



# LiveDiverse

*Sustainable Livelihoods and Biodiversity in Developing Countries*

## **M7.1: Identify interconnections between their cultural and spiritual practices and biodiversity in the area: Analytical framework and methodology**

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## **WP 7: Cultural and Spiritual Vulnerability**

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### **Introduction**

This note constitutes the Milestone 1 mentioned in the DoW. Though it should have been published on the project website in month 12 of the project it did get delayed by a few months. However this delay has not resulted in delaying the field work related to this WP because we did present the first draft of this in the consortium meeting in March 2010 at Kruger National Park, South Africa.

In this note we try to do two things. In the first part we discuss the interconnections between cultural and spiritual practices and biodiversity, some of the important components/concepts and issues related to cultural and spirituality and also suggest a methodology as how to go about it. As we all know culture and spirituality are very value loaded concepts/terrains and we need to tread this in a cautious manner. In fact we share (or agree with) most of the cautions expressed in the note circulated on WP 4 (public beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and preferences) by the CSIR team. Here the attempt would be to some of the critical issues when we talk about culture and spirituality and try to arrive at certain degree of common understanding amongst the LiveDiverse partners and this would help us to come up with a commonly agreed framework for analysis. In the second part we discuss some of the methodological issues and this would include the data requirements, the units and levels of data gathering, data collection tools, and so on and also come up with a timetable for the various activities and outputs related to this WP. Overall one can say that this WP would require more of qualitative analysis, something that has been mentioned in relation to WP 4 also.

### **Objectives of the WP**

As per the LiveDiverse DoW, WP7 has the following three main objectives:

1. To understand the interconnections between the landscape of cultural and spiritual practices, beliefs and attitudes of different representative groups with different livelihood patterns and biodiversity the environmental landscape with which they interact.
2. To identify the various contextual factors and developments in the area that are likely to generate cultural and spiritual vulnerability – a) by directly threatening cultural and spiritual diversity and b) by threatening biodiversity through the above interconnections.

3. To explore in a participative mode coping mechanisms and policies for dealing with cultural and spiritual vulnerability through scenarios.

## **Justification for the WP**

### **How is WP 7 innovative?**

The explicit consideration of cultural and spiritual biodiversity and hence vulnerability as part of biodiversity is a recent phenomenon. The UNEP has pioneered this concept through Posey (Posey (Ed) 1999) which brought together a compendium of examples and the diversity of thinking around cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity centred on indigenous peoples. Under this rubric there are two broad conceptual schemas: a) that cultural and spiritual values of a people shape and help preserve/enhance biodiversity and b) that the diversity of cultural and spiritual values is itself a manifestation of biodiversity as applied to human beings and is worth preserving for its intrinsic value. The first has been implicit in many studies but the second is recent and innovative as is the explicit recognition and separate consideration of the first. The latter has indeed led to the movement for the rights of indigenous peoples and its recognition by the UN. Of course there is a need to steer away from both the environmental determinism as well as the cultural determinism and the efforts would be to understand the dialectical relations between the two.

### **How does WP7 contribute to the overall aims and objectives of LiveDiverse?**

Long-term environmental and socio-economic sustainability requires that development as well as displacement/rehabilitation of a community/ethnic group take care of its cultural spiritual needs. Development and consequently rehabilitation often tend to be looked at from the point of view of socio-economic processes devoid of cultural and spiritual content. By explicitly addressing the cultural and spiritual dimension, and especially cultural and spiritual vulnerabilities WP7 will deepen and strengthen the overall aim and objective of LiveDiverse. WP7 requires that in each case study area we organise an advisory committee of specialists with a background in cultural and spiritual studies with respect to biodiversity who can interact with the multidisciplinary team and see that these aspects are adequately addressed.

