

We know that climate change can compromise people's wellbeing in multiple ways, be it through impacts on income, livelihoods, food security, social and gender relations, or the degradation of natural resources.

How can we ensure that adaptation policies and practices are genuinely impactful and useful to the people with whom we work?

*the* **ASSAR**

**SP**  **TLIGHT**

*on*

Wellbeing

# CONTENTS

- March 2016 -

## Meeting People's Needs, Wants and Goals

An overview of the 'Wellbeing Approach'  
by Laura Camfield

## Regional reflections on wellbeing

### ~ India

How climate change is affecting people's wellbeing in India  
by Andaleeb Rahman

### ~ Southern Africa

The impact of drought on the wellbeing of subsistence farmers in north-central Namibia  
by Irene Kunamwene

### ~ East Africa

Pastoralism under pressure in the drylands of East Africa  
by Daniel McGahey

### ~ West Africa

We want sign boards, not fancy toilets!  
by Edmond Totin

## Changing attitudes, changing actions

Reflections on a multi stakeholder workshop to understand the dimensions of vulnerability and risk in Botswana  
by Daniel Morchain

## About ASSAR

# Opportunities

ACDI Masters 2017 – scholarships for Botswanans and Namibians.... *UCT, South Africa*  
National-level stakeholder engagement event .....*India*

# Upcoming Events

MARCH & APRIL 2016

Southern Africa Vulnerability & Risk Assessment, Omusati Region..... *Namibia*  
East Africa national stakeholder event in Addis Ababa ..... *Ethiopia*  
East Africa local stakeholder event in Awash Fentale Woreda ..... *Ethiopia*  
East Africa household questionnaire surveys ..... *Kenya*  
West Africa student field work ..... *Ghana and Mali*  
West Africa national- and district-level stakeholder mapping ..... *Mali*  
India team questionnaires in Kolar, Karnataka sub-region ..... *India*  
India team vulnerability assessment in the Sangamner sub-region ..... *India*

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# Meeting People's Needs, Wants and Goals

## An overview of the 'Wellbeing Approach'

by **Laura Camfield**

East Africa Researcher  
University of East Anglia

### The Wellbeing Approach

To ensure our work at ASSAR is genuinely useful to the people we are working with, we use a 'wellbeing approach' in all of our investigations into vulnerability and adaptation. This approach considers more than what a person has (their material wellbeing); it considers what they do (their agency), and what they feel and think about what they have and are able to do (the subjective and relational dimensions of wellbeing). It takes into account not only a person's current circumstances, but also their aspirations, and the wider context in which these aspirations are formed and realised. This helps us to better understand what really matters to different groups at different times, and to get a holistic idea of how people view and experience the world around them.

Employing a wellbeing approach doesn't require fundamental changes to typical social science methods; by combining different kinds of information (qualitative and quantitative data; objective, subjective and intersubjective data) the approach moves beyond simple vulnerability assessments. Instead research becomes more people-oriented and context-specific, and supports a socially differentiated and fluid understanding of people's needs.

Within climate change adaptation research and practice specifically, we can use this approach to understand how environmental change - and interventions to address this change - affect people's wellbeing. We can then gauge how adaptation policy and practice impacts on people's vulnerability - both intentionally and unintentionally.

### Applying a wellbeing approach in ASSAR

Professor Allister McGregor, one of the main proponents of wellbeing approaches within international development and natural resource management argues that "the challenge of sustainable development is the challenge of finding ways to live well together both in terms of people on the planet now and the people who will be on the planet in the future"<sup>1</sup>. Does this broader temporal and spatial awareness require a wellbeing approach, or is it already part of our existing practice as researchers, practitioners and policy makers?

At ASSAR we recognise that wellbeing – understood as being “not just about what people have, but what their goals and aspirations are ... [and the] choices they make in trying to achieve these goals”<sup>2</sup> – is central to the way in which we work with communities.



