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DECISION-MAKING POWER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION: AN EXPLORATION OF ENABLING FACTORS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS IN REDISTRIBUTING DECISION-MAKING POWER IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

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Abstract

There is an inherent power imbalance between the different actors involved in the humanitarian response due to differentiated access to resources and the varying agendas informing their decision-making. The participation discourse evolved in an attempt to redistribute power towards people affected by crisis, encompassing a diverse group of first responders and recipients of humanitarian aid. These people are often deprived of any influence over the decisions affecting their lives. The participation discourse emerged more than 20 years ago and has been incorporated into organisational policies and commitments in the humanitarian sector. However, reports show that a significant gap remains between what is discussed on paper and at conferences and the actual possibility for affected communities to participate in important decisions. This study seeks to explore this issue further by investigating relevant factors, limitations and current practices using a literature review and case study in order to explain this gap and gain a better understanding of the ways in which it may be mitigated.

Keywords: humanitarian action, power, participation, decision-making, community-based organisations (CBOs), refugee community, non-governmental organisation (NGO), Same Skies.
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List of abbreviations

AAP  Accountability to Affected Populations
ALNAP  Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CBO  Community-based organisation
CHS  Core Humanitarian Standards
HAP  Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HPN  Humanitarian Practice Network
IASC  Inter Agency Standing Committee
ICRC  International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO  International Non-Governmental Organisation
JEEAR  Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda
NGOs  Non-Governmental Organisations
ODI  Overseas Development Institute
OECD  The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBA  Partnership Brokers Association
RLC  Refugee Learning Center
RLN  Refugee Learning Nest
StARS Egypt  St. Andrew’s Refugee Services Egypt
UN  United Nations
UNHCR  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UR  Urban Refugees
1. Introduction to the power imbalance in humanitarian action and the participation discourse

The humanitarian response is characterised by an inherent power imbalance between the humanitarian organisations delivering aid and the people affected by crisis receiving it. This power imbalance is embedded in the very nature of the response; access to resources and influence over the agenda at the different stages of the response lie first and foremost with humanitarian organisations, whether the organisations are international, national, local, governmental or non-governmental (Pouligny, 2014, p. 18). It is important for humanitarian actors to be aware of this power imbalance and its implications for their response in order to avoid the ‘giver’ dominating the ‘receiver’ and depriving people of the ability to decide the course of their own lives (Pouligny, 2014, p. 18). According to Barnett (2016), humanitarian action should be delivered in a way that respects the dignity of affected communities and grants them a certain degree of power over their own fate (Barnett, 2016, p. 13). This suggests that decision-making power should lie with people affected by crisis to some extent.

In response to the issues relating to this power imbalance, the humanitarian sector expressed the intention of “letting go of power and control” (Bennett, 2016, p. 6) and redistributing power to allow greater participation. This would require a change in the mindset of all actors involved, as well as the actual transfer of resources and decision-making power (Bennett, 2016, p. 6). As a result, the participation discourse promoting increased participation in the humanitarian response by people affected by crisis emerged in the sector more than 20 years ago (Pouligny, 2014, p. 6).

It is necessary here to clarify certain concepts in order to ensure a common understanding of participation and decision-making. The Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) Alliance\(^2\) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), both of which play an important role in the participation discourse, define participation as follows: “Participation involves 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” (CHS Alliance, 2015, p. 39). The second important concept

\(^1\) In this study, ‘people affected by crisis’ are defined by the author as those who are directly or indirectly affected by a conflict or natural disaster, referred to here as a crisis. Often, people affected by crisis are referred to simply as ‘recipients’ of aid and addressed as a homogenous category. Yet the people among this group are not only recipients of aid but often first responders to crisis or deliverers of aid as well, forming a heterogeneous group. For the purposes of this dissertation, the terms ‘people affected by crisis’ or ‘affected communities’ will be used to refer to people targeted by humanitarian action. These people are not a single category but a diverse group with different backgrounds, stories and levels of involvement in humanitarian action.

\(^2\) The CHS Alliance is a body composed of humanitarian organisations. Its vision is stated as “people and communities vulnerable to risk and affected by disaster, conflict or poverty, influence and access quality assistance and can hold organisations accountable” (The CHS Alliance 1, 2019).
is decision-making, which is defined “as a process of problem-solving [...] taking place within specific contexts. [...] A process whereby a single action emerges as the decision-maker perceives and understands the situation” (Campbell & Knox Clarke, 2018, p. 9). These two definitions will be used throughout the dissertation within the wider framework of the concepts of accountability, ownership, local capacities and empowerment that will be developed further in Chapter 2. Moreover, different types or levels of participation exist depending on the extent to which people are involved in the humanitarian response. According to the ‘Participation Handbook for Humanitarian Field Workers’, there are seven types which range from a low level of passive participation such as information sharing or consultation to the highest level of interactive participation and support for local initiatives. The main focus of this dissertation, decision-making, appears only at the two highest levels of participation, in which people affected by crisis have power over the decisions concerning their lives (Groupe URD, 2009, p. 40).

Following the emergence of the participation discourse around 20 years ago, policies have been drafted, commitments made by organisations, conferences held and an overall agreement on improving participation in the sector drawn up. The issue gained momentum during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, where donors and humanitarian organisations agreed to commit to participation in a more standardised manner (Austin et al., 2018, pp. 26–27). These commitments occurred following numerous evaluations of humanitarian programmes and statements from field workers and affected communities, as well as academic studies highlighting the lack of a common understanding of participation and the gap between the commitments made and the participatory approaches or transfers of decision-making power actually implemented (Austin et al., 2018, p. 23-27). This gap between commitments and practices in the humanitarian sector is the primary rationale underpinning this research. Studies have also shown that participation by affected communities at a high level creates ownership, fosters local capacities and improves responsibility for the programmes, which optimally leads to improved sustainability and quality of humanitarian action (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 125). People affected by crisis have very different coping capacities and strategies and possess a wide range of resources, knowledge and other means for participating in the humanitarian response. Only when humanitarian organisations understand the capacities present among a population can a participatory response be effective (Groupe URD, 2009, p. 60). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the overall quality of the humanitarian response improves when affected communities participate and play an active role in decision-making to create more
accountable, efficient, effective, appropriate and relevant programmes (Austin et al., 2018, p. 23).

However, a 2018 study by ALNAP showed that even after the humanitarian sector’s proclamation that it would increase participation and accountability in its programmes, only limited progress has been made in involving affected populations in decision-making. Different types of participation occurred in the sector and a variety of understandings of the concept have evolved. Most improvements in participatory methods were made to passive participation, whereby people affected are informed, consulted or supply information to humanitarian organisations. Moreover, feedback mechanisms have improved throughout the period covered by this study, representing the main drivers of accountability processes in humanitarian programmes. However, participation at a higher level, such as interactive participation in which people affected have real decision-making power, has not significantly evolved. Furthermore, the study showed that the number of people participating in consultations during early phases of the response had risen in comparison with the previous study period (2012-2015) but had not influenced the agenda for the resulting programmes (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 157-160). Additionally, a study by Anderson et al. (2012) in which more than 6,000 people who had received international assistance revealed that they still could not influence or decide on crucial decisions relating to their assistance and that their ideas were incorporated only in limited cases (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 68). In another study, Knox Clarke et al. (2018) provide several examples in which power was handed over, but these remain isolated and have not led to sector-wide change in the actors involved in decision-making (p. 156).

In summary, the gap between the participation discourse present in the humanitarian sector over the last 20 years and the actual implementation of changes to decision-making power has given rise to the following research question: Why is there a gap between the participation discourse and real possibilities for people affected by crisis to decide on humanitarian action, and how can it be mitigated? In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions will be explored:

1. What factors enable the redistribution of decision-making power to affected communities?
2. What limitations are present in the transition of decision-making power in the humanitarian response?
3. What practices are currently used by humanitarian actors who have already adopted a participatory approach at a high level and what can be learned from these?
The aim of this research is to contribute to enhancing knowledge of the gap between the participation discourse and reality, to build new knowledge of the factors and practices that enable decision-making power to be redistributed to affected communities and to encourage the dissemination of best practices between humanitarian actors, specifically within the network of NGOs interviewed for this study.

By addressing these questions, the analysis will focus on the following thesis statement: Redistribution of decision-making power to people affected by crisis is possible if organisations and affected communities change their mindsets, build relationships and actively dedicate resources to a participatory decision-making process.

1.1 Methodology

For Chapters 1 and 2 (Introduction and Literature Review), the methodology employed was a literature review of journal articles, reports and working papers. The ALNAP website was used as the main search platform for suitable articles due to the high quality of its publications. Other websites used were the Metasearch website for the Graduate Institute of Geneva library and Google Scholar. For the Conceptual Framework (Chapter 2.1), a review of literature from the development and social work sectors was carried out. In addition, definitions were taken from ALNAP, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and other relevant sources relating to humanitarian action. The main studies and reports used for the existing research section (Chapter 2.2) were ‘Time to Listen. Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid’ by Anderson et al. (2012), the report entitled ‘The State of the Humanitarian System’ by Knox Clark et al. (2018) published by ALNAP, ‘How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector’ by Austin et al. (2018) published by the CHS Alliance and ‘Why attention to detail matters in the participation revolution’ by Degett (2019) published by the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN). These reports were chosen due to their comprehensive overview of participation in the humanitarian sector and their status as the most recent publications on the developments in this area.

For the discussion in Chapter 3, a single case study focusing on Same Skies, a small international non-governmental organisation (INGO) concerned with assisting refugees, was selected. Same Skies was founded 4.5 years ago and aims to take a different approach by engaging in high-level participatory activity. Same Skies has developed a method known as Refugee-Led Action in which refugees take over responsibility for establishing their own initiatives or are supported in their existing initiatives. This means that refugees play an active role in decision-making throughout the project cycle. For this research, Same Skies provides numerous insights into enabling factors, their limitations for the redistribution of decision-
making power and current practices. Knox Clarke et al. (2018) noted in their report that “there were more ambitious examples of ‘handing over power’ in humanitarian programming, but they were generally isolated […]” (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 157). Same Skies is one of the rare cases in which decision-making power is redistributed to refugee communities via a systematic approach, and is therefore a suitable case study for analysing good practices, limitations and enabling factors.

