

Climate related stakeholders and questions to ask them

Why this document?

As humanitarian workers, we need to know more about who is doing what on climate issues in our country and/or region. Contacting key stakeholders is a great first step towards knowing about observed or projected changes in climate risks, and working out where are the gaps between knowledge and action to address them at a community level.

Establishing the first steps of a dialogue with experts can be a bit challenging. This document has been produced at the request of National Societies and Federation staff world-wide. It aims to help get that dialogue started by providing sample questions that you can consider asking to some of the key climate related stakeholders in your country. For a suggested list of stakeholders to contact, see the 2-page document 'Stakeholder Analysis' (available at: <http://www.climatecentre.org/site/wbg-step1>).

The following sections focus on (1) Meteorological Services, (2) Government focal points on climate change, (3) Health, and (4) Other stakeholders (local government representatives, community informants, etc). The questions listed below are not exhaustive: you may come up with questions that are more relevant to your circumstances. It is hoped that these might help inspire you.

1. Meteorological Services: A special contact

Background on Meteorological Services:

Meteorological (or 'Met') services often have the best technical knowledge on climate science. Unfortunately, however, they are generally overstretched and under-resourced, and are used to communicating in using somewhat sophisticated terminology. In most cases, this means that it will not be easy for them to divert resources in order to tailor products to your humanitarian needs. There are exceptions and a number of international initiatives are underway to help promote this type of service-oriented work. In some cases met services have gone so far as to send tailor-made bulletins to key Red Cross/Red Crescent contacts, develop Red Cross/Red Crescent-specific forecast products, and even provide a helpdesk to address questions on interpreting forecast information. Whether your met service is exceptional or only willing to do the bare minimum, it is a priority for virtually all met services to provide warnings for natural disasters. If you haven't accessed it yet, in most cases, the met services will have a good amount of information already available for you to tap into.

Although it is in a met service's interest to help the Red Cross Red Crescent, one exception to this is in the case that a country's forecasts are controlled by the aviation sector. Working with aviation to obtain forecast information can be difficult. The World Meteorological Organization is working to remedy this through re-structuring the organization. In the meantime, countries with aviation-controlled forecasts may find greater support from regional information providers.

In virtually all cases, establishing a relationship with your met service before a high-risk time, such as the rainy season, is important. Building the foundation for a flow of relevant information takes time, and is difficult to do once a crisis situation is underway.

Getting the relationship and flow of information started:

One way to get the conversation going is to invite a contact from the met services to your office, and show them the activities you're involved in. They will be more motivated to work

with you if they understand what you do and how the information they offer might be able to help save lives and livelihoods.

Sample questions

Questions to ask yourself and your colleagues before approaching the met service:

- What natural hazards related to climate and weather affect our work?
- Are we getting forecast information to help anticipate those hazards in advance? If so, is the information easy to access, understand, and act upon? If not, what would we need to know, and what would we do to prepare, if we had that information in advance?
- What's the best way for us to receive time-sensitive alerts? E-mail, fax, phone, SMS?
- How do we define "heavy rainfall"? At what point does rainfall become "too much" and cause concern for us?
- Do the government departments that you work with already have a partnership with the met service? (for example the national disaster management office might have an agreement with the met service on the activation of early warnings) How might this facilitate or inform the type of partnership we establish with the met service (how can we complement rather than duplicate or complicate established procedures)?
- Do people at risk have good access to early warnings? If so, do people trust the warnings? Why or why not? How are alerts usually communicated? Does the public understand them? What could be done to improve use of early warnings at the community level?

Who at the met services should you contact?

- For weather information (forecasts a few days in advance), you'll want to speak with someone in the "weather" or "meteorology" group.
- For historical information (for instance on weather extremes, what is the risk in different parts of the country) and forecasts with lead times of more than a few days, you'll want to speak with someone in the "climate" or "climatology" group.

Note that some meteorological offices may be arranged differently. For example they might have a hydrology section providing flood forecasts. Some might have sections that analyse longer terms trends in climate and a separate one for forecasting the season ahead.

