

**Helpdesk Research Report: Community Participation in Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery**  
**30.05.08**

**Query:** Please identify literature on community participatory processes in disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts - including the involvement of vulnerable groups (women, elderly, children, disabled)

**Enquirer:** DFID China

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**1. Overview**

Much of the literature on participation in emergencies focuses on the role of community engagement in disaster preparedness. However, the literature that does address participatory approaches in disaster-affected contexts highlights the advantages, which include better analysis, effective programming and implementation, and increased accountability. In addition, such participation creates linkages between relief, rehabilitation and development work, and allows members of affected populations to emerge as social actors in their own right, with valuable knowledge and insights on their situation, as well as competencies and ideas of their own.

Thus, there is general agreement that while it may be unrealistic to aim for community participation in the initial relief phase, it is important that communities are included in the design and implementation of assistance programmes, to ensure greater ownership over the recovery process. However, there is no standard participation model. Any approach must remain flexible, and sensitive to the local context. Aid agencies should take local coping strategies into account and build upon them instead of imposing their own 'ready-made' interventions.

Important ways of ensuring community engagement include providing timely and regular access to information, and recognising the capacity of local community organisations. Much of the literature shows that while there is widespread theoretical recognition of the importance of community participation, this has rarely translated into reconstruction practice, and grassroots participation in recent crises has remained insignificant.

Supporting meaningful participation by vulnerable groups in disaster response is a further challenge. Past experience has shown that local participation can often be captured by local elites, and the vulnerable left out of the process. Some commentators argue that the long-term strengthening of local communities that is needed in this respect requires a lengthier commitment from aid agencies than their funding and staffing cycles currently allow. In the short-term, however, the literature below highlights that aid agencies should learn to see these groups less in terms of their vulnerability and more in terms of their resilience and potential to contribute. Agencies should recognise and build upon the ways in which local and vulnerable groups are independently responding to the crisis.

This query includes materials from both academic and operational perspectives. Literature on sectoral issues has been included as it illustrates the more general recommendations and may provide more widely applicable lessons learned. Some materials offering practical guidelines, toolkits and approaches to facilitating community participation have also been included.

## 2. Key Documents

### *General*

- Roper, L., Utz, E, and Harvey J., 2006, 'The Tsunami Learning Project: Lessons for Grantmakers in Natural Disaster Response', Grantmakers Without Borders, Boston, MA  
[http://www.internationaldonors.org/issues/pdf/tlp\\_full-report.pdf](http://www.internationaldonors.org/issues/pdf/tlp_full-report.pdf)

This report documents the experience of a group of grantmakers that responded to the tsunami: the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), Global Fund for Children (GFC), Global Greengrants Fund (GGF), Global Fund for Women (GFW), Oxfam America (Oxfam) and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF). A review of the literature on the tsunami found that the central role of local organisations as mechanisms for ensuring local participation is widely recognised. However grassroots participation in the tsunami response has been insignificant, forcing local organisations and communities to compete for resources and recognition.

The authors argue that targeted small grants and community-based interventions can have a significant impact even within vast humanitarian response operations: "Such initiatives have the potential to reach the most needy; be driven by what communities need rather than what large organizations are geared up to deliver; be more sensitive to the range of issues that emerge in the aftermath of disasters; and build on existing social capital to sustain relief and recovery efforts over the long term" (p.8).

Section Three (pp. 8-16) outlines some policies and practices that played a beneficial role in the tsunami response:

- tapping into existing relationships
- focusing on marginalised groups and strengthening their capacities
- building solidarity across social divides
- funding women-led initiatives and promoting gender equality
- promoting participation and protecting rights
- giving local people a voice in coordinating temporary shelter
- paying close attention to the political situation on the ground

- Twigg, J. et al, 2001, 'Guidance Notes on Participation and Accountability', Benfield Hazard Research Centre, London  
[http://www.benfieldhrc.org/activities/misc\\_papers/PA%20text.pdf](http://www.benfieldhrc.org/activities/misc_papers/PA%20text.pdf)

This paper argues that participation is not a quick-fix solution. While its broad principles may be relatively clear, it is not a rigid ideology and can encompass a variety of ideals and attitudes. There are various types of participatory methods which require careful selection according to context: "The practice of participation is complex and full of challenges. The skills – and especially the attitudes – it requires from its practitioners are not easily acquired. The flexibility and openness to change that are innate to good participation mean that the approach does not fit comfortably within operational agencies' more rigid timetables and programmes. The influence of participatory ideas and approaches should not be exaggerated. They have extended their influence rapidly since the early 1980s, but the prevailing approach to development and disaster management remains a top-down one. People in positions of power, be it political, institutional or professional, are reluctant to hand over authority to the grass roots. Many organisations have called their work 'participatory' but have not changed the substance of their approach" (p.5).

