

Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in Ladyville and Caledonia

Location:	Ladyville, sub-urban area of Belize City, and Caledonia, Belize
Date:	2005
Sector focus:	Multi-hazard analysis, community based Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment
Spatial focus:	Community level

Bibliographical reference

Report of the ProVention project “Community based Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in Central America”, in Belize. The present guidance note compiles two assessment case studies developed by the Belize Red Cross Society (BRCS) in the communities of Ladyville and Caledonia. Both case studies are included in the compilation *Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in community education projects*, Centre of Reference for Community-Based Disaster Preparedness Education, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Costa Rican Red Cross.

These case studies can be downloaded from:

www.cruzroja.org/desastres/redcamp/crrec/tcomuni.htm

Abstract

Both assessments were carried out by a BRCS team, formed by members of the local branch and the national headquarters, together with local authorities. Most of the information was collected in situ through direct observation; semi-structured interviews to key informants and community leaders; focus groups with Belize rural central office staff, local authorities, and students; and at a participatory workshop with participants representing different sectors of the community (local leaders, elders, local authorities, teachers, local organizations, housewives, businessmen/women, students, etc.)

The report starts with an overall diagnosis of community and institutional problems. It also proposes a series of tentative actions for transformation, agreed with local leaders, based on the vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) analysis. The list of different assessment tools used for this analysis process is also presented. The document ends with a short list of lessons learned and recommended better practices for the future.

The Belize Red Cross is more experienced in disaster response activities, and therefore the present assessment exercise has meant a new focus of attention on longer-term risk reduction actions. This case study is a clear example of a very simple VCA process developed by local resources using

elemental and low-tech participatory tools. The result is not a systematic and scientific report, but a good, small and honest analysis of locally perceived priority needs, which can be the basis for a deeper analysis and the development of local projects. In the words of the BRCS's national project coordinator: "...the assessment has been an entry point for us. It has allowed us to better know the community and to be better known by the community."

Technical description

Hazard/risk type

Floods, hurricanes, explosions, contamination, house fires, social violence,

Type of assessment

Multi-hazard analyses. Community based VCA focusing on field visits and the use of participatory tools.

Community risk assessment process

Methods used

Some tools were selected from the IFRC's VCA toolbox: direct observation, community mapping (spatial, hazards, vulnerability and resource maps), collection of secondary data, interviews, focus groups, historical profile, historical calendar, seasonal calendar, institutional and social analysis, and actions for the transformation framework (transforming vulnerabilities into capacities).

Was livelihood analysis used?

Not directly. But through the use of other information-gathering tools, some information about livelihood problems, such as the high rate of unemployment, was brought up.

Was external specialist knowledge introduced?

The Centre of Reference and Sustainable Development Department of the Organization of American States (OAS) supported the process, providing training and guidance on assessment tools and training resources.

Vulnerability analysis

The vulnerability analysis revealed that homes constructed in low-lying areas, by the banks of rivers and creeks, close to stagnant ponds, or below street level are highly vulnerable to floods. Hurricanes are also a threat to the area during the annual Caribbean hurricane season. The risk in Caledonia and Ladyville is high due to poor infrastructure and poorly constructed houses (lumber walls and zinc roofs; cement house structure but with poor zinc roofing techniques; or stick palmetto walls with thatched roofs). Other vulnerabilities identified are the lack of garbage disposal systems in some project areas, and the river contaminated by sugar industries and chemical overflows. The study also revealed the risk of fires in the community due to wooden homes built close to each other, high grass/bushes surrounding homes, a long dry season, poor electrical wiring, and children left in charge of cooking on fire hearth or stove while parents are out working.

Capacity analysis

Resources available

As regards financial resources, the assessment is part of the first phase of an IFRC, Central American National Red Cross Societies, OAS and ProVention project. The Centre of Reference has provided technical support and information. The BRCS team is highly committed. At community level there is access to potable water and electricity, as well as to community centers, a police station, health centers, and the National Family and Children organization.

Limitations to capacity

Difficulty of access to the project area, low level of disaster preparedness at community level, lack of garbage disposal which could contaminate potable water, lack of coverage of some organizations. The Belize Red Cross recognizes that the lack of funds to develop longer-term projects is a handicap.

Action planning and implementation

What actions were actually planned?

A number of actions were proposed in order to reduce both contamination and floods: a micro-mitigation project to improve the drainage system (this was considered a priority); a family awareness program to bag garbage, and deliver bags to an area where garbage is collected; the creation of garbage collection committees as part of the village council; and education on water- and garbage-borne diseases with the assistance of the health center nurse.