Types of questions you might ask the Met Service:

Questions asked might depend also on what sort of relationship the Red Cross/Red Crescent already has with the met service. Here are some examples, which of course can be adjusted to the specific needs and opportunities of your team:

- What information services do they offer the public?
- What other user groups do they support? (For example, some might be linked to the government's water, agriculture or national disaster management agencies).
- What forecast information do they provide on extreme weather events?
- What timescales do they provide forecasts on (monthly, weekly, daily, hourly etc)?
- What area do the forecasts cover?
- How do they define "heavy rainfall"? (Compare it to how you define heavy rainfall)
- Are their forecasts strictly meteorological (atmospheric) or also hydrological (water related)? If hydrological, what type of flood forecasting or flood hazard mapping is available?
- Have they noticed any trends in recent years (hotter, drier, wetter etc), particularly in extremes? (Some meteorological offices do analysis on climate trends which can be very useful)
- Do they provide any training to the public or specific user groups on how to utilize forecast information?

- While you are there, it might be worth asking what non-climate related hazards they also provide any information on. For example, some might have information on seismic activity.
- Have they identified any gaps in their own work? What are they planning to work on in the future? Can the Red Cross / Red Crescent work with them in order to help save lives and livelihoods?

Note: the met services might not be your only source of information. For instance, very few met services have experience dealing with climate and health. So you might look for resources and contacts who can help you on anticipating specific climate and weather impacts within relevant sectors (health, agriculture, water resource management and hydrology).

Types of questions you should *NOT* ask:

- Don't ask for raw data, such as the daily rainfall measurements taken at a particular weather station (unless you really need them for a very specific purpose *and* have the mathematical and statistical skills and software to do proper analysis, which is often cumbersome). It is difficult for them to provide data, and in some cases it is politically sensitive. All the information you ask for should come in the form of interpreted products.
- Sometimes past forecasts are difficult to provide, but it is worth checking anyway.

Tip: It can be intimidating speaking with met service contacts. The key is not to get discouraged. Just as their language is unfamiliar to you, they are operating from a place in which they do not understand what you need or how to present it. So even without understanding all the technical language, you may find they can help you if you've communicated what you need to know and for what purpose. For example, "I need to know when heavy rainfall is enhancing flood risk. If flood risk in a particular area is getting high, I can alert my volunteers to activate community based early warning systems. Once one of these systems is activated, the entire community can be evacuated within two hours."

Getting it in writing:

It is very important to put all agreements, procedures, contacts etc. in writing with the met service. Even if the contact has been relatively informal, without documentation, progress you make in building the partnership can be lost if management changes or your key contact leaves. For these reasons it is also important to have a secondary contact, who understands your needs and their responsibility to you, in case your primary contact is unavailable.

Tip: It's natural if you don't understand some of the words that your met service contact is using. If they use a word repeatedly that you don't understand, ask them to explain it. It is important that people other than meteorologists understand what they are talking about.

2. Government focal points on climate change

These contacts, often found within the environment ministry, will have a good picture of who is doing what in relation to climate change and may have produced documents on the topic in your country. They will probably share information on climate change from two viewpoints. One is in relation to addressing the causes of climate change, commonly called "mitigation": this is mostly about the reduction of greenhouse gases (easy to get confused because in the humanitarian sector we use the concept of "disaster mitigation" - be wary of this term when talking to people working on climate change). The other, which is very relevant to disaster risk management efforts, is in relation to addressing the consequences of climate change, commonly called "adaptation". You may need to explain that the Red Cross/Red Crescent is concerned about the humanitarian implications of climate change. Here are some examples

of questions you may want to ask:

- Does your team work on climate change adaptation issues?
- Which areas/groups of people are most vulnerable to climate change?
- Have future climate projections been done for the country? On what geographic and time-related scale? What are the likely future impacts?
- In your opinion, what is the level of public understanding of climate change? Does it vary between rural and urban areas?
- Have awareness campaigns on climate change taken place? If so, can you share some examples with us? What was the target audience? Was the campaign successful? What did you learn from it in relation to communicating climate change?
- Who are the main stakeholders involved in climate change in the country? Does your team work in cooperation with other government departments/organisations etc? NGO's? Which ones?
- Is there a national climate change coordination body? Who is involved and when does it meet? What role do they play? Who can join?
- Does the government have plans to undertake climate change adaptation? What? Who is involved? Are there plans for community-level work, reaching the most vulnerable? How can the Red Cross help?
- Can you recommend any studies that have been done on climate change that would be relevant to the humanitarian work of the Red Cross?
- Do you know of any academic institutes or researchers working on climate related hazards or on climate change adaptation?

