

Working in partnership in the Americas

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) at community level in Central America

Background

The *ProVention Consortium* was launched in the year 2000 as a global coalition of partners, including governments, international and regional organizations, academic institutions, and representatives of the private sector and civil society, dedicated to improve the safety of vulnerable communities and to reduce the impact of disasters in developing countries.

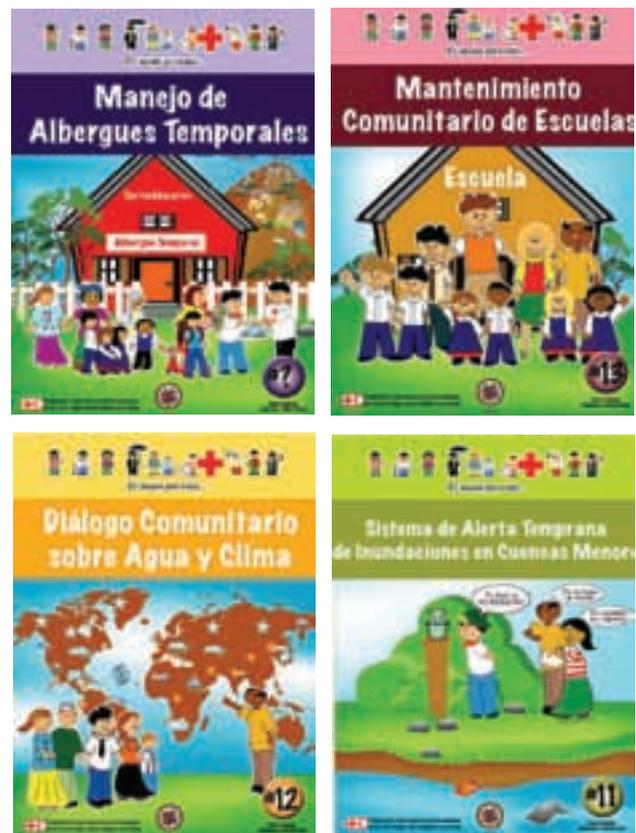
In 2004, two members of the *ProVention Consortium*, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), through its Regional Delegation in Panama, and the Organization of American States (OAS), through its Department of Sustainable Development, began implementing the first phase of VCA at community level in Central America financed by ProVention. The objective of the project was to develop and implement a VCA methodology at community level in four Central American countries: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica. Central America is regularly hit by hurricanes between the months of June and November. The region is also prone to intense seismic and volcanic activities.

The project

The project proposal submitted to ProVention was developed jointly by OAS and the International Federation, which took the opportunity to address risk reduction at the community level. OAS' small valleys early warning programme in Nicaragua, the school maintenance programme in the Caribbean, the International Federation's experience in the publication *Prevention is better* handbooks and its VCA approach provided the core elements for the proposal. This proposal was amended by the National

Society participants at the regional meeting held in San José, Costa Rica in December 2004.

Upon acceptance of the project proposal, the two organizations signed a contract with ProVention.



The first phase of the project focused on the preparation of community handbooks on disaster risk reduction. OAS took the lead and coordinated the production of the material and also shared existing materials. The International Federation, Regional Reference Centre for Community Education of Costa Rica (CRECR), the National Societies and the Regional Delegation contributed in editing and finalizing the handbooks.

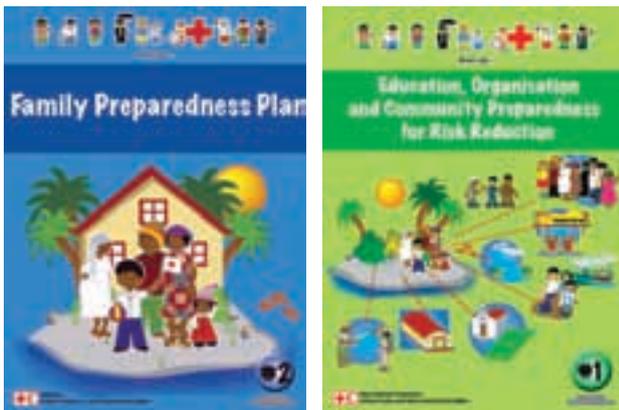
The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) are amongst the other organizations that contributed to the production of the handbooks.

