chapter 9
Participatory implementation and monitoring

Implementation
The implementation and monitoring of humanitarian aid projects is a vast subject. This section does not, therefore, attempt to be all-encompassing. Instead, it focuses on activities that are common to many humanitarian projects.

Most aspects of a participatory implementation and monitoring process will have been planned during the design phase. In particular, the roles and contributions of members of the population, of any partners and of your aid organisation, should have been collectively discussed and decided. It is very difficult, and even disrespectful, to expect people to participate in a project when they have not been able to contribute to the design process. Without their involvement in the project design, people are less likely to be interested in participating, and may feel angry or resentful towards the aid agency (which in itself can have security implications).

Humanitarian projects rarely go exactly according to plan and situations are always subject to change, sometimes very suddenly, therefore monitoring is very important. Members of the population, however, are seldom genuinely involved in the monitoring process. Participatory monitoring is essential to support good communication and relationships between all stakeholders and to make necessary adjustments to the project in a timely manner.

Transferring resources to local organisations can put them under pressure or can make them the targets of parties to a conflict. Monitoring can highlight problems related to mismanagement or abuse, as well as errors in the initial design or difficulties that were not taken into account.

Participation in implementation and monitoring can help identify security and protection issues (e.g. human rights violations, gender-based violence, etc.) and can contribute to better security for both the participants in the project, and the aid organisation itself.

Although participatory implementation and monitoring has clear benefits, there are also a number of potential negative factors to which you should remain alert. If the project is being implemented with or through a local partner, local hierarchies and socio-political dynamics can reinforce and perpetuate existing patterns of discrimination. The type of activities chosen can de facto exclude certain groups, and favour others already privileged in some way. The views of minorities and marginalised groups can be overlooked during the monitoring process if, for example, they are unable to attend community assemblies or meetings in public places. Some groups may attempt to manipulate the monitoring process in order to orientate the project in ways that benefit them, at the expense of other groups.

Participation often entails working with existing structures or supporting the establishment of new institutions or social entities. These activities are rarely without political consequence. Different population groups may perceive an intervention in different ways: some may consider that it supports a particular group, thus demonstrating partiality or political affiliation.

When the project is ready to be implemented, some time will have passed since the design phase. The situation may have evolved and participants’ needs may have changed, so it may be helpful to hold a meeting or event to remind everyone of the key project components. Reviewing project content with stakeholders and members of the population ensures that everyone is ‘on board’ and that there are no misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations.
It is important to discuss whether or not the project strategy is still valid in light of changes in the situation. If there are real discrepancies between the planned project and the current situation, discuss potential changes that could be made to the project, bearing in mind the resources available.

Important issues that should be discussed include:

- project content and strategy
- commitments made by the various stakeholders
- responsibilities of each stakeholder
- implementation procedures including the work plan

It may be difficult to discuss potential changes to the project at this stage. There is a risk of entering into a new round of negotiations - including with donors - which can be very time consuming. However, if the situation has drastically changed, reviewing the project may be the only way of ensuring that it meets real needs in an appropriate manner.

When meeting with stakeholders to review the project you will need to bring the project document - if possible, the same document that was discussed when closing the design phase - and other documents such as contract agreements, as these common references can help resolve disputes over what was agreed.

Between the project design and implementation phases, all the parties involved (partner agencies, members of the population, etc.) should have started mobilising the resources they made a commitment to provide during the project design and negotiation phase. For the aid agency, this essentially entails mobilising donor funds, technical expertise, materials, etc. For local partners and/or population members, this can be financial resources, labour, and/or materials.

It is important for each party to inform the others about how the resource mobilisation process is progressing before launching the implementation. Failing to do so, especially when resources are not mobilised according to the planned time frame, can lead to a breakdown of trust before the project has even begun.

When population members, in particular, project beneficiaries, made a commitment to contribute materials and/or labour during the design phase, the questions to address at this point include:

- Do they have the capacity to fulfil their commitments?
- Has their situation changed so that they are no longer able to provide the resources?
- If they are having difficulties, how can the project be adapted to support them?

There is a tendency for all stakeholders to be very enthusiastic and ambitious when designing a project, leading to a tendency to promise (and expect!) too much. There is often a loss of momentum over the course of the project implementation phase. It is better to not be too ambitious, and to achieve what you set out to achieve rather than to aim too high and create disappointment on all sides.

It is crucial that the aid organisation also fulfils its commitments to the population. Failing to do so can lead to disappointment, loss of trust, and even security incidents. If it is not able to do so, it is crucial that it explains the reasons for this.

### IX.1.1 Managing human resources

The first step in project implementation is establishing the general management framework and relationships between the stakeholders involved. This should have been defined as part of the project strategy and is now put into practice during the implementation phase.

This involves reviewing the terms of the contracts that have been made between various stakeholders, such as between partners and between the aid organisation and
relevant authorities (traditional leaders, elders, government institutions, etc.). The roles and responsibilities of each party in terms of project management and supervision should be clearly set out and understood.

