



Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Guide
Dialogues



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Tataua Pese is in no doubt where the front line of climate change is. It is creeping up the beach of his South Pacific island home: the sea level is rising at twice the average global rate that scientists had forecast. It is eating away at the shore. As in so many places around the world, local residents who notice rapid and dangerous changes wonder why it is happening, what to do about it, and who can help.

If it goes on like this, it is feared, the nine coral atolls and islands north of Fiji that comprise the Polynesian nation of Tuvalu will be gone within a century. The people could be gone within decades.

Pese, the Tuvalu Red Cross's climate change and disaster management officer, told colleagues at a Red Cross/Red Crescent conference in The Hague, "Our highest point is only four metres above sea level. Most people live at between one and three. My country is 100 per cent vulnerable."

With a total landmass of just 26 square kilometres, Tuvalu's 10,000 inhabitants are all coastal dwellers. A few minutes walk from any shoreline you reach the

water on the other side. When the big waves come, the tidal surges, there is nowhere else to go. Unless you consider New Zealand where 4,000 Tuvaluans already reside and an official intake of 75 a year helps increase the number.

Tataua Pese is going nowhere. He'll be the last man standing if he has his way, the last man boarding the last of the ships, although before that day arrives much can be done to help islanders adapt to the changing situation. All is not lost. There's life among the atolls yet.

How good it can be depends on partnerships, the Tuvaluan says. Because the challenges are so immense, because time is ticking faster in the South Pacific, because resources are limited, those confronting the changes must pull together. The way Pese sees it knowledge must be pooled, strategies shared, available means aligned.

"This isn't something you do on your own. With small islands like these it is very important stakeholders work hand in hand and know what each other is doing, and what they do well," he contends. "Together we can do a lot more."

Dialogue sought around the world

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement never works in isolation, on small islands or anywhere else. But partnerships, one of its strategic directions, were never more important than in the context of global warming. Around the world, as National Societies have taken on climate change programmes they have sought dialogue with government and local authority, with meteorological offices, universities and other centres of knowledge, and with NGOs, civil society. By reaching out to others they have started to network.

Perhaps in a very small country cooperation comes more easily. Everyone knows one another. Even so, when the Red Cross showed concern about climate change it surprised the Tuvalu government. Had the Red Cross become environmental?



"My country is 100 per cent vulnerable"

TATAUA PESE, TUVALU

The National Society explained it was the humanitarian consequences on which it wished to focus. Through its community presence it was very well placed, particularly for raising awareness among the islanders and developing risk reduction.

Tataua Pese is close to government today, close to the meteorological office, and extremely close to the national disaster management agency where the coordinator depends upon Red Cross support. "He doesn't have staff," Pese says, "but we have capacity in our volunteers. The coordinator appreciates that."

Particularly during flooding. Alongside awareness and risk-reduction measures, the Red Cross has strengthened its disaster response as well. Once upon a time unusually high tides could be predicted by islanders. They came early each year to the islands. Now they come any time, the most invasive from January to April. The Red Cross assists with evacuation and shelter, and consults with the authorities and NGOs on measures to protect particularly endangered places.

What Pese fears most is a tide surge caused by one of the ever-more-frequent cyclones. "It hasn't happened yet but I am sure it will come," he says, predicting a major disaster.

Support for cooperation on all fronts has come from the Tuvalu Climate Action Network (TuCAN) of which Pese is a founding member. A working group, it brings together government, church, NGOs and the Red Cross. Through TuCAN, WWF has supported the development of a toolkit to assess community dangers and how to respond to them.

Such is the teamwork, the Red Cross delayed the start of its own community self-assessments (see *Community Risk Reduction*) until the toolkit was complete, and a common approach could be implemented. Pese says, "The Red Cross has a clear role here in the islands. We have our own activities and agenda but with TuCAN we do things as a group." Awareness raising is one of them, something that is so much stronger when organizations agree on the message they want to get across.

Helping vulnerable people to help themselves

Cooperation is at its best when everyone recognizes their own agenda. Networks like TuCAN can only strengthen that because defining what one does, and does not, is prerequisite to how it operates.