For the case study, a qualitative research method was chosen due to the decision to use a single case and the small amount of data involved. The methods used were a document analysis of the Same Skies website and communication materials and a semi-structured interview3 with the organisation’s international director, Julia Frei. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with Abdullah Sarwari, a refugee volunteer in one initiative supported by Same Skies, in order to explore the perspective of the affected population. Further interviews were conducted with Alaa Kasmo from StARS Egypt and Sonia Ben Ali from Urban Refugees (UR). These organisations have created a network with Same Skies to exchange knowledge and best practices concerning participation, among other matters. Finally, several members of the Communication, Policy and Support team at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were interviewed in order to include approaches taken to the participation discourse by large humanitarian institutions. Limitations of this methodology that may impact the findings are the limited number of interviews and the choice of a single case study instead of a comparative analysis of several cases.

1.2 Structure

The dissertation begins with an Introduction (Chapter 1) to the participation and decision-making discourse, presenting the research problem and objectives. Chapter 2 defines the two main concepts within the framework of other concepts such as accountability, ownership, local capacities and empowerment (Chapter 2.1) and discusses the interrelations between them. It then goes on to provide an overview of existing research on enabling factors and their limitations for the transfer of decision-making power in the humanitarian response (Chapter 2.2). This section focuses mainly on answering sub-questions 1 and 2 on p. 3. Chapter 3 discusses the answers to sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 on p. 3 using insights from the case study. This chapter is divided into an introduction to the participatory approach used by Same Skies (Chapter 3.1) and the main findings from the interviews (Chapter 3.2). Finally, the Conclusion in Chapter 4 will summarise the main findings of the study. The Annex provides further information on specific topics mentioned throughout the dissertation.

3 A summary of the interviews can be requested from the author.
2. Literature review on participation and decision-making

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts and discusses the literature on participation, enabling factors allowing affected communities to play an active role in decision-making and the limitations of these factors. Chapter 2.1 introduces the concepts of participation and decision-making and links them to interrelated sub-concepts, while Chapter 2.2 presents existing knowledge about enabling factors and offers answers to the research questions from the literature.

2.1 The concepts of participation, decision-making and related sub-concepts

Participation, as defined in the Introduction, is linked to the concept of power and the inherent power imbalance between different actors involved in humanitarian action (Pouligny, 2014, p. 18). In this dissertation, participation is seen as one approach among many to redistribute power in the humanitarian response to those affected by crisis. Other trends in the humanitarian sector aiming to redistribute power, improve accountability and place people affected by crisis at the centre of the response more effectively and efficiently are the localisation of aid, inclusive humanitarian action, simplification and harmonisation of reporting requirements, and many others (Austin et al., 2018, p. 4). For the scope of this research, the discussion will be limited to decision-making and participation, in the awareness that these trends in the humanitarian sector are all highly interrelated. While conducting the literature review and interviews for this dissertation, I realised that the lack of clarity surrounding these concepts is a challenge. Therefore, this chapter begins by clarifying the concepts from different perspectives: political science, development studies and social work. Finally, it ends with literature from the humanitarian sector.

The participation discourse is rooted in political science and initially referred to citizen involvement in political decision-making. Later, the concept was adopted by the social sciences; it became an area of interest in education, pedagogy and social work to describe the involvement of people in decision-making in a social sphere (Derecik, Kaufmann, & Neuber, 2013, pp. 44–46). Eighty years ago, the participation discourse entered the development sector. Here, participation refers either to the type and level of involvement of people at different stages of a project, from planning to implementation, or the process by which people take decisions (Kyamusugulwa, 2013, p. 1267). In development studies, participation can be understood as a means, as in the example of participatory tools for enhancing community development, or as an end goal, whereby existing power relations are transformed to give voice to the voiceless, empowering those with less decision-making power (Kyamusugulwa, 2013, pp. 1270–1271). Criticism of the concept within development studies resonates with...
similar critiques heard among humanitarians: participation may strengthen existing power relations in communities, power is unevenly distributed between the facilitators of decision-making processes and those participating in them, participation is often a fuzzy concept and the definitions and methods used differ widely across the sector (Kyamusugulwa, 2013, p. 1272). Following an extensive literature review, Kyamusugulwa (2013) concludes that more research is needed to find sustainable forms of participatory development by promoting local ownership and taking all relevant stakeholders and their interrelations into account in order to alleviate poverty, empower the population and enhance local governance (Kyamusugulwa, 2013, pp. 1273–1274).

In the humanitarian sector, participation was mentioned for the first time following the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) in 1996. The need for greater clarification of concepts and agreement on common standards in the sector evolved over the years. Along with participation, the need for improved accountability became apparent in order to improve the quality of humanitarian action and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP, later replaced by CHS Alliance) was founded in 2003 to develop accountability and quality standards. The discussion on local ownership as a means to achieve more effective humanitarian action evolved in relation to the concepts of participation and accountability when the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was signed by aid recipient and donor countries in 2007 (Austin et al., 2018, p. 26). Participation became part of the “Transformative Agenda” of the IASC⁴ to improve coordination, accountability and leadership in the humanitarian sector in 2011. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 in Istanbul even spoke of a “Participation Revolution” and many humanitarian organisations committed to the CHS, which includes participation in decision-making in commitment number 4⁵ (Austin et al., 2018, pp. 26–27). The aims of the summit were to clarify participation as an approach within the humanitarian sector, to find common standards between donors and humanitarian organisations and to further improve the implementation of the IASC commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)⁶.

This short historical overview of the discourse on participation and decision-making outlines its roots in political science, social science and development studies. These concepts

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⁴ IASC: “The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners” (IASC 2, 2019).
⁵ Commitment number 4 states: “Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them” (CHS Alliance, 2015, p. 4).
⁶ The AAP commitments endorsed by the IASC in 2017 focus on leadership, participation and partnership, information, feedback and action, and results. The second commitment on participation and partnership states: “Adopt agency mechanisms that feed into and support collective/coordinated people-centred approaches that enable women, girls, boys, men, including the most marginalised and at-risk people among affected communities, to participate in and play an active role in decisions that will impact their lives, well-being, dignity and protection. Adopt and sustain equitable partnerships with local actors to build upon their long-term relationships and trust with communities.” (Reliefweb, 2017, p. 2).
entered the humanitarian sector rather late but steadily found their way into the policies, commitments, standards and approaches of humanitarian organisations. Nevertheless, participation continues to be defined and practised in very different ways by different actors. As in development studies, humanitarian organisations view participation as an approach that allows affected communities to wield influence in decision-making. Some interpret participation as a means involving tools and methods, while for others, participation is the objective, providing affected communities with decision-making power (Austin et al., 2018, p. 28).

For the purposes of this dissertation, participation is understood in terms of the definition presented on page 1, which underlines the active role to be taken by the affected community in decision-making processes and stresses that the principle should be incorporated into practice via clear guidelines (CHS Alliance, 2015, p. 39). This definition is recognised by the IASC, the SPHERE Standards and the CHS. The ‘Participation Handbook for Humanitarian Field Workers’ lists different levels of participation which can be seen in Table 1 (see Annex p. 37) (Groupe URD, 2009, pp. 40–41). In 1969, a model of participation depicting different levels of involvement was introduced in the field of political science. The model ranges from a low level of participation at which citizens are merely manipulated (non-participation) to a level at which they are informed and consulted, while at the last level citizens take control over decision-making (Nieß, 2016, p. 81). This was further developed in the field of social work to create a model of youth participation in education, which added a final dimension covering initiation by children (Nieß, 2016, p. 82). The handbook by Groupe URD (2009) presents a model similar to the aforementioned models and situates decision-making power for people affected by crisis as part of the two highest levels of participation, in which actual redistribution of power occurs: interactive participation and local initiatives (Groupe URD, 2009, pp. 40–41). Interactive participation means that “the affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers.” (Groupe URD, 2009, pp. 40). Local initiatives are those in which “the affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organisations or institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community; it is the aid organisation that participates in the people’s projects.” (Groupe URD, 2009, pp. 40).

The definition of decision-making introduced on p. 2 was chosen because decisions are always dependent upon the specific context in which they are taken. The humanitarian sector brings specific challenges as decisions often have to be taken under conditions of
significant uncertainty, with many decisions with life or death consequences for the population required in a short time and under pressure (Campbell & Knox Clarke, 2018, pp. 17–24). It is therefore difficult to discuss decision-making in the humanitarian field in general terms; this research focuses specifically on factors enabling decision-making by people affected by crisis and the limitations of these factors. Decision-making could be researched from various angles, including psychological or behavioural aspects, within different disciplines such as business or anthropology. Here, space limitations mean that the focus of this dissertation remains the humanitarian sector.

As mentioned in the overview of the historical development of the participation discourse, accountability and local capacity are important related concepts. In many reports, accountability and participation converge as complementary elements to improve the quality of humanitarian response. The two concepts are closely interlinked and cannot be separated in practice. In order to be participatory at either end of the spectrum of participation typologies (see Annex p. 37), humanitarian organisations should include accountability processes in their response and vice versa. The discourse on accountability has also led to the introduction of a wide range of policies and procedures in humanitarian organisations to improve feedback loops and other accountability mechanisms. Like the effects of the participation discourse, these efforts are often perceived as a “box-ticking” exercise by humanitarian workers and affected communities alike, used instead of genuine attempts to review the impact and quality of actions and implement changes in response to feedback (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 66–67).

According to Obrecht et al. (2015) “accountability and participation are different ways of addressing the inequalities that arise when an actor acquires and exercises power” (Obrecht et al., 2015, p. 9). Humanitarian organisations may focus on one of the aforementioned concepts to a greater extent than the other, but usually address both concepts as they are closely interlinked.

