

Conceptual and Methodological Reflections on Vulnerability Assessments: A Comprehensive Focus on Inequality and Capacity for Change

Petra Tschakert^{1,2}, Asuncion Lera St. Clair², Armando Lamadrid², Bob van Oort²

¹ Pennsylvania State University, Geography, University Park, United States;

² Center for Climate and Environmental Research (CICERO), Oslo, Norway

ECCA
Hamburg
March 19, 2013

Outline

- Advances in A research, methodological gaps
- Achievements and shortcomings of VAs
- Reframing of VAs (inequality; capacity for change)
- Inequality and Transformational Analyses (ITAs)
- Potential application of ITAs

Adaptation Research

- Adaptive governance
- Resilient trajectories
- Cross-scalar and nested vulnerabilities
- Barriers and limits to adaptation
- Interrelations across development pathways
- Multidimensional poverty and deprivation
- Disaster risk reduction and preparedness
- Transformative change



VAs Literature Review

Methodological toolbox hasn't kept pace with the conceptual advances in the vulnerability and adaptation community

- Legacy of early IPCC work, focused on “who” is materially vulnerable and simplified
- Abundance of vulnerability measurements, maps, indicators, and indices
- Mainly quantitative and expert-driven



VAs Literature Review cont.

- Discursive/lock-in trap (inherent vulnerability)
- Less emphasis on structural and relational drivers of vulnerability
- Snapshot in time *versus* process dynamics, trajectories
- Little engagement with people's understandings of and visions for change, values, and trade-offs
- Science-policy interface seen as linear, not suitable for dealing with cross-scalar changes and uncertainties

➤ Need to understand nature of vulnerability, complex drivers, and iterative (learning) processes to improve capacity for change

Reframing VAs

- Shifting focus from describing, mapping, computing, and comparing to attention to **relational and structural drivers** of vulnerability, attention to adaptive **capabilities** and the components of a “**solution space**”
- Alignment with framings of **poverty reduction & well-being**
- Focus on **processes, participation, and agency**
- Central role of **power**
- Incremental change AND **transformation** for resilience
- Synergies with the **SREX** (justice, sustainable development)

Introducing ITAs

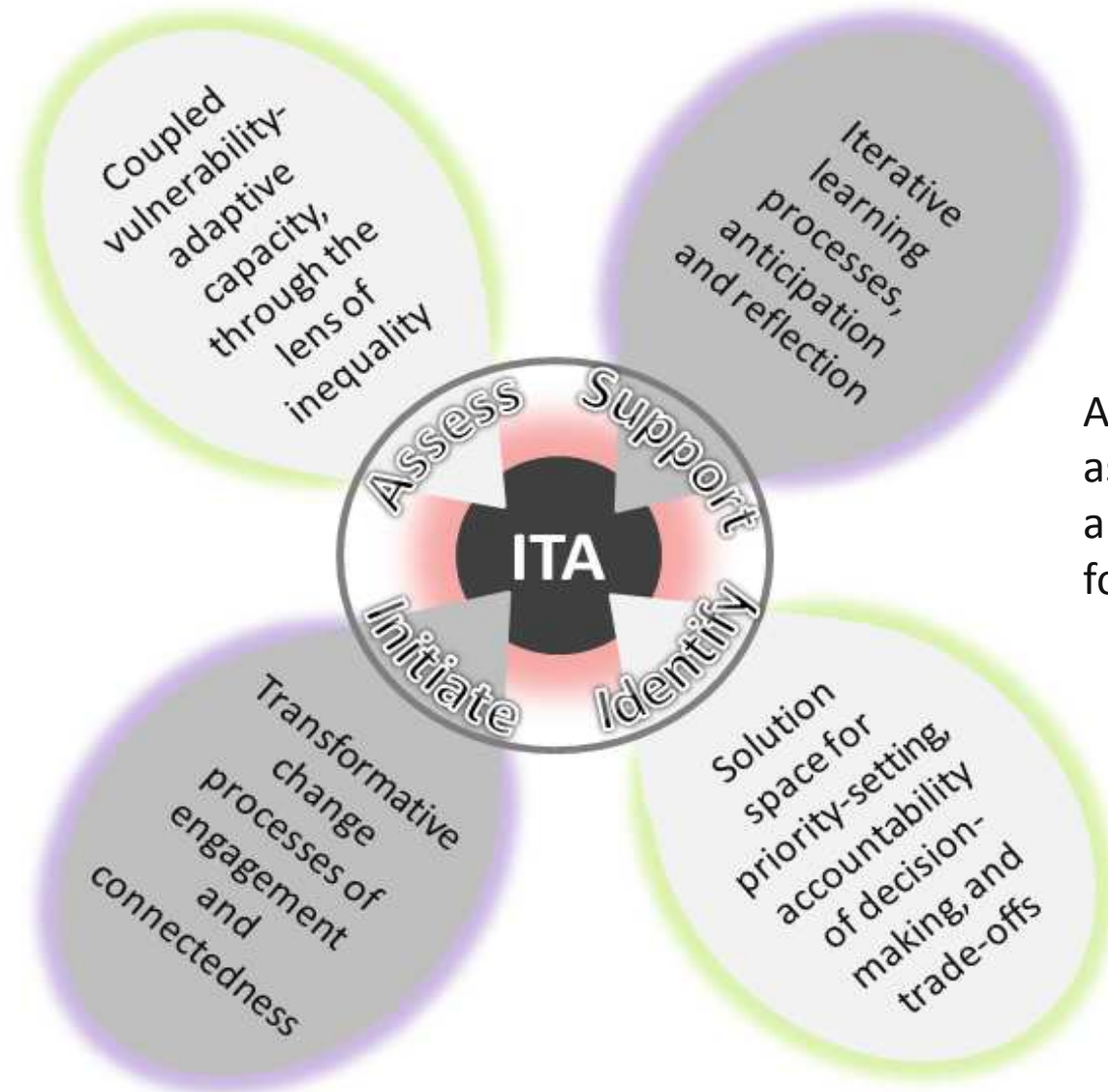
- **Reducing social-ecological vulnerability**
 - Addressing persistent inequalities
 - Building capacity for change (learning)
 - Preparing for resilient future trajectories
- **Enhancing governance capacities/capabilities**



Ontology:

- Relational and inclusive notion of harm and flourishing
- Participating stakeholders = agents (authoritative actors)

Methodological Framework



A balanced combination of assessments (light gray/green) and enhancement of capacity for change (dark gray/purple).

Source: Tschakert et al. 2013. Conceptual and methodological reflections on vulnerability assessments: A comprehensive focus on inequality and capacity of change. *Climate & Development* (under review)

What do ITAs tell us for HKH

The HICAP project region and study sites



- Hazards stereotype (fragile, vulnerable, fatalistic)
- Social, cultural, gender, governance complexity
- ⇒ Focus on social, cultural, and political drivers of inequality to delineate problem space and solution space

Conclusion



- New generation of V and A analyses: relational, inclusive, forward-looking framework
- Incremental adjustments unfeasible or undesirable; uneven wealth, high C pathways, and abuse of ecosystem services
- Re-conceptualizing the way we comprehend and realize vulnerability reduction, tightly linked to poverty reduction
- Transformative change ought to happen at multiple scales
- Take seriously complex social-ecological interactions, adaptive governance, development priorities, and resilient trajectories
- Inform an adaptation process embedded in transformative paths leading toward sustainable and equitable futures