Table of contents

FOREWORD 5

INTRODUCTION

A challenge for the 21st century 8
Case study: British Red Cross – Developing a focused national strategy 8
Case study: Philippine Red Cross – Integrated community disaster planning programme 9

PART ONE

The importance of vulnerability and capacity assessment

Purpose of the guide 11
Basic concepts 11
Chart 1: The progression of vulnerability 12
The dynamics of VCA 12
The change process 13
Table 1: Organizational characteristics 13
Case study: Swedish Red Cross – Local VCA has a mobilizing effect 14

PART TWO

Preparation for a vulnerability and capacity assessment

Defining aims and objectives 15
Table 2: Programme design and capacity building 15
Case study: Canadian Red Cross – Targeting the most vulnerable 16
Is the Movement ready for the challenge? 16
Table 3: Can the National Society begin a VCA? 17
Case study: Finnish Red Cross – Understanding vulnerability and distress 17
Working together 18
Time and resource management 18
Case study: Kazakhstan Red Cross and Red Crescent – Short-term winter assistance 19

PART THREE

Initiating a vulnerability and capacity assessment

When should VCA be used? 21
Choosing a method 22
Participatory approach 22
Table 4: Strengths and shortcomings of the participatory approach 23
Case study: Bolivia Red Cross/Argentina Red Cross – Participatory methods for assessing vulnerable communities 23
The place of VCA within National Society activities 24
Case study: Nepal Red Cross – Using PRA/SWOT techniques 25
Case study: Bangladesh Red Crescent – Institutional restructuring 25
Data collection 26
Table 5: Questionnaires – Advantages/Disadvantages 26

Mapping hazards and risks 27
Sharing information 27

PART FOUR

Using the results of a vulnerability and capacity assessment

The road ahead 29
Common challenges 29
Recalling three steps 30
Lessons learned from case studies 31

CONCLUSION 32

FOREWORD

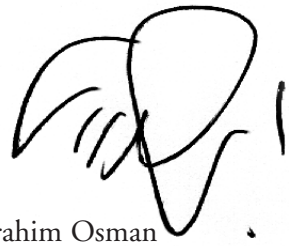
This guide is another step towards fulfilling the International Federation's commitment to reduce the exposure of people around the world to the risks caused by natural and man-made hazards. The process of assessing people's vulnerability and their capacities gives National Societies an opportunity to collect relevant information about impending risks before the event occurs. This will enable them to set up programmes to mitigate potential loss of life and property, as well as to improve the organizational systems, information flows and decision-making necessary to plan for both risk reduction and disaster response programmes.

In concert with world leaders and international organizations, the International Federation and National Societies must adopt disaster prevention methods that reflect the needs of different sectors of society. Effective prevention strategies by National Societies will be developed with the participation of people at risk and have incorporated their perception of risk, coping strategies and critical needs. The International Federation's task is to ensure that its programmes both strengthen and empower people at the community level, and are effectively linked to national and local disaster response plans.

Disaster preparedness strategies must be based upon relevant and reliable information. Since coping strategies of vulnerable people are as ever changing as risk itself, they must be regularly monitored, assessed and amended.

The challenge for the International Federation and National Societies is to ensure that the experiences and lessons learned from undertaking vulnerability and capacity assessments are translated effectively into action. Information gathered will enable disaster preparedness delegates and National Societies to produce and share valuable regional and country-specific guides describing important tasks such as: reviewing National Societies' preparedness capacity; contributing to national and local disaster preparedness and management systems; and ongoing monitoring of hazard and risks.

The International Federation gratefully acknowledges the financial support of Britain's Department for International Development for the production of this guide.



Ibrahim Osman
Under-Secretary General
National Society Cooperation and Development

INTRODUCTION

> **While hazards are inevitable, and the elimination of all risks is impossible, there are many technical measures, traditional practices and public experience that can reduce the extent or severity of economic and social disasters. Hazards and emergency requirements are a part of living with nature, but human behaviour can be changed.**

This statement was made by participants at a forum organized in July 1999 by the United Nations' (UN) International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The forum, Strategy for a Safer World in the 21st Century: Disaster and Risk Reduction, looked at what should be undertaken to reduce the risk of disasters and mitigate their impact.

On 9 July 1999, the forum's participants adopted the Geneva Mandate on Disaster Reduction, in which they echoed the view of many in the international humanitarian sector that proactive rather than reactive actions are necessary to reduce people's vulnerability to both natural and man-made hazards, and that measures must be taken at the international, national and local levels to establish hazard-resilient communities. At the forum, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out that:

> **"We must, above all, shift from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. Prevention is not only more humane than cure; it is also much cheaper... Above all, let us not forget that disaster prevention is a moral imperative, no less than reducing the risks of war."**[1]

This publication is not a 'how-to' guide, but should be considered as a step in the process of showing National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies how vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) can help them improve their understanding of the needs of people at greatest risk of natural and man-made disasters, and thus prepare more appropriate actions to assist them cope with and recover from these hazards. The guide includes National Society case studies and examples describing VCA's usefulness and lessons learned.

The International Federation's disaster preparedness department believes that VCA will contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face; where these risks come from; who will be the worst affected; what is available at all levels to reduce the risks and what initiatives can be undertaken to strengthen the impact of National Society programmes to raise the capacity of people at risk.

The guide also shows how VCA can support National Societies to be greater advocates for vulnerable groups in the disaster preparedness and response process and so contribute to the creation of even more effective risk prevention networks and plans.

Potentially, VCA could help the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to have more impact in raising public awareness of risks, and to ensure that National Society activities are focused and realistic, and that staff, volunteers, communities and other key stakeholders are directing resources towards a common goal. That goal may be simply described as reducing the vulnerability of people at risk through sustainable preparedness strategies designed by the communities themselves, their National Societies and the International Federation.

---

1 IDNDR. *A Safer World in the 21st century: Disaster and Risk Reduction*. Programme Forum, Geneva, July 1999.

A challenge for the 21st century

One valuable lesson learned in this century is that disasters cannot be solved in isolation. Nor is it possible to reduce losses from hazards unless disaster management planners shift their strategy to cope with the complex factors that contribute to disasters in today's environment. In the *Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties,* the International Federation's challenge was described as **improving the situation of the most vulnerable**. This directive indicated the necessity of going beyond a basic needs-assessment of the most vulnerable. It called for gaining insight into why people are vulnerable, what are the factors that contribute to their vulnerability and what capacities exist to contribute to achieving a sustainable change.

