

Introduction

We continue to witness a steady increase in the number of disasters. Many factors contribute to this trend: a growing population, an increased number of people living in hazard-prone areas, environmental degradation, unsustainable development patterns that often lead to higher levels of vulnerability, as well as rapid and unplanned urbanization, amongst others. These trends are set to continue and will be compounded by the impact of climate change. **Assessing vulnerability and capacity in at-risk communities is critical to determine how to most effectively reduce disaster risk and foster community resilience.**

The “Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment” is a long-standing approach of the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) better known by its acronym “VCA”.¹ It is 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 these. It enables communities, with the support of the RCRC when needed, to explore where these risks come from, which members of the community will be the worst affected, what is available at all levels to reduce the risks, and what initiatives can be undertaken to strengthen the capacity of people at risk and reduce the risks they face.

EVCA stands for enhanced VCA. It is an improved version of the VCA made possible thanks to the support of a number of National Societies, Reference Centres and IFRC.

Why do an EVCA?

Assessments are a vital element of the programme planning process. It provides the information on which decisions should be made. Whilst good information does not guarantee a good programme, poor information almost certainly guarantees a bad one.

Twenty years of experience using the VCA have shown it to be a methodology that is highly-valued by National Societies, not only for risk assessment but also as a process that, when done well, has the power to promote inclusive participation, community leadership and empowerment of vulnerable people. Local perspectives and priorities are critical for the success of any risk reduction plan resulting from the EVCA. **Communities need to ‘own’ these plans and the analysis that led to them in order to put efforts into implementing them.**

Four reasons to conduct an EVCA:

1. For communities to better understand the nature and extent of existing, changing and emerging risks they are and will be facing.
2. For communities to identify relevant and practical actions to reduce their risks and strengthen their resilience based on their priorities.
3. To raise awareness and mobilise resources within the community and externally so that the community can implement its risk reduction action plan.

¹ The EVCA’s origins are in participatory rural appraisal methodologies (recently renamed Participatory Learning for Action). Within the RCRC, most participatory assessment tools (CBHFA, PASSA, HES) use similar processes. See section below on ‘RCRC community assessment choices’ for further explanation on which assessment process to choose.

4. For National Societies to support communities to reduce their prioritized risks, including by influencing policies, laws and development investments which can benefit those communities.

What is the EVCA?

1. A participatory and empowering process

The EVCA is not merely a process for data collection, analysis and action planning. It is also a process of learning and empowerment whereby target communities are supported to be in the driver's seat when it comes to their risk understanding, risk reduction and resilience building endeavours.

Inclusive participation of the community is fundamental for the process to be truly empowering and have a sustainable impact. A community is not a homogeneous entity. You must apply a gender and diversity approach to ensure you engage with and understand the needs, capacities and priorities of women, men, boys and girls, as well as people with disabilities and individuals from diverse social, cultural, economic and religious groups that make up the community, including migrant groups.² In some cases, such as in urban areas, a 'community' might be harder to define and bring together, which therefore requires an extra step of identifying the different 'communities' in the urban area.

2. A process focused on understanding risks and identifying risk reduction and adaptation actions

A specific hazard does not affect all individuals, households, communities and infrastructure to the same degree and in the same way. While some could be seriously affected, others might not be affected at all. Even though the magnitude of the hazard might be the same, the impact can be different depending on exposure, vulnerability and coping and adaptation capacities.

In other words, the risk of a disaster is directly proportional to the magnitude of the hazard, level of vulnerability and exposure, and is inversely proportional to the capacity to withstand the shocks and stresses of the hazard. Hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity are often called risk determinants or risk factors. See the risk formula below:

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Exposure} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

[Read more about the different determinants of disaster risk >](#)

The EVCA helps communities to understand current and emerging risk factors, their underlying causes and actions that could help to reduce their impacts.

3. A multi-sectoral process

Most hazards affect more than one sector. Floods can affect people's livelihoods, contaminate water sources and lead to illness, destroy homes and schools, and cut road networks. At the same time, risk-blind development and imbalances of power create vulnerabilities. For example, a school that is built in an earthquake-prone area without using earthquake-resistant construction techniques puts children at risk. Violence and conflict can disrupt government services and lead to destruction of natural resources that the community depends on. Conflict affects livelihoods, health, shelter, education, road, communication, etc. For this reason, we need to mainstream risk sensitivity in all

² Gender and diversity sensitive VCA, 2017.

