

# Including the Communities They Seek to Change

*Insights from  
Democracy, Rights, and  
Governance  
Practitioners Using  
Participatory M&E*

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The views in this report reflect the findings of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of Search for Common Ground or the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL).

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# Glossary of Terms

**DRG:** Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance

**EU:** European Union

**INGO:** International non-governmental organization

**NGO:** Non-governmental organization

**M&E:** Monitoring and evaluation

**MEL:** Monitoring, evaluation and learning

**OH:** Outcome Harvesting



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# Introduction

Donor governments spend billions of dollars annually in foreign aid promoting democracy, rights and governance (DRG) in developing and conflict affected countries. In 2021, the U.S. Government enacted 2.42 billion dollars in DRG aid, a figure expected to increase in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in 2021 the EU enacted the Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy program, intending to spend 1.5 billion euros over six years on DRG programs worldwide.

With spending on DRG programs prospectively on the rise, there is renewed importance to understand the implications of such spending in the countries and communities it intends to benefit. DRG programs promote civic engagement, encourage government transparency, and build human rights institutions' capacities, among other things. While donor governments establish budgets and agendas, DRG programs are implemented through practitioners such as NGOs. Through DRG programs, these practitioners provide "technical leadership through research, training, and dissemination of best practices in anti-corruption, security sector reform, and legislative strengthening."<sup>2</sup>

But do these programs work? To answer this question, DRG practitioners, like most individuals and organizations implementing foreign aid programs, use a variety of approaches to monitor and evaluate their programs to understand the resulting institutional or societal changes that are, or are not, taking place. This method is one way to understand accountability in foreign aid: that the organizations which were given money to make a desired set of changes (e.g. promoting democratic values) are indeed making those changes. In this way, "aid has been framed as a contract, where accountability involves regulating behavior between separate entities" (e.g. a donor government and an INGO). This contract framing manifests itself through legal compliance, financial audits, and top-down evaluation frameworks demanded by donors. This view of accountability in aid, however, neglects or negates the voices of the communities where programs are implemented.<sup>3</sup>

There is a second and increasingly popular (arguably more important) way to view accountability in aid: people in the communities where aid programs are implemented "have the right to expect INGOs to be answerable" to them.<sup>4</sup> This second understanding of accountability in aid becomes especially pertinent when we speak about DRG programming that promotes government accountability and civic engagement. How are DRG practitioners practicing such accountability and encouraging communities to hold them accountable?

In response to the critical question of accountability to communities they serve, INGOs adopted participatory methods in their aid programs. Participatory methods enable “ordinary people to play an active and influential part in decisions which affect their lives... their voices shape outcomes.”<sup>5</sup> These methods can be incorporated into any point of the aid implementation cycle. However, the idea “that all people have a right to play a part in shaping the decisions that affect their lives sounds obvious, but is not easy to achieve.” A variety of participatory approaches have been created to design, monitor, and evaluate aid interventions. A number of organizations and institutions have established initiatives promoting the use of participatory methods in aid.

This brief study explores DRG practitioners’ accountability to the communities they intend to serve and the extent to which their monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices are shaped by the voices and lived experiences of those communities through participatory approaches. This study does not necessarily seek to contribute to ongoing academic conversations about power relations in foreign aid, human rights, democratization, or governance. It instead focuses on exploring the challenges and barriers to including participatory methods according to the experiences of practitioners. It will examine how practitioners in the democracy, rights and governance (DRG) space use participatory methods to monitor, evaluate, and learn (M&E / MEL) from their work.

## What is participation?

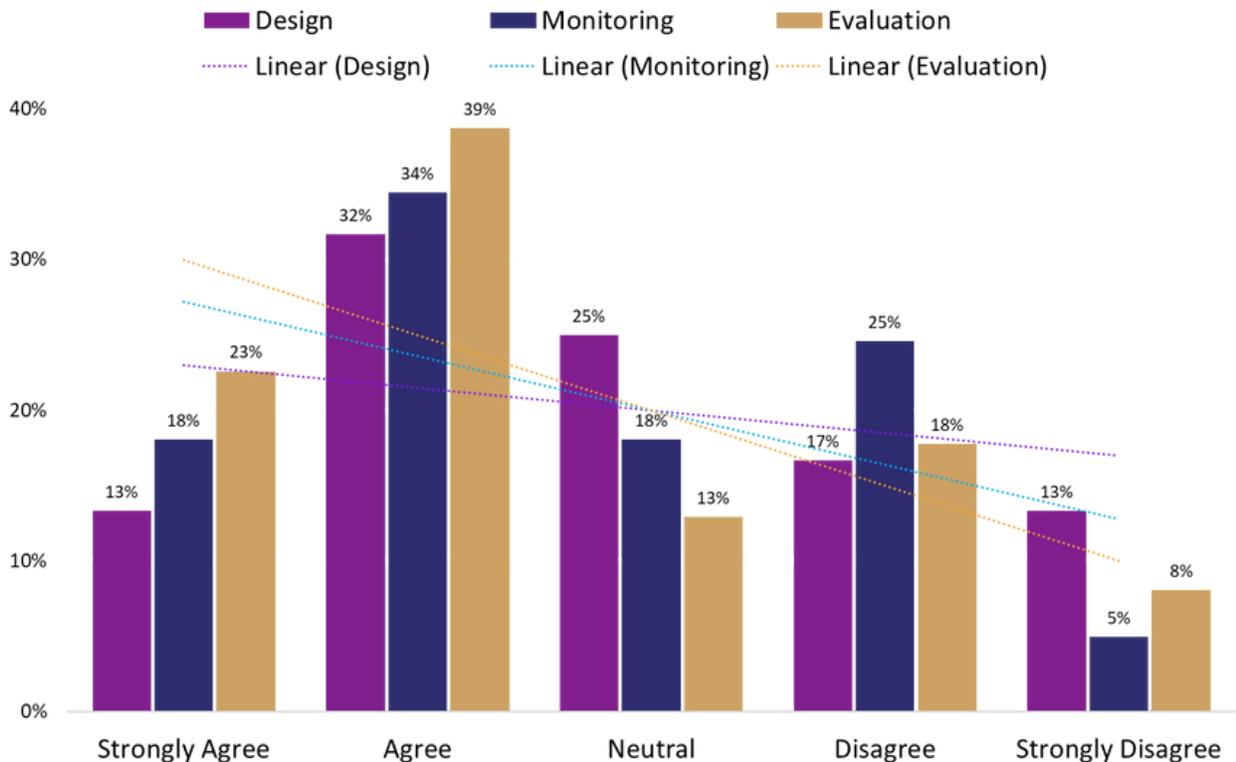
The very definition of “participation” is a fundamental issue that underpins the conversation on participatory approaches to M&E. Scholars have developed various frameworks through which to understand participation. The Ladder of Citizen Participation formulated by Sherry Arnstein over two decades ago remains an influential framework for understanding participation in governance and democracy. The ladder comprises groups of rungs which climb from non-participation, to degrees of tokenism, and on to various levels of citizen power. Others have developed similar ladders to frame issues around empowerment and children’s participation, as an example.

