

Vulnerability – towards a conceptual framework for use in the PPA

A contribution from the Research and Analysis Working Group
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1. Introduction

Local stakeholders have decided that the first round of the Tanzanian PPA Process under Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System should focus on issues of vulnerability. The PRSP highlights the vulnerability of the poor as 'a major concern' and proposes some programmes aimed at containing vulnerability. Yet, at the same time, the PRSP recognises that the knowledge base on vulnerability in Tanzania is relatively weak.

Knowledge on vulnerability in Tanzania needs strengthening along five lines. More information is required on:

- the factors that make people vulnerable
- the different manifestations of vulnerability and their prevalence in different strata
- The ways in which individuals, households and communities act to contain or reduce vulnerability
- the likely impact of the PRS on vulnerable population groups
- the most effective programmes that could be put in place to contain or reduce vulnerability.

The first PPA round can make important contributions to strengthen the knowledge base on vulnerability in Tanzania. This seems particularly appropriate given the emphasis the PRSP gives to the role of local communities in defining the needs of the vulnerable. The aim of carrying out a PPA on vulnerability would be to gather information on different types of vulnerability, but also to provide concrete policy recommendations on how vulnerability might be addressed more effectively in the PRS. The PPA could provide invaluable evidence in the five areas mentioned above. However, it is important to understand that the nature of the research process will not allow us to draw conclusions about the prevalence of different types of vulnerability in different parts of the country or in different social strata. The PPA will inform us on the diversity of vulnerability in different contexts and will help us to understand the dynamics underlying specific instances of vulnerability.

In order to design a successful PPA on vulnerability, it is important to be crystal clear about the definition of the concept and how it relates to other concepts. In the discussions on poverty reduction in Tanzania, vulnerability and related concepts have been used rather loosely. This note aims to serve as a starting point for the

discussions by the PPA Implementing Consortium and other stakeholders, which should bring about greater conceptual clarity about vulnerability.

In section two of this note, an outline is given of the thinking on vulnerability that is implicit in the PRSP and the first PRSP progress report. As the PPA is expected to provide information that can be used to strengthen the way in which vulnerability is treated in the PRS, a logical starting point is to try to understand how the authors of the PRSP and the progress report understand vulnerability. Section three proposes a conceptual framework for vulnerability. The proposed conceptual framework is compatible with the thinking in the PRSP, but it is sufficiently broad to allow the PPA to investigate manifestations of vulnerability that have not been considered in the PRSP. Section four gives an outline of the questions that might guide the PPA research process on vulnerability, based on the proposed conceptual framework. In the annex, all passages of the PRSP and the PRSP Progress Report related to vulnerability are reproduced for reference.

2. Thinking about vulnerability and poverty in the PRSP

A reading of the passages about vulnerability in the PRSP and the PRSP progress report¹ reveals that these documents see vulnerability as people's susceptibility to become poor or poorer because of unpredictable events, or shocks. The shocks that are mentioned in particular include adverse weather conditions, in the form of floods and droughts, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. The PRSP mentions several categories of people who are especially vulnerable to these shocks: the elderly, the handicapped, orphaned children and refugees. The PRSP also remarks that traditional systems to protect the very vulnerable and cope with unpredicted events have eroded and this has increased the need for safety-net programmes.

The implicit argument in the PRSP is that the strategy for economic growth and the programmes to strengthen human capabilities, survival and well-being will lift substantial numbers of people out of poverty. However, there are exogenous shocks, in the form of climatic events or epidemics, which risk forcing people back into poverty or preventing them from climbing out of poverty. If people's vulnerability to these shocks can be reduced and if the effects of the shocks can be managed, the external shocks do not need to jeopardise the achievement of the PRSP targets.

The programmes regarding vulnerability set out in the PRSP reflect this thinking. They are partly aimed at addressing people's vulnerability to shocks, for example by

¹ See annex

introducing drought resistant crops and irrigation schemes. Partly, they are providing direct support to people who have been adversely affected by shocks, through food-for-work programmes and other employment-related initiatives.

The PRSP stresses in various places the need for a database on the vulnerable, indicating that there is a knowledge gap on how vulnerability manifests itself in various parts of the country. Interesting also is the emphasis that is put on the need for strong community involvement in the identification of vulnerable groups and the management of programmes to contain vulnerability.