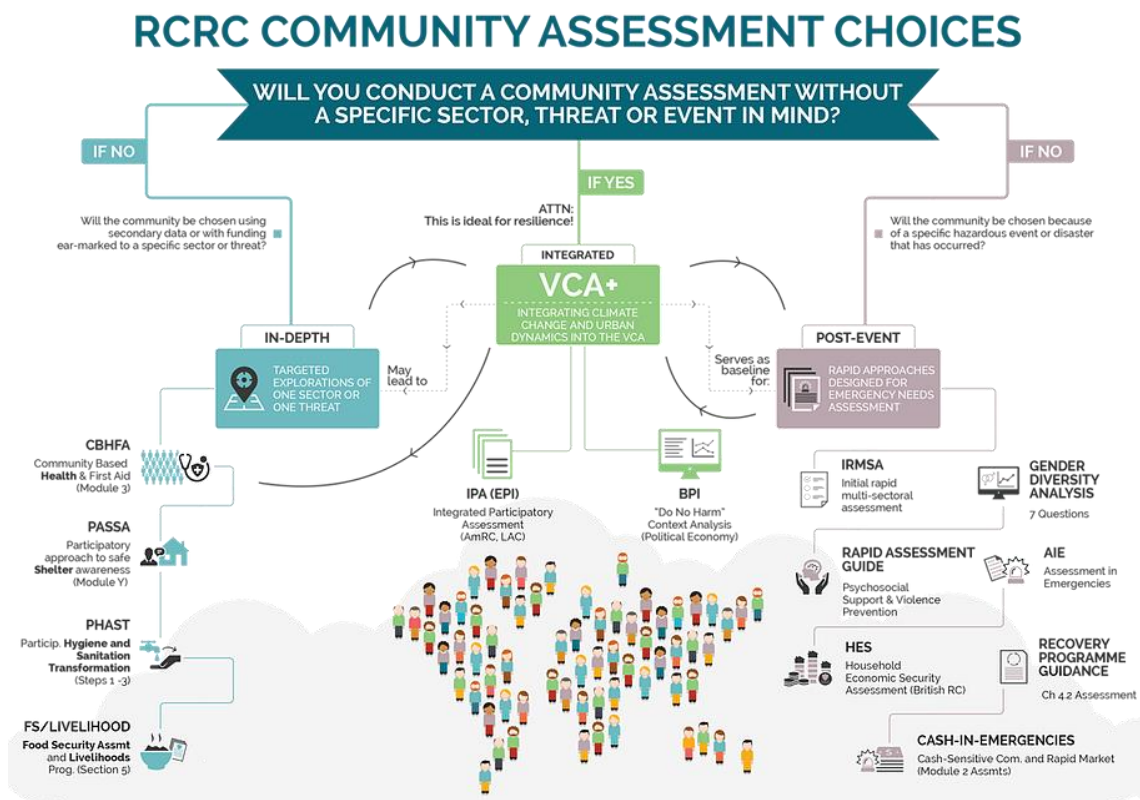
sectors and we also need to consider all sectors while doing a risk assessment and risk reduction planning to make the risk reduction effort successful and sustainable. That is why the EVCA is developed to suit all types of threats to safety and well-being, and is also designed to understand the overall risk landscape in the community regardless of the sector. For these reasons, it is strongly suggested that EVCA be facilitated by a multidisciplinary team.

4. A multi-stakeholder process

The EVCA should be a multi-stakeholder process involving other key stakeholders such as local government, relevant ministries, meteorological offices, NGOs, the private sector and academic institutions. Your National Society should accompany the community and help it connect with stakeholders that can support the community’s assessment process and implementation of action plans. The more stakeholders you engage, the more successful your risk reduction efforts will be. However, it requires patience and careful planning as working with many stakeholders can be complicated. It is important to think creatively of how and whom to engage with and to do this from the start of the process. (See also Roadmap to Community Resilience Milestone 3: Connect the community to stakeholders).

