

# Protecting the most vulnerable

*Vulnerable communities are the most exposed to the effects of climate change. How can they be empowered to overcome the challenges posed and what more can the wider international community do to help?*



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Every day, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is confronting the impacts of climate change through its work with vulnerable communities around the world. Our membership of 189 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and their 17 million volunteers provide us with

unique perspectives on the humanitarian consequences of changing weather patterns and new and more intense climate-related disasters. The need for humanitarian action is beyond doubt. Building on our global reach and our knowledge of the communities in which we work, the IFRC has been translating global climate change science into action on the ground, helping communities adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The interaction between climate change adaptation and humanitarian action was

first given formal recognition at the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 1999, and our plan of action for 2000–03. Soon after, in 2002, the Netherlands Red Cross, working with the IFRC, established the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, which provides expert technical guidance on climate-related

▲ A family collect water from a pump in a makeshift camp in Pakistan's southern Sindh province during severe monsoon floods

policy and programmatic issues. In 2007, at the 30th International Conference, our societies, together with governments, adopted a resolution that recognised the increased burden on vulnerable communities arising from the increase in disasters and the scarcity of resources induced by climate change. For these communities, climate-related effects were perpetuating poverty, triggering migration, increasing health risks and aggravating the risk of violence and conflict. The resolution resolved to address the humanitarian impacts of climate change by:

1. Working with partners and raising awareness of the serious humanitarian concerns linked to climate change, including their causes.
2. Decreasing the vulnerability of communities and providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people, in particular those in affected developing countries.
3. Improving individual and collective capacity to respond swiftly to humanitarian challenges.
4. Ensuring that environmental degradation and adaptation to climate change are integrated in disaster risk reduction and disaster management policies and plans.
5. Mobilising the necessary human and financial resources to implement them, giving priority to actions for the most vulnerable people.
6. Supporting and complementing elements of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In 2010, the IFRC committed to address both the root causes and consequences of climate change. Our Strategy 2020 calls for a contribution to climate change adaptation through scaling-up disaster risk-reduction measures, and to climate change mitigation through advocacy and social mobilisation.

Most recently, at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in March 2015, the IFRC launched an ambitious global initiative to scale-up community and civic action on resilience. Called the 'One Billion Coalition for Resilience', the initiative aims to engage at least one person in every household



▲ Members of a community in Ethiopia attend a Partners for Resilience programme, designed to implement 'climate-smart' measures to reduce disaster risk, such as reforestation, irrigation, and soil and water conservation

around the world in active steps towards strengthening their resilience by the year 2025. This was the IFRC's voluntary commitment toward the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction and Sustainable Development Goals.

#### International efforts

The impacts of climate change are without borders and no single government or organisation can address them alone. In addition to our advocacy work on mitigation and adaptation actions at global, national and sub-national levels, we engage with international partners to advocate

for collective efforts and community involvement to address climate change.

At the international level, we have initiated partnerships that translate into action on the ground to enhance local-level resilience to changes in risks or environment. The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance is an innovative partnership between Zurich Insurance, Wharton Business School, the International Institute of Applied System Analysis, IFRC and Practical Action. It aims to enhance community flood resilience by finding innovative ways to increase the impact of disaster risk reduction efforts at community, national and global levels. In Indonesia, Nepal, Mexico and Peru, the programme uses insurance expertise to enhance resilience to flooding while looking at the role of financing for communities that need it the most.



Using creative, simple communication methods, Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies have been targeting vulnerable communities to raise their awareness about the uncertainties and increasing risks induced by global warming. Better understanding of climate and environmental change has motivated people to change their behaviour and proactively prepare for the effects of a changing climate.

There are many inspiring and innovative examples from our global membership. Using the interactive medium of popular theatre and youth volunteers, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society built a stage on a truck that visits districts across the country prone to cyclones, floods and drought. The roadshow communicates messages on climate change adaptation to thousands along its route.

### Disaster management

The humanitarian system will have greater demands placed upon it due to climate change. The IFRC is taking steps to improve its preparedness and response to disasters, including enhanced use of weather and climate information for proactive response preparedness. The ‘early warning – early action’ approach has been widely adopted, so standard contingency planning processes have increasingly been adjusted to prepare for more extreme events.

The Finnish-Pacific Project (FINPAC) is funded by the Finnish Government and administered by the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). IFRC and SPREP are collaborating to implement the community-based component of the project, which involves the creation of partnerships between national meteorological services and Red Cross national societies in ten Pacific nations. They are working with local communities and villages to develop early warning systems and improve dialogue between disaster managers.

More attention is needed for solutions that harness synergies between climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation. For example, activities such as tree planting and agro-forestry programmes help mitigate climate change and also enhance local

livelihoods, improve food security, reduce disaster risk and combat desertification. Viet Nam Red Cross has been planting and protecting mangrove forests in the country since the 1990s, understanding the interconnected economic, environmental and social benefits. Mangrove afforestation has been an efficient and effective way for disaster mitigation, protecting coastal inhabitants from typhoons and storms, and enhancing livelihoods as well as mitigating climate change.

For decades, many national societies have been engaged in various forms of community-based projects to build resilience through disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction or health projects. Over the past five to ten years, such projects have increasingly sought to tackle risks related to shifting weather patterns, including changing seasonality, more variability and new extreme events.

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National societies have implemented climate change action in at least 102 countries with a special focus on the most vulnerable communities in all types of settings, including small island states, urban areas, arid and semi-arid lands, flood-prone zones and drought-prone regions. They play a unique auxiliary role in support of governments and are able to address the local aspects of climate change in a customised manner, working on the ground through established volunteer networks.

### IFRC recommendations

Despite all these successes, much more needs to be done. For the implementation of climate change actions in the post-2015 era, linking with the Sendai framework, COP21 outcomes and Sustainable Development Goals, the IFRC recommends

that governments take the following actions:

- Ensure effective cross-disciplinary collaboration (i.e. finance, development, environment, interior ministries) – governments can develop a national plan in a holistic way and then consider stakeholders and allocate budget efficiently.
- Engage with local actors and strengthen local-level capacity to enable integration of climate change concerns into disaster risk reduction and vulnerability reduction work – governments should prioritise vulnerability and disaster risk reduction in their adaptation and development budgets.
- Ensure that relevant climate information is available to inform decisions, especially by the most vulnerable communities at the local level, implementing the vision expressed in the Global Framework for Climate Services.
- Prioritise, with development agencies, mitigation activities such as tree planting and agro-forestry programmes that help not only to mitigate climate change impacts, but also enhance local livelihoods, improve food security, reduce disaster risk and combat desertification – these actions will also support and contribute to socio-economic development goals.
- Scale-up implementation of UNFCCC Article 6 obligations on education, training and public awareness of climate change, as well as on disaster risk reduction, to build the capacities of people and their communities and strengthen local-level governance.
- Increase investment in youth-led and youth-targeted climate change education activities and skills training, including non-formal education, and involve and engage young people at all levels of decision-making related to climate change.
- Strengthen inclusive and participatory local governance and action for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and improve local and community preparedness and response capacities. ●