This reading of the PRSP and the PRSP progress report reveals that there is an implicit conceptualisation of vulnerability and poverty in the PRSP, but it leaves many questions unanswered. Some of the questions raised in discussions about the treatment of vulnerability in the PRSP are:

- Is the reason that vulnerable people become poor or poorer always a shock or even an event? Are there not also more gradual processes that have this effect?
- Do the events or shocks that impact negatively on the vulnerable always have to be unpredictable and exogenous?
- Is the best approach to vulnerability to identify the most vulnerable groups and put safety-net programmes in place for them?
- Is it true that traditional mechanisms to cope with vulnerability are eroding? Which mechanisms do actually exist and how have they evolved over time?

The PPA needs a conceptual framework that is compatible with the thinking in the PRSP, yet at the same time is broad enough to allow seeking answers to these and other questions. A proposal for a framework that would allow this follows in the next section.

3. Conceptualisation of vulnerability

We propose to define vulnerability as the susceptibility of individuals, households or communities to become poor or poorer as a result of events or processes that occur around them. Vulnerability is therefore not a synonym of poverty. Not everyone who is vulnerable is also poor and not all the poor are equally vulnerable. Yet, while vulnerability and poverty are not synonyms, the two phenomena are correlated. We will come back to this later. Vulnerability describes the extent to which an individual, household or community is at risk of sliding (deeper) into poverty. Vulnerability therefore is about the *dynamics* of poverty. The concept helps us understand why the poverty status of individuals and groups of people

changes over time and why particular events or processes affect some more than others.

As vulnerability is defined in relation to poverty, there is also a need to further define poverty. In recent policy documents in Tanzania, poverty is seen as a multi-dimensional concept, which includes income as well as non-income related aspects. The PRSP, for example, talks of income poverty, human capabilities, survival, nutrition and social well-being. The latter incorporates social exclusion. If we consider poverty in all its dimensions, the study of vulnerability becomes very wide and potentially very complex. It leads us to consider vulnerability leading to low consumption, ill health, lack of education, illiteracy, poor nutritional status, social exclusion, etcetera. The many dimensions of poverty are closely interrelated, but for the purposes of research into vulnerability, it may be advisable to focus on one particular aspect of poverty. For the PPA, for example, we could decide to focus on studying how vulnerability leads to food insecurity, or ill health, or low consumption.

Some people are more vulnerable than others. The same goes for households and groups of people. We can identify characteristics of vulnerable groups and individuals, which explain why some are more likely to feel the impact of a particular event or process than others. We could call these characteristics risk factors. At the level of the individual, for example, age can be a major risk factor. The very young and the very old are in many ways particularly vulnerable. If, for example, a drought puts their livelihood under stress, they are more likely than others to feel the impact and to slide (deeper) into poverty. At the household level, one can also identify risk factors. For a household engaged in small-scale farming, relying on rain-fed agriculture is a clear risk factor. At the community level, there are more risk factors. The location of a community in a drought prone area is one. Apart from dividing the risk factors according to the level at which they occur, one can cluster them into those related to the

- life cycle (e.g. age),
- physical factors (e.g. illness, handicaps),
- social factors (e.g. gender, social exclusion),
- cultural factors (e.g. knowledge)
- economic factors (e.g. land ownership, savings),
- political factors (e.g. solidarity, organisation, 'voice'), and
- environmental factors (e.g. soil fertility).

What may be confusing at first is that poverty itself is a risk factor. Vulnerability and poverty are correlated. The poor, because they have very limited savings and stocks on which they can rely in hard times, feel a greater impact in times of crisis. Often, those who are less poor also have a lower chance of being exposed to the kinds of events and processes that push the vulnerable deeper into poverty. For example, the non-poor are less likely to live in informal settlements, which may have

a higher incidence of crime and violence. So, while poverty can be the result of vulnerability, it also increases vulnerability in its own right.

Another important point to make in connection with the characteristics of vulnerability is that vulnerable people or groups often combine several of these characteristics. Think, for example, of the elderly widow, who is vulnerable because of her age, her gender, unfavourable social/cultural practices related to inheritance and ownership of land, perhaps also faced with social exclusion.

A final point to bear in mind is that the characteristics of the vulnerable are not static. People and groups become more vulnerable or less vulnerable over time. The processes that lead to changes in the level of vulnerability should be distinguished from the processes that lead to the impoverishment of the vulnerable.

With the matrix below, we can start mapping out the characteristics of vulnerability in the Tanzanian context. We should however keep reminding ourselves that individuals and groups may combine different characteristics and that the characteristics of the vulnerable change over time.

