2.7.0

CLIMATE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK
ISET-INTERNATIONAL

Contents of Set

TRAINING.I-S-E-T.ORG

VULNERABILITY AND INSTITUTIONS

Vulnerability is often perpetuated through institutional constraints, either cultural norms and expectations, or governance. Identifying and addressing these constraints is critical to successfully building resilience.

IN THIS SET YOU WILL:

✓ Explore the role institutions play in maintaining vulnerability in your city.

Institutions

Institutions are the rules, laws, customs, social norms and conventions that guide, enable, and constrain people's behavior. Institutions define the range of perceived possible responses or actions in a given situation. Institutions can be formal or informal, overt or implicit. They are created to reduce uncertainty, to maintain continuity of social patterns and social order, and to make our interactions more stable and predictable.

Institutions link agents and systems, thereby mitigating or exacerbating vulnerability, by constraining or enabling access by agents to those systems. This can be seen in overt ways – who has access to education, health services, clean water supplies, labor markets. However, institutions also structure things such as:

- Who is enabled or constrained to play a role in decision-making (i.e. who is viewed as a legitimate "stakeholder"). This influences whose interests are considered in political decisions;

- The standards to which systems are designed and managed (i.e. building codes, engineering standards), which strongly influences whether those systems will meet the needs of users;

- Pricing structures for urban services, which influences access to those services, particularly for the poor;

- Slum clearance and resettlement, which can be positive or negative based on whether it incorporates just compensation, participatory planning and governing rights; and

- Social marginalization or entitlement.

Cultural exclusion of women, the disabled, migrants and inadequate representation of the young and elderly tend to leave them more vulnerable than others, and put them particularly at risk. In assessing institutional enabling or constraining of populations, these groups should be called out explicitly.

Characteristics of Resilient Institutions

The attributes of resilient institutions are:

- **Access:** Rights and entitlements to use key resources or access urban systems are clear and are equitably distributed;

- **Decision-making:** Decision-making processes, particularly in relation to urban development and urban system management, follow widely accepted principles of good governance, chiefly: transparency, accountability, and responsiveness (United Nations Development Program, 1997 #292); and

- **Information:** Private households, businesses, and other decision-making agents have ready access to accurate and meaningful information to enable judgments about risk and vulnerability and for assessing adaptation options.

In the following exercise you will consider vulnerable groups in your city and the institutions that contribute to perpetuating that vulnerability. Using these resilience characteristics will help identify entry points for institutional change.

INSTITUTIONS
Information

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Illustration by Jamie Stroud
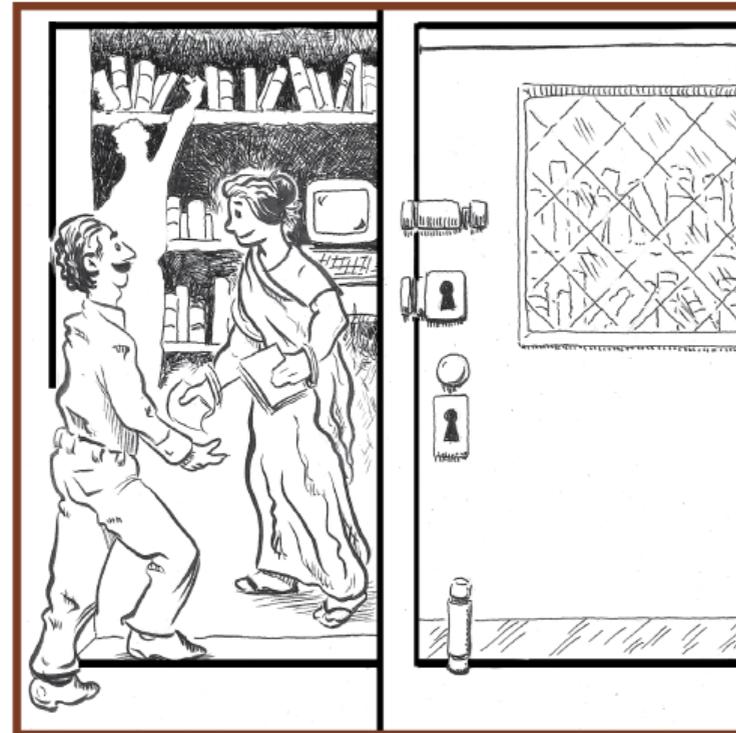
2.7.1

SERIES 2
Understanding
Vulnerability & Risk

CLIMATE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK
ISET-INTERNATIONAL

☑ **Activity 2.7.1**

Exploring Vulnerability and Institutions

Institutions—rules, laws, customs, social norms and conventions—guide, enable, and constrain people's behavior. Institutions define the range of perceived possible responses or actions in a given situation. Consequently, institutions play a large role in constraining or enabling agent response to shocks and crises. Resilience requires strong institutions that enable agent response and support access to needed systems.

Sometimes the role of institutions in creating vulnerability is obvious, such as when girls are not allowed to attend school through either formal policies or social convention. However, because institutions have the role of mediating access and response of agents, their impact on vulnerability can also be indirect. Here we provide two different activities that will allow you to explore how institutions enable or constrain agent response to stressors. Feel free to use either activity, both, or a combination of the two.

IN THIS ACTIVITY YOU WILL:

✓ Use creativity and imagination to explore the complexity of vulnerability; and

✓ Explore the role institutions play in maintaining vulnerability in your city.

In Activity 2.5.2 we mapped community vulnerability. This activity may build on that one indirectly.

ACTIVITY OPTION 1:
Worst Humanitarian Or Community Development Agency EVER!

