultant practitioners in humanitarian action. The field research was carried out in three locations. General meetings with agency personnel were held in two of these locations and individual interviews were conducted with agency staff in all three. Some or all of the team met and held interviews and focus group discussions with representatives from a broad range of villages and camps in war-affected areas. Care was taken to ensure that men, women, children and members of different social and economic groups were included in the research. Where views differed, this is indicated in the body of the report.

Group-based research methods were employed during the research. These were complemented by unstructured and semi-structured interviews, which were employed with individual respondents and by observation. One-to-one interviews provided an opportunity for discussion of issues that were too sensitive or complex to be raised in a public forum.

 Civilians in all five categories were included as respondents in the study.

1) those in their original homes and communities who were never displaced;
2) those who are displaced and living in camps (IDP and returnees from camps in India);
3) those who are displaced and self-settled with friends and/or relatives;
4) those who have returned to their original communities (resettlement villages);
5) those in ‘relocation villages’, who have left camps and have been relocated to new settlements.

Three sites were selected for inclusion in the study: Batticaloa in the East of Sri Lanka, and Jaffna and Vavunia/Mannar in the North. They were chosen because they have been exposed to major outbreaks of violence, represent a broad range of military, political and socio-economic contexts and have long been centres of humanitarian action. Choice of these sites enabled inclusion in the research of areas that are controlled by the government (‘cleared areas’), areas controlled by the LTTE (‘uncleared’ areas) and ‘grey areas’ controlled by government by day and the LTTE at night. The majority of the population in these regions is Tamil, although there are significant Muslim populations in some areas of Batticaloa and a small number of Sinhalese in Vavunia and Mannar in particular.

Draconian security procedures have acted as a major constraint to humanitarian aid and thereby to beneficiary participation also. Prior to the cease-fire most areas in the North and East were subject to curfew and access to civilians had to be negotiated through the government, the Sri Lanka Army and in some places the LTTE. Obtaining security clearance for an area, either from government / the armed forces or—for UN staff—from the UN security officers, meant that visits had to be planned well in advance. Permission would often entail time consuming and expensive negotiation, undermining the ability of agencies to respond swiftly to crises. This of course seriously hindered the work of the Global Study Team.

3. FINDINGS

In a conflict that has lasted for nearly two decades, centralised, ‘top-down’, measures have long been the norm and indeed remain fairly entrenched in some quarters even today. Agencies have grown used to making decisions on behalf of clients and consulting them very little. If power and decision-making are seen to remain with humanitarian actors, there may be no perceived value in participating in a process that is essentially pre-determined by agencies. The divide between aid recipients and the humanitarian community can be so great that some NGOs in Sri Lanka allegedly pay people to attend training sessions and meetings (to boost coverage and impress donors). If aid beneficiaries are indeed being paid to take part in projects, any resistance to making voluntary contributions is hardly surprising.

The degrees and forms of beneficiary participation vary considerably according not just to environmental opportunities and constraints but also to the objectives and underlying theoretical perspectives of humanitarian agencies. Such variations can be observed in the different stages and activities of the project cycle.
Most of the agencies in Sri Lanka have adopted an *instrumental* view of participation that favours consulting beneficiaries (especially during baseline assessment) about their views, problems and needs, informing them and building in them the commitment and competencies necessary for active engagement in project implementation. Because project design and approval does not involve beneficiaries directly, however, most find it difficult to offer aid recipients a meaningful role in planning. This sets a precedent for engagement with beneficiaries which is not very conducive to sustaining high levels of participation throughout later stages of the project cycle.

Examples of more *transformative* approaches in which beneficiaries are empowered to represent themselves before the authorities, engage in autonomous collective action on community and other issues and assume control of project resources are comparatively rare. However, some projects embody certain elements of this kind of approach and some organisations are moving gradually in this direction as confidence in the cease-fire grows, more developmental approaches are being employed and civilians begin to return to their communities.

Opportunities to engage with aid recipients depend on environmental constraints, organisational capacity and other factors. The timing, intensity and scale of civilian needs during humanitarian crises are significant obstacles to participation in many cases. High levels of consultation and participation, which tend to lengthen project planning and implementation processes considerably, are not seen by most organisations in Sri Lanka as a truly viable option during an acute emergency. The ability to apply participatory approaches in the country has been greatly impeded by the particular nature of the humanitarian crisis, although the kinds of obstacles that arise in Sri Lanka occur in many other emergencies of political origin.

Political actors play a direct role in humanitarian provision in Sri Lanka. This has highly detrimental outcomes in terms of civilian participation since it is widely recognised that *official measures that are couched in terms of humanitarian assistance and civilian protection are often, in practice, the means to serve political or security interests*.

The traditional top-down mode of delivery of humanitarian support embodies certain social and cultural assumptions which match very well with the prescriptive and hierarchical culture of the island. Ideas about participation are perceived by many as counter-cultural. Relations between people in different social groups and categories tend to be both prescriptive and hierarchical and very few civilians are accustomed to the exercise of choice, or involvement in decision-making. Even the notion of being consulted is foreign. In addition, in the Hinduist areas like Jaffna caste distinctions impose major limitations on co-operation between civilians in different status categories. This makes collective participation nearly impossible. Caste-based conflict over access to both economic opportunity and resources is in certain areas more the rule than the exception.

One major finding of the research is that *support for participatory approaches is far higher in rehabilitation and development programmes mounted in resettlement and relocation villages than in relief initiatives established in camps*. Many agencies find it hard to understand why camp residents can be so reluctant to take part in participatory initiatives since the benefits, in terms of improved health, sanitation and the like, would seem to be self-evident. Interviewed agency staff put this reluctance down to what they perceive as the prevailing ‘relief mentality’ among camp dwellers. This, they suggest, is characterised by high levels of dependency on free handouts. However, arguments that draw on notions of a relief mentality or backwardness fail to take many important issues into account. Caution among camp dwellers about involvement in participatory programmes may derive from an extreme unwillingness to invest in temporary facilities and resources, while their objective is to quit the camp and resettle as soon as conditions so permit.

The project cycle and its different phases provided a useful frame for the analysis of participation of the affected population in aid programmes in Sri Lanka:

Assessment of the circumstances and needs of crisis-affected populations is generally the first point of contact between potential or actual aid recipients and humanitarian actors. As such, it is a fundamental initial stage in the project during which mutual knowledge and confidence
between agencies and beneficiaries is built. Despite wide acceptance of the PRA methodology in Sri Lanka, it seems that this method is often used in a rather mechanical manner and it is not evident that its interpretation and application really are participatory. The methodology is sometimes employed merely as a means of obtaining access to a community or to attain a specific set of data. Even if PRA strategies are carried out in a non-extractive way, there is little evidence to suggest that they are used as a mechanism for sharing power and decision-making. Ultimately, it could be argued that because baseline assessments tend to follow on from, rather than being a precursor to, project design the use of participatory methods is almost irrelevant, since it is solely to ‘rubber stamp’ decisions already taken in Colombo. Consequently, some humanitarian actors are rather cynical about the application of PRA methodology in Sri Lanka.

However, for most of the humanitarian actors in Sri Lanka there is a vital prior stage in the project cycle—programme and/or project design and approval—and beneficiaries are seldom, if ever, involved in these tasks. Normally one would hope that aid recipients could influence project design. In many cases, however, an agency's entire programme within a particular sector, and hence each of the constituent projects, is devised according to a standardised format before consultation with beneficiaries. Indeed, most humanitarian measures follow a ‘blue print’ model, in which the sector, services, operational objectives and strategies, outputs, project area, and size and make up of the target population are all defined before clients become involved.

It is evident that ‘blueprint’ projects are not very effective in terms of fostering high levels of participation throughout the project cycle. It is also apparent that greater flexibility and openness to beneficiary involvement in the earlier stage of the cycle and in project appraisal would make a difference in this regard. But, given the political and other constraints, it is not clear that this kind of innovation is possible in many cases in the Sri Lankan context. Also, based on the reflections of a significant proportion of respondents, such innovation is not always sought by aid recipients.