The developed manuals are:

- School maintenance
- Disaster Mitigation of Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Systems
- Natural Hazards and school Shelters
- Community Early Warning Systems for Small Valleys
- Floods Awareness Practices Guides
- Community dialogue on water and climate

The project provided an opportunity for updating the previous four community handbooks. Further, the two interactive CD-Roms which included the VCA case studies were developed with the support of the Regional Disasters Information Centre (CRID).

The project approach promoting simple community-based risk assessment activities through common methodologies and tools had a local to global focus. According to Laura Mora, a nurse at the Social Security Fund Health Centre of the Linda Vista community in Costa Rica: “VCA enabled us to comprehend existing risks in the community. We now understand that we need to be better organized and work together with other organizations to solve our common problems.”



Results

- The ProVention project provided the platform for two different organizations OAS and the International Federation to work together to prepare a common proposal and share experiences. This collaboration was



VCA in Turrialba community, beginning of the ProVention project.

further strengthened by signing a broader cooperation agreement between the two parties, which opened the path for future partnerships.

- The project enhanced the cooperation between different organizations such as PAHO, CRID, UNICEF, ISDR and the University of Costa Rica contributed actively for the development of new materials. An example would be the ISDR collaboration which is in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and provides an ideal model to be shared and implemented at national and regional platforms.
- The project reflected a positive impact on the organizations which have collaborated on risk reduction initiatives. CRID has highlighted that this has held to positive impact on many stakeholders.
- A major achievement of this project was the development of the community-based risk reduction modules, its implementation within the communities. The National Societies are now equipped with community assessment and planning tools.
- The project provided an opportunity to National Societies to work with other local and international organizations to develop and implement joint community-based risk reduction projects. This is a step forward for National Societies that were initially reluctant to join are now keen to continue with the initiatives. According to Vivian Monge Arias, a Costa Rican Red Cross volunteer: “There has been a shift in thinking before and after the project implementation. Red Cross especially has opened up a new world and a perception of the

community and disasters which extends well beyond mere response and assistance”. Therefore, the VCA process has provided an opportunity to the communities to identify and address vulnerabilities through community participation in order to increase their resilience.

- The general feeling expressed by all the participating organizations was very positive. They have greatly benefited from this collaboration, which has opened up a spectrum of new possibilities in risk reduction.

Lessons learned

- Even if mandates differ, given common interest and shared values there is always a possibility of different organizations collaborating together in order to strengthen communities against threats and vulnerabilities.
- Coordination is based on effective communication, the promotion of common elements for discussion and sharing a strategic framework.



- The first phase of the project has been a learning experience for all the organizations involved.
- It is essential to have a greater cooperation with other regional and international organizations, as well as with national and local organizations and institutions.
- The process of institutional consultation and approval was fundamental for reinstating the National Societies commitment towards the project. The project has further ensured that the National Societies integrate community-based approach in their risk reduction activities.

- It is possible to simplify technical material and to adapt and develop it into a more accessible and user-friendly format.
- CRECR has played a vital role in the success of the project and also in strengthening the collaboration. The Centre’s contribution can be extended well beyond the American continent and can be adapted by the National Societies in other regions to develop VCA based community risk reduction activities.
- The project highlights that good participatory methods in any community work is a key component to deal with challenges.

Further steps

- The main achievement of this project was the production of the handbooks and the integration of the process by all the involved parties. This enabled the project to move towards the implementation phase of VCA based community risk reduction activities.
- The systemization of community processes which lead to risk reduction actions and projects.
- The project will be extended to two South American countries: Brazil and Chile. The idea of extending the activities in other countries is to analyze the applicability and viability of the methodology.



Community First Aid training at Linda Vista community.

- The existing collaboration model should be tabled at the national platforms in accordance with the HFA agreements.
- The material is being translated into different regional languages.



VCA mapping at Linda Vista community with local authorities, Red Cross volunteers, community members and local institutions.



Installation of an early warning system, Upala, community. Micro project developed as a result of ProVention project.



All these materials may be useful for other regions therefore, we encourage the National Societies and the delegations of the International Federation to contact:

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For more information, please contact:

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