

How to do a vulnerability and capacity assessment: A step-by-step guide

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Organisation

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; IFRC's Disaster Preparedness webpage: www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/dp

Bibliographical details

Published by: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Year: 2007

pp. 1-96

The document is available from the CRA toolkit at:

http://www.proventionconsortium.org/themes/default/pdfs/CRA/how-to-do-VCA-en_meth.pdf

File size: 3.4 MB

Abstract

This publication is the 2nd manual in a series of 4 on vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA). VCA is a participatory investigation method designed to assess the risks that people face in their locality, their different levels of vulnerability to those risks, and the capacities they possess to cope with a hazard and recover from it when it strikes. It updates the 1996 IFRC publication Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) Toolbox incorporating lessons learned and promoting integration of assessment with other sectors.

This publication is a practical and chronological guide intended to introduce the 12 step conceptual framework, methods and tools to conduct a VCA. It highlights the three sectors of support that are essential for successful implementation of a VCA. These include the "political" level of having support of the National Society board, the "driving force" of the leaders in charge, and the "implementation body" of the people who will actually carry out the VCA.

Intended end users

Intended end users are **policy makers, staff and volunteers** with Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies who work with vulnerable communities. The publication advises that National Societies should seek support for a VCA process from somebody either within their own National Society or their region who has received formal training in carrying out VCA and training others in its use. This publication would also be useful for **community development, humanitarian and international staff** working with **community based organizations** or **local governments**.

Geographical focus

This guidebook can be used in **communities throughout the world** with the purpose of assessing vulnerability and capacity and undertaking action planning and implementation to reduce risk from natural hazards. The guidebook is also designed for Red Cross and Red Crescent branches. Local adaptation of the material may be necessary to make it more relevant to the local context.

Type of Material

This publication is a **comprehensive manual** introducing the conceptual framework, methods and tools to conduct a VCA. Explanations for the tools and to train users are provided in separate publications available through the ProVention CRA Toolkit website. A VCA is expected to provide:

- ◆ Baseline assessment information that can become the entry point to an emergency needs assessment following disaster.
- ◆ Community understanding of its own environment in relation to known risks and hazards.
- ◆ Community realization of its own capacities to cope with the risks and hazards.
- ◆ Community and local authority agreement on actions needed to prevent or reduce the effects of risks.

Language

This manual is available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Scale of assessment

The focus of the assessment is at the **locality, neighbourhood and community-level**.

Type of assessment

The assessment is based on a **Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)**. This is a 12 step participatory investigation method, broken down into 3 broad processes, designed to assess the risks that people face in their locality, their different levels of vulnerability to those risks, and the capacities they possess to cope with a hazard and recover from it when it strikes. The IFRC set of publications on VCA is unique in that they aim to go beyond the collection of baseline data and the steps with the community to identify hazards using primarily participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools. VCA aims to incorporate factors to consider such as: capacities, environment, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs & values, and identity. The combination of these principles and the steps of the VCA result in a powerful transformative process which lead to participants gaining new understanding of how they can do things differently. The process goes beyond doing a basic assessment to engaging the community and national levels to undertake action planning to overcome identified vulnerabilities in the community. The success of a VCA process relies heavily

on three sectors of collaboration: institutional political support and understanding, leadership from at least one trained VCA leader, and a body of implementers who will carry out the VCA.

Analytical methods

This publication provides the conceptual framework for a **Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment**. A VCA disaster risk assessment method concerns the structured and meaningful collection, analysis and systematization of information on a given community's vulnerability to hazards. This guidebook uses Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) general assessment methods. It also incorporates **institutional** and **network analysis**, which leads to a re-generation of National Societies, their branches and volunteers and **livelihood analysis**, which determines well-being and concerns income-generation, and is a critical aspect of strengthening people's resilience to various types of risk.

Tools

The VCA investigation tools listed below are mentioned in this publication. The separate VCA publication *VCA Toolbox the third publication* explains what each tool is to be used for and how to apply each method. The *VCA Training Guide* explains how to train people in the use of the various tools for a VCA. The publication '*What is VCA? An introduction to vulnerability and capacity assessment*' outlines the conceptual framework for the methodology. These publications are available on the ProVention CRA toolkit website: <http://proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=43>.

Tools listed in bold coincide with the ProVention search engine. Tools not bolded are featured in the publication.

The participatory tools include:

- ◆ **Focus Group**
- ◆ **Historical Timeline**
- ◆ **Mapping (risk, community, spatial and capacity)**
- ◆ **Seasonal Calendar**
- ◆ **Institutional and Social Network Analysis**
- ◆ **Direct Observation**
- ◆ **Transect Walk**
- ◆ Problem Tree
- ◆ Triangulation

Technical tools include:

- ◆ Triangulation
- ◆ Action Planning Tables
- ◆ **Secondary Data/ Sources**
- ◆ Sampling
- ◆ **Questionnaires**
- ◆ **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Notes on methods

- ◆ The guidebook gives step-by-step instructions for the entire process of community involvement by explaining chronologically with detailed explanation of how and why to use the profiled tools, templates, tables and exercises.
- ◆ Community-based approach with community involved in most steps in the process.
- ◆ Provides good examples and case studies of lessons learned from National Societies.

- ♦ It would be difficult, and is not advised by the publication, for the community to undertake this process without the support of a trained and experienced Red Cross or Red Crescent resource person.

Case studies / practical examples

Case studies from the Belarusian, Solomon Islands, Caribbean, Mongolian, Azerbaijani, and Syrian Arab Red Cross Societies provide useful lessons learned from VCA. Topics covered include:

- ♦ How community assessment can go beyond addressing day-to-day priorities to lead to preparedness in responding to natural disasters.
- ♦ Engaging a facilitator from another part of the Region to inspire local ownership of the VCA.
- ♦ Sensitisation and choosing not to undertake a VCA.

The publication also includes many practical examples and templates such as the template for evaluating the feasibility of actions, a planning matrix, transforming vulnerabilities into action and a template for recording information about problems, risks, capacities, needs and possible mitigating actions.

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