On World Environment Day on 5 June, the Tuvalu Red Cross campaigns with the others for islanders to care for their own environment. "It is," Pese says, "one of our big clean-up days. We clean up along the shore to protect the coral. Dumping rubbish there is a national habit but it affects the coral in the lagoon so we campaign against it."

There is nothing wrong in that. There would be nothing wrong in helping to promote clean energy for the islands, even if greenhouse-gas emissions in Tuvalu are less than the flatulence of a herd of cows in a corner of a field in Germany. It might even embarrass

the world's biggest producers, whose pollution is warming the ocean and doing most of the coral damage, into moving faster.

But for the Red Cross the 5 June event is not merely an environmental effort: Healthy corals support local livelihoods, ultimately reducing the vulnerability of islanders to climate change. Similarly, planting of trees along the shore to help reduce the strength of the waves, and thus the coastal erosion, is the more important lesson. "Our main task," Pese says, "is working with the communities to understand what is happening and how they can reduce the impact."

That is the core of Red Cross/Red Crescent work: to help vulnerable people to help themselves. And what makes it easier for National Societies is that as independent auxiliaries to public authorities in humanitarian activity the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is clearly described in existing agreements with governments.

Some National Societies, in fact, have found themselves in a position to influence national policy. The Nicaraguan Red Cross is one of them. It plays a key role in the country's National Risk Management Plan, working with decision makers at a national and regional level to enhance their collective disaster response, from training to coordinating response procedures.

One of the lessons learned there has been the value of the Red Cross and Red Crescent as a bridge builder between the climate change world and that of disaster risk management. In most countries climate change is dealt with by environment-related government departments focusing on pollution issues, with little involvement of disaster-related ones. The Red Cross and Red Crescent can facilitate dialogue and strengthen the disaster-management (DM) component in national climate change policy.

The Viet Nam Red Cross is another society connecting a national DM system with climate change players and environmental institutes. When the country's disaster-management board was not invited to a climate change conference organized by a government

agency, the society approached the agency, expressed interest and have since been included in that network. In southern Africa, the Mozambique Red Cross has brought government agencies together with community leaders at national, district and local level to share information about extreme weather and the need to develop more resilience to storms, floods and droughts. The Malawi Red Cross is working with the meteorological service and rural community leaders to ensure that subsistence farmers can receive, understand, trust, and act upon the climate information produced by scientists.

And in the Netherlands, the Red Cross has shown what can be achieved by bringing people together. Heatwaves over the past few years have brought increasing death and the Red Cross felt that the Netherlands was unprepared for more and longer hot spells. Advocating heatwave preparedness, the Red Cross opened a dialogue with the health ministry and more than 60 organizations. They found unexpected partners – in construction, the health sector, knowledge centres and elsewhere – and created a broad platform recommending action. The upshot was a national heatwave plan, which came into force in 2007.

Dialogue with knowledge centres is fundamental but can be challenging. One National Society officer from Latin America tells how on starting a climate change programme she went to her meteorological office for advice. They provided a mass of information on agriculture and rainfall that she studied diligently for a couple of months. At the end of it all her head was spinning: she understood nothing even vaguely useful.

The challenge is mutual. More and more scientific institutes are turning to climate change, and some universities are developing curricula. But most are science-oriented, intent on doing research and publishing it in scientific journals using sophisticated language. How the knowledge can be communicated to vulnerable people in a way that benefits even the poorly educated without compromising scientific complexity is something academics want answered as well.





“Perhaps we have been addressing climate change, only before we didn’t recognize it”

BEVITA DWI MEIDITYAWATI, INDONESIA

A question being asked by some National Societies is: how complete does the information need to be? It isn’t easy to deal with the uncertainties that are a part of the science.

Tight partnership with local government

Setting up meetings with meteorological offices to discuss what they do and do not know about expected impacts of climate change, and with academic institutions to learn what they do and do not do in research and support of government policies, is the starting point.

For Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI), the Indonesian Red Cross, dialogue with knowledge centres has come through the climate change network they are part of. Both the national meteorological office and Bogor agricultural university are in the group that also includes the environment ministry and an independent research institute that advises it,

Friends of the Earth Indonesia, the United States Agency for International Development, WWF and other agencies.

A tight partnership with local government and the community is a key element for the success of its long-term disaster management plan, starting from the village up through sub-district, regency and provincial levels in the form of technical and financial assistance. Health, social affairs, public works, education, water supply and forestry agencies can all be part of it.

The structures and processes stand PMI in good stead. Climate change as such has only now begun to be integrated into what the National Society does, but the preparedness programmes could have been written for it. “Perhaps we have been addressing climate change,” says PMI disaster preparedness coordinator, Bevita Dwi Meidityawati, “only before we didn’t recognize it.”

The Polewali Mandar district in West Sulawesi provides an example. Back in 2003 cooperating with the Danish Red Cross, PMI introduced a five-year community-based disaster-preparedness programme to four provinces, including West Sulawesi. Developed in line with government structures, it covered 15 villages, three of them in Polewali Mandar. It was a bottom-up approach, the communities themselves identifying and mapping potential risks to their lives and livelihoods, and compiling an action plan to avoid or at least reduce the negative consequences.

The threats in Polewali Mandar come mainly from sea erosion and river floods. The villages are sited along the beaches, caught between the sea on one side, the river on the other. A wave-breaker project and mangrove planting to protect the shoreline have brought improvement already, along with the construction of a health post and a safe water supply.

An adaptive response for climate change might augment the programme but would not alter the direction because it already contributes to disaster risk reduction nor would it depart from the partnership practice in which PMI looks for “intensive participation” from

community, government and any other institutions or NGOs that share an interest.

Among the lessons learned, Bevita Dwi cites the importance of mainstreaming the community-based disaster preparedness concept into local government. One way to do that, she says, is to integrate the community action plan into the government’s development strategy.

PMI would seem to be on track. What they have achieved in West Sulawesi and elsewhere the government is keen to replicate in other places, with and without the Red Cross.

Now that really is networking.

Dialogues

How-to guide

The Red Cross and Red Crescent does not work in isolation and this is particularly true for climate change work. It is crucial to develop and maintain contacts with government at local and national level, knowledge centres like meteorological offices and universities, and other actors in civil society.

Red Cross/Red Crescent work on climate change should be connected to government policies. In many countries, the National Society has an agreement with government, and dialogue with authorities can be seen in that context. A Red Cross or Red Crescent society could even be a partner in developing national policy on the humanitarian consequences of climate change, since climate risk reduction and adaptation is new to most governments.

This section gives you suggestions on strengthening your partnerships or starting new ones, and is particularly relevant for your National Society's climate change focal point. Later on, when more Red Cross/Red Crescent departments integrate climate change into their planning and programmes, this section will be helpful for them, too.

Dialogue with knowledge centres

Because climate change is such a broad issue it is important that what your National Society communicates about climate change is science-based. To achieve this you need a good relationship with the knowledge centres in your country.

Much of the knowledge can be found at the national meteorological office and sometimes at universities. However, their prime objective is to do research and to publish it in a technically rigorous manner. For many scientists it is a challenge to communicate their knowledge in a way everyone can understand but still reflect scientific complexity.

It can be difficult to deal with their information, particularly the uncertainties that are an inherent part of the scientific world. Since Red Cross/Red Crescent staff cannot be expected to be familiar with the technical aspects of climate science, it is perfectly reasonable to ask experts to try to simplify their key messages.