### **How does WP 7 link with the other work packages?**

WP7 has links with all the other work packages. It draws on inputs from as well as contributes to WP2 (in terms of the data base). WP7 is closely related to WP3 because how we analyse and determine stakeholders in WP3 has to incorporate WP7 concerns so that the relevant ethnic and other vulnerable groups are identified right from the beginning as important entities and their concerns and viewpoints are brought on to the table. Much of the necessary material for WP7 will also come under the umbrella of WP4 that has to do with public beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and preferences. WP5, WP 6 and WP7 each study different dimensions of vulnerability that will have to be integrated and provide input for

WP8 which deals with sustainable livelihood scenarios. In fact, there could be (or rather would be) overlap amongst the bio-physical vulnerable groups, socio-economic vulnerable groups and cultural-spiritual vulnerable groups and it is important to capture these overlaps. All these need to be taken into account in the work planning and also into the scenario building (WP8) and the overall policy suggestions (WP9).

### **Cultural and spiritual vulnerability: demarcating the boundary**

WP7 is about cultural and spiritual vulnerability. It has a very great overlap with WP4 which deals with public beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and preferences. Though not identical in their scope, culture and spirituality are very much part of public beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and preferences. If we treat WP7 as dealing with culture and spirituality in the basin as a whole it would become a part or subset of WP4. Therefore it is important to demarcate what exactly WP7 is attempting to do. The key concepts here we feel are diversity and vulnerability. It is proposed that WP7 concentrate on those aspects that are related to cultural and spiritual diversity and more specifically, vulnerability.

### **Religion: an important factor in shaping worldviews and cultural-spiritual values and practices**

In the context of cultural and spiritual diversity and vulnerability one of the important areas that needs to be explored is religion. The concept of religion is important in understanding the cultural and spiritual diversity and vulnerability and also the belief systems because very often all these differ according to religions. Religion is an important factor that shape worldviews and the cultural and spiritual practices are very often embedded in the ethnic community/group's worldviews. Geertz's (1965) anthropological definition of religion includes the following: 'a system of symbols whose function is to establish pervasive moods and motivations and to formulate conceptions of a general order of existence with an aura of factuality that those moods and motivations seem realistic' (Geertz 1965 as cited in Gollhofer 1999). The function of religion is central to this understanding and the focus is on the 'general order of existence' and this characterises its cosmological scope. This view of religion is important because one's appreciation of cosmology is broadly equivalent to our respect for and knowledge of ecological systems (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976 and Metzner 1994 as cited in Gollhofer 1999). In the present day global context religion has become an important source of conflicts and the issue of religious minorities has become a critical issue and religious minorities are one of the most vulnerable groups.

### **Culture: a set of material practices and institutions**

For the purposes of WP7 we concentrate on culture as a set of material practices and the institutions (rules and arrangements) and values they are embedded in. They have an intimate relationship to the material of WP4 and are supplementary to it. This is in the belief that no set of beliefs, perceptions attitudes or preferences can be actualized except in interaction with our natural surroundings and

surrounding human beings, that is without creating a set of material practices and institutions in which they are embedded. WP7 would therefore deal with the diversity of material practices and institutions within the basin to identify ethnic communities who are culturally and spiritually vulnerable in the sense that their material practices and their institutions are increasingly endangered in the course of development in the region.

However, it should be emphasized that even though for analytical purposes we may separate it into different aspects – biophysical, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual and belief systems – the conduct of human activity is holistic – every act is simultaneously a biophysical, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual act that is based on and interacts with belief systems. Thus, the full meaning and import of the study would not be complete without the composite and integrated picture that WP4, 5, 6 and 7 together would provide.