Local capacity is often seen as a way to prepare affected communities for potential future disruptions of their lives and to minimise any negative effects of humanitarian action. Therefore, it is closely linked to sustainability, as discussed earlier. The assumption among organisations that capacities are already in place is a key factor enabling participatory processes in decision-making. Activities to strengthen local capacities tend to involve a participatory approach (Pouligny, 2014, pp. 7–8). Pouligny (2014) explains that participation and accountability also help to improve the ownership of projects by affected communities, which she views as “the ultimate condition to raise the quality of humanitarian responses to

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1 The definitions of accountability, local capacity, ownership and empowerment can be found on p. 38 of the Annex.
disasters” (p. 9). Ownership indicates a shift in the power balance from humanitarian organisations towards people affected by crisis. Participation, accountability and local ownership are interlinked in such a way that they lead to more sustainable humanitarian action under optimal conditions, meaning that the response has a long-term impact and is set up in a way that strengthens local capacities. Anderson et al. (2012) conclude that “insiders (people in recipient societies) and outsiders (external aid providers) all observe that when people participate in all phases of an aid effort, from conception of the idea, to the design and planning, to implementation, and through final evaluation, they will “own” the process and therefore be more likely to maintain the results. Participation leads to ownership leads to sustainability” (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 67–68). This chain of actions may eventually lead to more sustainable projects, if participation, accountability and local ownership are all in place. The outcomes of such projects should ideally be more sustainable, although many other factors must be taken into consideration when considering the sustainability of humanitarian action.

Empowerment is often mentioned in relation to participation. Drydyk (2013) suggests that empowerment is the result of a process of change rather than the manner in which an individual is involved in the humanitarian response (Drydyk, 2013, pp. 250–253). Empowerment is linked to decision-making and participation as both may be needed to empower affected communities (Kyamusugulwa, 2013, p. 1268). However, while decision-making may contribute to higher levels of empowerment, it is not the only element required to achieve it (Drydyk, 2013, pp. 250–253). The same is true of the concept of power introduced in Chapter 1: power is one component of empowerment but a shift of power alone does not necessarily lead to empowerment (Drydyk, 2013, pp. 259–261).

In summary, this chapter has provided an inter-disciplinary, historical review of the participation and decision-making discourse and demonstrated its links to other concepts such as accountability, local capacity, ownership and empowerment. Many other concepts could be considered at this stage but will not be addressed here due to space constraints. Chapter 2.2 will introduce the factors enabling organisations to transfer decision-making to people affected by crisis and the limitations inherent to these factors.

**2.2 Existing research on enabling factors and their limitations**

Six key factors enabling participatory decision-making processes were identified in the literature, allowing the research question to be answered in part. However, these factors can also limit the redistribution of decision-making power and provide some explanation for the gap between the participation discourse and its practical implementation. Some of these
factors were mentioned in relation to participation rather than decision-making, as shown in the table used to analyse the different factors on p. 38. Given that the transfer of decision-making to affected communities is viewed here as one end of the participation continuum, factors mentioned in the literature and in reports promoting participation will also be included as factors enabling decision-making by affected communities. Many other factors could be explored in this chapter but due to space constraints, the study will focus on the factors mentioned most frequently throughout the literature.

Factor 1: Local capacity and the two-way flow of information and knowledge

Understanding of local capacities and the establishment of a two-way flow of information and knowledge is a key factor enabling affected communities to play an active role in decision-making.

Pouligny (2014) explains the importance for humanitarian organisations of having information and knowledge about affected communities. Often, affected communities develop coping strategies when faced with a crisis and are the first actors to respond to it. Many needs have therefore already been addressed before humanitarian actors arrive and it is essential to understand these strategies and seek local information and knowledge to build on them. This requires humanitarian organisations to be attentive to local economic and political resources to limit disturbances to the systems and strategies in place. Moreover, Pouligny (2014) notes that building on local capacities and resources shows respect for the local culture and the values of affected populations, which might lead to more appropriate, relevant and sustainable projects. A key issue related to decision-making is “*who decides what the local ‘cultural resources’ and norms are and presents them to outsiders*” (Pouligny, 2014, p. 14). This is linked to the need to understand local power dynamics and the capacities, strengths and responsibilities present within the community. The question of who should be assigned this representative role is often a source of tension and must be addressed via identification mechanisms and discussion with the community (Pouligny, 2014, pp. 13–14).

A 2019 study by the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) showed that it was often impossible to transfer decision-making due to the correlation between lack of opportunity for decision-making and lack of information. The ability to decide requires people affected by crisis to be informed before activities take place and a project is designed. Hence, information on the agenda, on projects, on meetings and on how decisions are taken is again a vital factor. The dissemination of information to all members of the community and not only to specific representatives is important. Information about the humanitarian organisation and their engagement within the area should reach everyone who wishes to be involved (Degett, 2019,
The report ‘How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector’ (2018) explains that participatory decision-making processes are further enabled by a new development: people actively demand to make decisions relating to humanitarian action and are aware of their rights. This has been reinforced through local capacity strengthening in humanitarian programmes. Not only have local actors or people affected improved their skills, but they also already possess an understanding of the context, culture and language and are present on the site long before and long after international humanitarian actors (Austin et al., 2018, pp. 32–33).

Access to social media and to the media in general by affected communities functions as another factor enabling decision-making to be redistributed. Not only does it give rise to an improved understanding of local perspectives, but it can also improve accountability mechanisms. One example is the introduction of two-way communication and transparency mechanisms to inform both sides and to enhance accountability by creating a closed feedback circle\(^8\). People affected by crisis can also make their voices heard publicly through social media or other media channels and bypass humanitarian organisations if these feedback channels are dysfunctional (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33).

In summary, a two-way flow of information and knowledge from the affected population to the humanitarian organisation and back again is an important factor in enabling participatory decision-making. People affected by crisis who are informed about humanitarian organisations and their programmes are more able to engage with humanitarian actors and make informed decisions at the right time. By strengthening and using local capacities, the transition of decision-making to affected communities can be facilitated by fomenting ownership of the projects, leading to a more sustainable humanitarian response. However, information and knowledge from communities is too often gathered but not really exchanged, creating a one-way process with the result that affected communities are not informed about the programmes, timelines and activities of the humanitarian response in a timely manner. Participatory tools are frequently used to obtain information but are insufficient to close accountability and feedback loops. It is important to establish a two-way stream of communication, information and knowledge involving both sides and to engage local capacities.

**Factor 2: Dedicating time and building trust**

Time for listening, discussing options and exchanging and providing information is a crucial factor in enabling decision-making by affected communities. It allows trust to be built, an

\(^8\) See Annex p. 42 to read more about closed feedback and accountability circles.
additional factor that enables both humanitarian actors and people affected by crisis to take part in the decisions affecting the lives of communities.

The report by Anderson et al. (2012) demonstrates that participation and engagement with affected communities is only possible when relationships can be built, which requires time first and foremost (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 125–126). Affected communities also mentioned that it is essential for them that there is enough time during community consultations and discussions with humanitarian organisations. In some societies, taking a decision or discussing issues are time-intensive processes. Too often, humanitarian organisations call meetings abruptly and define specific times for making decisions, which can feel unnatural and imposed to the communities. These interactions between humanitarian organisations and affected communities are driven more by the need to meet deadlines than by a concern for relationship building (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 71). Another factor related to trust is the presence in the field of humanitarian actors in order to build close relationships. Presence in the field and time spent together supports both sides in understanding each other’s perspectives, exchanging information and knowledge (see factor 1) and bringing in the human touch which can instil trust. This makes it possible to have productive discussions which may subsequently lead to decision-making and modifications to the action implemented (Degett, 2019, p. 37).

According to Anderson et al. (2012), limitations relating to time include a limited focus on the quality and substance of the engagement with the affected community among humanitarian actors. Humanitarian organisations instead seek timely and speedy delivery of programmes and projects. Furthermore, humanitarian actors tend to spend limited time in the field. Anderson et al. (2012) mention that most of this time is spent on reports and proposal writing rather than on engaging with affected communities (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 125–126). Conversely, the affected communities also have limited time to participate in the response. Time is an expensive good, especially in poor areas. This has led to a practice of compensating people for participating in programmes by paying transportation costs, food or other allowances. Affected communities and humanitarian organisations are critical of this development and question the quality of participation and decision-making under the influence of incentives (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 129).

Time was also mentioned as a limitation on participatory programming and the transfer of decision-making by humanitarian practitioners in the 2018 report ‘The State of the Humanitarian System’ by ALNAP. During emergencies, humanitarian organisations have to respond quickly and efficiently, and participatory methods were seen as too time-consuming
in such situations. However, the report suggests that many humanitarian programmes run for several years, viewing time constraints as an excuse for the actual reasons for not taking enough time: business processes and different priorities (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, pp. 162–163).

In summary, dedicating time and building trust are crucial factors with the potential to enable qualitative participation and the transfer of decision-making to affected communities. In the report by Anderson et al. (2012), affected communities stated that building trust and making decisions requires time and that often the timing for decision-making imposed by humanitarian organisations does not comply with their agenda and ways of making decisions. Another issue is the limited time that humanitarian workers have for interaction with affected communities as they are occupied with other tasks such as reporting. Similarly, affected communities have only limited time for participating in humanitarian programmes due to their other obligations. Time is a crucial resource which, when used in the right way, may allow trust to be built between different actors in the humanitarian response in order to collaborate and make decisions in a participatory manner.

Factor 3: Commitment and mindset of humanitarian organisations and skills of aid workers

Humanitarian organisations’ commitment to encouraging participation, the paradigm shift towards more participatory processes in the humanitarian sector as a whole, a genuine will to engage people in decision-making, individual and organisational mindsets, and the specific skills of aid workers are another crucial set of factors enabling participatory decision-making.

Anderson et al. (2012) discovered in their research that a commitment to sharing decision-making between humanitarian organisations and people working in the field is essential in order to provoke genuine change in decision-making processes. Working and collaborating with affected communities by planning and making decisions together requires listening, facilitation, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills. Additionally, a genuine interest in the context, people, and political and cultural background is needed to support these processes. Furthermore, only trained people are able to facilitate a shared decision-making process, making sure that affected communities and representatives of humanitarian organisations participate equally in decision-making (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 129–131). The importance of these factors is corroborated by Austin et al (2018), who mention the need for communication, problem-solving, negotiation and facilitation skills among aid workers to enable processes in which affected communities can take decisions (Austin et al., 2018, p. 32). One limitation, according to Knox Clarke et al. (2018), is the incentive to maintain power within the humanitarian organisation, which is often stronger than the commitment to sharing
power. Their report shows that organisational change takes time and changes in organisational cultures and the mindsets of people working within a system are limited by a certain degree of resistance. Various actors stated that the humanitarian system is not yet ready for this shift of mentality and organisational culture towards ceding power and genuinely sharing decisions with affected communities (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 164).

