

Participatory
Vulnerability
Analysis and
Action



Participatory

Communities – working together with state institutions and other stakeholders – engage in analysis, decision making and policy formulation...

Vulnerability

... on issues that affect their power to prevent, mitigate and cope with disasters.

Analysis

They identify their vulnerabilities, and analyse them and their causes in a way that everyone can understand. Equipped with this new understanding, they then build on past experience, traditional knowledge and practices to gain insights which help them plan and take...

Action!

Communities mobilise and organise to engage duty bearers and address the root causes of vulnerability and the dynamic pressures that lead to them.

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Preface

ActionAid's first participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) guide, written in 2004, was the result of a lot of thinking and action. PVA evolved from a workshop convened by ActionAid in the UK in 2000. The workshop recognised the importance of vulnerability in development and emergency-related work and identified a gap in translating the knowledge of vulnerability into practice. Specific areas included how to: build community resilience to disasters; link emergencies and development; influence policy; and motivate the most vulnerable. The workshop agreed to develop a guide to PVA that would be used by field staff. In conjunction with Swansea University's Centre for Development Studies, ActionAid consequently undertook a series of studies in Bangladesh, India and Ghana. A field test conducted in The Gambia in May 2003 culminated in the formulation of the first PVA guide.

A few years on, PVA is widely used by ActionAid and its partners to bring communities together with government institutions and other relevant stakeholders – including armed factions in conflict situations – to address vulnerabilities and ensure the right to human security. Over the past few years, many people have contributed their ideas and energies to improving the methodology, though a particular mention should go to Roger Yates, the members of the international emergencies and conflict team and all the country programme staff who contributed to the roll-out and subsequent review of this guide.

Communities all over the world have been involved in PVA. It has been used both for prevention work and in the aftermath of disasters, to tackle a wide range of vulnerabilities related to floods, hurricanes, food security, epidemics and violence against women. PVA was also used extensively as the starting point of the disaster risk reduction through schools (DRRS) programme, which covered seven countries and explored the role of children, their parents and their carers in reducing vulnerabilities.

There is a growing body of experience on the practical use of PVA – including participatory videos

done by communities (for example, in Nepal). PVA has also generated powerful knowledge for effective advocacy, which has translated into action with international institutions (for example, with the UN on the DRRS project).

We have achieved a lot, and are continuously learning from our mistakes. Under the original vision, PVA was intended as an empowering process that motivates people to take action. However, experience has shown that PVA is often seen as another form of participatory rural appraisal that can be 'applied' in short workshops with a community, spanning only a few days. When PVA has been seen simply as an opportunity to assess vulnerability and extract information, it has led to weak plans and weak follow up. There have been times when communities were unable to demand action from their government on their joint plans and we fell short of supporting them, making them feel more isolated. At other times, advocacy work was not led by communities and we, the international NGO, took the limelight instead. In so doing, we deprived them of their voice and missed an opportunity to make their achievements stand out.

So, although PVA has become an important aspect of ActionAid's work, some feel that it has failed to fulfil its potential. We must therefore return to the original vision and refocus the process to ensure that analysis always leads to action. We must always think of PVA as participatory vulnerability analysis and action, with the emphasis on action. If we succeed, we will create long-term platforms for engagement with government which will become part of wider 'people, power and change' deliberations within ActionAid's global monitoring framework.

This guide therefore aims to build on our experiences to date and further disseminate the PVA way of thinking and working. It does not provide step-by-step guidance; PVA needs to adapt to the local context and therefore cannot be prescribed.

We are aware that many challenges lie ahead, and

that there are countless opportunities to adapt PVA across our work. Climate change means that communities are experiencing more and different vulnerabilities, so we have started to adapt PVA to climate change work. We must also make PVA more conflict-sensitive and ensure it focuses on protection in order to respond to vulnerability in conflict situations. We are also aware that PVA can be a powerful tool for advancing women's rights.

Colleagues across ActionAid are working on methodologies and approaches – such as STAR (Societies tackling AIDS through rights), ELBAG (economic literacy and budget accountability in governance) and the Reflect approach to adult literacy – which closely resemble PVA. Among other factors, these approaches insist that communities: understand their own vulnerabilities; know they have a right to be protected from them; be active agents in dealing with their vulnerabilities, but are not left alone; and join forces with civil society and government institutions to overcome these vulnerabilities. These approaches serve to complement and enrich PVA, and vice versa.

We strongly believe that PVA should not be left in the hands of those working on conflict and emergencies, but rather that it should be used across all aspects of relief and development work. We also believe that PVA should not necessarily be facilitated by international NGOs. Risk reduction and prevention should always be an integral part of all our work with communities. The fundamental right of human security can only be enacted by thinking ahead to address vulnerabilities, together.

Unnikrishnan PV
November 2008

What is PVA?

Participatory vulnerability analysis and action (PVA) is not a predefined approach – it is a way of working and thinking. Those working for change today must always consider what could disrupt this change tomorrow. When the lives, livelihoods and rights of people living in poverty are at stake, thinking ahead is not a luxury – it is a necessity. Poor people are most exposed to hazards, and any changes they achieve through their own action are often fragile ones. Unless they are in a position to deal with hazards, they are unlikely to realise their desire and right to human security, to a life free from want and fear.

PVA recognises that communities exposed to hazards must be the main actors in addressing these hazards. They live with risks, and know them well. They already have valuable strategies and knowledge to address these risks, but they cannot do it alone. The causes of vulnerability run deep and are often out of a community's reach. So PVA brings together communities with representatives of their local and national governments – who are responsible for guaranteeing their citizens' right to human security – as well as other actors, such as international institutions. They must all then think and learn together how to best address vulnerabilities. They must act together and hold each other accountable.

It is jokingly said that the best result of work to reduce risk is “nothing”, because, while conflicts and disasters are visible and loud, prevention is quiet and unseen. Stronger embankments ensure that a river will not flood. If schools are safer, nothing will happen to children and their parents. Awareness of climate change might avoid famine. Talks with factions can prevent violence. But we should make sure that this “nothing” does not go unnoticed. A smooth life, free from fear and shocks, is a major achievement for a vulnerable community.

PVA work is not only about “preventing something from happening”: it is also about changing the lives of people as they engage with the PVA process. Communities involved in PVA in the aftermath of a disaster will experience the healing power of a collective process that helps them overcome their

distress while rebuilding their confidence in their own power to act. Communities that engage in analysis and action on vulnerability to accompany their development process will build stronger links and accountabilities with their government and institutions: a most valuable asset in realising their rights.

PVA must not only reduce the risk faced by communities “tomorrow”; it must start to change people's lives today.

The starting points of PVA

- It has a right-based focus and a bottom-up, people-centred ideology. PVA uses a framework and participatory tools to analyse and address the causes of vulnerability.
- All individuals have a fundamental right to human security (freedom from fear and want) and should be protected from hazards and disasters. Governments and institutions must assist the most vulnerable communities to realise this right.
- Reducing the risk of disasters requires forward thinking and action: to assess potential risk, analyse vulnerabilities, question existing response mechanisms and take concrete action. PVA cuts across and links traditional long-term development and emergency work.
- Citizens must have power and active agency: individuals and communities are not helpless, passive beneficiaries. Those who are vulnerable to and hit by disasters – particularly poor and marginalised people – can and must act on the vulnerabilities they face. As citizens, they must have the power to call on their government to support them in this pursuit and a say on the policies and practices put in place to reduce their vulnerabilities. They must also demand accountability on these.
- Local knowledge and practices are invaluable: communities know their local conditions; they have valuable traditional knowledge on how to prevent and cope with disasters and are best placed to judge what course of action can ultimately reduce their risk. PVA enables people to break down the complexities of their own vulnerability and harvest their own knowledge and practices to take action. And when external knowledge and practices are brought in, PVA helps to contextualise them.
- A multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Addressing vulnerability is a complex process, and no individual group or agency can do it alone. It requires good planning, strategic vision, strong participation and awareness by all stakeholders. As the root causes and solutions to vulnerability are often located or controlled outside the community, actions will often need to take place simultaneously and on multiple levels. This is why PVA brings together different stakeholders acting at local, district, regional, national and international levels. But vulnerable and marginalised communities always remain at the centre of this work.

What can PVA do for communities?

PVA is a good way to discuss what we have been doing about hazards and disasters. We looked at our experience and knowledge. We looked at what worked and what didn't work. Yes, we learnt a few things from the outsiders who came in to work with us (the NGO, the government), but we also showed them that not all their ideas really work in our place. They had to recognise that we had lot of valuable knowledge and wisdom: they accepted ideas from us and changed their plans.

The PVA included very clear and simple explanations of our rights, of existing policies and of the institutions that are there to serve us... I did not know all this! We also found out that some existing policies need some changes. We will discuss this with our MP (member of parliament).

I belong to a very poor minority community. We are always forgotten. When NGO and government officials come, they never talk to us, they only talk to the community leaders. But they don't know exactly what we go through! This time it was different. Those running the PVA looked for us. They made a big effort to do so: we work during the day, so they stayed at night in our houses. They helped us to explain our lives, ideas and worries to the rest of the community. We were so happy to see that our suggestions were accepted in the plan! Now we are better off. We also feel much more a part of the community – and stronger, too. We are even in the delegation that will talk to the government. [WHO IS SAYING THIS?]

Grown-ups never used to care about what we had to say... Then we ran a PVA in our school. Our teachers and parents were surprised to see how much we knew about vulnerability. They understood that they should take us seriously. And they were so surprised when they saw that we actually did all the cool activities we put in our plan!

We understood that, as a community, we can and must think ahead. We can do something to reduce our vulnerability. But we also learnt that we should not be left alone! During the PVA we worked together with the government, and made a common plan with the district. We are making progress. Trust me on this! I am part of the monitoring committee!

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I didn't know how to use a camera, but the NGO gave me some training. So we made a video about all the issues we discussed in the PVA. I also interviewed many people in the village... Some clips were even broadcast on national TV! Because we understand our vulnerabilities better, we can explain them better to outsiders. We have hard facts, evidence and powerful stories. We started to work with some journalists; a few national papers have already published articles about us. I would like to be a journalist myself! As a cyber café opened in the town nearby, I am thinking of starting a blog on what we are doing.

We did timelines, maps, problem trees and ranking matrices. We used them to put down facts, share our views and learn from our own experience. We had never looked so deeply at our vulnerability. I feel we learnt a lot, and can now cope better.

We got together with other communities: we heard their stories and learnt from their experience. Now we are working together with them.

We did a timeline, and told our stories. It was painful to think back at how disasters hit my family and my community. I felt so powerless... I thought: "Why bother? Nothing will ever change. This is just God's will". But I did not want to upset the NGO people, so I stayed. We started to discuss why disasters happen. Little by little, I started to see that something could be done. Some young girls asked me what I did to survive when disaster struck. I hope my story will help them if something like this happens again. We made a good plan. Maybe this time something can change.

We did a stakeholder analysis and understood that nothing will really change until the national government takes action. But we also got a clearer idea of how to influence them, how to check their plans and budgets. We know who to meet to voice our concerns, and learnt that some international agencies can push our government. We received support to send a representative of this district to an international meeting with them.

We joined the women's focus group. With no men around, we could talk freely about our common issues. As we put our ideas together we felt stronger, and ready to discuss them with the men. My husband told me that he never realised how much we are going through and how much we are already doing. We also learnt that there are government departments and other groups in charge of women's issues. We want to meet them.



What can PVA do for government institutions?



I am an extension worker with the local district. I usually advise communities about new and better techniques. I thought I was the expert, and that they knew little. But this PVA opened my eyes. I was part of the PVA team, and instead of my usual quick visits, I sat and stayed with them. Participatory tools – such as seasonal calendars and resource maps – really helped us have constructive discussions on concrete issues. I discovered that the communities know a lot about hazards: they know how to deal with them and have already done a lot with their very limited resources. I learnt many things, and later shared some of their knowledge with other communities!

Now we understand each other better, and I can offer more relevant advice. I can support them in the new activities they already started. I think I will continue to use this approach in my own work!



I am the head of the district. The NGO people met us and explained the process very clearly. We chose some good officers to be part of the PVAA team – they were given good training and learnt some interesting techniques. After visiting a few communities they came back with some good data and information about the district, which will be very useful to us.

The planning process was good. The PVA team helped the communities put a joint plan together, and we then had a meeting to discuss it. In the meeting we learnt a lot about the communities' problems and this information will really help us. But we also informed them of some initiatives we had done that they were not aware of, such as trainings and distributions.

We agreed about many of the activities in their plan, but we also had to explain that we did not have the budget or the capacity to do some of them. Maybe together we can influence the national government to support us. We did not know that the government must have a plan on disaster risk reduction – this might be a good starting point to get better resourced!

We established further meetings to check progress on the plan. The community asked us to write the plan on a big board so that everyone could see it. They also want to see information about budget and expenses. It is tough for us, but we know that it is their right to have this information.



