



# THE IMPORTANCE OF SCALING UP **LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION**

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Climate change is altering the magnitude, frequency and intensity of extreme events around the world. Globally, extreme weather such as floods and heatwaves, and slow-onset phenomena such as sea-level rise and desertification, coupled with changes in vulnerability and exposure, are exacerbating humanitarian crises, especially in poorly resourced and fragile settings.

Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are engaged before, during and after climate-related disasters. Their volunteers and branches are rooted in communities that know their needs and challenges best; the IFRC and National Societies can play a critical role supporting them to face and adapt to the climate crisis through locally led solutions. National Societies are integrating climate risks into existing programmes and operations; for example, by improving preparedness and early warning systems to address more intense floods.

But considering the scale of the climate crisis we need to increasingly work alongside

communities to strengthen climate resilience and implement climate adaptation measures from the short to the long term. Building longer-term climate adaptation capacity to withstand both current and future rising risks can include, for example, switching to resistant crops to deal with more intense and frequent droughts, building more resilient settlements in less flood-prone areas, and planting mangroves to protect coastal areas from the increasingly intense storms and sea-level rise.

Despite people and communities being on the front line of climate impacts, only 10 per cent of international climate finance reaches the local level, according to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, 2019). Much of the decision-making surrounding adaptation funding, policy, design and implementation occurs at national and global levels, which makes it challenging to tap into the vast expertise and knowledge of local actors, communities and indigenous peoples, who are most affected and best placed to design and deliver appropriate and effective solutions to the climate crisis. Locally led

adaptation aims to address this problem, giving local actors maximum agency over diverse climate adaptation actions.

Locally led adaptation should be the default approach to channelling climate finance and strengthening adaptation by directing flexible and targeted funding, information on climate risks, and technical support for local solutions.

In 2021, the Global Commission on Adaptation established these eight principles for locally led adaptation, endorsed by over 100 donors, governments and intermediary organizations, including the IFRC:



Art by Rebecka Ryyvola



- **Devolving decision-making to the lowest appropriate level.** Giving local communities and institutions more direct access to financing and power to decide how adaptation actions are designed, implemented and evaluated.



- **Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, people with disabilities, the displaced, indigenous people and marginalized groups.** Putting inclusion at the centre of adaptation interventions.



- **Providing predictable funding that can be accessed more easily.** Supporting simpler, quicker access modalities that span longer time frames.



- **Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy.** Improving the capability of local institutions to manage adaptation over the longer term without donor dependency.



- **Building a robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty.** Informing adaptation decisions through a combination of local and scientific knowledge.



- **Supporting flexible programming and learning.** Enabling solutions that deal with the uncertainty of adaptation through learning, flexible finance and programming; using evidence from programming to drive internal decision-making rather than treating monitoring and evaluation as just a reporting exercise for donors.



- **Ensuring transparency and accountability.** Being open with local stakeholders in terms of the process of application, selection and awarding of finance; where possible reducing upwards-facing accountability and reporting requirements of donors for local partners.



- **Encouraging collaborative action and investment.** Incorporating local adaptation into strategies and approaches across scales and initiatives to connect the local to the national level and international efforts.

## WHY IS LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION IMPORTANT TO THE IFRC NETWORK?

National Societies have a long history of engaging with communities, gathering their concerns, listening to their needs, and integrating them into priority actions, strategies and policies. Each National Society has a wide network of community-based volunteers – key partners in implementing and delivering humanitarian assistance.

This is formalized by [community engagement and accountability](#) – a way of working that counts communities as equal partners, ensuring their opinions are taken into account as the basis of the design and implementation of IFRC operations. Community engagement and accountability is critical to ensuring community trust and participation of affected communities in the adaptation efforts taking place at the local level. The perspectives of those affected by climate change need to be systematically integrated into the design,

implementation and evaluation of climate adaptation programmes, combining scientific and local and traditional climate knowledge, and using the right tools and social approaches.