5. An entry point to all RCRC community work

The EVCA should be the entry point to all initial RCRC community work because it provides the overall risk landscape of the community. However, the EVCA can often reveal issues that are sector-specific and about which you do not have enough information. To explore these sectoral issues, the RCRC has sectoral assessment approaches that will provide more in-depth information. The picture below explains how the EVCA relates to the different RCRC sectoral community assessment approaches.





What is new about the EVCA?

The EVCA is the result of an extensive review of the VCA guidance and toolkit and its application within the RCRC conducted in 2015.

[More about the history of the VCA and its enhancement process >](#)

The EVCA brings together all the previously published VCA guidelines and toolbox into one easy-to-access place.

It has been aligned with the Roadmap to Community Resilience and has been adapted to better analyse the different characteristics of resilient communities. The ambition is to over time include the EVCA as an integral part of a revised/enhanced version of the Roadmap to Community Resilience, with the EVCA focusing mainly on the assessment and planning process/steps (from Stage 2 (related to understanding community risk and resilience) through to Stage 3 (related to taking action for resilience and developing a community resilience plan of action)).

The EVCA now includes climate change considerations as well as gender and diversity considerations. It will also provide a platform for future guidance on how to conduct EVCA's in an urban or conflict context and the utilisation of digital tools [under development]. You will find the following icons to indicate where we have incorporated climate change and gender and diversity guidance as well as new changes in the process:

Climate change



Gender & diversity



New



Furthermore, efforts have been made to improve the assessment process, including by improving the sequencing of the assessment steps and introducing a clearer focus on the different elements of risk (hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity). This has helped simplify and strengthen the analysis process. The guidance has also expanded on how to ensure that the EVCA is used as part of an overall process to empower communities.

The following are the key differences between the EVCA and VCA:

	VCA	EVCA
Process	The VCA was perceived as a once-off product, not a process for community leadership in risk reduction.	The EVCA includes concise guidance on how to promote community leadership during preparation, analysis, reporting, implementation and follow-up.
Data collection	The VCA started with the immediate use of VCA tools to collect data.	The EVCA indicates which tools to use for different elements of risk. This process makes data collection more focused.
Tools	Some of the tools over time required revision.	The tools in the toolbox have been updated to integrate gender and diversity, climate change and resilience considerations. Furthermore, digital collection tools are under development.

Analysis	The traditional VCA often led to analysis of the data once all the data was collected using the selected tools. This approach meant that, at times, too much data was collected, making the analysis more difficult.	Data collection and analysis are to be done for each element of risk (hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity) separately and the results then later combined during the synthesis. This approach makes the analysis less complicated, more manageable and allows the community to participate in the analysis.
Resilience	The VCA was perceived to be a DRR-focused tool.	The EVCA incorporates a more holistic lens through the addition of the resilience characteristics/dimensions.
Links	The VCA was not clearly aligned with other sectoral assessment tools.	The EVCA aligns with other sectoral assessment tools (e.g. CBHFA, PASSA).



EVCA and resilience

Resilience has become a top priority for the RCRC and many humanitarian organisations. Community resilience is the ability of communities (and their members) to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects.³

The IFRC believes that strengthening community resilience entails (1) assisting communities to adopt risk-informed, holistic approaches to address their underlying vulnerabilities; (2) a demand-driven, people-centred approach; and (3) being (and remaining) connected to communities.

The EVCA is a useful tool for resilience work because it serves as an entry point to the community and provides a holistic risk landscape of the community. The EVCA has been adapted to better analyse the different characteristics of resilient communities (see diagram).

