

Case Study: Increasing Community Resilience Using the eVCA Tool.

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1.0 Brief History of The Vulnerability Capacity Assessment

The foundation of any endeavour with the goal of building community disaster resilience, is the community's awareness of key disaster terms such as risk and vulnerability and knowing how to identify them. If the goal is to establish sustainable resilience, then community ownership is a must, as it is the residents of the community who have the in-depth knowledge and understanding of the interconnectivity of the community's unique environment and circumstances. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) developed a tool in 1999¹ that encompassed all these elements, with the aim of guiding the community through the process of developing a suitable disaster resilience strategy. This tool is known as the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA).

The IFRC defines VCA as, "a participatory process developed for communities to become more resilient through the assessment and analysis of the risks they are facing and the identification of solutions to address"². The IFRC further explains that the VCA allows communities to recognize the source of these risks, actions that can be taken to reduce these risks, community members that are at most vulnerable and the resources available to the community at all levels of risk. Community members are therefore heavily involved in every step of the process and are charged with deciding on the actions, sometimes referred to as microprojects, to undertake that best suits their needs and their unique context.

In 2015, after an extensive review of the VCA toolkit by specialized persons conducting VCAs, the tool was revamped to include climate change, gender and diversity considerations and guidance on how to conduct VCAs in urban contexts³. This improved version is now called an Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA). The EVCA is now part of the wider, more holistic approach to resilience called the Roadmap to Resilience (R2R). The Roadmap to Resilience outlines the pathway to building community resilience and consists of four (4) stages of which, stage 2 is the EVCA process. The Roadmap to Resilience (Version 2)⁴ speaks to enhancing resilience through the increase of the 11 dimensions of a resilient community.

¹ <https://vcarepository.info/>

² [7baf5b_99e666a4f70d4a9bb8e8b77ff5a8604f.pdf \(ifrcvca.org\)](https://www.ifrcvca.org/7baf5b_99e666a4f70d4a9bb8e8b77ff5a8604f.pdf)

³ <https://www.ifrcvca.org/what-is-EVCA>

⁴ <https://www.preventionweb.net/media/73765/download?startDownload=true>

Some of the things EVCA facilitators are taught - having the capacity to engage with communities - a minimum of seven different tools are learnt so that a mix of these tools can be used to obtain relevant risk and vulnerability data from the community. The EVCA also now considers climate change and nature based solutions.

2.0 Understanding the Caribbean Context

The Caribbean is considered to be the second most disaster-prone region in the world. In 2021, the Caribbean faced four (4) major humanitarian challenges: COVID-19; mixed migrations; hurricane season and a wide range of natural hazards (floods, droughts, a volcanic eruption)⁵. Additionally, having a “small island developing state” status means that the region is at risk of being impacted by more severe and frequent climate related events.

The IFRC, under the capacity building initiative, placed much needed focus on building the capacity within the various national societies in the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean through frequent EVCA Training of Trainers (ToT) and refresher trainings, which is a core service provided by the Caribbean Disaster Risk Management Reference Centre (CADRIM)⁶. In 2022 alone, EVCA ToTs were conducted in St. Kitts and Nevis and Jamaica and in June 2023, a regional eVCA training was held with participants from nine (9) countries.

Several communities throughout the region have benefitted in the past from the execution of the EVCA tool. Through the guidance of experienced EVCA facilitators, communities were able to incorporate various mechanisms to enhance their disaster coping capacity. This was sometimes done through the implementation of suitable projects or micro-projects, which are ultimately owned by the community or through partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

This case study will be divided into two parts. The first will focus on an overview of the EVCA and some of the major challenges faced by facilitators when using the tool, within a Caribbean context, and the second part will highlight some examples of projects and micro-projects recently implemented with the aim of enhancing the characteristics and dimensions of a resilient community. These projects will show how a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach can be used to help communities as communities cannot do it

⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/caribbean-factsheet-last-updated-14072022>

⁶ <https://www.cadrim.org/blendedlearningservices>

themselves and the national society cannot do it alone. All facets must work together for long-term improvements to be made.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Primary Research

A survey was created and developed on the KOBO Collect application and disseminated to participants of the recently held EVCA Training of Trainers in both St. Kitts and Nevis and Jamaica, via email. The questions posed to participants aimed at better understanding the factors needed for a successful EVCA, such as key stakeholders, the criteria needed for community selection and the main characteristics of a resilient community that the tool most enhances. Respondents were also asked to identify any improvements that could be made to the process. Information collected via the survey was collated and analyzed.

