

Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments as an organisational learning bridge for resilience building?

A case study of Red Cross National Societies in the Caribbean

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Lund 2023

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Number of pages: 67

Keywords

Organisational learning, resilience, vulnerability and capacity assessments, red cross red crescent.

Abstract

Adaptive capacity based on organisational learning (OL) is at once a critical imperative facing humanitarian organisations in their mission to save lives and support communities most at risk; and inherently evidenced as an enduring weakness over the past decades. Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) are community-based risk assessments established for their utility in supporting communities' iterative learning. However, understanding of their potential use for OL remains scarce, owing to their application having been limited to a community-based learning perspective. This timely study sought to explore their potential contribution to OL, specifically investigating the newly released Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (EVCA) of the IFRC as the methodology in real-time. A multi-case study approach involved 4 National Societies in the Caribbean region with whom 17 interviews were conducted, alongside 6 interviews with HQ-level informants and document analysis complementing the empirical data. Results revealed a significant potential for the Enhanced VCA methodology to contribute to learning at the micro, meso and macro levels, contingent upon leveraging a nexus of motives, means, and opportunities for OL. The study provides additional evidence to previous studies having nuanced enduring gaps in leveraging assessment processes for learning by further nuancing the interactions and systemic interdependences at play. Notwithstanding its contextual scope specifically focused on the IFRC and Caribbean region, the study provides insight which could be of interest in other contexts.

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Summary

Active in 191 countries with an estimated volunteer-base of 15.2 million, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRC) is the largest humanitarian network globally. Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) are the tool most applied by the RCRC to guide the organisation in its mission to provide need-based assistance to communities most at-risk.

The relatively recent shift of humanitarian organisations to a resilience building approach, evolving from emergency response, has entailed greater need to anticipate, recognise, adapt and learn, at once for communities the RCRC seeks to assist; but also critically the organisation itself. Whilst VCAs are recognised as holding significant value in fostering iterative learning at community level, their significance in contributing to learning from an organisational perspective is unclear. The study is rooted in considering the latter a problematic gap requiring further elucidation, particularly considering evidenced gaps also existing in the humanitarian sector regarding practical operationalisation of organisational learning (OL).

The study specifically addresses the Enhanced VCA (EVCA) launched in 2019 following a VCA enhancement process started in 2015 seeking to address enduring gaps in its utilisation. Its timely nature, practically occurring in real-time, was a key advantage of the research, which was able to build upon descriptions of prior VCA utilisation; while also enquiring on informants' newly acquired understanding of the enhanced methodology.

Hence, two research questions were posed: firstly, prior and current VCA utilisation by the case study NSs was investigated, built upon which, the second question sought to explore "under which conditions the enhanced VCA methodology can contribute to OL for resilience building".

Resilience, OL and VCAs are connected through the systemic perspective required to pursue their achievement. Multi-level perspectives are most appropriate, even critically necessary in decision-making processes for resilience. The study's conceptual framework builds on complex adaptive systems theory, in seeking to account for evidenced systemic interdependence within and across the processes under consideration.

The study took place within the specific context of the RCRC movement in the Caribbean region, involving four National Societies (NSs) which act as the country-level operational arms of the global organisation. The research was possible through collaboration with the RCRC Climate Centre and CADRIM, the study's research topic was itself originally grounded in practical exposure of the researcher to the organisation.

Primary data was collected by conducting 17 interviews with a specific sample of informants across the four NS cases, complemented with 6 interviews involving informants from the regional (Panama) and global HQ (Geneva) offices. Document analysis was used as a secondary source of data collection.

The study approached the analytical stage of the research using the Motives, Means and Opportunities (MMO) framework to ground its analytical endeavor. The MMO framework proved especially useful in revealing interdependencies between components.

The findings showed a large variation in how VCAs are currently being utilised related back to the role of the respondents and their leadership responsibilities and, more importantly, the lack of internal focus in their utilisation.

Findings further indicated that whether and the extent to which EVCA may contribute to OL for resilience building is contingent upon the interplay of motives, means and opportunities (MMO) present at once within the NS system and the broader RCRC network. Crucial to potential EVCA contribution to OL is consideration of sub-optimisation risk.

Literature on utilisation of risk assessments or OL has, to the best of our knowledge, so far not explicitly approached the topic in a manner which highlights the significance of the MMO components' interplay and intersections. This study does not claim to deliver revolutionary findings, nor previously unknown factors essential for enabling OL in this sector; its contribution is nevertheless deemed valuable for advancing understanding of the complexities at play.

Whilst the contextual nature of findings, limited to a small sample of both informants and NSs and cannot be deemed representative of either the Caribbean region, nor of the RCRC as a whole, it is hoped some aspects of this study may reinforce impetus for enquiry on the topic. While clearly not a panacea, the use of the MMO Framework provided insights into the interdependent components the study findings suggest the topic could be worth exploring in further depth.

Acknowledgments

The past years at the Division for Risk Management and Societal Safety have been nothing short of extraordinary. I am thankful for the dedication, passion and unconditional support of all the professors and members of the faculty who encouraged and guided me every step of the way.

Phu, my gratitude for your supervision and support goes beyond what can be put into words, thank you for your constant encouragements, patience and flexibility.

Magnus and Mo, thank you for going above and beyond always, learning from you has been an honour, and your empowering mentorship will stay with me well after leaving Lund.

Misse and Jenny, thank you for your availability and advice.

Per, your work was an inspiration for this research from the outset, and your support is what ultimately led to the project's fruition, thank you.

My most heartfelt thanks goes to everyone from the Red Cross Red Crescent who contributed to this thesis directly or indirectly. Thank you in particular to the participants from the *Suriname, SVG, SKN, Belize National Societies and the IFRC* for your availability and for sharing your knowledge.

Thank you to the *RCRC Climate Centre, CADRIM* and the *CCST* for making this research possible, through a collaboration which I hope enabled mutual spaces of learning. *Reynette and Janot*, thank you for believing in me and for being precious examples of leadership.

I have been inspired and humbled from my time engaging with RCRC humanitarians, at all levels and across continents the past years, whether volunteers in the field, members of NSs boards, or at regional level offices; thank you to all of the individuals who by their commitment to the values and goals of the RCRC, embody the meaning of resilience and convinced me that through the power of humanity, moving mountains may be possible.

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Acronyms

CADRRIM: Caribbean Disaster Risk Management Reference Centre of the Red Cross

CAS: Complex adaptive systems

CBDRR: Community-based disaster risk reduction

CCA: Climate change adaptation

CD: Capacity development

CUDA: Complex, Uncertain, Dynamic, Ambiguous

DG: Director general

DRR: Disaster risk reduction

DRM: Disaster risk management

DRMCCA: Disaster risk management and climate change adaptation

EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment

EVCA: Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment

HQ: Headquarters

HR: Human Resources

IA: Impact Assessment

IFRC: International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent

IM: Information management

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

KM: Knowledge Management

M&E: Monitoring & evaluation

MMO: Motive, Means, Opportunities

NS: National Society of the RCRC

NSD: National Society Development

OL: Organisational Learning

VCA: Vulnerability and capacity assessment

RCRC: Red Cross Red Crescent

SEA: Strategic Environmental Assessment

SES: Social-ecological systems

SKN: St Kitts and Nevis

SVG: St Vincent and the Grenadines

ToT: Training of Trainers

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1 INTRODUCTION

The intricate nexus causing climate change and vulnerability to its impact, combined with inherent uncertainty regarding the future, constitute the most critical global challenges today (Prins & Rayner, 2007, p. 974). Actors at all levels in all sectors face a dual imperative to mitigate and respond to current risks while also adapting to long-term predicted conditions (Becker, 2014). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) deems a resilient future contingent upon iterative learning and adaptive management fostering transformational changes to risk management and resilience-building processes (2012, pp. 53 - 467). Learning crucially determines our ability to adapt to deviations and act creatively in complex situations (Brinkerhoff, 2018).

Organisational learning (OL) is an established factor of adaptive capacity (Diduck, 2010) within social-ecological systems (SES). Improving the OL capacity of organisations in the humanitarian, development or non-for-profit sectors with missions centred on increasing the resilience of vulnerable groups is an urgent and complex need in the face of emerging risks (Kontinen, 2018). However, many challenges have inhibited their ability to improve services in alignment with their ethical mandates, putting at risk both the communities they seek to assist and the organisations themselves (Gibson, 2019).

Community-led participatory risk assessments such as Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCAs) have increasingly been used to ensure community needs shape interventions (Kontinen, 2018). Despite a decades-long legacy, understanding their potential utility for OL remains scarce due to their application being limited to a community-based learning perspective. Such narrow scope on a widely applied methodology is a missed opportunity to “further practical operationalisation of OL in the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) sector” (Twigg & Steiner, 2002, p. 478). This study of the IFRC’s newly released enhanced VCA (EVCA) methodology addresses the latter by exploring its potential to contribute to OL, and in turn, to resilience.

1.1 Study context and case

The Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) is the largest humanitarian network¹ globally.

¹ The RCRC is considered a network rather than an INGO due to its complex composition of the International Committee of RCRC (ICRC), the International Federation of RCRC (IFRC) and National Societies: the RCRC’s country-level operational arms. The study focuses on the latter two.

Its mission to assist those most in need is actioned through an estimated 15 million volunteers across 191 National Societies (NSs). Since first adopted “for NSs to keep their programs relevant to ever-changing needs” (IFRC, 1999, p. 16), VCAs have been the most used method to foster community resilience across the RCRC (Morinière & Turnbull, 2016).

Notwithstanding their experiential value offering seemingly significant potential to contribute to OL, their underuse has instead been qualified at NS-level as “failing to inform programmes” (Cannon & Kirbyshire, 2011, p. 53).

In 2015, a global review² found that top-down learning transmission across the RCRC system could risk impeding the fulfilment of its demand-driven mission. The enhanced VCA (EVCA) launched in 2019 results from the VCA enhancement process started in 2015, seeking to address enduring gaps in its utilisation (Annex 5).

1.2 Research scope, questions, and study overview

This research seeks to explore the potential value of EVCA in contributing to OL from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The scope is primarily focused on a multi-case study of VCA utilisation in four Caribbean NSs to answer the following research questions:

- 1: *In what ways are VCAs utilised in Caribbean NSs?*
- 2: *Under which conditions can EVCAs contribute to OL for resilience building?*

Finding out how Caribbean NSs utilise VCAs provides insights into the methodology and the context of its application. The factors affecting EVCAs’ potential contribution to OL are drawn from NS members’ and IFRC informants’ responses combined with an analysis of global guidelines.

Following this, **Chapter 2** lays the conceptual foundation, connecting resilience, OL and VCAs. **Chapter 3** presents the case study approach, research context, data collection and analysis process, as well as reflections on limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 describes Findings according to each of the above-mentioned research questions.

Chapter 5 Discussion draws from the two latter sections to discuss findings’ implications, also reflecting on recommendations, further research needs and study limitations.

Chapter 6 concludes and summarises the main research findings and limitations of this study.

² <https://www.ifrc.org/get-involved/volunteer-us/global-volunteering-alliance>

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter conceptualises resilience, Organisational Learning (OL) and Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) based on an interdisciplinary literature review conducted to clarify interconnections between them.

2.1 Resilience

Based initially on Hollings' socio-ecological systems (SES) perspective of resilience as “the maintenance of structure and functioning of complex systems that undergo disturbance” (Tschakert & Dietrich, 2010, p. 4), resilience represents a spectrum of conceptual framings and definitions, whose number and scope continue to evolve today (Alexander, 2013).

Increasingly complex, uncertain, dynamic, and ambiguous (CUDA) conditions, combined with mainstreaming of DRM and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), have resulted in evolution beyond the original meaning of “bouncing back” to “bouncing forward” (Coetzee et al., 2016; Manyena et al., 2011). Hence, resilience is also increasingly recognised as intrinsically linked to “adaptive capacity” (Manyena, 2014), itself rooted in “reflexive learning at the core of interventions” (Harvey et al., 2017, p. 15). However, learning to foster resilience remains “a normative goal” for which much is yet to be understood (Reed & Abernethy, 2018, p. 171).

Resilience at one level is at once affected by and affecting other levels, constantly negotiated (Harris et al., 2018) across time and space. Complex cross-scale interactions influence the root causes of vulnerability and risk, as well as the outcomes of initiatives seeking to address them (Cash et al., 2006). Becker’s resilience definition (Figure 1) depicts human-environment systems’ nexus of interdependent abilities “to anticipate, recognise, adapt to and learn from variations, changes, disturbances disruptions and disasters that may cause harm to what human beings value” (2014, p. 154).

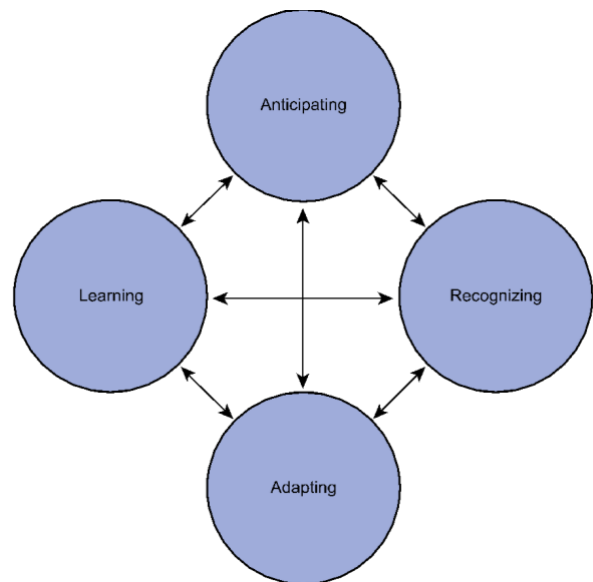


Figure 1 The nexus of fundamental abilities for resilience according to Becker (2014)

Community resilience is the IFRC's institutional priority (IFRC, 2017, p. 6). The Framework for Community Resilience lays the foundation of its programmes, projects, interventions, and actions globally (IFRC, 2014a, p. 5). Whilst not included in the IFRC's resilience³ definition, *learning* is an integral part of the guidance to NSs for operationalising the Framework. Indeed, the Roadmap for Community Resilience (IFRC, 2016) emphasises participatory learning-by-doing throughout each of its four stages, Stage 2 and 3 of which entail VCAs, and Stage 4 focuses explicitly on learning (Figure 2).

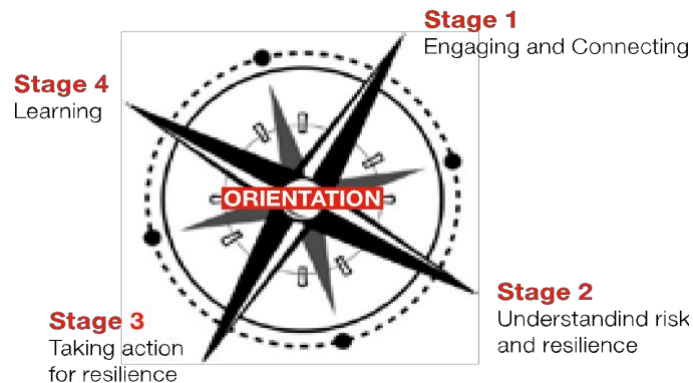


Figure 2 Stages for community resilience building
(Source: IFRC, 2016:13)

The IFRC's resilience-building approach is embedded in the roadmap's six landmarks (Figure 3).

