Handbook on Social Participation for UHC

virtual launch session
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Dheepa Rajan
on behalf of the handbook team

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240027794
Handbook concept

Engagement modalities

participatory space

- directly with populations
- through communities
- through civil society

Target audience

Member State Governments

Policy dialogue
National health planning
Policy- and decision-making

Universal health coverage

for what?

engage participate
Social Participation Technical Network

Chairs:

Mette Kinoti/Githinji Gitahi, AMREF Health Africa
Jean-Francois Delfraissy, National Bioethics Council, France
Justin Koonin, Civil Society Engagement Mechanism, UHC2030

1/3 Civil society and communities
1/3 Member state governments
1/3 Academia/international organizations/others
Evidence generation for the handbook

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![Diagram](image-url)
A recent consultation with civil society organizations (CSOs) has reinforced the importance of practical and flexible guidance for meaningful social participation, communicating the benefits of social participation to decision-makers, and widening access of marginalized groups to national policy and decision-making processes.

Social participation mechanisms are vital for responsive health reforms that leave no one behind in efforts to achieve universal health coverage.
Handbook outline

Chapter 1: Participation: a core instrument for voice, agency and empowerment
Chapter 2: An enabling environment for participation
Chapter 3: Representation in participation
Chapter 4: Capacities for meaningful government engagement with the population, communities, and civil society
Chapter 5: From population engagement to decision-making
Chapter 6: Legal frameworks for participation
Chapter 7: Sustaining participatory engagement over time
Power dynamics create unequal conditions for participation

- structural barriers to participation for some
- increasing access to for others

**Selected key messages**

- enabling environment for participation → evening out the playing field with the aim of empowering those who are weaker and less powerful
- A participatory space → potent tool to minimize power asymmetries if designed in a way that counters formal and informal barriers for equal participation.
- Social participation → transformative potential
  - challenges societal conventions of whose **voice** should be heard
  - who should have **agency** over their own health
  - who should be **empowered** to meaningfully contribute to policy-making.
Challenges in finding the ‘right’ representatives:

- Considered legitimate
- Able to represent a constituency, idea, and/or their own individual experience

Selected key messages

- Format & design of participatory processes influence the ability to effectively take on representation roles
- Balanced and transparent selection strategy
- Format which lends legitimacy to participants
  - Neutral facilitator
  - Homogenous focus groups
  - Meeting location
  - Speaking time
  - Preparatory material
- Statistical vs qualitative representation
Recalibrating the balance of power which is rooted in expertise, knowledge, and speaking skills

**Selected key messages**

- **Quality of exchanges** → determined by the competency and capacities of the participants
- **Level playing field** →
  - stakeholders/participants on an equal footing
  - more frank and fruitful discussions
  - policy influence
- **Recognition** is the most fundamental dimension of capacities for equal interaction but is the most difficult to build
- **Communication** depends on exposure to participatory spaces
- A lack of technical skills impedes the participation process but governments can ensure that **technical skills can be compensated for** if lacking
Public participation initiatives have insufficient influence on decision-making

• ‘Deliberation-to-policy gap’

Selected key messages

• Policy uptake is not always the priority in participatory governance processes

• Value-driven argument → participation is a value in and of itself, an intrinsic goal

• 2 complementary approaches to participation: governance vs. service delivery objectives

• Policy uptake → level of government involvement is critical

• Institutionalized government-initiated and/or -supported spaces for participation → higher policy uptake
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: “....The right to participate in political and public affairs should be enforceable by law and its denial should be open to judicial challenge...”

Examples: legal frameworks relevant for participation
- Decentralization legislation
- Right to health laws
- Health Acts
- Freedom of Information laws

**Selected key messages**
- Participation can and does take place even when legal frameworks do not exist → **BUT** better to have participation embedded in legal framework than not
- Legal frameworks do not guarantee participation per se → just one of several elements needed to ensure participation
- Legally mandated participatory spaces risk being captured by society’s elite
Long-term sustainability of participatory spaces → actions required are most effective when reflected on as part of its set-up and operationalization.

- Participation mostly largely voluntary
- Participation as a regular modus operandi in health can only happen if people stay engaged
- Long-term sustainability ↔ culture of participation

**Selected key messages**

- Formalization and institutionalization of participatory spaces can contribute to long-term sustainability → funding & capacity boost
- Long-term, stable funding for participatory spaces and for civil society
- People and civil society are motivated when their participation leads to results
- Locally respected and trusted community representatives are crucial resources
Thank you