### **Ethnic communities and minorities**

It is important to demarcate the unit or level at which the analytical framework is being mobilized. Much of the writing and treatment of the issue of cultural and spiritual diversity utilizes the concept of indigenous people (for example, the monumental collection edited by Posey which first collected together the material on this issue). The particular usage of the concept of indigenous people assumes often implicitly – a modern colonial context: namely that of non-indigenous people colonizing the land fairly recently (within the last three centuries or so) and a very clear line between the indigenous people and the ‘other’ – non-indigenous people. This context may be insufficient for two kinds of reasons. Firstly, the processes of colonization may be very different. Though it is true that most if not all countries of the South have undergone some type of colonization, the process is also very varied. For example, so far as our case study areas are concerned, in India as well as in Vietnam (or China) the colonizing population of non-indigenous people was never very large. The processes are different in South Africa where the separation may be sharper while in Costa Rica it again seems to be different. Secondly, there are processes of marginalization that may not be identical to colonization within indigenous populations because of which some groups are more vulnerable to loss of cultural and spiritual identity than others. In such cases it is not possible to classify the other population as ‘non-indigenous’. This is the case especially in India and this distinction is therefore considered to be important in India. For example, though it is common to refer to the erstwhile tribal groups in India as adivasis, literally – original settlers, this does not make other groups non-indigenous in the same way that countries that have gone through a colonizing experience like the USA.

What we need here is a category that is more inclusive, that which can include indigenous people but would not restrict the meaning to them. We suggest ethnic community and within that vulnerable ethnic minority as better units to deal with the problems of cultural and spiritual vulnerability across all

contexts within the case study areas. Ethnic community may include race but need not be restricted to it. It is therefore more a group that shares a distinct cultural spiritual identity and associated material culture and institutions. Thus a caste group, a tribe, and indigenous population, a sect could all be treated as ethnic communities if they share a distinct cultural spiritual identity and associated material culture and institutions. In India, the Dange dhangars are such a community, as are the shikalagar Muslims or the Lingayats. None of them can be considered to be indigenous as opposed to the rest of their society, yet they do form communities that are culturally and spiritually vulnerable.

### **Cultural and spiritual diversity and biodiversity**

Cultural diversity is one of the fundamental attributes of human beings because 'change, creation and re-creation, interpretation and re-interpretation, are all parts of the fabric of everyday experience (Carrithers 1992:9). Very often their lives are intimately bound up with their environments, which not only provide for production, but also provide the spiritual inspiration for life. Of course we need to steer away from the risk of essentialism – 'essentialised images' of ethnic communities. To say biological diversity causes cultural variation would risk falling into a crude environmental determinism – cultural variation is a human matter based on choice and decision. For each indigenous people the nature-culture relationship is defined in very specific ways rooted locally in the territory. It is not possible to say that biological diversity determines cultural diversity and vice versa, both elements of variation rely on each other because both actively contribute to the formation of the other: biodiversity is the inspiration for spirituality and culture for indigenous peoples who through their production activities and shamanic practices contribute to respect for and enhancement of biological diversity.

Cultural and spiritual diversity and biodiversity are related in two ways. In the more common and simpler form of its relationship cultural and spiritual values (and practices) of people are often based on and also in turn affect the biodiversity of the environment in which they live. Thus food habits and their seasonality may have cultural as well as spiritual grounds. For example, certain foods are eaten in certain seasons and not in other seasons, and this may be simply because it is felt to be 'good' to eat that food in those days or it may be that the traditional/indigenous knowledge systems suggest these to be good for health or it may be that certain festivals or gods may be associated with these prescriptions, or merely that certain foods are available in certain seasons. Sacred groves are the most prominent example of this interconnection in India and it is not uncommon to have special sacred groves where it is taboo to cut down those trees and they often stand out as strikingly green patches amidst a generally denuded landscape in some places. Such examples would be available in other case basins also.

In the other sense, cultural and spiritual diversity is itself considered a part of biodiversity since it is the way that intra-species diversity would reflect itself within the human race. More specifically, cultural and spiritual diversity and the vulnerability in this respect is seen respectively as the cultural and spiritual

diversity of various ethnic groups and their ways of life and the vulnerability of these ways of life to the advent of modernity. Also, the cultural and spiritual value systems have a relationship with their material culture and institutions which are intimately connected with their livelihood systems, the way the different communities earn their livelihoods and cannot be separated from them because they are often embedded in them. Historically, traditional livelihood systems and cultural and spiritual systems have evolved and adapted to each other over a long period and therefore cannot be treated separately.

