RLI Working Paper No. 53

REFUGEE LAW INITIATIVE | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Locating the value of the participatory approach to 'humanitarian accountability' in displacement contexts

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February 2021

Abstract

So-called 'participatory approaches' are, along with associated concepts of accountability, empowerment and community development, now part of mainstream humanitarian discourse and reflected in many of the major standards and initiatives of the sector. Yet 'participation' is neither well defined nor is there consensus regarding its aims or its value to affected populations, particularly those affected by forced displacement.

This review explores the different, sometimes contrary, strands of thought within the humanitarian sector regarding 'participation' of affected persons in humanitarian programming. It traces the rise of the concept from its origins in the development sector to its transition through the arrival of rights-based approaches and the influence of shifts within Western governance. This history allows for an analysis of the varying motivations for participatory programming, whether 'normative', 'instrumental' or 'emancipatory' – all contributing in different ways to how accountability is viewed, pursued and found to be elusive in the sector.

Whilst participation remains a popular concept in itself, this article touches on the evolution of the concept over recent decades, providing context to newer debates around system innovation and governance, modalities of intervention such as cash-based programming and ultimately the drive for accountability to which all these contribute.

Keywords

Accountability, participation, displacement, refugees, humanitarian

Contents

1.   Introduction

'Participation' and so-called 'participatory approaches' are, along with associated concepts of accountability, empowerment and community development, now part of mainstream humanitarian discourse and reflected in many of the major standards and initiatives of the sector. Both celebrated and decried as a sector buzzword, participation has nevertheless emerged as one of, if not the, dominant concepts in the drive for accountability to affected populations. The humanitarian sector's policy and grey literature identifies participation as a necessity in any humanitarian programme, the gold standard of a responsible and effective intervention and a key contributor to achieving accountability to affected populations. Aspiring for a 'Participation Revolution', the 2016 Grand Bargain agreements emerging from the World Humanitarian Summit typify the omnipresence of this approach in the humanitarian rhetoric.[1]

Like many buzzwords, participation has evaded clear definition in theory and consistent application in practice. The word 'participation' has been long associated with social movements and the struggle for citizenship and voice as well as being used in the service of governance and taxation; competing currents which 'continue to course through discursive representations and practices of participation'.[2] Likewise, contemporary humanitarian analyses tend to identify very different reasons for the growth in popularity of participatory approaches, with many locating the origins of the concept in the development sector and others pinpointing its arrival with the rights-based approaches used by particular NGOs, whilst a different argument co-exists to attribute participatory approaches to a neo-liberal shift within Western governance and the influence of powerful donor governments protecting their interests.

The policy literature produced by leading organisations easily elicits confusion between the concept and its associated terminology, so that 'participation' is used interchangeably with 'involvement', 'engagement', or with 'accountability' itself. Definitions from ALNAP, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) or the EU, for example, cite participation at different stages in the project cycle and give affected people differing levels of involvement in the decision-making process. Considering the ever-expanding and increasingly diverse group of international, national and local organisations defining their work as humanitarian, set against the backdrop of varied and complex displacement crises around the world, a simple definition is an increasingly unlikely prospect.

Attempts in recent years include the following IASC definition[3], which necessarily retains subjective and vague terminology and which is subject to differing interpretations in practice:

> Enabling crisis-affected people to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them. It is achieved through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and worst affected are represented and have influence.

Reaching into the academic literature, criticism of the humanitarian sector's issue with defining key concepts is clearly not new. Nor is a robust critique of the concept of participation and its value in pursuing accountability to affected people; encompassing accusations of inappropriateness, proceduralisation, and even manipulation and exploitation. This body of work does, however, provide us with a historical view of the development of participation as a concept in the sector and illustrates the events and developments that gave it the ideological prominence it has today.

Whilst this paper does not have the intended purpose of establishing a definition for participation, it is able to explore the meanings which emerge (at least in part) from its lack of definition. It also goes some way to revealing the contrasting incentives existing in the push for participation which reflect the philosophical divisions in the humanitarian sector and the way in which these can have different impacts, particularly in the development of practices such as the contemporary focus on cash-based humanitarian interventions, which is given attention towards the end of this paper. To take the concept apart by interrogating its origins

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1   Grand Bargain, 'The Grand Bargain – A shared Commitment to Serve People in Need' (2016) Grand Bargain https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Grand_Bargain_final_22_May_FINAL-2.pdf.

2   A Cornwall & K Brock, 'What do buzzwords do for development policy? A Critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'' (2005) Third World Quarterly 26 (7).

3   Agreed by the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) in December 2011 as one of five commitments to accountability and since embraced by the contributors to the Grand Bargain's 'Participation Revolution' workstream.

in the humanitarian sphere therefore offers a fresh opportunity to understand and contextualise its position in the accountability rhetoric and debate its ongoing relative value.

The author takes direct inspiration from Brown and Donini's 2014 ALNAP study *Rhetoric or Reality?*[4], as the work clearly and persuasively differentiates the three key rationales (or imperatives) behind, as they describe it, the humanitarian sector's engagement with affected people; 1) the emancipatory (or empowerment), 2) the normative and 3) the instrumental rationales. Each rationale reveals the different, sometimes contrary, strands of thought within the humanitarian sector and demonstrates something different about the power and practical implications behind implementing participation of affected persons. Each rationale contributes in different ways to how accountability is viewed, pursued and found to be elusive in the sector.

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4   D Brown, A Donini, Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action (ODI, 2014).