Additionally, virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the most experienced EVCA facilitators in the region to get a perception of how communities have benefitted from the EVCA process. Examples of recent projects and micro-projects resulting from an EVCA being conducted were also obtained.

3.2 Secondary Research

A desk review was completed of all relevant documents, reports and other case studies previously done on the EVCA tool and its implementation within the Caribbean. Information was also obtained from documents and the EVCA Toolkit found on the IFRC's EVCA Platform⁷.

4.0 The Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment

In order to appreciate the merits of the tool, we must first grasp the basics of the EVCA. The process consists of different innovative methods to engage the community and to engender a safe space in which the community members feel free to fully share their experiences, thoughts and ideas. Therefore, facilitators must have the skills to listen to the community, understand their concerns and use their knowledge to offer proper guidance.

⁷ <https://www.ifrcvca.org/>

4.1 Community Selection

According to the Road to Resilience (R2R), there are 6 characteristics and 11 dimensions of a resilient community. While the process of selecting a community does not involve an in-depth analysis of those, they show that there are many facets to what makes a community vulnerable.

The main reason for choosing a community is the frequency by which the community has been impacted by hazards. The National Society considers hazard impact reports from their own responses in the past as well as information received from their country's National Disaster Office (NDO) and uses this information to choose a community based on their level of risk and vulnerability.

Another important factor in community selection is choosing a community in which the National Society has previously worked. Prior connections made within the community would reduce the challenges faced with getting buy-in as there is an already established level of trust within the community. Working with the community previously means that the National Society understands its culture and social dynamics and have an established relationship with community leaders and key community groups. Already having these connections in place also makes getting information from the community easier. An example of this is at community in Jamaica called Rock River. When the national society worked with the community, a WhatsApp group was created. The national society was then able to use this community WhatsApp group to they are able to reach out to key persons in the community to relay information about an upcoming EVCA.

In an effort to build community resilience, National Societies train community members as Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs) in various topics on disaster risk reduction inclusive of conducting damage assessments, fire safety, communication and light search and rescue. These community teams work with either the national society or the NDO to assist the community after an emergency or disaster. Though not a main criterion, it helps if the community has an established CDRT. CDRT members can help to encourage other community members to actively participate in the EVCA process.

4.2 Gathering and Sharing Information

4.2.1 Learning About the Community

There is a lot of preparatory work that must be done before an EVCA can be conducted. The facilitators must complete their due diligence and conduct research to establish a full

picture of the resources that exist and some of the risks and vulnerabilities that the communities face. Information collected include an overview of the general location and geography of the community, demographic data, literacy and education levels, community resources and any services and disaster/emergency plans that exist.

A review of secondary information from a desk review of documents obtained from national ministerial and other partnering organisations, and newspaper articles is completed. An example of this is data shared by the national statistical office as the latest country census can be a great source of information or seeking hazard maps as well as risk and vulnerability profiles from the NDO. In Jamaica, the Social Development Commission, which is principal organization that works with the 775 communities in the country to serve the advancement of sport, social, cultural and economic development, uses reliable and disaggregated data to produce community profiles⁸. The Jamaica Red Cross liaises with the organization to get updated profiles.

However, challenges arise when the data or information is outdated as the national census is conducted every ten (10) years and therefore there are times when clarification and updated information can only be received from community members. As a result of this, engagement with the community starts long before the first EVCA session.

There are different methods facilitators use to collect information from the community. Community walkabouts was identified as one of the most effective ways to gather data as well as disseminate information to community members. Community walkabouts are useful for getting individual feedback and to reach community members who may not otherwise be accessible, such as persons with disabilities (PWD) or persons within marginalized groups. It can also be an effective mechanism to encourage community participation and allow facilitators to better understand the social norms and cultural practices unique to the community. Knowing how the community relates to religious groups, civil society organizations and businesses is essential, and this information can only come from the community itself.