In a rapid onset or large-scale humanitarian emergency the identification and selection of beneficiaries is likely to be determined largely by access and urgency of need. In Sri Lanka, where the crisis is long term and the fighting shifts in location and intensity, this decision is shaped by a diversity of actors and forces over which crisis-affected populations have no influence. Indeed, sometimes beneficiaries are not even informed about the criteria for their selection and many of those we interviewed were critical of this tendency. These criteria are normally pre-determined by agencies (often with government) as a matter of both policy and mandate. The fact that aid-recipients are excluded from the selection process in humanitarian interventions has several implications for their participation during subsequent stages of a project:

- The pre-determination of criteria limits flexibility, and more importantly the capacity to respond to the specific circumstances and expectations of recipients. This may convey to beneficiaries the message that agencies do not consider their priorities and concerns important,
- Agencies' definitions of vulnerability may be at variance with those generated locally,
- Agencies may not be aware of subtle social and economic distinctions within a community and thereby inadvertently favour groups that are already privileged in some way. This was a concern of several respondents,
- When selection criteria focus on specific social categories agency staff need to be extremely wary of stigmatisation as an unintended outcome.

Involvement in project execution may take several forms: the provision of unskilled labour in the construction of structures and amenities; the management and administration of CBOs; the contribution of funds; and engagement as change agents in social mobilisation and other activities. The more instrumental models tend to emphasise manual labour and input into administration and maintenance of facilities, whereas transformative models are more open to beneficiary input into management and control of resources. That said, overall levels of client participation in the implementation of humanitarian initiatives in Sri Lanka are quite low and many opportunities to increase participation are missed, whether through lack of agency will, capacity, or expertise.

In general, beneficiaries often assume a less significant, or no, role in decision-making during implementation and, with the exception of some micro-finance projects, are seldom given full control of funds. Reluctance on the part of agencies to hand over project funds to clients may be due to a
concern that attempts to foster client self-reliance may be thwarted by the very volatile environment in which they operate.

In projects that include a monitoring component, these exercises tend to be rather informal, often involving animators or field officers meeting with beneficiaries on a fairly regular basis and listening to reports of events and activities, checking accounts and other documents. Reporting to agencies is frequently verbal. Mid-term reviews and end-of-project evaluations tend to be more elaborate, with a day or so of meetings with beneficiaries. Even though the team came across a few positive examples, the tradition of participatory monitoring and evaluation is not well established within humanitarian practice in Sri Lanka. Several aid agencies attributed this to the fact that until recently their local partner organisations were focused solely on the distribution of relief items and actively resisted attempts to introduce monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. For their part, some of the local NGOs complained that the international agencies normally undertake evaluations internally and do not share the outcomes.

Despite the many limitations, there is evidence that aid-recipients can benefit by being better informed and consulted and by assuming meaningful roles in project implementation. Overall, targeted projects with women on the one hand and with children and youth on the other have been more ‘successful’ in terms of fostering beneficiary participation than more generic projects affecting whole population groups or projects with men. Of all groups, children and young people who have been involved in psychosocial programmes report the most radical effects. This may be because humanitarian measures normally take place in communities whilst men are at work elsewhere, or it could be due to high rates of alcohol use among men in the north and east.

4. CONCLUSION

Levels of beneficiary consultation and participation in humanitarian aid have in the past often been very low or non-existent and such ideas and practices are not very developed in many of the more hierarchical and prescriptive cultures of the world. This implies that humanitarian actors that are committed to the approach must develop explicit means for promoting participation. That said, implementing participatory approaches in areas affected by protracted political conflict is by no means a straightforward task. Further, there remains wide variation in working definitions and understandings of the concept of participation among agency staff and major differences also in its practical application. Ideas about what participation actually entails are often quite imprecise. While most agencies agree that ‘consultation and participation of beneficiaries are key’ and ‘there can always be more consultation” it is not always evident what this amounts to in practice. Within some agencies there is disagreement about the value of and mechanisms for participation. This applies even in the more prominent agencies that have a clear institutional commitment to the approach. Indeed, it is clear that some actors regard the notion as quite problematic.

With the changing context and the trend to shift from relief to more rehabilitation programmes, humanitarian agencies are heavily reliant on locally recruited change agents to mobilise village and camp inhabitants to take an active part in project implementation. The orientation and training of these animators is of critical importance to project outcome, as is the support they are given. Many agencies regard the recruitment of animators and mobilisation of beneficiaries as a first step in creating a more formal institutional structure (commonly a CBO) within which collective social action can be promoted and directed. These structures vary in the extent to which they become truly self-governing, autonomous entities and often in practice remain very dependent on the implementing agency. Management of CBO funds by implementing agencies poses very real limits to beneficiary empowerment and self-efficacy.

With the increased reliance on partnerships with local and national organisations, the lengthening of funding cycles and development of more open and flexible relations between donors and implementing agencies there have been some very promising trends in institutional relations in recent years. To this we should add efforts in some quarters to create less authoritarian management structures and styles and improve aid co-ordination. Certain donors have played an important role in this respect, encouraging implementing partners to avoid duplication and collaborate with each other.
whenever possible. These developments have considerable potential to further promote beneficiary participation.

An important challenge associated with beneficiary participation in project execution is to develop levels of engagement that go beyond mere information sharing, consultation, or the provision of manual labour. Meaningful participation is about listening to and supporting civilian populations, building capacity and helping them to assume control of their lives, insofar as this is possible in an area affected by conflict. In other words, participation cannot really be reduced to implementing more effective projects and requires some commitment to a more transformative approach.

Nevertheless, there remain serious problems in some sections of the aid community in terms of political intervention in humanitarian action, high turnover in staff, inflexible and short funding cycles, competition over beneficiary populations and conflicting aims and strategies. In many cases, humanitarian actors are party to major decisions and policies that have a crucial impact on the lives of beneficiaries and yet make no effort to consult or keep affected populations informed. Such trends have the capacity to undermine agency-beneficiary relations.
COLOMBIA
CASE STUDY
1. CONTEXT

The decision to add the Colombia case study was taken following discussion between Groupe URD and the Global Study Steering Group. Although Latin America had originally been earmarked as a desirable regional focus for one of the sudden onset case studies, it was agreed that to ensure the Study’s regional diversity, Colombia should be added as a fifth complex emergency providing a conflict situation in Latin America.

1.1. Colombia, a country of contrasts:

A complex and diverse topography:

Colombia is composed of three geographical zones: the coast, the plateaus and plains, and the Andes. Three basins form the main of the Colombian hydrographical network: the Pacific side, the valleys of the three cordilleras (the Atrato, the Magdalena rivers), and the Eastern plains (the Caqueta, Amazon, and Orinoco rivers). Access to certain zones is sometimes very limited because of the complexity of the topography.

A multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population:

The development of colonies and the mass arrival of African slaves are the foundations of the actual composition of the Colombian population: Afro-Colombian, “criollos” (Colombians of some European descent), Indians. Presently, ethnic minorities are protected by laws that give them, at least in theory, access to land and guarantee the respect of their ethnic identity.

1.2. The humanitarian crisis in Colombia:

The direct impact of the political crisis that the country has been undergoing for nearly 50 years is a civilian population hostage to the conflict, caught in the cross-fire between the different warring factions: guerrilla movements, paramilitary and Colombian Armed Forces. The various parties are fighting throughout the national territory, according to a scattered configuration, with no clear pattern; pockets of conflict are dispersed and unpredictable. The factions attempt to take control of territorial zones for several reasons (weight in negotiations, control of illicit productions, control of geo-strategic zones, of access roads and strategic corridors) and, to this end, they seek to control the populations of the concerned territories in various ways.

These characteristics of the conflict cause a series of direct impacts on the populations:

- intimidations, threats, sequestration, homicides, massacres of civilian populations; and,
- individual or collective displacements (estimates range from 1 500 000 to 2 700 000 displaced persons);

This also entails:

- destabilisation of host areas (villages or large towns);
- difficulties on return when the place of origin has been abandoned for several months; and,
- “blo” areas.

1.3. The humanitarian interventions and actors:

The Colombian government is the main humanitarian actor in the country, and it takes on part of the concomitant responsibilities. The texts that govern emergency assistance, the rights of displaced persons, and the role of the various ministries, are among the most elaborate in the world. The main government actor for humanitarian aid is the Red de Solidaridad Social (RSS – Social Solidarity Network). It is responsible for humanitarian assistance, which is defined specifically as emergency relief during the first 3 months of a displacement. A system of close collaboration exists with the ICRC, which intervenes when the RSS does not have access to certain areas.

