

STEP 4 Capacity assessment

Capacity assessment should come after the vulnerability assessment, rather than at the same time. This is because people often find it difficult and confusing to constantly change from discussing their weaknesses and problems (vulnerabilities) to discussing their strengths and opportunities (capacities). There are, however, some exceptions to this rule.

Capacity assessment involves looking at:

- **PROTECTED ELEMENTS** – to identify which elements are not badly affected by the hazard.
- **SAFE CONDITIONS** – to identify what capacities exist in relation to a hazard. These strengths may already be used, or have potential use.
- **PRESSURE RELEASES** – to establish who is helping to create safe conditions and how this is done.
- **POSITIVE UNDERLYING CAUSES** – to consider what political ideas, economic principles, and cultural practices support and motivate those helping to create safe conditions.
- **SPIRITUAL CONTEXT** – to consider the ways in which the spiritual context helps to build capacity and reduce vulnerability.

Capacities are sometimes referred to as ‘coping mechanisms’ or ‘survival strategies’. However, these terms may not always be positive and healthy. For example, a household may cope with hardship through criminal activity, commercial sex work or selling of children.

Be aware that people might try to hide their strengths if they think they will get less outside help after revealing them. This is particularly the case where relief dependency has developed. Capacity assessment should therefore be closely linked with ‘action planning’ so that people have a reason for sharing their strengths.



Activities

- 1 Meet with focus groups.
- 2 Explain to the group what capacities are and why they are important.
- 3 Select a hazard that was seen as a priority during the vulnerability assessment.
- 4 Select a category of analysis (see page 25).
- 5 Work through the table for that category of analysis from left to right.
- 6 Repeat activities 4–5 with the other categories of analysis.
- 7 If there was another priority hazard that was focused on in the vulnerability assessment, select it and repeat activities 4–6.
- 8 Add the findings of each focus group on to a large version of the Release model displayed in the community, demonstrating how these strengths can be used to overcome vulnerabilities.



Tools

Tools for the various categories of analysis include:

- **ECONOMIC** seasonal calendar, time line
- **NATURAL** risk mapping, transect walk
- **CONSTRUCTED** risk mapping, transect walk
- **INDIVIDUAL** risk mapping
- **SOCIAL** Venn diagram.

Category of analysis

Economic assets

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?	WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?	WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?	WHY are safe conditions being supported?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which economic activities or assets are least affected by the hazard? • Which assets are never sold, even when times are very hard? • Is it possible to borrow money in an affordable way if necessary? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are certain economic activities and assets not affected by the hazard? • Why are people not forced to sell certain assets? • How are people able to meet their basic needs (such as food and water) when a hazard happens? • Are there reserves of food or money for use in hard times? • Remember: some economic capacities may be illegal (such as cattle stealing) or damaging to health (such as selling sex) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What organisations or institutions are present? (such as CBO, church, government) • How do these help local people economically in times of crisis? (such as loans, providing work, gifts in kind) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What political ideas and policies are helping? • What economic principles are helping? • What cultural activities and beliefs are helping? • Are people provided with good work opportunities? If so, why? • Are people paid a fair wage? • Do people have access to finance schemes? • Is money lent under fair terms?
<p>Spiritual context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What spiritual beliefs encourage the reduction of vulnerability? • What strengths does the church have to help improve economic capacity? 			

Category of analysis **Natural assets**

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?	WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?	WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?	WHY are safe conditions being supported?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which natural assets are not affected by the hazard? (such as trees, water, pasture, high land) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are natural assets not affected by the hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who owns or controls the use of natural assets in the local area? • Is greater access given to natural assets in times of crisis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What political ideas are helping? • What economic principles are helping? • What cultural activities and beliefs are helping?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do any natural assets benefit from the hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do some natural assets benefit from the hazard? • Which natural assets recover quickly after the hazard? Why? Are they protected? • Are any natural assets used in times of crisis (such as wild berries, roots, fish)? • Are natural assets used in special ways to protect people (such as floating bamboo platforms or banana tree rafts during floods)? 		
Spiritual context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What spiritual beliefs encourage the reduction of vulnerability? • What strengths does the church have to help improve natural capacity? 			