What actions were actually carried out?

In order to strengthen community preparedness, the BRCS developed some small activities and suggested others during the VCA process:

- Community preparedness for hurricanes and flood awareness as part of the VCA training.
- Community first-aid training.
- Community leaders discussed evacuation plans, dependent on the projected path of hurricanes.
- BRCS shared the hurricane survival kit with local leaders.

Have these actions turned out to be sustainable?

Sustainability will depend on the second phase of the project when the BRCS starts implementing proposed local projects, and develops a fruitful collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g., local and national authorities) which aims at filling the gaps in the local plan that the BRCS cannot cover.

Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions?

To tackle social violence, particularly domestic violence and youth criminality, BRCS discussed activities related to humanitarian values with community leaders. The VCA process helped to encourage the village council to call a community meeting to discuss the community's problems and to suggest solutions.

Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions?

N.A.

Limitations on action/sustainability of actions

Difficulty of physical access to the communities, which can be isolated during rainy season. Encouraging community participation is more difficult in sub-urban areas than in rural areas.

Indicators

- Communities in project areas (Caledonia and Ladyville) are now aware of their vulnerabilities and are willing to change them into capacities.
- Community leaders have prepared community risk maps, carried out interviews for research, and involved all community groups, especially the elderly, in participatory discussions.
- Experiences and activities are now being compiled and documented.
- VCA analysis developed with ProVention support has helped to reduce political divisions and improve lines of communication within politically divided communities.

The implementation of the second phase, the participation of other organizations in the local plan, and community involvement in the process will show the positive or negative effects of the community risk assessment (CRA) process

Contextual notes

Existence/role of prior or contemporaneous conflicts?

Although a historical dispute between Belize and Guatemala, which claims Belize's entire territory, exists, tensions between the two countries have not yet led to violent military confrontation. Since 2000, the OAS has been working with both countries to find a peaceful solution to this problem.

Role of displacement/relocation

Because of migration and settlement from other Central American countries, Europe and South Asia, the ethnic composition of the country is sometimes hard to determine. Nevertheless, racial tension is very rare due to the constant mixing of the different ethnic groups. Tensions at local level are more related to political divisions.

Role of previous disaster and recovery attempts?

Hurricanes, fires, and flooding are the main threats. The area is very vulnerable to such hazards due to poor housing construction, topography (swamp areas), overgrown yards, poor/lack of infrastructure of surrounding areas, and limited disaster preparedness capacities. Caledonia remains isolated during rainy season. Until recently, and due to the lack of previous support for mitigation or preparedness measures, the community accepted disasters as inevitable, something they had to live with.

Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences?

The BRCS's previous experience of working with both communities, their high vulnerability to natural disaster, the lack of previous disaster mitigation or preparedness support provided by government or any other organization, and the communities' isolation defined the necessity of a CRA process.

Strategic notes

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at national level?

N.A.

How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at local level?

Community leaders emphasized that they are now confident that they can change or influence the risk levels they accepted before and lived with for many years.

How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out?

Although it is too early to measure, the CRA has allowed the communities to strengthen existing solidarity linkages between local organizations, particularly between community leaders, local civil council, elders, parents' clubs, youth groups, schoolchildren and teachers.

Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them?

Yes, through the participatory VCA process, they were able to express their problems and identify priorities.

Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines?

The participatory approach allowed the involvement of all groups within the communities concerned. As a result, VCA has helped to reduce political divisions and improve lines of communication within politically divided communities.

More divided along these lines?

Unlikely. As mentioned before, racial tension is very uncommon because of the constant mixing of the different ethnic groups, but political division might arise again in electoral periods and during relief operations.

Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA?

During this exercise, participants realized the need to form parents' clubs, youth groups and even upper-division schoolchildren's groups (for children aged 10–14) to train the groups in positive relationships and parenting skills. Formation of local Red Cross groups has been proposed.

Lessons learned

- The political context greatly affects the progress and implementation of project activities.
- Participation is much higher in rural than in suburban areas.
- The hurricane season in the Caribbean is not the best time for workshops, due to reduced accessibility to vulnerable areas.
- Communities are not only vulnerable, but they also have many capacities and untapped resources which need to be identified in the VCA process.
- Active community leader involvement and National Society support is essential to the success of any Red Cross project and VCA.
- VCA has the potential to identify and stimulate hidden skills within the community leaders. For example, listening, planning, drafting plans, developing mitigation, and preparedness activities, etc.

Keywords

Hurricanes, floods, contamination, social violence, house fires.

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