

Participatory data collection methods – November/December 2023

Training handout

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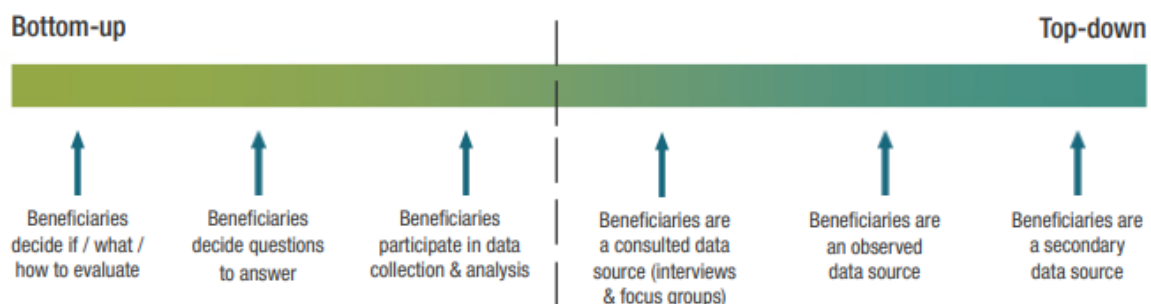
DEFINING PARTICIPATORY DATA COLLECTION

Four key principles:

1. Participation' – which means opening up the design of the evaluation process to include those most directly affected, and agreeing to analyse data together.
2. The inclusiveness of participatory monitoring and evaluation requires 'negotiation' to reach agreement about what will be monitored or evaluated, how and when data will be collected and analysed, what the data actually means, and how findings will be shared, and action taken.
3. This leads to 'learning' which becomes the basis for subsequent improvement and corrective action.
4. Since the number, role and skills of stakeholders, the external environment, and other factors change over time, 'flexibility' is essential.

(Gujit and Gaventa, 1998, p2)

A participation continuum



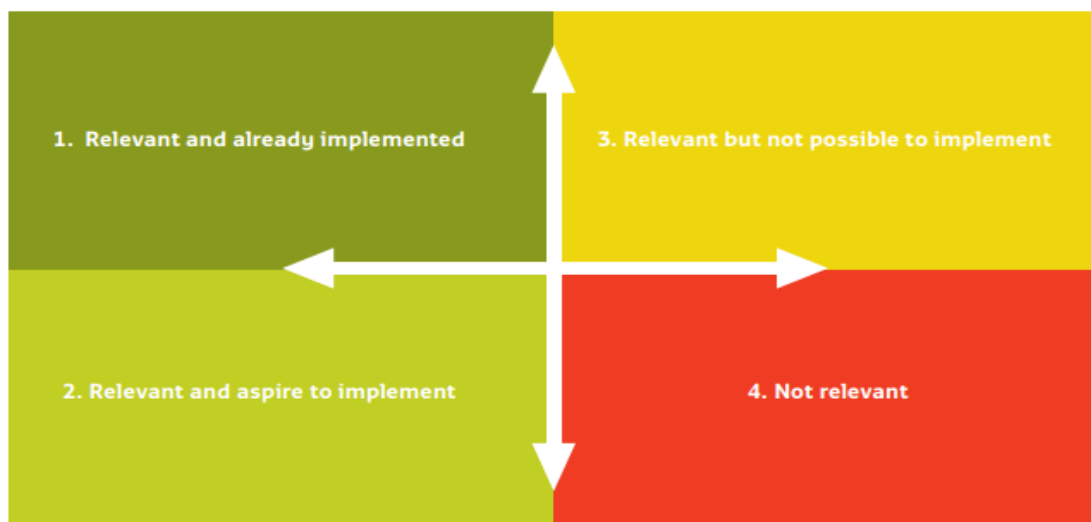
Source: IFRC-PED (2014)

(Alexander and Bonino, 2014, p3)

BEYOND DATA COLLECTION: HOW ELSE CAN WE INVOLVE AFFECTED POPULATIONS IN MONITORING, EVALUATION, LEARNING AND RESEARCH?

- Participatory analysis
- Validation of findings/recommendations (see diagram below for an example)
- Participatory development of reports/other outputs/sharing processes e.g. videos/drama
- Participatory processes to support use of findings and recommendations
- Being part of an Advisory Group for a specific data collection exercise, like an evaluation
- Being part of an ongoing MEAL/research related group – e.g. War [Child UK Voicemore programme](#)

Example framework for participatory validation of recommendations



(Source: Author's own)

WHY SHOULD WE USE PARTICIPATORY METHODS?