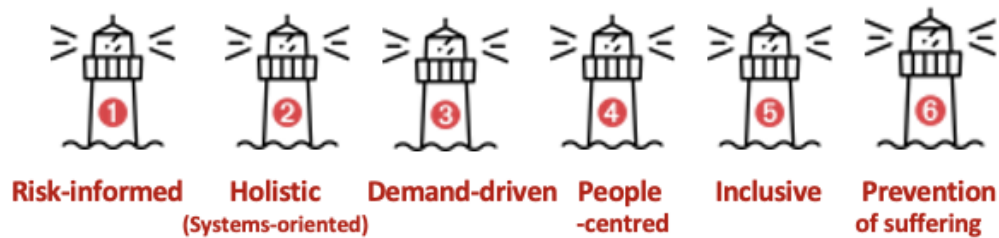


Figure 3 Landmarks for community resilience building
(Source: IFRC, 2016:13)

2.2 Organisational Learning

Similarly to resilience, OL is a multi-disciplinary concept grounded in numerous definitions across traditions. While the necessity for embedding OL at all organisational levels is now established, mechanisms to foster such endeavour remain disputed (Basten & Haamann, 2018)⁴.

³ "Ability of individuals, communities, organisations or countries exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from effects of shocks without compromising their long-term prospects" (IFRC, 2014: 6).

⁴ E.g., Enduring terminological ambiguity (Wang & Ahmed, 2003); lack of integrated OL framework operationalisation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2011); gaps in the applicability of material from for-profit to not-for-profit sectors (Van Brabant, 1997).

Depending on organisational needs and objectives, different tools and approaches are adequate (Pawlowsky, 2001; Ramalingam, 2006). In the not-for-profit sector, OL has been equated with knowledge management (KM)⁵ and tended to focus on outcome-oriented approaches (Britton, 2002; Tafere, 2014). This study approaches OL as “much more than a matter of making information available” (Twigg & Steiner, 2002, p. 478), not only considering *what* an organisation knows -the product-, but also *how* it learns -the process- (McGill et al., 1992, p. 10).

To contribute to resilience-building efforts, OL should fulfil three essential purposes; enabling organisations’ adaptation to their environment, learning from their people and contributing to the learning of the broader context of which they are a part (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 4). Accordingly, it must entail an ongoing, dynamic process “covering all their efforts to absorb, understand and respond to the world around them” (Chetley & Vincent, 2003, p. 5).

1. Humanity 2. Impartiality 3. Neutrality 4. Independence 5. Voluntary service 6. Unity 7. Universality

Figure 4 RCRC Seven Fundamental Principles

Through their auxiliary role, NSs are expected to respond to needs, serving “as a link between communities and decision-makers” (IFRC, 2017, p. 20). OL is considered “central to NSs adapting and evolving to meet changing conditions” and defined in the NS Development (NSD) Framework as NSs’ “ability to share and analyse experience, and for leadership to convert this analysis systematically into useful contributions to NSD” (IFRC, 2013, p. 14)

Considering such organisational context, OL is thus framed based on Britton’s definition as an organisation’s: “intentional use of learning processes at individual, group and system level to continuously transform in a direction increasingly satisfying to its stakeholders” (2005, p. 8).

For OL to align with the organisational mission and mandate, its very definition must be based on the principles, values and methods guiding its work (Guijt, 2010; Woodhill, 2008). Hence, OL here entails IFRC pursuing its community resilience mandate through an approach guided by the landmarks and Fundamental Principles (Figure 3, 4).

The study thus combines the framings of OL (Britton, 2005) and resilience (Becker, 2014), defining *OL for resilience building* as:

“OL increasing the organisational ability to recognise, anticipate, adapt and learn to build communities’ resilience”.

⁵ Here defined as “managing what we know” and problematised based on evidence it can impede learning (Chiva et al., 2018).

2.3 Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA)

The VCA methodology's relevance to both DRM (Pelling, 2007) and CCA (van Aalst et al., 2008) as a community-led assessment and local decision-support tool is established in the literature. Engagement in the iterative learning process enhances participants' understanding of changes, enabling communities' informed decision-making (Tschakert et al., 2013, p. 344).

Aside from Davis et al.'s review stating, "organisations conducting VCA learn about themselves" (2004, p. 12) through reflection on their role during involvement, VCAs have not been explicitly examined in relation to OL.

Instead, enduring gaps related to the methodology's contribution have been highlighted, most of which being the enhancement process's very mission to address. However, both the IFRC's VCA review and enhancement process have been problematised as based on a deficit model that "repeatedly identifies problems rooted in structural impediments" yet still "fails to address systemic obstacles causing persistent failures" (Tozier de la Poterie, 2017, pp. 208 – 221). The latter entails a risk of EVCA sub-optimisation⁶: the enhanced methodology may not trigger enhanced utility nor utilisation, justifying the study.

Accordingly, applying a systemic approach drawing from complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory to consider unpredictable "dynamics and non-linear interdependencies between all parts in complex systems of factors determining risk" (Hollnagel, 2006, pp. 14-17) and processes to address them is essential here. The importance of considering multiple administrative levels highlighted by Becker (2012) also informs the framing of all three concepts under study here.

While empirical research on the OL value of community-based risk assessments is limited (Pelling, 2007), it is extensive on impact assessments (IA) or strategic environmental assessments (SEA), which inherently share similar characteristics to VCAs (Miller & Bowen, 2013, p. 90). Hence, the study builds on such previous work, which framed assessments as collaborative learning processes (Saarikoski, 2000), platforms (Sinclair et al., 2008) and catalysts of social, experiential, and transformative learning (Armitage et al., 2010; da Silva et al., 2013).

⁶ "a situation where a change in one factor does not generate the desired outcome in the system as the factor or the desired outcome are dependent on other factors that are not changed or even counterbalance the intended change" (Becker, 2009: 15)

Resilience, OL, and risk assessments within SES link to issues of power, inclusion, and justice (Cutter, 2016; Ziervogel et al., 2017; Dewulf et al., 2019). Since initiatives with a strictly local-level focus fail to consider established governance systems beyond community scale (Dodman & Mitlin, 2013, p. 651), decision-making for resilience requires multi-stakeholder engagement at and across all levels (Cruz et al., 2018, p. 242), particularly cross-scale micro and macro interactions (Holdschlag & Ratter, 2016). Hence, while recognising drawing boundaries entails analytical sacrifices, this study draws on OL and resilience literature which distinguishes between micro, meso and macro levels whilst also considering

EVCAs are thus considered experiential mediums “from”, “through”, and “based on” which to foster OL (Jha-Thakur et al., 2009), with NSs acting as the meso-level bridge between micro (communities) and macro (IFRC) levels (Bergström & Dekker, 2014; Akude, 2014:7).

“To understand a world, you must become part of it while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from” (Patton, 2015, p. 327)

3 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter introduces the research context and rationale for the case study approach, describes the process of qualitative data collection and analysis and concludes by reflecting on ethical considerations, limitations, and mitigating measures.

3.1 Case study approach

The research idea emerged from practical exposure through the researcher’s prior experience with the organisation⁷ shortly before this thesis project. The research was co-designed with the Caribbean Disaster Risk Management Centre (CADRIM) and the RCRC Climate Centre, after participation in the first EVCA Training of Trainers (ToT) globally in Barbados, in June 2019. While acknowledging the debated value of the case study methodological approach in scholarship, it was chosen here based on its evidenced utility to organisational research (Lee et al., 2007) and in developing a nuanced understanding of complex settings (Rowley, 2002).

The research timing permitted investigation of “OL as part of its evolvement in practice”, a success factor in a similar study (Hartmann & Dorée, 2015, p. 349). This insider status was crucial to organisational research demands for at once informal contacts as gatekeepers of support from management and staff for initial access and the legitimacy and trust foundational to interview-based enquiry (Bryman, 2013). The researcher's participation in the ToT enabled the development of an “advanced form of understanding” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 236) in the context and topic of enquiry before data collection, which took place shortly after the ToT in July 2019.

The four participating National Societies - Belize, Suriname, St Kitts and Nevis (SKN) and St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) Red Cross- constitute a heterogeneous sample of distinct size and capacities. These national-level perspectives were complemented with those of key IFRC informants from regional and HQ levels and document analysis of IFRC guidelines.

⁷ Internship with Resilience Programme of IFRC CCST- English-speaking Caribbean and Suriname in Trinidad and Tobago (2018)

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary empirical data collection method chosen to enable detailed inquiry of complex issues (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The seventeen NS informants' interviews across four NS cases were supplemented with six key IFRC leadership informants, contextualising the Movement's vision and useful for triangulation.

Participation in the EVCA ToT mentioned above was the primary inclusion criteria for selecting NS case studies. An introductory email from CADRIM initiated contact with NS leadership. The second inclusion criteria entailed a clear expression of interest by leadership and their approval to contact NS staff and volunteers.

Informants' selection followed a purposive sampling strategy based on their respective involvement (Robinson, 2014) at various stages and levels of the VCA management structure (Figure 5) described in the step-by-step training guide (IFRC, 2009).

The objective was to interview at least one stakeholder per specified category to represent different perspectives, valuing each for their unique contribution (Mason, 2002) since each level holds "different roles and responsibilities as do the relationships between each level" (IFRC, 2007: 27).

Key informants identified were a member of the board, leadership, technical or operational management and volunteer. Informant inclusion criteria and case sample size were adjusted according to access and emerging findings (Silverman, 2013). However, the in-depth study of information-rich cases was prioritised over a large sample (Patton, 2015).

While the original intent was to have five cases, two of the NSs initially contacted did not fulfil the secondary inclusion criteria, reducing the sample to three cases. An additional case was included (SKN) at a later stage, but interviews for all informant categories could not be conducted.

Drawing on Vinke-de Kruijf & Pahl-Wostl's (2016, p. 243) multi-level learning approach, Figure 6 describes stakeholders involved in VCA processes at different levels.

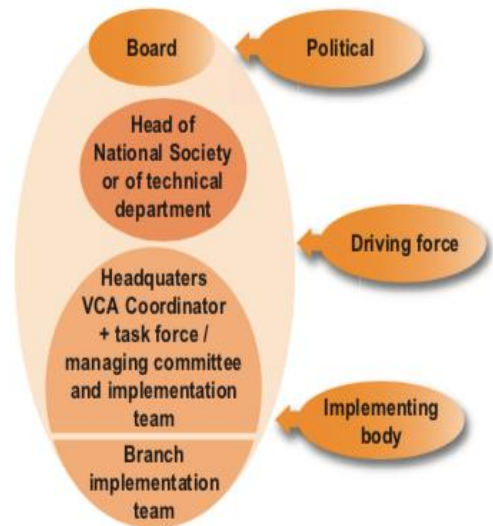


Figure 5 NS-level VCA Management Structure

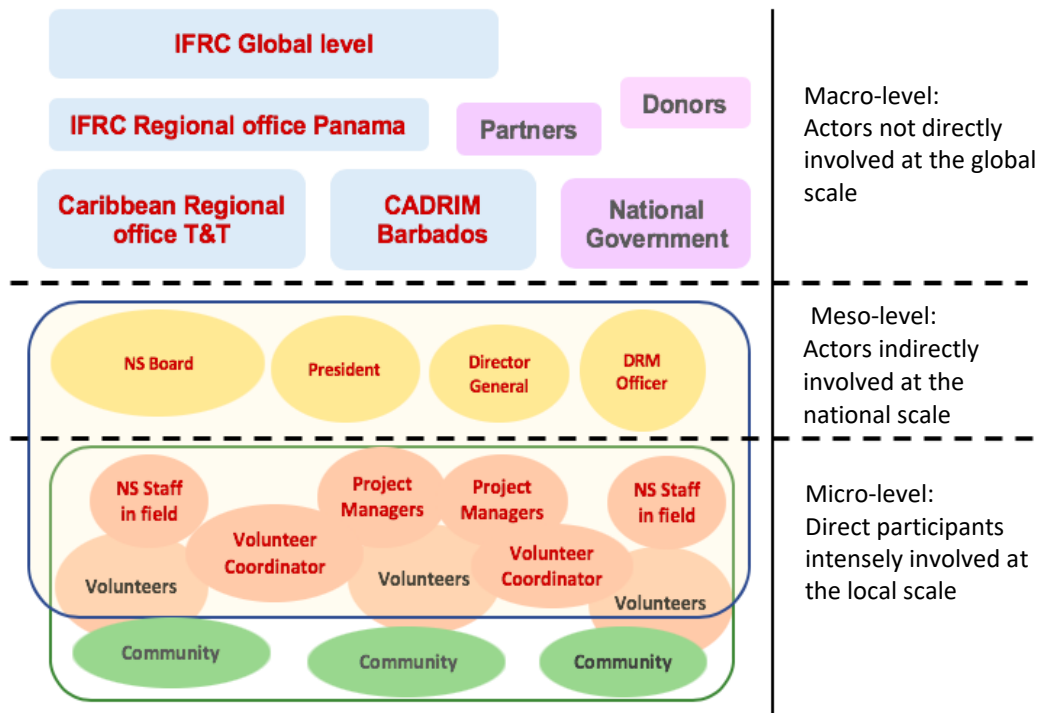


Figure 6 Learning agents at micro, meso and macro levels in the study
 (Source: Adapted from Vinke-de Kruijf & Pahl-Wostl (2016:243) by author)

The macro-level includes national, regional and global-level actors - both internal (blue/red) and external (purple) to RCRC - governments, partners and donors.

The meso-level is here conceived as NS “leadership” (persons in decision-making, strategic and operational management positions).

The micro-level includes NS staff and volunteers (often community members - act as a bridge between the community and NS) directly involved in VCA and communities as contributors and drivers of the EVCA process - even if not NS members per se. Hence, NS stakeholders appear across levels within the blue circle and those directly involved in field-level VCA processes in the green circle. Most of the empirical data were collected from interviews with micro and meso-level stakeholders, as featured in the blue circle.

A short face-to-face interview during the ToT in Barbados permitted to pilot the preliminary interview guide. Its assessment, according to the checklist proposed by Chadwick et al. (1984), led to a simplification of conceptual terms and reordering of questions' sequence.

The interview guides were adapted depending on the informants' roles, keeping flexibility and space for emerging topics (Annex 2). The interview guide, initially planned for a maximum duration of 25 minutes, required real-time adjustments to accommodate for the interviews' actual lengths, which ranged between 15 and 71 minutes (Table 1).

