

**ACSF-Oxfam Rural Resilience Project**

**Researcher Reference Guide**

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# **Rural Resilience Capabilities Measurement Framework Community-level Participatory Assessment Tool Researcher Reference Manual**

## **Rural Resilience Team**

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## (I) Overview

This reference manual outlines the community-level Participatory Assessment Tool of the Rural Resilience Capabilities Measurement Framework. It is intended to be applied in rural communities around the globe in order to facilitate a participatory process of community reflection contributing to resilience building, to generate unique community-level data regarding local resources for resilience, and to inform the development of a national-level indicator of resilience capabilities. The RRCM engages a capabilities approach that seeks to identify the options that are available to people rather than measure outcomes. It is particularly well-suited for research on resilience because resilience capacity is directly related to the capacity to pursue alternative options should existing mechanisms for livelihood construction, governance, and resource management be threatened by external shocks or dynamics internal to the social system.

The Assessment Tool involves three distinct research activities: 1) the generation of a community profile; 2) a participatory community meeting; 3) interviews with household representatives. The research involves a balance between inductive methods that allow new ideas to emerge and get at the subjective understandings

around resilience threats, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, and deductive methods that gather data on pre-determined categories as identified in the Rights-to-Resilience conceptual framework.

## (II) Background

The Rural Resilience Capabilities Measurement (RRCM) Framework has emerged out of ongoing collaborations between researchers at Cornell University, Clark University, and Oxfam America. The Cornell Indicator of Agrarian Development project<sup>1</sup> is oriented toward the development of measurement tools that contribute to a reimagining of rural development motivated by a critique of the idea of development as simply a matter of reducing scarcity and encouraging economic growth. These efforts are predicated on the argument that, today, ecological and social well-being and security take precedence over calculations of scarcity and increasingly hollow promises of growth (Wolford, et al. 2011). This work has been influenced by a second collaboration, the Rights to Resilience project that emerged out of Oxfam America's strategic initiative to envision how the resilience concept could be used to push the development agenda forward in socially and ecologically responsible ways, particularly in light of concurrent social and ecological crises and the observed rise in climatological and economic volatility. This initiative led to the development of the Rights to Resilience framework, a rights-based approach that brings power, rights, and agency into social-ecological resilience thinking (Walsh-Dilley, Wolford, and McCarthy 2013).

### *Resilience, and the Rights-to-Resilience framework*

Resilience is an increasingly popular framework for thinking about rural development, particularly among development agencies, policy makers, and practitioners. It is a response to the perception that increased volatility—both social and ecological—is a key challenge for development, and that improving wellbeing will necessarily require a greater ability to anticipate, respond to, and cope with episodic shocks and long-term structural conditions of social and ecological change. Resilience frameworks focus on understanding the capacity of local communities to respond to, negotiate, and transform shocks such that disturbances do not initiate a downward spiral and may even provide opportunities for improvement.

The concept of resilience has been developed in a number of different disciplines, but the most developed and influential framework for rural development work has emerged out of attempts to understand the dynamics of social-ecological systems. This approach builds on ideas from ecology, which has moved from a focus on equilibrium and persistence to incorporate the dynamic interplay of persistence,

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adaptability, and transformability across multiple spatial and temporal scales. The basic assumptions underpinning social-ecological resilience are: 1) humans and nature are inextricably linked in interdependent systems; 2) there are multiple interrelated systems across different special and temporal scales; and 3) systems vary over time, with unexpected and unpredictable disturbances influencing the direction of change.

From this perspective, development work should contribute towards building the adaptive capacity of vulnerable populations. The literature suggests that adaptive capacity is positively related to:

- 1) A high degree of diversity, broadly defined, including ecological diversity as well as diversity of livelihood strategies and opportunities.
- 2) A strong capacity to learn, including learning from the past as well as the ability to utilize a variety of knowledge sources towards creating novel solutions and creative coping strategies.
- 3) Effective governance, institutions, and control mechanisms; decentralized and adaptive governance capacity is a strong theme within the resilience literature.
- 4) Preparedness planning and readiness—including instituting processes, pathways, and plans through which coping can take place.
- 5) A high degree of equity and the equitable distribution of risks.
- 6) Shared social values and ethics—group with higher degrees of trust are better able to reach agreement and distribute resources during crisis. Dense social networks and social solidarity contribute to adaptive capacity.

In the Rights-to-Resilience framework, resilience is defined as “the process of learning, organization, and adaptation taking place across scales that enable people to respond to and cope with internal and external stresses in ways that allow them to build and defend healthy, happy, and meaningful lives”. That is, resilience is recognized as an ongoing process rather than an outcome that is easily measured. A rights-based approach to resilience recognizes that the adaptive capacity of humans is contingent upon the set of resources they have access to, the quality and quantity of these resources, and the nature of this access. To this end, the RRCM framework seeks to identify the resources that contribute to building the capabilities that enable rural resilience.

