What is climate-smart programming and how do we achieve it?
IFRC and Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, September 2019

To address increasing risks from climate change in our work, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (‘the Movement’) invests in climate-smart programming, including the fostering of dialogue on policy, strengthening the capacity of National Societies, and raising awareness.

There is no universally accepted definition of climate-smart programming. Climate-smart programming equates simply to good development, enabling people to anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate shocks and stresses by using climate information across timescales, considering landscapes and ecosystems as key areas of intervention – all in close collaboration with governments, specialists and the private sector.

Most of what the Red Cross Red Crescent does can be affected by climate variability and change – in terms of climate-related events like storms, floods and droughts but also conflict.

The likely increase in the scale and predictability of risk in the next few years is of huge concern. Projects and planning in the Movement can no longer be based just on past experience; we must adjust to the new context of heightened uncertainties, growing vulnerabilities, scarce resources, and long-term change in general.

For the humanitarian and development sectors, climate-smart programming centres on the integration of the impacts of climate variability and change so it includes not only past and present risks but also changing and future ones (see Table 1).

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<th><strong>Table 1. Levels of integration in projects on climate change</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Climate smart</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Climate aware</strong></td>
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The Movement also, of course, aims to do its bit in reducing carbon emissions, greening our organization, reducing our CO₂ footprint and playing our part in limiting the long-term impacts of climate change on vulnerable people and the planet. Climate mitigation is an obligation on us all.

The following sections of this paper will elaborate on several preparatory steps, planning & implementation and complementary actions to strengthen the enabling environment for climate-smart programming, which involves engagement on policy with – and advocacy to – a wide variety of actors, including local and national government.
What steps will make our work climate-smart?

1. Assessments

A starting point is an assessment of climate risk that gathers background information on the changing risks in a country or a project area to inform prioritization within programming. Below are the types of questions that should be considered when undertaking a national level assessment of climate risk:

- Who are the key actors and vulnerable people who should be involved in the assessment?
- Which hazards and risks (see Figure 1) are changing most and how does this affect vulnerabilities?
- What sectors and which vulnerable people will be most affected in a changing climate?
- Are existing institutions and systems (such as social protection) able to adapt?
- What institutional changes may National Societies consider?
- What are current climate trends and how could extremes develop?
- Do legal and policy frameworks take weather and climate into account?
- What early warning systems exist and which stakeholders are active with them?
- How can disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness in general be reinforced?
- Are existing funding models adapted to climate change and changing risks?

For assessments at community level, it’s important to ensure that they are done through a future-climate and ecosystem lens as incorporated in the IFRC’s **enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment** (EVCA) guidance. The EVCA also provides local evidence of patterns of vulnerability and adaptation needs which the National Society can carry forward in their advocacy work (see below). When using other assessments tools, e.g. CBHFA, seeking inspiration in the EVCA can help climate-smart programming in other areas of work.

The findings on vulnerability can then be considered in relation to weather and climate patterns on which scientists can now provide good information (if not for specific locations).

It’s important to collaborate closely with national agencies providing meteorological and hydrological services and others. (See the **Climate Training Kit**, Modules 1a, Science and impacts and 2c, Community resilience and climate.)

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**Climate-smart programming**

...begins with a proper diagnosis of risk

- **Hazard.** Which (new) climate hazards and extreme weather events are occurring?
- **Exposure.** Are homes, businesses, infrastructure and people in the path of the storm?
- **Vulnerability.** What makes exposed people, homes, businesses, infrastructure susceptible to harm?

*Figure 1. Risk as a combination of hazards, exposure and vulnerabilities.*
2. Planning and implementation

Overall, climate-smart programming is about adjusting all the National Society’s activities and plans so they can face new weather conditions and extremes.

This includes ensuring that staff, volunteers and vulnerable people are not taken by surprise by extreme weather. A key is making use of weather forecasts (days, seasonal) and climate projections (years and decades) and invest in capacity building for people to access, understand and translate those warnings at different time scales to practical actions. This applies to whatever programmes the National Society is implementing or supporting: Long-, medium- and short-term risk reduction, livelihoods planning, WASH and disease prevention etc. all need to be scaled up in the face of climate change, taking information on climate risk-information into account. Examples are provided below.

Since climate-smart programming is a relatively new approach to many National Societies, reiterative learning, monitoring and evaluation are important components to ensure the activities are not just ‘business-as-usual’ but actually adjusted based on available evidence and projections of changing risk patterns. We encourage ‘learning-by-doing’ and exchange of knowledge, experiences and skills.

3. Community-based programmes

Climate-smart community planning (see Figure 2) – based on EVCA or similar assessments – needs to take into account new or changing extreme events along with the changes in exposure and vulnerability, including:

- Risk reduction, adaptation and mitigation measures can then be designed from an understanding of climate trends, backed up by strengthened capacity to act on forecasts.
- Stakeholders, partners and vulnerable groups can be supported in understanding early warning, early action – and the associated community preparedness measures such as team training, evacuation plans and WASH infrastructure can be developed with new extremes in mind.
- Risk reduction hardware projects in community plans should be designed with the best technical advice available, to withstand new or more intense extremes. (See examples and Exercises C and D in the Climate Training Kit, Module 2c, Community Resilience and Climate, which also includes further reading and materials.)