In summary, several reports showed how important it is for humanitarian workers to possess the appropriate skills in order to facilitate decision-making processes with affected communities. A participation-oriented organisational culture and mindset among staff and affected communities is needed for participatory decision-making. These changes are limited by the failure to achieve a paradigm shift and bring about a sector-wide change in attitudes, mindsets and practices due to incentives to retain the power humanitarian organisations have today.

Factor 4: Donor-related influences

The requirements and conditions of donors are an important factor in enabling or limiting participatory decision-making processes. The 2012 OECD report ‘Towards Better Humanitarian Donorship’ argued that donors must start to prioritise participation in order to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian sector. This was reiterated by another OECD report published three years later in 2015, which clearly stated that affected communities should be enabled to make their own decisions with the aim of improving accountability mechanisms, especially closed feedback loops. During the same year, many donor countries worked on and committed to the Sustainable Development Goals which form part of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations (UN), which mention participation as part of goal 16. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 marked another important commitment to a “Participation Revolution” among the donor community in the Grand Bargain (Austin et al., 2018, p. 27). The Grand Bargain is an agreement between humanitarian agencies and donor countries to improve the efficiency and efficacy of aid delivery in light of the underfunding of the humanitarian sector. One example is that donors decrease earmarked funds to give agencies and humanitarian organisations the freedom to choose where to invest the resources. This is an important condition which allows for greater flexibility and the potential to allocate resources to participatory processes. Commitment 6 of the Grand Bargain states “A Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives” (IASC 1, 2019). The commitment aims to create programmes that are more efficient, timelier, more relevant and more effective through participatory decision-making
These commitments by donors are an important factor in creating a context in which decision-making power may be transferred. It is also a response to the fact that many contemporary crises are protracted, meaning that humanitarian organisations stay longer in a place and require multi-year funding that allows for greater flexibility and long-term planning. According to members of affected communities cited in the report ‘How Change Happens in the Humanitarian System’, durable solutions are needed in protracted crises. The report also mentions that structures and power dynamics must be reworked in order to allow communities to have a say in the decisions determining their lives during the humanitarian response (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33).

Anderson et al. (2012) identify numerous limitations to the transfer of decision-making power in the proposal and funding procedures of international humanitarian organisations. These procedures represent a barrier to participatory processes, as humanitarian organisations explain how aid is to be delivered, who is to receive it and when during their appeals or proposals for funds. Hence, many decisions have already been taken before humanitarian organisations start their work within affected communities. The funding system itself prevents people from having a say on the actions taken on their behalf (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 69–71). An additional factor related to funding procedures is the availability of resources required for participatory processes. Time and money must be dedicated to proposals and projects to enable decision-making by affected communities. Anderson et al. (2012) state that affected communities and aid workers alike continue to view the amount of resources allocated as insufficient (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 128-129). Corroborating Anderson et al. (2012), newer findings in the report by Austin et al (2018) show that short-term funding remains one of the major limitations to genuine decision-making. Only in projects that invest time and resources in long-term activities such as mentoring, translation services and training are able to provide space for building relationships and gaining trust for decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35).

In summary, progress has been made in recent years in terms of donors’ commitments to accountability and consideration of participatory processes in order to achieve better outcomes by improving the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and timeliness of the humanitarian response. However, a wide gap remains between the commitments made on paper and actual funding procedures that restrict humanitarian organisations to short-term planning before the views of affected communities can be considered. These limitations are mostly due to funding procedures and reporting requirements from donors which focus

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9 The full commitment can be read in the Annex on page 42.
mainly on measurable outputs rather than qualitative outcomes and impacts of humanitarian projects incorporating the decisions of affected communities.

Factor 5: Access to affected communities and understanding of the local context

Understanding of the local context, including the predominant power relations, social structures, taboos and language, among many other aspects, is a key factor in enabling participatory processes in the humanitarian response.

One of the prerequisites for decision-making by affected communities is access to the population in need. Anderson et al. (2012) focus primarily on limitations on participation due to a lack of access. The authors discovered that real or perceived security concerns among humanitarian organisations, as well as the remote location of some affected communities and the inability to reach them, is often a major limitation on interactive participation. Access can sometimes be difficult due to real or perceived societal traditions, such as women being restricted to their homes, complicating their engagement. Furthermore, perceptions of humanitarian organisations within the affected community are essential to their willingness to play an active role. If access to communities can be obtained in terms of security and cultural aspects and there are regular opportunities to interact and build relationships, it is possible to listen and actively discuss decisions affecting communities, according to Anderson et al. (2012, pp. 128–129).

Moreover, if the local context and power dynamics present within an affected community are understood by humanitarian organisations, participatory processes such as inclusive decision-making can be effective, according to Knox Clark et al. (2018). However, their report also notes that standardisation of participatory tools, donor requirements, funding procedures and the desire for consistency among programmes in different contexts tend to limit the adaptation of programmes and processes to a specific context (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, pp. 163–164). The complexity of a context can limit interactive participation. Complexities may include different ethnicities and potential tensions between them, the socio-economic status of representatives, political affiliations, the competencies and skills of affected communities, gender and age-related issues. These issues may make it more difficult to identify suitable representatives within the community or to develop trustful relationships. In other words, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, a large amount of time and resources must be consciously dedicated to understanding the complexity of affected communities and skilled aid workers should be in place to facilitate interactive participation (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35).
Anderson et al. (2012) mention another limitation on inclusive decision-making in certain contexts. Affected communities explained in the report that they may express disagreement with humanitarian organisations and their programmes in a way which is not acknowledged by the workers or mechanisms of these organisations. Sometimes, if their opinion is asked, they agree to decisions out of courtesy and politeness rather than because they agree with the content of the decision. Some respondents cited rude or insensitive behaviour among aid workers as a constraint leading to the potential disengagement of affected communities. All of these factors are linked to the aforementioned factors of time, funding procedures and skills of aid workers (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 70–71). Finally, some humanitarian organisations explained that interactive participation is constrained by the risk of increasing tensions within affected communities and compromising the humanitarian principle of impartiality. There is a fear of engaging with people in a way that may deepen political or ethnic tensions, excluding marginalised groups still further. Moreover, the impartiality of humanitarian organisations could be compromised if corrupt and politically biased governments or community representatives have influence over decision-making and politicise the humanitarian response (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35).

In summary, an important prerequisite for participatory decision-making is access (physical and relational) to communities and an in-depth understanding of complex contexts in terms of ethnicities, political affiliations, social structures and tensions, power dynamics, traditions and taboos, language and culture and decision-making processes within affected communities. Several major limitations on these factors are complex security situations and perceptions among humanitarian organisations which lead to a lack of access. In addition, participatory decision-making is constrained by misunderstanding of the context or fear of supporting local power dynamics which may have a negative effect on aid delivery and potentially exclude marginalised groups further. Finally, the principle of impartiality may be compromised by engaging with people who politicise the humanitarian response to suit their own interests.

**Factor 6: Organisational structure, procedures and resources and clarity regarding concepts**

Organisational policies, procedures, practices, cultures and staff skills are all enabling factors which support the aforementioned factors such as establishing trust, dedicating time, promoting longer-term funding procedures and obtaining in-depth understanding of the context. Furthermore, a shared understanding of the concept of participation enables participatory approaches to be implemented. Anderson et al. (2012) demonstrate that the policies, guidelines and procedures on participation and decision-making adhered to within an
organisation are a factor enabling decision-making by people affected by crisis. Numerous handbooks for practitioners, policies and guidelines for internal use have been produced by scholars and humanitarian organisations; academics have researched best practices in recent years while organisations have committed to participatory methods and approaches at conferences and summits. These procedures are agreed by both sides: humanitarian organisations and people affected by crisis. The aim of these improved procedures and policies is to produce better outcomes in terms of accountability and participation (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 65–82). Not only have humanitarian actors learned and integrated new participatory practices, but people affected by crisis have also obtained access to such tools and are better able to participate in decision-making as a result (Austin et al., 2018, pp. 32–33). Anderson et al. (2012) discovered that some procedures led to improved transparency and greater fairness in humanitarian action, but noted that increased proceduralisation in recent years has also had negative impacts. Numerous limitations are highlighted, including the fact that new procedures are often too complicated, inflexible, time consuming and even counterproductive. Humanitarian workers and people affected by crisis referred to some procedures as a “box-ticking exercises”, and the value behind the procedures is lost in practice. They may even undermine innovation and lead to badly designed projects. A similar criticism may be made of bureaucratisation, which was meant to ease processes and allow tasks to be accomplished. However, too often processes become excessively rigid and unable to respond to actual human concerns. Anderson et al. (2012) conclude that rigid procedures undermine the building of relationships which should be at the centre of humanitarian action and participatory practices. It is important to identify those procedures which fail to achieve their intended outcome and to develop them so that they are more effective (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 65–82).

Another important factor is the clarity of concepts and approaches used by affected communities, field staff and organisational headquarters. The whole organisation must have the same understanding of participation, accountability and decision-making in order to create an environment to foster these approaches. Knox Clarke et al (2018) discovered that these terms are often not clearly defined and the confusion surrounding them leads to a lack of knowledge sharing and prevents the development of expertise on participatory practices (Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 162). Another limitation is the need for humanitarian organisations to be able to measure community participation and engagement in order to be accountable to donors and affected communities. However, trust, decision-making, the quality of relationships and the ownership of affected communities are very hard to translate into
measurable indicators. The indicators currently used to measure these concepts are ineffective and measure outputs, such as the number of people attending, rather than quality. In addition, frameworks should be put in place by humanitarian organisations when recruiting, assessing and evaluating staff to take the skills mentioned in Factor 1 (i.e. active listening, facilitation, communication, etc.) into consideration. In this way, genuine participation processes may become part of an organisational culture and structure (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 133). Moreover, decision-making by affected communities must be promoted throughout humanitarian organisations at all levels in order to finally become part of the organisational culture. Austin et al (2018) discovered that humanitarian organisations and their cultures are often resistant to change and the existing organisational culture, structures, approaches and leadership do not foster an environment for participatory decision-making. To enable decision-making at all levels of the organisation, the leadership plays a crucial role and must actively support a trickledown effect from the senior leadership to all levels of management, as well as a culture fostering participatory approaches (Austin et al., 2018, pp. 34–36). Austin et al. (2018) also mentioned that the humanitarian organisations with power in the sector do not really have an incentive to change the current system for decision-making. Change is mainly asked of those with less power, and incentives are required for the powerful organisations to change their participatory approaches in an effective manner (Austin et al., 2018, p. 32). In the same report, the power structures present in the system are mentioned as a limitation on participation. Although the sector has agreed on the importance of allowing affected communities to participate throughout the project process, discussions have fallen short of considering the extent to which power is shared to enable genuine participation in decision-making. This hesitation may be observed in practice when commitments to donors trump commitments to listen to affected communities and genuinely involve them in decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 32). Humanitarian organisations can create an environment which enables participatory approaches by actively investing in the management, collaboration, problem-solving and leadership skills of their staff and recruit, evaluate and assess their staff accordingly (Austin et al., 2018, p. 36).