#### *The Rural Resilience Capabilities Measurement Framework*

The RRCM Framework includes two measurement tools: a national level indicator and a community level participatory assessment tool. They are both based on a general model that outlines five sets or categories of capabilities that we have identified as critical for building resilience. These categories include: 1) Effective Adaptive Governance; 2) Civic Capacity; 3) Natural Resources; 4) Resources for Economic Exchange; and 5) Opportunities for Social Learning.

General Model:

*Effective governance* is necessary for building adaptive capacity on many levels. Decentralized and local adaptive governance is a strong theme running through the resilience literature. Governance that contributes to resilience is adaptive, flexible, and closely connected to the realities on the ground. It should be inclusive, and involve real opportunities for and high levels of democratic engagement and participation. Moreover, governing structures and civic institutions must protect effective access to and exercise of the resources people need to build adaptive capacity.

*Civic capacity* reflects the strength and density of civic institutions and associations. Such institutions play an important role in providing spaces for civic engagement and the formation of social ties—which help to forge and reproduce shared social values. They also play an important role in the exchange and translation of knowledge between stakeholders. Associations of all sorts contribute to building strong civic capacity.

*Natural Resources* are an important component of resilience thinking since the framework recognizes that ecological and social systems are inextricably linked. The land and environment where agricultural production takes place, and where rural life is situated, is perhaps the most fundamental building block of rural wellbeing, and rights to natural resources, particularly land and water, are necessary to develop rural livelihood security. Thus, the nature of access to natural resources, and the quality of those resources, are important determinants of rural resilience.

*Resources for Economic Exchange* are a significant contributor to rural resilience. The people that are most vulnerable are those that lack access to economic resources, including, but not limited to, reliable and effective markets. Markets contribute to resilience building when they work for the poor, and do not exploit or disadvantage them in favor of urban or corporate elites. However, in addition to market, the capabilities for resilience are improved when there are a diversity of livelihood mechanisms, including local or regional markets and non-market cooperative or redistributive mechanisms.

*Opportunities for Social Learning* are an important contributor to resilience because they provide mechanisms through which knowledge can be harnessed and shared and because learning improves creative capacities. Education also improves the ability to predict and prepare for shocks. Learning can take place in a variety of settings, including formal and informal education, through producer networks or extension services, through apprenticeships and intergenerational learning networks.

The National Resilience Capabilities Index and the Participatory Assessment Tool are still in development, and we anticipate this to be an iterative development

process between the two tools. The national indicator makes use of secondary data already available, identifying 3-4 measures within each category. This will generate a measure that will be comparable across nations, which will have the advantage of decomposing resilience capabilities into their respective categories. That is, this will provide a tool that development practitioners and policy makers can use to identify and target certain arenas for intervention.

The initial research in nine rural communities during the summer of 2013 will help us to refine the RRCM framework and contribute to the development of the national level indicator. The overarching goals for this summer research are three-fold: 1) generating feedback on the RRCM Framework and helping to develop the participatory assessment tool to make it more widely useful and available; 2) generating unique community level data on the subjective perspectives about resilience and what local capabilities for resilience already exist and what resources are harnessed for resilience; and 3) facilitating a participatory process with action research that contributes to the ability of communities to develop crisis readiness and undertake preparedness planning.

### (III) Community Research Methods

There are four distinct activities involved in the Participatory Community Assessment:

- 1) the generation of a Community Profile, based upon the five categories of resilience capabilities;
- 2) the community participation component, involving a community discussion about the threats, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities regarding resilience that the community faces;
- 3) a set of household-level interviews that is based largely on the five categories, but includes some of the same type of questions regarding subjective understandings of community resilience capabilities;
- 4) a presentation of preliminary research findings to the community.

#### *Community Profile*

Each researcher will generate a community profile that identifies and evaluates community resources within the five capabilities categories. The methods for the community profile will vary; researchers can make use of direct and participant observation, key informant interviews, or other methods most suited for the context. Since it is expected that each Researcher will have an ongoing relationship with the field site, we also expect that much of the information required for the Community Profile will already be known by the Researcher.

A Community Profile Guide is located in Appendix I. It identifies the types of questions that should be answered in the Community Profile. However, the context of each community is unique, so the Community Profile Guide is neither exhaustive nor strictly relevant to each community.