Photo: Sumetee Pahwa Gajjar

**Shifting to a perspective that is 'people-centred' rather than 'project-centred' enables us to understand why interventions are or are not successful by looking at how people respond to them.**

In his [article about West Africa](#), for example, Edmond Totin describes how thousands of dollars could have been saved had the development project which funded sanitation facilities in a village realised that what the community *really* needed was secure grain storage and signage to facilitate visits from middlemen to sell their crops. Sanitation may be a universal human need, but at that point, community members were pursuing the equally important goal of food security.

**A wellbeing approach also provides insights into the importance of relationships and the threat to people's subjective wellbeing when these are damaged.**

For example, in her [article on wellbeing in Southern Africa](#), Irene Kunamwene describes how farmers in north-central Namibia feel themselves to be genuinely poor because they cannot share food with family members and neighbours as they did in the past, indicating how, in the words of one respondent, 'poverty can destroy relationships'. In his article on [wellbeing in East Africa](#), Daniel McGahey observes a similar phenomenon in Kenya where traditional pastoralist safety nets are being replaced by church-based or informal support.

**Within research and practice, the relational 'turn' in wellbeing, which had previously focused more on material and subjective aspects, also helps us understand the intended and unintended impacts of policies and programmes on people's vulnerability.**

For example, in his [article on wellbeing in India](#), Andaleeb Rahman describes how rural young people are increasingly relocating to the cities to avoid the drop in agricultural productivity due to higher temperatures, and as a result are facing the effects of climate change in urban areas, which include water and vector-borne diseases. Andaleeb observes that vulnerability to climate change is shaped by existing class, caste and gender tensions that intersect with poverty. Vulnerability to climate change also intersects with political marginalisation, for example, Edward Totin notes that a barrier to adaptation for smallholders in Mali is the lack of secure land tenure, highlighting the political nature of wellbeing research and practice.

**Practically speaking, a wellbeing approach also offers a methodology for combining qualitative, quantitative, and objective, subjective and intersubjective data to address the same question from different angles. This is important in a multi-country programme such as ASSAR that aims to support people's own adaptation strategies and understand the barriers they face in pursuing them.**

**In the second phase of ASSAR's research (the Regional Research Phase; 2015-2018) this will involve encouraging a participatory process where people establish what they value most, for example, through 'scenarios', and what the indicators of wellbeing should be, recognising that wellbeing perceptions and priorities are likely to be differentiated and competing.**

<sup>1</sup> McGregor, J.A. (2014). *Human wellbeing and sustainability: interdependent and intertwined*. In: Atkinson, G., Dietz, S., Neumayer, E. and Agarwala, M, (eds.) *Handbook of Sustainable Development: Second Edition*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, pp. 217-232. ISBN 9781782544692.

<sup>2</sup> Gough, I., McGregor, I. A. and Camfield, L. (2007) *Theorizing wellbeing in international development*. In: Gough, Ian and McGregor, J. Allister, (eds.) *Wellbeing in Developing Countries: From Theory to Research*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, pp. 3-44. ISBN 9780521857512.

## THREE TYPES OF DATA CAN BE USED IN COMBINATION TO ASSESS WELLBEING

**Objective:** externally observable and independently verifiable aspects of people's circumstances; for example, their income.

**Subjective:** people's 'subjective' perceptions and assessments of these aspects; for example, whether they feel their income is adequate.

**Intersubjective:** subjective views shared and agreed upon by two or more people; for example, how people's gender and ethnicity affect their ability to earn an adequate income.

ASSAR recently held a public webinar on wellbeing. View the recording of this webinar [here!](#)



Photo: Sumetee Pahwa Gajjar

# south ASIA

How climate change is affecting people's wellbeing in India

by **Andaleeb Rahman**

*South Asia Researcher*  
Indian Institute for Human Settlements

To get a better sense of how climate change is impacting the wellbeing of people in rural and urban areas of India we spent our early ASSAR months delving into the wide landscape of literature on the topic. Here's what we learned.

## Rural areas

Rural India is reeling under acute distress owing to droughts<sup>1</sup>. These resource-poor and mostly rain-fed regions of the country also have high levels of poverty, small farm sizes and low agricultural productivity. As higher temperatures and rates of evapo-transpiration threaten to lower agricultural productivity even further, so food insecurity becomes an ever-possible reality. Already rises in the prices of staple food items have become a common feature in the news<sup>2</sup>.