2.   Participation as 'an end in itself'[5]: a tool for empowerment

Most observers locate the origins of the concept of aid-recipient participation in the development sector. It first gained popularity there in the 1950s as a critique of top-down government development practices, experiencing a second wave of support in the mid-1980s when Robert Chambers, Paulo Freire and others led a new participatory development movement, mirroring the rise of pro-democracy movements in many parts of the world. Participatory approaches in development have since been broadly endorsed by the World Bank and other dominant institutions and have been absorbed into mainstream development practice, where they continue to be championed in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.[6] In the truly developmental sense, participation pursues structural and political change via the empowerment of aid recipients. It is inextricably involved in local power dynamics, has an 'emancipatory rationale' and is, therefore, an inherently political tool. Development actors, from Chambers himself to small, local NGOs, agree that social change is a key rationale for engaging with affected groups.[7]

When studies in the late 1980s suggested humanitarian aid failed to take into account local knowledge and attitudes, humanitarians began to consider how ideas of participation might inform international humanitarian interventions.[8] The early borrowing of approaches from development colleagues is credited with pushing humanitarians to detect sexual violence after years of failing to do so, handing affected women a voice where they previously did not have one.[9] Translated directly from development, this new way of intervening in local knowledge and local structures of power retained its emancipatory rationale and ultimately rested on transforming the power of affected people.[10] It would also become one of the most ideologically challenging issues in humanitarians' reckoning with 'accountability', and remains so to this day. For the classic *Dunantist* humanitarians[11], any interaction with local power structures jeopardises the core humanitarian principles and interferes with their self-image as apolitical and neutral actors working only to provide for basic needs and to save lives. The outcome of humanitarian action may, in this view, have negative outcomes for agency access to affected populations (particularly in politically complex and conflict contexts) or have negative consequences for staff security and protection of affected people. Chambers himself concedes that only 'a few' humanitarians would agree that the original, developmental concept of participation, of participation as 'an end in itself', is applicable to the humanitarian endeavour.[12]

And yet, criticism also extends from the development sector to demonstrate that the use of participatory methods and engagement with local power structures is not always a clear-cut story of empowerment. The notion of gathering 'local knowledge' for example, is often criticised as a construct of the planning context of the intervention, which falsely imagines socially homogenous communities to enable a knowledge production controlled by the international agency in question.[13] Interventions are often only participatory at particular stages of the project cycle and within the priorities defined by non-participatory processes, occurring only in 'invited spaces' as opposed to the 'demanded spaces' created, chosen or claimed by communities.[14]

Likewise, participation in the humanitarian sector faces criticisms of being disingenuous. Long-standing complaints include little progress in enabling 'meaningful' participation as opposed to more indirect feed-

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5   Ibid.

6   D Sriskandarajah, 'Toward an Accountability Revolution? Citizen Participation in the SDGs' in H Kharas, H Kato, J McArthur & R Desai (eds) From Summits to Solutions: Innovations in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

7   Brown, Donini (n4).

8   J Mitchell and H Slim, 'Towards community managed relief: a case study from southern Sudan' (1990) Disasters 14(3).

9   E Stobbaerts & N Torrente, 'MSF and Accountability: from global buzzwords to specific solutions' (2008) Humanitarian Exchange Magazine 41.

10   Brown, Donini (n4).

11   Refers to the group of humanitarian practitioners who follow a traditional approach to humanitarian action inspired by the founder of the Red Cross Movement, Henri Dunant, based around the four fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

12   Brown, Donini (n4).

13   D Mosse, 'People's knowledge, participation and patronage: operations and representations in rural Development' in D Narayan (ed.) Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook (World Bank, 2002).

14   A Cornwall, 'New Democratic Spaces? The Politics and Dynamics of Institutionalised Participation' (2004) IDS Bulletin 35(2); RK Murthy & B Klugman, 'Service Accountability and Community Participation in the context of health sector reforms in Asia: implications for sexual and reproductive health services' (2004) Health Policy and Planning 19 (1).

back loops or 'consultation'.[15] Participatory approaches in the design and implementation phases tend to be weaker too, with input more likely to be sought in response to an already determined service or pro-gramme, making the involvement of recipients during the evaluation stage rather tokenistic.[16] In a recent survey of six countries, four countries returned findings that the majority of affected persons surveyed did not feel that their views were being taken into account in the aid they received,[17] bringing into question the years of work to empower these same people through participatory methodologies. The space claimed by aid recipients through 'empowering' humanitarian interventions inspired by developmental participatory methodologies is limited, even built in the image of an aid agency and its strategic priorities rather than the voice of the recipients themselves.

A particularly strong rebuke of participatory development was invoked by Cooke and Kothari in their 2001 book *Participation: The New Tyranny*, in which they argue that the term participation is used to serve po-litical agendas and to manipulate and impose power relations outside of the benefit of affected people.[18] The academic-humanitarian discourse has taken its cue here, positing that, worse than naïve or rhetorical, worse than an accidental reduction of voice, participation is often used as a manipulative tool, by which to 'alter the subjectivities and the psychological state' of affected populations,[19] particularly in refugee and forced migration contexts where most forms of participation are inherently and unavoidably political. Re-search literature from authors such as Elisabeth Olivius, Naohiko Omata and Tania Kaiser, amongst others, deconstructs the way that humanitarian agencies are prone to the 'de-politicisation' of refugees, accepting of only particular forms of participation which are acceptable in their pre-defined rationalisation of the affected population.[20] Olivius illustrates how, in refugee camps in Thailand, self-organised refugee groups who demanded a right to agenda-setting were met with repression by humanitarian agencies who la-belled this 'politicisation'.[21] Meanwhile in Bangladesh, agencies bemoaned the unwillingness of refugees to partake in programming: notions of gender equality being used to construct an image of normative supe-riority and therefore legitimate control by international humanitarian agencies. In this same article, Olivius describes participation as a 'technology of government' when used by humanitarian agencies, drawing a picture of a concept very far removed from the dream of empowerment or of accountability to affected people.

Whilst the above analyses might hold true in the context of a particular refugee camp or in the actions of some agencies, the sinister motivation of manipulating a target population will not always be either an accurate or fair explanation. There may be instances when, rather than an attempt to 'de-politicise' affected people, humanitarians produce confusion on the ground by using the language of development (such as 'participation') when it is does not chime with their objectives. As articulated by Paul Knox Clarke, cited at the 29th ALNAP annual meeting in Addis Ababa: 'where we often get caught up, perhaps, is that we're using the same language in order to try to do very different things, depending on the mandate and the nature of the agency'.[22] The borrowing of language and tools from the development sector as a general trend in the humanitarian world produces confusion and forms expectations which may clash with humanitarian objectives, where structural and political change are typically (though, to add to the confusion, not always) not the goal. The problem is exacerbated in our contemporary humanitarian landscape, populated by a growing number of agencies of different form and aspiration, some multi-mandate or with development interests and others with more directly humanitarian objectives, who nevertheless tend to be perceived by affected persons as one homogenous group.