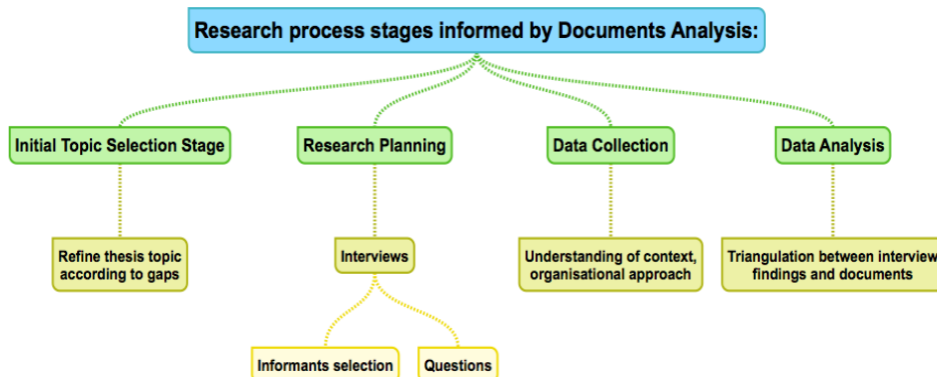
NS	Position	Minutes	Organisation	DPT/ Position	Level	Minutes
Belize	DG	37	IFRC	REA, Director	HQ	67
	Project Manager	30		PSK Digital lead	HQ	15
	Volunteer	32		NSD Dir	HQ	15
	Project Manager	48		NSD	Reg.	43
St Kitts and Nevis	President	53		Data literacy lead	HQ	15
	DG	23		NSD	HQ	25
	DRM Officer	25				
St Vincent and the Grenadines	President	21				
	DRM Officer	37				
	Field Coord / IT	71				
	Project Coord	27				
	Youth Coord.	27				
Suriname	Vol. man	32				
	DG	41				
	DRM Officer	60				
	Project Manager	36				
	Volunteer coord.	28				

Table 1 NS and IFRC Informants overview (Interviews conducted in Summer 2019)

3.2.2 Document analysis

The empirical data collected from interviews were complemented with a systematic analysis of IFRC documents feeding into all stages of the research process. As described in Figure 7 below, it provided the initial grounding to the research, informed the framing of the overall study scope, and then guided the research design (selection of NS as case studies, defining key informants), interview planning and analysis by permitting to triangulate interview data.

Figure 7 Research stages informed by Documents Analysis (Source: Author)



Document selection first “determined their existence and accessibility” (Bowen, 2009, p.12) by searching for key terms – VCA, Learn*, Resilience- in several IFRC databases (Annex 3). Word search and frequency queries across all documents uploaded to the data analysis software NVivo provided an overview of learning mentions to establish the documents’ usefulness. Sometimes used to encompass ‘learning’, ‘knowledge’ was added to the list of key terms. Documents’ thematic and geographic focus, combined with key terms’ coverage percentage, determined the final document selection for detailed analysis (Annex 3).

3.3 Data Analysis

During data collection, simultaneous analysis of complete interview transcriptions transferred to NVivo after each interview informed subsequent interviews and ‘real-time judgement’ (Robinson, 2014) regarding saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

After finalising data collection, individual cases were created in NVivo for NSs and informants; each informant type was assigned to a level (micro, meso or macro). Both selected documents and interviews were further analysed through a mix of deductive and inductive thematic queries. Case comparisons combined with ‘see also links’ queries between transcripts and documents permitted analysis of patterns between cases and interconnected themes. The selection of an analytical framework refined the scope and strengthened analytical rigour.

3.3.1 Motive, Means and Opportunity Framework

The MMO framework⁸, adapted here from Britton's MMO for OL in NGOs (2005), provided the systemic lens key to this study while supporting considerations of micro, meso and macro connections thanks to its evidenced utility for cross-level research (Shin et al., 2018).

Keeping in mind the study's explorative nature calling for a relatively broad initial approach, Figure 8 considers “all three of its constituent elements” as interdependently determining OL potential (Hong & Gajendran, 2018, p. 800). The second research question was tackled through analysis of primary and secondary data using the framework to assess whether the MMO exist for EVCA to contribute to OL at the individual, group, and organisational levels.

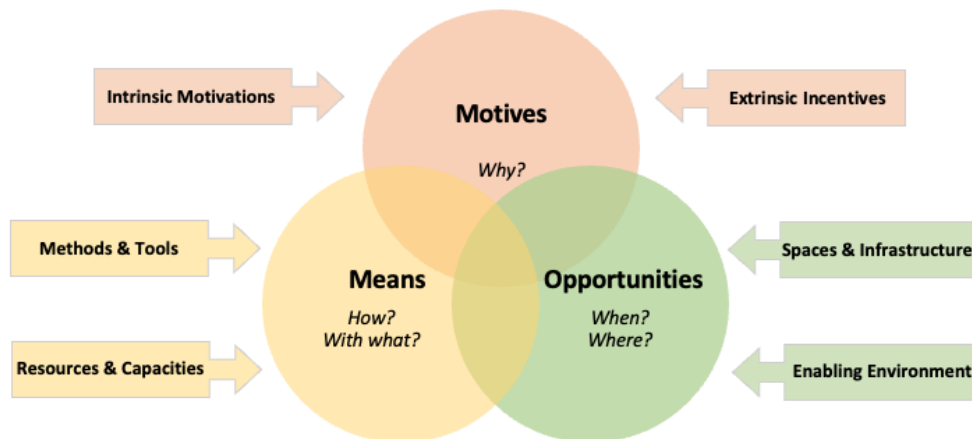


Figure 8 Motives, Means and Opportunities (MMO) Framework

(Source: Author)

⁸ It is also commonly termed, MOA or AMO, ability replacing means. Widely used Framework in organisational performance and psychology research with origins traced back to Blumberg & Pringle (1982), Appelbaum et al., (2000) and Boudreau et al., (2003).

The **Motives** component is understood as fostering a compelling reason to learn through a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting perceived value and willingness to learn (Moorhead & Griffin, 2008). The drivers of *why* extend to both voluntary (wanting to) and imposed (having to).

The **Means** relate to “instruments available to carry out a task” (Pendse, 2012, p.272), including tools, policies, guidance, and processes on the one hand (Jacopino, 2019) and financial and human resources on the other (Britton, 2005) determining OL ability.

The **Opportunities** for OL entail “the extent to which learning occurs as well as whether it can be acted on” (Valters, 2016, p. 22). It is determined by the “space to leverage the means for learning” (Britton & Serrat, 2013, p. 28) as influenced by contextual factors such as the culture underpinning practices and relationships of involved actors, among others, forming the “enabling environment” (McKendall & Wagner, 1997, p. 626).

3.4 Ethical considerations and limitations

The advantage of conducting the research “in real-time” as the EVCA was first deployed and attending the first global ToT also entailed resulting difficulties. Conducting all interviews virtually permitted the participation of actors in multiple, distant geographic locations (McIntosh & Morse, 2015) but also posed technical challenges such as unreliable Wi-Fi quality requiring rescheduling or cancellation of several interviews altogether.

Positionality was particularly considered due to the researcher’s prior familiarity and engagement during the EVCA process, combined with the formalised facilitation of access. The study design, analysis and results were influenced by such involvement with subjectivity implications on participants' contribution and data analysis (Letherby et al., 2013). Hence, researcher objectivity and independence were key concerns to this study and the involvement in the ToT, whilst having informed the researcher’s understanding, was distinct from the research.

The interviews’ length, scope and depth varied widely, resulting in an unequal contribution between informants, necessitating caution to ensure representation of each perspective. The cross-contextual approach (Mason, 2002) and heterogeneous cases offered a rich picture for analytical generalisation, despite it not being the study’s objective (Yin, 2009). However, restricting case selection to NSs involved in the ToT overlooked NSs having potentially benefitted most from participating and introduced a further bias in the region’s representation.

The influence on results of deliberately keeping interview questions broad rather than precisely focused on learning; as well as framing learning based on Britton's MMO (2005) approach, must also be noted for their effect on the study's validity and contribution, though it is difficult to quantify the extent to which having used another conceptual frame or questions would have altered findings.

Often neglected in organisational research, the topic's relevance and "beneficence"- explicitly considering and addressing participants' needs, how it can benefit them and minimising harm- were carefully considered (Lindorff, 2007). Provision of an indicative list of themes and questions alongside a brief overview of research rationale, objectives and intended outcomes ahead of interviews sought to ensure clarity and transparency with participants.

Consent was received for recording, transcribing, and quoting, respectively, in writing via the pre-interview form or alternatively verbally at the outset. Seeking to align with the IFRC's Code of Conduct⁹ and Fundamental Principles, the pre-interview form invited informants to specify any concerns or request adjustments (See Annex 2). Non-English speakers provided with the option to answer questions in their mother tongues still chose to conduct the full interview in English.¹⁰

Drawing on a mix of primary and secondary data sources provided the triangulation necessary to assess the findings' legitimacy (Creswell & Cresswell, 2017). The study design sought to balance sample variety and detailed enquiry to ensure increased rigour (Gentles et al., 2015).

⁹ <https://www.ifrc.org/document/staff-code-conduct>

¹⁰ Dutch (Suriname RC), Spanish (IFRC Panama Regional office), French (Geneva HQ) are the researcher's mother tongues.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings according to the two research questions. Firstly, section 4.1 addresses how VCAs have been utilised by the case study NSs based on the 17 NS-informant interviews. Section 4.2 subsequently unpacks potential EVCA utilisation for OL according to the MMO framework based on the combined analysis of the 23 interviews and documents.

4.1 VCA utilisation in the case study NSs

Findings regarding case study NSs' VCAs utilisation entail differences between process-oriented engagement at micro-level and output-oriented uses at meso-level, then gaps in potential versus actual VCA use and ensuing links with EVCA.

NS Informants' VCA experience

From the outset of interviews, descriptions of VCA all distinguished between engagement in the VCA *process* itself and *utilisation of outcomes* resulting from it, namely VCA reports and plans of action. Correlating with informants' VCA experiences, implicit distinction entailed distinctive terms: 'tool', 'methodology', 'process' or 'reports'. Two instances explicitly nuanced "Do you mean the reports or the methodology?" (Informant 7); or explaining actors involved in VCA "benefit from the process and information in reports" (Informant 10).

Prior VCA participation			VCA report consultation		
Response	Nr	%	Response	Nr	%
Yes	6/17	35	Yes	9/17	53
Yes, during ToT	7/17	41	Yes, during ToT	6/17	35
No	4/17	24	No	2/17	12

Table 2 NS Informants having taken part in a VCA process and consulted VCA reports

Differences in informants' VCA familiarity *within* NSs mainly was linked to years of NS involvement and seniority. Meso-level informants had all consulted reports but did not all participate in the process, while micro-level informants had not all consulted reports. Experience levels also differed *among* NSs since more significant numbers of VCAs have been conducted, more recently in Belize and Suriname than in SVG and SKN. While 76% of informants had previously taken part in a VCA process, the four who had not were new staff who joined after their NS' last VCA (3/4), one of whose projects "did not conduct any VCA because the proposal did not include it" (Informant 15). VCA report consultation was higher than participation in a process, with 88% of informants having consulted VCA reports. The two negative answers were from Informants 11 and 15, who verbally asked NS staff about reports rather than consulting any themselves.

Process-oriented engagement at micro-level

From a micro-level perspective, **the VCA process** was most often described as an engagement and empowerment tool used as connectors for both intra-micro-level community and inter-micro and meso-level through which NSs put communities first. As Informant 9 explained, “when we work with communities, sometimes we don’t listen and tend to want to tell them what to do: I think the VCA is to help us understand what communities want”.

The interaction between communities, RC staff and volunteers during the various stages of the VCA process offers NSs opportunities to understand communities’ perspectives while also providing them with fact-checked information. Informant 10 emphasised mutual learning, describing that “the VCA is a tool for bringing people together...It brings out things you’d never expect, so communities get to learn, we get to learn: it benefits everyone after all”.

VCA training also increases community ownership and empowerment through capacity building of volunteers and participants in the process “because they acquire knowledge they didn’t have before and feel more comfortable imparting information to outsiders” (Informant 5). Although not explicitly referring to those, NS informants’ descriptions of VCA utilisation align with the key RCRC services to communities described in the Roadmap for Community Resilience guideline document – “accompanying, enabling and connecting” (IFRC, 2016, p.16).

Output-oriented uses at meso-level

At the meso-level, half of the interviews depicted VCA reports as “guidance documents” providing baseline information to inform project activities, through which NSs “can be directed to areas we should add to our work, redesign or by advocating through it for our communities” (Informant 1).

The information compiled in VCA reports feeds into advocacy as reports are built upon to make a case for a particular investment within a community, thus “convincing” donors. The high level of interest from national actors in the utility of VCA information was noted by half of the NS informants, one of whom (Informant 10) explained:

“While the VCA was a tool made mainly for community assessment, the information collected can influence national policies, and I think it has because different ministries and CSO have approached us for VCA reports.”

Across the four cases, such consideration by government bodies was directly attributed to the Red Cross's ability to collect information that other stakeholders cannot, helping to fill gaps in otherwise missing information at the national level about vulnerable groups (Informant 2):

"Whenever they're trying to get community data, a lot of government departments realise many are hesitant to give them information perceived as sensitive, but if we ask for similar information with our Red Cross uniform, we're likely to get it."

VCA's have also served to complement other methodologies during collaborations between NSs and other stakeholders at the regional level, such as in this example described by Informant 6:

"The tool is very important; we're doing projects with UNDP, and VCA is actually more complete, speaks to a lot of issues UNDP or GEF would not speak to"

NSs also use VCA processes "to identify stakeholders the NS would like to collaborate with" both "within a particular project" as well as "beyond the life of a project" (Informant 15). Such identification can occur at different stages of the process, which determines the nature of the ensuing collaboration between the NS and other stakeholders. In one instance, early interaction with a government department showing interest led to the department's staff's training in VCA and conducting fieldwork together.

Potential vs actual VCA use and link with EVCA

Discussions regarding prior VCA utilisation led to most informants implicitly or explicitly discussing how VCA *can, could or should be* used. Consideration of such nuances during analysis revealed gaps between NSs' actual versus potential VCA utilisation. The utility of both VCA process and outputs extending beyond the specific project or communities VCA's are conducted in was the gap most predominantly discussed in interviews, with 12 of 17 informants noting their under-utilisation beyond projects.

VCA's potential utility to inform NS strategic programming versus their limited actual utilisation for such a purpose was reflected upon by a leadership informant (Informant 1):

"I believe VCA reports give you a lot of information not only about communities but about your future work as an NS, improving knowledge and learning at all levels. But I don't know if NSs actually look back on those reports; I think they're very underutilised after the project is done".

Another, Informant 7, asked whether VCA inform NS decision-making, replied: "No, no, no, at the moment, it only informs micro-projects".