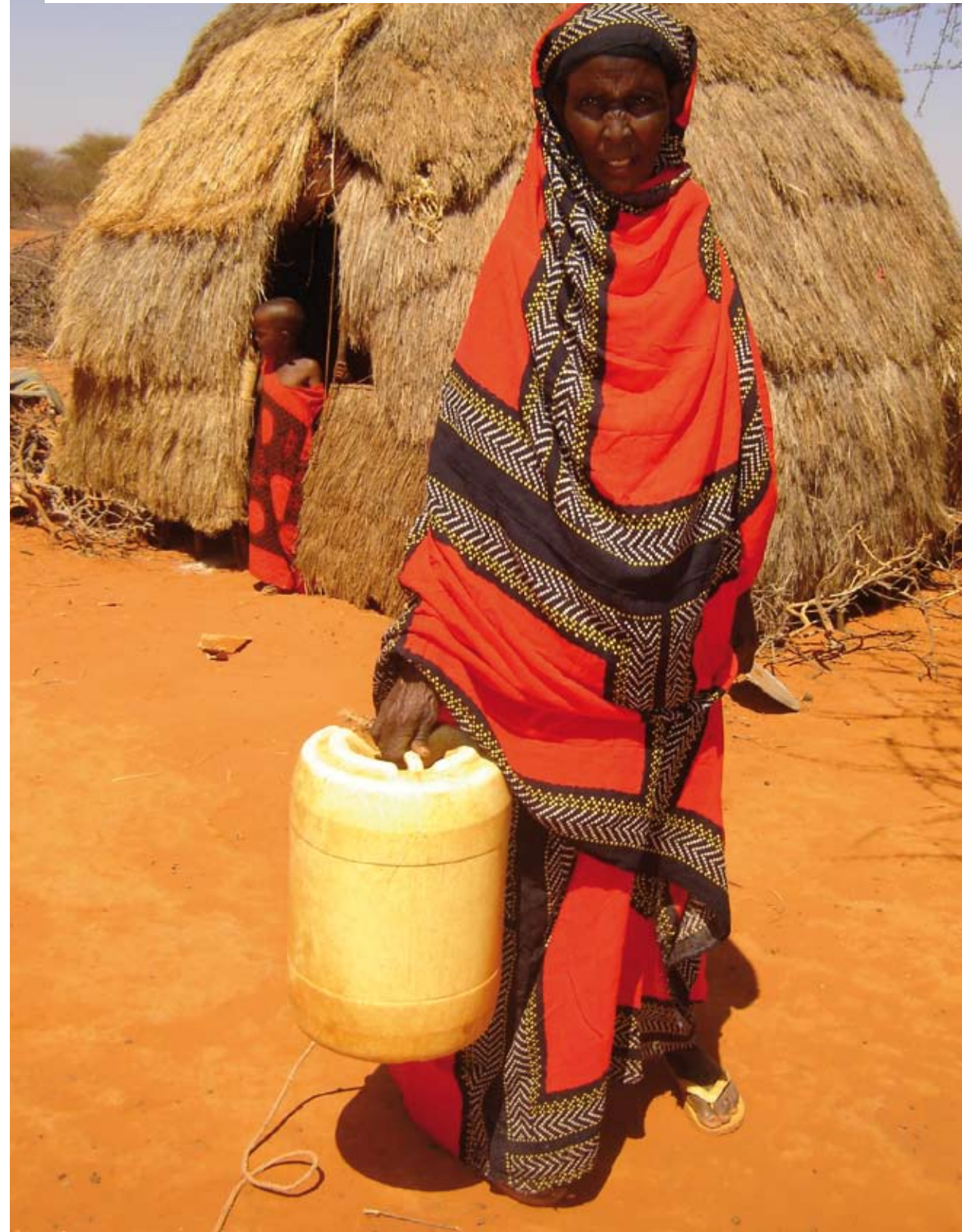
If your National Society is helping to disseminate them, the experts must ensure that the most important aspects of climate change are expressed in plain language. Always feel free to ask for clarification and simplification when learning about climate science.

Most of the work on climate change science has involved projections for the coming decades and even centuries. This is slowly changing and there is more research into observed changes in weather patterns and extreme events. Additionally, shorter-term forecasts for such things as intense rainfall, tropical cyclones and even seasonal rainfall have improved considerably and may be very useful for disaster-management planning (see *Disaster Management: How-to guide* and *Community risk reduction: How-to guide*).