With agriculture no longer remunerative, farming households are diversifying into non-farm labour and distress migration. Census figures show a significant drop in the number of cultivators between 2001 and 2011, while the number of agricultural labourers has increased. It remains to be seen whether these occupational transitions are purely coping mechanisms or whether they can be considered as adaptation measures that lead to improved wellbeing.

We heard some of these issues first-hand during a scoping visit to a village in the water-scarce district of Kolar, Karnataka – an area marred by erratic rainfall patterns. People in this village talked of diminishing water levels, drying bore wells, lower soil fertility, and fluctuating market prices<sup>3</sup>. More and more village youths are choosing non-agricultural occupations, and commuting to urban areas (in this case Bangalore which is

an hour's train ride away) for work – a pattern mirrored in most rural areas of semi-arid India.

## Urban areas

Impacts of climate change on the urban areas of India are magnified through unplanned urbanisation, infrastructural bottlenecks and poverty. In the last few years frequent incidences of extreme rainfall events in Chennai, Srinagar, Guwahati and Haridwar have exposed the vulnerability of cities to climate extremes, and demonstrated how different groups of people within cities are impacted by these hazards in different ways. For example, flooding associated with heavy rainfall leads to greater incidences of vector-borne and water-borne diseases. These diseases disproportionately affect the urban poor who have limited access to quality health infrastructure and limited means to pay for medical treatment.

**In all areas of India, climate change impacts are further complicated by existing class, caste and gender tensions. Research has shown that droughts lead to higher rates of domestic violence, greater dowry related deaths and atrocities against the marginalised castes<sup>4</sup>.**

## Our focus

Through intensive field work in both rural and urban areas, ASSAR India plans to build the understanding of how to improve people's wellbeing in the face of climate change. In our rural study sites we focus on the ways that climate change impacts on agricultural production, livelihood opportunities and the decision to migrate to urban areas. In our urban study site we focus on the wellbeing and vulnerability of the people living in informal settlements who are more prone to both climatic and non-climatic shocks.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/as-bharat-succumbs-to-drought-the-centre-seems-otherwise-engaged/story-Mm6HZcSudV9sILNqo1771K.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-rural-inflation-idINKN0S0Z0FZ20151110>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/chandni-singh-/what-farmers-really-need-\\_1\\_b\\_8299824.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=india](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/chandni-singh-/what-farmers-really-need-_1_b_8299824.html?utm_hp_ref=india)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S030438781400100X>

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## RECENT EVENTS

### Stakeholder events

- ~ IIHS ran a course for researchers, practitioners and planners called "Understanding Vulnerability: Concepts, Methods, and Applications for Development Planning?" (December 2015)
- ~ WOTR held a stakeholder engagement event with [50 representatives from 15 villages spread across the Sangamner transect](#) (December 2015)
- ~ ATREE held a community stakeholder engagement event with people from multiple villages in the [southern Moyar region of Tamil Nadu](#) (January 2016)



Photo: Hillary Masundire

# southern AFRICA

The impact of drought on the wellbeing of subsistence farmers in north-central Namibia

by **Irene Kunamwene**

*Southern Africa Researcher*  
ACDI, University of Cape Town

For the subsistence farmers of north-central Namibia, crop fields and livestock provide crucial year-round food and livelihood security. As a consequence any reduction in agricultural productivity fundamentally affects the wellbeing of these farmers and their communities.

## Hunger

It is unsurprising then that the severe droughts of recent years have caused people in this region to experience major food shortages, with many going hungry for days at a time.

**“There isn’t sufficient pasture for our livestock in the village. Most of the grazing areas have been turned into crop fields because there are too many people to feed. But the crop fields are not fertile, and there is no manure. When it rains, the soils become inundated and when it doesn’t rain the soil dries out and the crop harvest is poor.”**

## Relationships

The impact of drought on people’s wellbeing extends beyond hunger levels. Good relationships form the social glue of these subsistence communities, and food shortages can erode these bonds. For instance, in the past, farmers would share food among their family members and neighbours, but many can no longer afford to do this.