Section A of the paper outlines some of the main features of participatory approaches and sets out its main challenges, using case study illustrations from different disaster management contexts.

- Davidson, C. H. et al, 2006, 'Truths and Myths about Community Participation in Post-Disaster Housing Projects', Habitat, Vol. 31, Issue 1, pp.100-115  
<http://kernn.org/pdf/davidsonetal2006.pdf>

This paper argues that although the idea of community participation is extensively discussed in the theory it is not clearly reflected in the realities of reconstruction practice. In fact, there are many ways in which beneficiaries can participate in post-disaster reconstruction projects but not all types of participation ensure the best use of their capabilities. According to the 'systems approach' there is a continuum of possibilities for participation; at one extreme, users are involved in the projects only as the labour force, while at the other, they play an active role in decision-making and project management. The authors use four case studies of post-disaster housing reconstruction projects (one each in Colombia and in El Salvador, and two in Turkey) to illustrate this continuum. A comparative analysis of the organisational designs of these projects highlights the different ways in which users can be and were involved. The authors divide these into 'empowerment', 'informing' and 'consultation'. The paper argues that the participation of users in up-front decision-making (within the project design and planning phases, including the capacity to make meaningful choices among a series of options offered to them), i.e. 'empowerment', leads to positive results in terms of building process and outcomes. However, this level of participation is rarely obtained and the capabilities of the users are often significantly wasted.

- Wisner, B. and Adams, J., 2003, 'Environmental Health in Emergencies and Disasters: A Practical Guide', World Health Organization, Geneva  
[http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap15.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap15.pdf)

Chapter Two of this paper, 'Health promotion and community participation', argues that participatory approaches have been widely tested in the fields of water, sanitation and hygiene, and found to produce wide-ranging benefits. The main principles are:

- Communities can and should determine their own priorities in dealing with the problems that they face.
- The enormous depth and breadth of collective experience and knowledge in a community can be built on to bring about change and improvements.
- When people understand a problem, they will more readily act to solve it.
- People solve their own problems best in a participatory group process.

Community-focused programmes therefore should aim to involve all members of a society in a participatory process of: assessing their own knowledge; investigating their own environmental situation; visualising a different future; analysing constraints to change; planning for change; and implementing change. The success of participatory action depends on a continuous community

dialogue, where provisional goals are set and tested, subsequent action is based on analysis, research, and education, and experience is fed back into the process.

- Sanderson, D. and Sharma, A., 2008, 'Winners and Losers from the 2001 Earthquake', Environment and Urbanization, vol. 20, no. 1  
Please see attached: 'Sanderson'

This paper reviews some of the consequences of different approaches to reconstruction after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, as illustrated by the experiences of three villages. It ends with a discussion of the lessons that the author argues are repeatedly ignored after disasters. These include:

- The drive for quick reconstruction can lead to inappropriate and costly responses. Often, building takes place quickly at the expense of meaningful participation.
- Contractor-driver construction projects are rarely developmental initiatives. The drive to rebuild quickly inevitably leads early on to the decision to hire commercial contractors. At this point, these projects cease to be developmental initiatives and become construction projects. The participation of residents is relegated to mixing concrete or making building blocks, or worse.
- Inappropriate layout and shelter design. In Gujarat, many large-scale, donor-driven projects were costly, inappropriate, and increased risk. Rebuilt villages appear to have been designed primarily to suit the demands of mass house building with no consideration of Gujarati culture.
- The unhelpful perception of a victim/saviour relationship. After an earthquake, the response is to help the victims. "At what, however, do people stop being victims? For many post-disaster recovery programmes, the label seems to stick. (In Gujarat) (T)he housing responses were classed as donor-driven and owner-driven, as if there was a difference in the eventual ownership. Villages were "adopted" by outside organisations, adoption being a process of taking on the guardianship of the less empowered." (p.184)
- Donor-driven programming can neglect social capital. When powerful external agents are driving the process within an affected village, the social capital present within long-standing communities can be ignored or even damaged.

