



**Background Note prepared for the**  
**INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY RISK ASSESSMENT**  
**in CAPE TOWN (SOUTH AFRICA)**  
**31<sup>st</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> June**

## **Introduction**

This paper is prepared as a background document for workshop participants with the aim of providing a context for discussion. It provides a general introduction to the subject of community risk assessment, highlights the Provention Consortium's efforts in this field, and provides an outline of the key issues and questions to be considered at the International Workshop on Community Risk Assessment.

## **Background**

One of the key conclusions from the Kobe/Hyogo World Conference on Disaster Reduction, January 2005, was the recognition that the different actors dedicated to reducing risk need to engage more rigorously with risk assessment, project application and advocacy. Community risk assessment (CRA) in particular was recognized as critical in identifying, assessing and monitoring risk at a community level, with the purpose of informing the design of locally appropriate risk reduction programmes and assisting in the monitoring and surveillance of risk at a community level. An effective risk assessment at the community level can contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face. CRA can help to reveal how these risks are generated, who will be most at risk, and what resources/ capacities are available locally to reduce risk. CRA can serve as a tool in designing initiatives that increase the resilience of communities and households. The active participation of communities and local institutions in the risk assessment process is critical in ensuring that risk assessment findings are integrated into local community practice and local development planning. In light of this many community risk assessment methods are highly participatory in nature.

In addition, a risk assessment may be crucial in informing national development planning, by providing vital information to national institutions concerning sustainable development measures, social planning options, and resource allocation priorities.

Community risk assessment has become more common over the past ten years. Nevertheless, there are three challenges to its successful use that should be the focus of attention at the Cape Town workshop.

The first challenge concerns "mainstreaming" or "going to scale." Despite the growing recognition of the importance and potential benefits of risk assessment at the community level, government institutions and decision makers at the national and sub national level rarely use CRA methods and seldom utilize its results in the risk

assessment and reduction planning process at higher spatial levels. One reason is that the data concerning the different assessment methodologies have not been thoroughly compiled, compared and analysed. Another reason is the lack of knowledge of their relative accuracy, effectiveness and quality. These important constraints can be partially addressed by comparative analysis, interdisciplinary research and, above all, the sharing of knowledge, learning and experience between the different actors involved in risk assessment. Furthermore, it is recognized that there is a need for enhanced cross-fertilization with assessment tools from other disciplines which would be useful in conducting community risk assessments, such as rapid rural appraisals, livelihood security and food security assessments and social impact assessments.

The second challenge concerns the “knock on” effects or further beneficial consequences of the application of CRA. CRA is not an end in itself. It should result in changes locally or more distantly that result in the reduction of risk. However, where CRA has been used, its results have not always been translated into action plans and implementation of risk reduction. Indeed, even the best practice of CRA has seldom changed local or national government practice and policy. Use of CRA remains for the most part “stuck” at the stage of the “pilot project” and “demonstration.”

The third challenge is manifested by the multiple demands on people’s time and resources and the multiple agendas and mandates that development organizations have. For very poor, marginal, and excluded groups of people, risk reduction might appear a luxury. Their daily existence is one of risk and struggle – just to find enough food for the day, or to maintain minimal shelter and personal security. Likewise, all development agencies and entities have been charged with addressing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Quite frequently one hears NGO, donor, and agency personnel express the opinion that “risk reduction” is a diversion of their time, energy, and resources from a focus on poverty reduction and the MDGs. In Kobe at the WCDR, many interventions and, indeed, the final outcome documents made clear that this is a false dichotomy. Sustainable human development, achievement of the MDGs, and risk reduction are inextricably interwoven.

### **The ProVention Consortium “Tools for Community Risk Assessment (CRA) and Action Planning” project**

The subject of community risk assessment and action planning is central to the work of the ProVention Consortium and its efforts to improve the accuracy and quality of the risk identification process and the implementation of effective risk reduction measures. For that purpose, ProVention initiated the “Tools for Community Risk Assessment and Action Planning” project which aims at:

- Reviewing current tools for community risk assessment, identifying gaps and defining elements of “good practice”.
- The collection of community risk assessment methodologies and applications in a web-based register. These will be supported with guidance notes.
- The development of an active (virtual) network of community risk assessment practitioners and researchers.
- The dissemination of the project outputs and promotion of risk reduction activities aimed at high-risk communities in developing countries.

The project involves a broad range of partners who play a key role in the development, implementation and evaluation of community risk assessment and

action planning tools. These include academic institutions and training centres in both the industrialised and developing world; IFRC and the network of National RC & RC societies and a wide range of INGOs, regional organisations and community based organisations. For example, ProVention is currently collaborating with IFRC and the Organisation of American States (OAS) on an initiative to develop practices in Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) in four Central American countries in order to strengthen community based disaster risk assessment and reduction.

