

# What Are Culturally Attuned Indicators?

Culturally attuned indicators are indicators that are deeply grounded in local cultural contexts. They can help us to understand complex interactions between people and place and provide a basis for self-defined sustainable development and resource management. The relationships between and across people and place, as well as Indigenous and local knowledges, practices, and worldviews, are often critical to long term resilience.

Indicators measuring the extent to which people have others they can rely on in times of need and neighbors they can trust are crucial to understanding the health of a community.



Other indicators of resilience that track interactions between people and place include the ability of households and communities to move between different livelihoods and locations as necessary\*...



...or the availability of opportunities for people to develop and maintain a sense of place, belonging, rootedness or connectedness, associated with different entities of the living world (e.g., cultural, sacred and heritage landscapes, sounds, scents and sights associated with childhood experiences, iconic animals, trees or flowers).\*\*



**Indicator sets coming from outside a project, country, or region frequently overlook the connections between and across people and place.**

Other examples of culturally attuned indicators may encompass indicators about knowledge, for instance the trend in knowledge and application of farming practices based on local knowledge of seasonal patterns and soil health. Identifying these trends keeps track of important community-based management techniques built over time regarding how to sustainably manage local food production systems. Tracking interactions between people and place may require indicators that focus on activities, such as those that measure Indigenous and local cultural practices that rely on the health of a resource base and vice versa.



Culturally attuned indicators may encompass a mix of quantitative metrics that allow for comparison within sites (and potentially across sites as needed), as well as qualitative information that allows for deeper understanding of what is happening and why, and in particular the feedbacks between human actions, environmental health, and human health.

\*UNU-IAS *et al.* 2014, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7pcqq2l>

\*\*Diaz *et al.* 2018, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap8826>

# What Process Can You Use to Identify Culturally Attuned Indicators?

Identifying culturally attuned indicators requires an approach that explicitly builds on local worldviews, knowledge systems, and management practices, used in combination with methods to incorporate evidence from multiple sources and scales. Such an approach should begin with an understanding of locally grounded priorities and needs that inform interactions with, and management of, natural resources.

The **2030 Peoples' Plan in Vanuatu\*** represents one example of an output that successfully highlights culturally attuned metrics in national-level reporting.

\*[https://www.gov.vu/attachments/article/26/NSDP\\_M\\_E\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.gov.vu/attachments/article/26/NSDP_M_E_Framework.pdf)



**Participatory methods support** the creation of metrics that are culturally attuned, **are monitored** in a way that respects peoples' livelihood strategies and time limitations, **and provide** information that applies to decision-making across local, national, regional, and global scales.

Engaging community members to reflect on and choose indicators is an essential part of the process, which supports self-determination and, ultimately, may improve environmental and social outcomes of resource management initiatives.

**Example participatory methods:**

Community-led visioning

Co-design of workshops

Other locally/culturally informed methods of engagement and interaction to identify indicators



Indicators developed at the local level can provide decision-making bodies (*e.g., regional and national government agencies and global policy platforms*) with on-the-ground perspectives of social and environmental change. Toward development for people, planet, and prosperity, leaving no one behind, this has the added benefit of supporting equitable representation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities within decision-making processes.

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

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