



# Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT): *Mapping Climate Vulnerabilities*

A majority of India's population is highly dependent on climate-sensitive sectors (agriculture, livestock, forests and fisheries) and natural resources (water, biodiversity, mangroves, coastal zones, grasslands) for survival and livelihoods. Climate Change is directly or indirectly responsible for adversely affecting these sectors by creating negative socio-economic pressures. Tackling climate change is already proving to be one of our biggest national challenges. The first step towards this is to know the problem: Vulnerability.

The Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) is a unique tool developed by WOTR to assess vulnerabilities of communities in a particular area. It gives 'indications' of the vulnerability of communities to the hazard which they are most likely to face. The tool is open-ended and allows constant improvisations. We at WOTR believe that there needs to be a shift in policy and implementation approaches from 'Development Planning' to 'Planning taking into account Uncertainty due to Climate Change'. So, WOTR has started conducting VAT trainings for implementation teams and development professionals.

The data for this Vulnerability mapping is not collected objectively by a field worker, but the entire community is involved in the data collection. This participatory method is always WOTR's grassroots approach and it ensures a strong rootedness in the current reality of the community.

A common terminology is explained to facilitate better understanding:

- *Vulnerability* (The extent to which a natural or social system is susceptible to sustaining damage from climate change), *Sensitivity*, *Resilience*, *Adaptation*, *Adaptive capacity*, *Risk*, *Hazard* (An event with potential to cause harm) and *Sustainable development*
- The difference between *Adaptation* (actions undertaken as a response to stress) and *Adaptive capacity* (ability of a system to adjust to climate change and to take advantage of opportunities, and cope with the consequences)
- **Types of Adaptation:** *Anticipatory/ Reactive* (as a private, public response as well as for specific sectors like Agriculture) and *Policy-driven adaptation*
- **Approaches to Adaptation:** Building adaptive capacity, Taking adaptive action, Autonomous or unassisted adaptation

A VAT worksheet is prepared which documents:

- Drivers and pressures in Climate Sensitive Livelihood sectors,
- Data collection from the field – past history, current scenario, responses to problems till date
- Risks and Resources- i.e. The 5 Capitals in the village (Natural, Physical, Social, Human and Financial Capital) needed for identified climate risks / vulnerable groups

The SYSTEMS APPROACH is used to map all interdependencies and interactions between the Capitals. Then a VULNERABILITY CODE is generated by grading all highly sensitive and essential resources on a scale of 1 – 5, again based on the 5 Capitals.

Vulnerabilities of a community can change over time in many different and subtle ways. The speciality of VAT is its flexibility. Coping with uncertainty and change is interwoven into its approach and so the assessment is never static. It is an effective tool to gauge the efficacy of current interventions and plan new immediate interventions if needed. VAT could help implementation team and development practitioners in planning and modifying their approach and actions- Adapting to a changing climate in the real sense.

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