**“I have a good relationship with my siblings. We appreciate one another. I don’t wish for this to change. But poverty can destroy these relationships.”**

Theft of crops and livestock has increased, and many people have become bad-tempered and unhappy as they struggle to produce enough food for their families.

However, things are not only negative. Even in these dire circumstances, people still find ways to rally together to manage their hardships.

**“My neighbour is very helpful. He suggested that we buy heifers from him and he assisted us with two donkeys for ploughing.”**

## Livelihoods

With food security being such a stark daily issue for these farmers – and with a strong interest to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of themselves and their families – livelihood development and livelihood diversification is something at the forefront of people’s minds.

**“If I get a job, things will change for the better. I can at least buy draught animals to improve my crop production.”**

**“I want to get employed in order to assist my family. I want to buy farming implements such as draught animals and ploughs. We want to get more food. We have a shortage of food in the house.”**

## Our focus

In our work in Southern Africa we are trying to better understand all of the ways that the wellbeing of people in our study sites is being impacted by climate change and climate variability. By considering people’s current circumstances as well as their future aspirations, we will critically evaluate which adaptation strategies will be most effective at improving all aspects of their wellbeing. We aim to use this understanding to ensure that development policies address the wide spectrum of human needs and not simply the material ones.

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## RECENT EVENTS

### ◆ Stakeholder events

- ~ [Stakeholder influence mapping workshop](#) in Windhoek, Namibia (July 2015)
- ~ [Vulnerability and Risk Assessment](#) workshop in Bobonong, Botswana (November 2015)

### ◆ Capacity building

- ~ A member of the team from the University of Botswana attended a course focused on tools for [ecosystem services modelling](#) in South Africa (December 2015)
- ~ Members of the team (from the University of Cape Town) attended a publication writing retreat in South Africa (December 2015)

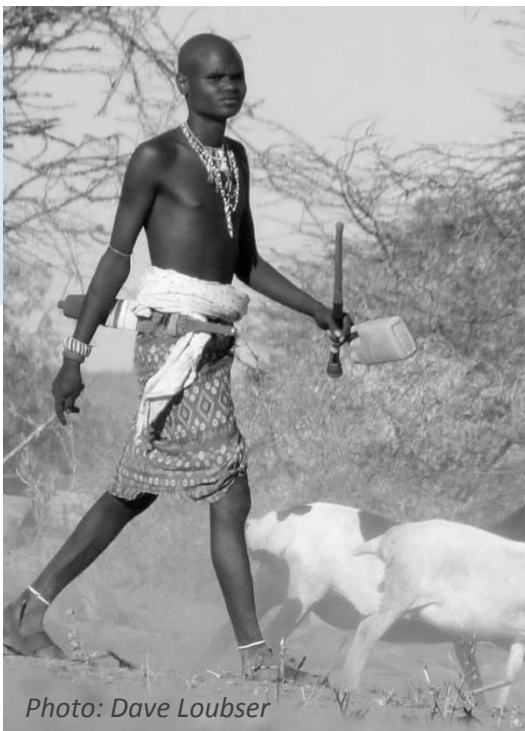


Photo: Dave Loubser

# east AFRICA

## Pastoralism under pressure in the drylands of East Africa

by **Daniel McGahey**

*Regional Director*  
INTASAVE Africa

Over the next 50 years the semi-arid regions of East Africa are expected to become hotter with more wet extremes. Changes – including increased frequency and intensity of droughts and floods – are predicted to negatively impact food security, economic growth, infrastructure, human health, and wildlife and ecosystems. Over the last 50 years temperatures in this region have already increased by an average of 0.16°C per decade – which is five times higher than temperature increases observed over the last century. Drought and flood hazards are expected to intensify demand for food, water and livestock forage. There has already been an increase in the number of climate related disasters in the region and between 2000 and 2006 these disasters affected almost two million people per year on average.