The International Association for Public Participation developed the Spectrum of Public Participation, which illustrates a range of participation from keeping the public informed to the public having complete control over what is implemented.<sup>6</sup> In the realm of inquiry, scholars have built on and adapted these ideas to frame and describe levels of participation in research and evaluation. These scholars have made it clear that participation exists on a spectrum. Subsequent questions in this report will use the Spectrum of Public Participation framework to unpack practitioners’ experiences with participatory monitoring and evaluation of DRG programs.

# Findings

## Participation in Design, Monitoring & Evaluation

This study was underpinned by a survey of DRG practitioners from around the world, which asked whether respondents felt that most organizations working on DRG include the ideas and opinions of ordinary people in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of their programs. 45% of respondents agreed that ordinary people’s opinions are included in program designs, with 30% disagreeing and 23% neither agreeing or disagreeing (neutral). There was slightly more agreement among respondents that ordinary people were included in program monitoring efforts, with 52% agreeing and only 30% disagreeing with 18% staying neutral. Respondents agreed even further when asked about inclusion in evaluation with 61% of respondents agreeing that DRG programs include the voices of ordinary people, only 26% disagreeing, and 13% remaining neutral. In short, there is more disagreement among DRG practitioners that ordinary people’s voices are included in the design process of a program rather than its accompanying monitoring and evaluation approaches.



DRG practitioners surveyed believe that the **design phase** of DRG programs is the **least inclusive** of the voices of ordinary community members.

Nonetheless, a majority of respondents agree that organizations working on DRG include the voices of ordinary people. As we drill down into the data, however, some differences in experience emerge. To those same statements, respondents who had experience working for organizations typically seen as “donors” tended to disagree disproportionately more than respondents with no experience working for donors. Moreover, the more experience with donors a respondent had, the more likely they were to disagree. 100% of respondents with over 10 years of experience working with donor organizations disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with the statements that DRG programs include ordinary opinions and voices. Does this trend exemplify the saying “with experience comes wisdom,” or is it indicative of a bygone era of exclusion that the more seasoned practitioners will not let go? One DRG practitioner with experience working for a donor organization asserted during an interview that “institutional funding comes with a kind of set of requirements in terms of M&E, and those requirements don't necessarily change.” She went on to say “there isn't much leeway normally in M&E systems to accommodate specific programs' directions.” This interviewee was not alone in her views; another practitioner with experience working for a donor organization pointed out that “There is always power at play, and beneficiaries as stakeholders are considered to be untrained in M&E, even though they may have indigenous knowledge of evaluation.” In terms of program indicators, DRG practitioners generally felt that most indicators are not developed by members of the target communities. Most respondents disagreed (62%) with the statement “DRG program indicators are developed by people from the communities where the project is being implemented.”

DRG practitioners with experience **working for donor organizations** were disproportionately **more pessimistic** about the extent to which ordinary people's voices contribute to DRG programs' M&E.

*“It's very hard because we're usually responding to donor bids that want certain things to happen. So there's always this external perspective that kind of gets dropped down on communities.”*

– An evaluator with experience in Latin America and Africa

Despite some reservations about the extent to which ordinary community members are shaping the monitoring and evaluation of DRG programs, 50% of respondents agreed with the statement “DRG organizations use monitoring and evaluation approaches that are relevant to the realities of the ordinary people in the communities where they work,” while 25% remained neutral and 25% disagreed. Also, respondents believe that DRG program indicators are relevant to the realities of the communities they serve and are selected with due consideration for conflict sensitivity. 39% of respondents agreed with the statement “Most DRG program indicators accurately reflect the realities in conflict affected communities” (35% disagree, 19% neutral, 8% DK/NA) and 46% agreed that the indicators “are chosen with due consideration to conflict sensitivity” (19% disagree, 29% neutral, 7% DK/NA). So, there is some admission that organizations working in DRG do not always allow the ideas and opinions of ordinary people to shape their M&E approaches, especially among those who have worked for donor organizations. One interviewee explained that the design of indicators “is left to the experts and does not usually include the participation of the beneficiaries of a project.” Most respondents, however, also assert that these approaches are nonetheless relevant. So, there is an implicit assertion that the inclusion of ideas and opinions of ordinary people is not always necessary for an M&E approach to be relevant to that community.