ProVention organised an International Workshop on 'Social Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis' in Geneva on May 25-26, 2004 at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The workshop brought together some 26 leading academics and practitioners from different organisations and countries, with representation from Central and Latin America, Southern Africa, South and South-east Asia, who contributed to the initiative through presentation of case studies, research and workshop discussion groups. Participants highlighted key elements of good practice in VCA but also identified a wide range of technical, social, conceptual and developmental gaps that await closure. Suggestions concerning "good practice" in VCA included:

- integrating VCA with sustainable livelihood analysis
- improving the participatory process with the groups being assessed
- expanding VCA to assess root causes of vulnerability
- the creation of holistic risk assessments.

Various gaps in VCA practice were identified, including;

- weaknesses in current VCA tools and approaches
- the elusive governmental presence in the assessment process
- challenges in dealing with communities
- poor links between assessment and disaster reduction action.

A workshop discussion paper was developed as a background document for the workshop participants (see: [www.proventionconsortium.org/files/tools\\_CRA/VCA%20Workshop%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf](http://www.proventionconsortium.org/files/tools_CRA/VCA%20Workshop%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf)). Also a report, providing a summary of the key issues raised and conclusions of the international workshop, has been produced (see:

[www.proventionconsortium.org/files/tools\\_CRA/VCA%20Workshop%20report.pdf](http://www.proventionconsortium.org/files/tools_CRA/VCA%20Workshop%20report.pdf)).

Workshop participants also suggested a number of follow-up activities to the workshop. One of their key recommendations was the need to develop a web-based inventory of CRA methodologies and a compendium of good practice case studies. In response to these recommendations, the ProVention Consortium Secretariat initiated the development of a register of community risk assessment methodologies and resources. The Toolkit section on the ProVention website currently contains 20 entries, including methods on disaster risk assessment, food security and livelihood security assessment. (<http://www.proventionconsortium.org/toolkit.htm>) (see I. c and d). This initiative benefited from broad participation by project partners with much valuable contribution of methodologies and resources from IFRC, NGOs and academic centres.

Next, a project team, consisting of the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (DiMP), University of Cape Town, and Ben Wisner (Oberlin College, Ohio) was set up to further develop the Toolkit of CRA Tools, which will include the register of CRA methodologies and the compendium of case studies.

DiMP is coordinating the further collection and consolidation of the CRA methodologies register. DiMP's main assignment entails the analysis of the different CRA methodologies, involving the development of guidance notes, a matrix aimed at

providing a detailed overview of the content of the different methodologies and the development of a typology of methodologies. DiMP is also responsible for the collection of methods possibly useful for CRA but applied in other contexts. This may include tools for participatory rapid appraisal, social impact assessment, livelihood and food security assessment.

Ben Wisner is developing the compendium of case studies illustrating the applicability of the community risk assessment methodologies. His assignment also involves the development of guidance notes for the different case studies.

The CRA register and compendium will be developed in close collaboration with the OAS/NOAA "Vulnerability Assessment Techniques and Applications (VATA)" initiative and the UNHABITAT/ISDR WG III "Disaster Vulnerability Assessment Tools" project.

The project team will present the findings of their work at the Cape Town Workshop. Following comments by the workshop participants the CRA register and compendium will be revised and posted on the ProVention website.

### **International Workshop on Community Risk Assessment, Cape Town May 31st – June 2nd**

The Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, University of Cape Town, is hosting the workshop. Thirty five delegates from Africa, Asia, Europe, Pacific, Caribbean and Americas are participating in this three day event. Participants include representatives from academic institutions, international non-governmental organisations and their partner organisations, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, community based organisations and mid-level and local government officials with extensive experience in community risk assessment.

The aim of the workshop is for delegates to critically discuss the strategic use of community risk assessment, whilst sharing experiences on community risk assessment.

The key objectives of the workshop include the following:

- Presentation of in-depth regional experiences/case studies from Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Pacific related to community risk assessment.
- Structured analysis of existing community risk assessment methodologies.
- Discussion on the applicability and relevance of assessment tools from other disciplines.
- Review and evaluation of the user applicability of the ProVention methodologies register, specifically the guidance notes and matrix.
- Presentation on the challenges of integrating community risk assessment with related developmental assessment/planning tools to ensure the sustainable reduction of risk at the local level.

- Debate on the strategic use and impact of CRA in the broader context of disaster risk management, and development planning.
- Discussion on the formalization of a virtual community risk assessment network.

The workshop will be centred around three main themes, namely the ProVention Community Risk Assessment Toolkit; Learning from risk and vulnerability methodologies/experiences in other fields and the role of CRA in the broader context of Disaster Risk Management and Development Planning. The workshop will include a mix of presentations, small focus groups and plenary discussions. On Day 1 and Day 2, presentations will be conducted by regional specialists on the application of community risk assessment from Asia, Africa, Latin America and SIDS. In conjunction presentations will be conducted by other specialists conducting risk and vulnerability assessment, with a plenary discussion on the links with other such assessment methodologies and CRA. The final day of workshop will explore the role of CRA in the broader context of DRM and Development Planning. The workshop will conclude with a panel discussion on the establishment of a Community Risk Assessment Network.