Typical of many landscapes in Africa, northern Kenya's semi-arid region is a vast, open, largely unfenced grazing system occupied by numerous pastoralist groups and their livestock as well as agricultural communities. The latter typically settle on the higher areas of the region where rainfall is often greater, such as the foothills of Mount Kenya. People within this landscape are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change as a variety of factors such as land degradation, land fragmentation and an erosion of community-level norms around rangeland governance combine to reduce the movement of livestock, which further aggravates land degradation and increases conflict over grazing land and water. Climate stressors combined with these existing challenges, place increasing pressure on pastoralists and farmers alike.

Pastoralists have transitioned over the last 50 years from practicing a diversified livestock system (involving mobile family units keeping cattle, camels and small livestock) to increasingly commercially-orientated camel and goat production. This adaptation has dramatically changed the household economy as many people become more sedentary and engaged in localised

livelihood activities, and contract herders are frequently employed to tend to more mobile camel herds.

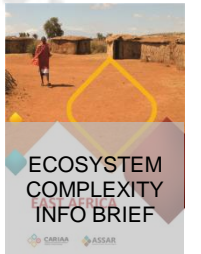
We need to explore more closely the ways these transitions have affected people's wellbeing and consider the longer term implications under a changing climate. Early indications suggest that relational and subjective aspects of wellbeing have changed dramatically.

While people still perceive livestock ownership as the ultimate symbol of wealth, increasingly entrepreneurship and waged labour are equally prioritised. Women, especially, now engage in a wide range of localised trading activities from camel milk trading, goat marketing, and water and firewood sales, and therefore the most successful people maintain complex relationships with a diverse network of actors.

**Traditional safety nets based around pastoral customs are increasingly rare as the vulnerable become more reliant on church-based support or the support of neighbours in peri-urban areas and larger settlements.**

### Our focus

In many ways ASSAR is breaking new ground in our quest to gather the knowledge East Africa requires to effectively plan and catalyse the sustained, widespread adaptation urgently needed within semi-arid drylands. To date we have been overly reliant on a series of simplified social vulnerability assessment tools that have in many ways failed to enhance our understanding of these issues. Through intensive fieldwork in northern Kenya the ASSAR East Africa team plans to build understanding of ways to improve people's wellbeing under progressive climate change. We are specifically focused on the ways that climate change affects wellbeing through its impacts on agricultural production within farming and pastoralist communities.



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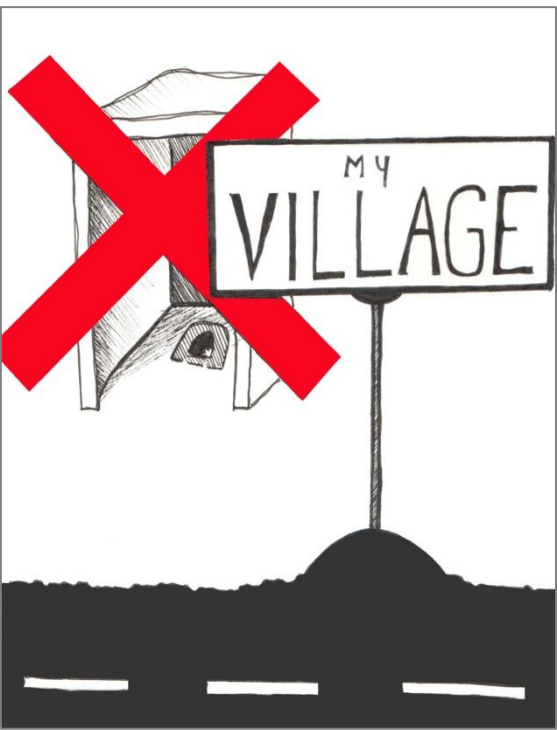
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## RECENT EVENTS

### Field work

- ~ Researchers conducted stakeholder interviews in the primary case study site in Ethiopia (December 2015)
- ~ Researchers conducted stakeholder interviews in the primary case study site in Kenya (December 2015)
- ~ In January, researchers piloted a household survey questionnaire in Ethiopia, and trained local enumerators. The survey is now being rolled out in three of our four livelihood and wellbeing focal area villages. The implementation of the questionnaire in the fourth village was postponed owing to the severe hardship the villagers are experiencing with the ongoing drought in the area (January/February 2016)



# west AFRICA

We want sign boards, not fancy toilets!

by **Edmond Totin**  
West Africa Researcher  
ICRISAT

When doing adaptation work, we should not plan *for* people. Rather adaptation measures should be planned *with* people whose wellbeing is at stake, and interventions should be embedded in their particular contexts. It's also important to not view 'wellbeing' as a one-size-fits-all concept. Instead, researchers and development agents need to understand what wellbeing means for the communities with which they work. Doing so will ensure that their work addresses relevant concerns and aligns with peoples' needs and expectations.

