

Exploring Culturally Attuned Monitoring and Reporting Indicators: In-Depth Questions to Guide Your Process

The questions in the following pages can help set plans in place to address what may be needed to enhance for local applicability and cultural relevance.

When **preparing to engage** in indicator-oriented work around issues of well-being, biodiversity conservation, and sustainability, the following might be useful questions to spur dialogue within your planning group:

All indicators relate to an overarching existing vision, management plan, or framework (see “When considering the broader framing of your work”). Once the plan/framework is clear:

Who will develop the indicators and for what purpose? Will they use participatory processes? Who will use the resulting information?

What data already exist and/or what is the feasibility of collecting new data?

Do decision-makers...

Have the ability to navigate, and processes to incorporate, both quantitative and qualitative evidence in decision-making?

Have the appropriate skillsets or procedures in place to synthesize across multiple sources of evidence, for instance forms of cultural expression as well as data from scientific research?

Have access to tools to assess and/or address differences across multiple sources of evidence?

Have a process to assess and acknowledge multiple knowledge systems, for instance knowledge gained from lived experience (sometimes called tacit knowledge)?

Have a clear plan for a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process?

Have a process to assess and acknowledge unconscious biases when defining success, for instance prioritizing income over other environmental and social values?

Have the ability to navigate and address different time scales meaningful in planning and decision-making (e.g., fiscal and political cycles, environmental cycles, and intergenerational planning and goals)?

For an example which addresses many of these questions, please see:

<https://www.epa.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Te-Hautu/293bdc5edc/EPA-Maori-Perspectives.pdf>

When considering the broader framing of your work, take into account the following:

It is useful to explore the various categories of well-being or resilience that are important in your setting?

For example, the Vanuatu Peoples' Plan 2030* used extensive engagement to find culturally attuned and appropriate definitions under three pillars: society, environment, and economy. Examples include:

Cultural identity; education; health care; social inclusion; security, peace, and justice; and strong and effective institutions

Food and nutrition security; blue-green economic growth; climate and disaster resilience; natural resource management; and ecosystems and biodiversity

Stable and equitable growth; infrastructure; strong rural communities; jobs and business opportunities

What is the relative focus on resilience in contrast to vulnerability?

Vulnerability indicators, such as measures of food insecurity or “poverty” levels dominate indicator sets, yet resilience narratives can often be more motivating at the local level. Consider when best to use these different framings, including the possibility of a mixture of vulnerability and resilience indicators (e.g., reports on ecological or social vulnerability to climate change should also include resilience-focused components, for instance reporting on observations and new knowledge used to adapt cultural practices).

What is the importance of standardizing indicators (using the same indicator across all sites) in contrast to allowing flexibility in indicator selection?

What indicators are critical to be able to compare and why?

For instance, an indicator on agricultural sector production (i.e., imports and exports, including subsistence/artisanal production) may be useful to compare across areas.

What indicators are most meaningful when specific to a place/people?

Some indicators may fall under a larger category but have specific elements measured at the local scale. For instance, agricultural productivity might be measured using pastoralist and fisher income in one area, but in other areas could be measured via pathways for secure and equal access to land.

Are you evaluating what is most important within a system and not just what is most easily measurable, comparable, and/or standardized?

Indicators focused on quality may be more meaningful than measures of quantity or abundance.

Not everything that is measurable is important and not everything that is important is easily quantifiable. For instance, monetary exchange is easily measured but may not be the most important metric to track and manage in many settings.

*<https://tinyurl.com/yzqzmfmm>

When developing and evaluating indicators for local relevance, consider the following:

Does the indicator have appropriate specificity for monitoring and evaluation?

Does the indicator consider the role of age, gender, ethnicity, governance type, or other information important to issues of equity?

Is the scope/scale of data disaggregation (separation of data into categories) appropriate for local social, cultural, ecological, temporal, or geographical contexts? Can it sufficiently address local nuances? For instance, some international indicators measure percent coverage of protected areas by ecosystem type but not by use and management types, thus potentially devaluing community-led efforts towards conservation.

Is it reasonably feasible or realistic to measure this indicator? If not, what could be put into place to facilitate measurement?

Do communities/agencies have access to or capacity in the technical skills required to measure this indicator?

Do they have adequate access to the tools/infrastructure required?

Is the time duration and frequency in which the indicator is measured clearly specified?

Does the measurement frequency synergize with local livelihood strategies, seasonal responsibilities, and other timing considerations?

Can the measurement plan contribute to long-term monitoring efforts?

Does it reflect local contexts, is it aligned with local activities, and have local meaning?

Is the indicator and measurement process meaningful for decision making in your particular setting/context?

Can the indicator effectively measure change resulting from management actions and/or ecological processes?

Could the indicator measurement or actions implemented based on the indicator inadvertently result in social or environmental harm?

Can it promote behavior that may degrade the environment? Examples may include promoting extractive practices without requiring sustainability safeguards.

Can measurement of this indicator modify social norms and affect community fabric? Examples may include questions regarding monetary income from livelihood activities in communities who rely on subsistence-based practices.

Can measurement of this indicator devalue or undermine value systems, knowledges, institutions, and/or practices? Examples may include school curricula and assessments with limited inclusion of place-based knowledge practices.

Can it lead to social conflict? Examples may include intra and/or inter-community disagreement or other conflicts caused by having to identify and share specific information (e.g., income from extractive harvesting practices).

Ideally, indicators should guide progress towards goals and it would be useful to consider the extent to which the indicator measurement, or actions implemented based on the indicator, could contribute to social or environmental benefits.

For additional materials in this informational series, visit: <http://amnh.org/assessing-biocultural-indicators>

To browse an expanded directory of resources on this topic, visit: <http://resources.cbc.amnh.org/indicators>

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