The facilitators identified the following as the most effective practices of obtaining relevant information from the communities:

- Face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions with specific groups, such as community seniors and leaders. This is important in Suriname, where some

⁸ https://www.localgovjamaica.gov.jm/local_govt_entity/social-development-commission-sdc/

communities may have a very traditional culture, where the male leaders are dominant, and the women have more submissive roles. Understanding the power dynamics and circumventing them is important.

- Community walks through the community and canvassing the community to talk to relevant persons to get their feedback.
- Meetings with community members/Town hall meetings.
- Recently completed Knowledge Attitude and Perception (KAP) surveys where community members participated.

4.2.2 Providing information to communities

Before an EVCA is conducted, the community is made aware of the upcoming programme and the benefits of participating. Factual information on what comprises an EVCA is shared with the community and a mini-awareness campaign is conducted. Some of the aforementioned methods to obtain information can also be used to disseminate information about the upcoming EVCA such as meetings with community groups, conducting community walkabouts and town hall meetings.

Additionally, the facilitators identified the following as supplementary means of providing information and raising awareness: Community awareness through volunteers and CDRTs as well as through community leaders, school, churches and other community forums. Where applicable, posts are placed on community notice boards or promoted on social media. In some communities, like Old Harbour Bay in Jamaica, a Town Crier can be used to disseminate information.

4.3 Role of Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs)

Typically, community volunteers are trained as CDRTs after an EVCA is completed. However, due to the frequency with which CDRT trainings are conducted, there is the possibility of the community already having a CDRT before an EVCA is done.

In these cases, CDRTs can provide support to the facilitators before and during the EVCA. As CDRTs are from the community, they are knowledgeable about the culture and the past experiences of the community, which they can share with the facilitators. They can also act as community liaisons, helping to identify community groups and vulnerable persons that facilitators can engage, or in some cases, the CDRTs would volunteer to meet with some community groups and document the necessary information needed. They can also raise

awareness of the EVCA to community members to garner greater community participations. They can provide assistance with conducting the pre-EVCA assessment used to create the community profile.

4.4 Ensuring Inclusivity

The EVCA, in addition to being a community driven and owned process, is also one that is inclusive. Inclusivity of the different sectors of a community is fundamental to a successful EVCA and therefore, the EVCA utilizes a participatory methodology that requires participation by community members within vulnerable and marginalized groups. Persons considered part of these groups can oftentimes be excluded as some may have mobility and accessibility issues, which are not always catered for. Building community resilience means ensuring that everyone is knowledgeable and can put measures in place to properly prepare for and cope with emergencies and disasters that have a high likelihood of affecting the community. Feedback is needed from all groups comprising the community.

Ensuring that all perspectives are captured can be a challenge, however different strategies are used. EVCA facilitators ensure inclusivity by conducting meetings with persons who have limitations or community groups to get their feedback. This can include home visits or ensuring that vulnerable persons are met during community walks. Another solution to ensuring their voices are heard is through the engagement with organisations that works with vulnerable and marginalized persons. Eliciting the help with community groups and CDRTs to identify additional persons is another tactic used, so that the facilitators can get direct feedback.

4.5 Engaging with Stakeholders

Building a resilient community requires a multi-stakeholder approach as the national society cannot do it on its own. Therefore, engaging stakeholders who can provide the appropriate value added is another essential component of the EVCA. Stakeholders can play different important roles. The NDO and government organisations can assist with disaster risk reduction knowledge sharing and awareness sessions during the EVCA sessions with communities. These organisations can also partner with communities to develop micro-projects aimed at reducing community risks and vulnerabilities at the end of the EVCA sessions.

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Society partners with corporations, that commit to providing much needed assistance to impacted community members, or to help the community build back better, after an emergency or disaster.