A great example of how far removed adaptation efforts can be from people's needs comes from a community in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Here, a development project recently spent thousands of dollars to build sanitation facilities. Good idea, one might think! But surprisingly the community members do not use these facilities – at least not for the purposes they were intended. Instead, people use them to store their crop harvests (e.g., maize, millet, groundnuts).

One of the community chiefs explained that his community did not want sanitation infrastructures. Instead, he said, "if the project staff had asked me, I would have told them that what we need are sign boards along the roadside that indicate the way to our community". Of course, sanitation facilities are important for wellbeing given that they help prevent water and sanitation-related diseases.

**But if the project plans were first discussed with the community members, and were co-developed with all their needs in mind, they would have been better aligned and better accepted.**

## Our focus

To consider what wellbeing means to our stakeholders in West Africa we engage with them and our partners throughout the design, implementation and assessment phases of our research. During our recently completed design stage we conducted interviews and focus group discussions to diagnose the problems that our stakeholders are having and to explore any existing solutions to these problems. We tried to capture the voices of all stakeholders to ensure that our work is responsive to a wide range of wellbeing needs.

**An important conversation with smallholder farmers in the Koutiala district of Mali – one of our study sites – led us to critical information about how the livelihoods and wellbeing of these farmers is strongly linked to issues of land tenure.**

Land tenure can serve as a key impediment to undertaking the kind of production practices that could help to manage climatic and non-climatic risks. For example, a secure land tenure system is crucial to the increasingly common practice of agricultural intensification, which often requires large investments in resources (e.g., labour, production inputs, water). Farmers explained that, without land tenure security, they would not be willing to invest these resources. We will continue to engage these same stakeholders during the next phase of our work – the implementation phase – where we aim to better understand how the land tenure system is considered, and will be affected by, governance decentralisation processes. Ultimately, by exploring pathways that make land users feel more secure, and that have positive impacts on their wellbeing, we truly hope our adaptation efforts are valuable and welcomed, rather than flushed down a toilet!

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## RECENT EVENTS

### Stakeholder events

- ~ Ghana stakeholders at the national and district levels (from civil society groups, academia, media and the public) attended a Pre-COP Climate Change Knowledge and Leadership Festival organised by [DECCMA](#), with support from ASSAR-Ghana, and funded by [CARIAA](#). The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the French Ambassador and the Environmental Officer from the Embassy of France in Ghana also attended the event (December 2015)

### Field work

- ~ PhD and Masters students from the University of Ghana are currently conducting their fieldwork in the Upper West Region of Ghana (January/February 2016)
- ~ Mali student researchers are currently conducting exploratory field visits in the Koutiala District, after which they will conduct their field research (January/February 2016)



# Assessing Vulnerability and Risks

## REFLECTIONS ON A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP TO UNDERSTAND THE DIMENSIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND RISK IN BOTSWANA

By **Daniel Morchain**  
ASSAR Co-PI, OXFAM GB

In November 2015 heavy rain swept across eastern Botswana, with floods causing the death of two people and major damages to the town of Bobonong. It was the worst-hit place in the country. A few days before the storm hit, and with temperatures teetering around 45°C, a team from ASSAR – University of Botswana, University of Cape Town and Oxfam GB – ran a [Vulnerability and Risk Assessment](#) (VRA) with a group of approximately 20 stakeholders from Bobonong and the general Bobirwa Sub-District. This is not a typical vulnerability assessment, but rather, in the spirit of the wellbeing approach, it offers a holistic approach to understanding vulnerability, wherein key actors collaboratively design and implement programmes and resilience building initiatives.