Seemingly in response to this trend, participants at an ALNAP Annual Meeting in 2014 identified a new ten-

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15   D Hilhorst, 'Taking Accountability to the Next Level' in CHS Alliance (ed) On the Road to Istanbul: How can the World Humanitarian sum-mit make humanitarian response more effective? Humanitarian Accountability Report (CHS Alliance, 2015); CHS Alliance, How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector: Humanitarian Accountability Report (CHS Alliance, 2018).

16   T Kaiser, 'Participation or consultation? Reflections on a 'beneficiary based' evaluation of UNHCR's Programme for Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in Guinea' (2004) Journal of Refugee Studies 17(2); CHS Alliance, How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector: Humanitarian Accountability Report (CHS Alliance, 2018).

17   V Metcalfe-Hough & L Poole, Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report (ODI, 2018).

18   B Cooke & U Kothari, Participation: The New Tyranny? (Zed Books, 2001).

19   E Olivius, '(Un)governable Subjects: The Limits of Refugee Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Humanitarian Aid' (2014) Journal of Refugee Studies 27(1).

20   See for example E Olivius, '(Un)governable Subjects' (2014); Kaiser T, (2004); E Olivius, 'Displacing Equality: Women's Participation and Humanitarian Aid effectiveness in Refugee Camps' (2014) *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 33(3); N Omata, 'Unwelcome participation, undesirable agency? Paradoxes of de-politicisation in a refugee camp' (2017) *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 36(3).

21   E Olivius, '(Un)governable Subjects' (2014).

22   Brown, Donini (n4) 22.

dency to emphasise accountability as a concept over participation, with the participatory term beginning to be used more hesitantly.[23] The participants felt it was easier to distance oneself, or one's organisation, from the developmental origins of the term along with its connotations of power and politics, particularly when negotiating humanitarian access and space. Here, the 'buzzword' value of participation is its undoing.

Yet, participation as a concept remains popular in high-level humanitarian discussion and it retains its buzzword value. The recent Grand Bargain agreement emanating from 2016's World Humanitarian Summit famously called for a 'participation revolution'[24], and the recently developed Core Humanitarian Standard continues to pursue community participation as an essential element of quality programming.[25] There is more to the concept of participation in the theory of humanitarianism than simply a borrowing of development terminology and we can expect the idea to be resilient.

23　　　Ibid.

24　　　Grand Bargain (2016).

25　　　The Core Humanitarian Standard (2014) sets out nine commitments for humanitarian and development actors to measure and improve the quality and effectiveness of their assistance. The fourth commitment reads: 'Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them', corehumanitarianstandard.org.

3.   Participation as the 'right and moral' course of action: the normative incentive

The introduction of the participatory concept from the development sector was soon complemented by the arrival of rights-based humanitarianism and an associated normative approach to participation. This approach shifted the focus from charitable giving in order to meet the needs of affected people to instead focus on upholding their human rights. Outrage over the Rwandan genocide and the failure on the part of humanitarian actors to avert the 1996 and 1997 massacres in the Zaire refugee camps in the early 1990s was cemented by the publication of a joint evaluation lamenting humanitarians' lack of contextual under-standing[26]. This commentary brought with it an effort to propel participatory approaches across the system for the first time with the intention to give voice to those affected, taking shape as a collection of standards, codes and initiatives. These included the Red Cross Code of Conduct,[27] the Sphere Project, HAP, People in Aid and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP). Rights-based perspectives were drawn upon as key strategic inspiration for agencies such as ActionAid and Save the Children, and for many multi-mandate agencies participation became an organisational policy aim in and of itself. To invite participation with affected persons was seen as an undeniable morally 'right' approach, and notions of morality, solidarity and respect for the dignity of affected people took the fore.[28] It was at this moment that participation entered the broader humanitarian accountability agenda.

Commitments to participation were quickly institutionalised within these initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s. Participation was identified as an essential foundation of people's right to life with dignity in Principles 6 and 7 of the Red Cross Code of Conduct (1994), amidst similar statements in Sphere[29], HAP and[30] many agencies'[31] own policies and programmatic guidance. Although not always definitive, some authors have taken the view that through the emergence of the new accountability standards, and particularly the HAP and the EU Humanitarian Consensus, community 'engagement' become a moral duty, defined similarly to a legal right on behalf of those receiving humanitarian aid.[32] For those hoping to adhere to these codes and standards, participation thus became a normative aspiration.

The marriage of rights with humanitarian assistance is certainly not without its detractors and the divisions and dilemmas this raised remain evident today. Strongly independent Dunantist actors such as MSF continue to object to the impulse to 'combine the moral/legal force of rights statements with the specificity of needs statements'[33], which they see as worrisome from the perspective of principled, neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian aid based on need alone.[34] From another perspective, an ambitious rights-based approach may create serious political and practical problems as it risks confusing independent humanitarian actors with democratic power-wielding national bodies, otherwise known as states. As Steets *et al* suggest in their recent political economy analysis of change in the humanitarian sector, it is unreasonable to elevate humanitarian non- or inter-governmental agencies into such position of power and responsibility, an endeavour which cannot function in the absence of key democratic accountability mechanisms,

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26   The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR), 1996.

27   The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief has as signatories most of the dominant international humanitarian agencies in existence.

28   N Barry and J Barham, Review of Existing Practice to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations (Aguaconsult Ltd, 2012).

29   The Sphere standards state a belief that 'the affected population is at the centre of humanitarian action, and recognise that their active participation is essential to providing assistance in ways that best meet their needs…', see Sphere Standards, Sphere Humanitarian Charter (1997), found at www.spherestandards.org.

30   The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) (established 1993) published its first set of Standards in 2007, with one core principle calling for 'Participation in Programmes' for 'beneficiaries', see Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International, HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management (2007), found at www.reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/0753C21D42FFEAA4C-125727C0053B0D0-HAP%20-%20Coordination%20-Jan2007.pdf

31   See for example Save the Children, Practice Standards in Children's Participation (2010)

32   Brown, Donini (n4).

33   J Darcy and C Hofmann, 'According to need? Needs assessment and decision-making in the humanitarian sector' (2003) Humanitarian Policy Group Report 15.