I am a representative of the national government. This PVA process has been useful to us. For a start, I must admit that we did not know much about international frameworks, such as the Hyogo Framework for Action. Nor were we really clear on how to translate these into practice. The support of an expert NGO has therefore helped us do this.

The NGO also proposed to involve the government in a series of consultations with local people on disaster risk reduction, starting in few remote districts. They provided some expert facilitators and trainers, and we provided the venues and ensured that key people – such as extension workers, district and province functionaries – could participate. The local-level consultation had already produced some plans for action. We then consolidated these in a provincial-level meeting. We are discussing now how to best add some of the findings to our national plans.

What can PVA do for other stakeholders?



I am a journalist. I work closely with communities involved in PVA because I can write some good articles about them.

They are not the usual lot, brought by some NGO to protest with placards in front of an office without knowing why!

They really know what they are doing. They put strong facts together and serious requests. They also started doing good things in the district.

Their achievements help me to portray them in a good light when I write about them. They are now asking for some changes in national policy, and they are denouncing episodes of corruption. I want to continue to support them in my work and give them good exposure in the national press.



I work in the headquarters of an international company. We had trouble because some villagers accused us of drying out their water sources. An NGO started to work with them. They did some water work together with the local government, but they also started to put pressure on us. Villagers and the NGO put together some strong analysis on the impact that our factory had on them, and persuaded the government to increase controls. They also used the new environmental law, and threatened to take us to court. We made some concessions, but it was not enough. These villagers got together with other people affected by our factories. They made a video and put it on the internet. The most vocal villagers started to join protests abroad, and in the end we had to give up, because we were getting too much bad press. We are now negotiating a way forward with the communities and the government.

I am the local chief of the anti-government faction. The NGO had to negotiate access with us to work here. We control the area and the government has no power here. We demanded to know what was discussed, and they promised they would organise a meeting with us. Some villagers came together with the NGO people. They explained how the conflict is affecting them and they proposed some actions we could do.

The main problem for their women is rape. Some of our soldiers do this. I don't approve on this practice, but I didn't do much to stop it until now. We understood that, if we want to be seen as good leaders, we need to take care that the community is protected. I promised that, as a start, I would punish the soldiers who are raping women.



I am an NGO fieldworker. I thought I knew about PRA, but this time it was different. We used it more rigorously, so the analysis was stronger. We cross-checked the maps and timelines produced by different groups, and brought in some statistics to verify them with the communities. In the end we had better information than we would have done if we had called in a consultant! People discussed hard facts, rather than their own preconceptions, and this was really useful.

Working with the district was hard. The first meeting – to present the plan – went well, but after a few months the community started complaining that the government was not really doing anything. We had to work hard to persuade the government that PVA was a serious business. Usually we have no issues with the district, but this time we demanded stronger accountability from them.

At the beginning I questioned why we were spending so much time worrying about vulnerabilities when there are so many problems that need resolving now. But I soon realised how much of the community's work was disrupted by disasters; how many resources were lost. And I also saw that it is possible to do prevention work while still working on our usual projects. It only requires thinking ahead, and little changes in what we are doing to make change last.



Understanding risk

Individuals and communities are at risk. They are constantly exposed to hazards – both natural, such as storms, droughts, epidemics and earthquakes and man-made, such as conflict, violence and environmental transformations. Disaster happens when a hazard severely impacts on the lives of people, and threatens human life and wellbeing. It can come on all of a sudden – which is the case in rapid onset disasters such as earthquakes – or can build up over a longer time, as happens in slow onset disasters such as famine.

However, it is usually possible to have some influence over the effects of hazards. The three levels to reducing risk are:

- **prevention:** it is sometimes possible to prevent them altogether
- **mitigation:** containing the negative effects when they do happen
- **adaptation:** when individuals and communities find ways to protect themselves and minimise damage. They learn to adapt and cope better, and to develop resilience. In some cases they can even transform potential hazards into positive assets – for example, pastoralists in eastern Africa switched from rearing cattle to camels in response to drought, while communities in flood-prone parts of Bangladesh shifted from keeping poultry to ducks, which can survive floods and still provide regular income in the form of eggs and meat.

In development jargon, disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a relatively new concept. It encompasses prevention and mitigation of – and preparedness for – disasters. The term is mostly used in connection to natural disasters, and the international community has developed frameworks for action on DRR, such as the Hyogo framework, to this end.

However, risk reduction should not only apply to natural disasters, but also to complex situations – such as conflict, marginalisation and violence – where man-made threats are at play. Notwithstanding the cause of the risk or disaster, every individual and community has a fundamental right to protection and human security.



Rather than merely identifying hazards, one should measure the risk they pose to individuals and communities. Risk is a probability which measures how likely a disaster is to strike and the effect it will have on people. Risk is therefore determined by:

- the **presence** of hazards
- **exposure:** the number of people likely to be affected, and the extent to which they are affected
- **vulnerability:** whether individuals or communities are strong enough to prevent a disaster or to contain its negative effects
- **coping capacity or resilience:** the ability to adapt or react to a disaster when it strikes. Coping capacities and resilience are often looked at as a component of vulnerability.

Reducing vulnerability

The strength and power of individuals and communities in the face of hazards are key to reducing risk.

Individuals and communities are **vulnerable** when they **lack the power** to prevent, resist, cope with and recover from a disaster.

PVA works towards reducing vulnerability of individuals and communities. It is best seen not as a standalone activity, but as a process that accompanies and strengthens broader actions undertaken by a community to overcome poverty and marginalisation. PVA should always accompany development activities in risk-prone areas, to prevent disasters. It can also be used after disaster strikes, to support recovery while reducing the likelihood of the disaster happening again. PVA seeks to build the power of a community to act on vulnerability in the following four steps:

1. Bringing together different stakeholders



The *causes* of vulnerability are often found outside a community. Vulnerabilities are complex, and many different actors must be involved in addressing them. A good PVA will therefore:

- bring together communities with government representatives, starting at the local level
- reach out to provincial and national government, and to international institutions if necessary
- continuously consider which other key actors could help bring about change – for example, state departments, donors, the media, social movements, networks, civil society groups – and ensure they are informed, involved, lobbied and made accountable.

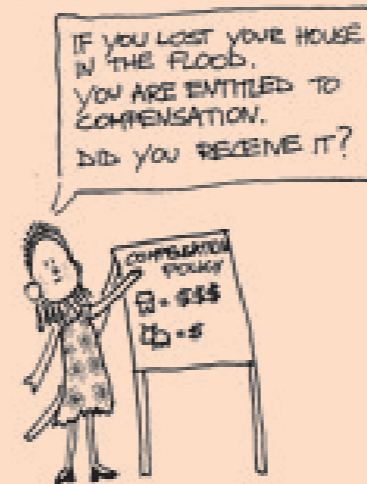
2. Analysing and understanding vulnerability, starting from community knowledge and experience



Those facing hardships in their everyday life might not have the space to address things that could happen in the future. Their vulnerability can look too big to overcome, and concerns about risk can often be left aside. PVA leads communities and other actors to understand that vulnerability can and must be tackled. Community-centred analysis will therefore:

- *look back* and understand who was affected by disasters in the past, and why
- *predict* who is likely to be affected in the future, and why
- *share* traditional knowledge and experience, *complementing* it with learning from communities experiencing similar threats and/or relevant scientific knowledge (eg on climate change).

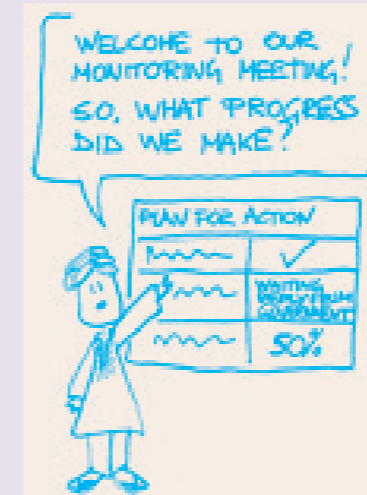
3. Examining and challenging existing policies and practices



Communities must act, but state institutions also have roles and responsibilities – in formulating and implementing policies and laws; creating and running institutions; undertaking direct action (eg through public works); and allocating resources and budgets. All this should be transparently done and communicated to citizens. A good PVA will therefore:

- inform citizens – simply and clearly – about their rights, their entitlements and existing policies and institutions
- support citizens to check whether law, policies and institutions adequately respond to the vulnerabilities they face
- help citizens access and question institutions, as well as public plans and budgets.

4. Formulating a plan of action and acting on it!



Analysis disconnected from action does not lead anywhere. The PVA process looks at what was done in the past and what can be done in the future. It produces plans for action – then implements them and checks their progress. The minimum starting point for a PVA is a joint plan drawn up by communities and district officials. It should then move towards provincial, national or international plans for action.

Communities exposed to risk will always be the main actors at the centre of the process. They will be involved in direct action and make other actors accountable to their commitments, joining forces with others to advocate for changes in policies and practices.

What makes individuals and communities vulnerable?

Assessing vulnerability is not an easy task. Vulnerability is dynamic; it changes in time, and from group to group. It might be invisible or forgotten in everyday life, as it involves thinking forward; thinking “what if”. But risk is always around the corner – especially for people living in poverty and for marginalised communities. They need to think constantly about risk, if they are to be protected from shocks.

Not all members of a community will be equally vulnerable. When looking at vulnerability within a community, it is important to ensure that the most vulnerable groups and individuals are not forgotten or left out. The following is a list of some of the factors that are at play in determining the power people have to prevent, resist, cope with and recover from disaster. These factors should be considered when unpacking the vulnerability of different groups within a community and when checking whether the PVA is really reaching the most vulnerable people:

- **Geography:** To a large extent, the places where individuals and communities live determine their vulnerabilities, especially with regard to natural hazards.
- **Health and age:** Individuals who are physically weak, ill or disabled – including those with pre-existing mental health problems and disorders – are more likely to be vulnerable. Age is also an important factor: children and elderly people are often the most vulnerable.
- **Gender:** Women and girls are likely to be affected differently and to have different responses and coping mechanisms to hazards and disasters. When their basic rights are denied, their vulnerability is likely to increase.
- **Social status and power relations:** Groups which have a lower social status or are stigmatised tend to be more vulnerable. They often lack the power to make decisions and access and influence decision makers. As a result, they cannot realise their right to human security.
- **Lack of assets and resources:** A lack of financial resources or material assets can prevent individuals and communities from being able to deal with potential hazards. While not all vulnerable people are poor, people living in poverty tend to be the most vulnerable. Material poverty is also often accompanied by exclusion and marginalisation, which further aggravates vulnerability.
- **Limited or erroneous knowledge of hazards and their causes:** PVA starts from the assumption that communities know best how to cope with hazards. But this knowledge can be fragmented: sometimes valuable experience is not discussed and capitalised on by the community as a whole, or the knowledge is not articulated well enough to be shared with other stakeholders and acted upon. Cultural practices and beliefs might increase vulnerability, while some elements of knowledge would not withstand scientific testing. It is therefore important to analyse, pull together and systematise existing knowledge about disasters and their causes.
- **Fatalism:** Some individuals or communities might accept disasters as “God’s will” or as something that has always been a part of their life. In these cases, they might not use their power to act to prevent them.
- **Awareness of rights and capacity to demand rights:** Individuals and communities might lack awareness of their right to human security, and of the mechanisms that can be used to demand such rights. It may be that the relevant policies, laws and institutions are not in place, so there is no recognition that rights are lacking, and people are deprived of effective tools to reduce their own vulnerability. In other cases, laws and policies may already be in place, but communities and individuals are denied decision-making power and access to government institutions, increasing their vulnerability.
- **Marginalisation, weak social and political connections:** Communities can reduce their vulnerability by joining forces with others. A divided community might not be able to act to reduce risk or demand rights, while minority groups or communities that are not linked effectively to state institutions or other social movements are often more vulnerable.
- **Conflict:** Conflict within or around a community makes it more vulnerable, and can put some groups at risk. Unlike other emergencies, conflict divides communities, making it difficult to minimise their vulnerabilities. As well as being a threat in itself, conflict can also aggravate existing vulnerability to other hazards. The situation is very different from natural disasters, which tend to bring communities closer together thus helping them reduce vulnerabilities.