Civil society is extremely well organised and many Colombian NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are active in responding to the crisis. The “international aid community” (United Nations agencies and INGOs) come to complement these actors, which represents an atypical situation with regard to the majority of crisis contexts.

The action of these various actors focuses in particular on:
• **protection** issues (ICRC), and international presence for the monitoring of human rights or IHL (International Humanitarian Law), protection of populations, etc.;
• **emergency humanitarian aid**, following forced displacements (food aid, sanitary items, settlement kits, etc.);
• **mid-term assistance** when return is not possible (micro-projects, agricultural rehabilitation); and,
• **return assistance** when the situation allows it.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. A study carried out in several steps:

A *preparatory mission* was carried out from the 14th to 28th June 2002, to prepare for the research (select sites, set-up a local team) and to present the study to key institutions. The *study itself* was carried out from mid-July to 10th September 2002 in three specific zones where data was collected through semi-structured interviews using a questionnaire developed with the team in the field and direct observations on various types of programmes. A preliminary analysis of the data was undertaken and a one-day *feedback workshop* organised in Bogota, on 10th September, during which around 20 participants discussed the initial results.

The first draft of the Colombia monograph will be sent to the field actors for validation, before being shared with the Global Study Steering Group for feedback.

#### 2.2. Diverse study areas and informants:

The sampling of the study areas was done using a combination of three criteria: characteristics of the zones, nature of the crisis, and intensity and modalities of humanitarian interventions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zones</th>
<th>Magdalena Medio</th>
<th>Choco- Medio Atrato</th>
<th>Soacha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage of the crisis and impact</strong></td>
<td>Protracted crisis, Previous collective and individual displacements, from rural to semi-urban areas</td>
<td>Emergency (case of Bojaya). Massive displacements: rural to rural and rural to semi-urban.</td>
<td>Forgotten and hidden crisis, drop-by-drop arrival of displaced persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social / cultural / ethnic context</strong></td>
<td>Oil-rich zone Strong trade union experience and rural population of peasants and fishermen</td>
<td>Afro-Colombian and Indian communities Small-scale agriculture and fishing</td>
<td>Megalopolis Uprooted people Bogota's suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of aid actors</strong></td>
<td>Present in large numbers (international and national)</td>
<td>Present in the regional capital (Quibdo)</td>
<td>All present (headquarters and main offices) in Bogota but few are really active in Soacha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large range of populations (IDP, host populations, CBOs) and aid actors (national, international) were interviewed, covering all facets of assistance and programmes currently run in Colombia.

The study team was multicultural, gender-balanced and multi-disciplinary. It was composed of aid practitioners experienced in programme evaluation and social science specialists.

### 3. OBSERVATIONS

Humanitarian actors and affected populations, the government and NGOs all speak about participation. The **definition of participation often has political connotations** because of its strong legal foundations in Colombia. The Colombian constitution of 1991, as well as the Law 70 (concerning Afro-Colombian communities) and the Law 387 (for persons displaced by violence), establish the necessity to take the “citizen” into consideration and make him “participate” in actions which concern him. All agree on the importance of having “participatory” approaches, but the discourse on participation can take several forms and be put into practice through a broad range of
approaches from round tables to workshops, from illegal occupation of offices to co-execution. The term “participation” is perceived differently by each actor.

In the Latin American context, and Colombia in particular, the history of social dynamics has made participation a key issue, both at the political and operational level. Nothing, or next to nothing, can be achieved without “participation” and where participation does not take place, it indicates severe external constraints such as leaders under threat or a limitation of the right to gather by armed forces.

3.1. What does it mean to participate? Definitions and perceptions of participation:

In humanitarian action, the meaning of participation varies according to individual perspectives. For host populations, participation is the capacity to welcome displaced persons, listen to them and help them, while for beneficiaries, it entails being accompanied and listened to, and being able to organise themselves to find solutions. For Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and local NGOs, the important issue is the consultation process concerning the “who, what and how” of aid delivery, as well as their involvement in the implementation of programmes. Aid actors see participation as a concrete mode of listening – to better interpret people’s needs or hear their recommendations in respect of the provision of technical support, education, or even co-implementation of activities and power sharing.

3.2. Why participate?

Reasons for wanting to participate or for making people participate in humanitarian action also vary according to individual perspectives. Participation can be seen as an “instrumental” process that serves a programme’s purpose or as a key to citizenship, the respect of a right, or an ideologico-political process.

The following table summarises the different objectives of participation, broken down according to “affected populations” and “aid actors”:

**Table 2: Reasons for participation, according to affected populations and aid actors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affected population (CBOs)</th>
<th>Aid actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatic reasons:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pragmatic reasons:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarantee the quality of aid (after bad experiences)</td>
<td>Cost/time (+/-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take into consideration particular requests, concerning gender or childhood, for example.</td>
<td>Information / Communication / Improved needs assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simply because the project is born from the grassroots.</td>
<td>Access / Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political reasons:</strong></td>
<td>Sustainability / Continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To negotiate with the State, to make the State react</td>
<td>Ideological/political reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical reasons:</strong></td>
<td>Organisation / Impact in the political life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CBO’s charter stipulates that it should have a participatory approach</td>
<td>Civic participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection reasons:</strong></td>
<td>Improved social integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To establish contacts with external organisations</td>
<td>Capacity-building, empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have more weight in relationships with the parties to the conflict.</td>
<td>Ethical reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect of mandate / impartiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect of dignity and freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing of responsibilities on dangerous choices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Participate, how? Participation in practice:

In the particular context of Colombia, participation in humanitarian aid is put into practice through meetings and dialogue in its broadest sense, rather than through specific techniques. The approach is
intuitive and rather informal, but extremely dynamic. Among the range of tools mentioned during interviews it would appear that few tools from the development sector are used, besides informal processes.

The following table presents the modes of participation of affected populations and beneficiaries in humanitarian action that were observed in relation to the different stages of the project cycle.

**Table 3: Modes of participation throughout the project cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs assessment</td>
<td>Delegated to pre-existing CBOs</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accept a pre-established list</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organise surveys to define needs</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of traditional mechanisms (“cabildos abiertos”¹)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting</td>
<td>Accept a pre-established list</td>
<td>information meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide information on the list of beneficiaries</td>
<td>questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish a list together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Accept the project as it is proposed by the CBO</td>
<td>Forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiate the design based on specific requests</td>
<td>Contract + FFW or other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bring the beneficiaries together to establish the design</td>
<td>Frequent visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Propose/ provide information on the project</td>
<td>Technical visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Co-execution with or without direct compensation</td>
<td>Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Execution of activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuous support and follow-up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financing and complete delegation of implementation</td>
<td>Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Delegation of the quality and quantity control</td>
<td>Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Activity evaluation such as through satisfaction surveys</td>
<td>Committees, round tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Inter-agency coordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>Training for participation</td>
<td>Training, workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion of organisations</td>
<td>Creation of displaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>organisations and CBOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financing of participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

4.1. **The key factors of participation**:

Three key factors determine the possibility and level of participation in humanitarian action:

- the **context** of the crisis, notably the level of violence, the strategies of armed parties, the intensity of threats to individuals and institutions;
- the **population**, with its own culture, level of organisation, its experience of collective action, the structures it has put in place;
- **aid actors**, their strategies, their knowledge of the environment and the level of donor pressure they are subject to.

One of the determining factors is the population, because the weaker it is (not very organised, without a “life project” – vision for the future – having lost everything), the more it becomes an “object” and not a “subject” of aid. If the affected population’s structure, level of organisation and training is sufficiently strong, it can “inverses” the direction of participation and “invites” the aid actors to participate. In a few cases, the population has even refused programmes or projects that are proposed by actors, when these projects are considered not adapted.