3. Health

It would be best if the person who does the assessment for the NSs teams up with the NS health manager/coordinator in doing this section. They will know a lot of people already in the country working on health so they know where to start, and it is also important that they are involved in networking with people working on climate change and health in the country.

Ministry of Health (MoH):

National Societies often have a close relationship with the MoH which is a great start. You can approach existing contacts and ask them who would be best to talk to on climate change and health in the MoH.

It is good to know that all countries have signed up to a World Health Assembly resolution that mandates governments to address the health effects of climate change.

- The MoH can be a source of information to find out what climate change will mean for health in your country.

- The MoH can also be a key partner to work with in addressing the effects of climate change on health. How this is best done is something that each NS will think about during the programme and discuss with the MoH. You can also discuss with the IFRC regional or Zonal health and care coordinator who can also contact the climate centre health specialist.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Country Office

The WHO do a lot of work on climate change and health. It is a relatively new topic area for them and there is not likely to be a climate change focal point in each country office. They might be able to give you materials on climate change and health that is relevant to your country and might be able to put you in touch with other local experts.

The WHO can also be a potential partner in addressing the health risks of climate change,

some country offices are starting projects on climate and health. They can also help you think about what the role of the NS could be in addressing the health impacts.

Contact details country offices: <http://www.who.int/countries/en/>

Just like the IFRC, there are also regional WHO offices. If the country offices do not have much information, the regional office can help.

Contact details for the regional offices: <http://www.who.int/about/structure/en/index.html>

Academics

It is unlikely that there will be a 'climate change and health' academic expert in each country that will know about all the different health impacts. Most people will know about a certain disease that they have been working on for a long time such as malaria, dengue, cholera etc. These academics may then also have some knowledge on how climate change will affect their particular disease.

Sample questions:

These are some sample questions you may want to ask your Ministry of Health (MoH) & World Health Organization (WHO) and local academics to find out more about climate change impacts on health in your area and what can be done about them:

- What are the health issues most related to climate variability and change?
- What is known about the observed or projected health impacts of climate change in your country?
- Are there any detailed assessments that are being/have been done? (You could think about whether or not the Red Cross/Red Crescent should be part of the assessment)
- Is there an action plan on health risk management under climate change?
- Is the Red Cross/Red Crescent and the MoH currently working on climate-sensitive diseases together at the national and/or local level?
- Is the MoH (and other agencies) doing surveillance on climate-sensitive diseases? Are the insights derived from this data shared with our National Society? Can it be used for planning?
- Are there any early warning systems for climate sensitive diseases? If so, how does our National Society fit into them?
- Who are the climate change and health experts in the country that we could contact?
- Is there a climate change and health working group of some sort that we should be in contact with or even be a part of?
- Are there any training or capacity building activities that we can be part of?
- What are NGOs doing on climate change and health? Do they have training or education materials that can be used?

Additional notes: Even though climate influences the distribution of several diseases there are many other factors that are important, such as poverty, urbanisation, population movement and access to care. It is very hard to say exactly what influence climate change will have. Many scientists are doing research in this area. However, for many diseases it is likely that climate change will have *some* influence. The Red Cross need to be prepared for things to change, even though we cannot say exactly how.

4. Other stakeholders (local government representatives, community informants, etc)

- What are the 'regular' climate risks that face the province/area/community - ie. weather related 'shocks' such as floods, typhoons etc and longer term/slower onset climate related risk such as drought.
- Have the intensity or frequency of these been changing at all?
- Have temperatures, rainfall or seasons been changing? If so, what implications might this have into the future? (could be positive or negative) Eg. consider health, disasters, agriculture, water, ecosystems.
- Are people/authorities making any moves to cope with these changes if they are occurring? What could be done?

At the community level you could consider asking these sorts of questions as part of your regular VCA or CBHFA (such as during the use of the seasonal calendar, historical mapping/profiling, focus group discussions with elders etc). Information gathered can then be used for risk reduction activity decision-making.