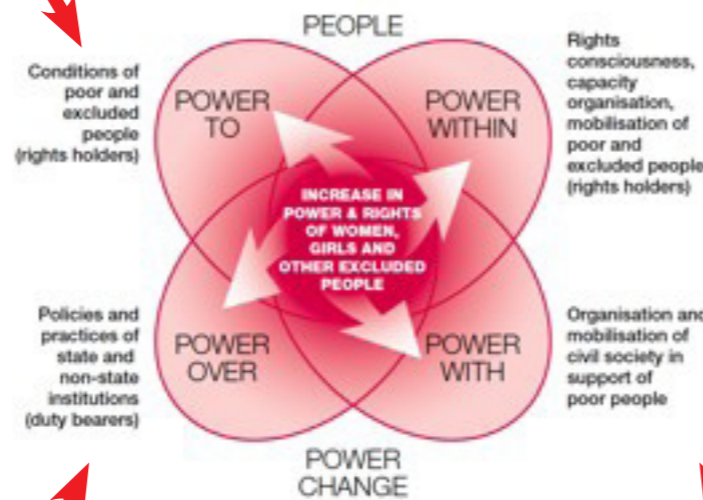
Reducing vulnerability, empowering people and bringing about change

If we understand vulnerability as a **lack of power** to prevent disaster, then the essence of PVA is about **empowering people** through an analysis process that leads to action, and therefore to **tangible change**.

- PVA increases people's power to act. It also produces actionable plans, and supports communities affected by disasters to access the necessary resources to realise their plans and produce **tangible change**.

- PVA helps citizens to **demand concrete action** on vulnerability from the institutions that govern them, creating stronger accountability by bringing together communities, government and other stakeholders to define and monitor plans and budgets.
- PVA **strengthens community governance** and links it better with higher-level institutions.
- PVA helps improve the **quality and responsiveness of policies and practices** to community issues by bringing in the analysis and experience of people threatened by disaster.
- PVA can lead to the creation of **accountable institutions** to address vulnerabilities.
- PVA equips citizens to **better understand national and international policies and practices** on disaster risk reduction. It supports them to formulate concrete demands for national and international institutions.

PVA works on people, power, change.



- PVA helps individuals, communities and other stakeholders to build a **common and deeper understanding** of vulnerabilities.
- PVA reminds individuals and communities of their **strength and capacity** to prevent and cope with disasters.
- PVA informs individuals and communities – particularly women, girls and the most marginalised groups (eg minorities, people living with stigma) – about their **right to human security** and the policies, practices and institutions that are in place to enact them.
- Information and analysis developed through PVA raise awareness among external stakeholders and institutions of the conditions and rights of vulnerable groups, **sensitising** them on their role in preventing disasters.
- PVA helps people to build a **long-term perspective** on their vulnerabilities, thus creating space and opportunities for action on the root causes of vulnerability.
- PVA helps communities to **value their own knowledge** and encourages them to deepen it to enhance their resilience and make their voices heard.

- PVA **brings together communities** and builds a common understanding of vulnerabilities. It allows different groups (eg men and women), to share their experience of vulnerability and work together.
- PVA **links communities directly with government institutions**, thus bringing community issues directly and almost immediately to the attention of government. Establishing more direct links and communication also helps institutions to fulfil their role of disaster prevention and preparedness.
- The deeper knowledge of vulnerability and its many causes generated by PVA is a powerful tool **to mobilise civil society** to act in support of vulnerable people.
- The multi-level approach helps communities **build alliances** with other key stakeholders. PVA establishes a **platform for networking and coalition building**, thus supporting engagement with the policy processes of state and inter-state institutions.

Start local, think, then go global!

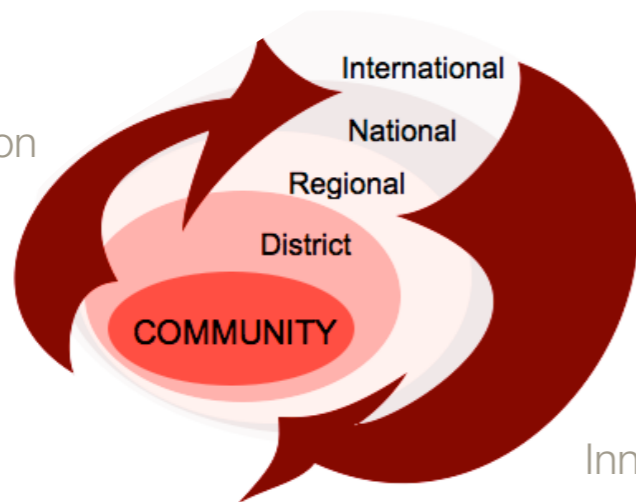
PVA is grounded in reality. It is a process that starts from the community itself, and as such ownership of the process should always rest with them. Through PVA, communities look deeply at their experiences of vulnerability. They gather data and facts; challenge their own ideas; and look back at what was done and what can be done.

But they do not do this alone. They involve government representatives, starting with those closest to them – at village or sub-district level – who they have direct access to and therefore more influence over. Analysis, knowledge and ideas for action consequently flow from the community to

sub-district and district level and beyond. It is the community that informs, influences and initiates change for provincial, national and even international action on vulnerability.

But to be truly successful PVA must become a two-way process. It is not only about analysis flowing out from communities: information about policies, practices, opportunities for action and accountability must also flow towards communities, to enrich their understanding and space for action. Without an authentic dialogue, the impact of PVA will always be limited.

Analysis
Ideas for action
Advocacy



Info on policies
Accountability
Innovative practises
Opportunities

	COMMUNITY	DISTRICT	PROVINCIAL / NATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
	<p>PVA starts with the community because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the right solutions to vulnerability cannot be found and imposed from the outside: they must respond to local conditions, building on local knowledge and practices communities must have an active role in analysing their vulnerabilities, proposing solutions and taking action communities themselves must judge whether policies and practices to reduce disasters are meaningful to them action on vulnerability cannot stop at the community level: its root causes are often beyond their direct control. 	<p>By interacting at district level, communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> get to know what policies and practices are currently implemented at district level, and how they can benefit from them point out the areas that require attention and direct action from district government can reach a common and agreed plan of action, clarifying roles, responsibilities and mutual accountabilities identify areas that cannot be addressed at district level and need to be taken to national government – communities and district officers can make a joint plan for advocacy on these. 	<p>Communities need to influence at provincial and national levels because these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are ultimately responsible for ensuring citizens' right to human security establish law and policies – existing policies might be inappropriate and require adaptations; additional policies and frameworks might also be needed define and control budgets and allocations and other resources must have DRR action plans and establish institutions for this purpose are accountable for checking that local institutions work properly and deliver. 	<p>Communities might need to influence at international level because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishes conventions and protocols for the realisation of rights, as well as specific agreements and frameworks for action – for example, on climate change or DRR – which influence national policies monitors state compliance with treaties and protocols – communities can write shadow reports for UN monitoring committees can put pressure on national government when the rights of citizens are violated – for example, in the case of conflict allocates financial resources – directly or through national governments – to programmes and projects.
Actors at this level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PVA team (in charge of facilitating analysis and planning). Groups within communities (eg women, children, minorities, professional groups). PVA must help vulnerable people to truly engage in decision making. It can be useful to run parallel analysis group sessions to ensure they feel safe and supported. Existing groups and institutions at village level with a stake in PVA (eg elected leaders, governance institutions, school management, religious and youth groups). Community committees set up to implement and monitor action plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District authorities and departments (eg agriculture, education, public works). In the context of conflict: local leaders of different factions and militia. Other local institutions and groups (eg churches, mosques or temples; community-based organisations and local NGOs). Local media (eg community radio stations, local newspapers). Local representatives of companies, if they are involved in increasing the vulnerability of people (eg industries that affect the local environment). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National authorities and departments. In the context of conflict: national leaders of different factions and militia. Other national institutions and civil society groups (eg religious institutions, national and international NGOs, including women's organisations). The media. Social movements. Political parties and trade unions. Tribunals and judiciary, anti-corruption units. National representatives of companies, if they are involved in increasing the vulnerability of people (eg industries that affect the environment). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UN agencies and other international institutions (eg World Bank, International Organization for Migration, etc). The International Strategy on Disaster Reduction – the UN's main forum for devising policies and strategies to reduce natural hazards – which coordinates local, national and international efforts to build disaster-resilient communities. International donors, who are increasingly focusing on risk reduction strategies. They should be considered not only as a source of funding, but also as powerful stakeholders in defining and influencing new policies and methods. International alliances and networks.

	COMMUNITY	DISTRICT	PROVINCIAL / NATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Tools and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PVA initial analysis, leading to community (and district) plans and budget. Transparency boards displaying: plans, achievements, budgets and expenses. Social audit, to check progress on plans and use of resources. Community meetings. Reflect circles,¹ to engage in further analysis of vulnerabilities. Establishment of local committees and institutions to implement specific actions on the plan (eg parent committees for work around schools) and to check progress (eg monitoring committees). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community plans shared with district authorities for corroboration and commitment to fulfilling points actionable by the community. Analysis consolidated among communities in the district, leading to district plan and budget. District-level meetings with representatives from communities and districts – including vulnerable groups – to present and approve action plans developed from PVA. Regular follow-up meetings. Community and district authorities agree on an accountability framework for holding the district policymakers (local duty bearers) to account, thus ensuring that citizens can realise their right to a disaster-free environment. Exchange visits among communities in the district – to check progress, improve mutual accountabilities and share learning. Monitoring committee set up (or clear monitoring responsibilities outlined), with periodic review of progress and transparent disclosure of results. Transparency boards and public budgets. Community-led advocacy and lobbying at district level, with clear demands and organised meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis consolidated and linked to clear asks and recommendations to national governments and relevant bodies, presented by community representatives in national-level workshops and meetings, and/or disseminated through media / networks / coalitions. Community-led lobbying and advocacy of government and other relevant bodies at national level, based on hard facts gathered through analysis. Communities supported by joining forces, organising, mobilising and accessing national institutions. Monitoring progress of national plans for action, based on community analysis. Findings shared by community representatives with the government in meetings, and/or disseminated through media / networks / coalitions. Judiciary action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis consolidated and linked to clear asks and recommendations to international bodies, presented by community representatives in international workshops and meetings, and/or disseminated through media / networks / coalitions. Community-led lobbying and advocacy at international level.
Frameworks			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National laws and policies (for example: disaster management laws, compensation policies, social security policies, etc). National disaster risk reduction framework (a requirement of all signatories of the Hyogo Framework). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human rights declaration and related conventions and protocols. Hyogo Framework for Action (especially for natural disasters). Humanitarian law (particularly relevant to reduce the vulnerability of civilians in conflict). Kyoto Protocol. Upcoming (post-2012) treaties.

¹ Reflect is an innovative approach to adult education and social change which helps groups of people, who meet regularly in Reflect circles, to analyse issues for themselves and articulate their views. Reflect circles are a basis for mobilisation.

Planning for action: principles, attitudes and behaviours



At the core of PVA is **planning** for two types of action:

- direct action – Who should do what? When? With what resources? With what results? Who will monitor it?
- advocacy and lobbying – How can we persuade others to do what they should to reduce vulnerability? Who should we address? What exactly should we ask? How should we ask it?

Good planning involves much more than simply putting down some actions on a piece of paper. A planning process can only be as good as the people engaging with it. This is why **values, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours** matter: PVA should work on promoting and building the right attitudes and behaviours with participants. If planning only focuses

on the tasks to be done, it will miss some important things, which could help a community to advance and develop its relationships with other stakeholders. Good planning must therefore put **principles** first; these should include advancing advocacy, transparency and promoting learning. Good planning should understand and attempt to correct power imbalances and advance women rights.

Transparency: PVA promotes transparency. It seeks to involve all relevant groups within a community in an open manner, and produces plans and budgets that are transparently shared and based on factual analysis. Selection of beneficiaries, budgets, reports on progress, and roles and responsibilities should all be the public domain. PVA must guarantee that all citizens in the community can participate and that information is disclosed in public meetings, via transparency boards and through social audit processes.

Accountability: PVA helps citizens make their governments and the institutions working with them – including NGOs – more accountable. Rather than asking for generic promises, PVA requires clear and agreed plans for action, with clear roles and responsibilities, and results that are monitored on agreed indicators. PVA also helps to build better accountability on international and national policies and plans, by informing citizens about them. When governments are not responsive, citizens participating in the PVA will need to be supported to demand accountability.

Learning: This is one of the pillars of PVA. Analysis leads to consolidation, sharing and action on experience and traditional knowledge of hazards. Participants – both community and external actors – build a deeper common understanding of how vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms work within communities. While PVA seeks to learn from the experience and expertise of communities, it also recognises that a community’s existing knowledge can be cross-fertilised and enriched with external inputs. In some cases, traditional knowledge might not withstand scientific testing. In others, communities might face new, unknown risks – for example, from climate change – and therefore lack the knowledge they need to confront them.

Women’s rights: The PVA process must advance the rights of women within a community and society as a whole. PVA will engage with women; give them space to discuss their issues (as women and girls have different vulnerabilities); give them a voice both within the community and with the government; and support them to engage in decision making.

Power: PVA is first and foremost about building the power of people to prevent, reduce and cope with disasters. It acts on different dimensions of power – power within, power with, power over and power to – **empowering** vulnerable groups and rights holders; **analysing** existing power dynamics; and **transforming** power dynamics in the long term. It helps a community to understand its own real power vis-a-vis other stakeholders, to act and demand action on vulnerabilities, thus making them stronger.