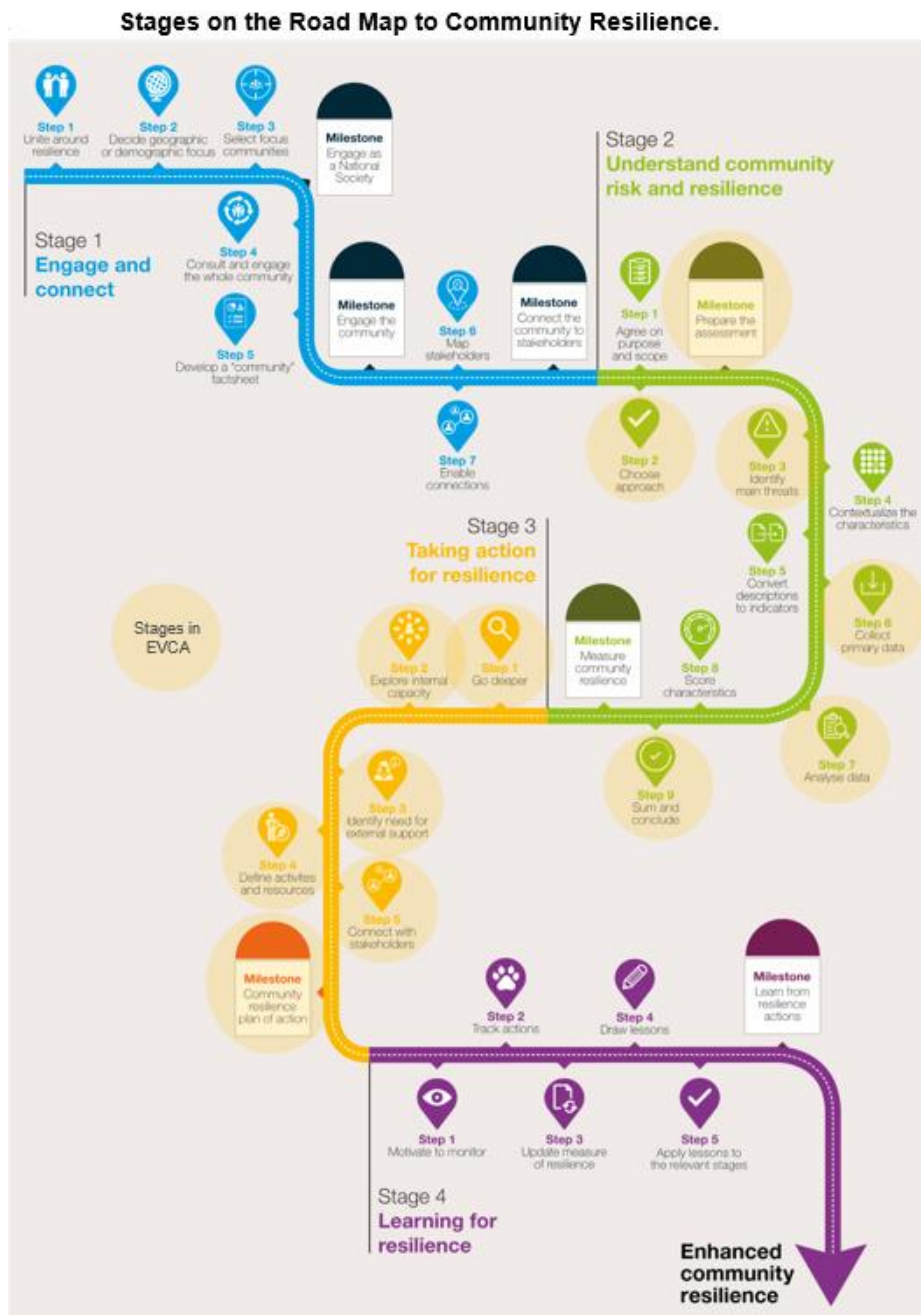
How does the EVCA link to the IFRC’s Roadmap to Community Resilience?

The EVCA focuses mainly on the assessment and planning process and therefore aligns with Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the Roadmap to Community Resilience (see highlighted portions in diagram below).

A resilient community...



³ IFRC. Framework for Community Resilience, 2014.



As you can see, the Roadmap to Community Resilience includes a broader process of community engagement and follow-up including some steps to set indicators with the community to monitor and evaluate progress in resilience-strengthening. If you are using the EVCA for the Roadmap to Community Resilience process, make sure to add these extra steps to EVCA:

- Step 4: Contextualise the characteristics
- Step 5: Convert descriptions to indicators
- Step 8: Score the characteristics



EVCA and climate change

According to climate scientists, weather extremes that already affect communities are likely to occur more often and be more severe in the coming decades. Weather-related disasters doubled in the past 20 years alone. These disasters disrupt community health, livelihoods and education, and damage infrastructure such as roads and homes. In addition to these effects, more gradual changes to temperature, sea level, rainfall and seasons over time can affect agriculture and water availability and quality, etc.

