Participate: Knowledge from the margins for post-2015

Perspectives of those living in extreme vulnerability and poverty matter in making decisions about how international development should happen. They matter, not only because they are the people most affected by development, but because their perspectives can shed light on how lasting change is possible. National governments, the UN and other key agencies are increasingly recognising the importance of engaging these marginalised perspectives in the post-2015 debate.

There is an extensive body of participatory research that has been carried out or is in the process of being carried out that can provide an invaluable contribution to this dialogue. The Participate initiative has been established to draw this work together, ensure that knowledge from the margins shapes post-2015 policymaking and that a future framework reflects the priorities of those directly affected by poverty and injustice.

While initiatives such as the UNDG process, global surveys and those using new technology will provide important inputs into the post-2015 agenda, participatory research can complement these efforts by engaging the most marginalised and vulnerable groups, helping them to directly communicate the reality of their lives and what is most important to them.

Participate is co-convened by Beyond 2015 and IDS, but the initiative is only possible because of the energy, expertise and vision of numerous organisations committed to participatory research.

Participatory research which shapes policy

This initiative will fill a crucial gap in the current policy context: providing high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, to address key questions in the post-2015 debate. It will bring together the findings of a diverse collective of participatory research projects to provide a reality check from ground level, examine how development interventions associated with the MDGs really affected people’s lives, and to support people living in poverty or who are highly marginalised to engage on key post-2015 dilemmas. Participate will draw out key lessons from existing studies; provide methodological support and synthesis for more than 10 major participatory research projects which are currently ongoing; and engage in a range of other activities to ensure that knowledge from the margins is taken seriously in post-2015 policymaking.

Key aims of Participate

- To bring perspectives of those who live in poverty or who are highly marginalised into post-2015 policymaking.
- To lay the foundations for embedding participatory research in global policy-making.
- To engage in advocacy to ensure that decision-makers understand the significance of this work for the post-2015 debate and genuinely incorporate it into their thinking.
- To undertake a meta-analysis and synthesis of both existing and ongoing participatory research initiatives, that has depth and legitimacy, to effectively communicate key messages.
- To ensure that knowledge from the margins is central to the monitoring and accountability of a future framework in the long term.
- To generate knowledge, understanding and relationships which will be a global public good within the wider development arena.

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Key activities of Participate
Activities that will be undertaken through this initiative include:

- **A review of the lessons from other large scale consultations processes**: Previous global consultations have been experienced by many as ‘extractive’ - there are considerable lessons to be learned about what to do, and what not to do. If the future of development is to be ‘owned’ by those who are affected by it, then it is crucial to learn these lessons.

- **Convening and facilitation for the Beyond 2015 Participatory Research Group**: Current participatory research projects gathering knowledge from the margins on the post-2015 debate are brought together through the Beyond 2015 Participatory Research Group. This group will be supported through methodological workshops for reflection and innovation, including participatory visual work and documentation of the processes involved.

- **A meta-analysis and synthesis of recent and current participatory studies relevant to the post-2015 debate**: Participatory research must be analysed and synthesised in ways that are consistent with its core principles. Synthesis will be conducted in an iterative way, with findings translated into a series of comprehensive research outputs, and key policy messages for decision makers, while retaining their legitimacy with the people who produced them.

- **Immersions for policy-makers**: It is critical to bring knowledge from the margins to policymakers, but it is equally important to bring policymakers to the margins themselves – so that they can directly experience the issues and draw their own conclusions. Participate will therefore facilitate immersions for key policymakers with poor and marginalised communities, supporting them to build their understanding directly.

- **The creation of a Ground Level Panel**: A ground level panel will provide a mirror to the UN’s High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda. It will be comprised of people who live and work within communities that face poverty, insecurity and exclusion. It will deliberate on the findings of the participatory research, and make recommendations based upon them.

- **Using visual and innovative methods to bring knowledge from the margins to life**: Participatory visual processes can reveal and communicate powerfully about experiences from the margins. Six participatory visual processes will be supported and facilitated which will provide contextualised examples of the complex and nuanced understanding of the subjective aspects and consequences of development. In parallel, a documentary film will draw together learning on the key themes that surface, and how such processes can re-position ground level perspectives for open dialogue with policy-makers.

- **Building partnerships with NGO and CSO led advocacy**: With an emphasis on engaging marginal communities directly, this initiative is distinct from efforts to engage civil society organisations in the post-2015 debate. However, this work provides a valuable means of triangulating and verifying evidence from both sources, and we will build partnerships with relevant NGO and CSO led advocacy efforts to multiply impact where possible.

**Who is involved**
Participate is co-convened by IDS and Beyond 2015, with the former providing coordination, methodological and research related components; and the latter providing guidance on advocacy and the post-2015 policy context. Beyond 2015’s involvement is coordinated through its co-chair organisation, CAFOD. Funding is provided by the UK Department for International Development.

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