The PVA will genuinely **support excluded people so that they can fully participate**, bringing poor and excluded people into the heart of decision making, rather than simply informing and consulting them. Participants will also share a commitment to address discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, caste, ethnic identity, race, colour, class, sexuality, disability, ideology or HIV status.

The PVA will lead participants to communicate effectively, and to **share lessons and experiences** in accessible formats and language.

PVA facilitators must be unbiased and open to learning from other participants and to unlearning where necessary.

The PVA process will support people to form and build alliances with others, aiming for similar goals through different methods. The PVA must lead to the **awareness that we are not working in isolation** in the search for a lasting solution to addressing vulnerabilities.

The PVA process builds on **participants’ desire for critical reflection, knowledge and understanding**, even when this undermines existing preconceptions, beliefs or self interests.

Both participants and facilitators will learn from each other and share their own knowledge, skills and experiences – including disappointments and ‘bad practice’.

The PVA process will build spaces for listening, understanding and taking account of different views and understandings of others.

Attitudes and behaviours



The PVA process must promote behaviours **that are not domineering or patronising, but genuinely share power** with others. The PVA should create an environment where those in a position of power – NGOs, government, community leaders – are willing to share it with the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Stages in PVA work

PVA is an ongoing collective process, without pre-determined steps, which needs to adapt to the local context. This section provides a broad idea of what is involved in organising a PVA, from the perspectives of the individual and the organisation that initiates and supports the process.

The actions presented here are not meant to be strictly followed in the order presented – some will run in parallel to each other, while advocacy/campaigning work will influence the setting up of plans (and vice versa) as the PVA moves from local to national and international levels.

1. Scoping	
<p>Activities: Establishing the focus of the PVA; consulting communities and other key actors.</p> <p>Aim: By the end of this stage, all actors truly believe that the PVA will be useful to them, and are ready to engage and commit.</p>	
<p>Is PVA needed/useful?</p> <p>Preliminary scoping of hazards and threats.</p> <p>What puts people at risk? What are the community's priorities?</p> <p>Would a PVA help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus of the PVA needs to be established in consultation with communities; it cannot be determined by outsiders. Consultation can be part of other ongoing development work as vulnerabilities start to emerge, or through preliminary meetings or focus groups. Opportunities for PVA can also appear in emergency work. PVA will help link short-term responses to resolve immediate needs with long-term work to build resilience.
<p>Who should be involved?</p> <p>Stakeholder mapping. Which actors can reduce vulnerability?</p> <p>Who is increasing it?</p> <p>Who is willing to be engaged?</p> <p>Who should be involved?</p> <p>What should they do?</p> <p>At what stage should they do it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every stage needs careful planning. Before entering a village, make sure your entry strategy is clear: How will you introduce the PVA process to participants? How will you introduce yourselves? How will you let the community introduce themselves? Stakeholder mapping identifies actors and institutions at community / district / provincial / national / international levels, and clarifies their potential roles. A plan for involvement of key actors should be made, based on the stakeholder mapping. Key questions include: Who should be involved in the first cycle of analysis and planning? Who needs to be informed that the process is under way? Who can provide support? Who could hamper the process? Who else should be involved, as the PVA process unfolds?

Information gathering

What traditional knowledge, expertise and practices do the community and other stakeholders already have? These are often unwritten, but can be collected and shared.

What other existing information should be used or verified in the PVA process?

What policies or laws are already in place?

Would the PVA process benefit from external experience or expertise?

- Build on existing data** to understand: the context of vulnerability (history of hazards, present threats and who is exposed); the causes of vulnerability; and any action that has already been taken on vulnerability by the community and external actors.
- Look for existing **analysis done by the community** that could feed into the PVA – for example, they may already have maps and other data.
- What other data and information exist locally? Consider, for example, **statistics and information available at the district / provincial level**, which could be communicated to communities to complement their analysis.
- When bringing **external information** into the process, it must be validated with the PVA. Is it up to date, relevant and accurate? Such information should be captured as part of the analysis done by and owned by the communities.
- What **lessons and technical information** could be shared? Scan for other community-led knowledge and actions in similar situations, and for new technical knowledge. Consider what should be presented to participants – external inputs can be used, for example, to deal with vulnerability from new threats and changing conditions, such as climate change work.
- What **policies and laws are in place?** What **institutions** should be accessed? How do they operate? Be prepared to translate this information in ways that are easy to understand so it can be effectively shared with participants.

2. Preparation

Activities: Identifying and training a PVA team; delivering a clear briefing on PVA to other participants, outlining what is expected from them; scheduling and planning meetings and activities; sorting out logistics.

<p>Learn from previous work Look at previous PVAs. How were they organised? What should be copied? What should be avoided?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not reinvent the wheel! There is already considerable expertise and experience on PVA. Look for reports and documentation; contact and connect with people who have already run PVAs and are willing to share their experience.
<p>Engage with key actors Inform communities and other relevant stakeholders about the PVA. Confirm that they are interested in taking part.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce and share materials in local language about PVA – leaflets, posters, reports and videos. This will give potential participants a good idea of what PVA is about. Discuss with potential participants what the PVA work involves in terms of time and commitment. Clarify expectations from the process, and ensure this feeds into the planning process. Agree with key actors what their engagement will be. When will they be involved in the process? In what role? Find out their existing skills and experience – eg with participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA) – as this will help you tailor the training accordingly.
<p>Prepare terms of reference Set up clear TORs for the PVA and share them with participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the PVA takes shape, produce terms of reference (TORs) on the process to clarify: purpose; key stakeholders, roles and responsibilities; outline of process; and budget. Share the TORs with all participants. Write them simply, to ensure that all involved can easily understand them. Check whether all participants agree with the TORs, making any necessary amends, to create a climate of participation from the start.
<p>Set up a PVA core team Build the PVA team. Identify a facilitator.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The core team is the group in charge of facilitating the PVA process. They will receive training and support. As a minimum, the core team should include community members (with adequate representation of women and minority groups) as well as local government officials and NGO representatives. The core team should be linked with other actors at other levels – such as government functionaries, traditional authorities and civil society organisations – to ensure that the process can move smoothly from the local level to provincial, national and international levels. In culturally sensitive countries such as Afghanistan, where community training normally takes place in separate venues for men and women, female trainers will need to be identified. The core team’s existing capacities and skills must be assessed as preparation for training plans.

Set activity programme

Organise PVA training.
Set dates for training sessions and analysis sessions with the community.
Set up PVA workshops with district / provincial / national stakeholders.

- Establish a **calendar for activities**, including, as a minimum: training for the core team; village / district analysis and planning (after consulting potential participants on their availability); and a district-level meeting. If possible, also establish dates for engagements at provincial and national levels.
- The calendar for activities will need to be **checked** with communities. It should not clash with major activities – such as harvest, festivals and festivities. If the PVA happens at a time with adverse metrological conditions (eg rainy season), make sure that the more remote communities can be reached.
- Also consider **daily life patterns**: at what time of day will different groups be available?

Work on logistics

Prepare for the training. Organise transport and lodging within the community.

- Find a **training venue** that allows people to work together comfortably for a few days, but avoid luxurious hotels. The closer this is to the communities, the better. Be transparent about the cost of organising such training.
- District-level PVAs might involve several communities. PVA work should first take place at community level and then discussed and consolidated at district level. Think how best to bring together community representatives.
- Remind participants of their commitments and of the PVA schedule, to ensure that all can run as planned.

Train the core team

- The duration of the training will depend on participants’ availability and their existing skills and capacity.
- Training should cover: concepts of vulnerability and risk; the importance of thinking forward; an overview of the PVA approach; principles of PVA work; basic concepts, principles and tools of PRA and PLA; how to put PRA and PLA into practice; relevant policies and institutions; planning and monitoring; the basics of people-centred advocacy; and an understanding of climate change and the effects it can have on vulnerability.
- Training should be **practical** and hands-on: simulate the use of the tools among trainees and provide space to discuss attitudes and behaviours of facilitators.
- Be prepared to adapt training if necessary in response to requests from participants. Responding to such requests helps build participation and shows that you value their input.

3. Initial analysis and plan of action at village / district level

Activities: PVA participants work in focus groups to analyse their vulnerabilities and put together an action plan. Planning and analysis are designed around the four main steps set out below, and culminate in a district meeting.

Aim: By the end of this stage, there should be a clear district-level plan of action.

Things to be aware of: The timing, location and working style of each group must ensure that the poorest and most marginalised community members are able to participate fully.

Organise participants into focus groups

How should each focus group be set up?

How to ensure that each group can discuss issues freely and deeply, and that all members can make themselves heard?

How to ensure that, when the focus groups come together, all groups are equally listened to – for example, that the views and decisions of the women’s group are as important as those of the men’s group?

- PVA takes place through **focus group** discussion. A standard way of doing this is to have groups of men, women and youth, but other groupings might be more relevant, such as: schoolchildren; teachers; professional groupings; etc.
- Ensure that vulnerable groups, both genders and all age ranges are fairly represented.
- Groups should be of a size and climate that allow members to talk freely and actively participate, without being eclipsed by natural leaders. This will enable individuals to consolidate their own understanding and ideas and **feel confident** about them before discussing and sharing them more broadly.
- The focus groups should **get together regularly, at different stages** of the PVA, and not just at the end of the process. Frequent meetings will allow them to discuss their provisional findings and ideas, creating a better understanding and consensus among participants.
- The **timing and location** of groups should be dictated by the participants’ engagements. The poorest and most vulnerable people are likely to have very rigid commitments and little capacity to travel.

Step 1. Who is at risk?

How do hazards affect a community?

Which groups are most at risk?

- Understand how hazards have hit a community and individuals in the past.
- Look at recurring patterns, trends and changes over time. *Tools: historical profile; timelines; vulnerability and hazard maps; transect walks; personal stories; interviews.*
- Discuss how people coped – discussions may highlight the use of traditional practices as coping mechanisms. *Tools: stories; interviews.*
- Discuss criteria of vulnerability. When can someone be defined as “most vulnerable”? Identify the most vulnerable groups. *Tools: livelihood analysis; vulnerability maps; seasonal calendars; daily activity profiles; personal stories.*

Step 2. Why are people vulnerable?

What are the causes of vulnerability?

Which must be addressed first?

- What are causes and effects of a hazard? How are they linked? How do they interrelate? *Tools: problem trees; concept mapping; spider diagrams.*
- Which causes should be addressed as a priority? *Tools: ranking.*

Step 3. What has been done so far?

What actions and strategies have been used so far to reduce vulnerability?

What worked?

What did not?

Who was involved?

Who should have been involved but was not?

- Discuss and identify any actions that have been taken so far to address priority causes of vulnerability. What resources were used? What worked? What did not? *Tools: activity and resource matrices and mapping; timelines; force field analysis.*
- Discuss whether there are any policies in place to reduce vulnerability. If so, are they being implemented? Do they work? *Tools: presentation of policies; force field analysis.*
- Who has done what to date? Who has or had the power to address vulnerabilities? What support has the community received to date? *Tools: stakeholder analysis; Venn diagrams; institutional profiles; network mapping; power analysis.*

Step 4. What can be done?

What should be done?

Do all people involved in the PVA agree on the plan?

Are they ready to be held accountable for it?

Who will be responsible for delivering on it?

How will they be made accountable?

How will progress be monitored?

- Define priority actions for the plan. Be aware of power dynamics and ensure that all groups are heard and can contribute to the plan. Verify that the key actions proposed address all the most important causes of vulnerability.
- Sharpen up the plan. Ensure that all actions are clear and understood by everyone. Define what change is expected as a result of an action – in other words, what will be seen when this action is completed? Clarify who is responsible for doing each action, and who will ensure that the action is done. Get the commitment of those involved. Establish timelines. Calculate how much money and what equipment will be needed to complete each action.
- Determine how much time and resources will be needed to monitor the plan. For example, a community member who engages in a monitoring committee will have to travel to engage with district officers – can the community compensate them for their time and travel expenses?
- Are those involved in the plan willing to engage? Are they willing to commit in front of a public assembly?
- Not all the necessary actions to reduce vulnerability can be done by the local community. Highlight what other actors should do, and propose a course of action. The PVA is also about reaching those actors and engaging them.
- Make sure that decisions and agreements are captured: use flipcharts, audio and video.

District-level meeting

Consolidate the analysis and plans and present these to the district authorities.

What is the plan for action at district level?

Are roles, responsibilities and timelines clear?

Is there agreement on how the plan will be monitored?