Many participatory projects rest on the establishment of committees for the implementation phase, such as steering committees for overall management, or water committees, community health worker teams, refugee committees, etc. This is the point at which the members of the committee should be identified and a working agenda should be decided. Be careful not to impose forms of organisation that are foreign to the local population as this can lead to lack of ownership, and hinder the integration of committees in the population. When possible, it can be useful to work through existing networks.

In order to get the best results, remember to listen to unrepresented groups. Create a space in which they can express themselves in a way that protects them and does not expose them to further stigmatisation, and make sure that you listen to all sides, e.g. by conducting a variety of focus groups and interviews in a variety of areas.

Create a space for ‘unofficial’ discussions. Sometimes relevant information regarding your project will only surface during informal chats.

If you are working directly with members of the population, it is important that:

- the person(s) acting as an intermediary with the population should be clearly identified
- the group or assembly that the agency deals with is clearly identified (council of elders, village assembly, etc.)

It is particularly important to clearly define who will be responsible for supervising each aspect of the project implementation.

**Examples**

1. Following the earthquakes in Nahrin, Afghanistan, aid organisations launched shelter reconstruction programmes, introducing earthquake mitigation techniques into the design. While the aid agencies provided technical supervision and wooden beams for roofs, beneficiaries were expected to build their homes in accordance with these earthquake mitigation techniques, make bricks and gather stones.

   Having been enthusiastic during the assessment phase, by the implementation stage, some beneficiaries were experiencing difficulty in making bricks or gathering stones. Furthermore, others were too busy earning a living to take part in the construction work. The situation was particularly difficult for households with no able-bodied men. Tension and anger rose, as autumn drew near. People’s main concern was to finish their shelter using traditional techniques – walls made of dried mud and straw (highly vulnerable to earthquakes) – in order to be protected from the cold. This was a very difficult situation for the agencies to manage.

2. There is solid evidence from the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan that relying on male family members to rebuild homes massively reduced cash in the economy as the men would normally have been working overseas and sending back remittances.

3. A community in Guinée Forestière had agreed to receive a population of refugees. It laid down conditions that were included in the agreement signed between the UNHCR and district authorities on issues such as use of water points and the health centre. The agreement also set out the obligations of the villagers, such as the amount of land to be made available for the refugee camp and for how long.

   However, the camp remained in place much longer than was originally planned. The villagers were very bitter about this, saying “At first, they came to talk to us, the elders, they even carried out sacrifices in our sacred forests (…) then they broke their promises (…) very few of our requests have been granted.” Better communication and involvement of the villagers as the situation evolved could have reduced the resentment on the part of the villagers.
IX.1.2 Communication

Poor communication is the main source of tension and conflict between parties, so make sure that there is agreement amongst all parties about lines of communication (e.g. meetings, reporting, etc.) and that they are clear and function according to plan.

This includes communication:
- within the agency
- directly with project beneficiaries and members of the population
- between partners
- with relevant authorities and stakeholders
- between the aid agency/agencies and representatives of the population

The means of communication should be culturally acceptable, effective and accessible to the whole population. Pay special attention to language, the way in which the information is being presented, where and how often information is circulated and the amount of detail that is supplied.

Information is a source of power - make sure the right information is provided to those concerned, and that certain individuals or population groups are not excluded from the project process through lack of information.

The means of communication that you select can give the impression that you are taking sides politically in relation to the crisis. For example, organisations displaying information in local administrative offices may well be seen as allies of the local administration. Be careful about where and how your information is circulated, especially in conflict or post-conflict situations.

Lines of communication should be clear for all those involved in the project, especially representatives of the population and beneficiaries, so that they know who they can speak to.

IX.1.3 Recruiting and organising the project team

Putting together the project team is an essential step since the quality of the relationship that is established between the team and the population can determine the success of a project.

The high staff turnover that is commonplace in international aid organisations can reduce participation levels in a project by weakening cohesion between team members and the population. Organisations looking to promote staff loyalty must be prepared to invest in or encourage the project team, especially national staff members and those with participatory skills.

When recruiting team members, you need to ensure that people are well informed about the skills you are looking for, such as participatory skills, and the ability to listen to and communicate with the population. Speaking the population’s language can go a long way towards facilitating dialogue and establishing a relationship of trust, and should be valued in potential staff members.

IX.1.4 Managing project resources: setting up the logistical and administrative system

The administrative system covers the management of funds, cash flows, purchases and accounts. The logistical system includes stock management, transport, vehicles
and their maintenance, buildings and their maintenance, etc. Together they cover the management of all the resources mobilised for the project.

Transparent and effective logistical and administrative management are essential to a project’s success. They are also essential ingredients for trust and motivation: if one party is seen as wasting resources or as not being sufficiently accountable, it can create tension and even conflict.