> **Another important lesson is that it is human beings – not nature – that determine whether a hazard poses a threat to the well-being of society. How people view both hazards and mitigation factors, and how other stakeholders respond to these issues, will determine which preventative measures are taken and which are overlooked. As such, human beings will decide their vulnerability and capacity quotient to accept disaster losses.**

A key challenge in the 21st century for the Movement will be helping people to define and achieve their desired level of sustainability to withstand and overcome damage, diminished productivity and a reduction in their quality of life from a disaster, without significant outside assistance. Many National Societies are well placed to contribute to this challenge through supporting hazard and risk assessments, developing sustainable mitigation and preparedness networks working on the empowerment of vulnerable communities, providing education and training, and sharing information acquired from each disaster episode to build ever-stronger response strategies.

Case study

British Red Cross – Developing a focused national strategy

The British Red Cross (BRC) initiated a study in inner cities, depressed industrial areas and isolated rural areas to define who were the most vulnerable groups and to use this information to develop a new national strategy. The BRC was concerned that many vulnerable groups were being excluded since the programme portfolio in many branches had not been amended since World War II. Combined with rapidly changing economic and social conditions, the society realized that the poor public image of the British Red Cross was reflective of its weak service provision and outmoded organizational vision.

The assessments included interviewing over 1,000 people in each of the three focus areas. The study, under the direction of local coordinators appointed to each branch, revealed information on the vulnerability of new target groups in addition to the positive and negative perceptions of the British Red Cross. The challenges to be faced by the BRC were now clearer and decisions could be reached to address fundamental internal weaknesses and to create a more focused national strategy.

Case study

Philippine Red Cross – Integrated community disaster planning programme

The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) proposed a five-year programme (Integrated Community Disaster Planning Programme) in 20 provinces which are especially vulnerable to natural and economic disasters. This approach was adopted by the PRC in accordance with the International Federation's Strategy for the Nineties and the Beijing Declaration, which called for action to improve the lives of vulnerable groups.

The programme focused on community involvement in participatory planning for disaster planning and training in the use of disaster planning tools. The PRC included local government units into the community training programmes. Community participants and facilitators were given ample time and space to adapt their training plans or materials when necessary.

Field testing of the questionnaire and the data collection process enabled the PRC to develop effective vulnerability profiles in addition to participatory mapping. The assessment process resulted in the initiation of community preparedness activities including infrastructure (bridges and footpaths) development, first aid and home nursing courses, and agro-forestry and water and sanitation initiatives.

An evaluation of the process and results of the VCA drew the following conclusions:

The VCA increased awareness of hazards by community members.

Communities accepted that risk mitigation can lower the threat posed by natural and man-made disasters.

It created a better working relationship between the community, the local government units and the Red Cross.

However, as in case studies in other countries, in areas where the PRC encountered resistance to developing new mitigation strategies and programmes, barriers were erected to protect deeply-rooted ideas and traditions.

PART ONE

The importance of vulnerability and capacity assessment

Purpose of the guide

This guide aims to explore – for National Societies, delegates and policy-makers who define disaster risk reduction and relief strategies – new approaches to increase understanding of the needs, perceptions and the resources of people most vulnerable to disasters. It has been clearly demonstrated that when disaster reduction is focused on reducing local vulnerabilities and increasing the capacities of vulnerable communities, risks can be managed and losses reduced.

> **One example is the municipality of La Masica, on the Caribbean coast of Honduras, where a series of capacity-building activities were initiated, with technical support from local agencies, along with an early warning flood system. In contrast to neighbouring communities, not a single life was lost in La Masica where the community was able to successfully mitigate the impact of Hurricane Mitch.**[2]

It must be emphasized that this framework is not a finished product, but a guide to present knowledge which is evolving continually as the International Federation and National Societies, working together, develop effective methods and tools, and learn valuable lessons. In 2000-2001, a collective assessment of these efforts will contribute to the development of country- or regional-specific guides describing the assessment process used to prepare more effective preparedness strategies and capacity-building activities with vulnerable communities and disaster response stakeholders. This initiative by National Societies and disaster preparedness delegates will enable the Movement to demonstrate the sustainable impact it can have in helping build disaster-resilient communities.

Basic concepts

Vulnerability and capacity assessment is a basic process used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of households, communities, institutions like National Societies and nations. Vulnerability can be defined as:

> **The characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural or man-made hazards.**

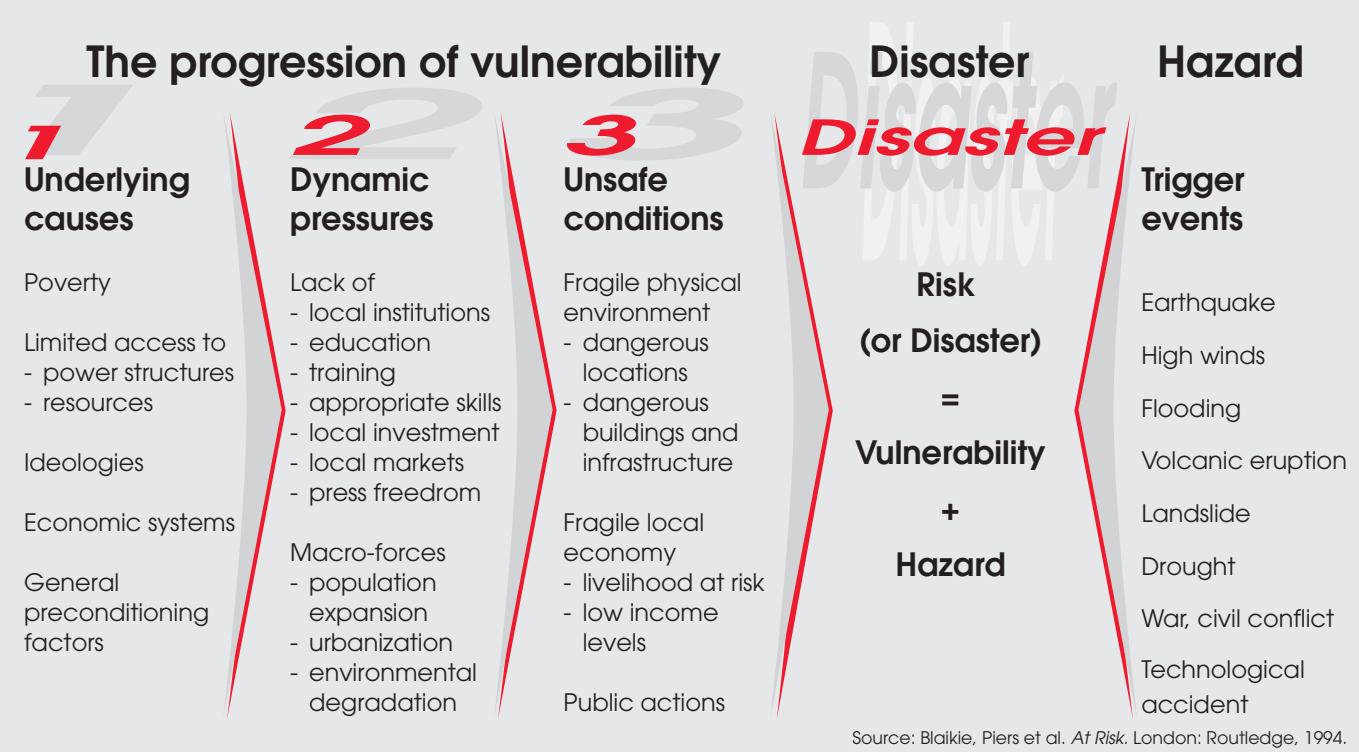
The definition of vulnerability suggests that it cannot be described without reference to a specific hazard or shock. So, the question that must always be asked is, "Vulnerability to what?" People living along coastal areas or rivers may be vulnerable to seasonal storms and flooding, while the inhabitants of countries with social, political and economic problems may face difficulties in achieving a satisfactory and sustainable quality of life. Or a National