1. **A value-based or normative rationale:** agencies believe it is the right thing to do, for example in order to fulfil a moral duty, or to respect the fundamental rights and dignity of affected groups.
2. **An instrumental rationale:** because it makes humanitarian programmes more effective, for example, by gathering information to inform programme decisions, and better meeting the needs of those affected by crisis.
3. **An emancipatory rationale:** because it addresses structural inequalities and the root causes of crises, for example giving voice and agency to marginalised groups, or more ambitiously, transforming power structures and dynamics.

(Brown and Donino 2014, quoted in Cosgrave et al., 2016)

Alignment with the Core Humanitarian Standard



(Source: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>)

POTENTIAL RISKS AND CHALLENGES

- Operational challenges e.g. related to access, attrition due to the transitory nature of the lives and/or competing priorities of those participating
- Ethical issues:
 - Involving 'the usual suspects'/Exclusion of marginalised groups e.g. based on disability, literacy, language barriers – and consequences for representativeness of data, community dynamics etc.
 - Tokenistic participation – symbolic participation, which 'goes through the motions' of consultation without actually seeking to make decisions based on the views and experiences of participants
 - Domination of more powerful groups/influence of gatekeepers – distorts data and makes participation a disempowering experience
 - Confidentiality – especially in the case of peer to peer data collection
 - Raising expectations that cannot be met
 - Protection risks to which the affected population, staff, volunteers etc. may be exposed if they participate in the process, including re-exposure to trauma
- Costs:
 - Opportunity cost of devoting budget, human resources and other resources to a participatory data collection process for the organisation(s) involved
 - Opportunity cost for affected populations participating in the process/risk of exploitation – and related ethical issue of whether to compensate for their time (see Save the Children, 2014, p39 for a discussion of pros and cons)

- Technical and ethical issues arising from participants' lack of experience in data collection (e.g. related to quality/usability of data collected, obtaining informed consent, not making a neutral stance, data security)
- Participation fatigue e.g. due to the presence of multiple agencies
- Unpredictable nature of the process and its findings – can be challenging to develop data analysis plan/sharing and use plan at the time of developing data collection tools, as per conventional best practice
- Lack of action/closing of the feedback loop - The process stops at the production of a report/other outputs

OVERALL TIPS TO CONDUCT PARTICIPATORY DATA COLLECTION EFFECTIVELY

- Conduct an evaluability assessment – including assessing likelihood and implications of risks.
- Build flexibility into the process and timeframe, and take an iterative approach – as far as feasible.
- Consider a Plan B that can be implemented if needed (e.g. remote data collection if access becomes challenging). Think about whether the 'Plan B' will affect credibility of the data collection exercise, and what the resource implications will be.
- Think about who is INCLUDED and EXCLUDED as a result of each decision you make.
- Make sure everyone is clear on safeguarding protocols, including what to do in the event of disclosure .
- Training should involve role plays/piloting data collection tools.
- Remember that choosing not to participate is a form of participation!
- Involve other colleagues e.g. child protection specialists, representatives from teams who would use the data, disability specialists – to ensure the process is inclusive, safe, and generates useful data.
- Talk to participants about their expectations of the process – and be clear about you can and cannot do (from the outset, as far as feasible, given the open nature of the process) – and make sure that you close the feedback loop.
- Organise logistics (e.g. location, timing, process for obtaining informed consent) in a way that suits participants, think about how to inform and engage gatekeepers (e.g. parents of children/community leaders), and respect the time of everyone involved – show up on time, don't change/cancel plans at the last minute etc. (as far as feasible, based on the security context).
- Make sure you're building on data that has already been collected (rather than duplicating!)
- Think about how to minimise safeguarding risks – e.g. one adult and one children being alone in a room.
- Think about how those involved in collecting data/facilitating the process will be perceived e.g. based on their ethnicity/perceived 'side' in a conflict.

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATORY DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- 1) Yes No Maybe tool** – This involves developing a series of statements and asking participants whether they agree/disagree/aren't not sure (i.e. they respond 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe') and then exploring the rationale for their responses. It can be implemented individually or with groups, can be used to compare knowledge/attitude/practice before and after an intervention, and can generate quantitative data (e.g. 85% of participants agreed that they had increased confidence compared to before the intervention, 5% disagreed, and 10% weren't sure).