### **Case Studies**

- Grünewald, F., 2003, 'The Case of Afghanistan', Case Study for Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) Global Study on Consultation and Participation of Disaster-Affected Populations, Overseas Development Institute, London  
[http://www.alnap.org/publications/pdfs/gc\\_afghanistan.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/publications/pdfs/gc_afghanistan.pdf)

The findings of this case study highlight a number of benefits associated with participation:

- actions are more responsive, appropriate and effective in addressing priority needs
- strong collaboration and mutual trust can facilitate access to various population groups and increase the safety of aid workers
- building local capacity and devolving responsibility allows the implementation of activities where access is restricted
- local involvement enhances sustainability and empowers people to build on interventions in the future
- even minimal participation and consultation demonstrates respect and accountability towards recipients of aid.

Participation may, however, also entail risks for the affected population, and may not always be feasible, and so it is important to be aware of the factors that constrain it. These can include:

- access difficulties (due to security, geography, social characteristics)
- the nature and impact of the crisis
- the number of aid actors present
- social/cultural factors including local power structures and decision-making processes (which can often exclude the most vulnerable sections of the population)
- previous exposure to aid (which can bias attitudes towards assistance)
- the capacity to participate (for example, availability of time and labour)

➤ gender segregation

Aid agency have their own limitations, such as mandates (for example, emergency versus development); institutional culture (which often determines the type of human resources required); staff turnover; duration and existing presence of a project in a region; and nature of relations with the affected populations. Some of the study's findings suggest that participation and consultation of affected populations in acute emergencies is not always possible due to time restrictions and the impact of the crisis on the population. However, it is often the case that aid agencies arrive with 'ready-made' interventions that are applied with very little consultation and participation and ignore local initiatives. Section Four addresses the question about whether aid agencies can work towards recognising local initiatives, even in acute emergencies, so as to support or complement them by filling the gaps that local initiatives are unable to cover.

- World Bank, 'Community Participation in Post-Disaster Reconstruction: Lessons Learned from the Maharashtra Emergency Earthquake Rehabilitation Program', World Bank, Washington DC

<http://go.worldbank.org/KT7M4G9810>

This web page discusses the Maharashtra Emergency Earthquake Rehabilitation Program (MEERP) which was set up in response to the 1993 Maharashtra earthquake. The programme institutionalised community participation and ensured that beneficiaries were formally consulted at all stages of implementation. The programme envisaged that every village created a village-level committee headed by the *Sarpanch* (head of village council), and that membership on the committee included women and disadvantaged groups. Consultative committees were also proposed at the level of the *taluka* (an administrative unit that includes several villages) and the district. As the MEERP progressed and results materialised, community participation in the rehabilitation received greater acceptance. While project management unit officials were initially skeptical of the community participation process, they later came to recognise it as an effective tool for dealing with difficulties that arose during implementation.

Participation also had a positive psychological effect on communities and helped them to overcome their trauma. Recognising the psychological importance of the reconstruction program the government began reconstruction in small villages even before the rehabilitation programme began, appealing to donors, corporate bodies, NGOs, and religious organisations to "adopt" villages for reconstruction. Some of these organisations also worked on social issues, such as schooling for children and campaigns against alcohol consumption. Over time the participatory process opened up informal channels of communication between the communities and the government, helping to narrow the gap between the two. Beneficiaries became conscious of their entitlements and worked hard within the process to secure them. Individuals who felt their grievances were not addressed appropriately at the village and *taluka* level could approach the district authorities and the government in Mumbai.

## **Vulnerable Groups**

- Valency, R. A. (ed.), 2007, 'Gender Perspective: Working Together for Disaster Risk Reduction: Good Practices and Lessons Learned', United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Geneva  
[http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about\\_isdr/isdr-publications/09-gender-good-practices/gender-good-practices.pdf](http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about_isdr/isdr-publications/09-gender-good-practices/gender-good-practices.pdf)

This paper presents a collection of 15 practices which describe the different roles played by women from disaster prone communities. These roles involve constructing disaster resistant housing; improving community access to services; upgrading livelihoods; increasing food security; collecting and disseminating information; and negotiating claims to rights and resources. The compilation is based on contributions from community-based organisations, NGOs and UNDP country offices. Some of the good practices highlighted include awareness-raising and capacity-building, women's participation in and contribution to building safe communities and households, and equal access to information. Contact details for the organisations involved in each good practice are available at the end of each chapter.