In summary, in recent years humanitarian organisations have discussed and committed themselves to various guidelines and procedures to include participatory approaches and tools in their responses. Participatory approaches may be enabled further if all levels of management foster an environment and culture for participatory decision-making with affected communities. This includes actively fostering specific skills among staff and developing a framework for recruitment, evaluation and assessment to promote these skills.
The leadership must act as a role model in participatory processes and foster an organisational culture of engagement and inclusion. Furthermore, clarity on concepts and participatory approaches throughout an organisation is essential in order to actively engage with communities in a comprehensive manner. Finally, incentives still exist which work against sharing power with affected communities. Letting go of power is accompanied by a sense of uncertainty, insecurity and a loss of resources.

Chapter 2.2 introduced six factors which partially explain the reasons for the gap between the participation discourse over the last twenty years and the implementation of this discourse in practice, demonstrating the potential of these factors to close this gap. Chapter 3 discusses the Same Skies case study, a rare example of an organisation which displays a high level of participation, in order to explore the factors enabling them to decrease the gap between discourse and implementation, understand the limits on participation which they experience and observe their current participatory practices.

3. Discussion of enabling factors and their limitations for participatory decision-making in the humanitarian response in the Same Skies case study

Chapter 3 will discuss the findings of the case study with a view to identifying the factors enabling Same Skies to take a participatory approach and understanding the limitations faced by the organisation. It will also explore the reasons for the sector-wide gap between the participation discourse and its implementation in practice, and the action taken by Same Skies to reduce this gap. Chapter 3.1 introduces Same Skies’ approach to participation, which is an important starting point for the later discussion. Chapter 3.2 will discuss the findings from the case study and compare them with the factors identified in the literature review in Chapter 2.2.

3.1 Introduction to the case study: Same Skies

Same Skies is a non-profit, non-religious and politically neutral organisation registered in Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia and Switzerland. The organisation began by supporting two local initiatives in Indonesia – Refugee Learning Nest (RLN) and Refugee Learning Center (RLC) – in 2015 and has been operational in Malaysia since 2017. Same Skies strongly believes in the need to “drive leadership and innovation in refugee work to improve efficiency, effectiveness, quality and social outcomes. Same Skies’ innovation is best described through its perception of refugees, who are traditionally seen as vulnerable. We focus on their resilience instead” (Same Skies 2, 2019). This quote shows the organisation’s desire to leave behind the paradigm focusing on refugee vulnerability and adopt a new emphasis on their strengths and capacities. This view is reflected in the approach entitled
'Refugee-Led Action'\textsuperscript{10}, in which refugees take responsibility for their own initiatives and receive remote support from Same Skies. It is defined as "a community-based approach emphasising strengths, resilience and access to human rights" (Same Skies 1, 2019, p. 2). This means that from the planning phase to project implementation, responsibility for the project lies primarily with refugees, who therefore own their initiatives. Same Skies supports and coordinates with the project team led by refugees remotely and through regular field visits. The organisation’s representatives spend only a limited time visiting the initiative to minimise dependency and allow refugee communities to make decisions independently. Same Skies specialises in capacity strengthening through training, coaching, and mentoring and offers general support for 9-24 months, depending on the initiative. The key steps of their Refugee-Led Action approach are as follows:

- **Step 1**: To assess the context, Same Skies consults local actors to identify an initial entry point to access refugee communities, alongside desk research. Following this, Same Skies holds a number of meetings to facilitate the process of identifying challenges and capacities with the community (community consultation).

- **Step 2**: Community actors who are willing to form the main work group, usually a team of refugee volunteers, are mobilised throughout the first step. During this step, the identity of the initiative and the roles and responsibilities of these actors are defined (group formation).

- **Step 3**: Same Skies supports the work group in designing and planning the initiative by incorporating local capacities and helping to resolve any challenges identified in step 1 (design & programming).

- **Step 4**: Same Skies provides the work group with set-up costs and in-kind donations, and supports the development of a financial mechanism allowing the initiative to fund itself sustainably and independently (seed-funding).

- **Step 5**: The main work group receives training in management skills to encourage ownership of the initiative and independence from Same Skies. Same Skies staff are never deployed permanently in the initiative to leave space for the refugees to implement and monitor the project. Several workshops are held during field visits, and these are supplemented by remote coaching and mentoring (capacity strengthening).

- **Step 6**: The community actors who are actively involved in the initiative often become mentors to other refugees and are supported by Same Skies to do so (mentor development).

\textsuperscript{10} The link to the document with the full explanation of the Refugee-Led Action approach can be found in the Annex on p. 43.
Step 7: Support for the local initiative from Same Skies is phased out after the group has developed the necessary capacities, organised financial resources and put in place suitable structures (handover & exit) (Same Skies 1, 2019, p. 4-6).

This section presented current participatory practices at Same Skies, answering the sub-question on p. 3. Chapter 3.2 will discuss the key factors enabling the organisation to distribute decision-making power differently and the limitations on this activity, addressing sub-questions 1 and 2 on p. 3.

3.2 Main findings from the case study

Many of the factors identified in the literature in Chapter 2.2 were reflected to some extent in the interview with Same Skies. However, certain factors appeared to carry greater weight than others in closing the gap between the participation discourse and its practical implementation. This section will discuss and interpret the key findings from the case study.

Inverting understandings of participation and changing mindsets

Same Skies has opted to completely abstain from using the word ‘participation’ due to the diverse range of understandings of the term. They decided instead to develop their own approach entitled Refugee-Led Action. This reflects the core of their work and their specific understanding of participation, whereby refugees take responsibility for the humanitarian response and Same Skies provides support in the form of resources and expertise. By defining and labelling their approach differently, the organisation seeks to ensure a better understanding of their work among refugee communities, partners and other stakeholders. This provides the organisation with a shared focus for working and deciding on the course of the project alongside communities.

Another key finding from the case study is that Same Skies understands participation in an opposite manner to the definition presented in Chapter 2.1. For the organisation, participation should not involve humanitarian organisations allowing affected communities to participate in their projects either passively or interactively, but the other way around. Affected communities should allow humanitarian organisations to participate in their initiatives. This implies a very different mindset to that of many organisations currently operating in the sector, placing decision-making power with refugee communities. Julia Frei stated that this change of mindset concerning understandings of participation and its implications for decision-making should occur in every staff member within an organisation, as well as being present in the refugee community. Sonia Ben Ali from UR supports this finding and explains that only when the mindsets and behaviour present in humanitarian organisations change and the organisation positions itself differently can a redistribution of
decision-making power take place. The interview with the ICRC provided further evidence that this change of mindset is often constrained by deeply rooted habits and individual incentives perceived by staff members. For as long as the negative consequences of failing to transfer decision-making are not felt by individuals, there is no real incentive to change their way of working. Furthermore, as an organisation which has been working in humanitarian action for more than 100 years, the ICRC has both staff with old-fashioned mindsets and others who wish to enhance participatory processes. Therefore, not everyone is on the same page and this new mindset has not yet permeated the organisation at an institutionalised level, which explains why decision-making power lies mostly with the organisation. In a paper on decision-making, Davies (2017) from StARS Egypt makes a similar observation regarding the mindset of the old guard of humanitarian workers: “humanitarian workers who see their roles as doers and problem-solvers are less likely to see the limited participation as a problem, and thus are less likely to hire persons with the skills and inclination to effectively facilitate participation” (Davies, 2017, p. 3).

On the other hand, the experience of Same Skies shows that over time, some refugee communities become accustomed to receiving aid and adapt to the problem-solver attitude among organisations. Therefore, the community’s commitment to taking an active role is influenced by the response they received in previous years. Some representatives assumed that Same Skies used a traditional aid-giving approach. Therefore, it is important for Same Skies to repeatedly communicate their approach and demonstrate their way of working through previous projects. Usually, this understanding takes time to sink in and long-term collaboration has been more fruitful when the mindset of the community and the organisation are aligned. Furthermore, Julia Frei stated that their understanding of participation operates on two levels: the work between Same Skies and a team of refugees managing an initiative, and the work between the management team and the refugee community. The second layer still represents a challenge for Same Skies as the organisation is not directly involved in fostering participation. The decisions lie primarily with the refugee communities and it is up to them how they engage the community. Same Skies hopes for participatory processes to take place at this second level and addresses them during the collaboration but leaves it to the team involved in the initiative to put them into practice. Abdullah Sarwari explained that at RLC, community participation developed naturally. The management team organises a community consultation to discuss solutions for all big decisions. However, day-to-day decisions are taken by the management team. Another key finding is the importance of having the ‘right’ mindset combined with appropriate skills and competencies among staff. As Same Skies
offers mainly technical, financial and educational assistance through training, coaching and mentoring, it is essential that staff members have well developed facilitation and communication skills. Moreover, the ‘problem-solver’ mentality has no place in supporting local initiatives. The key is for staff to facilitate problem-solving processes, build relationships and support communities in finding their own solutions instead of creating or implementing solutions for them. In previous years, Same Skies has faced challenges when some former staff members were unable to truly adopt this mindset and did not feel comfortable with this way of working. This was reiterated by the ICRC team, who mention the importance of having staff in the field with the right competencies to facilitate participatory processes.