The table below details the different factors influencing participation:

¹ Traditional assemblies in indigenous communities
Table 4: Factors affecting the possibility and level of participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The context</th>
<th>The population</th>
<th>The aid actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Access to victims</td>
<td>• The level of organisation (before → during the crisis)</td>
<td>• The principles for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The security of leaders</td>
<td>• The history of the population and group</td>
<td>• The capacity of the actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The availability and possibility of holding meetings, the space for</td>
<td>• The culture of the population</td>
<td>• The flexibility of the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td>• The socio-economic structure</td>
<td>• The field of expertise of the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The impact of the crisis</td>
<td>• The experience and training of leaders</td>
<td>• The resources available for the programme and their source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The stage of the crisis and prolongation of the emergency</td>
<td>• The type of reaction to the crisis</td>
<td>• Knowledge of the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The juxtaposition/excess of projects and actors</td>
<td>• The reaction of the host population</td>
<td>• The internal organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The political will (or absence of)</td>
<td>• Self-victimisation → aid-dependency</td>
<td>• The type of programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The possibilities to have a real impact on the situation</td>
<td>• the actual capacity to participate (money, time, knowledge)</td>
<td>• The time and rhythm of the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The cost-benefit relationship</td>
<td>• Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When the future is unclear, the life project (or absence of)</td>
<td>• The will and possibility for inter-agency coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was lost during the crisis, the previous situation</td>
<td>• Identification of local experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Previous bad experiences with aid, unfulfilled promises</td>
<td>• The quality of programmes technical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The fear of stigmatisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. A few questions to be further developed:

Participation seems to always be a negotiating game between two parties: those who offer and those who request assistance. The greater the equilibrium in the balance of power, the more participation is facilitated. But where does one place individual freedom in participatory programmes which are almost always collective? The level of participation in an emergency situation will depend on the population’s level of organisation, as it is often from there that the first assistance will arrive, through community support and solidarity.

What roles should be given to grassroots institutions? Are programmes for the institutional development of CBOs in stable periods investments that will bear their fruit during crises, even if the latter weaken them? What should be done about the threats and dangers, which the leaders may face?

Must an INGO work directly with leaders and organised structures or, on the contrary, must it have a direct approach with the community? Are CBOs truly representative of the population?

The « economy » of participation obviously poses a number of questions: must one support CBOs financially? Should the leaders be paid? Should they work as volunteers? A number of issues must also be delved into: what is the best group size for participatory approaches? Is size important? Can a CBO have effective participation with 12,000 members?

How far does the will to foster participatory approaches come from the necessity of a project or the imposition of a ‘collectivist dream’ by the actor itself?
AFGHANISTAN
CASE STUDY
1. INTRODUCTION

With a five-week Quality Project (QP) mission to Afghanistan already planned by URD prior to its appointment to the Global Study— a mission with ‘participation’ as one of its research items—the Global Study Steering Group agreed to a piggybacking arrangement whereby one extra person would be added to the 4-member QP specialist team. This would allow enhanced coverage of ‘participation’ issues in Afghanistan in general and a specific focus on the earthquake-affected area of Nahrin, as the first of the two Global Study sudden-onset case studies.

The Nahrin case study provided the opportunity to explore consultation and participation practices in the context of a sudden onset/natural disaster occurring within a complex, post-crisis situation following a protracted conflict. The hypotheses and questions behind this choice were:

- do aid agencies and the affected population develop a certain modus operandi based on participatory mechanisms in the context of dangerous protracted and often forgotten crises?
- the sudden changes in this type of context accompanying the transition from war to peace bring many new agencies with on the one hand new approaches and on the other hand little knowledge of, and few networks in, Afghanistan;
- is there a coherence in practices when aid agencies have to mobilise themselves when a sudden-onset disaster occurs in this type of context?

2. CONTEXT

On an evening of March 2002, the earth started to shake in the Nahrin district of Baghlan province, bringing houses to the ground, killing hundreds, wounding thousands. Two days later, a second earthquake hit the area. After 20 years of war, 4 years of drought, and the recent departure of the Taliban leaving a trail of mines behind them, the people of Nahrin had had their share of difficulties. The international aid community, already mobilised throughout Afghanistan, responded quickly with mobile clinics being set up the morning after and food and tent distributions starting within a couple of days. Government officials, United Nations agencies, local and international NGOs were all present for the two weeks that followed the disaster. 5 months later, however, at the time of the Global Study mission, only a handful of aid actors were left. The combination of these factors made the Nahrin earthquake an interesting case study to include in the Global Study.

1.1. The political situation

Afghanistan has been under the grip of war since 1979: from the invasion by the Soviet Union, to the civil war between the Mujahiddin in the early 1990s and the takeover of the Taliban, supported by Pakistan. The rural areas of provinces north-east of the Salang Pass have long been strongholds of the Mujahiddin groups from which they maintained a high level of insecurity in the main regional towns such as Taloqan (north of Nahrin) or Pul-e-Kumri (west of Nahrin). From their appearance in Kandahar in 1994 until 2001, when they controlled 90% of the country with a mere 10% under the control of Commander Masoud in the Panjshir, the Taliban enforced a regime of religious and political repression.

The Nahrin area remained under Masoud's control until a strong Taliban offensive in late 2000. Its position between the Salang Pass, the road to Mazar and the access roads to remote provinces in the North-East transformed this quiet countryside into a strategic target. During the American military intervention in Afghanistan following the events of September 11th 2001, the fighting in the region was quite intense, as shown by the number of destroyed tanks and armoured vehicles. Nahrin finally fell into the hands of the Northern Alliance weeks before the fall of the regime in November 2001.

Since then, the international community has mobilised considerable resources for the country, and set out to establish a new government. An interim government was formed until the Lloya Jirga (‘grand assembly’) in June 2002, when a transition government was put in place under the presidency of Hamid Karzai. The presence of the international community (bi and multi-lateral donors, UN, NGOs, International Security Assistance Force, Coalition Forces, etc.) has greatly increased in Kabul, with an aim to bringing political stability to the country, building government capacity and responding to ongoing emergency needs. In remote rural areas such as Nahrin, however, the increase of international
presence was at best marginal, at least until the earthquakes. The New Kabul government has very little control in the provinces and a limited presence in areas such as Nahrin.

1.2. The humanitarian situation
Over 20 years of war have led to mass destruction of villages, cities, and infrastructure (roads, industry, irrigation networks, etc.), population displacements, and widespread mining, leaving the country in a chronic state of extreme poverty. A sizeable proportion of the Nahrin population migrated to the refugee camps in Pakistan. People started to come back in the early 90s. Much of the country was hit by 3 to 4 years of drought between 1998 and 2002, leading to further destitution and more population displacements. Though the drought had a less drastic impact in the Northeast than in other parts of the country, it has led many families to sell part of or all their assets (livestock and/or land) and become greatly indebted, compromising their food security for years to come.

In Nahrin, the earthquake led to a massive destruction of homes, hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries. The population now faces the difficulty of rebuilding their homes before the winter and providing for their family. The mines left by the Taliban along access roads going to Taloqan and the Northern part of the country or on cultivable land, has further reduced access to land in certain valleys. The provision of humanitarian aid after the earthquake, though facilitated by the great increase in resources since September 2001, was complicated by the lack of visibility in the political situation, growing insecurity and the logistics difficulties characteristic of the Afghan terrain.

1.3. The social context
The Afghan population is composed of various ethnic groups. In the Baghlan province, one finds Tadjiks, Pashtuns and Uzbeks. Islam is a fundamental aspect of Afghan identity.

The traditional consultative processes inherent to the social organisation in Afghanistan are highly visible in Nahrin area. The unit of organisation varies according to the region, and can be the tribe, clan, the village, or the manteqa (group of villages). Decisions concerning the community are taken through discussion during the shurah (assemblies) where the male community members gather. These processes can be more or less representative of the whole community, depending on the influence and power of local leaders (maleks), who tend to be large landowners or commanders. Political legitimacy is obtained through the capacity to redistribute resources, such that the power structure is dynamic (depending on who has access to resources). Networks play a very strong role in this structure, in particular the gowm (“solidarity networks”), that tend to be based on kinship or geographic origin.

In Nahrin, the rural villages have a strong cohesion around their “white beards” (elders). The situation seems to be different in the urban centre of Nahrin itself due to the higher level of heterogeneity in the social setting, which is the result of the existence of the bazaar and the centre’s status as a “district town”.

3. METHODOLOGY
The particularity of the Nahrin case study is that it explored in depth the issues of sector-related specificities in relation to participation. To shed additional light on the findings of the in-depth Global Study in the Nahrin area, the original ’Quality Project’ team and their Afghan assistant fed back findings and data on consultation and participation from their visits to Kabul, Shamali/Panjsheer, Central Highlands, Mazar, Baghlan, Kandahar.