The VRA exercise was designed to enhance our understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of social groups with respect to climate hazards and other issues, as well as to engage stakeholders in the design of adaptation responses. But after the two day workshop I think that all of us left with something more. That ‘something more’ was different for every person and, while as a whole the outcome of the VRA could be seen as contributing to a more focused resilient development thinking, I would claim that the personal gains were equally significant.

### Unplanned outcomes

One important outcome was to shed light on and make accessible to the regular citizen the development work that government is doing, particularly around climate change. Creating this proximity among participants helped break barriers between officials and civilians.

**“We now have a better sense of what areas the government is addressing here, and the gaps. I’ve learned about the priorities that the government has in this sub-district.”**

**“This exercise will influence and contribute to draft our district development plan, particularly the activities related to climate change. Because of the useful outcomes the VRA**

**generated, we will fund workshops like this in other parts of the district.”**

- *Pelaelo Master Tsayang, Principal Economist and District Planning Officer, Bobirwa Sub-District, Botswana*

Another outcome was the recognition of the value of people’s inputs, whoever they are, whatever they represent, as well as an understanding that every individual can contribute to processes that may, wrongly, seem or be framed as inaccessible to ‘non-experts’.

**“I used to think my ideas weren’t worthwhile. Now I think I can make changes in my life and I know it is possible.”**

- *an elderly woman who makes baskets from Mokolwane reeds*

**“At the beginning of day one I didn’t understand why mopane worm harvesters were sitting around this table; now it is clear.”**

**“Now I see that even our field assistants have something to contribute, so we have to listen to them.”**



A third ‘soft’ outcome of the workshop was recognition of the benefit of joint work and a push to proactively look for solutions to problems.

**“I’ve learned I don’t have to keep waiting for the government to do something, but rather more proactively involve myself in finding ways forward.”**

**“People like to dwell on problems rather than focus on solutions. That’s not what we did here. That’s why I liked this workshop.”**

**“It was like a dream having the opportunity to sit around this group of varied people. When they contacted me on the phone to invite me to this exercise I thought this wouldn’t take us anywhere, but now I believe it will.”**

**“Having this wide variety of stakeholders sitting together as equals and coming up with joint ideas...this I found very humbling.”**

- *Prof. Hillary Masundire, University of Botswana*

Thinking about Research into Use (RiU) in ASSAR, CARIAA and in general in the development context, two things have stuck with me after the VRA in Botswana.

The first is the effect that being a part of something ‘big’ can have on people’s attitudes. This showed in a few ways:

- ◆ The openness of people to jump from a passive to an active state if pushed just a little bit.
- ◆ People’s willingness to see that agendas can and often need to have common objectives if they are to be long term and owned by many stakeholders.
- ◆ Certainly not least, the power of co-creation: passive, one-way interaction with stakeholders that focus on data extraction is short-sighted and doesn’t support a true, sustainable collaboration between governments or researchers and ‘vulnerable’ communities.

Active attitudes of stakeholders working together can lead to the development of climate change adaptation policy and practice that has positive influence across governance scales.

The second point that stuck with me after the VRA is the shift in perceptions that this kind of multi-stakeholder participatory process can trigger. Such as, how different kinds of knowledge can rapidly shift from being considered irrelevant to relevant. Also how people can take advantage of opportunities to move beyond the silos where systems and organisations have placed researchers, government employees and development workers, and to collaborate with each other.

**While not all of these advantages can emerge from two-day workshops alone, honest and open stakeholder engagement with clear and realistic expectations is a good way to start. Other than that, I personally think there’s no magic; it’s just a matter of fairness, tenacity and working things out as people to find ways to make progress.**

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I think the ideas from this workshop will change how I think about myself. I used to think I couldn't do anything for myself but the ideas from this workshop make me see that I can!

I learned that I should take risks and see what different opportunities there can be. Like if you are a farmer, maybe think about doing something else. I will advise my friends and other youth at home to try and do their own thing.

This workshop showed us that every problem has a solution.

The method of group work was essential and made it interesting.



I am going to use all these findings somewhere - this workshop will come in handy. I might hold this type of workshop with other people.