All informants deemed both process and outcomes could be further utilised, indicating VCAs have not been sufficiently contributing to the NS' ability to learn nor adapt. Several informants considered the internal utilisation of VCAs needs to be further leveraged, particularly in leveraging their potential to increase synergies across programs. Most problematic aspects of VCAs addressed in interviews aligned with gaps identified in the enhancement study (Figure 9).

1. VCA Analysis not sufficiently strong
2. VCA wrongly perceived as a once-off product, not a process for community empowerment
3. VCA results inadequately standardized to help inform national programming
4. VCA M&E system inconsistent
5. Urban VCA is problematic
6. VCA do not capitalize enough on secondary data
7. Sequencing of VCA process may be challenging
8. VCA quality is inconsistent
9. VCA not perceived as an entry-point for general RCRC community work
10. Climate change not adequately reflected
11. Incomplete contextualization/adaptation of tools to local conditions
12. VCA-produced knowledge and products often get separated from communities.

Figure 9 Gaps of VCA identified in the enhancement study

To summarise, this section finds that VCAs are described, discussed, and used depending on specific aspects of VCA, which entail contrasting types of utilisations between process versus output framings. Ultimately, findings indicate that while the way NSs engage with actors externally through VCAs, such as communities and partners at different levels, does partly constitute utilisation, there is a limited internal focus, and much potential is considered yet to be leveraged by NSs according to informants.

4.2 Conditions for EVCA contribution to OL for resilience building

The following section reports on the analysis of Motives, Means and Opportunities (MMO) for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience. These were explored according to the MMO framework and based on informants' discussions of such conditions covering both VCA and EVCA.

4.2.1 *Motives for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience*

Several self-motivated intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to conduct and learn from EVCA were discussed by NS informants, closely aligning with the previous section on types of VCA utilisation.

Intrinsic motives

Intrinsic motives at various NS levels were rooted in a solid organisational identity described in the National Society Development (NSD) framework as “driven by unmet community needs and joined by volunteers wishing to help others” (IFRC, 2011, p. 3).

Informants’ most predominant source of motivation was prior participation in a VCA process and first-hand experience of their potential impact: “it’s like a miracle” (Informant 10).

Micro-level field staff and volunteers all expressed a keen commitment to fulfilling the organisational mandate according to the RCRC standards. Five micro-level informants linked community ownership and empowerment as both VCA outcomes and prerequisites, constituting the crux of upholding the Fundamental Principles and need-based assistance mission. Informants reflected on the research’s relevance and their resulting interest, such as Informant 9:

“When I saw the questions about VCA [being used by NSs for learning], I smiled because I thought, that is the whole essence of what VCA is about; listening to communities and doing what they require from us, not what we think they want.”

Meso-level motives to learn from VCAs were similarly embedded in organisational values, mainly rooted in the unique modus operandi enabled by VCAs, according to Informant 2:

“Too often, a lot of organisations go into communities and tell them; this is how you must do x, y, z. What we try to do using VCA is not go in and dictate to them.”

Leadership informants’ motives for EVCA to contribute to OL held a strategic focus based on such learning feeding into organisational development as the NSD framework’s document core priority to “continuously maintain and improve” NSs’ work “relevance, quality, reach and sustainability” (IFRC, 2013, p. 14). Hence, VCAs’ utility for NS programming not being fully leveraged also compounded the latter, as explained by Informant 1, in similar terms to other meso-level informants that “VCAs heighten the need for us to remain relevant with our communities because we can only serve them if we improve the way we work” (Informant 1).

Informants’ existing interest in VCA was generally extended to the EVCA, in turn, welcomed: “I like the VCA very much; that’s why I’m very dedicated to the EVCA” (Informant 7). For some, it even created a renewed sense of purpose when perceived as a chance to:

“be in a better position to inform communities of their risks and help with strategies to improve their resilience” (Informant 17).

Conversely, high levels of dedication to the original VCA's legacy made many reluctant to “abandon” VCAs. A project manager newly trained in EVCA noted: “staff and volunteers tend to hold fast to procedures or strategies that were under the original VCA” and described EVCA discussions as having been “*an uphill process*” likely to remain challenging without a mindset change regarding the conventional approach (Informant 12).

Extrinsic incentives

Extrinsic incentives first relate to NSs’ roles as auxiliary to their national government. National stakeholders’ demonstrated interest in NS activities and data collected through the assessments was a majorly agreed upon extrinsic incentive to conduct and learn from it.

NS informants having piloted VCAs with an added ‘gender’ or ‘climate’ lens before the EVCA training cited examples of increased collaboration or even new partnerships with associated government departments as a result (Informants 12, 13). This provided confidence that EVCA similarly would extend NSs’ reach and recognition as partners fulfilling their auxiliary roles to the government. As informant 17 noted, NSs “might be better able to inform many national committees we're part of on what exactly is going on, so without a doubt, help to improve the country's resilience”.

In contrast, VCAs were described as a means to an end in which NSs engage “sometimes just because proposals say they need to” in turn using it “only to extract an issue and fund a micro-project out of it and: Happy! They’re finished” (Informant 7). Safeguarding NSs’ reputation was another significant concern for leadership Informant 4 because “if an NS always implemented projects with success but then things go South, it loses its perfect record, so to speak, so donors might think twice of doing business with you”. Keeping NSs’ image positive was also a national-level concern because of the unique services NSs offer, which are highly dependent on public opinion. A board member (Informant 11) further stressed the vital importance of donor accountability: “we are spending donor's money; we have to spend it well”.

Consequently, this section suggests that micro and meso-level informants have intrinsic motives to conduct and learn from VCAs similarly rooted in RCRC values. The complex nexus of priorities, commitments, and expectations from stakeholders at different levels resulting from combined intrinsic and extrinsic motives could impede NSs’ own ability to leverage VCAs for OL; **Extrinsic incentives** to “conduct” EVCA can indeed be disincentives to “learn” from them.

4.2.2 Means for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience

The means for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience covered below are twofold. On the one hand, the Enhancement of VCA methodology per se; on the other, resources in terms of funding and personnel, specifically for VCA and general NS, not only VCA-specific resources.

Methods and Tools: Enhanced VCA

This section addresses the VCA methodology's Enhancement as a “means” in itself due to its objective of greater VCA utilisation by tackling a variety of components highlighted as requiring improvement in the enhancement study (Annex 5).

The EVCA includes additional steps (Figure 10) for closer integration with the Roadmap for Community Resilience (IFRC, 2019, p. 7), and the guideline describes it as “a learning process and the first step towards encouraging risk reduction actions” (IFRC, 2019, p. 12). However, despite such framing, the guideline focuses almost exclusively on the community’s learning, with no explicit mention of learning for NSs, until the final stage (Level 5, Step 14), and alignment with the roadmap appears to place disproportionate emphasis on the assessment component (Roadmap-Stage 2 and EVCA-level 3). Evolving from a tools-centred to a risk-determinant approach (IFRC, 2018a), the EVCA also provides an **updated toolbox**¹¹ seeking to allow for “more systematically mainstreamed climate, gender and diversity considerations” (IFRC, 2018b, p. 16). Additionally, **report templates**¹² support risk-scoring while standardising and increasing reports’ quality.

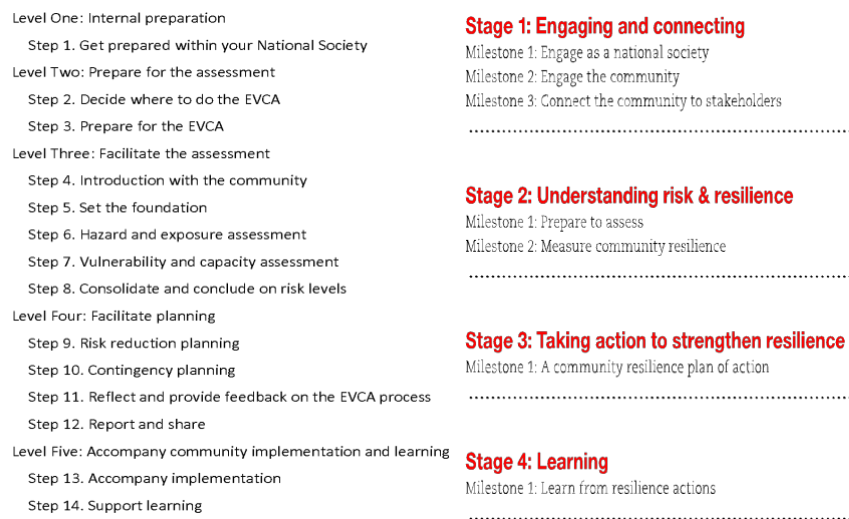


Figure 10 EVCA Process (IFRC, 2019: 4) compared to Roadmap stages (IFRC, 2016: 13)

11 https://968808b7-8899-4715-918e-d8ad58d11e14.filesusr.com/ugd/7baf5b_0a0563a5b107476bae00a364e8864b96.pdf

12 [EVCA Report Template](#)

Despite considering this to be addressing the need for *“a reliable VCA report so the board can make decisions based on it”*, the new approach and template have increased the methodology’s level of complexity and technical skills required from VCA facilitators:

“VCA looks very easy, but it's very difficult because analysis part; so now facilitators are expected to not just be skilled in community work also in hazards and risks, and therefore university-educated.”

Informant 7 further voiced concerns about whether such changes will lead to improvements, deeming the level of VCA utilisation by NS for OL would probably remain: *“the same...because we’re doing VCA the same way we’ve done it before, only with better technology”*.

The last component of the VCA enhancement initiative, **the VCA online repository**¹³, seeks to partially address difficulties related to reports storing with a *“platform to collect and consolidate VCA reports and Plans of Action for information and future reference”* (IFRC, 2018, p. 218)¹⁴.

Several NS informants welcomed the prospect of increased VCA output availability digitally, noting how valuable capturing VCAs on a soft copy is so it can be quickly updated and retrieved (Informants 6, 9). However, a VCA repository reports’¹⁵ search from Caribbean NSs resulted in a fraction of the numbers conducted uploaded: 17 (Belize), 14 (Suriname), 1 (SKN) and 0 (SVG)¹⁶. Concerns predominantly inhibiting NS’s willingness for public report sharing included: respecting confidentiality and privacy of communities; insufficient resources and capacities to dedicate to ensuring quality and reliability of reports; hence, being unable to ensure accuracy of the information contained and implications of publishing potential source of trouble for the NS; and finally, the cost of VCAs and stakeholders believing VCA data should be paid for. These factors highlight the relationship between *“tools”* and their ensuing use.

As the most frequently used tool and activity in the RCRC, VCAs provide iterative learning opportunities to build upon diversified local-level data at movement (macro) level. The EVCA’s critical role in *“determining how to reduce disaster risk most effectively and foster community resilience”* described in the guideline (IFRC, 2019, p. 3), is undermined in practice by NSs’ ability to adapt interventions based on VCA results largely determined by available funding:

13 seeks to address gaps related to use of VCA outcomes in response programming highlighted in the 2018 World Disaster Report

14 highlighting the collective use and impact of the methodology; serving for "NSs to have a historical repository of their work" and "access relevant information for longer-term risk monitoring or situational awareness in case of an emergency"

15 <http://vcarepository.info>

16 Probes on the latter generated discomfort among some NS informants describing challenges in accessing reports even within NSs, three of whom as recently as when ToT attendees were asked to request VCA reports from their NS to upload to the repository.

“In a lot of cases, our hands are tied if what's happening on the ground isn't the donors' focus. If the NS wants to address a localised issue not reflected at regional or global level, we either have to raise funds internally or try to negotiate; but even if allowed, so many restrictions don't make it worth all the stress” (Informant 2)

Ultimately, as informant 17 put it, “even if the IFRC sends good VCA guidelines, it comes down to being flexible enough to implement based on your local situation”.

“If you consult with donors early enough, adjustments should be possible; nothing's set in stone, except when people really stick to the project dossier” (Informant 4)

“We need to empower ourselves a bit more to use EVCAs not just as baselines we have to do as part of our annual work plan because donors ask for it” (Informant 12)

“If we just do things separately, not linking that's why VCAs are important, not only for communities but also for NSs: it'll just be a very costly document.” (Informant 7)

As several informants expressed, the nexus between NSD (and thus OL) and VCA is a relevant topic deserving attention and requiring further discussion. It emerged as a repeated indirect theme mentioned by informants that the mutually relevant aspects of both are insufficiently explicit in both theory (on paper in the guidelines) and in practice at various levels across the Movement. This specific aspect was reflected upon by an IFRC informant relating it to the macro-level conceptual framing as having created confusion:

“In the Federation, most people, if not everyone except for me, tend to use KM and OL almost interchangeably, and they're two very different things” (Informant 19)

Capacities: Human and Financial Resources

Each step and phase of the VCA requires different resources and competences (e.g., community facilitation skills or analysis, networking, advocacy skills), hence entailing an investment of resources during the process, but also before (for training of VCA facilitators and the secondary data collection and analysis stage of VCA, which occurs before the assessment) and after (for report writing, storing, and updating).

The VCA guidance states that the “time and commitment of NS staff and volunteers are the most important resources for VCAs” (IFRC, 2007, p. 43). Funding was a key concern for the case-study NSs, because “VCAs are normally done through projects because our NSs, especially in the Caribbean, are very small and restrained in finances” (Informant 1).

In terms of financial resources, means are insufficient to conduct VCAs processes and facilitators' training as often as NSs wish. Strict project timelines entailed insufficient time for appropriate EVCA process implementation as being: "so pro-project means if the money's done, so is the project" (Informant 11).

Discontinued engagement prevents VCAs' updating and ensuing use, with Informant 12 explaining, "it should be a working document, but we don't have the colon lending to sustainability at the end of a project cycle: often VCAs are printed and left on a shelf".

'No follow-up' was the term most consistently used by NS informants who related this to project timelines creating one-off processes and inhibiting synergies across NS programmes during planning and implementation.

Informants conversely deemed the lack of follow-up and synergies inhibiting cross-fertilisation and further use of VCAs as potentially addressed through leveraging VCA outputs to feed into programming. A volunteer (Informant 17) nuanced this:

"I think it has a lot to do with whether or not the NS is capable of its human and other resources effectively. A part of that is making use of the information they're provided with and incorporating it into an overall strategy; NSs need to get away from doing standalone VCAs, we do a lot of projects which do not tie into an NS strategy".

Informant 5 reflected on enhancing NS programmatic areas such as first aid and DRM based on VCAs, "so when the project's finished, there can be continuity in different areas".

At the same time, VCAs can also create resources. Indeed, VCA processes are linked to capacity building efforts and thus regarded as precious learning opportunities for volunteers and staff alike during associated training. Thus, VCA training enhances volunteers and staff capacities on the one hand, and as found in 4.1 and 4.2.1, reports can be and are used by NSs to advocate for donor investments and funding. Informant 17 described significant potential for further utilisation by NSs "if we can analyse VCA-generated data properly to come up with interesting ways of not just helping communities but also help the NS in itself".

However, VCA reports' storing and dissemination are essential to their potential subsequent use and updating. Unfortunately, fluctuating financial resources impede NSs' ability to fund a dedicated person in charge of IM and managing any digital server system put in place.