[2] Maskrey, Andrew. 'Reducing Global Disasters'. *Natural Disaster Management,* page 86. Keynote Paper, La Red, Peru. Tudor Rose Holdings Limited, 1999.

Society may have specific organizational limitations that impede progress in developing its capacity to carry out more effective disaster preparedness and response programmes.

The following chart describes the progression of vulnerability from underlying causes and the results of a hazard event that becomes a disaster.

Chart 1: **The progression of vulnerability**



Source: Blaikie, Piers et al. *At Risk*. London: Routledge, 1994.

The reverse of vulnerability is capacity, which can be described as the resources of individuals, households, communities, institutions and nations to resist the impact of a hazard. The coping strategies of people in response to various hazards will differ from one society to another and will often change over time. People in chronically-prone countries facing multiple hazards, such as drought, locust infestation and civil unrest, find their capacity levels weakening, reducing their ability to mitigate the effects of the next crisis. In addition, the capacities of National Societies and other institutions to maintain the manpower and resources to effectively mitigate and respond to the next disaster can vary over time.

The dynamics of VCA

The use of a vulnerability and capacity assessment may be new for many National Societies that are more familiar with the needs-based assessment approach. A VCA can be used as an institutional capacity assessment diagnostic tool and a programmatic tool to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of current programmes. The traditional needs-based assessment is important to verify that emergency preparedness, response and rehabilitation phases have fulfilled the basic requirements of people affected by a crisis episode.

The VCA is an important tool to support decisions made in relation to disaster preparedness and the development of mitigation programmes. Information gathered from a VCA describes the risk people or institutions are willing to take in preparation for the next crisis.

Another important dynamic of VCA is its ability to raise public awareness of hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities and the risk taken by society. The VCA process can often trigger positive responses by communities to initiate programmes of mitigation against the 'shocks' to their community that set back their development achievements.

The change process

Disaster preparedness is a core activity of the International Federation and each National Society, and is recognized as the most effective way of reducing the impact of both small and localized or large-scale disasters. The adoption of a new policy on disaster preparedness at the International Federation's General Assembly in October 1999 will ensure the integration of strategic initiatives and strengthen the collective impact on reducing the dramatic effect of disasters on the world's vulnerable citizens.

National Societies have a respected reputation for providing direct assistance to the victims of natural and man-made disasters in a timely and efficient manner to alleviate suffering and expedite recovery. Yet the numbers of people at risk continue to rise annually and evidence of human suffering and economic losses from disasters are unacceptably high. This demonstrates the need to strengthen capabilities in the areas of disaster preparedness and mitigation.

In the process of assessing community vulnerabilities and capacities, a National Society should begin to assess its role in both disaster preparedness and disaster response initiatives. National Societies with a strong response capacity might examine how new initiatives in mitigation could reduce the potential loss of life and capital assets in the next disaster. National Societies that have an effective mitigation strategy could look at how their efforts help address the critical vulnerability factors of a population at risk. And, in all cases, assessment of community conditions will provide key National Society decision-makers with relevant information to make strategic decisions.

The following table describes some characteristics found in organizations that focus on service delivery and on others that adopt the process of capacity building:

Table 1: **Organizational characteristics**

DIRECT SERVICE-DELIVERY PROVIDERS	CAPACITY-BUILDING FACILITATORS
Organizational approach is reactive, needs-based driven and decisions reached from a top-down approach.	Organizational approach is proactive, core-problem driven and decisions are made in a bottom-up approach.
Strong orientation towards disaster response.	Strong orientation towards disaster preparedness.
Development of effective, standard operating procedures for service-delivery functions.	Continuous adaptation and adoption of new approaches to achieve sustainable means to empower population at risk.
Operation requires minimal community participation and maximum participation of volunteers and staff.	Operation requires maximum community participation and minimal participation of volunteers and staff.
Programme is static – little major change to prepare for next disaster episode.	Programme is adaptive – continual change as vulnerability and capacity factors evolve.
Training needs of volunteers and staff are low.	Training needs of volunteers and staff are high.

The process of understanding a society's vulnerabilities and capacities will offer options as to how to contribute to the empowerment of people at risk. The use of VCA will equip National Societies with the capacity to monitor and assess its impact on both disaster preparedness and disaster response events. The case study on page 14 from the Swedish Red Cross demonstrates how VCA contributed to their development efforts.

Case study

Swedish Red Cross – Local VCA has a mobilizing effect

The Swedish Red Cross (SRC) has been carrying out vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) since 1994. As a first step, the SRC studied existing research available nationally in the public domain such as the standard of living survey. It then went on to examine local assessments of vulnerability and capacity. The main aim of local VCA is to identify the most vulnerable groups and their capacity to respond. However, equally important is the process of raising the awareness of local volunteers and staff to the change taking place in the SRC both locally and nationally, and to mobilize them to take responsibility for that change and new programmes. Other important aims are to develop local voluntary work and promote better cooperation with local authorities and organizations. Local VCA is still ongoing, as it is a time-consuming exercise to involve over 1,600 branches.

Pilot projects were performed in three of the SRC's 24 district branches. After evaluating the projects, the SRC decided to carry out local VCA throughout Sweden under the responsibility of local boards; a manual was developed and 150 facilitators trained and appointed in all districts.

As part of an information strategy, which included videos and magazine articles, the SRC's chairman and secretary general informed branches about local VCA and actively encouraged them to carry the assessments out. After a first phase, to inform and motivate local members, groups were formed with staff and volunteers of all ages and backgrounds who were genuinely interested in the subject. Care was taken that groups were composed equally of men and women.

The methods used included: collecting official statistics; carrying out interviews, study visits, meetings and dialogue with local inhabitants and authorities; noting observations; and checking local media. Written reports describe the findings of the assessments. At present, 150 local VCA have been done and 50 more are in progress.