Other pertinent stakeholders include civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), non-government organisations (NGOs) and community group leaders. These stakeholders must be engaged as they can help to build trust in the process and should be included in discussions. Different stakeholders can get involved in the process once the community decides on their priorities and any initiatives, they are willing to undertake. The national society and the NDO can also help communities to network with the right agencies that can provide any additional support and help needed.

4.6 Benefits of An EVCA

Communities derive long-term benefits such gaining an increased awareness of not only understanding their risks and vulnerabilities but by also understanding the resources that exists within the community and how they can be utilized to and to better able to cope with the negative impacts of the most common disasters or hazard impacts. The following are considered the major benefits of implementing an EVCA.

4.6.1 Increased Disaster Awareness and Planning

One of the most obvious benefits of the EVCA is the general increase in the understanding of risks, vulnerabilities and capacities in community members. The EVCA process also helps communities to better understand the capacities that exist within their own communities and the linkages between the community's vulnerabilities and capacities.

The knowledge gained by communities empower them to be able to recognize and appreciate the resources that already exists within the community such as the temporary use of a school as a shelter. They are then able to see simple actions that they can take to increase their own level of disaster resilience as well as that of the overall community.

4.6.2 Development of Community Disaster Response Teams

Building community resilience requires a multi-prong approach and together with conducting EVCA's, volunteers will receive training from the national societies on basic

disaster risk management and specialized topics such as communication, shelter management, fire safety and light search and rescue. This is known as Community Disaster Response Team (CDRT) training. CDRTs are expected, under the guidance of the national society and/or the national disaster office, to provide some preliminary assistance to community members before, during and after a disaster. In fact, due to the wide range of topics covered under the CDRT training, CDRTs play a role in all the phases of the disaster management cycle: prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.

4.6.3 Development of Community Disaster Plans

During the EVCA, the facilitators discuss community risks, vulnerabilities and capacities with community members but they also go through a process of helping the community to map these out. Through collaboration with stakeholders such as the NDO, a community disaster plan can be created, so that community members know what to do in times of disasters and emergencies. The national societies and stakeholders also help the community to test their plans as this is a key element to building disaster resilience.

4.6.4 Pairing Important Stakeholders with Communities

As mentioned previously, the Red Cross is not the sole agency providing support to the community. Depending on the nature and scope of the chosen projects, a multi-stakeholder approach is adapted whereby the most suitable stakeholders are introduced to the community and provides the guidance and resources needed to successfully implement these projects. The Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society connects communities with corporate sponsors who can provide much needed assistance after a disaster impact. JTA supermarket is one such sponsor that the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society adopted a slightly different approach where they get a corporate sponsor to adopt the Greenvale and St. Helena communities plagued by high crime and flooding events.

The national society also partners with local government organisations and non-governmental organisations to identify and facilitate small scale projects or micro-projects within the community to help bolster their disaster resilience and capacity to return to its normal standard of functioning within a shorter timeframe.

4.7 Implementation of Disaster Resilience Building Projects or Micro-projects

The following are example of small-scale projects as a result of the EVCA process.

4.7.1 The Maya Nut Project, Belize

This project was implemented in Harmonyville, Belize, which is a small rural village which lies along the Beaver Dam Creek. During the community needs assessment phase, villagers expressed concern about the deterioration of their community and indicated that historically, the creek was once alive with good water, fish, game animals, and forest trees. However, the area was cleared for lumber and all the natural resources were affected - the flora and fauna disappeared; the creek started drying out during the dry season and overflowing its banks during the rainy season (Belize Red Cross). As a result of trying to restore the area, the community decided to plant Maya Nut trees in a degraded areas.

The choice to plant Maya Nut trees were two-fold as the tree is resilient enough to survive the projected negative impacts of climate change and can provide the community with economic resilience. The tree can survive in temperatures ranging between 18 - 32°C as well as precipitation levels of 600 - 4000mm per year. It can also access water stored in limestone bedrock, allowing the tree to remain green and leafy even during long dry seasons. This helps prevent erosion, stabilize riverbanks, and maintain flows from natural springs. The tree requires no agricultural inputs, and its abundant leaf litter improves soil fertility and reduces erosion of the soil cover⁹.

