



# WORKSHOP

for the SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Tool Sheet

## The ladder of participation and support for volunteers

The members of the Train to Transform’ collective, of which Frères des Hommes (FDH) is a part, all support different groups of people with a focus on empowerment and collective action. In this context, the ladder of participation is a tool for assessing the space given to a particular group by those who supporting them: facilitators, staff members, etc.

Frères des Hommes is fortunate to have a network of volunteers who are committed to bringing about social change in France. These volunteers form local teams, each working within their own local areas. FDH’s paid staff, for their part, can both support these local initiatives launched by volunteers and take the lead in launching them. The participation scale can thus be used to illustrate the different approaches to supporting the volunteer network, depending on the nature and objectives of the initiative.

The Frères des Hommes team used the “Participation ladder” tool to reflect on the levels of participation in the various collective actions carried out by its volunteer groups. The tool showed that it is possible to position oneself at different levels of the ladder depending on the context of the action and the desired objective, whilst avoiding the lowest levels (manipulation, decoration, etc.).

The ladder can be also used to reflect on the current level of participation and the desired level of participation for a given activity.

The table below provides some examples of activities for certain levels of participation on this ladder.

	Level of participation	Examples in supporting volunteer dynamics
8	<b>Alliance</b> People living the area are free to organize themselves to carry out the initiative on their own way, but they choose to ally themselves with other stakeholders (public authorities, organisations, private sector actors) in order to take action. The initiative and the conduct on the activity are discussed jointly, but external actors recognize the particular expertise of the people living in the area where the action is taking place.	<i>Volunteers organise a film screening and discussion on agroecological initiatives in France. They invite the film director to speak, and ask an international partner of FDH to share a video account of initiatives abroad.</i>
7	<b>Self-management</b> People living in the local area are free to organise themselves to carry out the initiative themselves, in order to address the problem they face. They do not need	<i>A volunteer organises an awareness-raising campaign in their local area upon returning from a stay abroad.</i>

	support from outsiders and are in control of every stage of the process.	<i>Supported by other volunteers, they do not require resources beyond those they have devised themselves.</i>
<b>6</b>	<b>Partnership</b> The initiative is launched by people other than those living in the local area (political leaders, a company, a charity, etc.), but the local community is involved from the outset. The group works together to shape the initiative and ensures that the collective process runs smoothly.	<i>The staff inform the volunteers of the visit of an international partner to France. Together, they decide to organise a themed evening focusing on this partner's work. This event would not have taken place without the volunteers' participation.</i>
<b>5</b>	<b>Concertation</b> Before any action takes place, local residents are consulted to a public meeting. They are able to give their views and speak freely. Once a decision has been taken by those in charge, it may be subject to negotiation and adjustment.	<i>The staff team organises a communication campaign on the theme of gender-based violence and suggests that the volunteers organize photo exhibition on this topic around March the 8<sup>th</sup>. In this way, volunteers can influence the nature of the planned campaign.</i>
<b>4</b>	<b>Consultation</b> Before any action takes place, local residents are consulted at a public meeting. They can give their views and speak freely, but the decision is made by the authorities, and once made, it is non-negotiable.	<i>The staff team is organizing a day of collective action as part of its discussions regarding a new voluntary project. Volunteers are invited to take part in this initiative and are consulted on the day itself regarding the direction the organisation intends to take. Following this consultation, a new project is drawn up by the staff team.</i>
<b>3</b>	<b>Information</b> People who living in the area are informed of what is going to happen and what has already happened. For example : renovation work on this public building is going to take place. No opportunity is provided for them to respond to these announcement.	<i>The staff team is informing volunteers about the launch of a new volunteering opportunity within the organization. Current volunteers are free to choose whether or not to take part in these new initiatives, but the opportunity will be advertised to a new audience regardless.</i>
<b>2</b>	<b>Decoration</b> Refers to a situation in which people's participation is highlighted by those in power, in an indirect manner. For example, people stop to watch a festival event in the street; they dance. The organisers of this event them claim that everyone dancing supports the cause being championed at the event.	
<b>1</b>	<b>Manipulation</b> Describes a situation in which individuals are used to promote someone or a cause (political, social, ...). For example, this is the act of appearing in an election campaign video without one's knowledge, whilst out shopping.	

**Link to the article :** [The ladder of participation and support for volunteers - L'atelier de la transformation sociale](#)

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