This workshop made me wonder why we wait for people to come from afar to bring us together, instead of just inviting people from our communities to our local meetings.

Many times when problems are like this people like to complain and say "why doesn't government help us?" But in this workshop we thought of solutions together.

This workshop has equipped me for my work - I will know how to advise a young person who wants to venture into agriculture.

Photo: Gina Ziervogel

# ABOUT ASSAR

## WHY WE FOCUS ON SEMI-ARID REGIONS

As the global impacts of climate change become more clearly understood, so too does the need for people to effectively respond and adapt to these changes. Home to hundreds of millions of people, the semi-arid regions of Africa and Asia are particularly vulnerable to climate-related impacts and risks. These climate-change hot-spots are highly dynamic systems that already experience harsh climates, adverse environmental change, and a relative paucity of natural resources. People here may be further marginalised by high levels of poverty and rapidly changing socio-economic, governance and development contexts. Although many people in these regions already display remarkable resilience, these multiple and often interlocking pressures are expected to amplify in the coming decades. Therefore, it is essential to understand how to empower people, local organisations and governments to adapt to climate change in a way that minimises vulnerability and promotes long-term resilience.



To date, most adaptation efforts have focused on reactive, short-term and site-specific solutions to climate-related vulnerabilities. Although important, these responses often fail to address the root causes of vulnerability, nor shed light on how to proactively spur larger-scale and longer-term adaptation that has positive effects on socio-economic development. Using both research and practice to address this information shortfall, the Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) seeks to produce future-focused and societally-relevant knowledge of potential pathways to wellbeing through adaptation.

### Our research framework

ASSAR's overarching research objective is to use insights from multiple-scale, interdisciplinary work to improve the understanding of the barriers, enablers and limits to effective, sustained and widespread adaptation out to the 2030s. Working in a coordinated manner across seven countries in India, East

Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa, ASSAR's research is case study based and strives to integrate climatic, environmental, social and economic change. The dynamics of gender roles and relations form a particularly strong theme throughout our approach.

Each of ASSAR's teams conducts regionally-relevant research focused on specific socio-ecological risks/dynamics that relate centrally to livelihood transitions, and access, use and management of land and water resources in water-stressed environments. Focal research themes in each region are: agro-intensification in West Africa; land and water access in East and Southern Africa; and land use, land cover and livelihood changes in India.

Over its five-year lifespan (2014-2018), the cross-regional comparison and integration of research findings will enable ASSAR to develop a unique and systemic understanding of the processes and factors that impede adaptation and cause vulnerability to persist.

### Putting our work in practice

To ensure that project case studies are aligned with the needs and realities of those living and working in semi-arid regions, and to increase the chances that findings and recommendations are taken up, ASSAR builds relationships with a wide spectrum of stakeholders from communities, civil society organisations, research institutions, governments and non-governmental organisations.

By guiding stakeholders through participatory scenario planning processes ASSAR aims to build a common understanding of current adaptation needs and past adaptation failings, while promoting the co-production of adaptation responses that can yield appropriate, tangible and lasting benefits. By using stakeholder mapping and analysis to better understand the power dynamics of different stakeholder groups, by working with and alongside boundary organisations and the private sector, and by engaging in effective communication, capacity building and advocacy campaigns, ASSAR seeks to inform and promote sustainable development pathways that have the best prospect for enhancing the wellbeing of the most vulnerable and/or marginalised in the coming decades.



Through these activities, ASSAR will better integrate the domains of adaptation research, policy and practice. By building the adaptive capacity of primary stakeholders, policy and decision makers, practitioners, boundary organisations, and academic researchers, this integration could bring about previously inconceivable strategies for change and transformation. In time these efforts could also contribute to a change in the attitudes and behaviours of key stakeholders, prompt easier and better access to resources by vulnerable groups, and enhance the power and agency of vulnerable groups to lessen or remove adaptation barriers, and exploit adaptation enablers.

### Who we are

The international and interdisciplinary ASSAR team comprises a mix of research and practitioner organisations, and includes groups with global reach as well as those deeply embedded in their communities.



ASSAR is one of four hot-spot research projects in the Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIIA) programme, funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