- Yonder, A. Akcar, S. and Gopalan, P., 2005, 'Women's Participation in Disaster Relief and Recovery', Population Council, New York  
<http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/seeds/Seeds22.pdf>

This article aims to fill the gap in information on how low-income women affected by disasters can participate in post-disaster relief and recovery and secure decent housing, livelihoods, and the restoration of basic services for themselves and for their families. It also examines the roles that NGOs and government policy and procedures play in facilitating (or impeding) women's involvement.

The authors use detailed case studies from three earthquake-stricken areas in India and Turkey to highlight how post-disaster situations can be opportunities to empower women at the grassroots level, build more resilient communities, and initiate long-term social change and development. They show how low-income women who have lost everything can form groups and become active participants in the relief and recovery process, such as being involved in housing, creating businesses, mobilising funds, and providing crucial community services. They also illustrate how NGOs can focus on facilitating and partnering to leverage resources and thereby stimulate affected women's groups to scale up and sustain their energy and organisation over the cycle of relief to reconstruction.

- Thompstone, G. Chen, J. and Emmons, K., 2007, 'The Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies: A Guide for Relief Agencies, Based Largely on Experiences in the Asian Tsunami Response', UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok  
[http://www.unicef.org/eapro/the\\_participation\\_of\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_in\\_emergencies.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/the_participation_of_children_and_young_people_in_emergencies.pdf)

This document captures examples of children's involvement in the tsunami disaster response and recovery phases, as collected by UNICEF and other partner organisations and UN agencies. The guide aims to demonstrate that children's active involvement in relief and rehabilitation efforts is essential and should be an integral part of any humanitarian programme. It provides practical examples and guidance on supporting children's rights to expression and information, and on the active engagement of young people in emergencies. It also provides guidance on how relief agencies can involve children in assessments, planning and decision making both before and during an emergency.

- Penrose, A., 2005, 'Children and the Tsunami – Engaging with Children in Disaster Response, Recovery and Risk Reduction: Learning from Children's Participation in the Tsunami Response', Plan International, UK  
<http://www.plan-international.org/resources/publications/disasters/childrensunami/>

This report argues that there is a fundamental gap between what aid agencies on the one hand, and children and young people on the other, perceive as participation. The authors suggest:

- The most fundamental level of “participation” is acting or reacting to the events that influence individuals and communities; this may range from impulsive and instinctive actions to thoughtful and strategic efforts to protect and care for oneself and others.
- Humanitarian workers may inadvertently undermine or destroy valuable actions/reactions that are already taking place.
- Acknowledging and appreciating what children have done and can do, and listening to them, are forms of allowing children to participate.

The report includes several recommendations which it classifies as behavioural, attitudinal, and organisational changes. These include:

- Recognise the differences among children, such as age, culture, religion and ethnicity.
  - Ensure that children who are already marginalised even in normal times, are included in activities. They can become even more difficult to reach in times of disaster.
  - Conduct rapid assessment to identify what local children and adults have already done and are doing, as well as gaps.
  - Demystify “children’s participation” and promote dialogue regarding children’s evolving competencies and how this manifests in disasters.
- Maerten, B., 2006, ‘Older People in Aceh, Indonesia 18 Months After the Tsunami: Issues and Recommendations’, HelpAge International, Chiang Mai

[http://www.helpage.org/Emergencies/Resources?autocreate\\_RelatedHelpagePublicationList\\_start=1](http://www.helpage.org/Emergencies/Resources?autocreate_RelatedHelpagePublicationList_start=1)

This publication provides a selective assessment of ongoing rehabilitation programmes in Aceh in terms of the inclusion of older people over the first 18-month period of crisis intervention. The report concludes that most rehabilitation programmes have failed to properly or widely consider the needs of older people in Aceh in social protection, health and livelihood initiatives, and argues that their capacities and vulnerabilities must be recognised. The author recommends the following principles of good practice:

- Disaggregated information about older people must be included in any data collection and assessment.
- Older people must be recognised as legitimate stakeholders for development. At all stages of a project cycle, older people must be informed, consulted, encouraged to participate and provided with enabling conditions for their involvement. Older people must be recognised as active participants in, for example, livelihood initiatives, social protection approaches and disaster preparedness.
- Changes are required in the way relief and rehabilitation programmes are designed and implemented. This calls for specialised interventions for older people as a specific target group, as well as for promoting and integrating age-friendly components in all interventions.
- Ageing issues need to be mainstreamed into organisational policies and practices. This requires more awareness of the particular problems and obstacles that older people encounter, changes in attitudes amongst humanitarian workers, increased knowledge and skills in addressing issues of ageing, developing age-friendly policies and allocating resources.