- The district meeting should bring together: the **PVA team; representatives of the communities** who engaged in the analysis; and **district representatives** who have decision-making power.
- The PVA team and community representatives meet to **prepare** for the meeting. They consolidate their analysis, compare plans and discuss what they want the district government to do. Together they also decide how to best present their findings and plans.
- It is also an opportunity for the **district to present** their own understanding of the situation; any actions that have already taken place; the budget; and how it has been invested to date. The district leadership could use the occasion to account to communities, explaining its policies and presenting activities in a clear, transparent way.
- The meeting should result in a **district-level plan**, which should complement community-level plans. The district should take responsibility for some activities and allocate resources and budget in a transparent manner. Mechanisms for monitoring and follow-up meetings should be established as part of the plan.
- This is also an opportunity to highlight issues that cannot be solved at the district level and will need escalating to national level. Strategies on how to best achieve this should be discussed and captured, to be shared with national-level actors at a later date.

4. Provincial / national / international-level planning and advocacy

Things to be aware of: PVA work does not stop at the community or district level. Addressing the causes of vulnerability also requires action at provincial, national and international levels. In some cases, actors working at these levels can participate directly in the analysis and planning processes, but more often they will rely on analysis and discussion that has already taken place at district level. Action at these levels will need to complement work on plans for action with advocacy and lobbying. Of course, not all vulnerabilities will need escalating to this level, but it is still important that people who are acting locally are aware of global aspects and connections.

Organise PVA meetings

Structure community analysis and demands and present them at provincial / national / international levels to get to plans of action.

- Organise **meetings** at provincial / national level to consolidate district-level analysis and demands and feed them into provincial / national plans. Local community members will be key participants.
- The **policy component** will become more relevant in the analysis: provincial / national-level work will require close examination of policies that are already in place. To what extent do these respond to the needs and vulnerabilities identified by the PVA analysis? Are there gaps in the policies or in their implementation? Are public institutions capable of delivering them? Can they be accountable? Have sufficient funds and resources been allocated? How can a plan of action respond to these challenges?
- National-level work will involve **several units and departments**. The PVA work could help improve coordination between them around key vulnerabilities.

Advocate and lobby

Communities and their allies should engage with actors at provincial, national and international levels to ensure that actions and issues that were dismissed in the planning are put on the agenda.

- **International conventions and treaties** are a powerful tool for advocacy and lobbying. Pressurise governments that have not signed up to do so, and in the case of those that have signed up, denounce obligations that have not been met.
- At national and international levels, vulnerability will probably be addressed by engaging with different departments and offices. Good **stakeholder mapping** and knowledge of policies and legislation is key. It is important to have an **advocacy and lobbying strategy** that reaches out to key actors and favours coordination and information-sharing among them.
- Consider working together with **international networks** and advocacy groups.
- Engage with the **media**, bringing in solid analysis of vulnerabilities and concrete demands. Clear, jargon-free stories and case studies will be helpful.
- Create opportunities to expose national / international actors to the reality in the field. **Immersion**, where people are invited to share, for some days, the life of vulnerable families, can be a powerful way to change attitudes towards, and perceptions of, vulnerabilities.

5. Implementation and monitoring of activities and follow-up analysis

Things to be aware of: The PVA plan is not an end in itself. The aim of any PVA is to bring about change, reflect on achievements and share learning.

Make change happen!

Implement the plan and check what change is happening.

- Ensure that the planned actions – at all levels – **get done**. A good plan should make clear who is in charge of monitoring specific actions and what should happen when those responsible for an action do not do them.
- The creation and respect of **mutual accountabilities** is a key component of the PVA process. When actors in the process fail to be accountable for their work, other actors should push them to respect their promises. It can be hard for marginalised communities to make others accountable, and they will need support in this endeavour.
- **Reflect on and celebrate change:** ensure that the PVA process includes space for reflection – moments when participants can look back, remember the past situation and check what progress has taken place.
- Ensure also that participants can **learn** from their successes and mistakes as part of the process. Whenever possible, share progress and learning broadly – including with communities experiencing the same vulnerabilities elsewhere.
- **Revise** and update the plans periodically, based on a fresh analysis and understanding of vulnerabilities.

Ensure feedback takes place

Create feedback mechanisms, so that the communities involved in the PVA and other key actors are always informed of any progress made.

- As the PVA work moves on from local to international level, there is a risk that some participants are not informed about progress. Ensure that there is always **clear and transparent communication**, both on the state of the process and on any progress with the plan (concrete actions as well as advocacy and lobbying).
- Feedback should be provided to all actors involved in the process. It is key that the most **marginalised community members are informed of progress at all levels**, including national and international work, and have a chance to act and comment on it.
- **National and international actors** must be informed of actions at the district level, about any changes that take place, and about any challenges that remain.

Document and communicate

What should be recorded and communicated about this PVA?
Who is your audience?
What is the best medium to communicate this information?

- Documentation is not an activity that should take place after the PVA. Work on documentation and communication should be ongoing **throughout the entire process** to ensure that analysis is preserved, decisions are recorded, progress is reported and expenses are registered. This will also guarantee transparency and accountability.
- Documentation does not mean “bureaucratic reporting” – it is not done for the sake of writing reports. Rather, it is an integral part of a PVA, to **effectively communicate** the process and its results to relevant audiences.
- Remember that the most important audience is made up of the people who are directly involved in the PVA. It is therefore important to use **language** that they will understand and **media** that they can access. They should also be fully **involved** in the documentation process.
- Flip charts, diagrams and drawings produced as part of the analysis are often very effective ways to communicate findings. **Do not dismiss simple tools**; use them as much as you can. Flip charts and diagrams can be used in meetings with government officials. To preserve them better, some could be drawn on cloth rather than paper. Writing up a plan on a board will make it easy to display. Poems and songs are useful tools for communities and their partners to remember the issues. And of course, it is vital to take photographs of all the diagrams produced, to video all the songs being sung. This will provide a permanent record in case diagrams are damaged, and will make it easier to share them with external audiences.
- Look for opportunities to **systematise** and use the data produced by the PVA. Can it complement and fill gaps in existing statistical / information systems?

- **Be creative.** Think of how to use audio, video, photography and music to document a PVA – for example, you could equip children (or other groups) with disposable cameras to document their community and hazards. Think of how your documentation can be best disseminated. Using drawings, radio, street theatre, television and the internet can help to create a lively, active, fun and participatory atmosphere.
- **Share your learning.** The keenest readers of your documentation will be people embarking on a new PVA. Be practical in your documentation, and make sure that it provides a clear idea of how you ran your PVA. Do not forget to share your mistakes, your innovations and your learning.

Learnings and challenges

At times, PVA has been understood as an exercise in assessment only, and has been used solely to extract data.

In such cases, PVAs do not lead to a community / district-owned plan for action.

- A PVA is not only an assessment. The minimum a PVA should produce is a joint plan of action for community and local government.
- A PVA should equip a community with better analysis and understanding of their vulnerabilities. All analysis needs to be done and put together in ways and formats that participants understand – in other words, avoiding jargon and foreign languages.
- Of course, NGOs and governments can and should make use of the information the communities produce, but this should be done in collaboration with them, not by “extracting” information.
- All information produced by the PVA must be left with the community. Flip charts, for example, must not be taken away. If PRA/PLA exercises were done by writing on the ground, it is useful to take photographs of the outcomes and print them for the community to keep as a record. Key people in the community (eg teachers, older students) could be involved in note taking; while the results of activities could be recorded in a lasting way in places that are visible by everyone – for example, a timeline painted and updated in a community hall.
- Reporting on a PVA should not be about producing boring documents for the NGO running it. A PVA should look, first of all, to improve communication about vulnerability among all actors, using the most appropriate means. Using local language and media should be a priority.



In the past we have sometimes failed to trust the quality of the analysis produced by the PVA.

For example, in some cases, external consultants led research in parallel with a PVA, but with no overlapping.

- The shallow application of PRA/PLA tools has led to the belief that participatory techniques should not be used in “serious” research. However, when participatory techniques are rigorously applied, it results in solid, reliable data – both qualitative and quantitative.
- Knowledge is power. If we believe that only experts, consultants or NGO people are capable of producing and sharing good knowledge, we are undermining the empowerment process from the start. It is important to acknowledge the fact that communities can produce and share their own knowledge.
- Which is the most appropriate form of research? What is the best way to communicate this and use it to advocate and influence? Past experience of using PVA shows that, when communicated powerfully and effectively, research derived from communities has a considerable impact. In these successful cases, research was not only written up in standard reports – it was communicated through multimedia, in face-to-face interactions, and often focused on strong, real-life stories.



The training of facilitators is crucial. In the past, PVA has often assumed that facilitators have experience of using PRA and Reflect tools and that they will be able to adapt these to analyse vulnerability. This not always the case.

Facilitators must also have a thorough understanding of wider issues such as climate change and the Hyogo Framework. This will enable them to bring such aspects into the PVA process, and help communities make the relevant links with vulnerabilities and daily life issues they face.

- Training for facilitators should not be a one-size-fits all process. Rather, it must be adapted and tailored to the local/national context and to participants’ training needs.
- It is important to ensure that facilitators are not only conversant with PRA and PLA, but that they are properly trained in these methods and receive the support they need to adapt and use the different tools in the right context and understand how to apply them.
- Facilitators must be aware that basic uses of PRA tools alone are not enough to achieve the intended outcomes of a PVA process. They must make extra efforts to identify patterns of vulnerability, their causes, and any actions that can be undertaken to increase capacity and reduce vulnerability.
- It is vital that facilitators work at the participants’ pace. Facilitators should take the participants through the process in a way that makes sure they understand: the situation; their own role; and the way in which they are both part of the problem and of the solution.
- Remember that facilitation is not just about knowledge and skills; it is primarily about attitudes and this must be nurtured through proper follow-up.
- Facilitators will need a thorough understanding of the communities with whom they work in order to raise their awareness of how the issues affect them and to support participants in fostering their sense of cohesion as well as their willingness to help each other and work together.

Missing cartoon

There have been times when PVAs were planned to suit the NGO’s – rather than the community’s – needs.

Planning PVAs to suit the schedule of external participants is likely to exclude the poorest and marginalised people.

- A good PVA process requires the poorest and most marginalised groups to be involved in the discussion. However, they often depend on a daily wage, and are unlikely to have much time to devote to meetings, especially if they take place during daylight hours. Taking the community’s time schedules and seasonality into consideration – eg meeting citizens outside a place of worship after morning prayers or spending a couple of hours in the evening with busy (and tired) farmers and day labourers – will help ensure that people are not excluded.
- Strategies for involving participants might include: consulting with participants to check their availability; planning the process over a longer period of time; avoiding consecutive days, full days, etc; being flexible with the timing of meetings; organising discussions for different groups at different times; etc.
- The location of meetings is important: easy access for vulnerable and marginalised community members should always take priority over the comfort of external participants.



- Wherever possible, external PVA participants should stay in the village overnight, if community members can provide hospitality. Linking PVA with “immersions” in community life gives added value for external participants and can help build trust and stronger relationships among all participants.

Sometimes we have expected too much, too fast.

Some PVAs have attempted to speed the initial phases of analysis and planning. But it takes time to build up a relationship with a community which allows people to really open up. There is no short cut during the initial phase to build confidence and trust with a community and between the community and authorities.

This is why a PVA should be seen as an ongoing, collective process, where analysis and plans are continually revised and refined as a community’s confidence in the process grows.

- The PVA process is not only about putting together knowledge and action plans, but also about building relationships and emotional closeness among the people participating in it. As such, a deep understanding of emotional and psychosocial issues is key throughout the entire process.
- Vulnerability can be a sensitive topic. Asking about vulnerability means asking people to talk about their weaknesses and fears. Discussion on the most sensitive vulnerabilities might only be possible after building trust with and within communities.
- PVA builds on the use of PRA and PLA. These are not simply a set of tools, but a way of engaging with people which puts real participation at its centre. Aside from these tools, PVA must also apply attitudes and behaviours promoted by PRA and PLA, such as: the desire to build authentic relationships; respect, honesty and transparency; confidence in people’s ability and knowledge; a capacity to listen; critical reflection and acceptance of mistakes; patience; power sharing; etc.
- Never underestimate the importance of listening to a community’s immediate needs and experiences, no matter how insignificant they appear to the outsider. Helping a community identify and tackle small problems early on is a very empowering process that can bring a lot of benefits: an empowered, more cohesive community; a strong relationship between the community and the NGO; and a burgeoning sense of ownership.
- Power relations, social conflict and the complexities of community mobilisation all need to be included and addressed. There should not be a ‘1.5 day + lunch and two coffee-breaks’ short-cut to PVA, even if there is a high demand from within the disaster and development community.



Follow-up is key: in the past there has been a tendency to think of PVA as a one-off activity – something that can be ticked off a to do list. We need to move away from a “We have done PVA” to a “We are doing PVA” mindset.

In some cases, progress was not monitored and there were no follow-up plans. In other cases, there was a long delay before any follow-up activities, leading to a lack of confidence in the NGO from the community.

