Summary reflections from 2020 Participation in Practice Webinar

- **Interest in participation is global** – over 1,097 people from 103 countries registered for the webinar and shared their thoughts on participation, with particularly strong engagement from Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

- 90% of webinar participants believed that beneficiary participation in project design and implementation was **already happening** in March 2020.

- 93% of engaged humanitarians believe that it is **doable to engage beneficiaries in project design and decision making**, with 31% saying it was **very feasible** in their context.

- **Sharing practical experiences** of participation was effective, convincing 51% of webinar participants that beneficiary participation is **more feasible than they previously believed**.

- The top three **enablers** of effective participation were **staff commitment to participation**, **staff capacity and knowledge**, and **effective information sharing with communities**. This suggests that **political will and leadership** is key to improving participation. Individual comments imply that confident leadership that addresses the ‘fear of changing organizational program models’ is critical – Leadership has to be sufficiently bought into participation to make ‘systematic change throughout the organization’, and also needs ‘a comprehensive understanding of all stakeholders to whom humanitarians are accountable’.

- The top three **dis-enablers** were **Donor/Partner pressure to implement**, **Donor/partner inflexibility**, and the time pressures of humanitarian work. This suggests that remaining blocks to participation lie with **those who hold power** – Donors and leaders. Addressing this means the ‘genuine creation of space by those who have the decision-making power (INGO and UN agencies)’. This includes allowing **time** for participation mechanisms to work, a real challenge given the frequent urgency of humanitarian work.

- **Insecurity** was flagged by many participants as a major block. One respondent from a conflict context noted that ‘many do not participate through retaliation or that their names will be made public, so they prefer not to comment or participate [despite] knowing that they have much to say’.

- However, others noted that it was also important to be clear on the **limitations of the project** to manage expectations. Participants noted that affected population are **only one of several stakeholders** consulted and that other stakeholders often seem to be more vocal and prepared to convey feedback, thus overruling voices of affected populations.

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1 Further information about the event, as well as a video recording and audio podcast, is available at [https://phap.org/26mar2020](https://phap.org/26mar2020)