*The International Association for Public Participation developed the Spectrum of Public Participation*

This notion evokes the aforementioned frameworks that define levels of participation. Along the framework provided by the Spectrum of Public Participation, then, some practitioners assert that participation in M&E of DRG programs sits on the “inform” side of the spectrum. This side represents effective non participation, participation in name only, or what Arnstein might call “rubber stamping.” On that side of the spectrum, DRG practitioners commit only to keeping communities informed about the project design, M&E, and any results. One interviewee framed his experiences with these approaches as telling communities “we’ll keep you in the loop.” However, interviewees were quick to point out that this side of the spectrum is not necessarily negative or undesirable, but that “it depends on your partners and objectives.” If a program is addressing a set of complex parliamentary procedure reforms, for example, the extent to which practitioners can realistically involve or empower ordinary community members to participate is questionable. Additionally, some aspects of DRG work may be inherently

more political and therefore may require more discretion in how to involve communities while trying to remain apolitical or neutral as practitioners. On this side of the spectrum, DRG programs may focus more on the participation of “primary stakeholders,” or people who may represent target communities but have more vested interest and power to achieve the program’s desired outcomes; primary stakeholders may be members of parliament, civil society organizations, activists, or elites more generally.

**DRG practitioners interviewed assert that more participation is not always desired or realistic and that the extent of participation among ordinary community members should be a function of the program’s design.**

According to one experienced practitioner, “A participatory M&E system doesn’t necessarily have to be shaped by participants. It can reflect the views of participants that have been given in a participatory manner.” This view of participation falls clearly within the “consult” section of the spectrum, whereby practitioners control the decisions about their M&E with the inputs from participants or primary stakeholders in mind. These inputs may come from past evaluations or consultations with community members that reveal needs to update or redirect approaches. According to interviewees, this consultative section of the participation spectrum is where most DRG programs’ M&E approaches reside.

**Many interviewees describe most of their work with participatory M&E methods in terms that clearly fit in the “consult” section of the participation spectrum.**

Moving up the participatory spectrum, practitioners mentioned Outcome Harvesting (OH) as a valuable M&E approach that goes beyond consultation and more deeply involves community members or primary stakeholders in determining the contribution and value of programmatic outcomes. One practitioner asserted that the measures of change and outcomes DRG practitioners are looking for “depends on where [they’re] sitting.” OH allowed her team to bring “the community voices into the space and recognize the outcomes that were harvested in community spaces, which made a huge difference as to what people were looking for.” OH processes have bridged the divide between what practitioners are looking for as positive change and what target communities know to be positive change. Because OH intentionally avoids taking a linear view of cause and effect, it allows for a wider array of changes to be discussed and considered as valid or valuable. Depending on the design of an OH approach, it allows for greater involvement of communities in the data collection process as well.

Among several DRG practitioners interviewed, **Outcome Harvesting** is an effective M&E approach for **involving and collaborating** with ordinary community members.

To DRG practitioners who take a stricter view of participation, M&E approaches are only truly participatory when stakeholders have ownership over the formulation of monitoring priorities, evaluation questions, data collection processes, and the validation of findings. According to one practitioner interviewed, a hallmark of a truly participatory approach is when implementers and communities “both shape and co-own the project’s M&E.” In the Public Participation Spectrum framework, this view of participatory approaches to M&E might fall within the “collaborate” section of the spectrum, in which communities and stakeholders are viewed as partners and relied on for inputs, advice, and recommendations throughout the entire process. In this area of the spectrum, practitioners use their expertise while also relying on local knowledge systems and so-called “indigenous ways of knowing” to holistically assess value, meaning, and change. It is also at this point on the spectrum where practitioners more frequently refer to decolonizing or decolonial approaches to M&E.

The practitioners interviewed for this study spoke about participation at the “empowerment” end of the spectrum almost synonymously with decolonial approaches to M&E. Decolonizing evaluation means that practices are defined by local values and protocols. These approaches acknowledge that evaluation and research have, historically, viewed indigenous ways of knowing as lacking rigor, as backward, or in even worse terms. Evaluators have been seen as brokers of knowledge and creators of meaning or value, which runs the risk of further marginalizing and stereotyping the very communities these programs intend to serve. Decolonial approaches to evaluation are rooted in the belief that evaluations are made richer by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems.<sup>7</sup> But, more importantly, these approaches resist exploitation and oppression by giving control of information gathering, interpretation, and sharing to the target communities. The ultimate focus is placed on empowering communities, especially those that have been historically marginalized or oppressed, as many target communities of DRG programming are. In terms of the Public Participation Spectrum, the promise by practitioners is that “we will implement what you decide.” One DRG practitioner put it this way: “If you want to have a governance program, it’s the primary stakeholder who knows whether or not their situation as a citizen has improved, and they’re the ones that have to measure it. I could come in with my view of what greater access to decision-making might mean, but in every context that could be different. It doesn’t really make sense to set the value as an outsider.” Several interviewees mentioned specific approaches created by the Everyday Peace Indicators and other

community-led monitoring approaches that are rooted in decolonial thinking and intend to empower community members to shape project indicators.