A PVA is an ongoing process and must be sustainable. As such, coordination and long-term planning mechanisms must be put in place, involving a wide range of actors at all levels.

- Displaying information in a prominent place where everyone can see it is good practice. An agreed plan should be publicly displayed and regularly revised so everyone can track progress. It should be easily accessible on a community “transparency board” and regularly updated.

- The long-term aim of any PVA should be to provide a critical space in which community members can interact with government and hold it accountable for the issues raised during the PVA. It is therefore important to consider how participants will be motivated and able to actively engage in the process after the initial stages of the PVA have ended, without the support of external facilitators. Before leaving a village or session, a facilitator should make sure that individual participants are clear about: the next steps; how to implement or monitor their plan of action; and how to link up with other communities and local authorities for activities that they cannot do directly and alone.
- Responsibilities for monitoring should be established from the start. Effective monitoring requires roles and responsibilities to be clearly spelled out, timelines to be defined, and clarity on what is expected from each action. A lack of clarity on these issues will not only weaken the monitoring; it will also jeopardise action. It is important to define what will be done if an activity is not brought forward, and who can demand compliance on the plan.
- It is also worth bearing in mind that plans will almost certainly need to be developed to adapt to changing circumstances. Analysis should not end after the initial stage, but should be updated and deepened whenever it is useful to do so. Vulnerability maps and response plans should be revised and updated whenever disaster strikes.
- It is good to involve as many people or groups of people as possible in follow-up activities – for example, school children could perform measurements and carry out research on vulnerability factors such as measuring rainfall and temperatures.



The engagement of local government has sometimes been limited to the initial planning meeting and then not followed up. It is important to involve actors from all levels from the start, ensure they have a shared vision and maintain their interest in the project.

If planning is not accompanied by the creation of long-term, meaningful links between the community and its local government, action and accountability will be limited.

- Clear systems for mutual accountability need to be created, starting with the community and local government. Issues to resolve include: how often the community will meet with local government officials to check progress on the plan; what mechanisms to put in place to ensure that the government will be responsive; and the role the organising NGO will play in ensuring that pressure can be applied on non-responsive governments.
- Relationships with the government can make a big difference. Maintaining good, regular communications between communities, local and district government and national ministries increases the chances that PVA will lead to concrete actions as staff and other changes will not affect or jeopardise the relationship.
- The community will need support to demand action and accountability from the government and their leaders. This support can include: capacity building to engage with those in power – for example, through Reflect circles; material and logistical support for community representatives travelling to meet government officers (time and cost could be a big barrier to them); and bringing communities together to start common actions.



PVA is meant to lead to people-centred advocacy: the communities themselves will drive the advocacy work.

However, we have not always trusted a community's capacity to engage with those in power and sometimes stepped in unnecessarily.

- If campaigning and advocacy work aims to empower and strengthen those living in poverty, then they must be active agents in this work. This means that they should directly define priorities and agendas, do the actual lobbying and stir others into action. The role of external organisations should be a supportive one.
- There are instances when NGOs, individually or as part of a network, define and run the agenda and take the limelight. If this is necessary, it is important at least to check that no action is taken which substitutes an action that a community could have done themselves. If community members are part of the campaign – perhaps offering testimonials of the issues – their involvement should empower them and not portray them as vulnerable. It is also important to seek a community's consent to use data, information, insights or imagery belonging to or concerning them in a campaign.



It is important to ensure participation from all sections of the community and avoid over-organising or institutionalising community relations.

Relying too heavily on existing institutions can exclude some groups, while it is also important to ensure participation from a good cross-section of ages.

- There are often a lot of formal links already in place within a community – for example, village development committees; school management committees; parent-teacher associations; social audit committees – and many of them could take part in the PVA. It is important to ensure that engagement does not remain within these institutionalised forums as this would merely serve to bring together the 'elites' of a community.
- Everyone, regardless of their age, will have something to contribute: children can often present issues that affect them in a better way than adults speaking on their behalf; elderly people are indispensable when creating historical timelines; and young people are often more open and critical about power dynamics and social conflicts.

Missing cartoon

Expectation management is essential: if the community and other actors assume that those who facilitate the planning process will take responsibility for implementing the plans, this will create unmanageable expectations. Power dynamics are also important.

- At heart of the PVA process is enabling people to find their own solutions to their own problems and take action to reduce their vulnerabilities.
- The process will uncover and address all sorts of social dynamics and conflicts, power relations and inclusion/exclusion in the community, which have to be carefully managed.
- Facilitators must therefore be able to nurture the collective

Missing cartoon

responsibility of a community while taking differential vulnerability into account. It is vital that they understand the power dynamics involved to avoid adding unnecessary complexity to the process.

- The process must be well facilitated, so that all participants understand the PVA process and are clear about all roles and responsibilities, including their own.

It is important to ensure that all actors – including community members and facilitators – understand the terminology used. Confusion about terms can lead to superficial analysis that lacks the necessary depth for good action plans.

- Vulnerability is a broad theme and people may raise a wide variety of issues.
- The distinction between hazard and vulnerability is central to the PVA process but it is not necessarily as easy to understand as it appears.
- It is important to pay enough attention to the concept of vulnerability and to use a variety of examples that are adapted to the local reality to help people understand it well.
- It may be necessary to organise more than one PVA to deal with all the issues identified.

Missing cartoon

PVA in action: examples from the field

This section documents the experience of the PVA process in projects in three different countries: Cambodia, Malawi and Liberia.

1. Disaster risk reduction in Cambodia: a case study.

Using PVA to develop a district-level disaster risk reduction plan

Cambodia, one of the poorest countries in southeast Asia, is frequently affected by disasters – and it is poor villagers who often bear the brunt of them. The country has long been exposed to floods in the Mekong and Tonle Sap river basins, but the hazard scenario is slowly changing – with an increase in droughts, strong winds and epidemics. The national government has recognised the impact of hazards on the rural economy and acknowledged the need to incorporate disaster risk reduction (DRR) in development plans and establish an institutional mechanism to address related issues.

As part of its decentralisation process, the government asked provincial and district teams to come up with their own developmental plans. Working with the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), ActionAid and ADPC initiated a process to integrate DRR as one of the key agendas in district developmental plans. This is an account of the pilot in Sai Chrum district (Svay Reing province).

The process

1. The ActionAid-ADPC team held rounds of meetings and informal discussions at provincial level to identify stakeholders and ensure their partnership. To promote ownership, we supported district and provincial governors to create their own core group with representatives from different government departments.

2. A facilitating team from ActionAid, ADPC and NCDM then conducted a three-day orientation workshop for the core group and other district-level stakeholders – including heads of departments, district council members and commune leaders. The objective was to clarify the concept of DRR and methods used to collect field data on hazards and vulnerabilities. National and provincial leaders also took part in the workshop, inspiring the district team and other participants. The team developed a set of guidelines on conducting participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) at community and department levels.
3. Following training on how to facilitate PVA work, members of the core group reached out to local groups in all 16 communes and 12 departments, with support and guidance from the facilitating team.
4. The findings from this field work were later consolidated and presented to the facilitating team. These results fed into a three-day workshop to identify and agree on the risks and vulnerabilities of the district. Participants included civil society organisations, district Red Cross Society leaders, district council members and other leaders. The group used risk mapping to identify and prioritise major hazards and their history, vulnerable geographical

areas and demographics. The process helped identify vulnerable communities and social groups, sectors and vulnerable seasons. It also studied the strengths and weaknesses of local institutions, particularly in relation to disaster response, and identified the critical facilities and services needed during disaster time.

5. This information was then verified against the field data, and the group used it to develop 16 risk statements related to seven hazards.
6. During a one-day workshop, the core group and the stakeholders revisited and refined the risk statements, identified potential risk reduction measures, prioritised activities, identified institutions that could lead the activities and developed a DRR framework for each department and commune.
7. The district governor then requested all departments and communes to come up with DRR action plan that could be integrated into ongoing activities. The core group and facilitating team provided technical support.
8. During a consequent district-level workshop all department and communes finalised their DRR action plans and sought the approval of district council and action.

PVA tools used during the process

The team used the following tools during the workshops, later modifying them for use at the district-level consolidation workshop to provide a macro-level picture:

- social and vulnerability mapping: to identify the different aspects of disaster exposure
- time lines: to understand the history, seasonality and trends of the various hazards
- venn diagrams: to understand institutional linkages, the perception of services offered by the key institutions, key resources and processes available.

Successes and challenges

The process provided a new, participatory approach to developing district-level DRR plans, new insights and a broader perspective on multiple hazards and their inter-linkages. It also helped participants identify diverse solutions, including synergy between different departments, and highlighted the fact that health centres and agriculture and livestock departments cannot always reach to people in need. More importantly, it provided a good grounding for the DRR agenda in all the departments and institutions.

The training process helped participants develop specific tools and methodologies that they can apply to future district planning processes, and strengthened the District Committee for Disaster Management (DCDM) by providing clarity on its roles and responsibilities. A key achievement was the fact that the process reached out to 16 communes, covering about 145 villages.

On the whole, it was a rich, productive, positive experience, although there were a few problems. The absence of reliable data on hazards and their impact on the community was a major stumbling block, while the group also struggled at times to differentiate development needs from the DRR imperative. The remaining challenge is to sustain the political will, support and resources to convert these plans into results on ground.

For more information, contact aloyius.james@actionaid.org

2. Disaster risk reduction in Malawi: a case study.

Reducing disaster risk in schools: Chikunkha School, Nsanje

Through the DFID-funded disaster reduction through schools (DRRS) project, ActionAid is adapting its PVA process to work in schools in seven countries – Nepal, Malawi, Haiti, Kenya, Ghana, Bangladesh and India. The project aims to make schools in high-risk disaster areas safer, enabling them to act as a locus for disaster risk reduction, institutionalising the implementation of the Hyogo Framework within education systems. This case study is one of four that appeared in the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) review of the use of PVA in the early stages of the project. The review aimed to inform the application of PVA in all the project's target countries, to share and learn from the experiences of using PVA – initially within the project team and then more widely. For more case studies and to read the review in full, visit [\[add url\]](#).

Situation

Chikunkha primary school is located in Nsanje district, southern Malawi. The region has many rivers and during the rainy season, floods are frequent. In times of heavy rain, the school is used as a shelter for villagers who live on low-lying land. But in recent years the amount and frequency of rain has increased, floods have become more severe and the school has been affected through material loss and degradation of its buildings.

The school does not have toilets and struggles to cope with the numerous people who flee their homes looking for a dry area. This causes difficulties and disrupts schooling. The poor sanitary conditions contribute to the contamination of water: when the floodwaters reach the school land, they wash the effluent away to the rivers and bore holes.

During the rainy season, access to school is severely limited as water levels prevent both children and teachers from reaching school. In these conditions, children sometimes miss weeks of school.

The communities around the school are also affected by droughts, which are becoming more frequent due to climatic changes. People lose their

crops and go hungry; and children (particularly girls) miss school to work or stay at home to take care of younger siblings and sick people.



Teachers from Chikunkha point out damage to the school wall.

The PVA process

In April 2007, ActionAid International Malawi initiated a PVA process with people from four villages located around the school. Although school children, their parents and the school management committee were particularly targeted, the process was open to all and children who did not attend school were also invited. Some of them shared their experiences and the difficulties they face with different groups of people, including district authorities.

Participants of the PVA came from four villages near the school and included the village chiefs. However, because the PVA took place during school holidays, some of the teachers and children were unable to attend. It was therefore suggested that in future PVAs should take place during the school year. The initial analysis and drawing up the actions plans took four days. Representatives were then selected to present the fruit of their work at a one-day district-level workshop.



Girls often miss school because they have to care for younger siblings

The participation of elderly people was quite helpful – they were able to do timelines which helped community members to analyse changing trends in weather patterns and the intensity of hazards. They also helped identify factors that have contributed to vulnerability – such as the reduction of trees and increased agriculture on river banks. The presence of members of community-based organisations (CBOs) was also valuable. Teachers explained that CBOs have usually little to contact with the school and that the community often failed to respond to invitations to visit the school. The PVA process therefore contributed to bringing the community closer to the school and to highlighting how the involvement of both teachers and children in the discussions can benefit to the whole community.