34   Grünewald F, Debating Accountability (ODI, 2003).

namely elections and budgetary control.[35]

There is also reason to object to the popular discourse after Rwanda that engaged with the 'failure of aid' and its inability to understand local context whilst paying scant attention to geo-political actors, donor and host governments and the primacy of their accountability to affected people. The emergence of the Sphere project, which sought to standardise common approaches to participation amongst other accountability tools, epitomised this approach. By emphasising the accountability of humanitarian actors alone, through fairly prescriptive methodologies and specific indicators of participation, the project gives the impression of valuing NGO accountability above that of any other actor in the context of a humanitarian crisis.[36] The commitment of governments to ensure participation by affected people, very often displaced over in-ternational borders, of course remains without bite, only articulated overtly vis-à-vis internally displaced people[37] and later on in the Good Humanitarian Donorship agreement, in 2003[38]. It is therefore possible to argue that the impulse to emphasise participatory approaches in humanitarian action through sector-wide initiatives puts the onus for being accountable to the forcibly displaced on the shoulders of humanitarian actors, rather than the behaviour of the states that have primary responsibility for the protection and wel-fare of those residing within their territory, thus allowing space for the non-accountability of states.

Critical engagement with these early experiences of the participatory approach also highlighted that par-ticipation is a procedural phenomenon open to manipulation, and that it can be dangerous to give it un-conditional moral weight[39] or to give a standard value to the results of participation in all contexts. As now famously highlighted by the Rwanda crisis itself, participatory approaches have the potential to amplify the voices of the aggressors. In fact, those deemed 'representative' of the community encamped in the for-mer Zaire, the Interahamwe, had a direct role in the genocide. Conversely, it is perhaps unlikely, particularly in a politically tense context, that those most vulnerable will be willingly and truly 'participant' in human-itarian action and to place the onus on victims to identify problems with humanitarian actors will often be unrealistic or otherwise problematic.[40] Accountability reform is therefore enormously context-specific, more so perhaps than any area of humanitarian reform.[41] Participation may be understood in various ways by affected populations and agencies depending on local context and culture. The displaced community in an urban area, with no prior ties to the place, may not possess familiarity with the local context that would make all types of participatory activity beneficial in the same way as those living statically in a smaller or rural community[42], where individuals may feel not only a tie to their community but a duty to voice their concerns[43].

Normative participatory approaches formulated as a reaction to tragedy were never going to be broadly enforced upon the entirety of a newer, larger and more diverse humanitarian sector forever. So the rights-based incentive for participation, much like the developmental approach, does not hold in every context. Instead, it must be qualified as only one method amongst many to hold one category of actor to account.

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35   J Steets, A Binder, A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert, Drivers and Inhibitors of Change in the Humanitarian System: A Political Economy Analysis of Reform Efforts Relating to Cash, Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection (Global Public Policy Institute, 2016).

36   J Tong, 'Questionable Accountability: MSF and Sphere in 2003' (2004) Disasters 28(2).

37   The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, adopted in 1998, articulate the responsibility of all governments to consult with affect-ed people and to facilitate participation in the decisions affecting them.

38   The Principles and Good Practice of Good Humanitarian Donorship were drawn up by a group of 17 donors (16 government donors and the European Commission) in Stockholm in June 2003.

39   A Davis, Concerning Accountability of Humanitarian Action (ODI, 2007).

40   F Terry, 'The Limits and Risks of Regulation Mechanisms for Humanitarian Action' (2000) Humanitarian Exchange Magazine 17; E Fid-dian-Qasmiyeh, '"Ideal" Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps: "Good Practice" for Whom?' (2010) Refugee Survey Quarterly 29 (2).

41   J Steets, A Binder , A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert (2016).

42   Campbell L, 'Working with people and communities in urban humanitarian crises' ALNAP Working Paper (ODI, 2017).

43   There are studies to demonstrate how cultural factors also contribute into the willingness of a population to take part in participatory processes. In Colombia, for example, 'participation is perceived as a duty and right of citizenship to influence actions and/or decisions that concern them' (The Brookings Institution 2008).

4.   Participation as 'a means to an end'[44]: the instrumental incentive

Another incentive for participation's popularity, and in some cases perhaps the pragmatic reason for which it is carried out, is the widely held belief that participatory approaches contribute to the effective and efficient provision of humanitarian aid. This motivation for participatory approaches is therefore 'instrumental'.

There is much evidence and discussion of how recent decades have seen a broad shift towards neo-liberal management strategies of accountability in Western governments; 'from a liberal welfare rationality to a post-welfarist, neo-liberal expression of marketisation, audits and decentralisation of responsibility for welfare to individuals and communities'.[45] With these same Western governments featuring as the major donors in the humanitarian system, it follows that this has impacted the humanitarian sector and the services on offer to displaced populations. In an atmosphere in which the private sector is elevated, tools and language originating in the private sector have been adopted by aid organisations and inspired concepts like effectiveness, innovation and impact-measurement.[46] One clue is how donors and agencies have increasingly adopted the language of business, so that they talk about 'value for money', 'deliverables', 'return on investment' or the 'branding' of an organisation's work to distinguish it from others.[47] A closer look at the language and rhetoric of participation, and thereby the way problems are framed and approached, shows a radical change in a relatively short period of time. Today academic commentators tell us that the 'rhetorical emphasis on social justice, empowerment and participation emphasised by the rights-based approaches is absent'[48], and has been replaced by notions of marketisation of services that once belonged to this narrative of basic rights. The participation buzzword has evolved throughout a history of differing incentives and been brought starkly into the light of a neo-liberal world view.

Important to our topic is the neo-liberal orientation towards governing through the 'freedom' and 'agency' of the governed subjects. Rather than shaping conduct through coercion or force, through methodologies of participation, neo-liberal governmentality seeks to create rational, self-regulating subjects who conduct themselves in accordance with certain norms and can thus act as reliable conduits of policy impact and effectiveness.[49] This trend, propelled by dominant Western donor governments, played into the humanitarian accountability boom emerging in the 1990s, particularly in response to a flurry of concerns about aid 'dependency syndrome' (despite this idea being refuted both at the time and in research since), to which the response was a focus on participatory and community-based approaches.[50] More recently, donors responded to the lack of convincing empirical data around the impact of humanitarian interventions and the difficulty in measuring this by looking again at recipient participation as a 'proxy' measurement of impact.[51] Not only did this sidestep the problem of demonstrating impact in any direct sense, it again hijacks a concept, originally intended to be emancipatory and to provide empowerment, to fulfil donor-reporting obligations.