### **Vulnerability – problems and issues**

Vulnerability is the inability to cope with change. Most societies and social groups have coping mechanisms to address change. Change may demand adaptation and the degree of adaptation that may be required is the focus of interest here. How far that change endangers the cultural spiritual practices, institutions and values of a community may be defined as vulnerability. For example, pressure on land may lead to abandonment of fallowing practices, consequent loss of productivity of coarse cereals and disappearance of the food which forms a constant reference in cultural idiom reducing it to a memory delinked from present food practices. This may be a significant but small example of vulnerability. On the other hand displacement could lead to a situation where the religious council of elders would not be able to meet nor could the annual festival and rites of propitiation of the clan deity be organized. This could present a grave threat and high vulnerability. There are however, many issues in relation to identifying vulnerability and its extent in cultural and spiritual vulnerability.

### **Degree of vulnerability**

Defining cultural and spiritual vulnerability, especially assessing its degree or intensity, qualitatively (by a qualitative scale more-less) or quantitatively (assigning a number to it) is problematic for a number of reasons. Though it is likely to be easier to assess the threat to individual aspects of cultural and spiritual practices, institutions or values, it is difficult to assess their relative importance and come up with a composite index. In fact, the whole process of assessment of vulnerability is fraught with relatively subjective judgements to a far greater degree than it is for other kinds of vulnerabilities. How is one to assess whether the loss of a live link between idiom and the thing/practice it designates is more or less important than the loss of a particular kind of bird which no longer has a nesting site in the area? Cultural and spiritual aspects are greatly extensible and may cover many different things unlike biophysical and socio-economic aspects that are more amenable to such scaling. One solution for this is to present vulnerability scales as matrix instead of assigning weights and generating a single number. Another solution is to make the scale nominally qualitative, though it is a nominal device because it can always be reduced to an ordinal scale.

### **Observer participation and internal differentiation**

There are even greater problems with cultural and spiritual matters when we approach vulnerability – that of value judgements. These are of two types, arising out of the observer and observed relationship and those arising out of the internal differentiation within the observed. It has always been assumed – and we may acknowledge that it is largely true – that the relation between observer and observed is one of asymmetric power and that there is a need to refrain from value judgments in respect of the observed and their practices. However, this is still problematic. The problem lies in the artificial division that takes place within the mental space of the observer. Faced with a situation of genital mutilation or witch hunting or child marriages, all not uncommon phenomena in many traditional societies, the observer may now acquire a schizophrenic mental space, a space that denies that she even has a stand on these issues and a space in which she sees it as a cruel patriarchal practice. So far as the observed are concerned, she is neutral and holds their practices as acceptable as any other even while she in practice is perhaps passionately opposed to such practices. This imposes a somewhat schizophrenic or hypocritical attitude on the observer.

This is not meant to devalue the needs of objectivity and a non-judgmental attitude. But this is also accompanied by the need for transparency. It is also related to the issue of what role we see for outsider observers. Observers are also participants, and in ethnographic research there are no non-participant observers. Therefore it is important to define the role of the outsider participant. Here we would suggest that it is more important to recognize and compensate for the political asymmetry rather than operate on a principle of non-interference and simple non-judgment. What is important is to take a transparent stand, not refrain from putting forward your own views, though this needs to be done with sufficient discretion and sensitivity and not to take on the role of decision maker on oneself but leave it to the community or section of the community involved to take the decision. The principle we believe should be that the community or its section must have the final power, the say, but the outsider has always had a vital role to play in making decisions informed decisions, taken after due deliberation of options and alternative viewpoints.

### **Internal differentiation**

It is also important to recognize the internal contradictions within the cultural and spiritual value systems in the sense that there are certain elements within these systems that can take the society forward in the sense that these elements help in conservation of environment or preservation of biodiversity and so on. However it is also possible that these very systems have elements which may not be socially egalitarian or can lead to “exclusions”. Coming back to the sacred groves in India, as said earlier, the spiritual dimension of this has helped in maintaining local biodiversity and green cover. However, the customs associated with sacred groves also forbids women in their reproductive age to do any worship around sacred groves or access to them.