Community resilience projects that ignore climate projections and extreme uncertainty may risk to lose its purpose and create false sense of safety and security. For example, an irrigation scheme might stop functioning along a river that goes dry, or rising sea-levels or flash floods may jeopardize sustainability of drinking water projects.

An important ingredient is that communities explain their particular adaptation needs to local government; National Societies can help sharpen focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized people.

The 2013 Minimum Standards is a practical checklist to help local community leaders and National Societies ensure their community resilience efforts are climate-smart.
4. Preparedness for effective response (PER)

Preparing for effective response in a climate smart way means including scenarios that consider climate trends and weather extremes, and ensuring that proposed measures take these into consideration. Anticipatory action is a key element of being climate smart. The impacts of extreme weather events can be reduced if preventive action is taken before the events hit, based on forecasts. This requires applying the early warning, early action approach. Now, with IFRC’s fund for early action (called Forecast-based Action by the DREF), funding and pre-defined early actions can be triggered prior to a potential disaster as part of the forecast-based financing approach (see this German Red Cross manual).

For contingency planning, ask:

- What is a realistic worst-case scenario for a disaster considering the new weather extremes projected for your region?
- What preparedness and planning measures address which extreme scenarios?
- Review location of humanitarian warehouses: would they be safe and accessible in case of unforeseen extreme events?
- Are planned sites for camps for refugees or displaced people safe from extremes such as floods or storm surges? How would individual shelters feel in extremes of heat or cold?
5. Greening

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement aims to do its bit in reducing carbon emissions, make progress in greening our organization, reducing our CO₂ footprint and playing our part in limiting the long-term impacts of climate change on vulnerable people and the planet.

Climate mitigation is an obligation for our organization as a whole. In many cases, these solutions are cheaper to sustain and less environmentally harmful; much of our work on disaster resilience also both includes and benefits from ecosystem services like clean water or measures to control floods and erosion.

This helps to reduce risks and strengthen livelihoods, but can also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – when planting or protecting trees, for example.

Our starting point will be interventions that reduce risks and vulnerabilities for people, but we give special consideration to solutions that also reduce carbon emissions.

Among our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint is the green response, while programmes such as Partners for Resilience also apply ecosystem criteria. In addition, a short IFRC catalogue provides for National Societies of simple actions to address climate change.

Many National Societies have been promoting nature-based solutions such as the IFRC’s Caribbean Resilient Islands project, inland reforestation in Kenya, or mangrove planting in Indonesia and Vietnam.

A 2011 IFRC study of Vietnamese Red Cross coastal afforestation found that every year it compensates for the average emissions of 425,000 people. This is surely a great example of win-win-win-win activity – reducing disaster risks while providing adaptation, mitigation, livelihoods and health benefits. The IFRC is in the process of becoming a member of the Global Mangrove Alliance.

**Strengthening the enabling environment for climate-smart programming**

In order to ensure our climate-smart programming is sustainable and leads to broader institutional changes, we need to engage with many different actors, engage in policy dialogues, strengthen capacities and raise awareness about the urgency of climate change.

1. **Advocacy and dialogue on policy**

National Societies and other Movement entities gain a lot of insights on vulnerabilities and adaptation needs through the regular interventions with volunteers and people at risk – learnings that can be used in advocacy work:

- Present learning and evidence from community assessments, resilience planning and disaster assessments to policy-makers to demonstrate that local climate-smart disaster risk reduction and early warning early action need to be included/integrated in local and National Adaptation Plans.
- Engage in dialogue with authorities for the potential development of disaster laws and policies that include perspectives on climate change.
- Initiate partnerships and dialogue with actors who can support climate-smart programming. Which ones are already investing in climate change adaptation? Which ministries or other agencies are active?
- Is the private sector engaged? Is there already a good working relationship with agencies providing hydrological and meteorological services?

The Climate Training Kit’s Modules 3a and 3b offer material on climate-related policy dialogue and partnerships, including a new working paper on companies and resilience.
2. **Capacity strengthening and awareness raising**

Invest in awareness raising on how to access, understand and translate forecasts and early warnings into effective early actions. To raise awareness, consider ‘out-of-the box’ ideas like art and games; or appoint ‘ambassadors’ who can spread your message.

Mobilize volunteer and youth groups. A dedicated curriculum called Y-Adapt is available for National Societies to empower youth to take action. In addition, interactive methods like flash mobs and ‘tactical urbanism’ can motivate them still further.

A prerequisite for adaptation and climate-smart programming is first to do no harm; that means avoid actions that may be more harmful than helpful in the long run – we always need to avoid ‘maladaptation’, as it’s called. Two examples: if we support a livelihoods programme in drought-prone region by facilitating a shift in their main crops to more drought-resistant crops – instead of diversifying to a wider range of crop types – we may risk people become more vulnerable to the flash floods and wet periods that may also be an effect of with more variable weather patterns in the long run. Or if we support a livelihoods programme where coastal mangrove forests may be cut down and turned into shrimp farms to help increase the income of local households, we also reduce the protection against coastal waves that mangroves offer – and thereby leave coastal communities more vulnerable to storm surge damages on the longer term.