The yearly fluctuations in NSs' income and staff number in Figures 11 and 12 certainly provide a quantitative grounding to informants' descriptions of resource-related challenges inhibiting NSs' ability to leverage VCAs for OL.

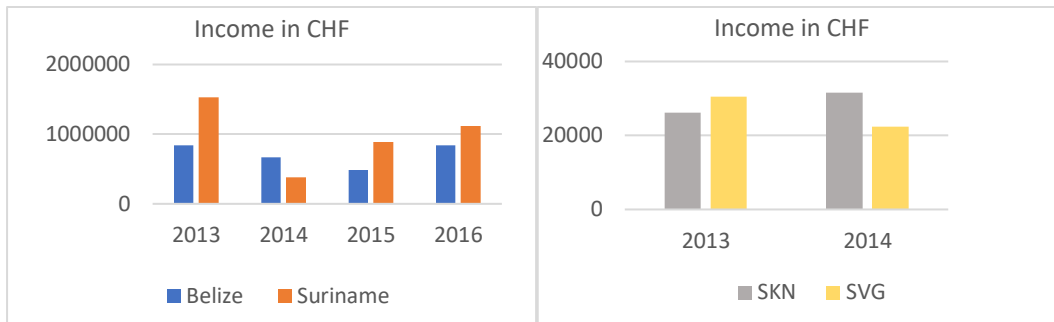


Figure 11 Total income per NS per year¹⁷

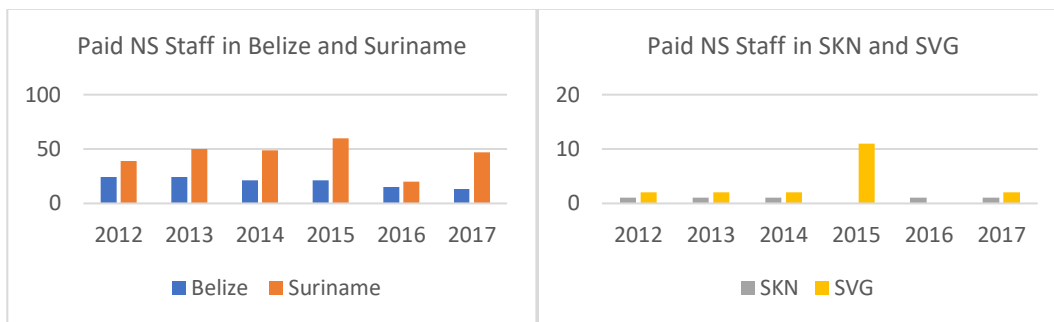


Figure 12 Number of Paid NS Staff per NS per year¹⁸

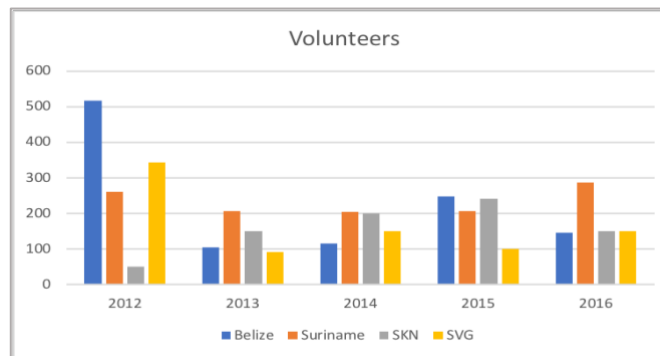


Figure 13 Number of volunteers per NS per year¹⁹

Volunteers are an essential resource for NSs considering the discrepancy in staff to volunteer ratio - expected in volunteer-based organisations – and highly valued NS contributors by all informants. However, their numbers also fluctuate, with volunteer retention challenging across all case studies (Figure 13). Informants' views on reasonable expectations regarding their contribution were split between two somewhat contrasting perspectives.

¹⁷ Total income is defined as the fiscal value of money, material goods and services received by the NS during the fiscal year.

¹⁸ Data retrieved from <http://data.ifrc.org/fdrs/Feb20> incomplete information for SVG and SKN

¹⁹ Number of people volunteering their time: people that have volunteered at least four hours during the annual reporting period

Either considering volunteer's full-time jobs calling for realistic expectations regarding the amount of time they can commit, and nearly half of interviewees deemed volunteers' potential contribution not sufficiently leveraged, even suggesting the latter could be a factor negatively influencing volunteer retention.

Volunteers and staff's high levels of dedication, sense of initiative, relationships with other stakeholders, and utilisation of skills from their professional realm were vital 'means' to NSs, helping to address funding constraints slightly. However, Informant 2 explained two paid staff members stretch their roles in an unsustainable manner leading to significant pressure as "everyone needs to do everything". Another NS leadership informant reflected on the uncertainty and instability of resourcing, limiting chances for long-term planning:

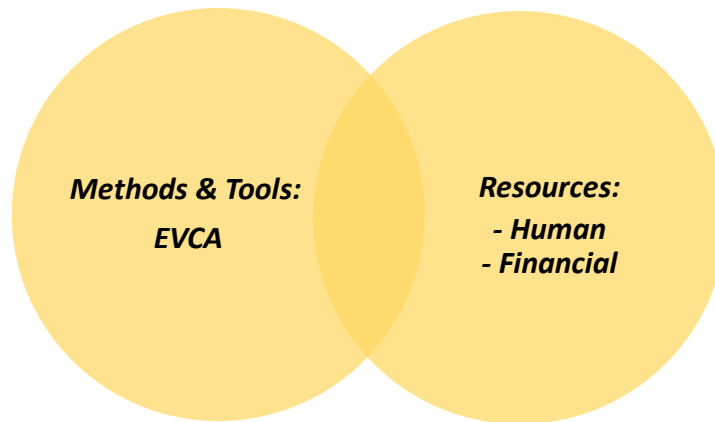
"Now, I must say, financial wise it is a challenge. The activities that I need to focus on is just how to have enough resources to maintain the NS. So, then you don't even get the chance to formulate policy or think of the long-term vision because every day, you know, you're busy filling this gap or pulling out here..." (Informant 4)

Project-tied funding, intertwined with fluctuating human resources, was consistently discussed by all NS informants, problematising reliance on external donor funding as having negative implications for VCA-related activities and NS programming overall.

Informant 18 further shed light on this from a macro-perspective, explaining that "funding is also what guides us here at a global level, so even if not a priority, if you have funds for climate change or migration, you'll go that way". They went on to say that securing funding for capacity-building activities is particularly difficult, in two instances contrasting with the fact that "while for projects or emergencies, of course, it's easier".

Notwithstanding inhibiting impacts from the latter on sustainability resulting in NSD making it a key priority globally, informant 18 still deemed it "unlikely to change long-term because you need funds to develop something". Intertwined with the opportunity component, these findings are further explored in section 4.2.3.

In summary, the means component firstly addressed the output-focus of the VCA enhancement process and ensuing potential of the EVCA methodology and tools. The combined challenges of funding and human resources faced by NSs inhibit sustainability, and fluctuating resources create fluctuating structures.



*Figure 14 Means for OL for resilience according to informants
(Source: Author)*

The following section further uncovers linkages between such components and their resulting impact on fluctuating ‘opportunities’.

4.2.3 *Opportunities for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience*

Building on the motives and means components, this section brings together the analysis of cross-cutting factors affecting OL opportunities throughout the EVCA process as well as for leveraging outputs. Firstly, *spaces* for OL are explored, followed by *enabling environment*; all sub-sections of which are interconnected and, in fact, also cross-reference the above sections.

Places and Spaces for OL

Forums, Infrastructure and Procedures

Internal NS information sharing happens through a mix of oral and written communication, including formal and informal meetings as well as emails and reports. While enabling to offset gaps in the formal IM infrastructure partly, the high proportion of verbal information-sharing means institutional memory mostly exists in human minds; or is reliant on ad-hoc personal systems put in place by staff or even volunteers. Inefficiencies caused by a weak IM system are described across the four NSs, as summarised by Informant 15:

“People at our NS have a wealth of information; the problem is not having a platform to share it! So, it's just word of mouth. As a very small NS, being closely knitted helps streamline information more informally, but in the technological age, we shouldn't need to wait forever for info right in front of us if properly managed”.

Opportunities for diverse forms of VCA experience to contribute to OL are influenced by a gap between those who conduct, collect then analyse the data and those who, in turn, should use and build on the reports (Informant 7). Experiential engagement during the VCA process occurs at the field/micro-level, but strategic thinking and planning occur separately, revealing a clear distinction between the operational versus the strategic spaces within NSs.

Leadership informants explained that conversations between micro and meso-level stakeholders during VCAs often revolve around enquiring whether things are going smoothly to safeguard the NS' reputation. Traditional routes focus on compliance, accountability, and reporting evidence of results to donors, often occurring through a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure "within the branch, we have a branch director and districts; we then have a district chair to whom the branch director forwards information" (Informant 8). Conversely, micro-level volunteer interactions are self-organised through various social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp) or informal meetings. Whilst informal spaces enable freer discussions on VCA experiences and lessons learnt, internal tensions can inhibit the latter, which Informant 8 described as "I try my best to share what I know, but some folks who think they're superior don't want to listen; they seem to want to create a friendship club, not an NS". Despite a mutual information sharing policy in place to improve internal information sharing, a leadership informant: "still sometimes faces hurdles as persons can get territorial" (Informant 10), while in another NS, internal tension reduced access to information opportunities for safe experiment.

Fragmented Structures

Projects are not only NSs' primary funding source; they also tend to be tied to donor-specific approaches, requirements, and structures (Informant 22). Informant 11 described "different islands *within* the NS" with board discussions "project per project". Exchanges *between* NSs regionally were similarly described by leadership as project-related, resulting in "like a disconnect, everybody's seemingly operating on their own" (Informant 4).

Probed on the relevance of project-related challenges beyond the study's NS cases, Informant 18 problematised fragmentations at the global HQ level, concluding:

"100% sure going mostly by project is the problem almost everywhere, even in the Secretariat. Among ourselves, we're not talking. I'm NSD, where we don't talk about VCA. What are we doing with, and to whom is VCA data useful? Definitely not for NSD; I don't know who's using it".

Similarly to such fragmentation leading to macro level gaps in understanding and use of VCAs, NSs' ability to fully harness EVCA was further deemed only possible: "if people start realising their importance at all levels, especially NS governance, but if the Board itself sometimes doesn't even know why VCA is so important or haven't seen reports, they can't make decisions based on VCA" (Informant 7).

The IFRC lead on evidence and learning, Informant 19, deemed the OL value of VCAs limited, explaining, "I think you need a theory on VCAs, but here that theory is never explicit nor validated; therefore, never improved and we repeat the same mistakes over and over". Informant 10 relates to the lack of M&E inhibiting opportunities for insights on VCA impact:

"We need to strengthen our M&E. Now we're lacking that going back into communities at least annually to track changes based on VCAs and action plans. If they've become more resilient, using what was learned, how's the information used?"

Limited understanding of VCAs' potential OL value explicitly related to previously addressed missing 'means' components with the EVCA guidance not putting sufficient emphasis on the M&E stage of the process as well as inadequate financial resources for necessary follow-up. Enablers and inhibitors of such endeavours are reviewed next.

Planning and Implementation Mechanisms

From an NS programming perspective, planning and implementation must align with NS strategic plans created every four years based on IFRC global strategies, previously Strategy 2020 (IFRC, 2010), now newly drafted Strategy 2030 (IFRC, 2018c). An NS leadership informant explained, "most activities we conduct are based on priorities highlighted in our strategic plan; we are currently working on our new plan for 2020-2024" (Informant 3). Global strategy should be developed through a cyclical process between strategic and operational planning based on a combination of bottom-up and top-down learning (Figure 15).



Figure 15 IFRC Strategic and operational cyclical planning process

In theory, the micro-level practical experience VCAs and EVCA's represent should feed into IFRC-wide programming to ensure priorities reflect community-led efforts (IFRC, 2016a). In practice, informants described a top-down, more than cyclical process, often constrained by NS-level planning complying with external donor requirements and thus largely influenced by projects:

"I think NSs are very rich but underutilised resources. We're the ones on the ground implementing with communities, so we know the challenges, results, impacts, data collected and how it's being used" (Informant 1)

This was supported by informant 3 from the IFRC perspective, who deemed that the wealth of knowledge at the NS level remains untapped, explaining that ongoing transformation efforts globally seek to change this.

Enabling Environment

The following section covers inter and intra-levels factors influencing and influenced by the organisational environment.

Cultural and Behavioural Environment

The interplay of wide-ranging expectations from internal and external stakeholders with resources-scarcity and fluctuations creates significant pressure on the meso-level. Several factors were found to either support or impede NSs in leveraging potential 'opportunities' for OL despite gaps in means and ensuing weaknesses of its 'places and spaces'. When means were lacking, staff and volunteers' motivation sometimes allowed for activities to take place, suggesting such dedication may compensate for lacking 'means' by enabling 'opportunities':

"In most cases, people say if we don't have funding, don't push for it, right? I believe people with volunteering at heart love working for the better of their country and community. So sometimes I say to the office, let us ignore that we don't have money and see what we can do to build skills within our volunteers" (Informant 9)

Several informants described creating innovative personal systems, offsetting the formal system's missing provision but noted such initiatives were not sufficiently applauded or encouraged (Informant 14). Further engaging, empowering, supporting and recognising volunteers' initiatives were deemed not only necessary to strengthen NSs' services and sustainability despite limited funding, but also likely to result in increased volunteer retention (Informants 12, 16 and 20).

However, the stressful environment hinders leadership's ability to give field-level staff and especially volunteers the freedom, flexibility, encouragement, and recognition for any initiative. Board accountability was contrasted by Informant 11 with the complexity of volunteer retention:

"You have to give volunteers freedom, honey to stay, so can't hold the lines too strict otherwise many leave" [but the board] "can't make any mistake, we're on top of it".

Such contrasting needs were described by the same informants, which suggests it does not result from individuals' diverging views, but instead reflects the complex inter-level context (meso-level as a bridge between micro and macro) in which NSs operate. Because ultimately, NS leadership is held accountable and must take responsibility, As expressed by Informant 4:

"Donors don't speak with the field officers; they speak with the DG!"

Inter and Intra-level relationships

Trust, reciprocity, and shared understanding emerged as key relational components to enabling OL at all levels. Most fundamentally, the trust afforded to the Red Cross by communities and the ensuing connection between NSs and communities underpins NSs' ability to engage with communities in the first place. Such trust is rooted in the RCRC modus operandi, and values (cf. 4.1 and 4.2.1), deemed to either originate from, be reinforced by, or even risk being eroded depending on a VCA process' quality of interaction, according to Informant 10, stating: "communities trust us because we use our 7 Fundamental Principles at all times, so we're able to get information from refugees or those here illegally without fear".