For all the talk that we hear about best practices, we know that there are things that do happen that would fit into the category of worst practices. This activity is a chance to playfully develop worst practices, ones that would increase a community's vulnerability.

In small groups, with whatever area of specialty that you are most familiar with, imagine what you would do if you were part of the worst community development, community planning, or humanitarian agency ever. First identify the vulnerable community that you would be working with, possibly the one that was mapped in exercise 2.5.2 or another that the whole group is familiar with and can imagine easily. Then get creative about entrenching existing problems and making things worse!

This is an activity where you get to let your imagination run wild. If you were a team of mythical tricksters, or misguided fairy godmothers with the magic ability to wave a wand and make things happen, what would you do?

- What actions would you propose to increase vulnerability of the target community that you are working with?

- What things can you do or facilitate that would weaken agents and lead to fragile systems?

- How can you undermine the ability of key local ecosystems to adapt or bounce back?

- What role would institutions play in making things worse? Would there be discriminatory laws? Cultural or religious norms that prohibit certain activities?

Brainstorm your ideas of WORST practices on a large piece of flip chart or butcher paper on the table.

Examples that you might come up with are things like:

- You can change organizational mission objectives and organizational priorities and shuffle budgets so no one knows how long resources will last and long term planning is impossible.

- You can defer exclusively to outside experts about local problems, and avoid building local knowledge and capacity.

- You can discourage collaboration and encourage staff in different departments to work in isolation without coordinating with other teams or outside agencies.

- You could build only one road that allows access in and out of town.

- You could build dikes along rivers with the weakest, most likely to fail points right next to the most critical city infrastructure.

- You could insist on strict adherence to hygienic, dietary or dress standards even during disasters, and refuse aid to anyone not meeting those standards.

ACTIVITY OPTION 1: DEBRIEF
Returning to the real world & decreasing vulnerability

After completing the brainstorm—or when you think you have enough examples to work with (and have laughed a bit):

Review what has been written down, some of the ideas might be so ridiculous that their opposite might highlight simple ways to reduce vulnerability. Write down what simple actions could be effective in *reducing* vulnerability.

- Which of these actions could you implement now? Which could you implement with the addition of limited resources or through strategic partnering?

- Are there existing organizations that would be natural allies in implementing these actions?

Now, pick two to five of these actions and identify institutions that would enable or constrain either implementation of the action, or the effectiveness of the action once it was implemented. Make two lists, one of enabling institutions, and one of constraining institutions.

- For the enabling institutions, are there ways you can further leverage potential institutional support for your action?

- For the constraining institutions, are there ways that

these institutions could be changed such that they would better address and reduce vulnerability? Are there smaller changes you could begin to act on? (e.g. education campaigns around vaccination or domestic violence, lobbying local government to change zoning, etc.)

ACTIVITY OPTION 2:
Role Play

This activity, a role-play with 2 to 4 roles, works best with a team of people who know and trust each other. If you have a very large group of people (more than 20) you might want to break into several smaller groups.

Roles:

1. Individual experiencing a shock or stress. This character is a member of a vulnerable community that has relevance in your local context. This person could be a member of the community that you mapped in exercise 2.5.2.

   Examples:
   • A single mother who earns money by preparing food at home to sell in the market, and lives in an area that floods regularly.
   • A motorcycle taxi driver who has broken his leg.
   • A youth who has to work to support his or her family and so can't go to school.

2. Representative of Social Services (or similar)

3. Representative of Community Development organization (or similar)

4. Representative of Community/Land Use/Urban Planning commission (or similar)

The two key roles to include are the individual from a vulnerable community and someone who can stand as a representative for key social institutions. To highlight power discrepancies, this activity is more effective when the vulnerable individual is outnumbered by representatives of the institutional systems that control their access to resources.

Once participants have decided on characters they should take a couple of minutes to imagine the role in greater depth.

PLAYING THE GAME:

The person who takes the role of the vulnerable individual approaches each of the service of planning representatives in turn, trying to problem solve around their particular stressor or crisis. What services or supports might theoretically be available?

Round 1:
The vulnerable individual requests support from each service representative/social institution. Each of the representative reply to a request for support with "No, because…."

For example:
The motorcycle taxi driver could ask for temporary income support from the social service agency, and the representative would reply something like "No, because, you were self employed and you need to provide proof of employment from your previous employer to have access to any income support."

Round 2:
Each of the representatives reply to the same request for support in the positive with "Yes, and ….". This gives the opportunity to imagine how to support AND build on the response requested.

For example:
In response to the same request the response could now be something like "Yes we provide partial income replacement AND skills training so you have the option of finding different work when you are able to work again."

At any point in the exchange if someone in a role is stuck they can ask for help from another member of the group in the audience. If someone else in the group has another idea for how the scene is played out they ask to replace someone currently playing a role or come in in a new role. The two rounds can also be repeated with different people to give more people the opportunity to participate and to build creative energy around the exchange.

Participants watching the role-play can be attentive to where there are institutions that would play a part enabling or constraining the responses of the characters.

DEBRIEF CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION:

Once everyone interested in participating has had a chance to do so, have a large group discussion. As a starting point for conversation consider these questions:

- What did it feel like to participate in the first round of exchanges?

- What did it feel like to participate in the second round?

- What were the key differences?

- Which of the scenarios that came up are likely issues for your community? What could you do to start changing these dynamics?

- In the scenarios, were institutions involved, either overtly or indirectly, in enabling or constraining actions?

- What were features of institutional responses that helped to decrease vulnerability or build resilience?

Note for Facilitators: This activity will probably go a little more quickly if you take some time to develop examples of characters that are locally relevant. It might also go more smoothly, because you can predict questions and challenges in advance and be prepared to address them.