There is, therefore, a strong argument to say that a considerable proportion of the participatory work carried out by humanitarian agencies in the field is done in order to be accountable to these donors, rather than to the participating affected populations. For many, the power asymmetries inherent to an international humanitarian response are too dominant an issue to mean participation plays a genuine role in achieving accountability to affected people, with the foreboding conclusion that 'until this changes, no amount of research can create progress'.[52] For the sections of the academic literature that take a stance on

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44   Brown, Donini (n4).

45   E Olivius, '(Un)governable Subjects' (2014).

46   E Stobbaert & N Torrente (2008); The Brookings Institution, Moving Beyond Rhetoric: Consultation and Participation with Populations Displaced by Conflict or Natural Disasters (The Brookings Institution, 2008).

47   The Brookings Institution, Moving Beyond Rhetoric: Consultation and Participation with Populations Displaced by Conflict or Natural Disasters (The Brookings Institution, 2008).

48   KB Sandvik, 'Now is the time to deliver: looking for humanitarian innovation's theory of change' (2017) Journal of International Humanitarian Action 2 (8).

49   E Olivius, 'Displacing Equality' (2014).

50   S Turner, The Barriers of Innocence: Humanitarian Intervention and Political Imagination in a Refugee Camp for Burundians in Tanzania (Roskilde University, 2001).

51   J Mitchell, 'Accountability to the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid: old messages, new messengers' (2007) Humanitarian Exchange Magazine 38.

52   ICRC & HHI, Engaging people affected by armed conflicts and other situations of violence – Taking stock. Mapping Trends. Looking ahead. Recommendations for humanitarian organizations and donors in the digital era (ICRC, 2018).

developments in international relations and engage in criticisms of neo-liberal Western governance, this argument holds the dominant position. The Global Public Policy Institute produced a political economy analysis in 2016 to examine the hypothetical gains and losses to different key actors, including donors, should the policy-level accountability rhetoric be made real, demonstrating poor willingness from donors to engage in change processes where their power would be diminished.[53] Following this logic, the current preoccupation with participation is not able to provide genuine accountability to those affected by forced displacement.

These emerging public management principles and methods for the measurement of humanitarian performance contributed to efforts to professionalise and standardise the humanitarian sector, and to impose the obligation to demonstrate participatory approaches across an increasing breadth of contexts and by all agencies hoping to maintain access to state donor funding. In many ways this directed a heavy burden – even, in some conceptions, a conditionality of assistance – towards the recipients of aid to display the appropriateness and effectiveness of the aid they received. The desire for satisfaction surveys and a general increase in information from affected populations for the purpose of donor reporting or fulfilling the requirements of a cross-sectoral standard has the potential, ironically, to become more exploitative than compassionate. In some contexts, recipient participation has been found to be used primarily as information channels for humanitarian actors or in extractive collection processes that regularly fail to address the issues which are most important to people, under the guise of listening.[54]

The Brookings Institution concludes that the 'principle of participation' has too often been 'inflexibly proceduralized' within the approaches of aid agencies and describes the resulting disillusionment of displaced people when they fail to see how the various assessments, meetings, and activities in which they have contributed are shaped by their input.[55] Indeed, the humanitarian sector viewed as a business has the unique feature that it is one that can afford to ignore its apparent client-base, the affected population. When focused on delivery, it is easy to develop a kind of 'supply-driven assistance where providers make decisions and choices even before they talk to receivers'.[56] Useful analyses to explain this are derived from the field of economics, within which A.O. Hirschman was able to show how people responded to deteriorating quality of goods, services and other benefits in non-competitive environments, similar to that of many humanitarian contexts.[57] Hirschman found only two courses of action for communities trapped in this situation: 'voice' or 'exit'. Where people cannot exit, the reality in most refugee camps and displacement contexts, voice can also be ignored.

Criticisms of the participatory initiatives emerging in the 1990s and early 2000s emerged in reflection of the instrumental imperative, with reactions to the Sphere project serving as a prime example of the objections to participation as a measure of quality programming. During the early days of Sphere, a collection of predominantly French agencies signed the notorious 'French letter', which described Sphere as a donor-prescribed set of standards unsuitable as a pre-requisite for funding for those organisations that are not mandated to take a 'rights-based' approach or do not have any developmental 'empowerment' motivations for their engagement. For the organisations on this side of the so-called Franco-Anglo divide, the Sphere project reduced participation to a matter of reporting obligation and ultimately MSF dropped out of the project.[58] The instrumentalist approach to participation plays into the ideological divisions within the humanitarian sector already illustrated and reveals the interplay between an agency's attitude to 'beneficiary' and donor accountability.

Furthermore, there is little evidence that participation makes aid more efficient. Hard data on the quality and outcomes of various participatory approaches in use are scarce and there have to date been some unimpressive evaluations of the accountability boom as a whole.[59] In all three latest editions of the State

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53   J Steets, A Binder, A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert (2016).

54   J Alexander, 'Informed decision making: including the voice of affected communities in the process' in CHS Alliance (ed), On the Road to Istanbul: How can the World Humanitarian summit make humanitarian response more effective? Humanitarian Accountability Report (CHS Alliance, 2015); E Olivius, 'Displacing Equality' (2014)

55   The Brookings Institution, (2008).

56   Ibid.

57   N Van Praag, 'Would you recommend this aid programme to a friend?' In: CHS Alliance (ed) On the Road to Istanbul: How can the World Humanitarian summit make humanitarian response more effective? Humanitarian Accountability Report CHS Alliance, (2015).

58   J Tong (2004).

59   E Stobbaerts & N Torrente (2008).

of the Humanitarian System[60], accountability has been one of the areas showing the least improvement, with the authors in 2012 saying that 'the weakest performance is in the areas of recipient consultation and engagement of local actors, despite the rhetorical emphasis given to these issues'.[61] It is not clear what outcomes the modern standards and institutionalised approaches to participation are resulting in. There is little evidence as to how far or consistently agencies are implementing participatory approaches at country level, and still less evidence of how they are adjusting programmes systematically in response to feedback, let alone whether humanitarian programmes are in any way actually becoming more 'demand-driven'.[62] Research exists in the development sphere to argue that participation is only effective when accompanied by longer-term interventions, namely education,[63] information dissemination,[64] or a broader environment of empowerment,[65] which is unlikely to be a feasible resolution for humanitarian interventions on a shorter time-scale.