Local VCA have produced two kinds of results: direct (or assessment) results, for example, the identification of the most vulnerable local groups; and indirect (or process) results, such as enabling programmes – whether new or established – to have a more widespread impact, better relations with local authorities, and local branches becoming more outward-looking. As an advocacy tool for the most vulnerable, local VCA have, in many places, been successful in influencing the actions of local governments and other voluntary organizations.

There were problems: it was sometimes difficult to involve the vulnerable themselves in the assessments; assessing groups found it hard to identify and really engage vulnerable individuals; and a few local branches did the assessments more to please demands from headquarters than to identify capacity in local society and among the vulnerable.

Although the SRC met many problems, difficulties and setbacks in local assessments, it is clear that the method works and has a mobilizing effect not only on the branches themselves, but also to some extent on their local environment, i.e., governments, voluntary organizations, companies and people.

PART TWO

Preparation for a vulnerability and capacity assessment

Defining aims and objectives

National Societies conducting a vulnerability and capacity assessment should begin by asking a simple question: "What will the National Society gain by undertaking a VCA?" Measuring community vulnerability and capacity requires a major investment in staff and volunteer time and resources. Organizations engaged in supporting civil society development use VCA to ensure that their efforts are focused on the alleviation of core problems facing the most vulnerable. However, VCA may also be used to critically examine an organization's current approach to achieving objectives and compare it to other available options that reach the same objectives more efficiently and effectively.

Setting up a VCA is a positive capacity-building activity for National Societies, as staff and volunteers work together with local communities in a dynamic process of participation and dialogue.

The following table describes some of the expected outcomes from a VCA in supporting programme design and capacity building within a National Society:

Table 2: **Programme design and capacity building**

PROGRAMME DESIGN	CAPACITY BUILDING
Contribute to effective vulnerability mapping and updating targeting strategies.	VCA skills training for staff and volunteers creates a more effective network to monitor ever-changing conditions of vulnerability.
Realign existing services to meet the needs of vulnerable groups.	Increase the motivation of staff and grassroots volunteers.
Development of new programmes to reach vulnerable groups.	Creation of a new organizational image that will attract more volunteers.
Rethinking relationships with government and other key stakeholders.	Development of new partnerships with organizations working with similar objectives and in the same sectors.
Using VCA as a new method for monitoring change and evaluation of activities.	Using VCA results in the decision-making process for the development of new organizational vision and operating strategies.

National Society leaders must ensure that the VCA's desired outcome is shared and understood throughout the society and that this aspect is incorporated into strategic work plans and other planning documents. Experience has shown that the planning process must be built upon the commitment of all those involved, directly or indirectly, in the VCA – from governance and senior management to volunteers, government representatives and other key stakeholders. Also, everyone participating in the assessment should be able to share in the results of data collection, analysis and resulting action adopted by the National Society.

The following case study from the Canadian Red Cross describes their use of a vulnerability and capacity assessment to examine the effectiveness of their service delivery to the vulnerable.

Case study

Canadian Red Cross – Targeting the most vulnerable

The Canadian Red Cross (CRC) decided to examine their organizational effectiveness by adopting a VCA model as a tool to contribute to their national strategic planning process. Preliminary activities included an internal SWOT analysis to verify their capacity to undertake this activity and the piloting of VCA methodology in one region using existing regional volunteers and staff. A VCA workbook was developed from the experience gained in initiating the process in a regional pilot activity. The initial VCA was conducted in southern Alberta with a population of 1.5 million people and involved five steps:

- Developing a regional demographic profile of the most vulnerable.
- Defining the threats addressed by current services as well as those affecting the total regional population.
- Identifying the risk group profile (population most at risk from threats and the effectiveness of current programmes to reduce their vulnerability).
- Assessing capacities.
- Determining the most vulnerable groups (population at greatest risk with the least capacity to effectively cope with threats).

The CRC found that their existing vulnerable group was not meeting the needs of all the at-risk groups (abused children, refugee victims of trauma, aboriginal people, people living with HIV/AIDS and the homeless) in the region. New initiatives were developed involving grassroots volunteers and staff and increased collaboration with organizations carrying out similar activities. By organizing training on issues of social justice, the CRC has created a climate to embrace change rather than be resistant to adopt and adapt their work as a result of the information gathered during the VCA.

Important operational lessons learned by the CRC to initiate the VCA were:

- Don't underestimate the time required for the process of collection, analysis and change (if any) to National Society operations.
- Ensure that the responsibilities of all key stakeholders involved in the VCA are clearly articulated, understood and that necessary human and fiscal resources are accessible to support the task.
- Devote time to extensive staff and volunteer training and orientation on VCA methodologies and explain how they differ from more familiar needs-assessment approaches. Ensure that any process of change adopted by the National Society is viewed as increasing the importance of the work undertaken by staff and volunteers.

Is the Movement ready for the challenge?

One of the most important gains in the past decade is the awareness that a better understanding of people – as victims, survivors or vulnerable communities – will contribute to capacity building and vulnerability reduction at the grassroots level. People living in hazard-prone regions will benefit from the use of VCA when it is employed by National Societies to enable greater self-reliance, awareness of risks and election of appropriate options to withstand the next disaster.

The VCA is a tool that contributes to a self-reflection process – bringing to light the strengths and shortcomings of current activities and highlighting the unfulfilled needs of new vulnerable groups. This process should be viewed as an opportunity for the National Society to affirm its continuing contribution to society and, when necessary, initiate structural

adjustments to ensure programmes are kept relevant to the ever-changing needs of the vulnerable.

Table 3 provides a few more questions for National Societies to address in the preparation process of undertaking a vulnerability and capacity assessment.

Table 3: **Can the National Society begin a VCA?**

Have the aims and objectives of the VCA been communicated and clearly understood at all levels of the National Society?
Is the National Society prepared to learn from the results of the VCA? Is it committed to adopting new programmes and practices to achieve greater results in aiding people at risk?
Does it have the full support of its entire membership – from governance and management to volunteers?
Has it undertaken an institutional analysis to understand its capacity to respond to the new priorities and initiatives? Is it prepared to commit sufficient human and material resources to ensure the success of the VCA?
Have external stakeholders been informed of the planning for the VCA and given the opportunity to contribute to the planning, initiation and assessment process?

The Finnish Red Cross addressed their impact upon the vulnerable groups through the development and initiation of a questionnaire survey. The results are described in the case study below.

Case study

Finnish Red Cross – Understanding vulnerability and distress

In the wake of declining social services in Finland, the Finnish Red Cross (FRC) decided to conduct a vulnerability and capacity analysis by means of a questionnaire survey. The basic questionnaire asked the local branches to assess the possible changes occurring in the lives of people in difficult circumstances. The process was not always easy. Some local branches indicated that it was impossible to assess the status of vulnerable groups, while others felt the answers were already well known. A quarter of the local branches, therefore, did not respond to the questionnaire.