M&E approaches exist on a spectrum of participation. There is consensus among DRG practitioners interviewed for this study that the extent to which programs' M&E approaches can and should move along the spectrum of public participation is dependent on the design of a program, its stakeholders, and objectives. The extent to which the voices of ordinary community members have the power to shape DRG programs depends on a number of constraints that are often outside the control of practitioners tasked with implementation.

## Challenges Along the Spectrum of Participation

Practitioners attempting to shift along the theoretical spectrum of participation toward approaches that empower communities to shape a program and its M&E approach are met with a number of practical challenges and constraints. Some of the constraints may be endogenous in that they originate from within the donor-practitioner ecosystem and the responsibility to transform those constraints rests with donors and practitioners. Other constraints are exogenous in that they may be practical realities of the contexts or communities targeted by donors and practitioners. These constraints often lie beyond the control of donors and practitioners, but they must contend with these challenges nonetheless.

DRG program timelines work in project cycles that M&E approaches generally must follow. Program timelines typically span two or three years, in which time all program outputs and M&E must be achieved. This is the primary constraint faced in DRG programming.

Respondents to the survey generally agreed

(61%) with the statement "project timelines are too short to properly use participatory methods in M&E." Projects must be designed and implemented in funding cycles set by donor organizations—often governments—who are eager to demonstrate impact or return on investment to lawmakers to justify spending choices to taxpayers.

Evaluation requires money. 67% of DRG practitioners who responded to the survey indicated that M&E budgets for DRG programs are insufficient to properly use participatory M&E approaches.<sup>8</sup> One interviewee asserted that "if you get 10,000 Euro for an evaluation, you have to be delighted." This sentiment was echoed by other

*"Our evaluations are done on a shoestring."*

– A former MEL department lead

interviewees who pointed to the fact that the time that a program can dedicate to M&E—let alone more participatory approaches to M&E—is often limited by the M&E budget available. Those budget amounts are determined by donors. A key requirement for participatory approaches to M&E is time, and the primary constraint on time is money.



There are the endogenous financial constraints such as time and salaries of implementing staff, but there are exogenous financial constraints as well. Target community members frequently participate in M&E activities expecting compensation for their opportunity costs. Most DRG practitioners surveyed strongly agreed (14%) or agreed (30%) with the statement “Ordinary community members do not have time to dedicate to various participatory methods.” Practitioners also strongly agreed (21%) or agreed (48%) with the statement “Ordinary community members frequently expect monetary incentives to participate in M&E activities.” Logically, participatory methods that require more time of a person who may otherwise be tending their farm, feeding their children, or otherwise working, would need incentives beyond altruism to encourage participation beyond community elites.

As one interviewee stated about participatory M&E approaches, “it always seems that elite groups dominate these methods.” This may be acutely true in DRG programming. Case studies have pointed to elite voices dominating participatory governance of development initiatives.<sup>9</sup> Other research has pointed to elite capture of participatory approaches used in the wake of natural disasters. Some case studies in the literature on participatory initiatives suggest that such elite capture can be overcome by resistance from the initially disadvantaged groups over time.<sup>10</sup> Others show that elite capture can be controlled at the design phase.<sup>11</sup> The notion of elite capture of aid has been discussed by practitioners and scholars for decades in terms of literal capture of the monetary value of aid, but there is less scholarly discussion of how elites may also be the dominant voices that shape the design and M&E of aid programs. This type of elite capture presents a challenge to practitioners looking to move from simply informing communities to collaborating with and empowering them through their DRG programs. After expressing concern over elite capture of participatory approaches, one interviewee went on to provide an example of a government housing intervention that made efforts to be inclusive and participatory, but ended up emboldening the loudest elite voices (local authorities and land owners) and marginalizing those who might be

most affected (those in need of housing) but were unable to attend, were unaware of the events where they could have shared their viewpoints, or were generally fearful of challenging elite voices publicly. As practitioners move up the spectrum of participation, they lose control over selection of participants and run the risk of inadvertently supporting oppressive power structures or self-serving elites with more vested interests and time to participate.

## Donors-Specific Challenges to Participatory M&E

The previous sections briefly mention some of the constraints that donors directly or indirectly impose on DRG practitioners and target communities by extension. This section further explores how DRG practitioners view the role of donors in their work.

Most respondents to the survey indicated that they strongly agree (32%) or agree (32%) that donors who fund DRG programs encourage the use of participatory M&E methods, and most agree (59%) that donors make including the voices of ordinary community members a priority throughout the project cycle. Nonetheless, respondents were split as to whether donors impose M&E standards that are unrealistic, with respondents being evenly split (33% agree, 33% neutral, and 33% disagree), and they were also divided as to whether donors required unrealistic M&E approaches generally (29% neutral, 25% agree, 43% disagree). One practitioner noted that oftentimes donors might strongly suggest an approach that is “trending in academic circles in the donor’s country” over something more participatory or locally appropriate. Another interviewee stated plainly that “donors discourage participatory M&E sometimes because they are so hung up on rigorous, scientific, quantitative processes that they don't really see the value addition of participatory methods.”

*“Some donors have no knowledge and appreciation of these [participatory] approaches, so they are the real challenge to using them.”*

– DRG practitioner with MEL experience across Africa

Generally, practitioners have had mixed experiences with the approaches donors suggest and the standards they expect. One interviewee summed these sentiments well, saying that practitioners are “aware that some donors are very rigid and some are flexible.” This was echoed by other interviewees who concur that the overt influence a donor has on practitioners’ use of participatory methods depends on the donor and its flexibility. A plurality of respondents to

the survey strongly agree or agree (41%) that donors influence practitioners' M&E choices more than contextual realities.