The Maya Nut or Breadnut has a wide range of uses. The branches and leaves are often used for animal feed during the dry season, while the nuts are used to make flour or as a substitute for potatoes. Biscuits, as well as hot and cold drinks are made using the flour. Additionally, the nuts are rich in vitamins and are a very effective supply of folic acid to gestating mothers. A single tree which matures in about three (3) to five (5) years, produces around 150 - 180 kgs of fruit and remains productive for around 120 - 150 years. The idea of growing this tree is a direct result of experiences of the people that settled the area.

The community was able to develop the micro-project to such a degree that the community form a cooperative group within the community to manage the project and coordinate awareness. The cooperative is also planning to export the products made from the Maya

⁹ <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/maya-nut-could-boost-resilience-to-climate-change>

Nut to external markets such as the United States of America. The new aim of the cooperation is to plant about 5000 trees in an area known as the “Mayan Corridor”.

4.7.2 Using Solar Lights to Increase Economic Growth, Jamaica

Old Harbor Bay in Jamaica is a fishing village whereby many of the community members earn a living through selling fish. The fishermen don't have an established facility with electricity to sell their fish and therefore, this activity is restricted by daylight. In an effort to boost this income generating activity, the community decided to install solar lights, which would allow them to extend the hours at which the fishermen can sell their catch. The aim is to increase their storage capacity as well as that the fish caught can be frozen and stored in a safe location, to be sold at another day.

4.7.3 Mangrove Restoration, Jamaica

Old Harbour Bay located on the southern coast of Jamaica is dominated by a more intense wave climate as a result of the persistent trade winds over the Caribbean Sea and is prone to flooding. It is also the home of mangroves in Jamaica.

The benefits provided by mangroves during meteorological hazard impacts is well documented as they act as the natural infrastructure to help protect nearby populated areas by reducing erosion and absorbing storm surge impacts during extreme weather events such as hurricanes. The complex mangrove root systems filter nitrates, phosphates and other pollutants from the water, improving the water quality flowing from rivers and streams into the estuarine and ocean environment¹⁰.

According to the Flood Protection Benefits and Restoration Costs for Mangroves in Jamaica, the mangroves lost in the community between 2005 and 2013 have a flood protection value of nearly \$1,000 /ha/yr. This value thus also represents the potential benefits from restoring mangroves that have recently been lost due to human activity¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/florida/stories-in-florida/why-mangroves-important/#:~:text=Their%20above%2Dground%20roots%20slow,the%20estuarine%20and%20ocean%20environment.>

¹¹

[https://websitearchive2020.nepa.gov.jm/new/projects/docs/mangroves_in_jamaica/flood_protection_benefits_and_restoration_costs_of_mangroves_in_jamaica_\(ucsc_2019\).pdf](https://websitearchive2020.nepa.gov.jm/new/projects/docs/mangroves_in_jamaica/flood_protection_benefits_and_restoration_costs_of_mangroves_in_jamaica_(ucsc_2019).pdf)

The Jamaica Red Cross in collaboration with the Nature Conservancy, the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), the National Land Agency, the St. Catherine Municipal Corporation and the Marine Laboratory at the University of the West Indies, are working together to restore the mangroves in the community. A mangrove assessment was completed and now the national society is in the process of obtaining the necessary permits to increase the project to a larger scale.

4.7.4 Provision of Cassava Processing Machinery, Suriname

In 2010, the community of Moengo Tapoe, Suriname had approximately 46.7kha of tree cover. In 2022 the community lost 137ha of that cover¹². The Suriname Red Cross implemented a climate change adaptation and disaster mitigation micro-project to reduce the impacts of climate change on the community. The National Society and stakeholders worked together to provide the community with processing machinery for the expansion of planting cassava as a climate resilient crop.

In Suriname, casava is considered to be the fourth most important staple food, after rice, wheat and plantain and is the main food security crop especially in remote areas. Cassava cultivation and processing provides an opportunity for income-generation where the crop is grown and processed following local cultural traditions¹³.