More importantly it is necessary to recognize that the community is not homogenous and there may be many differentiated situations within the community especially in situations in which different sections are likely to react differently to change. For example, attempts to eliminate witch hunting within some of the tribal societies in India create similar problems about vulnerability. They are seen as intrusive and as a threat to the cultural spiritual practices of those tribes. However, the matter may be seen as differently and there could be a section within the community composed of women and men both who may see it as destroying cultural spiritual practices but as reforming them. Alternatively, they may see the practice itself as placing tribal women in a culturally and spiritually vulnerable position and the abolition of the practice itself as removing that vulnerability. Further, these sections are likely to be influenced by development and modernity and likely to be labeled as external.

At issue here is the problem of the differential impact cultural spiritual practices themselves create on sections within the community and the vulnerabilities they create within those communities. It is important not to see the original or traditional cultural spiritual practices as free from vulnerabilities and treat departures from them as vulnerabilities. Instead it is important for analytical purposes to identify earlier cultural spiritual traditions themselves creating a field of differential vulnerabilities to which external change may add on.

### **Vulnerable ethnic minorities**

For the purposes of WP7, we would suggest that it is important to identify vulnerable ethnic minorities and to focus on them for detailed analysis. This is also important in view of the aim of the study which involves building scenarios and assessing them. In such a situation, it is the vulnerable minorities and what happens to them which become important factors. This is because it is likely that the development process will affect these communities much more adversely and what happens to them and their vulnerabilities is in some way indicative of the inclusiveness of the development process.

## **Methodology**

### **Data needs and their levels**

Data needs are at two levels – at individual/household level and at community level and would include:

- The demographic profile and distribution – time series data – for the distinct cultural/spiritual groupings in the case basins; their distribution/locations on GIS
- Life cycle events in the life of men and women; the rites that all men and women have to go through during the course of their lives (birth, baptism, naming ceremony, initiation rites (sometimes at puberty), marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, death, after death and so on
- Traditional and customary food patterns –seasonal changes or changes according to special occasions/festivals; changes in food patterns

- Sacred entities that the community holds to be sacred – sacred water bodies, locations, groves, trees, animals, birds, foods, etc.; the significance of these entities, the practices surrounding these entities, the taboos, gender specific practices and taboos
- Traditional ways of dressing – day to day traditional dress? For men? For women? What is the material they are made from? Dress for ceremonies and special occasions? Who wears them? Special dresses for officiating/ceremonial persons? (chiefs, priests, priestesses, etc.)
- Major deities of the community – their significance/importance; their abode; the form of interaction with the deity (worship, appeasement, obeisance, supplication, etc.); the major events/festivals/special occasions associated with the deity; the way they are observed
- Institutional issues – the way the cultural-spiritual activities are organized in the community; the major functionaries (chiefs, priests, elders); the council members, clan heads, priestesses, matriarchs, so called medicine men, witches, wizards, etc.; their duties, responsibilities and powers; legal sanction (including customary) of these functionaries and duties and responsibilities
- The community and its traditional pattern of livelihood – hunting-gathering, jhum (burn and slash) agriculture or rotational agriculture involving clearing, settled agriculture, fishing of various kinds, craft activities and so on; the resources used (including ownership or access relations: for example landlord-tenant, or chief distributing land, or fixed tenure for land, open access system for wood used for crafts etc., or fodder used for livestock, important domestic and wild crops, tress, animals for different purposes and so on); seasonality
- Traditional gender division of labour regarding both livelihood activities and housework
- The changes taking place in the above and the reasons behind those changes

### **Methods of data collection**

A lot of the work that WP7 needs will have to be done as part of and in association with other WPs.