Despite some donors' efforts to directly encourage or require the use of participatory methods by practitioners, donors may wield additional indirect influence over the extent to which practitioners can effectively use participatory methods. The indirect influence of the donor-practitioner and donor-community relationships were a key theme throughout interviews with practitioners. Regardless of their intentional influences over the programs' M&E approaches, donors also wield indirect influence over participatory settings through perceived power dynamics. In the experience of one interviewee, "Some local communities feared risking the flow of donor funding, so they responded positively to all questions and stretched the truth a bit." This points to a critical factor of the trust building necessary to any evaluation. The theme of trust building was especially prominent while discussing practitioners' experiences working with conflict-affected communities.

## Participatory M&E in Conflict-Affected Communities

According to some practitioners, the challenges to employing participatory approaches are especially acute in conflict-affected communities. Conflict-affected communities often lack social cohesion and trust.<sup>12</sup> Interviewees for this study who had experience in conflict-affected communities pointed out that violent conflict often leads to large deficits of trust within communities and between communities and "outsiders." As one interviewee put it, "what you say today can mean that you end up in prison tomorrow." This type of suspicion, fear or reluctance to share information was commonly mentioned as a challenge to using participatory methods.

Trauma is another challenge to participatory methods. While trauma is not unique to conflict-affected communities, it is far more prevalent.<sup>13</sup> Studies on the mental health effects of conflict suggest that around 10% of people exposed to armed conflict-related trauma will develop severe mental health problems and an additional 10% will develop behaviors that affect their day-to-day life adversely.<sup>14</sup> In short, trauma can lead to antisocial disorders and behavior.<sup>15</sup> According to practitioners with experience in conflict-affected communities, the prevalence of trauma adds a layer of complexity to their work that must be overcome by investing deeply in building trust.

Some practitioners point out that conflict settings can make it easier to find participants because they are generally more ready and willing to receive support. As one interviewee put it, "if you're saying you need 10 women to have conversations about

what women really need in this camp, you have loads of volunteers, and they're willing to go all out to ensure that they get support." This view of participation, however, falls clearly in the "consult" or "involve" portion of the participation spectrum.

*The only way that our understanding of what is working could function was by developing this long-term trust relationship, where people felt that it was important to say things as they are."*

– Practitioner based in Europe with global MEL experience

As practitioners attempt to move up the participation spectrum to collaborate with and empower conflict-affected communities, the challenges around trust are heightened. One interviewee shared his view that when trust is lacking, "not many will be willing to participate. And those that participate will only say things that they think the evaluator and project donors want to hear." Other interviewees pointed out that in order to foster more deep participation, practitioners need to create safe spaces for participants to build trust with program staff, evaluators, and other participants and to be able to openly share.

A dearth of trust in conflict-affected communities also exacerbates the problems associated with elite capture. As one practitioner stated about participatory methods in her interview, "you're much more likely to be able to speak to power holders. They wouldn't feel as threatened. It's much easier to collect rounded, full information if you're not in a conflict scenario." A general security protocol of many DRG organizations is to engage local authorities, religious leaders, or other types of power holders as a type of permission-seeking process before beginning a specific M&E activity. This type of support from local authorities creates an opportunity for these power holders to control or influence these processes as discussed in the previous section.

*"Where there is no trust, very little can be done. Where there is no trust there will be fear, and naturally, that paralyzes everyone and the process will be stalled or incomplete."*

– Practitioner with experience evaluating government programs

Finally, communities affected by violent conflict are difficult to reach for practitioners seeking deeper participation. There are challenges of immobility, which armed conflict creates. At times entire communities are disconnected or are unable to travel, making forms of participation higher on the spectrum extremely difficult to achieve. Then, practitioners must also consider their own physical safety. As one interviewee asked, “how can anyone work when they don't feel safe?” Indeed, threats to physical safety of practitioners are a common obstacle to achieving greater participation in conflict-affected communities. The conflict’s topography provides ridges and ravines that shape the river of community participation through which practitioners must programmatically and safely navigate.

# Conclusion

This study set out to collect and understand DRG practitioners’ experiences with participatory M&E approaches. The survey of practitioners conducted for this study shows mixed feelings among practitioners about the extent to which DRG programs, donors, and target communities are using participatory methods. Interviews with practitioners further revealed that practitioners understand participatory methods to exist on a spectrum ranging from informing communities, to empowering communities, to controlling these programs using decolonial approaches. Examples of DRG programs successfully using M&E methods on the empowerment end of the spectrum were nearly non-existent, despite the research team casting a broad net. Indeed, this study’s informants had abundant examples of the challenges to using more empowering forms of participatory inquiry and struggled to provide success stories. This report, then, can also be seen as an open call for more DRG practitioners to share their successes and the means by which they have overcome the various obstacles outlined in this report. This is the beginning of a conversation about how to address the barriers to moving M&E approaches further toward the empowerment end of the participation spectrum.

## What does this mean for practitioner accountability?

The results of this study indicate that the process of DGR practitioners’ accountability to the communities they intend to serve using participatory M&E approaches is an ongoing journey with a lot more distance to be covered. Through the course of conducting this study, the research team encountered passionate DRG practitioners who were eager to empower communities in which they work using increasingly

participatory, decolonial, and empowering M&E, but who also felt constrained by the donor requirements and time constraints.