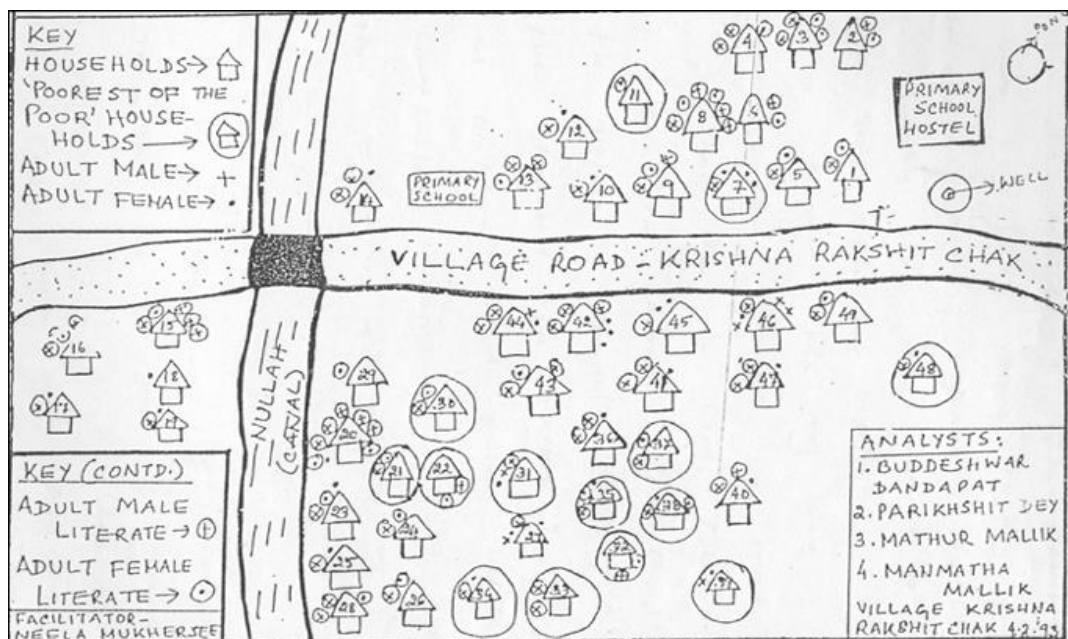
Here is an extract from a Yes No Maybe tool that was used with children living in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, to get their feedback on Primary Health Care Centres and health posts:

Statements	Write # of children giving each response			Notes on reasons for responses
	Yes	Maybe	No	
(Example – my favourite colour is red)				
1. I am able to access the PHCC/health post easily and safely				
2. The services/treatment I have received from the PHCC/health post met my needs				
3. Every child can come to the PHCC/health post and feel welcome (boys/girls, children with disabilities etc.)				

HOW TO USE: Prepare the statements (including an example template to check participants understand the exercise) and a template for capturing responses in advance. During the session, you simply read out the statements and ask people whether they agree (yes), don't agree (no) or are not sure (maybe) – for example, by putting up their hands, or by standing in a certain space within the room (you can put up signs saying 'yes', 'no', 'maybe').

2) Participatory mapping – This method involves asking groups of people to create a map of their community indicating particular information – for example, where they do and don't feel safe, where people go to defecate, or where services and resources are located.

An example:



Source: Neela Mukherjee (1994b).

(Source: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132108382>).

[This guide](#) has lots more examples of different types of participatory maps.

HOW TO USE: It might be helpful to prepare an example map in advance, to help participants understand the exercise. Think about what resources you have available for the group to use (e.g. a large piece of paper and pens). Hand out the resources and explain to the group what you would like them to map. You may need

to prompt them (for example, if you are mapping places where they feel/don't feel safe, you may need to ask 'Where else do you feel safe? Why?' etc.)

- 3) **Body mapping** – Body mapping involves drawing an outline of a body and mapping different types of information using the parts of the body. It can be a useful method for people with limited literacy or language differences, exploring complex, multi-dimensional processes as part of an assessment and/or evaluation, and thinking about unexpected outcomes. You can find more info, including suggestions for how to interpret the different parts of the body (e.g. eyes = What have you seen? Do you think people see children differently than they used to? Do children still do the same things or do people expect them to do more/less?) More information here: <https://childreninemergencies.org/2016/08/16/body-map/>. You can find a body map template here: <https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/body-map-2/>

HOW TO USE: You may want to prepare the body outline templates in advance, especially in contexts where it is considered inappropriate for people to lie down and have others in the group draw around their body. If you will include the drawing of the outline in the session, make sure you have large enough pieces of paper. Before participants get started, you need to explain to them what the different aspects of the body are intended to represent (and it would be helpful to keep reminding them as they work through the exercise – and have the information displayed somewhere, depending on literacy levels) – but you can also encourage them to be creative and interpret body parts in ways that are meaningful for them.