Main participatory tools used:

- focus group discussions with men, women, boys, girls and elderly people
- scoring and ranking (prioritising)
- problem trees/ root causes analysis
- mapping
- timeline and trend analysis (elderly)
- action planning

Problems identified

The difference between hazards and vulnerability was not really understood by participants, who considered floods as a vulnerability rather than a hazard. This limited the way that people could think of reducing their vulnerabilities. Altogether, the

focus groups identified close to 25 problems. After prioritising and ranking exercised they retained six for deeper analysis and action planning:

- floods
- droughts
- HIV and AIDS
- lack of teachers
- cracks in the school blocks
- girls missing school to care for sick people and younger children

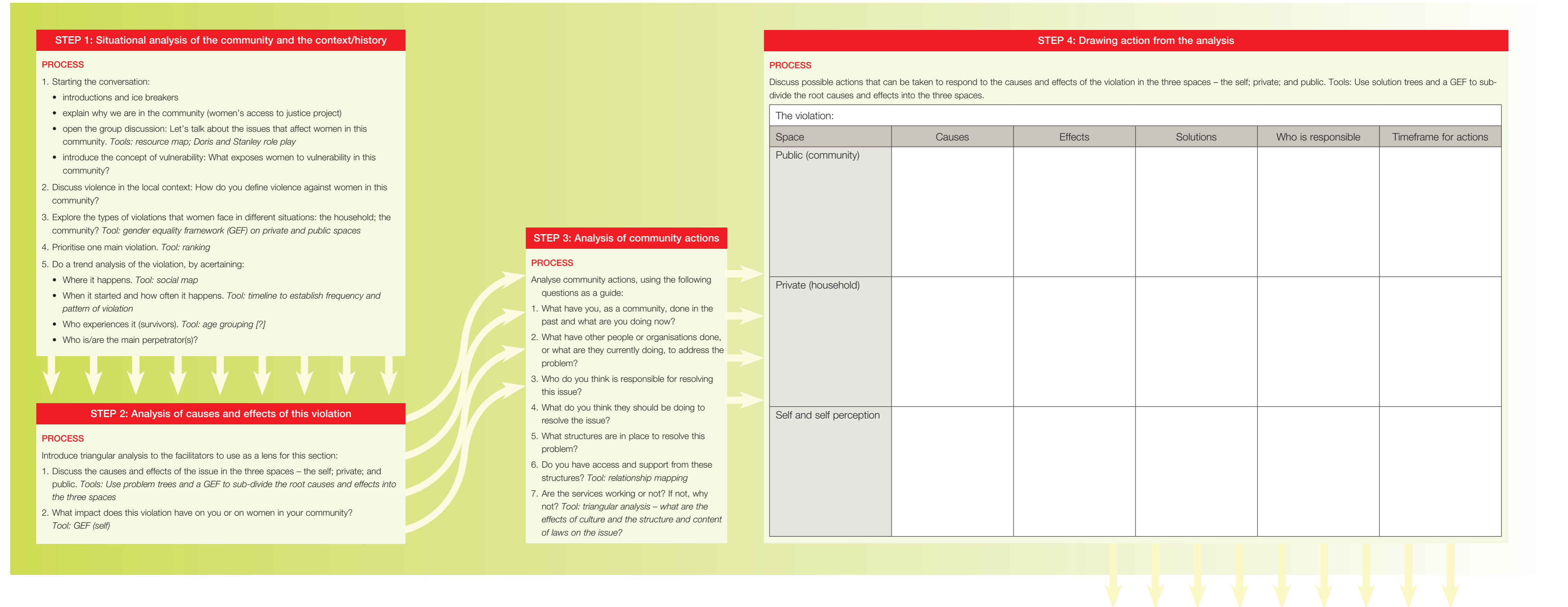
The sheer number of issues identified and the short time available meant that vulnerabilities were analysed rather superficially, without reaching much depth. More PVA would be needed to identify smaller concrete actions that could be taken at household and school levels to reduce vulnerability.

Actions undertaken

Following the PVA workshop with the district authorities, a task force was set up to assess if the school building was safe enough for the children to attend classes. They also committed to ask for support to either fix the existing buildings or build new school blocks in a safer area. Community members decided to collect sand and bricks to build houses for the teachers and contacted their extension officer about tree planting.

Teachers now want to do use PVA in class to help the children link their studies to real-life problems. They believe that children can influence their parents positively and that raising their awareness while they are young will have a positive impact on their behaviour and on the whole community.

3. Women's access to justice project, Liberia: a step-by-step guide to the PVA process



STEP 5: Community synergising of actions

PROCESS

1. Bring all three community groups together.
2. Ask a representative from each group to present their group's findings.
3. Get the community to discuss the presentations.
4. Develop a single community action plan, prioritising actions. *Tool: egg model*

The three violations (patterns of abuse):

RESPONSIVE ACTIONS: immediate actions to support the survivor and ensure that she is protected

	Actions
Public: community and structures	
Private: the family	
Self: the woman	

REMEDIAL ACTIONS: intermediate/follow-up actions to ensure the survivor recovers

	Actions
Public: community and structures	
Private: the family	
Self: the woman	

ENVIRONMENT BUILDING: long-term actions to stop the violation and ensure it does not recur

	Actions
Public: community and structures	
Private: the family	
Self: the woman	

Useful resources

PVA has a lot in common with other methodologies, tools and approaches. The resources in this section can be used to complement and enrich PVA work.

You can also download this guide and other valuable PVA materials – including case studies, lessons learnt, reports and evaluations of previous PVAs – from: www.actionaid.org/pva

PRA/PLA

“PRA (participatory rural appraisal) and the more inclusive PLA (participatory learning and action) are families of participatory methodologies which have evolved as behaviours and attitudes, methods and practices of sharing.” (Chambers 2007). PVA builds on concepts developed by PRA and PLA and extensively uses both these methods. There are countless manuals and resources on these approaches, which are often adapted to specific contexts and issues.

For an introduction to PRA/PLA and related approaches see:

Chambers, R. From PRA to PLA and Pluralism: Practice and Theory. IDS working paper 286, 2007

For some useful information on PRA/PLA manuals click here.

Reflect

Reflect is an innovative approach to adult education and social change which fuses Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s theories with participative methodologies. It helps groups of people, who meet regularly in Reflect circles, to analyse issues for themselves and articulate their views. Reflect circles are a basis for mobilisation. To date, there has been little interaction between Reflect and PVA, but bringing them together would help ensure that analysis and action created from a PVA can be followed up in the long term by a committed group of citizens. It would also ensure that any analysis and action evolved by a Reflect group takes a community’s risks and

vulnerabilities into consideration.

STAR (Societies tackling AIDS through rights)

STAR is a participatory approach for community mobilisation, empowerment and response to the challenges of HIV and AIDS. Linking together PVA and STAR will be essential when working with communities who are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

See a summary of the STAR approach: ActionAid. Community mobilisation to end AIDS: the STAR approach in action. 2008

ActionAid. A practitioner’s guide: Societies tackling AIDS through rights. 2008

ELBAG (Economic literacy and budget accountability in governance)

ELBAG supports social mobilisation by building the capacity of groups of citizens to look at financial aspects of development, public budgets and finances. It focuses on economic literacy, budget analysis, public distribution and the functioning of local services.

Gender framework

ActionAid’s gender framework provides “a guiding vision for all our internal and external work on gender and women’s rights.” For more information visit www.actionaid.org/xxx.

ActionAid. Women’s rights in emergencies: Integrating women’s rights into emergency response; a guide for trainers. 2009

Territorial analysis

Conflict analysis

To apply PVA in conflict, a sound knowledge of conflict analysis is essential. A useful reference is:

Africa Peace Forum et al. Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding – a resource pack. 2004

PVA has also been used to reduce violence against women in conflict or post-conflict states. Useful reports include:

ActionAid Burundi. International participatory vulnerability analysis training of trainers in Burundi. 2007

ActionAid Sierra Leone. A report on participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) on violence against women in Sierra Leone.

Advocacy and campaigning

There are many approaches to advocacy and campaigning. The best suited to PVA is people-centred advocacy, which puts citizens at the centre of action and decision making. A useful resource pack is:

ActionAid. Critical webs of power and change 200X

ActionAid publications and reports on disaster risk reduction

Other approaches to reducing disaster risk and vulnerability

Many organisations have developed methods and manuals on vulnerability and disaster risk reduction. A good starting point to explore the issue of disaster risk reduction is:

Twigg, J. Disaster risk reduction, mitigation and preparedness in aid programming. Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI, London 2004.

The best gateway for information, resources and manuals is: www.preventionweb.net

International tools

The Hyogo framework for action 2005-2015: building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

Glossary

disaster A natural or human-induced event, occurring with or without warning, that causes or threatens death, injury or disease, damage to property, infrastructure or the environment, and exceeds the ability of the affected society to cope using its own resources. Most natural disasters cannot be prevented; however, communities can be informed and prepared to prevent loss of property, health and money. Disasters occur when hazards meet vulnerability, meaning that loss of money, death and environmental damages are caused by human vulnerability and lack of emergency management planning.

ELBAG ELBAG (economic literacy and budget accountability in governance) enables communities to demand accountability from governments and international institutions and to reclaim rights and challenge injustice. A community learning process, it is aimed at breaking the barriers of information, knowledge and control, which ultimately make up power. The objective is to: bring about changes in favour of poor and marginalised people; increase their participation in economic and budgetary processes; reduce inequality and poverty; and promote transparency, accountability and basic rights.

hazard A natural or man-made phenomenon that may cause physical damage, economic loss and threaten human life and wellbeing, and thus has the potential of resulting or triggering a disaster. A natural hazard is a threat of a naturally occurring event that will have a negative effect on people or the environment. A man-made hazard has an element of human intent, negligence or error, or involves the failure of a man-made system. Hazards have varying degrees of intensity and severity.

Reflect ActionAid's innovative approach to adult education and social change, which fuses Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theories with participative methodologies, which enable participants to communicate their knowledge, experience and feelings without being restricted by literacy and language barriers. *Reflect* provides an on-going democratic space for a group of people to meet and discuss issues relevant to them. The development of literacy and other communication skills are closely linked to the engagement of people in wider processes of development and social change.

PRA Defined differently depending on the context, participatory rural appraisal is a generic term that covers the ever-growing family of participatory tools and methods. PRA tools emphasise local knowledge and enable local people to carry out their own appraisal, analysis, and planning. More recently, PRA has been extended to embrace ideas of learning and action. PRA uses group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analysis and action among stakeholders.

PLA The term participatory learning and action (PLA) was introduced in 1995, and is often used interchangeably with PRA. However, according to Robert Chambers it is broader than PRA and includes other similar or related approaches and methods.

PVA Participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) is a systematic process that involves communities and other stakeholders in an in-depth examination of their vulnerability and, at the same time, empowers or motivates them to take appropriate action. The overall aim of PVA is to link disaster preparedness and response to long-term development. The message at the heart of PVA is that communities know their situations best and so any analysis should be built on their knowledge of local conditions. The essence of PVA is not only for the community to develop action plans, but

to have their confidence built by valuing their knowledge and to be able to seek opportunities to enhance their resilience to difficult conditions.

STAR Societies tackling AIDS through rights – a participatory approach for community mobilisation, empowerment and response to the challenges of HIV and AIDS. STAR empowers people to protect themselves from HIV infection and to demand their rights to prevention, treatment and care. It has evolved from the fusions of two of ActionAid's long-standing programmes: Reflect and Stepping Stones – a participatory approach to HIV prevention – and seeks to build on the strengths of both these successful innovations, while addressing their limitations.

vulnerability Conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a person or community to the impact of hazards. People are more vulnerable if they are more likely to be badly affected by events outside their control.

Acronyms and abbreviations

DRR	disaster risk reduction
DRRS	disaster risk reduction in schools project
ELBAG	economic literacy and budget accountability in governance
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PLA	participatory learning and action
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
PVA	participatory vulnerability analysis
STAR	societies tackling AIDS through rights
TOR	terms of reference

Appendix 1: Participatory tools used during the PVA process

The PVA process involves using a variety of participatory tools with communities and other actors. These tools are designed to lead to the sharing of information and experiences, which in turn, helps to spread awareness and education to all members of the community and creates a solid foundation for an effective planning process and its documentation.

This section lists of some of the tools available. However, it is worth remembering that PVA is not a prescriptive approach and requires both creativity and adaptation to the local context. The choice of the tools you introduce, and the best way to apply them, will need to be decided on case-by-case basis.

1. Social map: One of the most popular tools used in the PVA process, social maps have been very effective in mobilising communities. A social map shows the physical situation of a village from the perspective of the community in a visual way, using varied materials. The map depicts housing and other infrastructure such as roads, schools, health facilities. Even the shyest person is eager to know whether his/her house has been drawn correctly, so there is usually good contribution to the process.

Social maps can be used to:

- help the community develop a broader understanding of its surroundings and the physical and social aspects of village life
- share information and data about the community
- provide an opportunity for community members to discuss and understand village dynamics and development concerns of all villagers
- allow a community to identify areas for future development interventions.

Issues to be aware of: Even though social maps provide an excellent opportunity for everyone, there are some possible problem areas. Non-literate participants can be reluctant to get involved, fearing ridicule from literate and elite members of the community. There is also a possibility that literate

and dominant community members may hijack the process and exclude the poor and marginalised. If communities are unable to devote the necessary time to the process, useful information can be omitted.

2. Resource map: Another commonly used tool, resource maps focus on the natural resources within a village – such as hills, rivers, agricultural fields, plantations, etc. This tool generates community involvement and participation, as everyone can contribute something to the map. The time spent creating the map increases community participation and strengthens the relationship between the community and facilitating organisation.