Participation is never a complete answer to accountability and is not perfect as a theoretical tool in all contexts. More rigorous application and then evaluation, other than in the selected case studies in existence, is required to conclusively demonstrate that the delivery of humanitarian aid can be made more efficient due to the use of participatory approaches. The instrumental motivation, the idea that participation makes aid to displaced populations more efficient and effective, appears for now to be based more on rhetoric and theory than on hard facts.[66]

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60   ALNAP, State of the Humanitarian System Report (ODI, 2010; 2012; 2015).

61   ALNAP, (2012).

62   V Metcalfe-Hough & L Poole (2018).

63   A Cornwall (2004).

64   M Björkman Nyqvist, D De Walque & J Svensson, 'Experimental Evidence on the Long-Run Impact of Community-Based Monitoring' (2017) American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 9(1).

65   A Ho & C Pavlish, 'Indivisibility of Accountability and Empowerment in Tackling Gender-Based Violence: Lessons from a Refugee Camp in Rwanda' (2011) Journal of Refugee Studies 24 (1).

66   D Brown, A Donini, P Clarke, Engagement of crisis-affected people in humanitarian action: Background Paper of ALNAP's 29th Annual Meeting (ODI, 2014).

5.   Ongoing tensions in conceptions of participation

By tracking the origins and development of participation as a humanitarian concept, we can explore the opportunities and limitations it presents and to interrogate the three key rationales for the use of participatory methodologies by humanitarian actors. This process details many of the dilemmas in pursuing accountability to affected populations and serves to illustrate the existential crisis that has emerged as a result of the expansion and diversification of the sector, as well as the complexity, length and variation of modern day displacement crises. Whilst neither the academic nor policy literature provides much in the way of meaningful suggestions to counter this – at least not to an extent which has proven generally impactful – it does seem to pull in two opposite directions in the way it sees accountability developing in future. One embraces the notion of 'complexity' and the interplay between humanitarian, development, and other fields, whilst the other wishes to shrink humanitarian action back to its 'basics'. One seeks to expand the participatory repertoire of humanitarian actors, whilst the other views participation as more readily disposable.

Development practitioners have tried to tackle the issues emerging from the use of participatory methodologies in their work and to reconcile it where possible with the power asymmetries of international aid for many years. A specific approach emerged to take a more holistic view of participation beyond the programme-level and into the broader context of community development.[67] This approach recognises that so much of what makes the incentive of 'empowerment' difficult to achieve is rooted in the specific nature of the crisis and context in question. It thus rejects fixed, standardised methods of engaging populations irrespective of context and instead considers the social, political, economic and physical intricacies of a context beyond particular programmes and projects.[68] Proponents of 'complexity theory' see an advancement of participatory approaches emerging in development where a 'systems and network way of thinking', inspired by private sector organisations, produces a diverse set of skills amongst development actors and where 'capacity to adapt and innovate' are part of a proposed new agenda, so that, for example, facilitators provide loose training to aid workers to allow them to adjust and adapt to the particularities of the local context and local participation in programmes.[69]

There is an emerging discussion on the issue of complexity amongst practitioners in the humanitarian sector, where many recognise that on-the-ground programmes are not showing the responsiveness or variation around the globe that you would expect in order to produce efficient and accountable aid and that the systems which govern it are more reactive to Western states, their policies and financing mechanisms than to local context. In this view, the log-frames and impact assessments imposed by donor governments are rejected and the best course of action is generally seen as being context-dependent.[70] The issue with the embrace of complexity theory is that it brings with it mathematical approaches and data gathering which are neither currently familiar to much of the sector nor easy to grasp within the time-frame of shorter humanitarian responses. Clear evidence of the implementation of complexity theory on the ground impacting participatory methodologies remains to be seen at this point in time.

By contrast, other commentators respond to complexity with the opposite impulse: to shrink humanitarian action and to bring it 'back to basics'.[71] These voices eschew overlaps in humanitarian action with development, human rights or good governance initiatives or response to protracted crises. DuBois and colleagues at the ODI lead calls for the humanitarian system to 'discover its humility' and focus only on urgent, life-saving need.[72] Whilst there is little direct comment on participation, they describe how past attempts at designing participatory methodologies have neither been successful nor meaningful, or have had adverse impacts on the delivery of aid, so that, for example, conflict-damaged homes are rebuilt with shoddy

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67   A Cornwall, Beneficiary consumer citizen: perspectives on participation for poverty reduction: SIDA studies 2 (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2000).

68   A Betts & L Bloom, 'The Two Worlds of Humanitarian Innovation' (2013) Refugee Studies Centre Oxford Working Paper Series 94.

69   R Chambers, 'Paradigms, Poverty and Adaptive Pluralism' (2010) IDS Working Paper 344; A Betts & L Bloom, 'Humanitarian Innovation: The state of the art' (2014) OCHA Occasional Policy Series.

70   B Ramalingam, H Jones, T Reba & J Young, Exploring the Science of Complexity: Ideas and Implications for Development and Humanitarian Efforts (2nd edn. ODI, 2008).

71   M Dubois, The new humanitarian basics (ODI, 2018).

72   Ibid.

materials or vulnerable groups are marginalised by local decision-making bodies.[73] This logic runs contrary to the three incentives for participation, and commentators are instead more likely to be beholden to the normative power of the fundamental humanitarian principles. They demand a profound change to the power relations in aid whilst remaining albeit 'development sensitive', although it is not yet clear how this would be enacted in reality.[74]

Opponents of the 'back to basics' model believe that it would ignore the voice of affected people to such an extent that it puts at risk the effectiveness of aid completely. To ignore a request for resilience-strengthening activities, for instance, would jeopardize humanitarian outcomes in the long-run.[75] Thus the re-emergence of the arguments for co-governance and local audits comes about, removing the responsibility for providing accountability directly from aid agencies and creating new bodies to fulfil this instead.[76] These would be intended to influence the power asymmetries in aid and provide the opportunity for redress for displaced populations whilst at the same time making provision for the fundamental principles of independence and neutrality of humanitarian agencies. This has emerged as an ongoing debate and its direction may influence participation of displaced persons considerably in the future.