Checklist

- Organize meetings with your national meteorological office and other knowledge centres, like universities.
- Discuss with them what they know and do not know about the expected impacts of climate change in your country.
- Does your meteorological office get seasonal forecasts (weather patterns for three months ahead) and how do they use them and communicate them to society?
- Expect to be bombarded with complicated words and figures. Be prepared to ask repeatedly for clarification and simplification, so you can take the right message from the knowledge centres to the people at risk.
- Identify possible niches for Red Cross/Red Crescent action, like bringing the knowledge centres

A Kenyan woman struggling to find enough water after the failure of the rains in 2005. An estimated 2.5 million people needed emergency aid, and thirty per cent of the livestock died. Photo: Anthony Mwangi/Kenyan Red Cross



in contact with communities so they can better understand the needs and issues of the most vulnerable people, or ensuring communication of longer-term forecasts to local communities (see box on the right).

- Ask your climate change experts to be engaged in your publications and other communication tools (such as videos and theatre productions), to make sure what you write, say or portray is correct.

Pitfalls

The science of climate change may be presented in a very abstract or complex way. Don't be intimidated; be patient and outspoken in your need for simple messages.

Opportunities

A national Red Cross or Red Crescent society may be an interesting outlet through which knowledge centres can communicate.

Dialogue with your government

Almost all governments have written reports about the vulnerability of their countries to climate change. These are the *national communications* written for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Even though the main parts of these reports are about greenhouse-gas emissions (of less relevance for the Red Cross and Red Crescent), they also describe the vulnerability of your country to climate change impacts in the coming decades.

El Niño and seasonal forecasting

Besides climate change, another area for dialogues with knowledge centres is *seasonal forecasting*.

For centuries, people have observed trends and patterns involving rainfall and temperatures. Noticing relationships between events often leads to reasonably reliable predictions. For example, fishermen in Peru have known for centuries that roughly every four to seven years, around December, the waters of the Pacific Ocean become unusually warm off their shores, leading to wetter and warmer conditions for the following months. They call this El Niño, and information about it allows farmers to adjust their planting decisions and improve harvests.

Recent scientific advances have helped us understand relationships between events like El Niño

and seasonal climate conditions. There is abundant evidence of the relationship between El Niño and droughts in various regions of the globe, including southern Africa, south-east Asia and north-east Brazil.

Climate scientists and meteorological services are now developing seasonal forecasts for many regions across the globe, based on observed and projected oceanic and atmospheric conditions. These projections, sometimes months in advance, can provide guidance on various issues from hurricanes to malaria and potentially help millions of people. The Red Cross and Red Crescent can use this information to plan work in food security, health, water and disaster management. The Climate Centre can help with the use of these forecasts and in connecting you to the right institutions.

contact details. This person is a possible entry point for further communication and dialogue with your government.

A first issue for discussion with the focal point is how the disaster-management structure of your country is linked to the development of climate change adaptation strategies. How can the National Society, through its government contacts, engage in climate risk reduction?

Some least-developed countries have written *National Adaptation Programmes of Action* (NAPA). In these documents, governments have prioritized what actions should be taken to make a country less vulnerable to the risks of climate change.

All governments have a *climate change focal point*, often based at the Ministry of Environment or the Meteorological Office. At the UNFCCC website you can find

After initial meetings and information-sharing it is important for the National Society to formulate what it wants to get out of this dialogue in terms of policies, knowledge, improved quality of programmes and mobilization of human and financial resources. This gives the dialogue an agenda and more focus.

With your knowledge about what the government is and is not doing to reduce the risks of climate change you can get a clearer picture of what role you can play to strengthen national policy.

A key responsibility of governments is to raise public awareness about the risks of climate change. The Red Cross and Red Crescent can offer its national network of local branches and volunteers for awareness-raising activities. When some dominant risks are identified, you can help define strategies to address them.

Governments often have a climate change advisory group with civil society actors. The National Society can propose it become a member. Indeed, climate change focal points often treasure the supporting role that national societies can play in reaching vulnerable communities with key awareness and adaptation messages. Be sure to emphasize your grassroots presence in areas government programmes find difficult to reach.