Therefore, co-ordination between WP tasks of the different WPs is of great importance. WP 7 will have to use methods/sources

- Secondary data and literature reviews
- Identification/recording of the location of ethnic groups and sites of specific cultural/spiritual practices using GPS so that the data can be taken on to a GIS platform and help in the vulnerability mapping
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the help of a checklist (but to be flexible as per the situation)
- Interviews with individuals; especially community elders wherever possible
- Participant observation

- Sample household survey (This is optional and not part of the minimum package that all case study partners are supposed to do. This is to be done as part of the socio-economic survey questionnaire. We have already included the questions that need to be asked at the household level. The main purpose here is to capture the degree of adherence/non-adherence to cultural/spiritual values at the household level)
- Ethnographic study, if possible; and
- Workshops and meetings

The cultural and spiritual values and practices in an area are much more grounded to local contexts and communities. Hence the effort would not be to have a rigid, structured uniform questionnaire or tools to be used in all the case study basins. Instead what we propose to come out with a minimum set of questions that need to be pursued in all the four case basins. The case basin partners would have the freedom to go beyond this minimum set of questions/issues requirements of their basins. Thus WP7 will provide checklists and guidelines at the appropriate times for the different stages of work to help case study co-coordinators develop the necessary instruments.

**The vulnerability matrix**

The data that would be collected using the different tools, as discussed above, would be used to develop a vulnerability matrix as an analytical tool for the assessment of cultural and spiritual vulnerability of communities. Whether we may require different matrices for different sections within the community will depend on the degree of differentiation within the community. If the vulnerabilities that arise are significantly different for different sections then we may require separate matrices for those different sections. If the differences in vulnerability for different sections are confined to a few cells of the matrix, they could be accommodated within the matrix itself. However, if they differ greatly then we may need different matrices to present them adequately.

The main principles behind the matrix are simple. The rows of the matrices would represent different cultural and spiritual practices, institutions or values. The columns of the matrix would represent drivers or affective factors. Each cell would then contain a value or description that summarise the level of vulnerability. The cell could contain qualitative terms or ordinal values. Thus one possibility of denoting the degree of vulnerability would be the scale [None, Slight, Mild, Moderate, High, and Very High], which could also be replaced by an equivalent ordinal code, for example [0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

Cultural practices, Values ↓	Drivers → Spiritual Institutions,								


We are not pre-defining what the rows or columns should contain because these will be specific to the basin communities chosen. For example, in Warana basin for the Dange Dhangars we may have food habits, dress codes, hunting, clan meetings, marriage ceremonies, value of cooperation as items for the rows and we may have national park coming up, dam being built, displacement, education, enactment of biodiversity act as one of the columns. The cell for clan meetings x displacement may have a 'High' value while dress code x displacement may have a 'Mild' values and dress code x education may have a 'Very high' value. Populating the drivers and the practices is specific to each basin community and its situation.

Cultural practices, Values ↓	Drivers → Spiritual Institutions,		National Park	Dam	Displacement	Education		
Food habits			Mild	Mild	Moderate	Moderate		
Dress codes			Slight	Slight	Moderate	Very High		
Hunting			High	High	Very High	Mild		
Clan meetings			Mild	Moderate	High	Mild		
Marriage ceremonies			Mild	Moderate	High	Mild		
Value of cooperation			Mild	Mild	High	Mild		

**The matrix and scenarios**

It is important to stress here that the matrix mainly serves as a summarizing tool and should not detract from the fact that the study of cultural and spiritual vulnerability is mainly a qualitative study. Each value in the cell should be based on a detailed analysis that forms the body of the work. The cell in the matrix summarizes that analysis. However, we feel that its importance as an analytical aid should also not be overlooked. The matrix will also help us in building scenarios.

What is important here is that the columns are already components of scenarios. A business as usual scenario (BAU), for example, in Warana basin, would be spread of mining, spread of high end tourism. Similarly, it could be replaced by restricted mining, ethno-eco tourism. In short each of the scenarios could have an associated set of columns that would describe the scenario and the vulnerability matrix

would help us see what difference the scenarios make to the vulnerability patterns. It is therefore an important tool for stakeholder interaction and decision making. And finally, important as the study is it is important that the study should result in stakeholder empowerment, should not just be a study of the observed but take account of the power relation between the observer and the observed and become a tool for the empowerment of the observed.

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