WHAT IS A VCA
KEY STEP, LIMITATIONS, SCOPE AND BENEFITS
WHAT IS A VCA?

The VCA is designed to assess the risks that people face in their locality, their vulnerability to those risks, and the capacities they possess to cope with a hazard and recover from it when it strikes.

It is concerned with collecting, analysing and systematising information on a given community’s vulnerability to hazards in a structured and meaningful way.

VCA is used to help communities understand the hazards that may affect them and take measures that are based on the communities own skills, knowledge and initiatives, preventing these hazards from turning into disasters. (IFRC)

VCA DEFINITION

According to the IFRC a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) is an investigation that uses various participatory tools to understand the level of people’s exposure to (and capacity to resist) natural hazards at the grassroots level.
**PURPOSE**

VCA is a way to collect, analyse and synthesise information with and by communities. It is a community development process which puts risks at the centre of the analysis and design. VCA taps into communities’ knowledge of local needs and risks in order to build resilience into project design. (IFRC)

It is an integral part of disaster preparedness and can contribute to the creation of community-based disaster preparedness programs. As the community is part the process, it allows people to identify and understand the risk they consider a priority (even if not natural hazards). VCA is a tool to identify local priorities, leading to the design of actions contributing to disaster reduction.

**BENEFITS**

The benefits of conducting a VCA is in its thoroughness and by including the communities in every step of the analysis, a VCA gives us information that we cannot get from secondary sources. It gives us a baseline that is much more useful for measuring progress and impact of our DRR efforts. Knowing the baseline and the degree of detail that the VCA gives us, makes it much easier to identify the right indicators of change and improvement.

If it is done correctly, the process of conducting a VCA is in itself an empowering process for the community. There are a number of principles for the interaction and analysis, which will be introduced in other parts of this training module.

A VCA is not only a fruitful process in itself, but it also gives the community a starting point for self-implementation of changes that can lead to reduced risk.

The VCA process may also contribute to closer contact with other organisations, as you will be introducing others to your activities and plans. Likewise, the analysis will help you identifying key issues for advocacy work and give you good content for both that and for communication activities. For example you will get to know the background and stories of community members and get a deeper understanding of challenges and opportunities in their settings.

Because of its thorough analysis of capacities and vulnerabilities, a VCA can also help attract donor funding for DRR activities.

A final, but very important point is that the VCA process is likely to improve the relationship between a community and the organization working there. The close working relationship establishes a trust and confidentiality that may result in better dialogue and give the organization more direct feedback on their work.

VCAs do not focus (exclusively) on needs like previous needs assessment methods, but focuses on where people’s vulnerabilities lie. Its inclusive approach engages the whole community, including the most vulnerable or generally excluded groups.
The VCA is an invaluable tool, that can be used in many situations. From project design to influencing the local government.

WHEN TO USE

The VCA is useful in many situations. As a general rule you should use it in the following situations:

- Prior to project design – implementing a sample of VCAs to help understanding the community’s perspective on risks and stresses
- Community mobilisation and commitment building – ensuring that the community is building commitment around a shared and agreed process and plan
- Documenting capacities, vulnerability and the vision or action plan of a community – identifying the risk and stress-reducing priorities of the community and the measures needed in the medium term to reduce exposure to these. This explicitly includes understanding the poverty and gender dimensions of vulnerability
- To influence and contribute to local government planning priorities
LIMITATIONS

The VCA however, isn't a do-it-all tool, there are some limitations to be aware of.

When and how VCA should not be used:

- As a large-scale investigation – VCA works best at community level and is not so useful when applied to a district or province.

- For reinforcing preconceived assumptions – an essential part of the VCA is to identify risks and solutions from the community perspective, although this does not mean that external expertise is not useful or needed.

- As an extractive research method – it’s value is only realised as a participatory tool.

- During an active conflict, such as civil war – it generally works best in relatively stable communities but it can be useful in fragile situations. A key issue is to avoid making the situation worse (do no harm).

- When your organization does not have the appropriate means (skills, resources, etc.) to facilitate a VCA.