Finally, when the mindset of the organisation and refugee community changes, so too do the dynamics surrounding decision-making. Julia Frei explained that most decisions are taken by the refugee communities that are involved in the initiative. Same Skies sees its role as supporting and in some cases facilitating an informed decision-making process by bringing in external opinions and experience. Julia Frei stated clearly that Same Skies always aims to enrich the refugee management team by offering long-term perspectives on sustainability or showing potential risks. The final decisions are then taken by the refugees. Ideally, the level of trust between the management team of refugees and Same Skies leads to a long-term relationship and continued collaboration beyond the framework of the common project, as in the case of RLC.

These key findings are reflected in factor 3 and elements from factor 2. The case study shows that this change in mindset, which operates here on two levels, is key for everyone who wants to change the way in which decisions are made and that this mindset modifies the dynamics influencing the distribution of decision-making power. Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of inverting understandings of participation as part of the change in mindset, as well as the shift required among aid workers to change their attitude from that of a problem-solver to that of a facilitator of processes while also building relationships. In summary, one reason for the gap between the participation discourse and its practical implementation is that many humanitarian organisations and some affected communities have not been able to change their mindset and attitudes.

**Transitioning from a transactional relationship to a collaborative partnership**

Another key finding indirectly derived from the case study and linked to the change in mindset is that the traditional transactional relationship between humanitarian organisations and affected communities, also referred to as aid delivery, should be replaced by a
collaborative relationship or partnership. If the relationship is of a transactional nature, very little decision-making power is transferred to affected communities. However, viewing the humanitarian response as a collaborative partnership enables the shift of decision-making power to affected communities as in the case of Same Skies.

Barnett (2016) explains that this transactional relationship may lead to paternalism. He explains that the relationship between humanitarian organisations and affected people is often characterised by compassion and a genuine will to alleviate suffering. The relationship of compassionately giving and receiving within an unequal power dynamic is defined as paternalism. The problem with paternalism is that the autonomy of the people affected by crisis are limited by the humanitarian organisations, although their actions are guided by compassion (Barnett, 2016, p. 14). Barnett (2016) explains that paternalism is not an inherent part of humanitarian action per se, but the power imbalance between the actors involved makes their relationship prone to paternalism (p. 14-16). Another problematic consequence of unequal power in the humanitarian response is the potential victimisation of affected communities, which may be perceived as unable to make good decisions (Barnett, 2016, p. 16). As a result, decision-making power is rarely transferred.

In contrast, shifting from a transactional to a collaborative partnership as part of a change of mindset and approach can have an enabling effect on the redistribution of decision-making power, as shown by the Partnership Brokers Association (PBA). They explain that one key attribute of effective partnering is shared leadership responsibility and decision-making (Partnership Brokers Association, 2017, p. 1). They researched ‘remote partnering’\textsuperscript{11} in order to collaborate effectively over distance, which is in line with the approach adopted by Same Skies of working remotely with refugee communities to foster ownership, autonomy and decision-making. Same Skies uses remote partnering as part of its Refugee-Led Action approach and this leads to an effective transfer of decision-making power to refugee communities. Often, remote management (not remote partnering!) in humanitarian action is used due to a lack of access to a region or insecurity in specific locations (Partnership Brokers Association, 2018, p. 4). However, Same Skies uses it as part of its approach to avoid placing permanent staff on refugee initiatives; instead, staff mentor, coach and train remotely and engage in regular field visits. They also support the initiatives by developing technological skills for remote partnering, creating and maintaining websites and social media channels, and introducing fundraising tools to allow the initiatives to achieve independence from external

\textsuperscript{11} “Remote partnering refers to working mostly long-distance as part of a structured collaborative relationship. Groups of people working from different entities share a common social or environmental purpose and are accountable to each other, but they largely work long-distance, across different locations, cultures and time zones, rather than face-to-face” (Partnership Brokers Association, 2018, p. 6).
donors (Same Skies, 2018, p. 4-6). Furthermore, Same Skies and the communities sign a partnership agreement to clarify each party’s expectations, roles and responsibilities. According to the PBA, such an agreement leads to a better understanding between the partners and results in more effective partnering (Partnership Brokers Association, 2017, p. 1). Same Skies actively uses “remote partnering” and “effective partnering” as introduced by the PBA, although it does not employ this precise terminology.

Moreover, Same Skies is slowly changing to a flat hierarchy inspired by the self-management practice known as Holacracy (see Annex p. 43 for an introduction), which reflects the organisation’s ideology of distributing power equally both within the organisation and with communities. This practice gives greater responsibility and freedom to the individuals within the organisation to fulfil the vision and mission of Same Skies12 (Same Skies, 2019, p. 4). The challenges involved in adopting holocratic processes are that staff may not feel comfortable with flat hierarchies and shared responsibilities, especially if they are used to more traditional forms of management. However, the author believes that their mindset, in combination with collaborative partnerships and a flat hierarchy that aims to distribute power within the organisation, enables Same Skies to allow refugee communities to take most of the decisions within the humanitarian response.

If we compare this sub-chapter with Chapter 2.2, a parallel can be drawn with factor 6 relating to organisational structures and procedures. The organisational practice of sharing power internally has a positive impact on sharing decision-making power with affected communities. This practice with regard to internal collaboration also has an impact on collaboration with refugee communities, who are viewed as partners. This may also attract employees who share the mindset of the organisation and repel those who belong to the old guard. Same Skies noted that people with a traditional understanding of participation who have previously worked in hierarchical organisations may face difficulties in adapting to their organisational culture. Furthermore, the case study shows the importance of developing partnerships based on an understanding of the PBA and the potential of ‘remote partnering’. Here, the organisation’s mindset, remote partnering and collaborative relationships resulted in decision-making power being passed to refugee communities.

Building trust, dedicating time and resources

Another key finding is that trust is one of the main drivers for developing effective collaboration with refugee communities. Julia Frei stated that trust must be earned by dedicating time and resources to the relationship. Moreover, trust must be developed and

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maintained in both directions. Same Skies should trust that the refugee community is committed to taking an active role in terms of time and resources, while the refugee community should trust in Same Skies. Abdullah Sarwari confirmed the issue of trust as one of the main drivers of participatory decision-making. He said that the relationship between Same Skies and RLC was positive because they trusted one another. Important factors in building trust were transparency and well-developed two-way communication. Both parties could thus communicate their expectations and informal feedback sessions were regularly held. He says that Same Skies eventually became a friend, with the result that Same Skies and RLC continued to work together through team mentoring sessions at the end of their joint project.

Conversely, Same Skies explained that a lack of trust is detrimental to collaboration with the refugee community. In the case of the organisation, the development of a trusting relationship was mainly limited by frequent fluctuations of staff at RLN. Furthermore, negative previous experiences of refugees at the same centre had led to mistrust towards Same Skies. Julia Frei explained that although the collaboration went well, at some point the lack of trust on a particular matter became an issue. This matter also involved a misunderstanding between the centre and Same Skies that could not be resolved. The lack of trust led to the decision by RLN to discontinue the collaboration after their joint project ended successfully.

Sonia Ben Ali from UR added that their organisation sometimes does not have enough time to answer all the needs and requests of the community-based organisations (CBOs) they work with. Often, CBOs would like to extend their collaboration with UR but the organisation is constrained by time and funding considerations. This makes the development of trust difficult. On the other hand, Davies (2017) from StARS Egypt states that humanitarian organisations cannot take it for granted that people from affected communities necessarily have the time and the will to participate in programmes (Davies, 2017, pp. 4–6), Hence, time and the dedication of resources with the right mindset has to come from both sides in order to build trusting relationships and collaborate effectively.

The case study shows the importance of factor 2 identified in the literature, in combination with factor 1. Trust, time and the conscious dedication of resources to relationship building and a well-developed two-way flow of communication play a significant role in enabling the transfer of decision-making power. The case study shows that fluctuations of active members in refugee communities, mistrust and previous bad experiences can limit the building of trust and negatively impact the relationship. Although the context was similar with RLC and RLN, personal and individual experiences had a significant influence on levels
of trust. Factor 2 suggested that limited time in the field has a detrimental effect on building trust. However, Same Skies actively limits the time they spend with communities to decrease the risk of dependency and to reduce their role in implementing the joint project. Ultimately, a balance must be found between spending time together to build a trustful relationship and abstaining from intruding.

**Donor-related limitations**

Although Same Skies’ support for local initiatives means that most decisions are taken by refugee communities, there are times when the organisation intervenes. Julia Frei explained that the extent to which Same Skies wishes to be included in a decision-making process depends on how much of their own resources are given to the community. However, Same Skies is relatively independent as their money comes from private donors, providing greater flexibility than when having to report to a big donor. For Same Skies, it is also easier to abstain from imposing strict conditions on the refugee communities for financial support to set up their centres because there are no requirements or conditions linked to the money from external donors. However, if the money is given by Same Skies, the organisation wishes to be involved in some of the decisions made by the refugee communities. The emphasis here is on informed decision-making. For Same Skies, it is important that the community members consider various aspects such as the sustainability of their decisions and the inclusion of the wider community before important decisions are taken. Abdullah Sarwari confirmed that Same Skies advised them in the decision-making process and that the management team usually consulted the community on major decisions. For the purposes of efficiency, daily decisions were taken by the management team only.

According to Sonia Ben Ali, donor conditions are a significant limitation on the transfer of decision-making. Some donors have specific requirements which must be fulfilled, limiting the participatory approach taken by UR. One example is that UR designs curricula for training sessions with CBOs. However, one donor requirement is to provide training in financial management. This training must be included, whether or not the community is interested in learning it. UR had to develop a way to fulfil the requirement without overruling community leaders. Similar experiences were expressed by Alaa Kasmo from StARS Egypt. Work with CBOs and joint project design was often influenced by donor requirements. Although the CBOs were actively involved in the design and planning, it is the organisations that finance the project rather than the affected community which has the final say.

These findings from the case study corroborate the elements mentioned in factor 4. However, the organisations interviewed were more concerned with the negative effects of
donor requirements than with pushing donors for greater participation. Furthermore, Same Skies appears to be more independent than UR and StARS Egypt because it has a different funding structure. This gives Same Skies greater flexibility in allocating their funds, adapting projects or partnerships to unforeseen changes and giving refugee communities space to decide, even when Same Skies resources are involved.

