

## Using the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment Tool in Rwanda

**Location:** Karaba, Gikongoro District, (South Province), Rwanda

**Date:** 2003

**Sector focus:** drought and food insecurity

**Spatial focus:** **National level:** 62 of 92 districts throughout Rwanda. (population 8.1 million)

**District level:** 13 out of 26 sectors in Karaba district. (60 people in a “working group” from each sector)

### Organization

---

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organization, with 185 member National Societies. IFRC's work is guided by seven fundamental principles; humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. The mission statement for the global strategy of IFRC during the first decade of the 21st century is "To improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilising the power of humanity".

Website: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org); IFRC's Disaster Preparedness webpage: [www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/dp](http://www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/dp)

### Bibliographical details

---

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Using the vulnerability and capacity assessment tool in Rwanda*, IFRC, Geneva, Switzerland (2003).

### Language availability

---

This publication is available in English.

### Abstract

---

With a population of 8.1 million and a density of 305 inhabitants per square kilometer, Rwanda is the most densely populated nation in Africa. In 1999, the Rwandan Red Cross (RRC) undertook a national and local level Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (VCA) as a participative means to understand the risks and capacities existing in the country. This publication details the chronology of taking the decision to do a VCA, people and partnerships involved, moving from action to planning and includes the national RRC action plan. The RRC, as well as the national government, local districts, other non-governmental organizations working in the area and community members supported the VCA.

Two levels of VCAs were carried out: one at the national level by means of a questionnaire administered to 92 districts in the country. Following this national assessment, the RRC focused on 13 of the 26 sectors in one district and established a 60-persons working group in each sector. Different groups carried out assessment activities: the elderly participated in focus group discussions on drought, famine and historical community coping mechanisms. Women sketched seasonal calendars of food crops and commercial production (coffee), and young people drew a detailed map of infrastructure and programs in the community. Other non-governmental organizations working in the community provided data on livestock production in the area.

The publication provides lessons learned from the experiences and underscores the importance of working in partnership. The final 4 pages are the national two-year action plan for disaster response, mitigation and preparedness for the RRC.

## **Intended users**

---

This case study would be of benefit to **municipal, district and governmental staff** as well as **international agency staff** planning to undertake a VCA process.

## **Background and context of country, location and project**

---

Rwanda is a densely populated country with a positive growth curve. Demands on land, livestock and agricultural space are increasing- which also increases the risk for drought and famine. Rwanda endured many years of civil conflict and genocide between 1959 and 1994 which has resulted in displaced people and food insecurity and exacerbated some of the other hazards faced by the population. The civil conflict decimated livestock leading to more intensive agricultural practices which in turn decreased soil acidity and fertility levels.

During the process of this VCA, a major volcano erupted displacing many people/communities as well as torrential downpours that resulted in landslides destroying homes. These disasters required the focus and attention of RRC staff, community members and donor agencies.

## **Technical description**

---

**Hazard/risk type:** The case study takes into consideration food insecurity and drought as major vulnerabilities.

**Type of assessment:** Vulnerability Capacity Assessment

## **CRA process**

---

Vulnerability was conceptualized in this publication as famine and drought. These were included in the national questionnaire and identified by the women's groups doing seasonal calendars. The elderly participating in focus group discussions did a historical timeline of drought and famine in the community.

Capacity was identified as the existence of infrastructure (number of bridges, schools, health centers, hospitals, and sources of water), the number of community programs carried out and their effects, knowledge of local agricultural practices, and capacity to cope during times of drought or famine.

## **Analytical methods**

**Two levels:** A VCA was conducted at a national level through a questionnaire. Recognizing the challenges with this scope and wanting to work more closely with the local communities, the RRC conducted a smaller scale VCA focusing on 13 of the 26 sectors in Karaba District. Based on the

national VCA questionnaire, this district was identified as one of the more vulnerable areas due to chronic food instability. The district demonstrated a high level of motivation from local government, the population, and partner NGOs.

A regional officer from the Ugandan Red Cross, experienced with VCA methodology provided technical support. A livelihood analysis was considered indirectly: there was consideration of food insecurity and livestock which are components to a livelihood approach. These considerations were made on a community and district, rather than an individual household level. The focus was on assessing the root causes of food insecurity which were determined to be the low number of livestock, the absence of income jobs outside of the agriculture sector, the low level of knowledge on how to start an income-generating project, underdeveloped marshlands and chronic disease.

## **Tools**

---

Committee formation, interviewing, questionnaire, historical profile focusing on food insecurity, seasonal calendar, daily routine, community mapping, and action planning.

## **Lessons learned**

---

- ◆ Partnership is important for the exchange of experiences and building impetus for the VCA process
- ◆ Volunteers from the local Red Cross were a key factor in encouraging the local population to take part in the VCA process
- ◆ Support of local political and administrative structures played a key role in mobilizing the communities as well as human and material support
- ◆ Taking the time to reflect on how, what and where food is grown and interacting with neighbours

## **Keywords**

---

Drought, food insecurity.

## **Cross references to other CRA Toolkit case studies**

---

Matsimbe, Zefanias., DiMP, *Assessing the Role of Local Institutions in Reducing the Vulnerability of At-Risk Communities in Búzi, Central Mozambique*: DiMP, University of Cape Town, 2003. This study aims at understanding the role of local institutions and organisations in reducing people's vulnerability to natural hazards and how this impacts on the national governments responsibilities and actions.

## **Resource people**

---

Rwanda Red Cross: [rrc@rwanda1.com](mailto:rrc@rwanda1.com)

## **Author of Explanatory Note**

---

The ProVention Consortium contracted Stephanie Bouris to author this explanatory note.

Contact: [cra@ifrc.org](mailto:cra@ifrc.org)