

Summary reflections from 2020 Participation in Practice Webinar¹

- **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.
- Broad and growing **understanding among affected communities** mean they now have better formed expectations both of aid provision and of their role in directing it. One respondent noted that ‘the affected population is used to participating through their representatives ... they complain whenever there are activities going on and they are not informed.’
- **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 feed-back, thus overruling voices of affected populations.

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