A similar micro-project was implemented in Akale Kondre.

4.7.5 Mitigation Measures Implemented Against Drought, Suriname

Though flooding is the main hazard affecting Suriname, some of the remote communities, especially indigenous and maroon communities, given the location and economic situation, are at risk of extreme drought¹⁴. In this regard, the Suriname Red Cross developed several micro-project to increase coping capacity of communities against drought.

The National Society worked with several communities to develop sustainable and cost-effective ways to increase their capacities to cope with the harsh conditions as a result of the droughts. The National Society increased the water conservation capacities and

¹² <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/>

¹³ <https://www.iadb.org/en/improvinglives/surinamese-women-tap-cassavas-enormous-food-security-potential#:~:text=Cassava%20in%20Suriname&text=It%20is%20naturally%20gluten%2Dfree,%2C%20zinc%2C%20calcium%20and%20iron.>

¹⁴ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SURINAME%20NC3_2023_FINAL.pdf

rehabilitation of community water reserves at a school in Tamarind through the provision of a tank farm. The water harvesting capacities of members of the Johanna Margaritha and Galibi communities, were increased by providing tanks to residents. In the Wanhatti community, solar powered mobile water pumps were provided to drain water during floods and irrigate during droughts.

4.8 Challenges with Conducting EVCA's And Solutions Implemented

The EVCA approach can benefit communities in a number of ways, however, despite its many success stories, the approach is not without its challenges. The main challenges identified by facilitators and are outlined below.

4.8.1 Timeframe and Lack Of Consistency

The EVCA is conducted over a period of time and as seen by the methodology used to engage communities, the approach requires several community visits and utilizing various forms of engagements such as walkabouts and meetings with the different community groups. The period during which an EVCA is conducted varies depending on the availability of community members. In some communities, members can be met for a few hours every week or other week, while in others, members can meet on consecutive days. Depending on the timeframe, difficulties can arise in having community members consistently attend meetings. The longer the timeframe, the more difficult it becomes to maintain the same level of community turnout and participation.

An important skill for a facilitator to have is time management and the ability to keep community members engaged. Therefore, facilitators try to work with the time constraints of community members while keeping them interested in the process. The main method used is by ensuring that the process is community driven and therefore, facilitators ensure that community members feel safe to share their concerns as well as feel like they are being heard. The main purpose of the facilitator is to not only share information with the community but to get their feedback and to use the experiences shared to help guide the community to develop the ideas for the micro-projects, where possible.

Micro-projects is a great way to keep community members interested as they are able to see how the actions that they take as a community can increase their coping capacity and resilience against disasters. These projects also keep to empower communities and

decrease their perceived reliance on government initiatives. Additionally, in Jamaica, a WhatsApp group was created with community members to keep them informed.

4.8.2 Conflicting Views

It is easy to take for granted that community members would agree on their risks and vulnerabilities but this isn't always the reality. There are times when the facilitators will have to deal with conflicts as not everyone in attendance of the eVCA sessions will agree on the happenings within the community. This is why the collection of secondary data is important. The creation of the community profile before the start of the EVCA can help community members come to an agreement as the profile developed is based on facts. Facilitators would sometimes have to improvise or engage with community leaders to resolve conflicts.

4.8.3 Funding

It can be difficult to get the funding needed to conduct EVCA's as well as the implementation of micro-projects. Facilitators identified sourcing funding through public campaigns as a solution. The major solution to this issue is also partnering with organisations or agencies that implement similar projects that the community wishes to implement. These organisations can provide the technical support and the financial support needed by communities to implement the micro-projects. In Jamaica, the Rock River community wanted to complete an agro-forestry project. The National Society was able to connect the community with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining to get the project off the ground.

5.0 Conclusion

The EVCA is a very useful tool utilized by the IFRC and National Societies to build much needed disaster resilience within vulnerable communities. In a region so prone to multiple hazard impacts, it is important to empower our communities engage in activities that help shift the mindset from being reactive to disaster situations to that of a more proactive one. Through the EVCA process, communities are able to understand and appreciate the changes that they can make to increase their capacity to cope.