Prior relationships and connections with individuals, either between NSs or other organisations, both internal and external to the RCRC, at national and regional levels, were repeatedly noted as positively influencing OL through facilitated information sharing (Informants 2, 7, 22). Conversely, limited **reciprocity** and **mutuality** created distrust; as Informant 2 put it, "it's almost like government departments are piggybacking off our faith with communities and hoping for us to gather information then share it with them".

Additionally, mixed levels of trust in data were noted as inhibiting their ensuing use; as an IFRC informant commenting on a global database explained, "nobody trusts data shared or is aware of what's available, and I think it's a mistake from our side, we collect data, do our reports, and we don't give back, so they (NSs) never understand what we use the data for" (Informant 18).

Linkages and Awareness

Enabling opportunities entails a combination of understanding, awareness and being empowered by the broader system. Volunteers' OL contribution in a strategic sense requires them to understand how their involvement fits into the overarching landscape as a volunteer coordinator (Informant 14) reflecting upon whether sharing lessons learned is valued by NS stakeholders explained: "it's appreciated by management and persons who see linkages because they understand the concept of lessons learned. Since most volunteers aren't exposed to different activities, I don't think they see it, but more training and exposure can help". The potential utility of data is unclear, so NSs and volunteers "aren't collecting anything because they don't know why it's important, the data literacy initiative is to clarify this" (Informant 18, IFRC).

While digital transformation and a data-driven approach are instrumental to the IFRC's Strategy 2030, digital aspects are not always sufficient alone nor only support the potential for OL. Indeed, Informant 4 wished for more face-to-face interactions in the region, remarking, "even with apps for DGs and presidents, everything still goes through regional offices".

Reflecting on this from an HQ perspective, Informant 22 noted strong requests from NSs for more open inter-NS communication challenged by:

"resistance from some of the network's centres of power to open that space keeps bottlenecks, so we need to navigate bits of tension in coming years".

These dynamics led to Informant 19, concluding the RCRC movement is far from:

"a learning organisation because we're a top-down hierarchical command and control organisation keeping donor commitments, only paying lip-service accountability to communities, and we don't empower volunteers. So, knowledge derived from these experiments stays with people on the ground; shared around alcohol in the evening as people get depressed or burn out from the absurdity of it all".

In summary, opportunities for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience building were found to be intertwined across levels, mutually determining, and determined by the nexus of MMO components. Firstly, context-dependent variations in spaces for OL are found between and within NSs. Secondly, enabling environment factors influenced by and influencing MMOs further elucidate the components' interconnectedness.

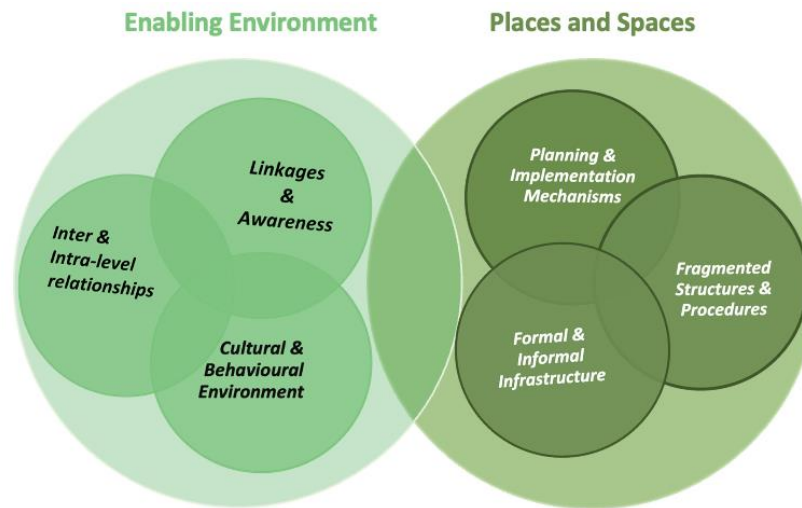


Figure 16 Opportunities for OL for resilience according to informants
(Source: Author)

Altogether, the findings of section 4.2 reveal an interplay of factors having influenced VCA utilisation so far, likely to have implications for the utilisation of the EVCA. The following section will further discuss the findings from 4.1 and 4.2 to elucidate their implications.

5 DISCUSSION

The research sought to determine how EVCA can contribute to OL for resilience-building in the RCRC movement. The following chapter begins with a summary of key findings from chapter 4.1 relating to the first research question in 5.1 and from chapter 4.2 tackling the second research question in 5.2. The resulting implications and recommendations are discussed in 5.3 and 5.4, followed by reflections on study limitations and further research needs in 5.5.

5.1 VCA utilisation

This first sub-section discusses the findings from section 4.1, which sought to address research question 1: ***"In what ways VCAs have been utilised by the case study Caribbean NSs?"***²⁰.

The various uses described by NS informants constituted the primary data analysed for this section, which provided a rich overview of ways VCAs have been used by the case study NSs.

²⁰ This part of the research served as the broad foundation for ensuing more detailed sections. Hence, while each research question is tackled separately, in reality, they were interrelated in interviews.

Though generally convergent among cases, the findings indicate that VCA utilisation, and in turn, VCA potential OL contribution is context, level, and engagement-type dependent.

Most significant regarding VCA utilisation for OL was the distinction of their utility between outcomes or outputs (building on information in VCA reports and plans of action) versus process (engagement during each phase, before and after). VCA utilisation entailed various forms of engagement extending NSs' reach and collaboration, most of which related to NSs' function as auxiliary to governments. Leveraging outputs to advocate, justify or demonstrate compliance to donors was another meso-level use.

VCAs contribute to resilience-building efforts at the micro-level in terms of “being the key tool used by RCRC to build community resilience”. Any explicit mention of learning took on an external micro (community), meso (government or non-government partners) or macro (donors) perspective rather than an internal organisational one. This comparatively lower “attention paid to the adaptive capacities of organisations that deliver this support” (Obrecht, 2019, p. 2) is not only problematic in terms of NSs' adaptive capacity; but also critically, in turn, inevitably affects the extent to which VCAs are able to fulfil their potential on behalf of communities at the micro, meso and macro levels. It is essential for NGOs to “strike the right balance between participatory learning among staff, partners at grassroots project levels; and learning intended to feed into wider policy and advocacy at national and international levels” (Edwards, 1997, p. 246).

Whether VCAs utilisation contributes to *OL for resilience according to* the adopted definition is contingent upon Becker's nexus of four abilities for resilience (2014) and OL as “enhancing organisational ability to recognise, anticipate, adapt, and learn so they can support communities' ability to do the same (communities, levels)”. VCA outputs and processes were described as feeding into the first two functions of recognition and anticipation for both communities and NSs, but only potentially useful to meso and macro levels to adapt and learn. Hence, it can be argued that VCA utilisation is not contributing to “OL for resilience” according to the study's definition, which emphasises the four interdependent functions.

The gap between potential and actual utilisation beyond project-specific activities to inform meso-level programming is not only a source of consensus among informants but has been highlighted repeatedly in IFRC reviews in the past decade. Cannon & Kirbyshire found that although “VCA findings should be routinely fed into NS programmes...There is significant evidence this opportunity is being missed in many NSs” (2011, p.3).

Whilst the latter aligns with the present study's preliminary results, the gap attributed to the fact that "NSs do not see the relevance of VCA as an information source for higher-level programme design" (2011, p. 3) does not. Indeed, most informants demonstrated they do see VCAs' programming relevance when describing their potential uses; and findings on MMO point to complex interactions among components inhibiting NSs' ability to leverage VCAs for OL rather than a gap in NS awareness.

The problematic tendency of reviews and enhancement process elucidated by Tozier de la Poterie's (2017) review further highlights the systemic nature of issues at play and thus the necessity to move forward with sub-optimisation risks in mind.

5.2 Conditions for EVCA enabled OL for Resilience

This section expands on section 4.2, which sought to address the second research question:

"What are the conditions under which EVCA can contribute to OL for resilience building?". Each MMO component will be briefly reviewed and discussed separately drawing on literature, section 5.3 will explore their interdependence by connecting the dots between each component.

5.2.1 *Motives*

Intrinsic motivations and extrinsic incentives enable or inhibit the potential for EVCA to contribute to OL, both as process and outcomes act as "carrot and stick" (Rothschild, 1999).

The study found that staff and volunteers' dedication to the seven Fundamental Principles was key to fostering motives for EVCA-enabled OL. The importance of vision alignment, established elsewhere (Whatley, 2013), is here evident as bridging organisational levels through supporting commitment to organisational values. Particularly, VCAs' embeddedness in the RCRC modus operandi provides a "focused frame of reference" (Weerakoon et al., 2020, p. 150) among the micro and meso-level feeding into a shared organisational vision.

However, this exact source of dedication to established routines conversely acted as a barrier to the potential of EVCA, suggesting OL requires unlearning (Becker, 2018; Visser, 2017) "previously established ways of doing things" (Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019, pp. 15-30). This also supports claims that existing methods perceived as still producing good results tend to subsist unless evidence such as failures justify the necessity of their abandonment and trigger a paradigm shift (Wang & Ahmed, 2003).

Consistent with previous evidence on the value of motivation in creating “persistence in the face of challenges and obstacles” (Hong & Gajendran, 2018, p. 806), NS informants’ intrinsic motives played a central role in their willingness to show initiative and commitment to go beyond minimum requirements in their work. However, motivation is insufficient in the face of low opportunity; when individuals are limited to act by external factors outside their control, such as time or financial resources (Binney et al., 2007, p. 1147).

Informants’ descriptions in 4.1 of gaps in VCAs not being used to full potential for NS programming align closely with those the EVCA aim to address. Thus, NS informants’ recognition that insufficient is learnt from VCAs indeed sometimes supported their motives to learn from EVCAs through evidence that change is needed. Linkages between types of utilisation and motives are apparent in the results highlighting specific aspects of VCA entail a different utility. VCA utilisation and engagement type (process vs outputs) tend to be determined by the purpose as either strategic (indirect engagement, output-oriented) or operational (direct engagement, process-oriented) and originating motive (intrinsic vs extrinsic).

Micro-level stakeholders engaged in the field with communities have an experiential social learning opportunity leading to, or derived from, a community-focused sense of purpose. Meso-level stakeholders combine types influenced by the number of years and positions held in the NS. In turn, distinct engagement types entail a different type of learning potential. The latter findings aligned closely with motives described by informants, and while cautious not to assume correlation nor causation, such a link could suggest that VCA utilisation (what for?) by NSs may shape perception (why?) of potential for OL for resilience or vice versa.

The study informants’ responses suggest NSs’ auxiliary roles nationally relied on, at once, their efforts to sustain trusting relationships they build with communities while continuously upholding their reputation with sufficient accountability to external donors. This speaks to other studies’ findings’ of direct correlations between NSs’ reputation to the public with blood donations (Mews & Boenigk, 2013); or significantly improved access and safety of RC staff and volunteers in Lebanon resulting from the Fundamental Principles (O’Callaghan & Leach, 2013).

5.2.2 *Means*

The means for EVCA to contribute to OL for resilience explored entailed, firstly, features of the VCA methodology enhancement per se and, secondly, general resources existing, necessary, or missing which may have an impact on enabling OL from EVCA.

The “enhanced” methodology, including the changes in overall approach, methods, and tools emphasise improved output quality and the EVCA repository and reporting templates appeared to be mostly focused on facilitating the use of data at a macro level by IFRC HQ (KM focus). However, it remains unclear how much value added is created for NSs, and in fact, whether existing micro-level tacit knowledge would benefit from digital transformation.

Whilst the digital transformation and VCA repository address the essential aspect of organisational memory for OL (Cruz et al., 2018, p. 248), findings demonstrate that having IM structures in place such as the VCA repository does not automatically guarantee the information will be shared and organisational memory enhanced. Information availability is not sufficient; accuracy is also a factor affecting whether stakeholders trust and, in turn, utilise information in any way (Diduck et al., 2012). Results from Makani’s (2008, p. 149) study on the IFRC’s KM efforts indicated that a lack of trust in the source of information inhibits the use of such information even if it is collected and accessible. Altering the means in terms of enhanced tools such as the report templates and risk scoring; improves the reliability of reports but the increased complexity of the methodology and template used brought forth the tricky balancing act of improving accuracy while not impeding participation, as in other studies on climate lens complexity (van Aalst, 2008).

As in prior studies’ findings in the sector, resource gaps clearly represent a “serious constraint” for NSs, “not just for learning, but their work in general” (Mougeot, 2017, p. 177). NS reliance on projects for funding, which is “not ongoing”, to carry out VCAs entail fluctuations in structures and procedures, appearing to suggest that unpredictable and inflexible funding mechanisms may be more problematic than insufficient financial resources. Findings highlighting donor influence on activities exemplify the NS development framework’s caution that “financial dependence on any one partner may undermine NS’ capacity to act in line with Independence Principle” (IFRC, 2013, p. 6).

5.2.3 *Opportunities*

Opportunities to learn from EVCA were explored in two parts: through spaces themselves during the process and through engagement in collaboration, supporting the development of enabling environment factors such as trust-building. The enabling environment for learning entailed cross-level trust, empowerment, and awareness consistent with the literature on psychological safety, self-efficacy and relational factors supporting learning among stakeholders.

Since experience occurs at field-level, micro-level stakeholders' ability to communicate such experiences lies at the root of potential learning (Elkjaer, 2009, p.82), which requires "open, ongoing dialogue not inhibited by defensiveness" (Argyris et al., 1986) and "explicit organisational support from top to bottom and between units" (Sánchez & Mitchell, 2017, p. 197). None of which are straightforward when a nexus of pressures influences organisational culture. Hence, Carpenter et al (2012: 3255) note "unless incentives are constructed properly, short-term decision making will tend away from the long-term view needed to build and maintain general resilience" which is also applicable for OL as learning "becomes increasingly challenging when more people and organisations are involved" (Valters et al., 2016, pp. 9-10).

Organisational culture influences behavioural factors, in turn either enabling or impeding space and time to be dedicated to reflection or OL. The bias for action and adrenaline culture, symptomatic of the sector and previously evidenced in the IFRC (Makani, 2008), influences space and time dedicated to reflection as well as the perceived value of OL, particularly risk-avoidant, affecting adrenaline and impeding such endeavours. Learning opportunities were significantly impeded when fragmentation and donor compliance underpinned processes. Further, the IFRC strategic programming approach itself does not provide flexibility either, hence systemic restructuring is required to enable greater agility.

Whilst VCAs are a source of learning and experience, no linkage is made with NS Development (NSD), and informants even described a ridge between NSD and VCA. Notwithstanding repeated recognition of its need to enhance its own "capacity to understand and anticipate existing and future risks" (IFRC, 2017, p. 19) to continue meeting communities' evolving resilience needs, RCRC's macro-level does not appear to consider VCAs as potential sources of such capacity building, in turn, not providing them with a real opportunity to do so.

5.3 Study Implications and Recommendations

Considering the above-presented findings and discussion, this section seeks to reflect on ensuing implications and caveats of relevance in issuing recommendations for enhanced EVCA contribution to OL at various levels.