## What are the takeaways for donors funding DRG programs?

Practitioners interviewed for this study had a number of pragmatic suggestions for donors funding DRG work to better empower communities through participatory M&E, specifically that donors should:

**1 Invest deeply in baseline, participatory research** in target communities before setting funding priorities. Frequently, baseline studies are conducted as a part of a broader grant award and therefore are shaped before individuals from the target communities are even aware of a project.

Investing in baseline participatory research may require donors to create stand-alone grant awards to practitioners, researchers and evaluators with the primary objective of understanding local ways of knowing and building trust between practitioners and target communities.

Trust building is not a linear process and requires significant time and investment from practitioners before interventions can be reasonably determined. One approach currently being developed by<sup>16</sup> Search for Common Ground is the Grounded Accountability Model (GAM), which is derived from the work of Everyday Peace Indicators<sup>17</sup> and focuses on developing indicators based on the lived experiences of the target communities. While serving primarily as an approach to decolonized evaluation, GAM can simultaneously serve as a trust building exercise within target communities, by demonstrating practitioners eagerness to understand what is important to these communities.

**2 Encourage indigenous evaluation practices** and promote protocols for engagement with indigenous communities. Donor organizations should consider supporting research frameworks and protocols which are defined by communities to outline how researchers or evaluators should engage with their communities. Communities of the First Nations in Canada have been leading the way on establishing such protocols, and research institutions have incorporated these frameworks into their ethics practices.<sup>18</sup> Through supporting the development of similar frameworks and protocols by communities where DRG programs are most frequently occurring, donors can invest in indigenous evaluation practices and empower communities to shape the research, M&E and programs that affect their lives.

**3 Increase research, project implementation, and evaluation timelines.** The two recommendations above necessitate longer timelines in DRG programming. DRG practitioners currently work in project cycles that last two or three years. Search for Common Ground's internal data shows that the average award length for its ongoing work in the government and civil society thematic sector is 3.1 years, which is up from a historical average award length of 1.9 years for similar projects. While the average DRG timelines, for Search at least, are on the rise, these average times are for overall implementation; baseline research and evaluation are only fractions of that time, making forms of empowering participation difficult to implement.

**4 Donors should ensure that the research and evaluation budgets reflect the realistic monetary cost of participation** and trust building by "ordinary" community members. Budgets are a critical piece of the participation puzzle. Budgets should reflect an understanding by donors of the barriers of participation among "ordinary" community members who otherwise may be occupied or disincentivized to participate. Removing monetary barriers to participation by ordinary community members ultimately may prevent the type of elite capture of participation discussed in this report.

# Endnotes

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# Annexes

## Annex A: Methodology

The research team explored the ubiquity and use of participatory approaches to M&E in the DRG field by focusing on five research questions:

1. What M&E approaches/frameworks are most commonly used in DRG programs and to what extent are they relevant to lived experiences of target communities experiencing conflict?
2. To what extent do DRG donors encourage/discourage the use of participatory M&E approaches?
3. How do DRG practitioners most typically formulate and use project indicators?
4. What are the primary challenges and barriers to employing participatory approaches in DRG programs in conflict-affected contexts?
5. What are the best practices for participatory evaluation approaches in the DRG field?

The study employed a convenience and referral sampling approach to collect data from DRG practitioners as the primary research participants. The research team defines DRG practitioners as those who have participated in the funding or implementation of (foreign or domestic) aid programs that seek to enact positive change in democratic institutions, human rights, and governance. Further, the study defines participatory approaches to MEL as those which allow ordinary community members to shape a project's M&E approach, such as what indicators are being measured and how indicators are being measured.

Data collection began with the dissemination of a quantitative survey. After the survey had a satisfactory level of representativity (based on years of professional experience, gender, etc.), the research team recruited secondary participants to participate in interviews based on their responses (and trends in responses).

### Geographic Scope:

The study began with an unlimited geographic scope, so as not to limit the potential number of participants. However, linguistic differences were accounted for in advance by creating multilingual tools in French and English.

#### Quantitative Data:

The research team disseminated an online questionnaire through various channels (e.g. ConnexUs, AfrEA, VOPE listservs, etc.). This questionnaire briefly ascertained their level of experience in DRG, conflict-affected communities, and MEL. It then measured practitioner perceptions of current donor dynamics vis-à-vis accountability and participatory approaches to MEL. The research team will aim for a goal of 250 respondents to the survey.