Methods used:
- interviews with key informants: local and international NGO staff who had been present in Nahrin during the earthquake emergency response (some interviewed in Kabul or Mazar) and/or are presently working there; local inhabitants and aid recipients;
- focus group discussions, formal and informal; organisation of two shuras (in two villages affected by the earthquake);
- participation in meetings between an agency and representatives of the local communities; and
- reading of secondary sources (assessment reports, evaluation of emergency intervention).
A feedback workshop was organised in Kabul, at the end of the mission, presenting firstly the results of the Quality Project and secondly, those of the Global Study. The workshop was attended by staff of local and international NGOs, UN agencies, ICRC, and donors. The present report is an interim report with the full Global Study Monograph due to be produced in the coming month.

4. FINDINGS

In a context of war, repeated population displacement, widespread destitution, insecurity and collapse of the political and societal structures, the Afghan population has been receiving humanitarian aid for 2 decades. The difficulty of access to certain areas and population groups (e.g. women), the security constraints, the lack of funds and short funding timeframes, and the high turnover of agency staff, have not been conducive to long-term involvement and participatory processes. Top-down technical approaches have prevailed and are still common today, especially as many aid agencies present are new in the country and unfamiliar with the social and political characteristics of Afghan societies. This applies both countrywide and in the Nahrin area, a zone very difficult to access for many years with only one agency there for more than a year.

4.1. Definitions and perceptions of participation

Before focusing specifically on Nahrin, it was important to review the existing approaches on consultation and participation prevailing in Afghanistan. Definitions and perceptions vary according to the informant. For some Afghans participation meant work (e.g. through Food for Asset Creation programmes) through which they contributed to the development of their community. For other informants participation was involvement in decision-making processes at various levels: from attendance in meetings to keep oneself informed and participation in discussions, to actual decision-making. One Afghan informant mentioned participation as being the capacity to solve problems, which entails a degree of empowerment.

International agency staff tended to emphasise the consultative aspects of participation in terms of needs assessments, programme design and monitoring; but devolving decision-making to local populations was barely mentioned. In some project documents, the use of local labour (e.g. for the cleaning of latrines in an IDP camp) was referred to as community involvement.

A distinction is to be made between ‘instrumental approaches’, in which participation is used as a means to reach a project’s objectives, and ‘empowerment approaches’, where the aim is to reinforce the community’ capacities to plan, organise, and implement what is seen as good for them. Most examples of participation seen in Afghanistan and all the examples analysed in Nahrin area were ‘instrumental’, serving the purposes of projects pre-designed by aid agencies.

‘Transformative approaches’, in which participation is being used to trigger societal change and empower recipients is extremely rare, and mainly centred on ‘women’s participation’. Only one example of a transformative approach was seen: the Community Forums of Habitat, which were created in 1995 in Mazar, and are now active in the major Afghan cities and Bamyan. Their purpose is to provide a ‘viable matrix for community-led development and self-governance’ (B.J. Rodey, A Socioeconomic Evaluation of the Community Forum Programme, Feb. 2000, UNCHS Habitat). Each Community Forum (CF) is managed by a Consultative Board (CB), made of volunteers that are selected by the community (women are included). The fact that consultative processes are already built in traditional decision-making mechanisms may facilitate the establishment of such an approach. However, some questions are raised as to whether and how the CF may compete with traditional decision-making structures and whether the CB and CF are truly representative of the community in a given area. Nothing of that form was observed in Nahrin, neither inherited from before, or as a result of the post-earthquake international involvement in the area.

4.2. The types of participation

In Afghanistan in general, various forms of very interesting participatory mechanisms have been identified, as shown in Table 1. Nahrin was an interesting site to assess whether accepted or field-tested principles on participation are applied in the case of a rapid onset disaster or not.
In Nahrin, when asked about how the population had participated to the emergency response, most people noted that during the first few hours and days following the earthquake, the energy of individuals and communities was focused on finding people in the rubble and burying the dead. ‘Ninety percent of the people were victims. In some families, all members were wounded. The people are busy with themselves, I don’t know if they can do something’. In only a few of the villages was there any mention of people being sent to other areas to see what the situation was there. This fact is very much in keeping with what is often observed in the first phase following a sudden-onset disaster. Aid agencies based in Mazar, arrived relatively rapidly, mainly with medical assistance (MSF and ICRC), and blankets/non-food items. Government, UN and Kabul-based NGOs were transported rapidly to the scene and a large number of assessment missions visited the area. Dozens of meetings took place with the local authorities, though limited assistance actually arrived. Reconstruction efforts started without necessarily the involvement of participatory initiatives.

Consultation and participation at the design phase:
Consultation of affected populations (whether for needs assessment, targeting, or monitoring) was considered essential by most stakeholders, to ensure programmes were adapted to people’s needs and implemented effectively. From the point-of-view of the local community, it is also a sign of respect. For agencies, examples showed that it is key to establish a good working relationship. In unstable areas, a relationship of trust with the local population was highlighted as a key security issue, yet, it did not appear that consultation had been more than a formal exercise during the first phases of the Nahrin response. Agencies arrived with their pre-set kits and packages. This resulted in a high level of efficiency, since the first convoy arrived just hours after the first earthquake. This became more complex during the transition between relief operations and the first days/weeks of the reconstruction efforts, the two being intricately linked and overlapping. Transfer of earthquake mitigation building techniques was the main aim of agencies implementing shelter reconstruction programmes in Nahrin, yet it is not clear that it was perceived as such by the population, or that this preoccupation was even among their priorities. This had tremendous repercussions in the following phases of the operations. The absence of consultation at this stage is even more obvious when one observes the multiplication of health-related projects that seem to be in the pipeline, most of them the result of an HQ decision, with no dialogue with the affected population and extremely little discussions with local authorities. But Nahrin became for a few months ‘an area in which to fly agency flags’...

The constraints/limits of consultation mentioned by both agency informants and beneficiaries are:
- it takes time and slows down decision-making: it was thereby mentioned as inappropriate for emergency situations, such as in the initial response to the Nahrin earthquake;
- it increases the pressure on agency staff because: consultation leads to the voicing of many requests or complaints and raises the affected population's expectations; it is rare for community members to all agree on their needs, making it impossible for agencies to satisfy everybody; when the views of beneficiaries are not fully taken into consideration (because of agency capacity, mandate, donor requirements, etc.), it can lead to considerable frustration and tension, thereby increasing the risk of security incidents.

Several informants emphasised the need to have experienced and mature staff to be able to cope with the pressures inherent to consultative and participatory processes.

Targeting
Targeting usually involves two stages: the definition of targeting criteria and the selection of individuals or households that correspond to these criteria. Though there can be some consultation of local populations to define the targeting criteria, they tend to be defined by the agency (e.g. “vulnerable households”, “female and disabled –headed households”). In Nahrin, when participatory processes were used to select beneficiaries, several difficulties were encountered:
- when the selection is delegated to local partners (local NGO, local representatives, etc.) there is a risk of bias, nepotism or corruption (or what is perceived as such by the agency); and
- when the selection of beneficiaries is done within the community, this can be a source of tension and even conflict within the community.

Social control seems to be the most successful mechanism to ensure that targeting procedures are proper (fair, efficient, etc.) although the role of certain elites appeared in Nahrin to be a constraint. In the shura not everybody feels able to speak or voice concerns. Problems encountered in Nahrin in the distribution of relief items and the allocation of means for house reconstruction indicate that transparency, explanation and respect for set procedures are key elements for smooth and participatory targeting processes.

**Supply of labour and materials**

The reasons for asking for a physical contribution from beneficiaries are in most cases pragmatic (reducing costs, saving time), but they can be used as a means to mobilise individuals and prevent the development of ‘aid dependency’, or even as a kind of capacity building.

Such participation can put considerable stress on affected populations and even lead to tension and resentment towards the aid agency. The constraints and limits to this kind of participation are:
- the use of labour for a programme may compete with labour needs for livelihood purposes. Some families of beneficiaries may not have the required manpower (e.g. female and disabled-headed households having difficulty building their homes in Nahrin); and,
- the beneficiaries may not have the materials needed or resources to provide them.