The study's main findings revealed that many branches felt that vulnerability of the young, affected by long-term unemployment and in debt, had significantly worsened. Psychosocial problems, including the increased use of intoxicants, was also identified as a condition of the group's vulnerability. The government's reduced ability to maintain the level of social services, particularly in housing, to a growing at-risk population contributed to vulnerability. An increasing number of vulnerable groups were turning to non-profit organizations for assistance.

The results of this survey indicated a rising need for the FRC to develop closer ties with social welfare authorities in addition to becoming more aware of the factors influencing vulnerability and capacities of their society. Additionally, the survey revealed a varying degree of capacity at branch level to respond to emerging social problems. The results of the study were summarized and shared with key government decision-makers.

As noted in this case study, the National Society's capacity to both undertake a VCA and to best utilize the information must be addressed. The Finnish study identified its limitations in responding to growing needs of vulnerable groups – yet shared the results of the study with key government decision-makers.

Working together

A National Society should carefully consider the selection of members, consultants and other key stakeholders entrusted to undertake elements of their VCA. The selection process will depend upon factors including the chosen methodology, resources available for the VCA and its aims and objectives. These factors will influence the size and scope of the planned activity, the extent of primary and secondary data to be collected and whether consultants or other non-National Society partners are required to successfully complete the VCA.

An effective rule to follow is to involve the people who will be required to implement any decisions influenced by the VCA's results. Staff and volunteers from local branch offices will adapt more readily to changes in policy and operational programmes if they were part of the data collection, analysis and decision-making process. Conversely, participation of the national board in components of the process will contribute to adopting any recommendations forthcoming from the VCA analysis process.

Who should be involved? The National Society should consider the merits for inclusion of key stakeholders such as:

- representatives from government, non-government agencies and academic/research institutions;
- local or traditional leaders in the region/community;
- authorities on the risks, hazards and vulnerabilities and capacities of the people in the study area;
- members of the communities to be assessed; and
- members of other National Societies in the region who may be contemplating conducting their own VCA.

Time and resource management

The National Society will have to decide carefully when is the most appropriate time to initiate a VCA. In many parts of the world, vulnerability may be heightened at particular times during the year. Such characteristics should be addressed in both the scheduling for the VCA and in assessing the data collected. The VCA should not impose on either the people conducting the assessment or the groups that are being assessed. Thus, consideration must be given to events such as local or national holidays, periods of peak labour needs and any seasonal climatic conditions that would impede the time line scheduled for the VCA.

National Societies should also include ample time for the training of staff and volunteers selected to participate in the VCA. Being sensitive to the conditions under which vulnerable populations exist and to the right of all people to be respected has to be ensured from the pre-VCA training.

Additionally, a process of investigating what information already exists to support the VCA must be incorporated into the early planning stages. Another rule to consider is to build upon, not duplicate, the work undertaken by other agencies in the examination of vulnerability and capacity assessments.

The Kazakhstan Red Cross and Red Crescent provides the next case study to describe their effective timing of a VCA to respond to critical seasonal vulnerabilities.

Case study

Kazakhstan Red Cross and Red Crescent – Short-term winter assistance

The Kazakhstan Vulnerability Study involved 2,800 households that were interviewed on issues such as income, food security and health conditions. The aim of this study was to develop a vulnerability profile while assessing the consequences of economic and social changes and their effect on traditional coping mechanisms. The study would determine which were the most critical factors affecting a rise in vulnerability and which coping mechanisms were still used in times of crisis.

The timing of the study (February/March 1997) helped target vulnerable groups more effectively before the winter season, when the harsh weather, combined with the adverse effects of economic collapse and social transformation, heightened vulnerability. The study identified families with five or more children, the elderly and the handicapped as the population groups facing the greatest risk. Single-parent families were found to have fewer children attending school, had a lower dietary intake and difficulty in accessing public utilities.

The conclusion of the study helped the Kazakhstan Red Cross and Red Crescent to identify both the most vulnerable sectors of society and create a programme of short-term winter assistance to alleviate suffering while working to raise capacities in other programmes.

For National Societies now contemplating a VCA, it is useful to again recap the lessons learned from the case studies above:

- Training of staff and volunteers both to understand the purpose of, and undertake, a well-organized VCA is essential.
- Pilot testing a VCA, to ensure the appropriateness of the methods used, will ensure the results fulfil the expectations of the National Society and other key stakeholders.
- Be patient. The process of undertaking an institutional VCA is lengthy. Allow time for staff and volunteers to become comfortable with the planned process. And plan time lines to ensure they do not encounter unnecessary obstacles that would impede the effective use of information collected.

PART THREE

Initiating a vulnerability and capacity assessment

When should VCA be used?

The primary purpose of the vulnerability and capacity assessment is its use as a diagnostic tool to provide analytical data to support better informed decisions on preparedness, mitigation, relief and development activities undertaken by National Societies.

> **VCA will contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face; where these risks come from; who will be the worst affected; what is available at all levels to reduce the risks and what initiatives can be undertaken to strengthen the impact of National Society programmes to raise the capacity of people at risk.**

VCA can also be applied in many ways: at different stages of the development cycle; as a diagnostic or planning tool across different sectors; or in one particular sector such as water and sanitation, health or food. It is important to recognize that VCA is not an approach only to define who should benefit from relief aid but also to identify in advance, and change where possible, the conditions that create or contribute to the state of vulnerability of at-risk populations.

Many threats, in spite of all efforts to diminish the vulnerability of people at risk, will eventually result in disasters causing the loss of lives and property. For National Societies, VCA will support the emergency response plan by identifying which groups are most in need of support through an efficient and effective relief programme. Thus, the VCA allows for proactive planning of National Society initiatives while amending the traditional profile of at-risk populations as 'victims in need'.

In post-disaster rehabilitation phases, National Societies have an opportunity to evaluate what might have been done to minimize the loss of lives and property and the long-term effects on survivors. Advocacy for an initiation of risk reduction programmes by National Societies is best timed when people still have a vivid recollection of the disaster episode. It is important to evaluate why some groups were more affected than others and which groups will be unable to recover fully from the impact of the disaster without assistance. The use of VCA will support effective targeting of the most vulnerable groups to ensure they are not driven further into destitution by repeat events.

VCA can also be applied to support National Society long-term development initiatives. Development is intended to strengthen the capacities of vulnerable groups to achieve sustainability – being less vulnerable to disasters and less dependent upon external assistance. The VCA will identify the strengths of each vulnerable group upon which to build in jointly-developed programmes to raise their capacity for achieving self-sufficiency.

Here are some reasons to use VCA as both a diagnostic and a planning tool:

VCA as a diagnostic tool

A It helps to understand problems (symptoms) and where they come from (underlying causes).