5.3.1 *Elucidating the EVCA and MMO interplay*

Findings clearly uncover the systemic nature of the nexus between MMO factors, and in turn, the risk for sub-optimisation. As characteristic of CAS, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts (Becker, 2014) prevents prediction or quantification of the effects of changes in one component on the other components. The EVCA's potential contribution to OL is contingent upon interdependent factors; hence, gaps and challenges are at once the very crux of complexity at play and, conversely, provide the potential for the opportunities to address such gaps.

The means are more tangible than motives or enabling environment components, arguably more unpredictable and challenging to control and change, especially considering the diversity of contexts globally but also at different points in time in the same place as resources fluctuate. Hence, addressing components related to the improvement of VCA reports' quality, availability, and reliability is undoubtedly an essential endeavour. However, doing so without in parallel, explicitly ensuring the value of OL, or opportunities for learning, are explicitly elucidated and conceptually connected by the macro-level guidelines could impede VCA utilisation, rather than support it. Indeed, volunteers' contribution, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motives.

Micro-level motives risk being altered as increasing methodological complexity (with risk scoring and digitalisation) lowers volunteers' opportunity to contribute by not providing them with sufficient competencies and skills, further altering both community engagement quality per se and staff perception of organisational motives and their own. Cross-level learning requires explicit consideration of the learning and roles of all actors involved (Valters et al., 2016, p. 9) in VCA, rather than focusing solely on the beneficiaries' learning.

Thus, to leverage such potential, it is essential to address involved stakeholders' self-efficacy, so the motives component is built upon the "interaction between perceived expertise level and psychological empowerment" (Hong & Gajendran, 2018, p. 806).

The micro-level engagement with VCAs corroborated prior findings on shadow systems²¹ as “resources for innovation, filling gaps in formal practice” or instances it proved “more effective than official structures” (2008, p. 878), enabling “individuals or subgroups to experiment, communicate, learn and reflect on their actions in ways that can surpass formal processes” (Pelling, 2008, p. 868). Thus, in resource-limited contexts such as the small NSs in this study, attending to the combined motive and opportunity components may arguably be more critical or even compensate for the fluctuating means.

Two implications emerge from the strategic vs operational alignment with NS staff and volunteers’ levels/roles within NSs and during VCA processes effectively divides “those who think from those who do” (Edwards, 1997, p. 24). Firstly, it suggests to volunteers and micro-level stakeholders that it is someone else’s responsibility, which leads to them being “unlikely to use or value learning if they see it as someone else’s responsibility”, in turn illustrating why it is “critical to encourage learning among those who have not been encouraged to see themselves in this light” (Edwards, 1997, p. 24). Changing methods such as VCAs, applied in a specific manner for two decades by individuals having invested significant emotions in the process, involves abandoning parts of their social identity (Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019, pp. 15-30). Conceptual models underpinning rationale and approach, in this case, the written EVCA guidance and methodology overall, influences the practical application of such guidance but is also “critical to how learning is perceived” (Valters et al., 2016, p. 9) in the first place.

Transformational learning entails “epistemological change rather than merely in behavioural repertoire or increased knowledge” (Illeris, 2009, p. 41). Hence, if “change cannot be engineered, but only be cultivated” (Reeler, 2007, p. 10), then “building people's capacity for learning and making connections should take precedence over building costly structures for information storage and retrieval” (Edwards, 1997, pp. 237-240). To decrease the pressure on NSs and enable OL opportunities through the leverage of micro-level competencies to increase the micro-level's ability to contribute through VCAs and other means, the existence of enduring tensions and barriers at all levels must first be more explicitly acknowledged and addressed.

21 Defined by Boyd and Osbahr as “the ‘messy’ processes of interaction between the ‘legitimate’ formal and the informal systems, where most organisational development takes place” (2010: 631-2)

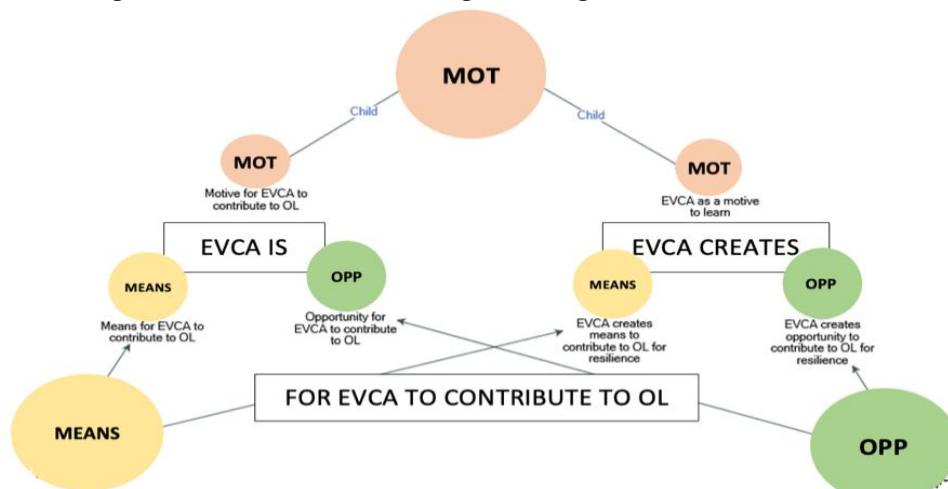
MMO exist for two first functions of recognition and anticipation but prove more problematic for the other two, adapting and learning, which require space and enabling environment. EVCA enabled OL for resilience is thus shaped as much by internal as external conditions due to its dependence on funding and its bridging role as an organisation, speaking to Butler’s notion of dependency on “what is outside of us” as the basis of “our very ability to persist, endurance and survivability” (2004, p. 32).

The IFRC’s evolving mandate in recent years, from a purely humanitarian and emergency response to a resilience building mission, is reflected in strategic and guidance documents (top-down) is not yet fully integrated *across* levels. In this case, lack of operational flexibility – an enabler of OL and resilience allowing organisations to respond quickly and effectively (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011, p. 5593) - hampers the organisational ability for real-time response to local needs, the very essence of VCA. Whilst the RCRC’s VCA enhancement approach may fall into enduring OL limitations in the humanitarian sector²², the prospect of overcoming such systemic challenges, also discussed in capacity development for DRR (Becker & Hagelsteen, 2019), is unclear.

5.3.2 EVCA as MMO for OL for Resilience

Figure 8 provides a visual representation of indications that EVCA themselves can constitute MMOs, in turn contributing to address gaps in MMOs and the very silos, resulting from and reinforced by project based VCAs, which negatively influence VCAs’ OL contribution potential.

Figure 17 NVivo nodes showcasing the linkage between EVCA as MMO



²² - such as a KM focus on outputs and managing what is known rather than leveraging capacities to improve learning-

EVCA as a motive to learn for resilience by enabling different stakeholders to engage with communities; to realise gaps and to be probed on their respective roles.

EVCA as means to learn by providing tools and resources while also creating means providing an experiential mechanism; mutual learning enabler for NS to connect with its external context at micro and meso levels as potential means for NSs; to learn with and from communities.

EVCA as opportunities to learn by engaging with others and creating spaces enabling mutual learning. EVCA as a tool implemented intra-organisationally (within NS), inter-organisationally within the RCRC and extra-organisationally at micro (communities), meso (government, other NGOs) and macro levels (donors, other INGOs).

Learning *about* self and others (partners, communities) as well as *with* others. VCA could be framed as boundary objects²³ serving as “an interface between different communities of practice - both individuals and organisations - but viewed or used differently by each of them” (Koskinen & Mäkinen, 2009, p. 32). If leveraged to live up to its potential, the EVCA could not only become “a focal point in collaboration, enabling parties to represent, transform and share knowledge” (Passera & Haapio, 2013, p. 38) but also constitute tangible “deutero-learning” (Bateson, 1972) and “meta-learning” (Chiva et al., 2018; Visser, 2007;) opportunities.

5.4 Recommendations to support EVCA contribution to OL

While seeking to address components in need of improvements, such as enhancing the VCA methodology, ensuring existing or established enablers or MMO sources are not neglected nor inhibited is essential. Any research done using EVCA as a process or outcome for encouraging OL's potential must account for MMO as multifaceted interdependent factors.

Rather than a multiplicative or additive approach seeking to quantify components' influence, this study suggests a reasonable starting point for the RCRC would entail acknowledging the complex intricacies involved at the components' intersections. This seemingly overly conceptual exercise holds the potential to leverage and create synergies in practice, ultimately making a difference.

²³ Defined as any object “part of multiple social worlds facilitating communication between them” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393)

Opportunities to learn must allow stakeholders to simultaneously look back and forward through reflective practices requiring time and space as well psychological safety and self-efficacy. Findings showed that meso-level OL should be treated as purposeful and designed as an integral component of the VCA process; thus, be explicitly clarified at all levels within programmes and for each stakeholder involved in VCA (Sánchez & Mitchell, 2017).

For OL through EVCA as boundary object or bridge (Löf, 2010, p. 532) across stakeholders and programmatic areas; it is essential to clarify the roles of both VCA as a learning tool and NSs as learning actors. Answering the five Ws²⁴ of learning ‘who, where, what, how and when’ (Lundholm & Plummer, 2010, p. 478), but also why, could ground EVCAs’ OL value in a common ethos for all involved (Gujit, 2010).

For the RCRC to benefit from the localised expertise currently underutilised, the micro-level volunteers’ competences must be explicitly recognised, described, and harnessed through encouraging, recognising and rewarding their initiatives, dedication and time. Letting go of control and increasing tolerance for potential mistakes necessitates embracing people-centred bottom-up approaches which call for “organisations to advocate for leading “strategic learning” from the middle. Enabling opportunities through leverage of micro-level competences requires for formal structures to be funded when it comes to the most important aspects of NSD, and systemic restructuring of the IFRC programming approach must enable greater organisational agility to face ever-growing complexity, particularly to optimise further alignment of the strategic/operational nexus and associated roles of NS stakeholders.

In a highly fragmented global network such as the RCRC, though attempts to decentralise governance and empower NSs are underway, the decision and framing of values, approaches and goals of the organisation still occur at the macro-level. The shared vision aspect critical to a LO should not be at the expense of OL being informed by micro-level. Multi-directional scaling up and down to align with its mandate (Gujit, 2008, p. 36), with vertical/horizontal and internal/external engagement (Slack & Brandon-Jones, 2018) built upon “explicit organisational support from top to bottom and between units” (Sánchez & Mitchell, 2017, p. 197). Examples of potential steps for stakeholders at NS level, global RCRC and IFRC, and external stakeholders, including donors and government bodies are listed in Appendix 1.

²⁴ Similarly framed the five Ws of resilience - of what, for whom, where, when, and why (Meerow & Newell, 2016)

Further research avenues

Though the initial intention to combine the MMO with the Learning Loops Framework (LLF) developed by Argyris & Schön (1996) was subsequently deemed beyond the scope of the present study, the LLF remains particularly well-suited to research on this topic and sector²⁵.

Research timing provided the possibility to align the data collection with EVCA methodology training and an insight into a real-time process. An extended research timeline allowed the researcher to engage with several ongoing activities such as an OL initiative started in October 2019. However, ensuing developments mean that at the time of the thesis submission, changes have already or are on the way to being planned and implemented. Notwithstanding limitations associated with the researcher's insider status, the collaborative approach proved useful in enabling access to rich insight not always available to outsiders, while testifying to the utility of conducting institution-based academic research for both sides. Potential opportunities for mutual learning could be further promoted in the DRMCCA space with scope for future collaboration and organisational research in this field.

Future research could benefit from further exploration of synergies across OL, OD, and CD for resilience and of aspects such as trust and the power structures at play, all of which the LLF framework could support. The timeframe of the research should be extended in order to cater to the additional analysis and scope covered.

6 CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the potential contribution of Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (EVCAs) to OL for resilience building in the RCRC Movement. With this purpose, the research first sought to understand how Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCAs) have been utilised through a case study of four NSs in the Caribbean region. The second research question then attempted to identify the conditions under which a participatory risk assessment approach, such as EVCA, can contribute to OL to build resilience. This section concludes by highlighting key findings and final reflections on the study's implications.

²⁵ used extensively in environmental (Löf, 2010; Yuen et al., 2013), development (Marquardt Arévalo et al., 2010; Tanner et al., 2013) and organisational management literature (McClory et al., 2017); The LLF enables distinctions in levels of depth, quality and implications of OL processes (Romme & van Witteloostuijn, 1999) by analysing "how these result in reflection, reconsideration of meaning, and re-interpretation of value structures" (IPCC,2012: 54).

Regarding the first research question, answers within the examined sample of respondents showed a considerable variation in VCAs' utilisation, related to their respective responsibilities, level and kind of engagement with the process or outputs, as well as seniority. Despite an agreed upon significant potential for VCAs OL contribution remaining largely untapped, laid ground for the EVCA's methodology potential to remedy enduring challenges, entailing at once the very source of their interest and call for caution among volunteers and staff at micro, meso and macro levels.

Regarding the second research question, findings indicated that whether and the extent to which EVCA may contribute to OL for resilience building is contingent upon the interplay of motives, means and opportunities present at once within NS systems and the broader RCRC network, with globally endorsed guidelines and approaches, such as the EVCA guidelines, holding significant potential influence. Whilst all the latter factors will inevitably fluctuate, explicit acknowledgement of their interdependence may reduce sub-optimisation risks.

The motives, means and opportunities (MMO) Framework, while not a panacea, provided insights into the interdependent components across findings worth exploring in greater depth. The above findings are contextual to the limited sample of informants and case study NSs in the Caribbean, as well as impacted by various methodological limitations, among which the initially selected conceptual framework. Hence, conclusions derived from the study can be deemed representative of neither the region nor of the RCRC Movement as a whole.

I hope the breadth of insight emerging from the study's partial regional coverage based on the MMO framework may reinforce the impetus for further enquiry using a different methodological strategy, or if building upon more extensive resources, extending its coverage.

Optimising the use of EVCA's for OL can support the RCRC's contribution to navigating the tremendous challenges ahead. The future's inherent risks faced by actors at all levels can also entail precious opportunities, provided we work on our ability to adapt and learn continuously. An ability rooted not only in the resilience of institutions, infrastructure, and communities globally but also in individuals willing to embrace the unknown with optimism. A resilient spirit I was privileged to witness among the Caribbean staff and volunteers throughout this research.