*Consultation and participation at the evaluation phase:*

Having true participatory mechanisms in the evaluation phase seemed to be a sensitive issue in Nahrin, but also in Afghanistan in general. On the one hand, recrimination and complaints go against the tradition of respect and hospitality towards foreign hosts. Thus people are very careful to always end discussions on cordial and warm footings. On the other hand, it was possible to observe tense shuras with many complaints being raised. Interesting enough, these complaints could have been avoided quite easily, provided that consultative and participatory mechanism had been put in place much earlier in the project cycle.

5. **PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

From the initial findings highlighted above, several factors were identified as affecting the degree of consultation and participation in humanitarian programmes. They involve three levels: context, population and aid agency.

Several questions/issues related to participation and consultation extracted from Afghanistan in general and the Nahrin case study in particular will need to be further developed:

- The importance of information-sharing, transparency and downwards accountability. Even when there is little or no participation, it seems essential to maximise the sharing of information on agency plans, reasons for action (or not), factors affecting the delivery of aid, the way the aid system functions, etc. Besides the question of respect towards affected populations, this is key to ensuring good relations with a community and the security of field teams.
- The relevance of pre-set assistance packages and standards if what should really be considered are people's views, needs and capacities.
- Consultation takes time and energy: how does one reconcile imperatives of responding to an emergency quickly and take the time to engage in consultation/participation with a community?
- The importance of building a relationship of trust over time (e.g. Acted in Nahrin: “Acted was here before, during and after the earthquake”).
- The difficulty of accessing certain groups (women in the case of Afghanistan), and the types of participatory mechanisms that can be put in place in a culturally-sensitive way to gain access to these groups.
- The need for adequate human resources (expatriate and local) having the skills and capacity to cope with the demands of consultation and participation (e.g. psychological stress).
• The need to determine what is an **appropriate level of participation** in a given context.
• The need for agencies to engage in consultative and participatory processes in a way that **promotes local initiatives**, rather than undermining them.
• Where **traditional consultative and participatory systems** exist, are they truly representative of the community (‘the shura is two guys speaking, the others being too shy to talk. There is a vocal minority with a lot of power”, says one aid worker in Nahrin), and are they a good basis to build on for participatory processes? Do forms of consultation and participation introduced by aid agencies come into conflict with traditional systems/decision-making structures?
• Many NGO’s are actively participating in **government capacity-building**, at the national and regional level. Are these capacity-building efforts: part of participation and consultation processes, complementary to consultation and participation done at the community level, or can they conflict with participation/consultation efforts at the community level? This question becomes even more relevant when one remarks the extremely low level of investment in capacity-building at administrative levels closest to communities and villages (i.e. district and sub-district), in areas such as Nahrin.

**Table 1: Participatory mechanisms used in the project cycle in Afghanistan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project cycle phase</th>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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| Needs assessment    | -Consultation through open discussion (sometimes shura)
                     | -Consultation through questionnaires (closed questions) | Most agencies consult local inhabitants, but do not necessarily take into account their views. |
| Planning & Design   | Consultation on specific points (but general programme design usually done by agency) | Housing reconstruction in Nahrin: consultation on design aspects of house (window size, n° of rooms…)
| Targeting           | -Lists of beneficiaries established by local representative
                     | -NGO calls upon local NGO to compile list of beneficiaries
                     | -Use of social control mechanisms: the process and targeting criteria are made public, enabling individuals to react if irregularities are found.
                     | -Selection of “vulnerable families” done by Consultative Board (CB) of Community Forums (Habitat) | -Nahrin food and tent distribution. These distributions were accused of being corrupted.
                     | | -Seed and complementary food ration distribution in Sar-i-Pul. A cross-check by the INGO showed non-vulnerable families included and some vulnerable families excluded from list.
                     | | -Food distribution: a shura is organised to explain the process. If cheating is found during cross-check, the whole village is sanctioned. Quite successful.
                     | | -Pasta making project, Mazar. Led to great pressure being put on CB, and conflict between community members. |
| Implementation      | -Beneficiaries supply some materials
                     | -Beneficiaries supply labour
                     | -Food Ac (Food for Asset Creation); FFW where 10% of food is given to most vulnerable members of community as identified by community.
                     | -Community health workers | -Nahrin shelter project: beneficiaries provide bricks and stones
                     | | -Nahrin shelter project: beneficiaries build their house (These types of participation were a source of considerable stress for some families who lacked the resources to provide materials or could not both build their house and provide for their family.) |
| Monitoring          | -Consultation of beneficiaries through open group discussion
                     | -Consultation of individuals during supervision visits by national staff and feedback to programme supervisor | -Nahrin shelter project: NGO organising shura to discuss complaints by community members
                     | | -Nahrin shelter project: ’The supervisors go around and talk to people, see mistakes, give advice”. |
Eastern DRC
CASE STUDY
CONTEXT

This case study provides a focus on consultation and participation as part of the humanitarian response to a long-term civil and international conflict. However, the recent Nyiragongo volcanic eruption and flash floods in Uvira has also enabled a focus on the humanitarian response to two natural disasters in the context of a long-term civil and international conflict.

The Conflict

The thirty-year reign of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo, began with a coup in 1965 and was characterised by severe corruption, a drastic degradation of infrastructure throughout the country, and a general downward spiral of the economy and standard of living of most Zairians. Between April and July of 1994, over a million Hutu refugees fled into eastern Zaire after the genocide in Rwanda, including the extremist Hutu militia, the interahamwe, and members of the former national army (FAR). In 1996, Rwandan troops dismantled the refugee camps in North and South Kivu, and the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADFL) for the Liberation of Congo, under Laurent Kabila, was established. The following year the AFDL took over Kinshasa and Kabila proclaimed himself president, but serious disagreements between the Rwandans and Kabila spawned further violence.

In August of 1998, rebel forces backed by Uganda and Rwanda launched attacks with the aim of overthrowing President Kabila’s government. Three additional countries sent troops into the fray, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe backing the government. Several inter-ethnic conflicts in the East, factional divisions within the main rebel group, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), as well as counter-rebel attacks complicated the situation. By the end of 2000, rebel forces occupied approximately 60% of the northeastern part of the country, and an estimated 1.8 million people had been displaced within the country, a large proportion of them children. A controversial but important mortality study undertaken by International Rescue Committee (IRC) finalised in 2001 calculated that between 1998 and 2001, 2.5 million people died as a result of the war. In July of 1999, the six countries involved in the war committed to a peace agreement signed in Lusaka, which was followed by the deployment of UN peace-keeping groups – the UN Observer Mission (MONUC) – in DRC. Following the assassination of Laurent Kabila in January of 2001, his son Joseph became president and advanced steps towards peace, supporting the Lusaka Peace Accords. Growing international attention to the situation in Congo helped spur the subsequent Inter-Congolese Dialogue held in Sun City, South Africa. However, the Goma-based RCD did not agree to the leadership structure and did not sign the document. Still now, regular attacks on civilian settlements and between warring factions result into a high level of suffering.

The massive influx of humanitarian aid actors who arrived to help the Rwandan refugees saw the beginning of years of assistance in eastern DRC that continues into the present, ranging from feeding centres to broad-scale health programs and support for livelihoods. The problems that emerged from the presence of hundreds of international organisations working with the refugees in Goma in 1994-95 – including the lack of consistent approaches, inadequate co-ordination, duplication of effort, and conflicting mandates – led to numerous analyses and recognition that important changes needed to be made in the field of humanitarian response. Since 1996, the growing influence and presence of Rwandans and Ugandans in the Kivus accompanied by operations of the Mai-Mai, civil defence forces and the interahamwe, as well as inter-ethnic clashes, have created an atmosphere of extreme insecurity and fear. In rural areas, many people are forced out of their villages by violence, their houses and crops burned and their animals stolen. In urban areas, citizens openly critical of the RCD have been harassed and sometimes arrested and imprisoned.

The Volcanic Eruption

On the morning of January 17, 2002, Nyiragongo volcano erupted through a series of vents that started high on the volcano. As lower vents closer to Goma opened during the day, higher vents shut off creating considerable confusion as to just what was happening. Several times during the day local radio broadcasts falsely announced the end of the eruption.