Now communities need to not only take action based on their past experiences, but also plan for a more severe and uncertain future.

Climate change may already be familiar to communities. Communities in many parts of the world are already noticing changes to climate and weather patterns or ‘funny weather’ relating to temperature and rainfall (particularly people who depend on climate-related sources of income such as agriculture). In many cases, the observed new weather patterns are challenging traditional knowledge. Talking to communities about these changes provides people with an opportunity to come up with new strategies to deal with them, and incorporate these ideas into their risk reduction plans developed through the EVCA process.

Two points to be mindful of:⁴

1. All good community-based risk reduction action plans that are addressing weather-related hazards are already to some extent contributing to climate change adaptation by building better preparedness and resilience against the negative impacts of extreme weather events. Communities shouldn’t always only focus on the negative aspects of this weather variability and changes, but also take advantage of them if they have positive impacts. However, one of the steps needed to make community-based programmes more ‘climate-smart’ is to adjust the EVCA approach slightly so we use the insights on changing risk patterns from communities, as well as climate information available to us, to help prepare community risk reduction plans that are geared to a changing and more uncertain future.
2. The EVCA should not be turned into a ‘climate-EVCA’ by focusing only on exposure to climate change and ignoring other factors that influence community risk.

For a summary of the science of climate change, please refer to the RCRC Climate Guide chapter “[Climate change: the basics](#)”. To know more about the RCRC approach to climate change, see the [Framework for Climate Action](#).



EVCA in urban contexts

The methodology of the EVCA is flexible enough to be relevant and applicable in every community whether it is in a rural, semi urban or urban setting. The main challenge in urban settings is how to identify which community is the most vulnerable and how to develop scalable solutions to the priority problems. Therefore, the EVCA should be preceded by a process to help the National Society narrow down the assessment from city level to community level.

Many of the major cities face seismic risk, recurring floods, fires, deadly heat waves and a growing number of displaced populations. The risks and vulnerabilities that communities face in cities and

⁴ How can climate change be considered in the VCA? 2012.

towns cannot be fully mapped or understood without a city-scale perspective. In urban environments, local problems are often caused by non-local phenomena and solutions must be sought outside the community, at local, city, national or sometimes even international scales. This has implications for the number and types of people, organizations, departments and agencies that may need to be or are already involved.

Mapping the essential urban systems (health, energy, water, waste collection, etc.) and analysing how these systems and the built environment would impact the needs of populations in the event of a disaster or crisis is critical for community resilience. Similarly, the community action plans will not have the desired impact unless they are linked to city-level key stakeholders, most prominently the local governments and city emergency management authorities.

New tools providing guidance on how to conduct [city-wide risk assessments](#) and [urban profiling](#) are helpful for National Societies planning to do EVCA in urban contexts. The [coalition building](#) toolkit provides much needed guidance for National Societies to get better at working with a wider set of partners in urban areas.

Things to consider before deciding to conduct an EVCA

Bear in mind that conducting an EVCA requires **commitment** and **investment** from your National Society and the community and therefore deserves careful consideration before making any decisions. It may require a change in mindset, roles and approach of your organisation. Use the following questions to help you determine whether your National Society is ready to engage in EVCA:

- Is community-level work reflected in your National Society development plans, policies and structure? If not, is your National Society prepared to make the necessary changes so that this becomes part of what you do?
- Is your National Society willing to commit to working in a participatory manner with communities over the medium to long term?
- Is your National Society ready and committed to enable and accompany communities to take a lead role in risk assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation?
- Does your National Society have the resources and skills to undertake an EVCA and do the required follow-up?
- Are the national headquarters and participating branches willing to make the necessary investments in training staff and volunteers in community work?
- Is your National Society prepared to work in a multi-sectoral manner so that different technical and programme departments can respond to community needs that arise?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', try to address them or reconsider whether to go ahead with the EVCA.