

Use it to...

- **Document** behaviour, physical aspects of a community and activities.
- **Fill** in information “gaps” that cannot be filled through other tools.
- **Support** observations and conclusions made while using other tools.
- **Helps** the VCA team to **understand** the context in which the information is being gathered, to validate the conclusions made through the use of other tools and to gain a more complete understanding of the community and the relationships between its members.
- **Describe** things that may be hard for participants to verbalize.

Skills needed

The **facilitator** should remain alert at all times in order to observe the surrounding environment, staying aware of possible biases and making sure information collected in this way is cross-checked through other tools. Skills in systematic recording of information are very important.

How to do it

Step 1. Decide what areas you are going to focus your observations on and how you will proceed.

While you should always be doing **informal** observation, you will still need to make a list of things to look for specifically, keeping the resilience characteristics in mind. Such a list might include:

- **Social cohesion: Demographic information**
 - Distribution of the population (age, work, gender, ethnicity)
 - Daily routine (school-aged children in school, adult present with children at home, working in the fields)
 - Family structure (nuclear or extended family present, child-headed households)
 - Community interaction
 - Presence of formal or informal networks in the community
 - Perceived level of safety in community
 - Presence of vulnerable or marginal groups.
 - Religion – churches, mosques, temples, etc.
 - Recreational activities
- **Healthy and Basic Water needs:**
 - Sanitation (sewers, availability of running water, functionality and type)

- Typical sanitation in use by individual families and communal sanitation facilities, practice of hand-washing
- Distance people have to travel to health centres
- Animals in the street, mosquito breeding areas (ponds, water logged areas)
- Water source for community and distance to be traveled
- Quality of the drinking water source
- **Basic Shelter needs and infrastructure**
 - Basic house construction type
 - Other prominent construction types in the community (describe)
 - Emergency shelter condition and construction type
- **Basic Food needs: access, availability and utilisation**
 - People's eating habits (what and how people acquire, transport, store, prepare and eat food, observing which family members eat first or the most nutritive food, observing hygiene practices around food preparation, knowledge of nutrition, food taboos...)
 - Where do people shop? What is available or what items are cruelly lacking in the surveyed area?
 - How families acquire their food?
 - Typical food types consumed (crops, livestock...) in the last 24 hours
 - What is the current food situation in the community?
 - Who appears to be most food insecure?
 - Occurrence of in-kind food or vouchers availed in the community for short-term emergency assistance; if possible observation of cash cards provided by an agency that is used to procure food
 - Current food reserves at family level
 - Current food reserves at community level (shops, food banks, warehouses, programmes, etc.)

Economic opportunities

- Main types of livelihoods/income sources of community members at the time of observation
- Level of employment of community members (perception of the absence of certain family member that might have migrated to find work or follow their livestock)
- Engagement of community in formal and informal economy
- Current access to natural and physical assets: land (for cultivation, pasture, fish farming), rivers, forests, productive assets (tools, machines for agro-processing, business assets...). Observe their quality or level of use as it can reveal important information
- Current access to financial services (existing/active saving and loans groups, microfinance institutions, banks, moneylenders...)

Infrastructure and services

- Types of housing and other infrastructure
- Access to services (doctors, nurses, teachers, government services, extension services, etc.)

- Construction materials, design and proximity of buildings
- Types of roads
- Green spaces and playgrounds
- Sports facilities

Natural assets

- Trees: type of vegetation, deforestation
- Grade of slopes:
- Situation of community near streams that may contribute to flooding
- Other natural assets

Step 2. Assign tasks.

Make sure that all members of the VCA team are assigned to observe certain things, although all members should be observing all aspects as well. By assigning specific areas to different team members, you will ensure that all aspects are covered.

Step 3. Observe and record the data.

You should be constantly observing, whether in a structured way or informally, so always take notes and instruct everyone else to do so as well. Be careful to note everything you see. It is equally important that you record under what conditions you observed things and as much detail as possible. This will help the team to remember the context and increase the validity of the observation. For example, a crowd will behave differently at a soccer match than when shopping in a market.



When observing the community, take the opportunity to talk to both men and women. Understand the problems from both male and female perspectives, taking into account factors such as age, disability, socio-economic status, ethnicity, etc. Observe any differences in access to services or in the hazards and risks facing men and women in the community.

TIP!

Be careful how you act and be sure that you are discreet when observing people. If you are observing a formal event, seek prior permission. If you want to take photographs or audio-tape it, request permission from the participants to avoid potential misunderstandings.

Step 4. Summarize the information.

At the end of the day, all notes should be put in a clean and concise format. This should be done by each individual so that the entire group will be able to understand the observations made during the data systematization and analysis process. Record the observations in the community map and/or a summary table with each of the six characteristics of resilience (see example below).

Resilience characteristics	Coverage of characteristic by tool	Example of information that can be collected	Vulnerabilities identified	Capacities identified
Knowledge about risk		Knowledge and understanding of risk and climate change, location of risk areas, e.g. flood zones, landslide risk areas, dangerous roads with high frequency of accidents, safety of evacuation routes and safe zones, etc.		
Health		Use of health facilities, maintenance of water point, use of latrines, practice of hand-washing and garbage disposal, health and eating practices		
Basic needs – shelter		Type of houses, houses located in high risk locations, identifying weak and strong structures, risk reduction features (e.g. on stilts, earthquake proof, hurricane shutters...) fire risk (bad electrical wiring, open cooking fire, etc.		
Basic needs – food		Frequency and nutrition of food eaten (by gender and age group), use for cooking stoves, hygiene standards at restaurants and food stands, etc.		
Basic needs – water		Maintenance and distance of water points, quality of drinking water source, practices (boiling, filters, etc.)		
Social cohesion		Community interaction, biases, presence of formal or informal leader and networks in the community, anti-social behaviour, violence, crime, etc.		
Economic opportunities		Knowledge of alternative livelihood skills, knowledge of climate smart agriculture techniques, access to training centres, access to financial services		
Infrastructure and services		Access to services by different groups, quality of roads, bridges, drainage, electricity outages, quality of structure of hospitals/clinics and schools and if they are in risk location and have safety standards in place.		
Natural assets		Status of rivers (pollution), coastal erosion, mangroves and forests management, protected zones, green zones/parks, etc.		
Connectedness		Access to government offices, trust in governance structures, trust in RC/RC branch, distance to nearest city/centre.		

Constraints and pitfalls

A challenge with this tool is that it is very subjective. Interpretation of information may be biased and is subject to change. The results of this activity should be verified later by the community. Careful recording and systematization of the information will contribute significantly to proper verification of the information by the community.

It is important to be respectful, as in many cases you are observing people without their knowledge. If you are observing a meeting or activity you must ask the participants' permission to do so.

Like any other tool, direct observation requires careful planning and must follow basic research rules. It also needs to ensure that the people observed are representative of the overall population.

If direct observation is not carried out with discipline, it can be hard to systematize and analyse the data collected.

Additional resources

- The [3CA toolkit developed by CADRIM](#) page 53-59 has good recommendations for doing direct observation and analysing the information.

Next steps

Cross-check information observed through the use of other tools such as interviews.



Think of the information you have gathered in from external sources on changes in climate and also interviews you have had with elders. Are there any obvious signs that changes are taking place? Can the elders or other key informants point out changes that have occurred over time if they aren't obvious? (e.g. land by the sea may have eroded away, new, higher flood levels, different crops being eaten or sold, etc.).

Remember: changes in general are good to note, you can have a discussion once all information is gathered as to whether the changes may be attributable to climate change or not.