In some situations it may be more appropriate for international staff or outsiders to take responsibility for the logistical and administrative system for the following reasons:

- giving responsibility for resource management to members of the population can increase their exposure to looting and violence
- accusations of nepotism, corruption, theft, and profit making are common in any social group, due to individual rivalries and underlying conflict. Giving an outsider the responsibility for these resources can defuse such accusations
- members of the local population are more likely to be subject to pressure from relatives, influential members of the population, etc. to use the resources for other purposes.

The transparency of the system should be ensured by clearly explaining to stakeholders how resources are managed. For example, members of the population can be invited to witness how certain procedures are implemented (e.g. how a tendering process is won, how stock safety is ensured, etc.). Involving the population in logistics management, such as stock management, dealing with the arrival of new beneficiaries or distributing certain types of aid can help stimulate or reinforce social control mechanisms.

### IX.15 Mobilising local resources

Local resources can include both material resources (such as medicines, building materials, vehicles, food, etc.), as well as services (such as construction workers, transport, etc.). While some resources can be mobilised from outside the region, mobilising resources locally can stimulate the local or regional economy. Using local suppliers and service providers is also a way of recognising that the region has a role to play in the post-crisis strategy and to promote ownership of the project.

Whether local or otherwise, service providers and suppliers who are involved throughout the programme and who understand the importance of the project for the affected populations are more likely to be able to adapt their approach or products to specific needs and timeframes. Subcontracting services to local businesses, NGOs, or training groups, can be an opportunity to enter into ‘small partnerships’ or to build local capacity. When subcontracting services to local businesses, it is important to be aware that they will gain economic power from the project.

If large amounts of resources need to be mobilised and local resources are overstretched, the positive effects for the economy in the short term can be outweighed by a number of negative impacts.

These include:

- undermining local purchasing power by driving prices upwards;
- upsetting regular supply and demand equilibrium: the project can increase demand over a short period, encouraging local suppliers to invest in a sector, but this then collapses once the project has been supplied.
IX.1.6 Selecting project beneficiaries

You will now need to select the individuals, households or groups that will benefit from the project according to the targeting criteria established during the project design phase.

While in some projects the process of beneficiary selection is integrated in the activities (e.g. patients attending a clinic, malnourished children who meet anthropometric criteria admitted in a feeding centre, neighbourhood dwellers who benefit from a well, etc.), in other projects, selecting beneficiaries is a very delicate process, particularly when it entails distribution of valuable items such as food, seeds and tools or building materials for house reconstruction.

Involving members of the population in beneficiary selection can help save time, facilitate access and coverage, increase the affected population’s confidence in the aid organisation and ensure that undue tension is not created within the population due to inappropriate targeting. However, there are also potential risks involved.

Careful assessment of the social and political situation is necessary before you engage in this kind of participation and your approach should be adapted accordingly.

Beneficiary selection involves three key elements:

- clearly established selection criteria
- extensive communication regarding selection criteria
- a mechanism for managing complaints

Be careful when communicating the names of direct beneficiaries. In some contexts, they may be subject to looting or aggression. They may also be seen as affiliated to parties to a conflict by other population members or armed factions.

The simplest yet most risk-prone procedure is to entrust the drawing up of lists to the affected population’s local representative(s). However the legitimacy of these institutions and individuals is sometimes in doubt and there is a risk of nepotism. In some contexts, not delegating the selection of beneficiaries can lead to inefficient targeting that excludes the most vulnerable. In many situations, local people know best who needs assistance the most.

If doubts are voiced regarding the legitimacy or objectivity of the local authorities, it may be appropriate to organise the beneficiary selection differently, notably via institutions that have less political or economic interest in distributing assistance. In addition, you can introduce other mechanisms, like social control mechanisms or a ‘complaints office’ to monitor how satisfied the population is with the way local authorities handle the selection process, although this too needs to be handled very sensitively.

One way of avoiding the diversion of aid for political or economic interests is to delegate the selection of beneficiaries directly to community members. This can be a successful process if carefully managed.

It is especially useful when beneficiaries selected for the project have been given certain responsibilities or must accomplish certain tasks. If these responsibilities are made common knowledge, this can help increase the sense of commitment to the project.

In certain situations, delegating this responsibility to community members can lead to tension and even conflict within the community. It can also mean that existing gender and social hierarchy relations are unchallenged. For example, male children may be prioritised for feeding assistance over female children.

Someone from outside the population (e.g. a member of staff from the aid organisation) can also facilitate the selection process and beneficiaries can be selected through group exercises and discussions. If similar methods were used in the design phase to establish targeting criteria, the results of these can be referred to.
Working with local partners or delegating the responsibility for selecting beneficiaries to them can help refine the targeting and identify the households with the greatest needs. To do this, the local partner needs to have a good relationship with the population and be respected by them. It may be necessary to involve other parties, e.g. representatives of the population or leaders, to cross-check the process.