- 4) **Participatory ranking** – This involves bringing groups together to rank information. For example, wealth ranking is a specific type of participatory ranking that can help with targeting - it involves developing criteria that indicate a household's 'wealth level' and ranking households within a community according to these criteria. Pairwise ranking is another specific type of participatory ranking, where categories are specifically ranked against each other, in pairs e.g. to understand the biggest needs within a community. Piling is a similar method, which giving a group a pile of stones/beans/seeds etc. to represent a 'total' in a given category, and asking them to divide them up (e.g. to represent relative sources of income).

HOW TO USE: Develop a template to capture the findings in advance, and think about how you will share the items to be ranked – for example, whether you will write them down or use images. If you are implementing wealth ranking, you will need a list of households, depicted in a way that will enable the group to be able to rank them – for example, on a map. Think about how you will ask the group to do the ranking – for example, whether you will work altogether, or whether you will divide them into smaller groups/pairs, and then bring everyone together to compare the results. If you are implementing piling, you will need to prepare the materials (e.g. stones/beans/seeds) in advance.

- 5) **Participatory photography** – Participatory photography involves giving participants access to cameras and asking them to take – and interpret – their own photos. Participatory photograph exercises can focus on specific indicators/questions (for example, 'where in your community do you feel the most safe?'), or be more open-ended. The method can be combined with other monitoring options e.g. Most Significant Change or the use of diaries (photos can accompany written diary entries, or diaries can be solely visual). For more info, see <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/photographyvideo-recording-for-data-collection>

HOW TO USE: If you do not already have cameras for the participants to use, you will need to procure some. Think about the time needed for this and the budget you have available, which will determine whether each participant is provided with their own camera, or whether they will work in pairs/small groups. Think about whether you will need to sign agreements about taking responsibility for the cameras, and what you will do if any are damaged/go missing. You will need to start the session by making sure everyone understands how to work the camera, and how you will share the photos developed – for example, printing them out or sharing digitally.

- 6) **Participatory Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** – One example of how you can make FGDs participatory using ‘vignettes’ (stories that you read out or images that you show) to inspire discussion. This can be especially helpful when discussing sensitive issues, such as domestic violence, when it would not be appropriate to ask people about their direct experience.

Here is an example of one of 12 vignettes depicting the most common risk or conflict situations children affected by HIV and AIDS are likely to experience in daily life, to prompt discussion in a participatory FGD. You can find the report on the process [here](#).



You can also use FGDs to generate quantitative data in a participatory way through the use of scalar tools – for example, introducing a scale (comprising a series of qualitative statements that can be scored) to help participants assess the extent to which women are able to play a leadership role in their community.

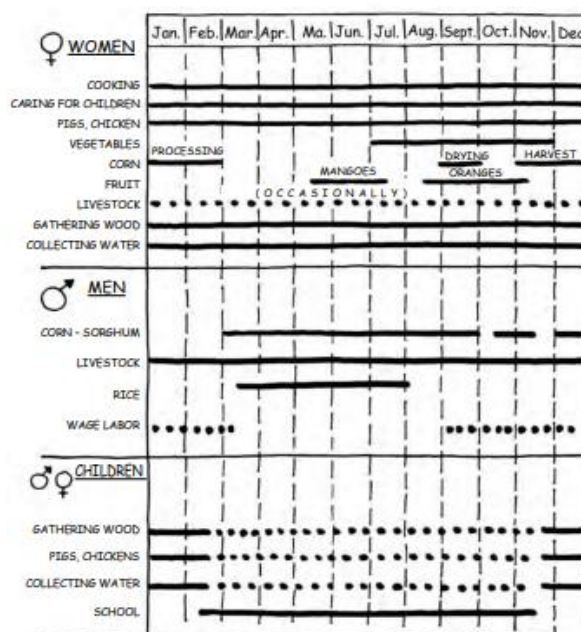
HOW TO USE: Plan the exercise in advance – for example, think about whether you will need to print out images/write down scenarios that will be read out to the participants, and develop a template for capturing data. It is a good idea to try and pilot the approach with one or two groups, to check that people understand it, and then adjust it accordingly (for example, if you determine that one or two of the scenarios need to be more clearly explained, or using a different image if people do not understand what the piloted image is supposed to represent).