#### Qualitative Data:

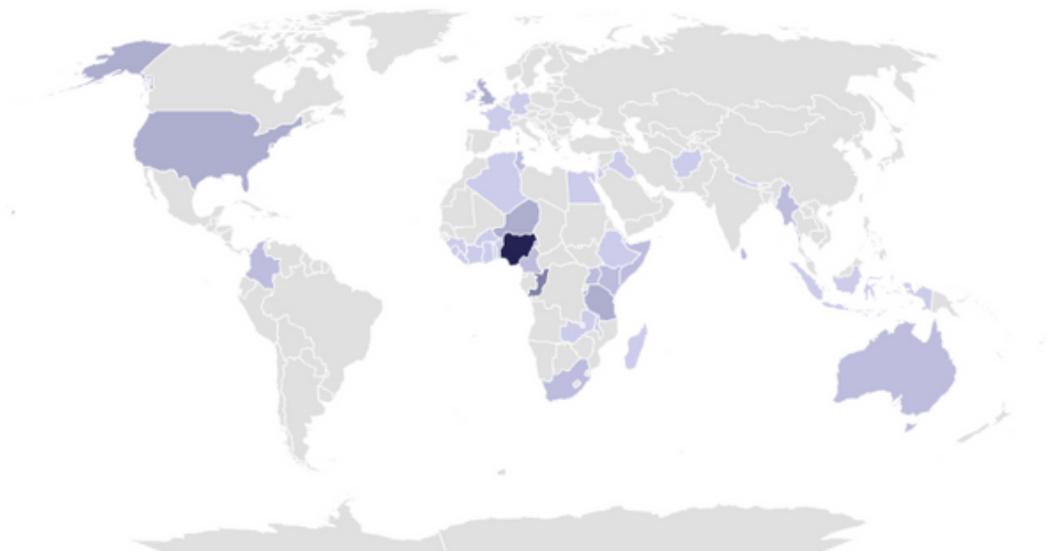
The aforementioned questionnaire also included several open-ended questions for brief qualitative and explanatory responses. However, the research team mainly collected qualitative data from key informant interviews (KIIs). KII participants were referred to the research team based on initial convenience/access, but additional participants were referred to the team by previous participants and through a contact information section in the questionnaire.

#### Data Management and Quality:

The team took a back-planned tools approach ensuring the economical use of team resources and participants' time and that the research questions will be specifically addressed. Back-planned tools are located in this document.

Quantitative data was collected using Google Forms, and responses were stored on Search's Google Drive. The research team did not collect personally identifiable information from any research participants, with exception to those who shared their contact information for interview follow up.

## Annex B: Survey Sample



*Geographic spread of survey respondents*

Respondent Age	
25-29	5%
30-34	22%
35-39	28%
40-49	15%
50-59	27%
60+	3%

Respondent Gender	
Women	35%
Men	65%

## Annex C: Online Questionnaire

Question Type	Question - English	Question-French
Single-select	Do you understand the purpose of this questionnaire and agree to participate?	Comprenez-vous l'objectif de ce questionnaire et acceptez-vous d'y participer ?
Single-select	Do you have experience funding or implementing (foreign or domestic) programs that seek to strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and/or advocate for good governance (DRG programs)?	Avez-vous de l'expérience dans le financement ou la mise en œuvre de programmes (étrangers ou nationaux) qui visent à renforcer les institutions démocratiques, à promouvoir les droits de l'homme et/ou à défendre la bonne gouvernance (programmes de DDG) ?

Question Type	Question - English	Question-French
Single-select	Nationality (which country do you call home?)	Nationalité (quel est votre pays d'origine ?)
Single-select	Gender	Sexe
Single-select	Age	Age
Numerical Text	How many years of experience do you have implementing DRG programs?	Combien d'années d'expérience avez-vous acquises dans la mise en œuvre de programmes de DDG ?
Single-select	Have you ever worked for an entity that is typically seen as a "donor" who funds DRG programs?	Avez-vous déjà travaillé pour un organisme qui est typiquement considéré comme un "donateur" qui finance des programmes de DDG ?
Numerical Text	How many years of your experience implementing DRG programs has been with donor organizations?	Combien d'années d'expérience avez-vous acquises dans la mise en œuvre de programmes de DDG auprès d'organismes donateurs ?
Single-select	Did most of your experience with DRG programs occur in your home country (i.e. the country of your nationality)?	Avez-vous acquis la majeure partie de votre expérience en matière de programmes de DDG dans votre pays d'origine (Par exemple, le pays de votre nationalité) ?
Single-select	Have you worked on DRG projects in communities affected by armed conflict?	Avez-vous travaillé sur des projets de DDG dans des communautés affectées par des conflits armés ?
Single-select	Which of the following categories best describes the role you played most frequently while working on DRG programs?	Laquelle des catégories suivantes décrit le mieux le poste que vous avez le plus fréquemment occupé lorsque vous travailliez sur des programmes de DDG ?

Question Type	Question - English	Question-French
Single-select	Are you still working on DRG?	Travaillez-vous encore actuellement sur des projets de DDG ?
Single-select	Do you have experience using participatory methods for program monitoring and evaluation?	Avez-vous de l'expérience dans l'utilisation de méthodes participatives pour le suivi et l'évaluation de programmes ?
Likert Scale	Most organizations working on DRG ... [...include the ideas and opinions of ordinary people in the design of their programs]	La plupart des organisations travaillant sur des projets/programmes de DDG ... [...incluent les idées et les opinions des gens ordinaires dans la conception de leurs programmes]
Likert Scale	Most organizations working on DRG ... [...include the ideas and opinions of ordinary people in the monitoring of their programs]	La plupart des organisations travaillant sur des projets/programmes de DDG ... [...incluent les idées et les opinions des gens ordinaires dans le suivi de leurs programmes]
Likert Scale	Most organizations working on DRG ... [...include the ideas and opinions of ordinary people in the evaluation of their programs]	La plupart des organisations travaillant sur des projets/programmes de DDG ... [...incluent les idées et les opinions des gens ordinaires dans l'évaluation de leurs programmes]
Likert Scale	Most organizations working on DRG ... [...use monitoring and evaluation approaches that are relevant to the realities of the ordinary people in the communities where they work.]	La plupart des organisations travaillant sur des projets/programmes de DDG ... [...utilisent des méthodes de suivi et d'évaluation adaptées aux réalités des membres de la communautés dans laquelle ils travaillent.]
Likert Scale	Most organizations working on DRG ... [...use monitoring and evaluation approaches that are relevant to the realities of the people most affected by violent conflict.]	La plupart des organisations travaillant sur des projets/programmes de DDG ... [...utilisent des méthodes de suivi et d'évaluation adaptées aux réalités des personnes les plus touchées par les conflits violents.]