### *Participatory Community Meetings*

In the Community Meetings, the researcher will convene a participatory process that allows community members to 1) subjectively define and reflect upon the nature and importance of resilience, the conditions necessary to build it, and how the community exercises resilience capabilities; and 2) identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with local resilience capabilities. The protocol for these participatory meetings is in Appendix II. One goal of the Participatory Community Meeting is to allow new ideas to emerge in an inductive fashion, and the open-ended questions of the protocol have been designed with this in mind. This is the least structured component of the Participatory Assessment Tool; we are hoping this will allow for novel and creative ideas to emerge that can contribute to our framework and make it more robust and grounded. We also hope that this Participatory Process will facilitate a process whereby communities improve disaster planning and readiness; thus, the Participatory Community Meeting is intended to directly serve both the academic research and the community.

We expect Researchers to convene 1-2 community meetings; if there is not wide attendance, and if attendance is skewed and certain groups are not present, the Researcher should seek to convene meetings with the missing groups.

It is difficult to audio record such group meetings. The Researcher should keep all of the notes made at the meeting— the notes from each group written on a flip pad or on a chalk board. The Researcher should record detailed field notes directly after the meeting, recording the gist of the conversation, who participated (number, gender, etc.), and outline the results from the small groups. The Researcher should also work to categorize and summarize the Threats, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, as this will be a principle component of the presentation of preliminary findings to the community.

### *Household Interviews*

Researchers will undertake at least 10 interviews with individuals or households. These interviews will be open-ended, but should follow the interview guide located in Appendix III. The interviews should be audio recorded, for later transcription, and the Researcher should write up field notes from memory after the interview.

The consent process must be adhered to, and consent documented on the consent form.

### *Presentation of Research Findings*

We intend to return research findings to the field sites in two ways. First, Researchers will complete a presentation of preliminary research finding to the community before they leave the field site. Secondly, the final reports that each

Researcher completes will be translated into the local language and submitted to the community.

The presentation of preliminary research should be made in whichever form the Researcher deems most suitable to the community. This can consist of a second community meeting, where a brief presentation is made and results discussed. Such a method may generate additional helpful data. The presentation may also consist of a poster, or a short presentation to the leadership council. This presentation is made at the prerogative of the Researcher.

#### (IV) Data

The data generated through the application of the Participatory Assessment Tool will be submitted to the project team, who will then be able to use it in any subsequent publications. This will include: a Community Resilience Capabilities Report; field notes; interview transcription; etc. Researchers will have authorship of their own Community Resilience Capability Reports, and will be acknowledged in the Project Summary and any publications that emerge out of this project.

#### (V) Expectations of ACSF-Oxfam Rural Resilience Grantees

1. Preparing for the field: training session, complete IRB training; assist in the preparation of the IRB amendment.
2. Undertake participatory research in communities during the summer of 2013
  - a. Travel plans by end of May
  - b. Communicate with research team while in the field
3. Report that includes:
  - a. Community resilience profile, including an outline of the five key sets of resources.
  - b. Describe the participatory assessment process (community meeting), and summarizes the data gathered.
  - c. Summarize household data
  - d. Images, including maps, photos of the community meetings or the community worksheets
  - e. In a separate section: Reflections on the process, the usefulness of the instruments, what should be added, any particular surprises, the most useful part of the community assessment, etc.
  - f. Consent forms
  - g. Interview transcripts
  - h. Field notes
4. Present research findings to community
5. Final workshop at Cornell.



## Appendix I

### Community Profile Guide

\* To generate a general description/understanding of the key resources for resilience in the community.

#### Governance

- How does the local governance structure work? How are leaders appointed? Who can become leader? Responsibility of leaders? Who makes decisions regarding the election of leaders? To whom and how are leaders accountable?
- What is the overall level of participation in community governance? What percentage of the community members attend community meetings? What percentage exercise the voting rights that they have? Who participates? Who is excluded?
- What recourse to community members have if they are unsatisfied with their leadership?
- How is local governance connected to regional and national level governance? What resources does the community receive from regional and national level governments? How do community members/leader influence regional and national level governance?

#### Civic Capacity

- What local organizations and associations are present in the community? Which are the most important, and what services/opportunities do they provide? How many people are involved in each organization? Where do they meet?
  - How are organizations/association established? How do they attract members?
  - How are local associations linked with associations in different locations or regional, national, or global associations?
  - Question about protests/social movements
  - Presence of non-local organizations? What is their role and how do they function locally?
  - Who participates? Who is excluded?
- List of possible civic associations: mother's clubs, producers clubs, unions, farmers associations, sports teams, religious groups, social movement groups...

#### Natural Resources

- Land: who controls access, rules of tenure/ownership, is it arable, quality? What it is used for? How are land use decisions made? How are conflicts settled?
- Water: how do people gain access to water and who controls access? Is it potable? Do they irrigate? How are irrigation decisions made? How are watersheds managed and maintained?
- Mining or deforestation? How are decisions made?
- Who has access to recourses/who doesn't?