Resource maps can be used to:

- explore the various resources located within a village
- discuss how community members can manage these resources effectively
- generate discussion about entitlement to these resources and problems associated with them
- identify resources which could assist a community in times of disaster or reduce the impact of disasters.

Issues to be aware of: There is a likelihood that the map itself becomes more important than the process that creates due to its graphical and colourful representation. It is therefore important not to neglect the participative and consultative process that leads up to it. In some communities, sensitivity around land issues makes it a difficult exercise – in such cases, facilitators need to make sure the process does not increase sensitivity around them.

3. Seasonal diagram: Also known as season calendar or seasonal activity, this popular tool reflects the perceptions of the local community regarding seasonal changes over a wide range of items such as hazards, migration, diseases and livelihoods. Quantifying the items on the chart can help show how such items may increase or decrease over a

period of months. The seasonal diagram can be used to explore what happens during the year and when it happens. It can also show how a community perceives these elements and how they impact on their lives and livelihoods. By portraying the inter-relationship of these elements, these diagrams can bring out interesting analysis.

Seasonal diagrams can be used to:

- understand how the items are related and how they influence one another
- know when the periods for frequent hazards are, and how they affects other issues
- analyse the various livelihood options and patterns across the year
- identify periods of difficulty within a community – such as times of water shortage or increased ailments – discussing and planning appropriate interventions to resolve or cope with them.

Issues to be aware of: A seasonal diagram can bring out a lot of information on various aspects of community life which may create the possibility of drawing out seasonal variation of aspects that may not be necessary for, or related to, the planned intervention. Good facilitating skills are vital when using this tool – without them, inter-related elements can be missed, leading to inappropriate actions.

4. Problem ranking map: Also known as the pair-wise ranking method, it is very helpful for understanding and prioritising the problems faced by a community. The exercise compares two items – hazards or other issues facing the community – at a time, continuing the process until all items have been compared with each other. The frequency with which each item is ranked over another is counted, and the one with the highest ranking is identified as the community's biggest priority. It is important to facilitate a discussion with the community to arrive at a preference between two items. This exercise is extremely good at mobilising high community participation and discussions.

Problem ranking maps can be used to:

- ascertain a community's priorities, including post-disaster priorities
- understand the decision-making processes and factors that influence people's decisions
- help create a planned intervention based on the priorities identified
- generate a high level of involvement and participation from the community.

Issues to be aware of: Even though the tool may look simple, the selection of the preferences can be a complex process. Because preferences are not guided by a simple criteria, it can be difficult to arrive at a decision and there are often heated debates. Good facilitation is therefore crucial. Time and spatial factors can influence a ranking – for example, a lack of drinking water may be a problem immediately after a disaster, but not later in time. It is also important to keep a cap on the number of factors being ranked: once the number exceeds 10, the activity becomes very time-consuming and can lead to monotony and boredom, affecting the quality of results.

5. Mobility map: This tool identifies movement patterns of a community or individuals, showing the places people go, the frequency of their visits, distances covered, and modes of transport used.

Mobility maps can be used to:

- understand a community's mobility pattern – where they go and for what purposes
- increase everyone's awareness of places available to them
- increase gender sensitivity and awareness, by using the map to highlight differences between male and female mobility patterns.

Issues to be aware of: The mobility map is quite similar to the services and opportunities map (see 6). The facilitator must have a clear understanding of both to avoid confusion.

6. Service and opportunities map: This map is used to understand the places people visit beyond their village with special reference to the services and opportunities available. Although it looks similar to a mobility map, a service and opportunity map focuses on the usefulness of the places community members visit and the reasons they visit them.

Service and opportunities maps can be used to:

- know the places a community visits which are related to their overall development
- increase awareness and usefulness of these places by providing more information about them
- increase gender sensitivity and awareness by using this map to highlight the difference between male and female mobility patterns
- increase awareness of places that are useful to the community in times of disasters.

Issues to be aware of: There is a possibility that this map could be confused with a mobility map. It is therefore important that the facilitator has a thorough understanding of the difference between the two. Also, if people identify a large number of services at a few locations, they could be bit difficult to represent them on the map. In such cases, the facilitator should focus on the utility of these places and making more people aware of their existence, rather than on their location.

7. Venn diagram: This tool is used to know and study a community's perception of relationships between various institutions. Popularly known as a 'chapati' (round bread) diagram, it uses circles of various sizes to represent institutions and individuals: the bigger the circle, the more important the institution. The strength of the relationships between the community and the institutions are indicated by the distance between the institution's circle and the community circle: the closer the circles, the stronger the links.

Venn diagrams can be used to:

- provide insight into a community's power structures, relations and decision-making processes
- learn about institutions and their influence on the community

- understand the degree of interaction between institutions
- determine the institutions the community resorts to in time of emergencies and need for support

Issues to be aware of: Because this tool brings out the power dynamics within a community, it could make some institutions and individuals feel sensitive or uncomfortable. Participants may also be hesitant to report the actual power dynamics of these institutions and individuals for fear of reprisal. An experienced facilitator is needed to ensure the exercise does not give rise to problems.

8. Timeline: A timeline is used to learn and understand the history of a village with regard to various issues. By capturing the chronology of events as perceived and recalled by local people, it provides details of a community's historical landmarks or events. This tool provides an excellent opportunity for older people to participate and contribute.

A timeline can help to:

- learn about past events that the community consider to be important
- understand historical perspectives of current issues
- generate discussions on changes that have taken place locally and the impact these have on a community's lives
- learn about common disasters and the impact they have on a community.

Issues to be aware of: It is good to have elderly people participate in this exercise, but it may be impossible to pinpoint the accurate year of events. The facilitator may have to lead discussions that help the group agree on the most accurate approximation of the time. It is important to ensure that older women are consulted as well as older men and to triangulate all information received. Older people tend to get nostalgic about past events and can digress into discussions around this. The facilitator must therefore keep the conversation focused on the topic.

Appendix 2: PVA and climate change

Climate change is one of the greatest obstacles to ending impoverishment and inequality and to realising full human rights. Climate change affects all countries, but its impacts differ according to region, generation, age, race, ethnicity, social class, income group, occupation and gender. Climate change is an issue of ecological justice that challenges sustainable development and people's rights. The poorest countries and the poorest people have done the least to contribute to the problem; they also have little access to and control over resources, and thus the fewest means to respond to the problem. Nevertheless, it is they who will be most affected.

There is clear evidence that the number of people who are vulnerable to poverty as a result of climate change will probably increase. With a likely rise in the incidence of climate-related disasters, a growing number of people will be vulnerable to flooding and drought, and many households will be forced to migrate in search of new homes and livelihoods.

It is therefore important to identify and analyse the new and enhanced vulnerabilities of poor people that are created by climate change. There have been attempts to include this dimension while applying PVA; however, we need to make a conscious and systematic effort to integrate it in all programme and policy work.

Integrating climate change into ActionAid's work:

Climate change is no longer just an environmental issue. In the last few years, the engagement of the development community has highlighted the impact that climate change has on people, particularly poor people living in poor countries with limited resources to adapt. The new and enhanced level of vulnerabilities created by the shift in climatic patterns and the increased intensity and frequency of disasters need to be analysed and factored into programmatic and policy advocacy approaches to adaptation. DRR has been defined as "the first line of defence" to climate change adaptation, as both aim to build people's resilience. Communities have started facing the impact of climate change, and PVA provides them with an opportunity to understand

their vulnerabilities, capacities and the efforts they are making to adapt. There is therefore a need to build the capacity of community facilitators, development staff and government authorities to bring the dimension of climate change impacts into vulnerability analysis, development planning and DRR approaches.

Facilitator skills and knowledge: Facilitators need to consciously find the space and opportunity in the PVA process to bring in a climate change dimension and make the links with what participants are saying and the issues raised. If facilitators have the necessary knowledge about the shift in climatic patterns and the causes of disasters that are due to climate change, they will be able to help communities identify a range of adaptation solutions that can form part of programme planning and advocacy and be the basis of social change. PVA has the potential to analyse the ground situation and see the extent to which strategies are succeeding in building resilience and what new components need to be added for climate-resilient development.

Dealing with fatalism: In most cultures, the causes of weather and climate change are considered God-given or at least beyond the control of human influence (fate). However, empirical research has proved that climate change is human induced. This will challenge deep-seated cultural or religious beliefs and the associated expectations and knowledge about the best responses to new climate challenges. Facilitators will therefore need to display sensitivity over this issue and identify opportunities when climate change can be linked into discussions on vulnerability to build awareness levels in communities. This requires both a good understanding of the issues and good facilitation skills.

Opportunities to link issues to climate change: Facilitators must take up all opportunities to link issues facing communities to climate change – for example, when elderly people talk about changes they have experienced in the last few decades during timelines and trends analyses, or when farmers comment on changes in the seasons, frequency or severity of floods and drought, etc. It is important to seize these

opportunities to introduce climate change concepts and explain how the changes that are taking place are caused by humans through their unsustainable consumption of natural resources and not driven by God or fate. This can be a sensitive area.

Preconditioning: Incorporating climate change into a PVA process may require a considerable degree of preconditioning, as many communities will be unaware of global knowledge of future climate change, or may downplay their daily experience of shifting climatic patterns as fate or inconsequential. Preconditioning activities could take a variety of forms, including: public meetings; presentations by climate change communicators (informed by climate science); additions to the school curriculum; and a range of other exercises tailored to local conditions.

Disclosing prior information: The inclusion of climate change notions into a facilitator's training is crucial to the careful analysis of vulnerabilities, and this may require case-based knowledge derived from local meteorological agencies. While this may prejudice the PVA process, there is a serious risk that climate change risks may not emerge at all in the PVA unless climate change awareness-raising exercises are conducted in advance. It is important, however, to strike a balance between providing prior information about climate change and not overly influencing the priority communities should give to climate change.

Timing of activities: Giving careful consideration to the timing of activities – for example, running a meeting immediately after an untimely and unnatural flood or drought event – will help communities make connections between their daily lives and changing climatic conditions.

International dimension: Given the scale and global causes of climate change, the policy processes and networking relationships relevant to empowerment and change are not just those that are geographically close to affected communities. Rather, they involve a much broader array of international processes and actors. It is therefore important to ensure that the international dimensions of climate change are taken into account during PVA discussions with communities about the causes of climate change and the actions that need to be taken at all levels. Focusing purely on the local and national levels is

likely to result in an incomplete analysis of causes, which would consequently affect planning and any actions taken.

Appendix 3: Conflict sensitivity and PVA

Violent conflict disproportionately affects some of the poorest countries and poorest people in the world. According to the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), "By 2010, half the world's poorest people could be living in states that are experiencing, or at risk of, violent conflict. Tackling violent conflict and its underlying cause is essential if we are to make progress in the fight against world poverty." The people who are caught up in these conflicts suffer immediate and acute powerlessness as their homes and livelihoods are threatened and normal rules of peaceful civilian life are suspended.

ActionAid is one of many actors working in conflict situations around the world. While we all have different mandates and different priorities, we were also aware that all such initiatives have some sort of effect and consequence on the conflict situation – whether negative or positive. This raised the need to define and develop a conflict-sensitive approach to working in such situations. As a result, we became a founding member of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, whose 3.5-year DFID-funded project, "Conflict sensitivity – concept to impact" aims to share experience across agencies with different mandates and promote the mainstreaming of conflict-sensitive approaches across all such programming, regardless of mandate.

What is a conflict-sensitive approach?

A conflict sensitive approach involves using conflict analysis to gain a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context, and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of any interventions on conflict, within an organisation's given priorities or objectives.

Conflict sensitivity applies to all contexts, regardless of the severity or frequency of violence, even in situations where underlying tensions have not recently resulted in violence. It also applies to all types of work – humanitarian, development

and peacebuilding – and should include, where appropriate, work conducted by local civil society, government or private sector partners.

As a member of the consortium, ActionAid must apply conflict sensitivity across and throughout all areas of our work. This should be an institutional approach and be effectively mainstreamed in all our work.

Conflict sensitivity in PVA work

It is therefore important to be aware that any PVA conducted in a conflict-affected area will interact with that conflict. A PVA may have positive or negative consequences during all stages of conflict, and there is even a risk of it inadvertently exacerbating conflict or leading to new conflicts. As such, a thorough analysis and understanding of the underlying causes of the conflict situation is vital.

For more information on conflict sensitivity and ActionAid's role in the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, see Sarah Brown. Conflict sensitivity consortium benchmarking paper. 2009 or contact: amany.abouzeid@actionaid.org

This guide was written in November and December 2008 by Silva Ferretti,
with contributions and ideas from all over ActionAid.

It is a work in progress and is currently being piloting.

Feedback and comments are appreciated.

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people to end poverty and injustice together.

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