B It helps to systematically look at what is available to alleviate the problem (resources, skills and capacities) and decide whether the National Society should be involved and at what level.

C It encourages focus on specific local conditions (specific threats and risks, most vulnerable groups, sources of vulnerability, local perceptions of risks, local resources and capacities).

D It highlights different areas of responsibility for reducing vulnerabilities as some will require political, technical, financial and social inputs. This information will assist the National Society define more clearly its roles and possible areas of collaboration with the government, communities and other agencies.

VCA as a planning tool

A As vulnerability reduction is a long-term process, VCA helps to prioritize and sequence actions and inputs, to determine who and what should be addressed in each stage of National Society activities.

B It provides an opportunity for dynamic and realistic planning where changes can be monitored and single-solution programmes can be avoided.

C It helps to evaluate the impact of a project in terms of risk reduction, vulnerable conditions minimized as local capacities are enhanced.

Choosing a method

The methodology selected by a National Society starting up a VCA should be considered in view of several factors:

- What is the social, cultural and political environment in which the VCA will be conducted?
- What human and financial resources does the National Society have to invest in a VCA?
- What is the National Society's capacity to design, initiate, analyse and use the results collected in the strategic planning process?

Participatory approach

National Societies must assure the participation of vulnerable groups in the planning, implementation and analysis components of a VCA. If they are involved in all stages of this process, vulnerable groups can actively contribute to the development of a greater understanding of core problems associated with vulnerability, such as the strengths and coping mechanisms already existing locally, and can offer insights into the development of programmes that can help them achieve self-sufficiency.

It is also very important to remember that people contributing to a VCA may have high expectations that core problems will be resolved with the assistance of National Societies. Therefore, it is critical to discuss the purpose of the VCA with all groups involved, especially at-risk groups, in order to avoid any unrealistic preconceptions of the assessment's results.

Electing a participatory approach requires that National Societies establish a relationship of trust with vulnerable communities and are willing to accept them as partners with a vested interest in the outcome of the data collection and analysis process of the VCA. The following table describes some of the advantages and disadvantages of using a participatory approach:

Table 4: **Strengths and shortcomings of the participatory approach**

STRENGTHS	SHORTCOMINGS
Provides more reliable and qualitative understanding of various risk group vulnerabilities and capacities.	Will not provide data available from national-level information sources which are often desired by the donor community.
Creates a strong community ownership in the assessment process.	Participatory approach requires greater sensitivity, time and resources to conduct.
Builds a stronger foundation for creating sustainable programmes with local communities.	May lead to unrealistic expectation of assistance offered in future development programmes.
Effective in developing both a long- and short-term approach to risk and hazard mitigation and response.	Process too complicated if the objective of the VCA is to develop a 'baseline' to assess future programmes.

The Red Cross Societies in Bolivia and Argentina used a participatory approach in their VCA to assess the critical needs of vulnerable groups and to develop more impactful programmes to assist groups to become self-sufficient. The following case study describes the process used and key lessons learned:

Case study

Bolivian Red Cross/Argentine Red Cross – Participatory methods for assessing vulnerable communities

VCA has been used in Bolivia and in Argentina in order to strengthen and support the work of approximately 2,000 Red Cross branches. This task included training branch members in participatory planning and vulnerability analysis methods. And, to continue the work of the Red Cross at the community level, the active participation of vulnerable groups was sought in the diagnosis and prioritization of problems affecting their communities.

A SWOT analysis was undertaken at two levels: at the branch level involving management committees, technical staff and volunteers; and at the National Society level (involving members working with local institutions, vulnerable groups, the general public and International Federation staff).

The participatory approach used was felt to be of crucial importance to adding greater clarity to the roles and technical capacity required by the Red Cross to sharpen the focus of its work and develop social projects which have a more direct impact on target groups.

Different cultural levels in the assessment areas made it necessary to adapt the methods to meet the conditions faced, which led to more time and resources being required to develop the assessment and training process. Resistance to new ideas was observed in areas where tradition and cultural norms were very strong and problems were encountered between management consultants and volunteers that impeded the progress of the assessment.

Finally, the process revealed several internal organizational weaknesses. The National Societies gained an understanding of an institutional dependence on its strong leaders, a weak institutional image in the community and an inability to attract new volunteers who would bring with them new and innovative strategies and technical skills to design social programmes to address very complex issues. With their problems well identified, the two Red Cross Societies in Bolivia and Argentina were able to create plans to reduce their vulnerabilities.

The place of VCA within National Society activities

Another effective participatory method of VCA is the participatory rural appraisal (PRA). This method is used to analyse people's livelihood – how people survive (what are their capacities) and what is perceived as a threat to their survival (what are their vulnerabilities). Using the PRA will help National Societies to understand how people are affected by different risks and the reason why they are either capable or incapable of withstanding a specific hazard. Many local development organizations have been using PRA or RRA (rapid rural appraisal) methods to add important information in their evaluative and decision-making processes. PRA techniques can include tools for examination of the following socio-economic factors:

- **Physical world:** Maps are used to describe the spatial dimensions of the community, show aspects of the physical environment and human activities that take place within it.
- **Groups of people:** Wealth and well-being ranking and social mapping are used to classify people into groups.
- **Institutions:** Organizational, economic and kinship charts are used to express the relationships between local organizations and social groups.
- **Time use:** Daily time-use charts and seasonal calendars can capture cyclical variations in activities (such as income and expenditure from various activities), seasonal variation in food availability, and employment and income diversification. Historical diagrams and time lines can be used to represent changes taking place through time.
- **Sequences:** Flow charts and problem trees are useful diagnostic tools that can assist understanding of the flow and sequence of activities in a community.
- **Comparisons:** The use of graphs, charts and matrix ranking and scoring can provide the means to compare the people, activities and objects among individuals and communities.

More information on the variety of PRA tools will be forthcoming to National Societies in the planned VCA Toolbox and the Bibliography on Disaster Preparedness now in development by the International Federation and planned for distribution by June 2000. On the following page, two cases studies are presented from the Nepal Red Cross and the Bangladesh Red Crescent. The first describes the Nepali experience using both SWOT and PRA techniques of assessment; the second discusses the Bangladesh Red Crescent's use of VCA to support institutional restructuring.

Case study

Nepal Red Cross – Using PRA/SWOT techniques

The Nepal Red Cross (NCR) conducted two pilot VCA in different areas with distinct socio-economic profiles in order to identify vulnerabilities and capacities in their community development programmes as well as in their efforts directed at institutional development. PRA techniques were used in the assessment of community programmes, while a SWOT analysis was employed for the institutional development programme analysis. Staff and volunteers received training on the purpose of the VCA and in methods to conduct this assessment.