Ultimately, both views emphasise the importance of considering local context in providing humanitarian aid, a point which is acknowledged at high level and which has entered the normative dialogue. Whilst the trend for introducing participation into standards and initiatives has continued (it has a strong presence in the 2017 IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People as well as both the Grand Bargain and Core Humanitarian Standard emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Conference), there are subtle caveats and instruction to use participatory methods 'if appropriate' to the context.[77] Observers note that the sector's approach has become more flexible in the face of their experience of the past twenty years of humanitarian crises[78], and even the MSF stalwarts acknowledge that a flexible approach to participation, taken alongside a dose of the fundamental humanitarian principles, might be the antidote to the standardisation attempt that the initiatives of the 90s brought about.[79]

The development of participatory methodologies themselves, however, is not quickly influenced by conceptual policy discussions and most change on the ground remains slow. Case studies which look at specific modalities of participation are few, and it is not clear that contextual flexibility is more often demonstrated by agencies now than at an earlier time. The exception to this rule – where we do in fact see a catching-up of implementation to policy – is outlined below in discussion of cash-based initiatives.

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73   ICRC & HHI (2018).

74   M Dubois (2018).

75   RFD Santos, 'Basics' won't do: A response to Marc DuBois' 'new humanitarian basics" (ICRC, 2018) < http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/11/13>.

76   D Hilhorst (2015).

77   J Steets, A Binder, A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert (2016).

78   D Hilhorst (2015).

79   J Tong (2004).

6.   Cash-Based Initiatives: the new Participation?

Whilst participation remains a popular concept in and of itself and has helped to define paths of action and lend legitimacy to a central element of the humanitarian accountability endeavour, it has likewise had a major impact on the development of other related concepts. Alongside participatory methodologies, cash-based interventions have received a great deal of humanitarian press in the past few years; toted as a 'paradigm shift' in the pursuit of accountability[80] and credited with the ability 'to set in motion a development that could potentially transform the humanitarian sector at large'.[81] Simply put, cash-based interventions shift the focus of humanitarian giving from in-kind aid (food products, blankets, jerry cans etc.) to the modality of dispersing cash, with which the receiving person is granted decision-making power in regards what to purchase. With on-the-ground progress slow on participation, cash injects new momentum into the accountability dialogue, and for some demonstrates a 'catching-up' in the development of practices to support participation policies, literally allowing affected people to engage more directly and with more power over the aid they receive.[82] The two concepts often appear side-by-side in the rhetoric of change emerging from the sector since the 2016 Summit, so that they are increasingly viewed as the two 'load bearing pillars of humanitarian reform'.[83]

Beyond the theoretical persuasiveness of the concept as a way to divert purchasing – and therefore decision-making – power into the hands of affected people and thus make them active participants in aid, research shows that recipients greatly prefer it as a modality of delivering aid.[84] Cash may therefore be perceived as a normative modality designed to support participation and improve accountability using different means to those proposed by reforms so far. It has a revolutionary feel.

Traced to many corners of the globe, rooted in various rationales and forms of delivery, cash has appeared throughout the history of modern humanitarianism – cash is not new – and yet has failed through the years to take hold as a mainstream practice. There is evidence that as early as the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian War, Clara Barton (who would later go on to found and lead the American Red Cross) helped to deliver cash relief to the destitute in the conquered city of Strasbourg.[85] With this event as the starting point, Paul Harvey details the long pedigree of cash-based interventions in his HPG Report on 'Cash-based Responses in Emergencies', where more of this history can be read.[86] In the 1980s a particularly influential case for cash was made by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen through his work on 'entitlements'.[87] Sen demonstrated, contrary to perceived wisdom until this time, that food insecurity may often be caused by inadequate purchasing power rather than inadequate food supply. However, the efforts of a few agencies at this time to develop cash-based interventions remained small scale and ad hoc, and the cash-based approach still failed to become widespread amongst sector practitioners.

A lack of institutional incentives and the paternalistic goal of avoiding 'aid dependency' meant that despite successful attempts to demonstrate the benefits of cash, it was still perceived as a radical and risky approach for another twenty years.[88] Those same currents of neo-liberalism which fostered the development of the participatory approach in the 1990s seems to have undermined the twin reform of cash.

Several important developments finally brought cash closer to the mainstream. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami brought with it an excess of donor funding and the opportunity to experiment and document learning from larger scale initiatives than ever before. A series of reports from the Humanitarian Policy

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80   B Ramalingam, K Scriven K & C Foley, Innovations in International Humanitarian Action: ALNAP 8th Review of Humanitarian Action (ODI, 2009).

81   KB Sandvik (2017).

82   N Barry and J Barham (2012).

83   N Van Praag 'Can cash transfers unleash the participation revolution?' (2018) Ground Truth Solutions http://groundtruthsolutions. org/2018/05/23/can-cash-transfers-unleash-the-participation-revolution/.

84   Ibid.

85   P Harvey, 'Cash-based responses in emergencies', *HPG Report 24* (ODI, 2007).

86   Ibid.

87   A Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation* (Oxford, 1982).

88   B Ramalingam, K Scriven & C Foley (2009); D Peppiatt, J Mitchell and P Allen, *Buying Power: The Use of Cash Transfers in Emergencies* (British Red Cross, 2000).