If your country has a national platform on disaster risk reduction in which your National

Society participates, it could be the forum where you can propose discussion of the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

There is a risk that you could get stuck at the national level. You also need to have this dialogue with local governments, particularly in the more vulnerable parts of your country and/or where the National Society already has health or risk reduction programmes. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is in a perfect position to stimulate policy dialogue with local government and to link it to national dialogue, and vice versa. Your National Society can play a major role by ensuring that the discussion properly addresses the challenges and opportunities posed by climate change among the people who are most at risk.

Checklist

- Contact your national climate change focal point to learn about your government's policies on adaptation to climate change.
- Read relevant documents (like the national communications, and NAPA)
- Check if and how the existing disaster-management structure is linked to climate change policies.
- Find out if your government has an advisory group for its climate change adaptation policies. Can the National Society be engaged in this?
- If there is a national platform on disaster risk reduction, make sure climate change risks will be discussed here.

- Identify what the National Society could contribute to the development of national policies on climate risk reduction.
- Invest in a permanent dialogue with government in order to be on top of relevant policy developments.

Pitfalls

Most governments still regard climate change policies as environmental ones and they may not be interested in the disaster risk-management angle of it. Likewise many disaster-management policies do not address climate risks. Don't get discouraged but see this as an opportunity.

Don't get stuck at the national level, support branches to contact their local government on climate risk reduction

Opportunities

The fact that there is often a mismatch between climate change and disaster policies creates the opportunity for the National Society to facilitate a dialogue between the two communities, and thus assist in streamlining these two vital policy areas.

You can engage your network of volunteers and local branches in public-awareness activities on climate change risks.

Dialogue with NGOs, donors and the private sector

Interest in climate change is growing rapidly in many organizations. Yet since the discussion of climate change risks is relatively

new, it can be expected that, like your National Society, they are trying to increase their capacity to understand and address the problem. Because of the magnitude of the issue, no one can address climate change in isolation. Cooperation is therefore a cornerstone of the climate change risk-reduction approach. Resources (human, finance and time) are limited so we have to work together to be most efficient.

Cooperation works best when all parties recognize the similarities and differences in their own agendas. For example, there is nothing against your National Society promoting clean energy (as many environmental NGOs would propose), but the core of our work is to help vulnerable people to help themselves against climate risks like floods and droughts. Companies may want to sell risk-reducing goods and services only in profitable areas, excluding the communities most threatened by climate risks that the Red Cross and Red Crescent cares for. When these different positions are clear and acknowledged, cooperation has more solid foundations and unforeseen partnerships may emerge.

Bear in mind that your National Society can help jumpstart the creation of new partnerships and coalitions on climate change. It can provide substantial credibility, legitimacy or name recognition to emerging collaborative efforts, accelerating the process of awareness and risk reduction.

Checklist

- Identify the organizations which are active or may have an interest in climate risk reduction and find out what they do, intend to do, or are capable of doing.
- Find out whether donors have programmes that can fund climate change work in your country.
- Learn whether actors from the private sector may begin to work, or support work, on climate change issues.
- Find out whether cooperation is possible, for example on public-awareness-raising about climate risks.
- Find out if actions can be complementary. NGOs active in different regions, or working on different but related issues, can strengthen expertise at the local level. For example, the Red Cross/Red Crescent VCA can be combined with the agriculture programme of an NGO.

Pitfalls

Be strong about the National Society's agenda in cooperations. Make clear to the other partners what subjects you're interested to cooperate on (like climate-risk assessments, or targeting the most vulnerable) and what you will not actively contribute to (like a proposal to government about energy-friendly public transport).

There may be pressure on the National Society to take positions on climate change that violate your neutrality, for example on specific government measures to reduce greenhouse gases. Be clear that while you cannot

support these positions it does not need to mean the end of the partnership.

Opportunities

When the partnerships succeed in highlighting what binds, rather than divides, (and climate change has a lot of binding elements) they may result in improved programmes for all partners. For example, a partnership between the meteorological office, the National Society and local radio stations may improve the awareness and early-warning programmes of all.

Programmes from good national and local partnerships may be more interesting for donors to fund.



School bus drives through flooded street during heavy rains in eastern Indian city of Kolkata. Photo: Reuters/Parth Sanyal