Characteristics of vulnerability - 'risk factors'				
	Individual	Household	Community	Area
Life cycle				
Physical				
Social				
Cultural				
Economic				
Political				
Environmental				

Vulnerability was defined, above, as the susceptibility of individuals or groups of people to become poor or poorer. It was argued that some people or groups of people are more vulnerable than others. Characteristics of vulnerability, or risk factors, can be identified to explain this. The next crucial element of the conceptual framework is the notion that events and processes occur that actually cause the vulnerable to become poor(er). Being vulnerable in itself does not make someone poor. We are interested in the events and processes that make the vulnerable poor. Sometimes these are sudden events, which can be described as 'shocks'. In other cases their onset is more gradual and predictable. The change that 'triggers' the impoverishment of the vulnerable can occur at the individual, household, community, district or national level. A work-related accident is an example at the individual level. The death of a family member is a 'shock' at the

household level. A landslide threatens the whole community, while droughts and civil strife are examples of events that threaten larger areas. Like the risk factors, the 'trigger' events can be clustered in main groups - related to:

- nature (e.g. a flood),
- health (e.g. HIV/AIDS),
- life-cycle (e.g. death of a family member),
- social (e.g. crime),
- economic (e.g. reduction in commodity prices),
- political (e.g. riots, abuse of power)
- environmental factors (e.g. pollution).

The matrix below can help to provide a typology of processes and events that cause the vulnerable to become poor(er) in the Tanzanian context.

Events and processes that trigger the impoverishment of the vulnerable				
	Individual	Household	Community	Area
Nature				
Health				
Life cycle				
Social				
Economic				
Political				
Environmental				

The final element of the conceptual framework are the mechanisms or practices to contain or reduce vulnerability. These, again, can exist at individual, household, community, district and national level. According to the conceptual framework presented above, these can be divided into three types:

- *Prevention/avoidance*: mechanisms that help to prevent or avoid the events and processes which make the vulnerable poor. A programme to reduce the level of crime in a neighbourhood is an example of prevention at the community level. Moving away from a drought-prone area is an example of avoidance at the individual or household level.
- *Preparedness*: mechanisms that address a person's or group's risk factors and therefore make them more vulnerable. A community building up strategic food stocks is an example at community level. Growing a range of different varieties of one crop is an example at individual or household level.

- *Mitigation*: mechanisms that aim to mitigate the impact of 'trigger' events or processes when they have occurred. This is the safety-net approach, with examples such as food-for-work or food hand-outs.

Again, we can use a matrix to think about the main types of mechanisms to contain or reduce vulnerability.

Coping mechanisms				
	Individual	Household	Community	Area
Prevention and avoidance				
Preparedness				
Mitigation				

4. Pointers for the PPA

The first PPA round can greatly contribute to a better understanding of vulnerability and the dynamics of poverty. It can help to fill the knowledge gaps on vulnerability that currently exist. The PPA can help to assess whether the exogenous shocks, which receive so much emphasis in the present PRSP, are indeed the most important ones in the eyes of the poor themselves. It can help us understand better which factors make some more vulnerable to those shocks than others and how these risk factors themselves can be addressed. And the PPA can inform policy makers on whether the programmes outlined in the PRSP are indeed the most appropriate ones in the view of the poor themselves.

Given the above, the following clusters of questions in a PPA may usefully inform revisions of the PRSP:

- Gain a better insight on the dynamics of poverty. Have the poor in a particular community been poor all their lives? And, conversely, have the non-poor in that community ever been poor? Were their parents and grandparents poor? If there are significant changes in poverty over time, how do the community members describe their wealth or poverty history? Are there long-term as well as short-term patterns? Do these patterns apply to the whole community or to individual households and their members?
- Which events or processes have triggered these changes? Are they related to nature (weather, natural disasters); health (illness, disability, epidemics); the life cycle (deaths and births); social issues (crime, violence, war, discrimination); economic issues (unemployment, crop prices, market failure);

- political issues (governance at local and national levels); environmental issues (deforestation, soil erosion, etc).
- Investigate the major 'triggers' identified by the community, in addition to the two main shocks highlighted in the PRSP (drought/flood and HIV/AIDS). What is the history of these types of events and processes in this community? How did they impact differently on different individuals and households in the community? What were the reasons behind these differences in impact? What were the characteristics of those people and households who experienced a greater or lesser impact?
 - Which mechanisms are in place to prevent or avoid these events, to enhance preparedness for them or to mitigate their impact - at individual, household, community, district or national levels? Have these mechanisms changed over time? How?
 - What can be done by individuals, households, community, district, national actors to reduce vulnerability and to enhance mechanisms to prevent or mitigate the impact of adverse events and processes? Are the measures proposed in the PRSP adequate?