About 5:30 PM that evening the final vents opened near the Goma airport quickly covering one third of the runway with lava. By the middle of the night, flows from these vents reached the shore of Lake
Kivu, cutting Goma in half. A second lava flow a few kilometres to the northwest, and unrelated to the airport flows, reached the main road connecting Goma and Sake, but failed to cross it. This natural disaster was superimposed on a complex emergency. An estimated 350,000 residents of Goma out of an estimated total population of 450,000 residents self-evacuated. Loss of life was officially estimated at 100 and approximately 12-15,000 dwellings and the main commercial part of the city were destroyed. Couple of days later, two rivers in the Uvira region saw their levels rising quickly and devastating flash floods devastated the human settlement installed on the river banks. The high level of insecurity in the East has greatly discouraged travel, and the appalling condition of residents in some of the remote rural areas is largely unknown to urban residents. The families’ silence also, however, regardless of the needs of their compatriots, reflected disappointment that additional assistance would not be forthcoming.

There are hundreds of local NGOs in the Kivus, many of which were established during the 1994-1996 Rwandan refugee crisis. Others, however, have been in operation for decades. Various churches and church-affiliated organisations also play a very important role in development and humanitarian assistance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a first summary of findings and reflections prepared by the DRC Team based on seven weeks of fieldwork conducted between August and September 2002. A preparatory study for the fieldwork was conducted in April by INTRAC. The DRC Team members, two men and two women, represented a interesting and complementary balance of perspectives: a Western-born staff member of a major donor agency with long-term field experience in Africa; a Central-African-born staff member of a western-based NGO, and two Eastern Congolese locals who had worked with local and international NGOs, and had themselves been among the victims of the volcano and wars in the East. The participation of individuals affected by the disasters facilitated access to individuals, organisations, opinions, and feelings that might easily have been overlooked by or inaccessible to an exclusively international team.

Three sites were selected for the study to cover the largest diversity of situations

- **Goma**, located on the northern part of Kivu lake. Goma and its surrounding area has been affected by years of civil strife. It received one of the biggest refugee population flows from the 1994 Rwanda crisis and is still dramatically affected by the civil war raging in the Massisi and North Kivu. It was also the centre of the volcanic eruption in early 2002;

- **Bukavu**, located on the western shore of Lake Kivu. Bukavu and its surrounding area also received large numbers of refugees from the Rwanda crisis and is still affected by population movements resulting from insecurity prevailing in the High Plateaux. Bukavu also received many displaced persons escaping the devastation of the lava flows in Goma.

- **Uvira**, a town in South Kivu, which, in addition to the regular military operations suffered by the civilian population, experienced a flood not long after the eruption of the volcano.

A number of key documents were consulted for background material. However, the bulk of the material for this study was drawn from interviews with a broad range of respondents. These included local authorities, international aid managers and workers, staff from local NGOs and a wide variety of war, volcano and flood-affected populations from the following categories: displaced, residents, returnees, host population.

Interviews were conducted with individuals, neighbourhood groups, families, and workers in shelters, homes, tents, the open air, offices and restaurants during both scheduled and unscheduled visits. Many areas in the Kivu region outside urban centres and their peripheries were not easily accessible due to security restrictions, thus limiting the access of the research team to the forested areas in the mountains where there is little humanitarian programmes development, due to the same ‘access issue’.
The greatest challenge facing the team was reconciling the widely disparate accounts of what happened during the response to the eruption of Nyiragongo. The often cynical, angry, accusatory, and sometimes resigned feedback offered reflected the unease of a population that feels itself subjugated by foreign powers – foremost by the Rwandans and secondarily by humanitarian actors.

3. FINDINGS

This short paper focuses on a limited number of key issues that arose during the DRC study:

- the difficult relations between the international agencies and local NGOs;
- the politicisation and risks of predation of humanitarian assistance and the complex issues related to ‘who speaks, who controls, who organises’;
- the complexity to work in a context of a protracted crisis and its implication on consultation and participation; and,
- the relation between improving participation processes and better linking emergency assistance to rehabilitation and development

It should be mentioned at this stage that, although the mission identified only a limited number of good practices, the difficulties identified and the constraints assessed on participation and consultation are opening very interesting avenues for tools and methodology development.

3.1. The Difficult Relations between International and National Actors

The operational worlds of the international groups and local organisations remain distressingly separate, contributing to the climate of suspicion and distrust, in Goma especially. A few select NGOs and church-based groups have had long-term working relationships with the same internationals for many years and both sides seem comfortable with these relationships – too comfortable, perhaps, since the cost-benefit analysis of working with only one group seems not to have been examined.

All of the international groups, regardless of their origin or mandate, from donors to PVOs to visiting delegations, are considered by locals to be ‘ONUsiens,’ or ‘UNers’. The ONUsiens come with money, expensive automobiles, and outside interests that may or may not reflect the needs of local inhabitants. Locals and even some of those employed by IOs do not for the most part understand—because no one has bothered to explain to them—where assistance funds come from (in many case taxpayers from various countries), and the types of accountability, conditions, and mandates that accompany their donation. There is great confusion surrounding the duties and raison d'etre of MONUC, for example. ‘What exactly do they DO?’ asked a Goma resident. ‘Why don’t they help us, the victims of the volcano?’ When the research team—in response to criticism that not enough had been done for the affected—told a representative of one Goma NGO that an entire fifth of a donor's entire DRC country budget had been devoted to the volcano response, the respondent, far from being assuaged, was apoplectic. ‘What in the world do they have to show for that [enormous] amount of money?! A few temporary shelters?!’ One of the more impressive examples of recent local NGO initiative in the East was a pair of workshops organised and conducted in May and June of 2002 in Bukavu and Goma, respectively, entitled ‘Disaster Assistance and Rehabilitation: Strengthening Negotiation Skills of Local Organisations with Regards to Disaster Assistance Practices’. While many IO representatives participated in the workshop in Bukavu, very few did in Goma.

3.2. The Politicisation and Predation of Humanitarian Assistance

The inhabitants of the Kivus have learned over the years to take very little at face value from people in positions of authority, beginning in the Mobutu years and reaching a peak now. It is widely accepted that the local authorities, considered to be controlled by Rwandans who claim to be in the East for the sole purpose of tracking down the *interahamwe*, are instead spending the greater part of their time exporting the great mineral riches in the area. The uncertainty of who represents whom, and for what purposes and why has led many Kivu inhabitants to question the nature of organisational and individual legitimacy and authenticity, and encouraged international groups to be suspicious of most—if not all—local motives and actions. Furthermore, over the years, several NGOs have had to shut down entire programs when high levels of corruption and deception were detected among their local staff. This is in issue in both the programmes related to the civil war and in the activities developed in relation to the rapid onset emergencies that affected the area.
If the educated urban residents seem less than appreciative of the humanitarian work undertaken in the East, it stems in part from tremendous frustration and disappointment that the international community does not seem to be committed to bringing an end to the ‘foreign occupation’ of their region and the violence and economic crisis associated with it.

Discussions with the affected populations revealed that the predation continues right down the line, to those who are least able to survive the assault. The issue of consultation and participation during the establishment of the lists of beneficiaries is one of the most complex in humanitarian action. For example, many interviewees alleged that the allocation of temporary shelters for Goma residents was fraught with corruption. Some local chiefs, whose collusion with the RCD has greatly weakened their responsibilities toward the neighbourhoods they are supposed to represent, were said to have ‘sold’ the rights to have one’s names on a beneficiary lists for an average of $10. Those households who received a shelter and/or household goods and food were very grateful to the international community for the assistance. They felt bad for those needy households who did not receive a shelter due to the corrupted lists. The inhabitants of some of the new neighbourhoods comprised of temporary shelters complained that because the closest source of water was across the runway of the airport, they were charged by the military guarding the airstrip to cross. The research team also heard reports that some of the local humanitarian aid workers had charged fees for shelter materials that they delivered to beneficiary households.

3.3. Working in the Context of a Protracted Conflict

In the situation observed, two main elements emerged as central to the issues of consultation and participation. The first is that the longer the humanitarian programmes last, the more sophisticated the ‘cheating strategies’ and the more demanding the population. People start to understand very well the strategies, needs and demands from the aid agencies and adjust accordingly. The second is that when people are consulted or if their participation is requested, then the demand focuses less and less on typical humanitarian relief and more and more an quasi-developmental operations.

Based on their experience, some of the IO staff believe that the less they have to explain, the less likely funds or materials will be ‘diverted’ to the less needy or to non-humanitarian pursuits. At least one IO representative explained that his staff is directed to take supplies unannounced to a transit camp on the outskirts of town to minimise the number of non-camp residents who would show up if they knew in advance about a distribution. Unfortunately, those bona fide camp residents who happen to be out of the camp at that time miss their share.