The PRA process helped the NRC to better understand the vulnerability of at-risk populations. The NRC realized that vulnerability was interrelated to factors of food production, seasonal migration, landlessness, literacy and access to safe water. These factors were screened through a set of indicators including longevity (life expectancy), knowledge (literacy and education) and access to resources. Districts were then ranked in accordance to the values given to these indicators.

The NRC was also able to extend its knowledge of traditional beliefs and customs that influence behaviour at local levels. The PRA was instrumental in motivating communities to develop groups to address their own core problems through self-initiated projects.

An important lesson learned was that the level of effort and time invested to create programmes which have the most impact upon the most vulnerable segment of the population is affected by a highly-stratified social system and traditional cultural customs.

Case study

Bangladesh Red Crescent – Institutional restructuring

The Bangladesh Red Crescent (BRC) decided to change from a centralized relief response agency to a more decentralized structure that would apply a community-based approach to disaster preparedness. To prepare for this change, the BRC organized a workshop aimed at orienting middle- and senior-level management to new approaches and creating a positive attitude for the restructuring. A consultancy firm was recruited to define and draft critical objectives and internal capacities for the National Society to describe roles, relationships and challenges for each department.

A full-time multidisciplinary task force was assigned to develop a long-term disaster preparedness plan and strategy in collaboration with all BRC stakeholders and communities. The task force employed a PRA at the community level while a SWOT analysis was used at the National Society headquarters and unit levels. The results of the assessments offered a wealth of knowledge about the nature and solutions on the issues of vulnerability and disaster risks. The process contributed to a gradual transformation of the National Society – from a highly centralized to a decentralized organization.

In the final assessment of the process, the BRC felt that the external consultants could have been more effective if they had acquired a background of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and an understanding of the institutional framework and political structure of the National Society. The time line of six months was found to be insufficient for the assessments planned and the level of support from target communities was slow in developing.

National Society staff were reluctant to describe organizational weaknesses or offer critical recommendations – symptomatic of uncertainty of the motives for initiating the restructuring process. Tension was also evident about the move to shift from a traditional top-down approach by management to one of decentralized responsibilities. This latter problem posed challenges for the BRC in establishing linkages between closely-related departments within the BRC.

Data collection

Experience of National Societies and other organizations engaged in vulnerability and capacity assessments is that the participatory process described in many PRA handbooks is not feasible during periods of chaos. For example, in Uganda, Oxfam sought to understand how war-ravaged communities were coping in an environment of extreme, adverse conditions. Using PRA techniques, members of the community were encouraged to relate how they would react if armed combatants returned to the community. Most informants refused to discuss this eventuality. The population most traumatized by the war felt they could not defend themselves against such a risk and elected not to think about or discuss any means to mitigate the risk.

Thus, an important lesson to recall is that people living in times of extreme tension may not necessarily want to support a participatory VCA process. And, National Societies may decide to use other means to collect important data for decision-making.

For many National Societies, secondary data collection may be the most cost-effective and efficient form of VCA. By searching documentation already developed by governments, the United Nations (UN), development- and research-based organizations, National Societies may be able to extract a wealth of information on vulnerabilities and capacities. Given the advances made in information technology, access to relevant data and how such information could be used by National Societies as an approach to VCA should be given due consideration.

The International Federation and National Societies have traditionally used questionnaires as an approach to assessment. Questionnaires are as useful as their questions are pertinent. However, they do run the risk of overlooking vital questions that may result in an incomplete understanding of vulnerabilities and capacities. Pilot testing a questionnaire may reduce this possibility as well as clarifying the precise information sought in each question.

The design of effective questionnaires is a special skill that National Societies can acquire from a variety of sources ranging from academic institutions to social services or managerial consultants. They will be able to guide the process by clearly defining the informational needs of the National Society, the development of a uniform understanding of each question asked, the training of interviewers using the questionnaire, the process to be used to complete and assess the information collected and how it can be used to support the decision-making process of the National Society.

The following table offers the main advantages and disadvantages in the use of questionnaires in assessments:

Table 5: **Questionnaires – Advantages/Disadvantages**

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Study can be tailored to specific informational needs.	A narrowly-focused design may miss the collection of important information.
Quantitative data collection can be used in simple, comparative assessments.	Technical expertise necessary in design of complex statistical questionnaires.
More effective methodology to produce desired results.	Training of interviewers how to use the questionnaire is essential.
Less expensive process when compared with other in-depth qualitative studies.	Questionnaire results require a sensitive analysis of data collected.

Mapping hazards and risks

Although participatory techniques for assessment can be used when mapping hazards and risks, information can be offered from readily-available information from governments, the UN and other sources engaged in disaster preparedness. Secondary sources may offer both a national- and regional-level assessment of hazards and attempts to describe the risk factors of the populations to specific hazards. However, the ever-changing environment and patterns of vulnerability of communities in disaster-prone areas will require mapping local vulnerabilities in order to plan community-based risk reduction measures.

Considerable progress has been made by local and international organizations in using risk mapping to gather information on the priorities, requirements and perceptions of those at risk. The important lesson learned in mapping hazards and risks for National Societies is the need to move beyond concentrating on the imposition of external solutions to community problems and the physical aspects of hazards and risks.

Sharing information

Another important, and often overlooked, aspect of the VCA process is how National Societies plan to document and share the results of the assessment. For any study directed at creating an institutional or attitudinal change, it is essential to make the results available to other stakeholders whether inside or outside the National Society. National Societies need not rely on written reports to share important information collected or analysed. Letting people from vulnerable communities tell their own stories to describe awareness of key hazards and their decision-making processes to arrive at a mitigation or coping strategy can be effective in raising the awareness of National Society staff and volunteers.

Throughout the VCA process, it must be kept in mind *who* will use the information collected and *how* the information will be used. It is also essential that a structure be in place to capture feedback and dialogue between the key stakeholders and those within the National Society who will use the information.

In summary, it is important to note that most National Societies will use a combination of approaches in the VCA process. The wide range of 'high-tech' systems such as global early warning and remote sensing with creative combinations of PRA to assess community perceptions will depend upon the objectives, resource commitment/internal capacities and operating environment of the National Society. The purpose of this guide is to describe various options that National Societies can choose to best meet their organizational needs.

PART FOUR

Using the results of a vulnerability and capacity assessment

The road ahead

Natural disasters during the past 25 years (drought, hurricanes, earthquake, fires and floods around the world) have shown that the disasters themselves and the risks they pose can erase years, and even decades, of economic development and investment. In addition, since the beginning of the 1990s, experience has shown that 'disaster' response has also had to deal with the consequences of societal and state collapse (from the Gulf war to the implosion of Yugoslavia to the disintegration of Somalia and Sierra Leone and the genocide of Rwanda).