Question Type	Question – English	Question–French
Likert Scale	Most donors funding DRG programs... [...encourage the use of participatory methods in evaluating programs]	La plupart des donateurs qui financent des programmes de DDG... [...encouragent l'utilisation de méthodes participatives pour l'évaluation des programmes]
Likert Scale	Most donors funding DRG programs... [...make the inclusion of ordinary voices throughout the project cycle a priority.]	La plupart des donateurs qui financent des programmes de DDG... [...accordent une priorité à l'inclusion des voix des membres de la communauté tout au long du cycle du projet.]
Likert Scale	Most donors funding DRG programs... [...impose monitoring and evaluation standards on implementors that are unrealistic.]	La plupart des donateurs qui financent des programmes de DDG... [...imposent aux exécutants des normes de suivi et d'évaluation qui ne sont pas réalistes.]
Likert Scale	Most donors funding DRG programs... [...require monitoring and evaluation approaches that are unrealistic.]	La plupart des donateurs qui financent des programmes de DDG... [...exigent des approches de suivi et d'évaluation qui ne sont pas réalistes.]
Likert Scale	Most donors funding DRG programs... [...influence practitioners' monitoring and evaluation choices more than contextual realities.]	La plupart des donateurs qui financent des programmes de DDG... [...influencent les choix des professionnels en matière de suivi et d'évaluation plus que ne l'imposent les réalités contextuelles.]
Likert Scale	Most DRG program indicators... [...are developed by people from the communities where the project is being implemented.]	Most DRG program indicators... [...sont élaborés par des personnes issues des communautés où le projet est mis en œuvre.]
Likert Scale	Most DRG program indicators... [...accurately reflect the realities in conflict affected communities.]	Most DRG program indicators... [...reflètent fidèlement les réalités des communautés touchées par les conflits.]

Question Type	Question - English	Question-French
Likert Scale	Most DRG program indicators... [...are chosen with due consideration to conflict sensitivity]	Most DRG program indicators... [...sont choisis en tenant compte de la sensibilité au conflit.]
Likert Scale	Most DRG program indicators... [...are predetermined by donors]	Most DRG program indicators... [...sont prédéterminés par les donateurs]
Likert Scale	Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: [DRG project timelines are too short to properly use participatory methods in M&E]	Indiquez dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes [Les délais des projets de DRG sont trop courts pour utiliser correctement les méthodes participatives dans le S&E.]
Likert Scale	Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: [DRG project budgets are insufficient to use participatory methods]	Indiquez dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes [Les budgets des projets de DRG sont insuffisants pour utiliser des méthodes participatives.]
Likert Scale	Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: [Ordinary community members frequently expect monetary incentives to participate in M&E activities]	Indiquez dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes [Les membres de la communauté attendent souvent des incitations financières pour participer aux activités de S&E.]
Likert Scale	Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: [I have had mostly positive experiences using participatory methods in M&E.]	Indiquez dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes [J'ai eu des expériences plutôt positives en utilisant les méthodes participatives dans le S&E.]

# Annex D: Key Informant Interview Questions

- Can you provide more detail about your experience as a DRG practitioner? Which organizations have you worked for and in what countries?
- In your survey you indicated that you've worked for a donor organization in the DRG space? Can you elaborate a bit more on your role and experience with that organization?
- In your experience, what types of M&E approaches are mostly commonly used in DRG programs?
- Can you share any examples/ anecdotes that demonstrate a contrast between DRG programs that have NOT included M&E approaches based on lived experiences of ordinary people in target communities and those programs that have?
- For this study, we have defined participatory approaches to M&E as those which allow ordinary community members to shape a project's M&E. Do you think this is an accurate definition? Why or why not?
- What are the hallmarks of a participatory approach to M&E for DRG programs?
- [For interviewees who have worked for donor organizations] Having worked for a donor organization funding DRG work, what was your impression of, or experience with participatory methods?
- [For interviewees who have worked for donor organizations] How do you think donors influence M&E choices? (Cite examples from their survey responses)
- Can you share any examples/ anecdotes of a time when a donor discouraged a participatory M&E approach? What were the reasons for such discouragement?
- Can you share any examples/ anecdotes of a donor actively encouraging a participatory M&E approach? What was that like?
- Should donors do anything differently to promote participatory M&E approaches? If so, what?
- What would you say is / was the typical process for creating project indicators or an M&E plan generally throughout your experience in DRG programs?
- [For those with experience in conflict-affected communities] How do you think participatory M&E approaches differ in conflict-affected communities?
- [For those with experience in conflict-affected communities] In your experience, what are the primary challenges to using participatory approaches to M&E in communities affected by violent conflict?
- How important is a general sense of trust among community members in target communities to the success of such approaches?
- How important is trust in the organization/practitioner by community members to the success of such approaches? Do you have any experiences to share in that regard?

- In your experience, does a sense of physical safety play a role in the success of participatory approaches to M&E for DRG programs?
- What are some challenges or obstacles that you personally encountered with participatory approaches in DRG programs?
- The questionnaire included a statement saying "I have had mostly positive experiences using participatory methods in M&E." And you indicated that you (agree/disagree). Can you expand on that with more detail? What made the experience (positive/negative)?