Category of analysis **Constructed assets**

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
<p>WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?</p>	<p>WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?</p>	<p>WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?</p>	<p>WHY are safe conditions being supported?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What buildings are not affected by the hazard? •Are water supplies protected from the hazard? •Are tools and equipment protected from the hazard? •Are government or community buildings protected from the hazard? •Are communications protected from the hazard? •Are power supplies protected from the hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Why are constructed elements not affected by the hazard? •How are constructed elements protected from the hazard? •Are buildings used in special ways (such as for storage, shelter): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before the hazard? - during the hazard? - after the hazard? •Are people able to protect buildings (such as build raised platforms for houses in flood prone areas)? •Do people have alternative means of transport if roads are damaged? •Do people have alternative forms of power if electricity supply is cut off? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Who owns or controls the use of safe buildings during times of crisis? •Who owns or controls the use of vehicles or boats? •Who has access to a phone or radio? •Do poor people have easy access to safe buildings during times of crisis? •Do poor people have access to transport and communications during times of crisis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What political ideas are helping? •What economic principles are helping? •What cultural activities and beliefs are helping?
<p>Spiritual context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What spiritual beliefs encourage the reduction of vulnerability? •What strengths does the church have to help protect constructed assets? 			

Category of analysis **Individual assets**

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
<p>WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?</p>	<p>WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?</p>	<p>WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?</p>	<p>WHY are safe conditions being supported?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is least affected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - during the hazard? - after the hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are these people least affected? Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mobility - health - skills - education and literacy - traditional knowledge • Do some people have particular knowledge of what to do when a hazard hits (such as the elderly)? • Does anybody take on a special role to help others during a hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has the knowledge/skills to cope with disaster? • How are knowledge and skills passed on to others? • Is there a system for passing on warning messages? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What political ideas are helping? • What economic principles are helping? • What cultural activities and beliefs are helping?
<p>Spiritual context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What spiritual beliefs encourage the reduction of vulnerability? • What strengths does the church have to help improve individual capacity? 			

Category of analysis

Social assets

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
<p>WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?</p>	<p>WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?</p>	<p>WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?</p>	<p>WHY are safe conditions being supported?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which groups are least affected by the hazard? • Are any relationships strengthened by the hazard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are some groups able to cope with the hazard? • Why do some relationships grow stronger during difficult times? • What role does extended family play? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who takes control or shows leadership during times of crisis? • Who gives most help to those affected? • Is help given fairly to all local people who are affected? • Do the poorest or most needy get any special assistance? • Do leaders give clear direction in a crisis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What political ideas are helping? • What economic principles are helping? • What cultural activities and beliefs are helping? In this culture, how do people help each other in times of crisis?
<p>Spiritual context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What spiritual beliefs encourage the reduction of vulnerability? • What strengths does the church have to help improve co-operation and care? 			

EXAMPLE OF CAPACITY ASSESSMENT: drought in Ethiopia

Protected elements	Safe conditions	Pressure releases	Positive underlying causes
WHICH elements are not badly affected by the hazard?	WHAT capacities exist that help protect elements at risk from the impact of the hazard?	WHO is helping to create safe conditions? HOW is this done?	WHY are safe conditions being supported?
ECONOMIC ASSETS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some crops are not badly affected • Some types of livestock are not badly affected • Handicrafts are not badly affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High diversity of crops • High diversity of livestock • Land can be rented out • Some family assets are sold • Ability to carry out handicrafts • Informal saving schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations and NGOs providing relief aid • Informal money lenders who provide credit • Strong local leadership • Local government schemes which target poor people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong culture of community togetherness • Oral culture tradition to pass on knowledge and skills
NATURAL ASSETS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild herbs and roots • Some vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High biodiversity • Land rotation 		
CONSTRUCTED ASSETS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital • Village health post • Village primary school • Village market 			
INDIVIDUAL ASSETS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills • Knowledge • Labour (though possibly weakened) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High motivation to learn • Ability to survive with minimal food • Knowledge to find wild food • Traditional farming skills • Knowledge of local medicines • Ability to work and migrate • Higher literacy of youth 		
SOCIAL ASSETS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established, stable village in conflict-free area • Tradition of sharing labour and oxen • Tradition of exchanging agricultural products 		
Spiritual context			
Strong religious belief. Active church.			