Limitations linked to risk and the do no harm principle

Another key finding that was mentioned as a limitation relates to instances when refugee communities must make decisions which may risk the well-being of the community or breach the do no harm principle\(^\text{13}\). Julia Frei explained that it is challenging to facilitate a decision which appears to have a short-term benefit but may cause harm in the future. Sometimes a decision may be right at that very moment but have negative future consequences for the whole refugee community. Same Skies viewed its role as encouraging the management team to reflect first before rushing into a decision. Abdullah Sarwari confirmed this. However, he added that RLC also learned by making mistakes and that it was a gradual learning process.

None of the refugees in the management team had ever set up a learning centre before. RLC started out in an experimental manner and the team had to identify what worked and what did not. Same Skies only interfered in decision-making at RLC if they considered the wellbeing of the community to be at stake or if the management team discussed an issue which could negatively impact the sustainability of the centre.

Sonia Ben Ali from UR also mentioned that any matters relating to staff security are decided on by the organisation. There are certain aspects of decision-making that UR would not transfer to the CBOs but which are part of internal decision-making processes.

The findings from the case study show that, in addition to the limitations identified in Chapter 2.2, some decisions belong to internal decision-making processes (i.e. security issues). Same Skies opted to draw a line when the wider community was at risk over the longer term or when the principle of do no harm was at stake.

No one solution fits all – context is essential

A further key finding is the importance of context, as co-designed solutions differ from one refugee community to the other. Same Skies observed that working relationships may differ even in similar contexts, i.e. RLC and RLN, depending on the individuals on the management team. Differences also arise depending on whether support is given to an existing centre or a new centre is established. In Malaysia, a network was created from existing CBOs which are independently funded and have an existing structure. Decision-making power lay mostly with

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\(^{13}\) See Annex p. 44 for the do no harm principle.
the network as no financial resources were provided by Same Skies as part of the project, which instead focused on exchanging knowledge and strengthening the management and educational capacities of the centres. Here, the commitment to regular and consistent collaboration with the CBOs was weaker than in Indonesia. For Same Skies, each community entails a different working relationship and every member of a refugee community has their own needs, interests and skills. This is supported by Davies (2017) from StARS Egypt, who noted that affected communities are not a homogenous group but include a variety of needs, interests and capacities. This diversity must be taken into consideration (Davies, 2017, pp. 4–6). Similarly, the ICRC communication team elaborated upon the importance of adopting different solutions in different contexts. The one-size-fits-all approach would not work in the various contexts in which the ICRC operates. However, the unit’s efforts focus on identifying measurable indicators in order to obtain better evidence on accountability and participation and explore the impact of these concepts on people’s dignity.

The findings from the case study show that factor 5 in the literature review is a key enabling factor in participatory decision-making processes, although not all aspects were present in the case study. Understanding the people with whom you work and the underlying power structures and other social relations operating in the specific context can influence whether and how decision-making is transferred. However, the limitations of the principle of impartiality and the politicisation of the humanitarian response were not mentioned in the case study.

As shown in the previous paragraphs, many factors mentioned in Chapter 2.2 are reflected in the approach and practices adopted by Same Skies. This shows that they are important enabling factors for redistributing decision-making power. The use of an approach such as that employed by Same Skies has the potential to close the gap between the participation discourse and its practical implementation. However, the final paragraphs reveal some of the many limitations and challenges facing Same Skies in its work.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to explain the gap between the participation discourse which has emerged in the humanitarian sector throughout the last twenty years and its practical implementation, and to assess the ways in which this gap could be closed. The literature review answered this question by exploring six factors with the potential to enable participatory decision-making processes to redistribute the power to decide on the course of the humanitarian response. Factor 1 explained that these processes can be enabled if local capacities are well-known and actively engaged, and a two-way flow of communication, information and knowledge is
present. Factor 2 stated the importance for both affected communities and humanitarian organisations of dedicating time to relationship building, and the importance of trust. Factor 3 elaborated on the mindset required to work in a participatory manner, which is also linked to humanitarian workers’ facilitation, communication, problem-solving, active listening and many other soft skills. The push by major donors towards increased participation by affected communities under factor 4 is another important enabling factor. Both physical and relational access and an in-depth understanding of the context and society are also factors that may enable participatory decision-making, as explained under factor 5. Lastly, organisational structures, procedures and practices must be aligned with a change of mindset towards inclusive decision-making, as seen in factor 6. While all of these factors can enable participatory decision-making, they also help to explain why a gap remains between the participation discourse and its practical implications for decision-making. Very little decision-making power is transferred if communication is disturbed or missing, if information is only received from communities but not fed back to them and if local capacities are ignored. A lack of time for being present in the field, for including participatory processes in projects and for building relationships is an additional issue. If resources are not adequately allocated and expectations come into conflict or are not communicated effectively between affected communities and humanitarian organisations, limited redistribution of decision-making can take place. Furthermore, humanitarian organisations are often stuck in the traditional mindset of ‘giving’ aid and affected communities are not committed to taking on an active role, limiting participation. The requirements and funding procedures of donors often systematically undermine participatory endeavours. If power dynamics, language, taboos and traditions are misinterpreted or unknown, this may lead to miscommunication and prevent relational access to communities. Finally, organisations might be power-vested, strongly traditional and highly bureaucratised and proceduralised. All of these factors play a role in explaining the limited number of decisions taken by affected communities in humanitarian action.

In terms of providing greater insight into the role of participatory decision-making in an organisational approach, Same Skies was an optimal case study. Many of the factors already mentioned are reflected in the way in which Same Skies works with refugee communities. Additionally, the organisation has adopted an inverted understanding of participation and developed its own approach entitled Refugee-Led Action to clarify its understanding of participation. The organisation focuses on supporting local initiatives, local capacities and refugee-led action. The relationship between Same Skies and refugee
communities is collaborative, and remote partnering is actively used as a management approach to avoid dependencies. Again, trust and time are crucial for both refugee communities and Same Skies. Similar contexts can produce very different outcomes if trust is absent. Same Skies had to learn the importance for their staff of fully adopting the organisation’s mindset and way of working, observing that humanitarian workers with an old guard/problem-solving attitude have difficulties aligning with the organisation. Same Skies is financially more flexible than other organisations as it is funded by private donors. However, money is a limitation on the transfer of decision-making power to communities. Same Skies draws a line here and seeks involvement in certain decisions. Further limitations include decisions that might put the community at risk or conflict with the do no harm principle. Finally, no one solution fits all. Refugee communities are made up of individuals with different experiences and the approach taken by Same Skies acknowledges this diversity and co-designs individual solutions in collaboration with each initiative. However, this diversity means that the same approach does not work in the same way with all communities. In some cases, partnering and collaborating runs smoothly and with others it does not. Furthermore, Same Skies distributes responsibility among its staff and acknowledges that decision-making power lies first and foremost with refugee communities. Finally, the factors from the literature review and the Same Skies case study cannot easily be separated from one another: on the contrary, they are highly interlinked and some may trigger or exacerbate others. Therefore, more research in this area is needed in order to understand these interlinkages and the dynamics involved when decision-making power is assigned to the affected community. Moreover, an active exchange of good practices should be fostered between different organisations and affected communities. The humanitarian sector may not yet be ready to fully change organisational cultures and mindsets in order to put into practice the statements made in international commitments and at conferences. A combination of top-down efforts, as in the Grand Bargain, and bottom-up initiatives such as RLC and RLN in collaboration with humanitarian organisations is required. Decision-making is linked to power and power comes with responsibility. This is why informed decision-making by communities and humanitarian organisations is so important. This research illustrated one case in which redistribution occurred, but the author is aware that redistribution of decision-making power is not always possible or even desirable depending on the context. Some organisations challenge traditional perceptions and ways of working in humanitarian action. It is important to learn from them, acknowledge the contexts in which they work and carry this knowledge into the work of other organisations and communities.
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Websites:


6. Annex

6.1 Pouligny (2014) on local actors:

Pouligny (2014) focuses mainly on local ownership in humanitarian action and how to create it with the different local partners that she distinguishes in the civil society, governments, and communities. Local ownership is closely related to decision-making and its transition, as mentioned under Chapter 2.1 and interesting to see what enables it. Optimally, all three actors receive equal attention and the choice with whom to work and how should be done with the partners. Usually, there is not simply a centralized, well-functioning government, but different layers of governmental structures with different levels of power and, depending on the context, differing functionality, and capacity. A government that is willing, functioning and has capacities enables humanitarian organisations to create local ownership for their actions, hence, also transfer some decision-making. According to Pouligny (2014), it is key for the organisation to adapt the strategy of interaction with different governmental layers according to the context. The civil society is defined here as a collective action with common interests and values. It includes local NGOs, coordination bodies, associations, and many more. There are three positive effects on humanitarian action to engage in civil society. First, humanitarian action can be implemented by civil society organisations and are often well-perceived within the population of concern as they are a counter-weight to power-holders or economic exploiters. Second, they can function as a bridge to other institutions on civil level. Third, the acceptance of a humanitarian organisation might increase through working and engaging in civil society. The third group, called community is the last group to engage when local ownership wants to be supported. The community should be part of an accurate assessment to discuss potentials and capacities, to identify representatives, and understand power structures within the community. In theory, there should be a balanced representation of the community to ensure that no one is excluded and marginalised (Pouligny, 2014, pp. 9–12).

6.2 Table 1: Types of participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of participation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive participation</td>
<td>The affected population is informed of what is going to happen or what has occurred. While this is a fundamental right of the people concerned, it is not one that is always respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation through the supply of information</td>
<td>The affected population provides information in response to questions, but it has no influence over the process, since survey results are not shared and their accuracy is not verified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation by consultation</td>
<td>The affected population is asked for its perspective on a given subject, but it has no decision-making powers, and no guarantee that its views will be taken into</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation through material incentives

The affected population supplies some of the materials and/or labour needed to conduct an operation, in exchange for payment in cash or in-kind from the aid organisation.

Participation through the supply of materials, cash or labour

The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash, and/or labour needed for an intervention. This includes cost-recovery mechanisms.