In all of the above, the PPA should utilise and build on the 1995 PPA as far as possible in terms of people's own perceptions of poverty and vulnerability, across various agricultural/ecological zones.

Annex:

A- What the PRSP says about vulnerability

p.11

"A major concern of the poor is their vulnerability to unpredictable events. In Tanzania, famine often results from either floods or drought. Since the mid-1990s, Tanzania has in fact experienced a series of adverse weather conditions, which undermined food security. Another threat is the increasing impact of HIV/AIDS on the number of orphans, currently estimated at 680,000. Many communities have to deal with growing numbers of AIDS victims and orphans, the handicapped, the very old, and refugees. There is, therefore, a growing need for safety-nets. This point was noted in the recent Zonal Workshops. The apparent breakdown of traditional systems that used to take care of vulnerable groups and the escalating number of dependent persons have increased the need for safety-net programmes."

p.17

"... in keeping with the concerns of the stakeholders, and guided by the overarching orientation of Vision 2025 and the NPES, the focus of the poverty reduction strategy concentrates on efforts aimed at (i) reducing income poverty; (ii) improving human capabilities, survival and social well-being; and (iii) containing extreme vulnerability among the poor."

p.26

"The Government will give specific attention to vulnerable groups through its own programmes and by enlisting the involvement of its development partners. Local Communities will be expected to play a major role in identifying the needs of vulnerable groups. Specific interventions in this area will include food-for-work programmes and other initiatives that are implemented under the World Bank Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF). The Government will also examine other interventions that would be targeted at the most vulnerable groups (orphans and handicapped)."

"The Government already has in place an early warning system to predict weather-related variations in crop yields. However, in order to increase food security, the Government will seek to reduce dependence on rain-fed agriculture by supporting irrigation schemes in the arid areas, and improving access to food supplies in

surplus regions. Related initiatives will also include the development of drought resistant crops and sustained efforts in re-afforestation.

p.32

"The Government intends to spend about TSh.100 million annually, to support demand-driven skill development over the medium term. This effort will also be directed at assisting vulnerable persons."

p.37

"It is intended to establish databases on vulnerable groups at local and central levels of Government administration."

Logical framework - p.53

Objective/impact indicators - Extreme vulnerability

Targets/outcome indicators - Built capacity to all communities needing safety nets programmes

Intermediate indicators - Established data base for the vulnerable groups by 2003; Promoted the production of drought resistant crops in all drought prone areas; Promoted community managed irrigation schemes in all potential irrigation areas by 2003.

Actions - Facilitate creation of data base for vulnerable groups; Promote drought resistant crops; Create Equalization Fund to cater for disadvantaged areas; Promote community managed irrigation schemes; Promote community-based care programmes for most vulnerable groups; Scale up efforts for afforestation and de-stocking.

B- What the PRSP progress report says about vulnerability

p.3 (Principal interventions in 2000/01)

"... adoption of measures, including in the context of the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), to alleviate rural income poverty and provide relief to vulnerable groups."

"Establishment of the Education Fund, to support children from very poor families."

"Abolition of primary school fees and other enrolment related contributions."

p.13 (Impact on poverty)

"Additionally, the Government has put in place safety-nets directed at protecting the incomes of the poor. One important initiative in this area, the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), is aimed at generating cash incomes directly to vulnerable groups that are involved in carrying out projects chosen and managed by communities. In addition to the monetary benefits, the TASAF process has also helped to strengthen the technical and managerial capacity of the poor, as well as participatory approaches in planning and implementing poverty-oriented interventions at the community level. Other initiatives include: Small Entrepreneurs Loan Facility; Poverty Eradication Initiatives; Community Based Initiatives Trust; National Income Generation Programme; Agricultural Input Fund; and Youth and Women Development Funds. In reflection of similar concerns, the Government will shortly develop, together with some international partners, a special programme aimed at providing support (such as credits and improved inputs) for the rural poor. Although prompted by essentially different considerations, the recent abolition of primary school fees and other enrolment related contributions is expected to provide relief for many vulnerable households."

p.44 (Policy Matrix)

Objective - Improve the welfare of vulnerable groups through upgrading their residential areas, provision of financial and technical services, enhancement of their property rights and adoption of safety nets.

Progress to date - The Government has established the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) to support demand driven projects at community level. Some NGOs are providing savings and micro-credit services to small business especially those owned by women.

Planned actions - Promotion of safety net programmes. Improve infrastructure network (water, electricity, roads and telecommunication services) in rural and suburbs of urban areas. Regularisation of tenure in informal settlements.