Group at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) then brought the concept of cash-based programming to the top of the policy agenda, and some agencies responded by creating relevant new guidance and implementing further cash-based programmes.[89]

Whilst much of the rhetoric around cash has an empowering quality (UNHCR talks of empowering 'refugees as customers'), there is growing evidence to say that this incentive does not hold true and that cash cannot fill the accountability gap where participation fails. Many in the sector have in fact expressed deep concern that a knock-on effect of mainstreaming cash approaches will be a loss of local knowledge and leverage, and therefore a loss of accountability to local communities.[90] There are fears that using cash as a default or large-scale option might make it more difficult for protection organisations in particular to negotiate access or aid worker safety, as they will have lost the bargaining chip that once was their assistance programmes to help them transverse the local political landscape.[91]

The instrumental motivator for the explosion in cash is, on the other hand, in full swing. The rise of cash has been further ensured by the 'datafication of humanitarian action'[92] and emerging technologies of biometrics which have completed the accountability loop with the promise of increased data accountability to donors. Following this motivating force to its conclusion, cash-based initiatives are likely to construct an understanding of aid accountability in which 'quantification, measurability and accuracy are assigned greater value than qualitative perspectives and contextual understanding'.[93] In a recent perceptions survey targeting the recipients of cash programming, the most remarkable finding across the regions was that people did not understand, or always see much logic, in the eligibility criteria for their assistance.[94] The affected persons' voice is in danger of being lost to (purchasing) choice.

Far from being a silver-bullet for participation or accountability to affected persons, cash programmes require investment in mechanisms of two-way communication, in much the same way as any other modality of aid programming, and thus come with many of the same limitations and dilemmas.

89   Ibid.

90   J Steets, A Binder, A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert (2016).

91   Ibid.

92   KL Jacobsen & KB Sandvik, 'UNHCR and the pursuit of international protection: accountability through technology?' (2018) Third World Quarterly doi:10.1080/01436597.2018.1432346.

93   Ibid.

94   N Van Praag (2018).

7.   Conclusion

An analysis of the three core incentives for humanitarian participation brings to light the problem with applying a singular concept like participation to a large and diverse sector, where each agency adopts a different identity and approach to work in countlessly complex crisis contexts featuring different experiences of forced displacement. This echoes a point made earlier in this paper that participation and accountability are not universally understood or defined and divergent opinions on what accountability is (or what attempts to improve it are meant to achieve) continue to be partially responsible for this overall picture.[95] A closer look at each incentive reveals ongoing tensions existing in the debates around humanitarian accountability and differing points of view relating to the existential questions of the sector and humanitarians' intended role.

The approach to humanitarian accountability which embraces the development sector's 'empowerment' vision has led to many different outcomes documented in the literature: from confusion to construction and manipulation. The aspiration to empower affected people has also been difficult to achieve or to measure, and 'empowering' participatory interventions have provided little space for aid recipients to claim as their own, particularly in forced migration contexts. It is therefore not surprising that the development sector has itself grappled with improvements to participation and that power relations are discussed if not successfully addressed. A discourse around complexity has also begun to be reflected in the framing of humanitarian accountability initiatives.

The normative rationalisation for participatory approaches has over the years been particularly resilient, featuring in dominant humanitarian discourse at inter-agency and inter-governmental level, as well as at programming level for many (especially multi-mandate or rights-based/originating) agencies. This brought focus to standard-setting, which has received a mixed response in the literature, and highlights divisions in agencies' definition of the 'basics' of humanitarian aid in and of itself. An emphasis on participation here becomes dangerous when it is used as a tool to avoid building accountability in weaker areas, such as redress after serious offences by aid workers or state accountability.

The major pattern emerging from this review of the academic and contemplative literature of the humanitarian sector is that the instrumental motivation is the most pervasive force behind the dominance of the participatory approach. We therefore find that participation is heavily weighted towards accountability to donors, despite a rhetoric which weighs in favour of accountability to affected people. Within the sector, there are different opinions about how dramatic a betrayal of affected people this really is; whilst the most critical of the accountability rhetoric (often academics) believe that the instrumental imperative breaks too far with traditional humanitarian approaches and values, others (the ICRC for example) still feel able to embrace the fundamental humanitarian principles as guiding stars in the search for accountability of all kinds whilst meeting donor standards.[96]

For some, the power asymmetries inherent in humanitarian action are too profound to imagine that participation can contribute to accountability.[97] No matter the intention, the many accountability standards and initiatives in existence are, in this view, unlikely to be properly enforced or are merely symbolic in nature. Furthermore, they fail to reflect the complexity of humanitarian response and mirror international and local power imbalances.[98] Participatory methodologies may sometimes generate the positive by-products of trust and listening or allow for improvements to the quality of service for affected people, such as through cash-based programming, but it would be disingenuous if we were to credit this as being the sole goal.

Despite this persuasive picture of humanitarianism on the global stage, a review of organisational literature, case studies and practitioner discussions (such as ALNAP, HERE-Geneva or the CHS consultations) reveals a very different determination to improve accountability to affected populations amongst practi-

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95   P Knox-Clarke, Changing Humanitarian Action? 31st ALNAP Annual Meeting Background Paper (ODI, 2017).

96   ICRC & HHI, (2018).

97   J Steets, A Binder, A Derzsi-Horváth, S Krüger & L Ruppert (2016).

98   Collinson S, 'Constructive Deconstruction: Making Sense of the International Humanitarian System' HPG Working Paper (ODI, 2016); KB Sandvik (2017); C Bennett, Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era (ODI, 2016); C Bennett, Constructive deconstruction: imagining alternative humanitarian action (ODI, 2018).

tioners and a more complex web of motivations than is captured in the academic literature. In reality, any one humanitarian organisation is simultaneously motivated by any combination of the three incentives for participation, including its donor reporting obligations at one level and a strong normative belief that participation is the right way to interact with affected people on another. The two are not mutually exclusive, although they are difficult to pick apart from one another in much of the literature and the latter is less commonly documented.

If we are to confidently understand the value of participation in delivering accountability to affected populations, we require a much stronger evidence base than that already in place, and case studies which relate desirable features of engagement with clearly identifiable operational factors and expected outcomes is needed.[99] This of course will necessarily be very sensitive to context and the fact that the feasibility and desirability of different types of participation will vary in different types of humanitarian situation. On occasion, such as in conflict contexts or very short-term emergency responses, participatory methodologies may be difficult or even unadvisable. Importantly, more understanding and evidence of the outcome of participation being operationalised and used by organisations is needed. It is key for accountability outcomes to be realised in which affected populations are learned from as well as listened to; that any organisation claiming to use participatory methodologies can demonstrate learning, adaptation and change as a result, if they are to claim accountability.

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99   J Mitchell (2007); ICRC & HHI, (2018).

8.   Abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to affected populations
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
EU	European Union
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International
HHI	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
HERE-Geneva	Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre, Geneva
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RLI	Refugee Law Initiative
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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