### Economic resources

- Number and description of market places. What is exchanged? Who does the buying and selling?
- How are producers and consumers in this community connected to regional, national, and global markets? How do local products reach these markets? How do local consumers access and purchase goods?
- Are labor markets locally accessible? How do labor markets work?
- Non-market forms of exchange: cooperative labor sharing? Gift-giving? Reciprocal exchange? Barter? Redistribution? Commons?
- Who is connected to markets? Who isn't?

### Social learning

- Local formal education opportunities?
- Local informal education?
- Presence of extension agents?
- Knowledge sharing?
- How do local people gain information about farming and livelihoods? Radio, TV, newspapers or other texts, internet, cell phones, extension agents, NGOs, participate in trainings locally, participate in trainings outside of the community, farmer-farmer knowledge transfer?
- Who gets to participate, why? Who doesn't?

## Appendix II

### **Participatory Community Meetings Protocol**

\*to generate a broader understanding of the strengths, opportunities, and challenges for generating local resilience and of the various threats to resilience.

#### **Oral Informed Consent**

##### **General Discussion:**

What makes people resilient? What do we need to be resilient? What does resilience mean? [a series of questions to begin to get people thinking about resilience, and developing a subjective definition]

-Researcher writes basic notes on the flip board as people talk.

**Small groups, each group addresses one of the following: [maybe breaking up into groups isn't such a good idea? Literacy; maybe they won't all be able to follow the directions...]**

Each group member receives a large piece of paper to keep notes from their discussion.

- (1) What threats to our livelihoods do we face? What changes threaten our ability to continue our way of life? What do we expect will threaten our way of life in the near future? (Threats)
- (2) What resources do we already have that help make us more resilience and able to cope with these threats? How do we respond to these threats? (Strengths)
- (3) What limits our ability to respond to these threats? In what ways do we remain susceptible to these threats? (Weaknesses)
- (4) What can we do to build greater resilience? How can we harness our strengths to address the threats and weaknesses we experience? What else do we need to build resilience? How could we get these resources? (Opportunities)

##### **Large Group Discussion:**

[On a large board, THREATS, WEAKNESSES, STRENGTHS, OPPORTINITIES with lots of space to write underneath.]

[Reporting back from each group, write on board.]

Ask them about governance, local civic associations, economic resources, natural resources, and learning capacity if this is not already included: What about

government (local, regional, national)? Is this a strengths, weakness, threat, or opportunity? [etc.]

## Appendix III

### Household Interview Guide

1. Individual/Household Interviews (established protocol)
  - a. Basic information
    - i. Name, age, occupation, number of HH members, education level, type of housing/income level?
  - b. Governance
    - i. Do you participate in local government? In what capacity?
    - ii. Do you vote?
    - iii. Does participation make a difference?
    - iv. Can you trust local governments to act in your own interest and make good decisions?
    - v. Can you trust regional/national government to act in your interest?
    - vi. Do you have a say in how natural resources are managed?
  - c. Civic
    - i. Do you participate in any civic organizations? (Examples: clubs, associations, church, sports teams, unions)
      1. If yes, what kind of group? Local, regional, national, international?
      2. Type and extent of involvement?
    - ii. What types of organizations are present in your community?
      1. Are organizations able to freely operate or are their local, regional, or national restrictions on their operation?
      2. What role do these organizations play in the local community (culture, education, environment, governance, economic?)
      3. What is your general assessment of these organization? Are they good for the community or detrimental?
    - iii. Have you ever engaged in protest? What kind?
  - d. Natural Resources
    - i. What are the most important natural resources that you use in your daily life?
    - ii. Do you have access to any land? How much? What do you do with it?
      1. Quality of the land? Problems associated with quality?
    - iii. How do you access water? Do you have sufficient quantity and quality of water?
    - iv. Do you have an concerns about the environment that you live in?
  - e. Economic Resources
    - i. How do you make a living?
      1. Employment, what kind?
      2. Agriculture, what kind?

- ii. Where do you acquire the food you eat? How do you acquire it? (Money, credit, barter, reciprocity, grow it self, exchange, redistribution, charity...)
  - iii. Do you acquire resources for living without the use of money? How? Is this an important aspect of how you make a living?
- f. Social learning
  - i. What level of education have you achieved? Why this level?
  - ii. Any other sources of education? Informal, workshops, local community schools?
  - iii. If you wanted to learn new skills, what would you do?
- g. What are the most important resources that you use to deal with threats/problems/changes that take place in the world?
- h. What resources do you wish you had in light of a changing world?

References Cited:

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