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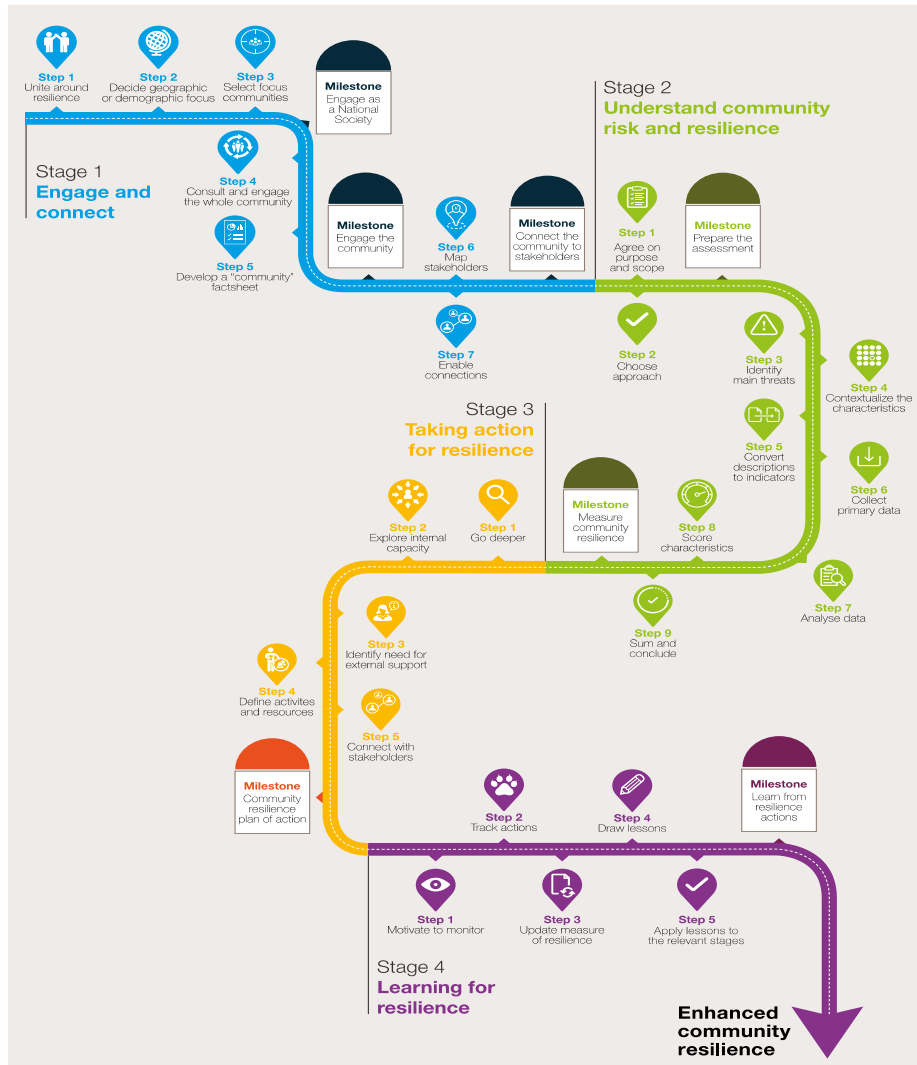
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Appendices

Annex 1. Roadmap for Community Resilience Process including stages and steps



Stakeholders	Suggestion
NS (Case studies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Build on existing peer to peer informal activities -Continue building on current efforts for strengthening information management structures -Empower volunteers to contribute further and embrace their OL role -Make learning explicit in NS strategic plan, project proposals and VCA reports -Most pressing: enhance and explicitly clarify/laying out why/how/whom recognition of NS staff and volunteers' roles in OL/ laid out.
Global RCRC Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Clarifying learning in guidelines; what OL entails and how it fits into overarching -Making the impetus, mechanisms, and utility of learning from VCA for all actors, particularly at the meso-level, more explicit in the EVCA guideline. - synergies programs vs projects -Recognising and enabling shadow learning to feed into institutional memory; as a form of accountability
Donor agencies	Donor agencies must recognise the need to provide funding for activities geared to learning which go beyond the scope of projects and provide an enabling environment to NS.
Governments	Stakeholders at national levels, particularly government agencies, can benefit from synergies with RCRC NSs, provided they respect the humanitarian principles which guide RCRC's work.

Table 3 Recommendations for various stakeholders to enhance OL through EVCA

(Source: Author)

Annex 2. Interviews

A. Interview Guide

Table 4 Indicative interview guide sample

Interview section	What covered and why
Intro	Briefly explaining again the goal of the research or providing further information, ensuring consent is received for recording, answer any questions
General info	Experience in RC and current role
Theme 1 Information	Info needs in current role, where can locate, how store or manage?
Theme 2	Knowledge and lessons sharing in NS mechanisms
Theme 3	VCA
Theme 4	Decision-making, planning and change
Wrap up and conclusion	Asking if any questions, finding out if there is anything else which was not discussed but deemed relevant, useful, important? Briefly walking through next steps

B. Pre-interview information and consent form

Pre-interview information and consent form

Good day and thank you for accepting to participate in the research!
This page seeks to provide more detailed information about the research and to get your consent on how your contribution can potentially be featured in the AI research outputs.

It should be very quick to complete it, ideally before the call. Otherwise your consent will be asked at the beginning of the interview instead.

*** Required**
Email address *
Your email

Position in the NS *
Your answer

Do you require any specific arrangements or wish to share information to be taken into account during the interview? (If yes, select "other" and describe)
For example, if you have a hearing impairment, a video call may be more convenient and the questions can be shared in writing on screen during the interview. *This information will be treated as strictly confidential.

No
 Other: _____

**For your information: - Research purpose and objectives
- Indicative list of interview questions**

The objective of the study is to explore the value of the knowledge base in EVCAs to support the organisational development and overall work of NSs in the region.
The research will build on interviews with 5 NSs in the Caribbean Region, and seeks to gain inputs from a variety of informants within each NS.

During the interview, please feel free to share or discuss any topics or themes you find important to consider and related to the research even if the questions are not covering those.

The interview will inform two types of outputs:
1) Red Cross resources and documents for CADRIM, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and National Societies interested: resulting resources are likely to be available both internally and externally to the movement.
2) A master thesis paper for the completion of an MSc in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation at Lund University, Sweden - the research report will be published at the following website: <https://up.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/>

Below are 14 examples of potential questions covering 4 themes which could be discussed during the call. Please note this is a preliminary interview guide which doesn't need to be strictly followed; some questions might not be asked, a few additional or follow-up questions not listed may be asked.

Feel free to indicate if you would rather not discuss some themes at the start of the interview.

THEME 1: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

THEME 2: KNOWLEDGE SHARING

THEME 3: VCAs

THEME 4: ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

*Other information and closing:
**Is there anything that we have not touched upon which you would like to discuss, or share?

To be completed: Consent Form

The research project seeks to comply and align with the RCRC principles, code of conduct and protection of information, please raise any concerns of failure to do so with Reynette Royer-Thomas, CADRIM and/or Janot Mendler de Suarez, RCRC Climate Centre.

Kindly note: the answers you give below are not binding, and if you wish to change your mind after the interview, you can withdraw from the study by sending an email to: gwenaelle.delcourt@gmail.com.
You can also withdraw from the interview at any time if you wish.

a) I understand the information collected will be publicly available and hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the interview for the two purposes described above *

Yes
 Other: _____

b) I agree to the interview being recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis *
The interview will be recorded to enable subsequent analysis. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed by the researcher for the purpose of analysis. No audio content will be shared or used aside from this purpose.

Yes
 Other: _____

c) Anonymity *
Participants will remain anonymous with only their position in the NS stated (for example "St Lucia RC, DG" or "Suriname, Volunteer") unless wishing to be named

I agree to my position and NS being displayed but not my name
 I agree to my position and NS being displayed and I would like my name to be featured
 Other: _____

d) I give permission to be quoted: *
For example, a report could include a sentence from a participant like this: "The NS has been increasingly involved in this area and we expect a similar trend in the future" (DG, St Lucia RC).

Yes, without prior request
 Yes but please ask for approval/confirmation first
 No, I would prefer not to be quoted at all
 Other: _____

That's it! Looking forward to speaking shortly and wanting to thank you in advance for your participation.

Do you have questions or would you like additional information on anything? I'll make sure to address it before the call! (Optional)

Your answer

Gwenaelle Delcourt
Junior Researcher, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
MSc. Candidate, Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation, Lund University
gwenaelle.delcourt@gmail.com / gwenaelle.delcourt.6460@student.lu.se

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

Annex 3. Document analysis

A. List of documents

- ICRC & IFRC (2016) A Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) – Improving communication, engagement and accountability in all we do <https://media.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/12/CEA-GUIDE-final-HR-1312>
- IFRC. (2006). What is VCA? An introduction to vulnerability and capacity assessment. Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- IFRC. (2007a). How to do a VCA: A practical step-by-step guide for Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers. Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- IFRC. (2007b) Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Guide, available at https://www.climatecentre.org/downloads/files/RCRC_climateguide.pdf
- IFRC. (2008). Bridging the gap: Integrating climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- IFRC. (2008). Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment – Guidelines. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland.
- IFRC. (2009). World Disasters Report 2009 – Focus on Early Warning, Early Action. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, Switzerland.
- IFRC. (2010). *Project/programme planning - Guidance manual*. Retrieved from <https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/monitoring/PPP-Guidance-Manual-English>
- IFRC. (2011). Project/programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guide.
- IFRC. (2011). Review of Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) use in relation to climate change and urban risk issues
- IFRC. (2012). *PMER (planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting) Pocket guide*. Retrieved from RCRC Climate Centre (2012) How can climate change be considered in Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments? A summary for practitioners – June 2012
- IFRC (2013) A guide to Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation (CADRIM) Red Cross Caribbean Disaster Risk Management Reference Centre (2014) The Caribbean Change Adaptation (3CA) Toolkit
- IFRC (2014a) IFRC Framework for Community Resilience, available at: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/ifrc-framework-community-resilience/>
- IFRC (2014b) Integrating climate change and urban risks into the VCA; Ensure effective participatory analysis and enhanced community action; IFRC Geneva
- IFRC & ISET. (2015) Community-based disaster risk reduction and adaptation planning: Tools for prioritizing potential solutions, 2015, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/community-based-disasterrisk-reduction-and-adaptation-planning-tools-prioritizing>
- IFRC.(2016a). Road map to community resilience: Operationalizing the Framework for Community Resilience, 2016, available at:http://preparecenter.org/sites/default/files/1310403-road_map_to_community_resilience-en-04.pdf
- IFRC (2017) Framework for Climate Action Towards 2020.
- IFRC. (2018a) What is EVCA? <https://www.ifrcvca.org/what-is-evca>

B. Databases used to locate documents

- GDPC <https://www.preparecenter.org/resources>
- IFRC <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document-library/>
- RCCC <https://climatecentre.org/publications>
- Asia pacific <https://www.rcrc-resilience-southeastasia.org/themes/>
- Fednet <https://fednet.ifrc.org/>

Annex 4. VCA Enhancement

Detailed EVCA process

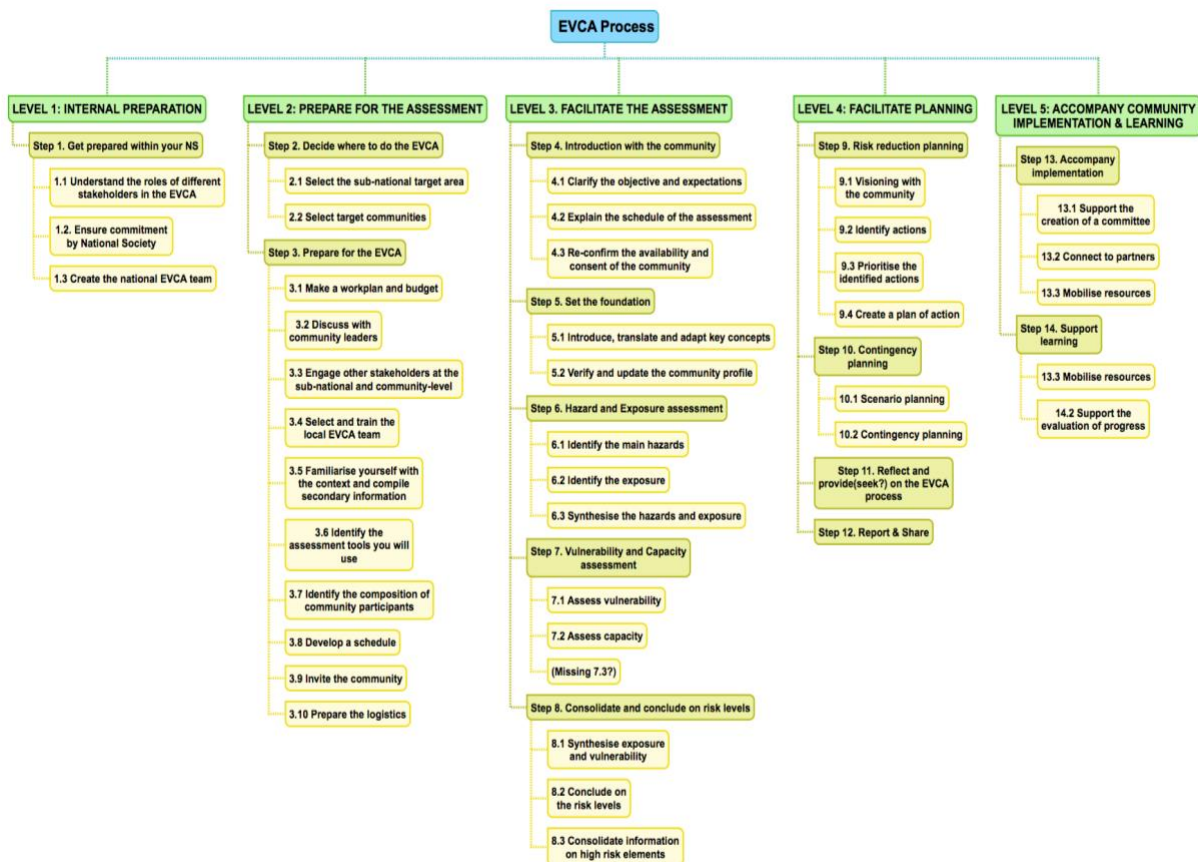


Table 5 Overview of difference between VCA and EVCA (IFRC EVCA Guideline, 2019: 6)

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.
LINKS	The VCA was not clearly aligned with other sectoral assessment tools.	The EVCA aligns with other sectoral assessment tools (e.g. CBHFA, PASSA).

Table 6 Measures to address VCA enhancement study gaps

(Source: author, adapted from IFRC, 2019)

Enhancement	Gap from Enhancement study
Motive ; Roadmap alignment	2. wrongly perceived as once-off product not process for community empowerment
Motive ; alignment	9. VCA not perceived as entry-point for general community work
Means; added lens	10. Climate change not adequately reflected
Means; adapted tools	5. Urban VCA problematic
Means; adapted tools	11. Incomplete contextualisation and adaptation of tools to local conditions
Means; adapted tools	7. Sequencing of process challenging
Means; report template	1.VCA analysis not sufficiently strong
Means: report template	3. Results inadequately standardized to help inform national programming
Means: HR	6. VCA not capitalize enough on secondary data
Means: reporting template	8.VCA quality inconsistent
Means; repository	12. outputs often separated from communities
Opportunity; Space; Mgt structures, procedures	4. M&E inconsistent