Social mechanisms, where community members themselves ensure that the targeting process is respected and well-implemented, can have various positive effects. They can ensure that the process is fair, help in reducing abuse of the system and even reduce conflict and tensions within the population. This takes place when the population feels that it is in their interest to make sure the rules for targeting are respected. To encourage this, it is essential to:

- reach agreement on the targeting criteria with members and/or representatives of the population
- communicate about the rationale behind the targeting process via community assemblies, notice boards, radio, etc.
- establish sanctions to discourage potential abuse

Other examples of social control mechanisms include posting lists of beneficiaries in a public place, so that everyone knows who should or should not receive assistance. However, social control mechanisms may be inappropriate when there is a lot of tension in a community as they can add to it or where social order has broken down. Social control mechanisms can be difficult to implement in certain contexts, notably when fear of retaliation prevents community members from complaining.

Any targeting and beneficiary selection process should include a mechanism for managing complaints in a timely way. This should be one of the key communication mechanisms between the population and the aid organisation. Failing to manage complaints as they arise can lead to a loss of legitimacy, loss of trust, anger and even security incidents.

Managing complaints does not mean that you have to comply with all demands, but that you have to consider the complaint being made, make a judgement on whether it should be upheld or not, take the necessary action or explain the decision. In some cases, the most suitable person for resolving conflicts may be an ‘outsider’, especially if the person is perceived as impartial. In other cases, complaints may be more efficiently resolved through local mechanisms (e.g. council of elders). The participatory nature of the process should ensure that the community can take responsibility for, and play its part in, solving problems that arise through targeting and responding to complaints related to the list.

You may be asked to set up a system that enables people to voice complaints anonymously. You need to ensure that people are aware that this system exists and that anonymity is indeed preserved and respected.

Make sure that the complaints system that you have set up is accessible to vulnerable population groups and to minority groups. For example, if the complaints box is placed in

In Afghanistan an organisation attempted to devolve the selection of female beneficiaries to members of the consultative boards of local community assemblies (the community forums). This put considerable pressure on the board members, who were accused by community members of favouring their relatives. The board members then said that they would exclude their relatives from the selection process to avoid accusations of nepotism! Fighting erupted between women over the question of who was the most vulnerable. The agency had to abandon this approach.

In Guinea, refugee committees established lists of beneficiaries and handled distribution lists. This ensured that the beneficiary identification process was subject to considerable pressure on the board members, who were accused by community members of favouring their relatives. The board members then said that they would exclude their relatives from the selection process to avoid accusations of nepotism!

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During the drought that hit Afghanistan between 1999 and 2002, the ICRC organised large food distributions in the north of the country. To ensure the distribution was fair, they defined the targeting criteria with elders representing all the villages of the concerned area who then drew up beneficiary lists according to these criteria. It was agreed that the ICRC would do a random crosscheck of beneficiaries, and that if anyone in a village was found cheating, the whole village would be sanctioned. The social pressure within villages was strong enough to prevent abuses of the system.
When a distribution is planned, it is better to put in place a mechanism for managing claims and complaints before the distribution, to avoid setbacks and disputes during the distribution (see section on pre- and post-distribution monitoring below).

### Tips & Warnings

In involving crisis-affected people in a humanitarian response

In most situations, especially in refugee camps or areas where the risks of manipulation and diversion of distributed material are perceived as high, distributions are anything but participatory and are marked by suspicion of the affected population and local stakeholders. People are simply called to the distribution point, sometimes with very little notice.

Such approaches can generate a sense of defiance among beneficiaries, and can foster a desire to ‘cheat the system’. This results in a need for more stringent controls, which can be distressing for the affected populations. This is highly demanding in terms of labour and can degenerate easily, since local authorities and organisations are given little, if any, responsibility.

Although there are challenges in carrying out participatory distributions, they are likely to be rewarding in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, and the quality of the relationship between the affected population and the aid organisation.

There are several ways that crisis-affected populations can be involved in the distribution process:

1. **Involvement of population members in specific tasks**

Here, the population provides personnel to clean distribution sites, unload trucks, transport food to nearby storage facilities and participate in the distribution itself. This has to be controlled in a relatively strict manner.

2. **Delegation and sharing of responsibility for the distribution**

Local institutions or structures can ease distribution logistics, facilitate access to the population, and enhance social control. However, this approach needs to be used judiciously. When the society concerned is of an oppressive nature, giving certain stakeholders control over distribution can reinforce their power. There is also an increased risk that assistance will be diverted or misused.

3. **Support for locally managed distribution**

This approach to distribution is very rare, because organisations want or need (due to obligations to donors) to keep control of the process. However, there have been programmes where local structures carried out the assessment, the programme design and its implementation, and where the external organisation only provided the items to be distributed. Although the resource provider was involved in the monitoring, the local structure was mostly responsible for implementation.