- 7) **Time use mapping** – it can be useful to map how certain groups (e.g. women vs. men) use their time on a daily basis (e.g. using a 24 hour clock) as part of an assessment, monitoring and/or evaluation exercise. The exercise could involve a pre/post comparison, to understand how an intervention has affected time use – this can be especially useful for understanding unanticipated impacts e.g. a programme that aims to economically empower women by supporting them to start a small business may result in significantly less rest for the women involved, if they don't have options to reduce their other responsibilities.

Time use mapping does not have to focus on how people spend hours in a day – for example, mapping seasonal time use can be helpful to support the design, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural interventions.

An example:

SEASONAL CALENDAR WITH A GENDER APPROACH



(Source: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/BVE17089190i.pdf>)

HOW TO USE: It might be helpful to prepare an example time use map in advance, to help participants understand the exercise. Think about what resources you have available for the group to use (e.g. a large piece of paper and pens). Hand out the resources and explain to the group what you would like them to do. You may need to prompt them (for example, if you are mapping how women use their time over a 24-hour period, ask 'How many hours do you usually sleep for? What time do you usually go to bed and wake up?')

- 8) **Peer to peer data collection** – This involves selecting and training a group of participants to collect data from their peers – for example, through a survey. You need to think carefully about your sampling approach (to ensure those involved in data collection are representative of the community you're collecting data from), how you will ensure confidentiality, whether and how you will involve the peer data collectors in analysing data and sharing findings and recommendations, and how you will compensate them for their inputs in a way that does not create conflict within the broader community.

HOW TO USE: Determine in advance how you will recruit peer data collectors – for example, what selection criteria you will use if you have more people interested in getting involved than you have capacity to include, and whether you will need to recruit more people than you think you will need, to allow for dropouts. Think about whether and how you will involve the peer data collectors in developing the data collection tool – or whether you will prepare it in advance. Remember to build in time for piloting the data collection tool as part of the training process – and making any necessary adjustments based on the piloting experience. Remember that you will need to provide ongoing data to the data collection process – and think about how best to do this (e.g. having an on the ground presence versus being available by phone). Think about whether and how you will involve the peer data collectors in processing and analysing the data and documenting, sharing and supporting use of the findings.

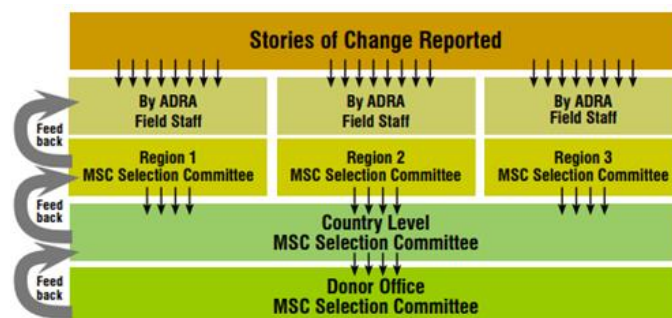
- 9) **Dot voting** (also known as ‘dotmocracy’) - This method involves giving participants dot stickers to vote with. It is helpful for getting feedback on items distributed/things that can be illustrated through a picture. The exercise can be conducted openly or privately, and you can use different coloured dots to signify different things (e.g. favourite/worst, most useful/least useful). Just remember to keep it simple – and be clear on what the participants have to do, so everyone interprets the voting process in the same way! You can use other materials if you can’t get hold of stickers e.g. just give people pens/pencils to indicate their preferences with a tick/a symbol of their choice. For more info, see <https://www.hisengage.scot/equipping-professionals/participation-toolkit/dot-voting>.

HOW TO USE: Decide in advance how the voting process will work, and what materials you will use (e.g. print outs of images that participants will vote on stickers/pens and paper for voting) and make sure that you are enough to cover the group. Develop a template for capturing the findings before you start.