Managing the risk of natural hazards is a huge task. To incorporate a response to man-made disasters into the process of preparedness makes this task even more challenging. The task for the International Federation and National Societies is enormous: to continue to develop imaginative programmes that convert the vulnerabilities of at-risk groups into strengths while, at the same time, creating disaster-resilient communities. Achieving this objective means focusing more effort on reducing a community's vulnerability to disaster episodes.

The International Federation and National Societies are well placed to address community vulnerabilities through proactive disaster preparedness programmes that deal with the critical problems of vulnerabilities, while disaster response programmes offer crucial relief and recovery assistance. The key to success in both dimensions lies in being able to determine what information the National Society needs to act, how to create the most effective plan to collect and analyse this information, and how to arrive at a plan of action that provides the most effective solution to core problems.

Common challenges

A great challenge to National Societies using VCA is in dealing with the diversity of vulnerabilities and capacities of people in society. People will demonstrate not only differences in their capacities and vulnerabilities, but also in their willingness to accept varying degrees of risk to prevailing hazards. In conducting a VCA, it is important to examine the level of understanding of people at all levels of society to cope with disaster events in order to plan effective disaster mitigation and preparedness plans.

Local perceptions of vulnerability and vulnerable groups can vary greatly among staff and volunteers in a National Society. When this occurs, it is easy to label a group as potentially helpless victims during the next disaster. It is essential to keep an open mind when exploring the capacities and vulnerabilities of people to risk. A useful tool is to ask the following questions to both members of the National Society and to members of target communities:

- Who is vulnerable ?
- To what particular hazards are they vulnerable?

- What are the capacities of the people to mitigate these hazards?
- Have the risks of the vulnerable groups been integrated into National Society planning?
- Have the vulnerable groups been involved in the development of preparedness plans?
- Who has influenced the development of National Society mitigation and disaster preparedness planning?

Over time, the vulnerabilities and capacities of National Society target groups may vary. This is particularly evident in countries that have been affected by a disaster of unexpected proportions or repeated disaster episodes that provide no opportunity for vulnerable groups to recover. VCA should, therefore, be considered as a tool to be used regularly in the planning process for the development of mitigation and emergency response programmes as well as in post-disaster rehabilitation planning.

Recalling three steps

Step 1: Understanding the importance of VCA

- Disaster preparedness is a proactive process of reducing societies' vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards. VCA contributes to understanding the needs and aptitudes of people living with the greatest risk.
- Disasters are not problems that can be solved in isolation. National Societies must work with governments, NGOs, other stakeholders and vulnerable groups to contribute to sustainable solutions. VCA brings key stakeholders together to seek for solutions.
- Effective disaster preparedness and disaster response planning requires organizational strengths in both capacity building and mitigation and in service provision and logistics. VCA helps organizations assess their strengths and weaknesses to respond to both dimensions of preparedness and response.

Step 2: Preparing for a VCA

- The measurement of a community's and/or an organization's vulnerability is a major investment in resources and staff/volunteer time. Remember to ask: "What can a National Society gain by undertaking a VCA?"
- Any change in the traditional activities and operations of a National Society requires the full support of the membership. Remember to ask: "Is the National Society prepared to learn from the results of the VCA and committed to adopting new programmes and practices to achieve greater results in helping people at risk?"
- Assessing the vulnerability and capacity of a society is a task that is best shared with key stakeholders. Remember to ask: "Have external stakeholders been informed and given the opportunity to contribute to the planning, initiation and assessment process of the VCA?"
- The success of a National Society will be greater if staff and volunteers remember to:
  Plan ample time for training of staff and volunteers.

Pilot test the VCA to identify both its strengths and weaknesses, and so achieve expectations,
Be patient – VCA is a lengthy process.

Step 3: Using the results of the VCA

- VCA, as a diagnostic and planning tool contributes to:
  - Understanding the nature and the level of risk vulnerable people face.
  - Understanding where these risks come from and who will be the worst affected.
  - Identifying what capacities exist to reduce risks for the most vulnerable.
  - Strengthening organizational and programme impact to be more effective.
- Sharing the information from the VCA with key stakeholders will contribute to building a stronger network for developing future programmes with vulnerable groups, government, NGOs and other key stakeholders.

Lessons learned from case studies

The case studies briefly illustrated in this guide have contributed to the development of relevant lessons learned by National Societies. Important information to recall is:

- VCA will be a useful process in the targeting of mitigation and disaster response programmes benefiting the most vulnerable groups of society.
- The participatory approach in VCA is effective when adequate time is allowed for communities, National Societies and other key players to plan, initiate and assess information. It is also important not to underestimate the time required to plan for implementing any change in operational or programmatic functions recommended from the VCA.
- The active participation of National Societies, at all levels, is required to ensure that the purpose of the VCA, the results of the data collected and the assessment process are consistent.
- Assessing both the capacity and vulnerability of at-risk groups and the internal capacity of the National Society can be undertaken using the VCA process.
- Devote time to institutional capacity training in VCA methods with staff and volunteers. Explain the difference between the VCA approach and the more traditional needs-based assessment. Ensure that staff and volunteers understand that VCA is an ongoing process to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of National Society programmes to the ever-changing conditions of people at risk.
- VCA can contribute valuable information on the status of vulnerable groups to share with government authorities and other key stakeholders engaged in development and disaster preparedness programmes. National Societies have the opportunity to become proactive in advocating for the populations at risk.
- Take into consideration local/national events when planning VCA schedules. Remember to ask, "Are there any particular holidays or events in the study area that will affect the VCA's initiation?"
- Ensure that VCA methods selected are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the people contributing to the process. If uncertain of the appropriateness of the study

methods, consult with academic or civil society institutions that have experience in field-level data collection for advice and guidance. Then pilot test study methods to ensure that the necessary information will be received.

- When using consultants, be sure to provide a thorough briefing on the National Society and the Movement. This preparation will enable the consultant to contribute more effectively to the achievement of the assessment objectives.
- And finally, BE PATIENT. The VCA process can be very time consuming, expensive and difficult.

CONCLUSION

The need exists for National Societies to interact more effectively with vulnerable communities, government and other key stakeholders in order to create more effective disaster preparedness planning. The time for greater interaction is now – prior to the next disaster when each stakeholder is able to be proactive in mitigation activities. It is not optimistic to expect that better understanding of the core factors influencing vulnerabilities of at-risk communities will help develop more effective programmes initiated by National Societies.

VCA can provide both a greater understanding of local conditions of life and of how effective organizations will be in raising the capacities of at-risk populations to cope with recurring shocks affecting their livelihood. While the reduction of vulnerability to disasters should be the ultimate goal of preparedness, National Societies must also focus on critical needs when a crisis arises.

It is, therefore, essential for the International Federation and National Societies to ensure they maintain the ability to keep in step with global and local environmental changes and are aware of the ever-evolving conditions that can alter the capacities and vulnerabilities of the people they serve.