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Your choice of approach should be based on the following considerations:

1. Which local stakeholders could potentially take part in implementing the distribution or could execute it themselves?
2. What capacity do they have?
3. What are their agendas?
4. How are they perceived by the population?

Members of the affected population who are responsible for the distribution of goods can be put under considerable pressure to favour family, friends and community. As an external stakeholder, you should be prepared to give them support.

The very least you must do is inform the affected population as widely as possible about how the distribution will occur and the rationale behind the procedures. Failure to do so can create tension within the population and between you and the stakeholders involved.

If you cannot delegate the distribution to a local actor, you can invite representatives of the population to oversee the distribution with you, which enhances your level of accountability to the population, supports information sharing, and can increase trust between you and the population.

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Monitoring before and after the distribution is a way to maintain trust between the affected population and the aid organisation, and to avoid or manage tensions within the population.

Monitoring in a participatory manner can enhance the efficiency and reliability of the process. It can also strengthen local capacity and the relationship between your organisation and the affected population.

Pre- and post-distribution monitoring can be carried out:
4. by your agency (although not very participatory, accountability to donors often requires it);
5. by your agency in collaboration with local actors and population representatives;
6. by the population itself, through social control mechanisms.

One way of managing a participatory monitoring process is to form a monitoring committee composed of representatives of the various stakeholders involved.

Pre-distribution monitoring involves checking that the beneficiaries on distribution lists correspond to the targeting criteria. This should be done whenever possible, since it is far easier to deal with errors and complaints before the distribution than during or after it!

In order to verify beneficiary lists, a team designated by potential beneficiaries can carry out house-to-house verification. In addition, information about targeting criteria and lists of potential beneficiaries can be displayed on posters or announced at public meetings.

Just outside the distribution sites situated close to airstrips in South Sudan, it is common to see women lay out all that they have just received on nets or directly on the soil, and to share it with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Although there is no doubt that taxes are probably levied by local institutions, the main reason for this phenomenon is the need for each woman to remain within the social security net. ‘You share when you have, so that the day you have nothing people will share with you.’

Failure to understand this fact can be a source of considerable frustration, or even of security problems for aid agencies. It requires going back to the assessment and deepening one’s understanding of the social and cultural context.
monitoring meetings, so that people not on the list can understand why they were not included or take necessary measures to be included if they meet the criteria. It is also important to put in place a mechanism for receiving claims, complaints or queries and dealing with them.

A variety of tools is available for this undertaking:

- A survey conducted at the gate of the distribution point (questions, checking bags, weighing goods) by designated representatives of the population and members of the agency.
- Simple focus groups to get rapid feedback (proportional piling and ranking exercises are very useful).
- House-to-house random surveys carried out by the same teams.
- More elaborate systems based on questionnaires.
- Specific studies carried out by external actors.

In a participatory post-monitoring process the results should be fed back to the main stakeholders, particularly those involved in the monitoring process. In this way everyone shares the responsibility of finding solutions. In the interest of accountability, results should also be shared with the population at large to demonstrate the efforts being made to achieve a fair and appropriate distribution process.

Be careful to ensure that the representatives of the population involved in the monitoring process are in a position to be fair and impartial. Try to ensure that the monitoring process includes ‘voiceless’ groups, giving them an opportunity to speak out or complain without exposing them to security risks.

An important advantage of making the monitoring process participatory is that it means the community can take responsibility for, and play its part in solving problems that emerge.

Monitoring project implementation is absolutely essential to ensure that the project is being implemented properly and necessary adjustments can be made. In order to monitor the project in a participatory manner, it is necessary to define how the various stakeholders will be involved. In order to define a monitoring system, you must:

- Clarify its purpose
- Establish monitoring criteria and indicators
- Decide what methods will be used
- Decide how feedback will be given and how the monitoring results will be used

Participatory monitoring means that the crisis-affected people, local stakeholders and agencies decide together how they will measure results and what action to take once this information has been collected and analysed. It is a monitoring system in which all stakeholders involved, from project team members to population members, have an opportunity to provide feedback on the project as it is being implemented and to influence its development.

Participation in monitoring has much less meaning if population members and local stakeholders have not been involved much earlier in the project cycle. It is important to accept that what aid organisations generally consider ‘good practice’ in monitoring may be challenged by members of the population - be ready to be flexible.

Participatory monitoring requires a commitment that recommendations from the monitoring process will have a visible impact on the project, and that when recommendations cannot be put into practice that an explanation is given. Otherwise, participants can feel betrayed.

There can be many different reasons for monitoring a project, but it is always essential to gauge the population’s level of satisfaction with the project.
Defining criteria and indicators for a participatory monitoring process is challenging, since population members and aid organisations may have different perceptions as to what criteria and indicators are appropriate.

Criteria are values that are used to define the quality of an intervention, for example: effectiveness (the project objectives are met), relevance (the project responds to the population’s needs), adaptation to the context, efficiency (effectiveness related to the time and resources spent), sustainability, impact, etc. Monitoring a project enables the actor to assess the progress a project is making in relation to the quality criteria that have been set.