- 10) **Most Significant Change** - A participatory data collection and analysis approach developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in Bangladesh in the mid-1990s. It provides a structured a process for collecting and analysing ‘stories of change’, doesn’t use pre-defined indicators, and is especially helpful for understanding unexpected changes, complex changes, and intangible changes. The approach has ten steps, as follows:

- I. Generating and interest and commitment to participate
- II. Defining the domains of change (ideally 3-5; include an ‘open’ domain)
- III. Defining the reporting period e.g. ‘During the last year.....’
- IV. Collecting SC stories e.g. ‘Looking back over the last year, what do you think was the most significant change in [particular domain of change]?’
- V. Selecting the most significant of the stories e.g. ‘From among all these significant changes, what do you think was the most significant change of all, and why?’
- VI. Feeding back the results of the selection process – closing the feedback loop
- VII. Verification of stories
- VIII. Quantification
- IX. Secondary analysis e.g. understanding themes, mapping stories to a Theory of Change
- X. Revising the system based on learning!

Example of a multi-stage selection process (Step 5):

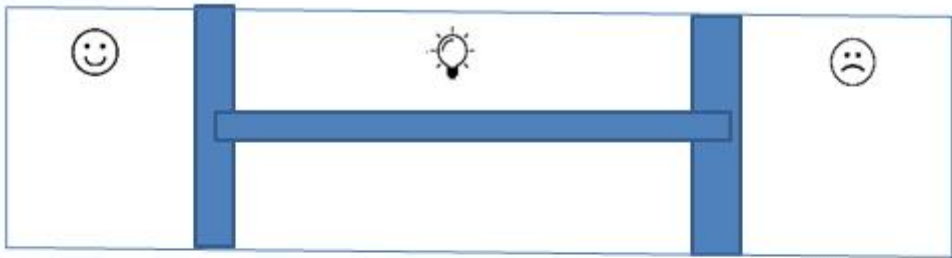


(Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275409002_The_'Most_Significant_Change'_MSC_Technique_A_Guide_to_Its_Use - a step-by-step guide to implementing MSC)

HOW TO USE: Think in advance how you will implement each step in the process, including thinking about who will be involved in the selection process – and in what order and over what timeframe, if you are involving multiple stages of selection. You also need to think about how you will capture the stories – for example, through a written template, or using video.

11) **H-frame** – This tool is particularly useful with children, but can also be used with adults. Here is an example template and some step by step instructions:



- In the left hand column draw a happy face 😊, in the right hand column a sad face ☹️ and below the middle “H” bar draw a light bulb (to represent ‘bright ideas’).
- In groups (of same age children, young people, or men/ women) enable the participants to fill in the chart accordingly:
 - ☹️ What are the strengths (or successes) of your children’s group or initiative?
 - 😊 What are the weaknesses (or challenges) of your children’s group or initiative?
 - 💡 What ideas/ suggestions do you have to improve / strengthen your children’s group or initiative?
- If the activity has been undertaken with different groups of participants enable each group to present their ‘H’ assessment and facilitate wider discussion on the findings:
 - What are the key benefits and challenges of children’s groups or initiatives?
 - What are the key action ideas to strengthen children’s groups or initiatives?
 - How can these action ideas be put into practice?

(Source: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/kit-tools-participatory-research-and-evaluation-children-young-people-and-adults-compilation/>)

HOW TO USE: Prepare the ‘H frame’ in advance, using a large sheet of paper, and think about whether you need to develop a template in advance for capturing overall findings, if you are conducting the exercise with multiple groups. Think about what materials you will need to hand out to the group e.g post it notes and pens.

12) **Drama-based techniques** – Drama-based methods can be especially helpful for understanding attitude and behaviour change. You can ask participants to create static ‘freeze frames’ or devise scenes, with/without dialogue. Remember to keep participation optional – and think about ways people can participate ‘behind the scenes’ if they are not comfortable performing. Think about how you’re going to document findings (photos/videos/narrative etc.) and associated consent processes & data security requirements. You can also use drama to communicate findings/recommendations from a data collection exercise that has already taken place.

Example of using drama to illustrate pre/post intervention comparison



Figure 1. From denial of rights ... Figure 2. To active realisation of rights

(Source: <https://www.oecd.org/countries/bangladesh/46146440.pdf>)

For more info, see <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/theatre>

HOW TO USE: Think about what materials you will need for the session – for example, whether you need to develop a written handout (depending on literacy levels) explaining what you want the participants to depict using drama (for example, the situation ‘before’ and ‘after’ an intervention) and have a camera/cameras available, if you are intending to capture the process using photos/videos. It would be a good idea to have an example prepared, to help the group understand what you would like them to do i.e. the facilitator(s) may need to act out a scenario. It would be helpful to start with an icebreaker, to get participants in the mood for acting!

