

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment Workshop: Fieldwork

Location:	Colonia Nueva Esperanza, Tegucigalpa, and El Zamorano community, Jamastran, El Paraíso, Honduras
Date:	2005
Sector focus:	Multi-hazard analysis, community based Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment
Spatial focus:	Community level

Bibliographical reference

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) report from the ProVention project: Honduran Red Cross (HRC), Colonia Nuevas Esperanza and El Zamorano case studies, included in the compilation of case studies (CD-ROM) *Análisis de vulnerabilidades y capacidades en proyectos de educación comunitaria* (VCA in community education projects), Centre of Reference for Community Based Disaster Preparedness Education, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Similar case studies undertaken by the Honduran Red Cross can be found in the same compilation: Colonia Canaan, Tegucigalpa, and Los Terrones community, El Paraíso district.

These case studies can be downloaded from:
www.cruzroja.org/desastres/redcamp/crrec/tcomuni.htm

Abstract

These two case studies systematize the fieldwork process developed by the Honduran Red Cross to analyze the level of community risk through the utilization of several VCA tools. The analysis is the main element of the first phase of a regional program, which aims to reduce disaster risks faced every year by some Central American communities. The analysis is the basis for the development of a local plan, which will identify key micro-projects to be implemented during the second phase of the project.

The case study starts with an exhaustive diagnosis of the historical and socioeconomic context. It continues with the results of the information-gathering process for which several VCA tools have been used. The information is then analyzed and incorporated in a framework where hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacities are linked in order to find out the existing risk to each hazard. The case study ends with a local development plan proposal that includes potential short- and mid-term activities or projects to be implemented by different local actors during the second phase of the program.

Technical description

Hazard/risk type

Landslides, floods, contamination, droughts, crop floods, gastrointestinal diseases.

Type of assessment

Multi-hazard analysis. Community based VCA focusing on field visits and the use of participatory tools.

Community risk assessment process

Methods used

In order to gather reliable information the Honduran Red Cross developed an action plan, and began by interviewing key informants in the communities. During these interviews the HRC briefed community leaders about the objectives of the VCA fieldwork and the different activities which would be carried during the VCA process, including the organization of training workshops and household visits. The visits were used to increase the households' awareness of disaster preparedness, including the elaboration of household evacuation plans and house risk maps. The HRC team also trained families in what to do in emergencies. Community based first aid training sessions were also organized. To develop the fieldwork, the following participatory tools were selected from the IFRC's VCA toolbox: direct observation, secondary data, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, historical profile, historical calendar, seasonal calendar, institutional and social analysis, Venn diagrams, mapping (spatial, hazards, vulnerability and resource maps), and actions for the transformation framework (transforming vulnerabilities into capacities)

Was livelihood analysis used?

Yes, but not at household level.

Was external specialist knowledge introduced?

The Honduran Ministries of Education and of Agriculture supported the action of the Honduran Red Cross. The Centre of Reference and the Sustainable Development Department of the Organization of American States (OAS) provided training and guidance on assessment tools and training resources.

Vulnerability analysis

The analysis of data collected through VCA tools is used to identify existing vulnerabilities. The information is then incorporated in a framework where hazards, vulnerabilities, and capacities are linked in order to find out the existing risk to each hazard.

The vulnerabilities identified in Colonia Nueva Esperanza in relation to landslides were that homes are constructed on inadequate lands with a 35° slope, and are surrounded by deforested areas prone to erosion. A significant number of people are also vulnerable to floods due to their homes being located on riverbanks. A contamination problem also exists, aggravated by the lack of an appropriate garbage collection system and an adequate area to dump the garbage.

In El Zamorano, crops are frequently threatened because fields are located in an area close to the river with a high risk of flash floods, commonly called "La Vega". In addition, periods of drought are becoming longer and more intense, but the community has no irrigation system.

Capacity analysis

Resources available

The VCA is part of the first phase of an IFRC, Central American National Red Cross Societies, OAS and ProVention project. Colonia Nueva Esperanza has well-organized community associations. A

reforestation day has been organized to increase green areas in the community and a project to build an embankment to help stabilize the land is being discussed. Sometimes, the community has access to a mobile garbage container. In El Zamorano, which is located a few kilometers away from a food market, safe, cultivable lands are available close to the community.

Limitations to capacity

Not enough material resources are available to respond to all the needs. Infrastructure and transport to the communities are bad.

Action planning and implementation

Activities are identified through a transformation matrix that shows how vulnerabilities can turn into capacities. Those activities constitute the basis of a local development plan where each action is linked to the organization in charge of developing it. It also defines whether short- or mid-term actions should be implemented.

What actions were actually planned?

Different actions were planned in each community according to the results of the VCA process.

In El Zamorano the local plan proposes to change the location of cultivated land, to plant trees along the riverbanks to reduce erosion and the impact of floods, and to put in place irrigation systems to support agriculture during droughts. Community health activities (community based first aid, home-based care and health education) and the construction of a health center were proposed to improve health conditions in the community.