Make sure that you use terms that have the same meaning for everyone involved. Even if the group shares a common language, cultural differences and nuances in the language can complicate communication or even give rise to misunderstandings.

If a participatory workshop is being held to decide upon project objectives, it may be useful to take the opportunity to determine quality criteria at the same time. This will promote ownership of both these elements amongst the stakeholders. If your project intends to be participatory, do not forget to include tools to assess participation.

Population members may be unfamiliar with the language of ‘criteria’ and ‘indicators’. Furthermore, it may be difficult to reach an agreement on indicators, since perceptions of what a “finished house” or a “productive harvest” is, can differ between different stakeholders. The process of defining indicators may require negotiation and flexibility, in light of what is feasible in a given project.

When and how regularly an indicator is measured will depend upon the nature and importance of the information it supplies, and the population can participate in establishing where the priorities lie.

Do not hesitate to use information from another source to supplement your monitoring system, if it appears trustworthy and transparent. If it conflicts with data collected using methods that were decided in a participatory manner, you will have to explain this to project stakeholders.

Having defined your project’s quality criteria and indicators, the basis for your monitoring system, you are now in a position to decide what method you are going to use to monitor the project and situation.

In order to select the most appropriate monitoring method, four questions must be addressed.

• Who will manage the monitoring process? Who will set it up? How will the population be involved in the monitoring process?
• Who will participate in the monitoring process?
• What methods will be used to collect monitoring information?
• What resources will the monitoring process require?

**IX.2.2 Who will manage the monitoring process?**

Monitoring can highlight errors or publicise abuse in the management, design and implementation of the project. This can place the people who detect these problems and those who are responsible for them in a difficult or even unsafe situation. Be careful about security and protection issues when deciding who will be responsible for the monitoring process.

While some aspects of project monitoring can be delegated to members of the population or partners, some issues may have to be monitored directly by your organisation.

Working through traditional assemblies or certain local institutions can lead to certain groups remaining excluded...
Creating the space for them to speak out is a delicate undertaking which should take into account the consequences they may face, such as risks to their security or further stigmatisation.

**IX.2.3 Who will participate in the monitoring process?**

Participatory monitoring should aim to collect the perceptions of a range of stakeholders, from those responsible for implementing the project (aid organisation staff, implementation committees, sub-contracted organisations, etc.), to beneficiaries, other population members and local authorities.

The idea is not to identify as many people as possible, but to consult a representative sample of these stakeholders.

Make sure that unrepresented groups are taken into account in the monitoring process, but consider their security before encouraging them to speak out, as this may expose them to risks, or may discourage them from getting involved. You may have to consult them separately, respecting their anonymity.

Wherever possible, monitoring should be carried out with a variety of population groups (different families, different regions, different population members, leaders, indirect beneficiaries, etc.).

Listen to other organisations. Knowing what other agencies and actors in the same field think of the programme can provide interesting insights. It is crucial to incorporate these views into the debate with programme beneficiaries.

Sometimes, the fact that one point has been raised by another agency can open up new avenues of debate and prevent dangerous ‘face-to-face’ confrontations between the aid provider and the recipients.

Be ready to listen to information transmitted via ‘unofficial’ monitoring channels such as complaints voiced to field workers or comments from other organisations. This type of information may reveal problems that your current monitoring system is unable to detect, and often proves extremely useful with regard to monitoring security and project relevance.

**IX.2.4 Deciding on the methods to be used**

Participatory monitoring can be done in various ways. The choice of method will depend on the issue that is being monitored. Some methods to consider are:

- incorporating monitoring into existing decision-making and problem-solving mechanisms (e.g. traditional assemblies);
- social control mechanisms and peer pressure;
- participatory tools and exercises;
- specific monitoring committees or groups;
- existing monitoring systems (e.g. other NGOs or UN agencies);
- one-to-one consultations (e.g. surveys, interviews, questionnaires, witness accounts, life story accounts);

Social control mechanisms require that corrective action is taken against those who break any rules that have been established collectively. The population should be informed about the nature and conditions of this corrective action, and whose role it is to apply sanctions, to ensure that tensions do not break out between population members. Social control mechanisms are more effective when there has been transparency from the beginning of the project (design) and when project ownership among the community is strong.

Social control mechanisms can be difficult to implement in certain contexts, notably when making a complaint exposes a
person to the risk of violence and when fear of retaliation prevents community members from making complaints.

If monitoring is carried out via traditional assemblies and other traditional structures, it is important to ensure that these bodies have the necessary legitimacy, that they do not reinforce discrimination against minorities and that there is little risk of them being manipulated by other interests. In cases where certain groups are marginalised, you may need to organise separate focus groups to ensure their views are heard.

