

# IMPLICATIONS

1 A wellbeing approach offers a clearer understanding of what matters to communities, and different groups within them, beyond traditional metrics such as increased income or reduced biophysical impacts to a hazard.

2 Wellbeing goes beyond the material aspect. It includes relational and subjective elements. Interventions aimed solely at improving material wellbeing may result in unintended consequences for subjective or relational wellbeing. Consulting with the people who will be affected by an intervention, to understand what affects their wellbeing, can help to avoid unintended consequences.

3 Risks and responses change over time and space. Households **shift in and out of vulnerability**. A dynamic understanding of risk and response, as well as how conceptions of wellbeing change over time, can give insights into where adaptation interventions should be targeted to be most effective.



4 People's aspirations motivate them to make certain livelihood and risk management choices. Understanding aspirations is important for designing effective state and non-state interventions that improve overall wellbeing for households and the individuals within them.

5 Recognising how aspirations change is key and can be used to inform investments by the state and private actors into sectors such as commerce, health, education (including vocational training), and industry. It can also help with effective implementation of agricultural policies and other programmes targeted at improving rural wellbeing. For example, projects in the context of larger-scale rural-to-urban migration can focus on young men as change agents where skill-building programmes and beyond-farm livelihood opportunities can help improve incomes while meeting personal aspirations.



6 When implementing or devising adaptation interventions, there is a need to consider the cultural, social, and ecological contexts people live in, and how changes to these systems could impact different groups' wellbeing.

7 The perspectives of affected communities must be included in decisions on appropriate ways to adapt to environmental change. Meaningful consultation, which also explores the factors that contribute to people's wellbeing, is required to allow numerous and diverse opinions and voices to be heard.

8 Any intervention will result in winners and losers. Acknowledging these winners and losers should form an important element of the design and implementation of interventions so that appropriate compensation arrangements can be made.

9 It is important to understand how the adaptation actions of some groups can compromise the wellbeing of others, making everyone more vulnerable in the long term.

## Read more

ASSAR. 2018. *Do conservancies enhance the adaptive capacity of communities? Perspectives from ASSAR's work in Kenya*. Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8dpt2yd>.

ASSAR. 2018. *Sometimes our interventions can lead to unintended consequences: A well does not always lead to wellbeing*. Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7awzvzd>.

Singh, C., Rahman, A., Srinivas, A. and Bazaz, A. 2018. Risks and responses in rural India: Implications for local climate change adaptation action. *Climate Risk Management*, 21: 52-68. DOI: [10.1016/j.crm.2018.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2018.06.001)

Solomon, D. S. and Rao, N. 2018. Wells and well-being in South India. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 53(17). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yawfjgu7>

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# A FOCUS ON WELLBEING CAN LINK ADAPTATION TO OUTCOMES THAT MATTER TO PEOPLE

A wellbeing approach helps humanise adaptation work, making it less technocratic and scientific. The approach emphasises the relevance of human needs and aspirations; the different resources and capacities people have; and how these shape livelihood choices,

satisfaction with life, and resilience. It recognises that people's capacity to engage in adaptation action, and the types of action they can engage in, varies within communities and households. All these factors coalesce to have implications for equity and inclusion.

BECAUSE SOCIAL DYNAMICS ARE SO IMPORTANT IN DETERMINING PEOPLE'S VULNERABILITY, A WELLBEING APPROACH CAN HELP MAKE ADAPTATION POLICIES AND ACTIONS MORE EFFECTIVE.



EACH DIMENSION HAS OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE COMPONENTS.

For example, material wellbeing can relate to whether people feel their income is secure and sufficient to meet their needs, in addition to how much income they have.

LOOKING AT THE OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE COMPONENTS HIGHLIGHTS SITUATIONS WHERE THE TWO MAY BE IN CONFLICT.

For example, objectively people may have a large income, but it may not be reliable, or could be earned through work that is perceived as demeaning.



The five-year ASSAR project (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions, 2014-2018) uses insights from multi-scale, interdisciplinary work to inform and transform climate adaptation policy and practice in ways that promote the long-term wellbeing of the most vulnerable and those with the least agency.