In Nueva Esperanza, proposed activities to reduce community risks included: reforestation of some high-risk zones, particularly the riverbank and the hilly areas; raising people's awareness about disaster risks; prohibiting the extraction of sand from the river; and studying the possibility of moving some houses from high-risk areas to safer ones. Community health education was also proposed.

What actions were actually carried out?

A limited number of activities have been carried out. The risk maps allowed the community and the HRC to elaborate household emergency plans. Community based first aid training was also provided to community members. It is expected that some of the proposed activities above will be implemented in a second phase of the project.

Have these actions turned out to be sustainable?

Sustainability will depend on the second phase of the project, as awareness-raising activities need longer-term approaches to have an impact. The success of emergency plans can only be tested in the case of a disaster alert.

Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions?

The VCA process has consolidated the role of the Honduran Red Cross within the community.

Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions?

N.A.

Limitations on action/sustainability of actions

Budget restrictions and delays, which would mean a loss of momentum created by the participatory approach, could limit the implementation of proposed actions. The case study does not clarify the level of involvement of local and national authorities. The sustainability of the local plan will very much depend on financial support by the authorities.

Indicators

- The information collected and analyzed has raised awareness of risks in the community. This has been reflected in the local plans in which the community has requested risk reduction and disaster preparedness measures.
- Each community where the VCA process was implemented has developed household emergency plans.

The implementation of the second phase (micro-projects according to local plans), the participation of other organizations in the local plan, and community involvement in the process will ultimately show the positive or negative effects of the CRA process.

Contextual notes

Existence/role of prior or contemporaneous conflicts?

One of the main problems in Honduras is the high level of social violence, created by youth groups and gangs called *Maras*, which are deeply rooted in poor communities.

Role of displacement/relocation

According to the household visits which took place during the VCA process to develop family plans, Nueva Esperanza has a relatively young population, many of whom come originally from interior areas of the country, particularly from southern and eastern Honduras. After Hurricane Mitch, affected populations benefited from a Honduran Red Cross project, which allowed them to move to a safer area, called Santa Rosa village.

El Zamorano suffers more from emigration than immigration. The community was originally settled by poor people from other parts of Honduras, attracted to the rich agricultural lands. But now, due – among other problems – to deforestation and drought, young people are leaving the area to find work in the northern part of the country or going to the United States.

Role of previous disaster and recovery attempts?

In 1998, when Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras, Nueva Esperanza captured national and international attention due to the many lives and homes lost under the mud and stone debris of a sudden landslide. Those families had never imagined how vulnerable they were until the disaster happened.

In 2003 and 2005, the Honduran Red Cross provided support to El Zamorano through the implementation of some micro-projects and food aid distribution to respond to the effects of a drought in the region.

Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences?

Like other communities in Tegucigalpa, Nueva Esperanza was created illegally, mainly by people coming to the capital from rural areas. However, land titles were legalized, thanks to the efforts of community associations and the new democratic government, and despite efforts by the police to evict some community members. Since that time, the community has continued to grow. However, because of the lack of houses and increased population pressures, construction began on lands registered as inappropriate or reserved as green areas (for example, riverbanks and ravines). But the community was under pressure to accept new immigrants, many of whom built their homes in areas that were at high risk, as Hurricane Mitch showed clearly but all too sadly.

Poor immigrants from other areas of Honduras set up the community of El Zamorano in the 1960s. At that time, the area was full of vegetation and wildlife and had a river with abundant water flow, and fertile lands to cultivate and rear livestock. By the 1990s, the situation had completely changed: the area had been deforested and there was no more wildlife. All the land had been taken over for agriculture and housing, but without any concern for the environment. Pressure over resources increased risks and drought became a recurrent event. The village is now characterized by its limited

resources, particularly as regards health and sanitation. It is an area prone to dengue and cases of cholera have been recorded in the past.

Strategic notes

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at national level?

N.A.

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at the local level?

A reforestation day has been organized to increase green areas and the construction of an embankment is being negotiated in order to stabilize the land.

How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out?

The elaboration of family emergency plans was included in the VCA process. This raised community awareness about the risks they face and how to use the emergency plans. Community members considered that both the training and the VCA process were very positive and taught them what to do in the case of an emergency.

Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them?

The VCA process showed that the communities were eager to participate and share experiences. The communities put forward their priorities, even those not directly connected with risks. The fact that there is a good level of community organization also helped.

Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines?

The participatory approach allowed the intervention of all people living in the communities in an impartial manner.

More divided along these lines?

N.A.

Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA?

No, they worked with existing organizations.

Lessons learned

- Undertaking training and awareness-raising activities during the VCA process allowed the team to build better relations with the community. It also facilitated a better understanding of risks and laid the foundations for preparedness work. The family plans that were developed are also relevant and important.
- It is important that proposed projects include not only an economic and technical support component, but also a community follow-up and participation process. This will ensure that HRC work is perceived as relevant and corresponding to the communities' needs.

Keywords

Landslides, floods, contamination, gastrointestinal diseases, drought, violence, youth alienation, migration, illegal settlements, high-risk areas.

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