Some subjects are extremely sensitive and cannot be discussed in public assemblies, such as monitoring birth control methods, protection issues, etc. You will need to organise private sessions for sensitive topics and ensure that appropriate interviewers are available. This is one way of showing respect towards the local population.

A participatory monitoring process should provide feedback to participants on monitoring results and involve them in decision-making. Failing to do so can lead to a loss of trust and motivation and can be interpreted as a lack of respect. Consulting the population and measuring indicators will also have been a waste of time.

**IX.2.5 Defining feedback methods and how the results will be used**

Questions to address when setting up feedback mechanisms include:

- How will feedback be given about results, changes and adjustments? Will a specific session be organised for this purpose? Will enough time be set aside for people to digest the findings and to react? Will they take part in decision-making concerning changes to be made?
- How will participants be informed of how their views have been taken into account?

- Is it possible to establish a participatory system to follow up the implementation of recommendations?

Setting up a feedback system implies having the flexibility to modify and adapt your programme. If you are monitoring elements that you cannot change, especially those related to internal project management, you should communicate this at the design phase of the monitoring system.

A certain amount of flexibility is necessary in the project design so that any necessary changes can be made. This may have to be discussed with donors prior to project implementation. You can put forward different scenarios and hypotheses regarding ways in which the crisis and context might evolve, for example if a new wave of refugees were to arrive, or access to populations became limited, and so on.

At this point, it will be necessary to recruit the monitoring teams. Involving the population in nominating the individuals, teams or committee members who will carry out the monitoring activities has the advantage of added transparency and may also help reduce the risk of bias. It is necessary to ensure that the monitoring teams have the appropriate skills, especially in participatory techniques. If this is not the case, you will need to provide the necessary training and support. Managers should make it their responsibility to observe the behaviour of the teams and take any necessary corrective or supportive action.

**IX.2.6 Data collection, analysis and feedback**

Although it is important that your teams respect the monitoring timetable as much as possible, flexibility is also required in case the context changes or some of the methods that you had planned prove to be unrealistic.

The monitoring system should include sufficient time and resources for processing and analysing data. Once the results have been presented to the population for discussion, group decisions can be made about whether the project needs to be amended, and if so, how.
Participatory monitoring takes time and too much discussion can hold up the project and lead to frustration. Try to find a balance between efficiency/effectiveness and discussion.

**Quote**

“Consultation is harder to do during the implementation phase. You need to have a plan and you need to carry it out. You cannot discuss it all the time. Often people want somebody who says, ‘This is how it’s going to be!’”

Aid worker, Nahrin, Afghanistan.

When processing monitoring results and feedback, it is unlikely that you will be able to take every recommendation into consideration. Explain clearly why this is the case with regard to constraints and project capacity. Create a space for ‘unofficial’ and informal discussions. Sometimes relevant information only surfaces in exchanges of this kind.

**Quote**

“We surveyed 7,000 families, and then 10,000 families and we distributed as much as we could. And at the end, the only thing we got was complaints... When we have a lot of complaints, we gather everybody at the mosque. Everybody talks, and in the end, they control themselves. There are always people who complain and others who are happy.”

Afghan project supervisor, Nahrin, Afghanistan.

### IX.2.7 Monitoring and evaluation with formal partners

If there is already an agreed formal relationship, joint monitoring of a programme generally requires the following:

- Clear written contractual agreements between all partners. These can take two forms: a general framework laying down the general objectives and conditions for the partnership or specific agreements for particular actions.
- Appropriate means and lines of communication with beneficiaries and all those affected by the crisis.
- Regular meetings between the partners, where monitoring information is gathered and discussed, and decisions are made about how the project will continue.
- A shared understanding of the criteria and indicators used in the monitoring.
- Project monitoring should be complemented by evaluations, such as mid-term and final evaluations. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for evaluations should be drawn up together by the partners. An external evaluation will ensure neutrality and objectivity.
- Monitoring and evaluation can focus on:
  - The project itself (objectives, process, results, impacts).
  - The partnership (objectives, process) and whether it has contributed to project activities positively or negatively.

This involves defining criteria and indicators for the partnership and capacity/institution building for each partner. These should be defined together by the partners.

Though in many situations, closing down a project is limited to ‘packing up and leaving’, it should be considered an integral part of the project cycle and should be handled with care. Failing to do so can have a negative effect on:

- people’s confidence in the aid system as a whole
- positive impacts produced by the project
- the sustainability of project investments, such as buildings, stock, training and networks
- members of the population who were involved in the project
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IX.3.2 Communication

All decisions related to project closure should be communicated to the community via the communication channels that you have been using throughout the project cycle. This means communicating extensively with the population about the following:

- when you are leaving - the date and / or the stage in events or activities
- why you are leaving
- what will happen next
- what effect this will have on the community
- what will be done with resources
- who is taking over

At this point, it is very important to ensure that you have kept all the promises that you made at the outset and during the project implementation. A hasty departure or a departure that is not concluded correctly can dramatically undermine a population’s confidence in the aid system.