However, diversions seem to occur even more often when transparency is limited, perhaps because there are fewer social checks and balances in such instances and when people do not feel trusted, their loyalty to, and belief in, an organisation or effort tend to be weak.

3.4. Consultation, Participation and the LRRD

All of the humanitarian actors in eastern DRC – from the RCD membership to the households affected by the war and/or the volcano have developed particular strategies for survival, some of which are highly predatory and most of which are opportunistic. For decades they had to struggle for life with or despite aid agencies. There is a high degree of resilience at the household level. Local initiatives through local NGO and churches have develop quite sophisticated health activities based on sound cost recovery mechanisms. Yet, many of the local actors are complaining that with the relief mentality of many international agencies and the lack of listening skills/attitude of many expatriates, the lessons learnt and experiences accumulated are not utilised.

The significant capacities and willingness of the local populations to assist one another during the Goma crisis has generally not been recognised, celebrated by – or is not even known to – the internationals. In most instances the later did not even ask what was going on, leading to a strange situation where the aid agencies wanted to restrain people from moving back to Goma after the volcanic eruption. Despite their efforts to keep people in Rwanda, the camps were emptied in a matter of days and the mobilisation of means on one side of the border became irrelevant and costly.
Many were severely burned crossing the still red-hot lava. A group of unidentified young men took the initiative to break up the big chunks of lava to make the passage easier and safer. Similarly in Bukavu, during the first few days after the eruption while the RCD held endless meetings and IOs made plans to respond, inhabitants of Bukavu welcomed the displaced into shelters, cooked meals for them, and organised for drinking water to be sent to Goma. Hundreds of families welcomed the destitute into their homes. Resident business people lent or gave money to those in need and many Goma and Bukavu inhabitants donated cooking equipment and household materials. While international agencies were still wondering what to do, some local actors and beneficiaries were doing some plans for any next eruption.

The same mobilisation of the local actors in the Uvira area was observed after the floods.

### 3.5. Prerequisites for Sound Participation

Consultation and the voluntary involvement of a population in participative approaches require confidence, in most instances based on person to person relations rather than institutional agreements. The high turnover of international staff and concomitant lack of institutional memory hinders the ability of IOs to be credible and of local actors and beneficiaries to have confidence. It also hinders the capacity for these international staff to recognise the wealth of skills in the region. Furthermore, several IO representatives explained that with their unrelenting reporting and management responsibilities, frequent meetings with authorities and mandatory correspondence and co-ordination with headquarters in Kinshasa or in western countries, they simply did not have time to interact with beneficiaries and local NGOs other than those with whom they were working.

Participation and consultation approaches require skills and experience. In almost all of the interviews with local organisations who had not been chosen to work extensively with IOs the question of ‘capacity’ and how it is defined was brought up. ‘Is capacity being an expatriate?’ asked a member of a Goma NGO. ‘If that is the case, that is the end of participation for us.’ Several Goma inhabitants questioned the professional capacities of several IOs hired by WFP to distribute food during the volcano crisis. “The people brought in to do this job seemed to be young trainees!” said one man. “They actually threw [high protein] biscuits out at the crowd and people rushed to grab them, crushing and even injuring each other. That is not the way assistance should be provided.” Several IOs admitted that the food distribution had been problematic, but added that it was very hard to get experienced humanitarian workers to accept assignments in the Kivus because of the difficult, frustrating, insecure and exhausting working conditions.

Members of a consortium of local NGOs in Bukavu wondered how it happened that once locals were hired by an international organisation and ‘crossed over’ the invisible line to the expatriate side – as if through a looking glass – that they suddenly became ‘capacitated’ and ‘trustworthy’. Local respondents described several instances where current or former employees of IOs, who had gained knowledge of the inner workings of the international world, had created their own NGOs and received money for programs, while other groups, lacking such knowledge, received no support.

In fact, there are many members of local NGOs in the Kivus who are well educated, highly trained and extremely competent who could have provided significant assistance during the emergency.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Establishing what are or could be ‘good practices’ in a situation compounded by a protracted crisis and two sudden-onset disasters is not an easy task. This is even more so when there is a high level of distrust between international and local actors. It is recognised by both international aid actors and affected populations alike that the humanitarian response to the eruption of Nyiragongo was fraught with difficulties and mistakes, many of which could and should have been avoided. With the exception of those individuals employed by international organisations, many Congolese feel that their opinions, skills, and expertise were not well utilised during or after the emergency. Some of the problems stemmed from the fact that many within the local population do not accept the legitimacy of the ruling authorities and feel largely abandoned by the international community to a life of fear, distrust, and impoverishment. Ironically, the long history of humanitarian assistance in eastern DRC, beginning with the flood of refugees in 1994 after the genocide in Rwanda, seems to have contributed to the
contested nature of the response to the volcano disaster. As in a growing number of regions around the world that are chronic hosts to disasters, emergency response in eastern DRC has become an enormous and complex business operation wherein outside organisations and local actors both try desperately to assert control over monetary resources, goods, and services.

It is possible that the relationships between local organisations and international aid groups in Goma cannot be repaired in the short term, or even perhaps until a regime accepted by a majority of the eastern Congolese is established, local powers renegotiated, and a minimum level of trust, hope and confidence re-established.

Building better relationships between locals and international organisations will depend on both the ability of each side to recognise that it cannot do the job well without assistance from the other, and the will to create and maintain systems of information-sharing and accountability that can withstand – and in some way compensate for – the high turnover of international staff. Legitimate and competent local NGOs in Goma are requesting that a record be kept on file with humanitarian co-ordinating agencies of their past performance and capacities, so that international groups could better determine with whom they could work most productively. Similarly, it would be helpful to have available to local actors the different mandates of international organisations and evaluations of international performance during crisis response, to improve systems of understanding, accountability and feedback. Every IO should have a staff member among whose duties is public relations and liaison with local organisations.

There are a handful of organisations that are often praised for their long-term partnerships with specialised local NGOs, and in many cases those relationships do reflect a significant degree of participation. But close inspection reveals that in some instances, while international partners assumed good practices and accountability on the part of their local partner, project participants and evaluators noted a disturbing level of complacency and/or corruption. A possible remedy for this situation would be to implement projects with a strong social control mechanism linked to participatory monitoring and evaluation by the beneficiaries themselves.
PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The challenges of conducting a research project across such a diverse range of contexts in a relatively short time and on an issue as complex and as subtle as the participation of affected populations in humanitarian crises, are considerable. Initial findings from the first set of case studies are rich but diverse, and require considerable reflection.

The analysis to date reveals that good practice at field level and positive examples are limited. The concepts of consultation and participation of affected populations are more often found in the discourse of aid agencies than in their operational practices and the reasons for this both good and bad.

Interest in the Global Study has varied significantly between the different case studies and among the different audiences and stakeholders and the various stages along the much contested continuum. Institutional cultures are central to the debate on participation and key elements in the economy of participation and the balance of power between stakeholders. However, although frustrating, these findings reinforce the importance of the Global Study.

There is no doubt that, although consultation/participation can’t be considered a ‘quick-fix’ for ensuring programme relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, it would appear to most observers – field actors and affected populations alike – that if implemented in a sensible and sensitive manner, consultation and participation can go a long way to improving the quality of programmes and enhancing upward and downward accountability.

The field research has revealed avenues that remain to be explored – eg:

- How to develop tools to enhance stakeholder analysis and better position aid actors to be able to identify constructive entry points, enabling consultation with and participation by affected populations in humanitarian action?
- How to adapt to the palette of existing development tools to the specificities of emergency contexts?
- How to identify means and mechanisms that would help aid actors to better engage with affected populations in a way which will both enhance the quality of the programmes and limit the risks that raising voice entails in conflict situation?

At a time where the international aid community is engaged in a series of protracted emergencies and acute crises and when the links between relief and development are being recognised, the participation of affected populations can’t ignored. Investing in aggregating the collective experience and wisdom of a broad range of agencies in different context to develop tools and method is the objective of the Global Study. We are more than half way through the first step of collecting the field data, with the respective Country Monographs currently being drafted. The inception of the preparation of the principal Study outputs (the Practitioner Handbook and the Overview book) is going on.

La Fontaine des Marins,
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