- World Bank Disability and Development Team, 2006, 'Report of the Online Forum on Disabled and Other Vulnerable Peoples in Natural Disasters', World Bank, Washington DC  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/News---Events/463933-1166477763817/EdisNatDisas.doc>

This report documents a three week long World Bank-facilitated online discussion on disabled and other vulnerable groups in natural disasters, which included almost 700 participants from civil society, public and private sectors in several countries. A particular challenge identified for the recovery and reconstruction phase was the inclusion of disabled people's organisations (DPOs). DPOs face significant problems with recognition and access to donor funding. Partnership with larger organisations known to donors can counter this obstacle, but can also perpetuate the notion that disabled people are unable to speak for themselves.

The paper concludes with some examples of past best practice. These include the "Access for All" campaign in Sri Lanka and a World Bank-funded project in post-earthquake Pakistan: "Engagement and participation were keys to the success of the "Access for All" campaign in Sri Lanka. Disabled people have to meaningfully engage in discussions and advocacy with those involved in recovery and reconstruction, both in identifying barriers, as well as giving examples of solutions - particularly as knowledge in this field is limited. In Sri Lanka, work continues to develop technical knowledge and model examples within the both disability community and agents involved in reconstruction. The earlier such participation and engagement happens, the higher chance of success it has." (p.18)

### ***Practical Guidelines***

- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), 2003, 'Participation by Crisis-Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action: A Handbook for Practitioners', Overseas Development Institute, London  
[http://www.alnap.org/publications/gs\\_handbook/gs\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/publications/gs_handbook/gs_handbook.pdf)

This handbook is one of the outputs of ALNAP's Global Study on Consultation and Participation of Disaster-Affected Populations ([http://www.odi.org.uk/alnap/publications/participation\\_study.htm](http://www.odi.org.uk/alnap/publications/participation_study.htm)). The Global Study aimed to increase understanding of the dynamics of consultation and participation through six country case studies encompassing a broad range of emergency types. (The Afghanistan study, the only case study looking at a natural disaster, is included in the 'Case Studies' section above.) The handbook is organised in four parts. Parts One to Three are most relevant. Part One explores the contextual factors that may affect community participation; and proposes basic guidelines for formal and informal communication, which are vital for using the participatory tools presented in following chapters. Part Two proposes a series of tools and approaches to help put into practice a participation strategy covering the various phases of the project cycle. It offers guidance on the potential risks of participation, and highlights the importance of taking into account at all times certain cross-cutting issues: the security of aid workers, partners and members of the affected population; the threat of exclusion and/or stigmatisation of minority groups; and the impartiality and legitimacy of the aid organisation. Part Three presents examples of tools for, and approaches to, participation in various intervention sectors common to humanitarian aid: food security and nutrition; health; shelter; and water and sanitation. The handbook concludes by providing guidance on how to evaluate the participation strategy that has been put in place.

- Shaw, R. And Okazaki, K. (eds.), 2002, 'The Sustainable Community Rehabilitation Handbook', United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)/ Sustainable Environment & Ecological Development Society (SEEDS)  
<http://www.hyogo.uncrd.or.jp/publication/pdf/Guide/HandBook.pdf>

This handbook aims to share lessons learned from the Patanka Navjivan Yojana (the Patanka New Life) Project (PNY) which was implemented in the village of Patanka in Gujarat following the 2001 earthquake. PNY was conceived as a model programme from its inception and aimed to build a model village with earthquake resistant housing and appropriate livelihood security. It also aimed to empower the affected community in order to build their resilience against future disasters, and to create a framework of mutual cooperation among different stakeholders. The handbook is divided into three



parts: the first describes the programme model; the second the process of implementation as well as examples from the programme; and the last part includes a checklist.

#### **Further Resources**

- 2007 'The Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network Directory'. The Asian Disaster Reduction Response Network (ADRRN), Malaysia  
<http://www.adrrn.net/adrrndirectory.pdf>

This resource includes profiles of the ADRRN's 27 members, a list of their publications, and a directory of organisations.

### **3. Additional information**

#### **Author**

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#### **Websites visited**

Google, Eldis, Duryog Nivaran, Prevention Web, Practical Action, World Bank, GSDRC, UNOCHA, Reliefweb, ODI Humanitarian Practice Network, ALNAP, Urgence Rehabilitation Developpement, Feinstein International Center, Provention Consortium, Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre, University of Delaware Disaster Research Centre, Center for International Rehabilitation, Helpage International, UNISDR, Gender and Disaster Network

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