## NEEDS, VALUES AND MOTIVATIONS SHAPE ADAPTATION CHOICES.

Wellbeing considers what people have and value; what they feel they can do within their socio-economic context; and how supported they feel. People's values, aspirations and motivations largely influence the choices they make and shape their adaptation decisions. These concerns are important to assist and encourage decision makers to work more closely with stakeholders to design and develop interventions that meet people's needs.

### CASE STUDY 1: UNDERSTANDING WHAT COMMUNITIES IN OMUSATI, NAMIBIA, NEED TO IMPROVE THEIR WELLBEING.

In rural villages in Omusati, Namibia, people see food security, good relations with their neighbours, access to government services, and rural development as important for their wellbeing. These issues intertwine to shape how they respond to environmental stress.

*During times of stress, people get support from their neighbours. Neighbours are the "neck-bone that holds the head to the body," as one person put it. "They help me with any needs that I have.... I can borrow money and food," said another.*

For these communities, crop farming provides food security and underpins cultural identity. With increasingly changing rainfall seasons, and more frequent and intense droughts and floods, people are struggling to grow crops. Many farmers are feeling hopeless. They perceive that growing crops is not viable and there are few alternatives. This affects their wellbeing at the material and psychological level.

Government and development services are essential for sustaining agricultural production in these isolated communities. People report that their satisfaction with access to government services is "average," indicating room for improvement. To improve their wellbeing, communities in Omusati need support for farming (e.g. tractors, seeds and water); better access to services (including health facilities); and support for dealing with shocks and stresses over the long term. They also need to diversify their livelihood activities beyond those affected by climate risk. Social networks (e.g. self-help groups) can enable communities to receive well-coordinated support from government, and stave off the erosion of social cohesion.

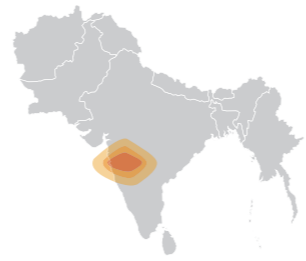


## CHANGING RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IMPACT WELLBEING IN THE SHORT AND LONG TERM.

Despite having honed their risk management strategies over generations, people in semi-arid regions (SARs) are now changing the way they deal with risks. They have to contend with increased frequency and severity of climate change impacts, increased uncertainty around climate, and uncommon climate events (like hail storms at harvest time). Responses to these risks range from no response to coping, adaptive, or potentially maladaptive. While some strategies improve household wellbeing in the short term these do not always lead to increased capacity to deal with climatic risks in the long term. Risk management strategies have trade-offs. It is crucial to recognise that some strategies might have unintended negative consequences in the future that can undermine wellbeing.

### CASE STUDY 2: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES FOR GROUNDWATER LEVELS IN MAHARASHTRA, INDIA.

To enhance agricultural security in India's Maharashtra state, in 2010 the government introduced a scheme to subsidise and promote farm ponds so farmers could harvest rainwater and adapt to the unpredictability of the monsoon. In the short term, these proved beneficial, enabling better conditions for growing crops. However, some farmers chose to convert the ponds, enlarging them and using them as storage tanks to hold groundwater. This has led to over-extraction from the aquifer system by a few farmers. Large farmers are better able to adapt to changing rainfall patterns while small farmers do not have adequate irrigation. Unequal access to groundwater has increased the vulnerability of communities and added stress to the agrarian ecosystem. By undertaking unsustainable practices in the short term, people's long-term wellbeing, and particularly that of worse-off farmers, has been put at risk. Future climate variability and change could make matters worse.



## ASPIRATIONS GIVE INSIGHTS INTO WHY PEOPLE ARE ADAPTING OR NOT.

People tend to measure their current standard of living against a set of socially-influenced goals. They may aspire to make changes in order to reach these goals. Understanding aspirations helps us better understand why, and how, people are adapting or not.