OTHER REFERENCES

Overall guidance:

- Alexander, J. and Bonino, F., (2014), Ensuring quality of evidence generated through participatory evaluation in humanitarian contexts, ALNAP Discussion series – Method note 3: <https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/mn3.pdf>
- Chambers (2002), Participatory Workshops - A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities: <https://www.routledge.com/Participatory-Workshops-A-Sourcebook-of-21-Sets-of-Ideas-and-Activities/Chambers/p/book/9781853838637>
- Cosgrave J., Buchanan-Smith M. and Warner, A., (2016), ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action: <https://www.alnap.org/evaluation-of-humanitarian-action-eha-guide>
- Gujit, I., (2014), Participatory approaches: Methodological brief: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/750-participatory-approaches-methodological-briefs-impact-evaluation-no-5.html>
- Gujit, I. And Gaventa, J. (1998), Participatory monitoring and evaluation, IDS Policy Briefing, Issue 2: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/dmfile/PB12.pdf>
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- IDS Bulletin 51.4A (2023), Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/power-poverty-and-knowledge-reflecting-on-50-years-of-learning-with-robert-chambers/>
- Recrear Tools repository: <https://recrearinternational.org/techniques/>
- Save the Children (2000), Children and Participation – Research, monitoring and evaluation with children and young people: https://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/children%20and%20participation_wilkinson.pdf
- Save the Children Norway (2008), A kit of tools for participatory research with children, young people and adults: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/kit-of-tools_1.pdf/
- Terre des Hommes (n.d.), Practical Toolkit for Children’s Participation: https://www.tdh.de/fileadmin/user_upload/inhalte/10_Material/Manual_Participation/Practical_toolkit.pdf

Guidance on specific methods and tools:

- Participatory Value for Money analysis:
https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid_-_value_for_money_-_creating_an_alternative.pdf
- Participatory ranking: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/hierarchical-card-sorting>
- An interesting participatory reflective exercise: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/six-thinking-hats>
- Photovoice website: <https://photovoice.org/>
- More on participatory photography: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/photovoice>
- Better Evaluation (n.d.), Transect: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/transect>
- Wellbeing Ranking Analysis: <https://meas.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/MEAS-Participatory-Methods-Tip-Sheet-Wellbeing-Ranking-Analysis-1.pdf>
- Child Safety Report Cards (peer to peer data collection example):
<https://gendereval.ning.com/profiles/blogs/children-measuring-their-perceived-level-of-safety-in-fragile-and>
- Seasonal calendars: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/seasonal-calendars>
- Some innovative story-based methods that use technology: <https://thecynefin.co/how-to-use-sensemaker/>, <https://www.sprockler.com/applications>
- Organisation with expertise in Participatory Video: <https://insightshare.org/>
- ‘Dotmocracy’: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods/dotmocracy>
- McCarthy, G. and O’Hagan, P. (2014), People First Impact Method – Facilitator Toolkit:
https://venro.org/fileadmin/user_upload/P-FIM-Toolkit.pdf

Examples of participatory research projects/evaluations:

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329488469_Rapid_Care_Analysis_in_Building_Sustainable_Women-led_Enterprises_in_Haiyan-affected_Communities
- Participatory research project with youth in DRC: <https://www.warchild.org.uk/our-work/what-we-do/innovative-programmes/voicemore/democratic-republic-of-congo>
- Specific example of using MSC in participatory video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGOVyanp2Hk&list=PL16DC22C3FABF7A59&index=5>
- Cornwall, A. (2014), Using Participatory Process Evaluation to Understand the Dynamics of Change in a Nutrition Education Programme:
<https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/3489/WP437.pdf?sequence=4>
- Zaveri, S. (2013), Listening to smaller voices: Using an innovative participatory tool for children affected by HIV and AIDS to assess a life skills programme:
https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Listening_to_smaller_voices_-_Sonal_Zaveri.pdf

- Jupp, D. And Ali, S.I. (2010), Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them Quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own analysis: <https://www.oecd.org/countries/bangladesh/46146440.pdf>
- Khushi Kantha (2022), Impact Report: <https://khushikantha.com/pages/impact-report>
- An evaluation of capacity-building services delivered by Youth Business International's Network Team, using MSC: https://www.youthbusiness.org/file_uploads/Capacity-Development-Evaluation-Report.pdf