IX.3.3 Learning from the project experience

Before you leave, it may be useful to hold a meeting with the different stakeholders in order to formally close the project. During this meeting, aid actors have the opportunity to give a summary of the project objectives, methodology, achievements and impact and where the future of the project lies. This provides the community with an opportunity to voice any complaints or recommendations and to discuss the positive and negative points of the programme.

This is also an opportunity for the project team to draw lessons and to manage questions and misunderstandings. It is
also an opportunity for the local community to say goodbye in a way that feels appropriate to them. During this meeting, it is both practical and symbolic to physically hand over the project documents to those who will be responsible for managing it in the future. This gives them a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of the population and clarifies both their position and yours.

When adopting a participatory approach it is important to regularly review how participation has worked at each stage of the project cycle. In this section, we look at whether participation has contributed to improving the quality of implementation and monitoring.

Who participated and how?
This section gives guidance on how to review your participatory approach during the implementation and monitoring phase. The following table will help you to analyse how you carried out the participatory implementation and monitoring. Chapter 10 gives guidance on how to evaluate the whole project from needs assessment through to project closure in a participatory manner.

En plus de décrire ce qui a été fait, il est essentiel de In addition to describing what has been done, it is essential to find out whether those who took part felt they were genuinely consulted, were able to express their concerns, were able to speak openly – in short, that they truly participated.

This can be assessed by consulting a small sample of those who participated in the design process. Preferably, this should be done by someone who did not facilitate the process (as this would bias responses).

Was participation successful?
The following questions will help you analyse how successfully you applied your participatory approach.

- Were people exposed to risks as a result of the participation process? What measures did you take to reduce and manage risks?
- Were you able to uphold the principles of independence and impartiality, by being careful about who you engaged with and by communicating your principles?
- Were you able to gain access to minorities, hear unrepresented groups and work with them without stigmatising them further or creating security risks for them?
- Have you succeeded in building the capacity of stakeholders and the population since the beginning of the project?
- Have you provided enough support to those who will be responsible for the project or project activities after your
departure? Have you supported and strengthened the population’s coping strategies?

- Have you succeeded in avoiding or reducing negative impacts on the affected population, their environment and aid workers?

- Did you succeed in preventing security and protection risks for the people who participated in your project? Did you face any security incidents or protection problems?

- Did participation allow you to take into account the viewpoints of a variety of different population groups? Did this enable you to focus on priority needs and target groups more effectively? Were you able to detect if needs changed over the course of project and did you revise your project accordingly?

- Did participation allow you to use local knowledge and resources to achieve project objectives and overcome context-specific constraints?

- Did you achieve the degree of participation that you set out to achieve? Are people satisfied that they have been sufficiently involved in the project?

- Did you succeed in communicating and informing people over the course of the project? Do people feel that they were well informed on a regular basis over the course of the project?

- Did the project take into account the population’s cultural, social and religious characteristics?

- Did participation facilitate the hand-over of responsibility for the project to a local organisation, stakeholder or group of people?

- Did participation and local knowledge allow you to anticipate changes in the context and/or crisis? Did participants’ feedback and input allow you to adapt the project appropriately in relation to developments in the context and/or crisis?

- Did participation allow you to identify and incorporate local resources (e.g. expertise, time, local knowledge, experience, etc.)?

- Did local knowledge allow you to estimate the resources (quantity and quality) required by your project with greater accuracy?

- Did the presence of national staff in your team increase your capacity to fulfil project objectives?

- Did you establish partnerships or subcontract work to local organisations or groups (e.g. logistics, administration) which allowed you to reduce the pressure on management teams?

- Did you listen to lessons learnt by the population, your organisation and other aid agencies? Were these lessons taken into account over the course of the project?

- Is a member of the population, local organisation or stakeholder responsible for recording and transmitting the history of the project and lessons learnt at project closure/handover?

- Did participation help to clarify your mandate and principles in the eyes of the population and stakeholders? Did it reduce the risk of project activities being manipulated by stakeholders? Were there any cases of project activities being manipulated by other actors?

- Did you implement the participatory approach as planned? If not, why not? Did you meet the objectives of participation? If not, why not?

- What lessons have been learnt? How can you help stakeholders and other organisations benefit from the lessons you have learnt?
Chapter 9 summary

Participatory implementation and monitoring

1. Participatory project implementation can help keep the project relevant and adapted to a changing situation.
2. Participatory implementation makes use of a wider range of resources, skills and expertise, and acknowledges and supports local capacities and expertise.
3. For participatory project implementation, it is essential that the roles of all the different parties should be clear and that there is effective two-way communication.
4. Involving crisis-affected people in beneficiary selection can make a project more effective, and can reduce tensions between those who will benefit directly from the project and those who will not.
5. Participatory monitoring is essential for accountability and transparency, and also builds capacity within crisis-affected populations.