Adaptation is a process of gradual behavioural change driven by the experience of dealing with shocks over time. We might assume that people change their perceptions and actions to deal with issues like water scarcity and food insecurity in the present and future. But behaviours do not operate in a vacuum. They are shaped by household endowments, assets, social norms, cultural beliefs, environmental conditions, personal views and aspirations.

In SARs, people perceive climate variability as one of many factors that drive aspirations for different livelihood choices. It is important to understand what drives shifts to alternate livelihoods, and how these choices affect wellbeing.

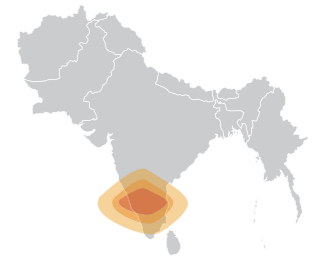
### CASE STUDY 3: YOUNG AND OLD ASPIRE FOR SHIFT AWAY FROM FARMING IN MOYAR-BHAVANI, INDIA.

In Coimbatore, in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the increasing uncertainty of farm profits, coupled with changing aspirations, is driving a decline in agricultural growth. Threats to rainfed agriculture (e.g. erratic rainfall, pests, unstable markets, and increasingly frequent extreme climatic events) have caused farmers to adopt intensive farming practices, and a shift away from growing food and fodder crops. But farming remains challenging.

*"We do not want our children to continue in agriculture, that is why we are investing all our money into their schooling. Let them get good salaried jobs, we don't want them to face the same difficulties that we face [...] Our land is all for them but we have told them to sell it after we are gone; we work hard so that they can have a better life away from here."*  
- Sethalaxmi and her husband, Muniappa.

Young people are no longer interested in farming. They aspire to earn regular cash income. They choose better paying jobs in nearby urbanising towns, where they work in textile manufacturing and chemical industries. The average age of farmers in this region is now around 55. Most are men. At the same time, older generations aspire for their children to get an education and find salaried employment.

Understanding aspirations for younger generations sheds light on why people make certain decision that affect their wellbeing and adaptation options. We see how older family members prioritise aspirations for their children over individual wellbeing. In Coimbatore, people are increasingly taking out loans to pay for their children's higher education, but the lack of government support for low-interest loans for education has led to high rural indebtedness.



## SOCIAL WELLBEING IS AS IMPORTANT AS MATERIAL ASSETS.

Traditional approaches to development tend to focus on material wellbeing, ignoring the subjective and relational components. Material wellbeing is important but sometimes this can improve while other wellbeing elements decline. Even though policy shifts may result in increased material wellbeing for some groups, this can come at the expense of other wellbeing aspects for the same group, or the wellbeing of other groups. People may feel less valued, find their aspirations unmet, or feel they are not "doing as well" as others.

### CASE STUDY 4: CONSERVANCIES IN KENYA CAUSE TRADE-OFFS IN DIFFERENT GROUPS' WELLBEING.

In Kenya, since the early 2000s, a conservancy model has enabled a community-based approach to natural resource management and wildlife conservation in semi-arid regions. Conservancies have improved material wellbeing and resulted in numerous benefits for host communities. These include better education; access to social services and loans; and jobs for youth. Women, who are involved in businesses like beadwork, have benefitted from improved market linkages. They also have improved decision-making power and take part in managing education bursaries.

But this model has trade-offs, which affect the subjective wellbeing of different groups in different ways. Some elders report feeling disempowered. While they benefit from ecotourism income, improved security, and enhanced livestock management, young men have taken charge of conservancy management, assuming decision-making roles that were traditionally the preserve of elders. While elders admit they are still consulted, they have lost their sole decision-making role over access to grazing and water resources.



*"Before, the roles were clearly defined and issues to do with access to pasture and water were discussed and concluded by elders only. One would have a voice on such issues only if he owned livestock. The morans (youth) were errand boys and would only act on decisions made by the elders. However, conservancies prefer the youth and often educated ones lead the grazing committees. They are at times forced to consult us, especially in cases of conflicts, because of our experience in handling such issues. It is a very good thing that conservancies have employed our children. However, because of their education there is the danger that at times they may underrate the voices of the elders in their decision."*  
- Borana elder.