Interactive participation

The affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers.

Local initiatives

The affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organisations or institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community; it is the aid organisation that participates in the people’s projects.

Source: (Groupe URD, 2009, pp. 40)

6.3 Definitions of accountability, local capacity, and empowerment

Accountability is defined by the CHS as “[…] the process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power” (CHS Alliance, 2015, p. 37).

Local capacity is defined here as the “process by which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their systems, resources and knowledge, all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives” (Pouligny, 2014, p. 7).

“Ownership refers […] to relations among stakeholders in development or humanitarian action, particularly their respective capacity, power or influence to set and take responsibility on the agenda and to muster and sustain support for that. This means that part of the implementing bodies needs to be firmly rooted in the recipient country and represent the interests of ordinary citizens” (Pouligny, 2014, p. 8).

Drydyk (2013) describes empowerment as “[…] becoming better able to shape one’s life for the better” (Drydyk, 2013, p. 250).

6.4 Table to analyse, cluster and summarise existing research on enabling and disabling factors for equitable decision-making in the humanitarian response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Enabling/Disabling</th>
<th>Related concepts and reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice of local partners often made from outside (from the organization abroad)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Local ownership (the article mentions it as a condition for local ownership to identify local partners, BUT this decision is often made abroad (Pouligny, 2014, p. 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor / Concept</td>
<td>Enabling/disabling</td>
<td>Enabling/disabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong local capacity (factor 1)</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Lack of knowledge and information (factor 1)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>(1) Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) “many aid providers recognize that they need to</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know more about the areas where they work.” (Factor 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>and decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local gatekeepers (factor 5)</td>
<td>Enabling/disabling</td>
<td>Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick delivery of aid (factor 2)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient delivery of aid (factor 2)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited local capacity (factor 1)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Local ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Adequate skills of humanitarian staff (factor 1)</td>
<td>Enabling (1)</td>
<td>(1) Managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Limited skills (i.e. limited skills in proposal</td>
<td>/disabling (2, 3, 4)</td>
<td>asymmetric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing) (factor 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Limited skills (i.e. active listening, facilitation</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Pouligny, 2014, p.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of problem solving and conflict management, effective</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement, etc.) (factor 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) “To nurture genuinely collaborative approaches to</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planning and decision-making requires people with</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skills and a real interest in the people, and the</td>
<td></td>
<td>(4) planning and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics of recipient countries” (factor 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity around concepts and approaches (factor 6)</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Participation and</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (factor 2)</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Participation and</td>
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<td>decision-making</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in funding and programming (factor 4)</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Participation and</td>
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<td>(Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 163)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture (factor 5)</td>
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<td>Participation and</td>
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<td>decision-making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 163)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentives (factor 3)</td>
<td>Enabling</td>
<td>Participation and</td>
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<td>decision-making</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Knox Clarke et al., 2018, p. 163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International proposal procedures (factor 4)</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predetermined assessment procedures (“people feel</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as if their thoughts are supposed to “fit” into</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>predetermined categories or options” (factor 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Style of community consultation (“the styles of</td>
<td>Disabling</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction of some international agencies limit</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Anderson et al., 2012, p. 71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
recipients’ participation. For example, people say that aid agency staff are in a hurry. But their cultures, discussions and decision-making take time; when staff call a meeting for a specific time when decisions are to be made, the process feels imposed and unnatural to them (factor 2)

<p>| Cultural factors/flawed use of appropriate tools (community consultation), here: “sense of courtesy means they sometimes accept ideas of outsiders out of politeness rather than because they really agree with them” (factor 5) | Disabling | Decision-making (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 71) |
| “Engagement requires time” It needs time to build relations with a community so they can actually talk about their priorities and capacities Most of the time is spent on writing proposals or reports Agencies are often focused on quick delivery rather than qualitative and relations with substance Time 2.0 Affected people may be busy with their daily life and do not have endless time to spend with aid agencies to get to know each other (factor 2) | Disabling | Engagement/participation (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 125–126) Time 2.0 : Participation (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 128-129) |
| Lack of access Reasons are security concerns of some agencies Geographically: remote areas Culturally/traditionally: i.e. women are not part of public life Perception of agency: affected people do not want to be in contact with them (factor 5) | Disabling | Participation (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 128) |
| Money Costly to take time and resources to engage people (factor 6 and 2) | Disabling | Participation (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 128) |
| Humility and commitment “Aid-providing agencies and their staff must approach their work with a range of colleagues broadly and inclusively – and, more importantly, with humility and a real commitment to sharing decision-making power. (Factor 3) | Enabling | Decision-making (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 131) |
| Local people, staff and organisations (factor 1 and 6) | Enabler | Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 32) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Description</th>
<th>Enabler/Disabler</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance and forums for sharing experiences and ideas (factor 6)</td>
<td>Enabler</td>
<td>Decision-Making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, ideas, capacity and agency (factor 1)</td>
<td>Enabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protracted crisis and multi-year funding mechanisms (factor 5 and 4)</td>
<td>Enabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information and social media (factor 1)</td>
<td>Enabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkages and other change agendas (factor 4)</td>
<td>Enabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak incentives to change (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power structures (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business model and market forces (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silos and specialisations (factor 1)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindsets (factor 3)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different definitions, goals and measurements of success (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-term funding and project timeframes (factor 4)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to crisis-affected people (factor 5)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opaque understanding of how decisions are made (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (factor 6)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about reinforcing tensions and upholding humanitarian principles (factor 5)</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing priorities and tensions between pushing for more participation by government, local organisation and/or affected people</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Decision-making (Austin et al., 2018, p. 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No common understanding of what participation is (and is meant to do), and what specific goal individual organisations (and overall responses) want</td>
<td>Disabler</td>
<td>Participation (Degett, 2019, p. 36)</td>
</tr>
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for each. (factor 6)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accurate, timely, targeted information (factor 1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enabler</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making (Degett, 2019, p. 36)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence:</strong> Reachability of programme managers even for local staff often difficult. Also when it comes to understand the context better: issues of ethnicity or power relations. Close relations between frontline staff and affected people are highly important in understanding their perspectives and creating a level of trust that can encourage productive discussions on such issues as decision-making. (Factor 2 and 5)</td>
<td><strong>Enabler</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making (Degett, 2019, p. 36-37)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representation (factor 5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disabler</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making (Degett, 2019, p. 37)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning and operational challenges (factor 1 and 2):</strong> Time management and planning Meeting agenda and information about meeting Language Operational priorities: building extra time and resources in activity plans and allowing enough time for co-creating proposals</td>
<td><strong>Disabler</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making (Degett, 2019, p. 37)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balancing upward and downward accountability (factor 2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enabler</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making (Degett, 2019, p. 37)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.5 Accountability mechanisms and closed feedback circles

According to CDA, “a feedback mechanism is seen as effective if, at minimum, it supports the collection, acknowledgment, analysis and response to the feedback received, thus forming a closed feedback loop. Where the feedback loop is left open, the mechanism is not fully effective.” (Bonino, Jean, & Clarke, 2014, p. 2). The circle of a “closed” feedback loop involves different phases: design, set-up, sorting/verifying & sharing, responding, expectations, and staff & learning. ALNAP and CDA developed a practitioner handbook in which each phase is described in detail. Please follow this link for the full handbook: [https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Closing-the-Loop-Effective-Feedback-in-Humanitarian-Contexts.pdf](https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Closing-the-Loop-Effective-Feedback-in-Humanitarian-Contexts.pdf).

### 6.6 The Grand Bargain, commitment no. 6 on the participation revolution:

“It is necessary to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective, and efficient. To do so, it is important to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions
are responsive to the views of affected communities and people. Donors and aid organisations should work to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups considering gender, age, ethnicity, language and special needs are heard and acted upon. This will create an environment of greater trust, transparency, and accountability. The following commitments will help promote the Core Humanitarian Standard and the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations.

**Aid organisations and donors commit to:**

1. Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.
2. Develop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation, with the emphasis on inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for sharing and analysing data to strengthen decision-making, transparency, accountability and limit duplication.
3. Strengthen local dialogue and harness technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback.
4. Build systematic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming.

**Donors commit to:**

1. Fund flexibly to facilitate programme adaptation in response to community feedback.
2. Invest time and resources to fund these activities. Aid organisations commit to:
3. Ensure that, by the end of 2017, all humanitarian response plans – and strategic monitoring of them - demonstrate analysis and consideration of inputs from affected communities.” (IASC1, 2019).

6.7 ‘Refugee-Led Action. A community-based approach emphasising strengths, resilience & access to human rights’ (Same Skies 1, 2018)

Click on the link:
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b90826_d9eb9d8b175bf49508746e1c089d1d9f3.pdf
(22.08.2019).

6.8 Introduction to Holacracy

“Holacracy® is a new way of structuring and running your organization that replaces the conventional management hierarchy. Instead of operating top-down, power is distributed throughout the organization, giving individuals and teams more freedom to self-manage, while staying aligned to the organization’s purpose.

It involves:

**Holacracy® is a new way of structuring and running your organization that replaces the conventional management hierarchy. Instead of operating top-down, power is distributed throughout the organization, giving individuals and teams more freedom to self-manage, while staying aligned to the organization’s purpose.**
• A new and evolving organizational structure
• Innovative meeting practices designed for rapid execution
• A shift in mindset toward greater autonomy and taking action” (Holacracy 1, 2019)

The website of Holacracy® (www.holacracy.org) introduces the self-management practice in a comprehensive way. There, you can interactively learn about Holacracy®, how to adopt it for your organisation and read about other organisations that use the practice.

The book “Holacracy. The New Management System for a Rapidly Changing World” by Brian J. Robertson is a good read to understand the self-management practice in-depth.

6.9 The do no harm principle
The do no harm principle: “The wellbeing of the people we are trying to help must be the focus of our efforts to help them. Wellbeing is not some brief thing that exists only in the moment we offer assistance. It is not a photograph of a school or a rebuilt house or a successful surgery or of feeding a child. Adhering to the principle of “do no harm” demands that we consider their wellbeing apart from and beyond our intervention.” (Wallace, 2014, p. 7).