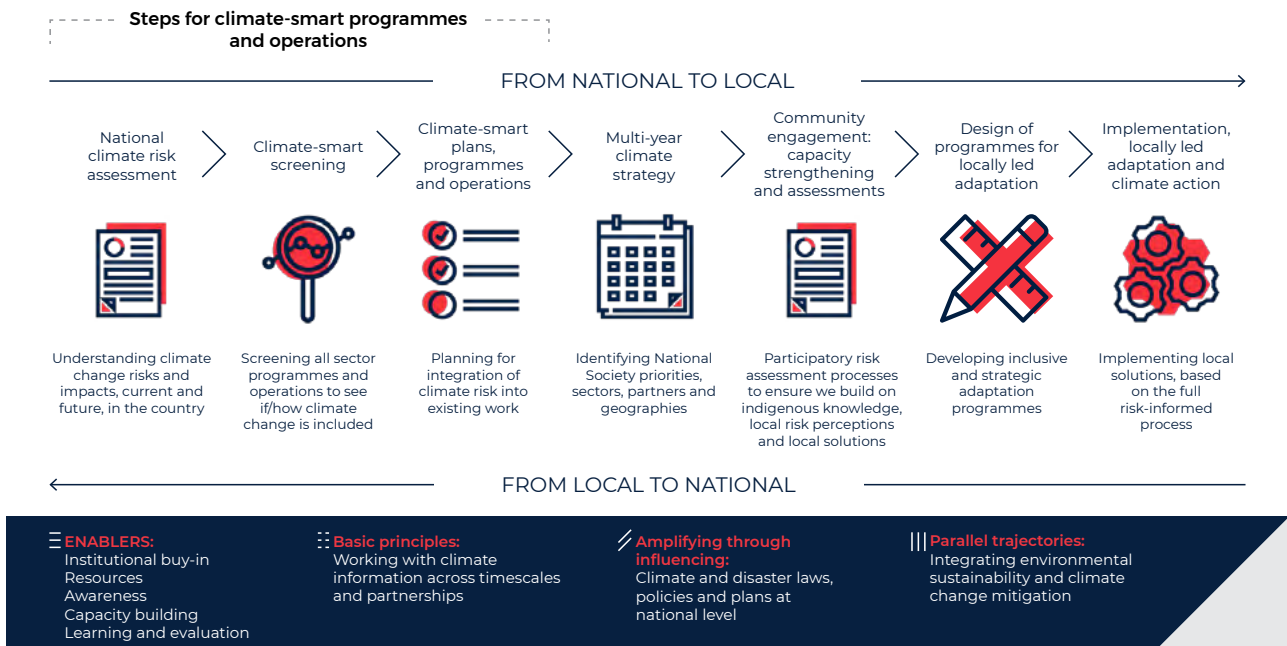
In addition, the IFRC network has shown strong institutional commitment to addressing the climate crisis – for example, through the *Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations*; by setting out in its *IFRC Strategy 2030* how we can help individuals and communities not just survive but thrive; and by helping people adapt to climate change and reduce their climate-related risks through the [IFRC Global Climate Resilience Platform](#). Locally led adaptation combines these agendas by promoting climate action through increased localization, ensuring that vulnerable people are empowered to take action to protect themselves against the impacts of climate change.



Alongside our humanitarian response to climate-related disasters, supporting longer-term adaptation led by communities and stakeholders is critical for the IFRC and links our work across the disaster management continuum – before, during and after climate-related disasters. With many decades of National Society experience in resilience building and disaster risk management in the most vulnerable and

remote communities, our global network is uniquely positioned to advance the aims and ambitions of locally led adaptation. It also provides a useful framework for National Societies to design, implement and learn from climate action, and generates new ways of working for the IFRC, its partners and donors, challenging us to enable decentralized decision-making and providing more flexible, long-term finance.

## HOW DO WE GET TO LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION?



**Figure 1.** The Climate Action Journey methodology

While most National Societies have extensive experience of working on resilience and disaster risk reduction, actual implementation of adaptation requires an increased understanding of climate risks and information, adjusting or designing new types of programmes that address these specific risks, and collaborating with new local and national partners. To support this shift in how we work, the IFRC has developed the climate action journey that has locally led adaptation as a central goal (Figure 1). This approach

encompasses National Societies as its champions, guiding the implementation of programmes and projects that empower local actors to engage in climate action.

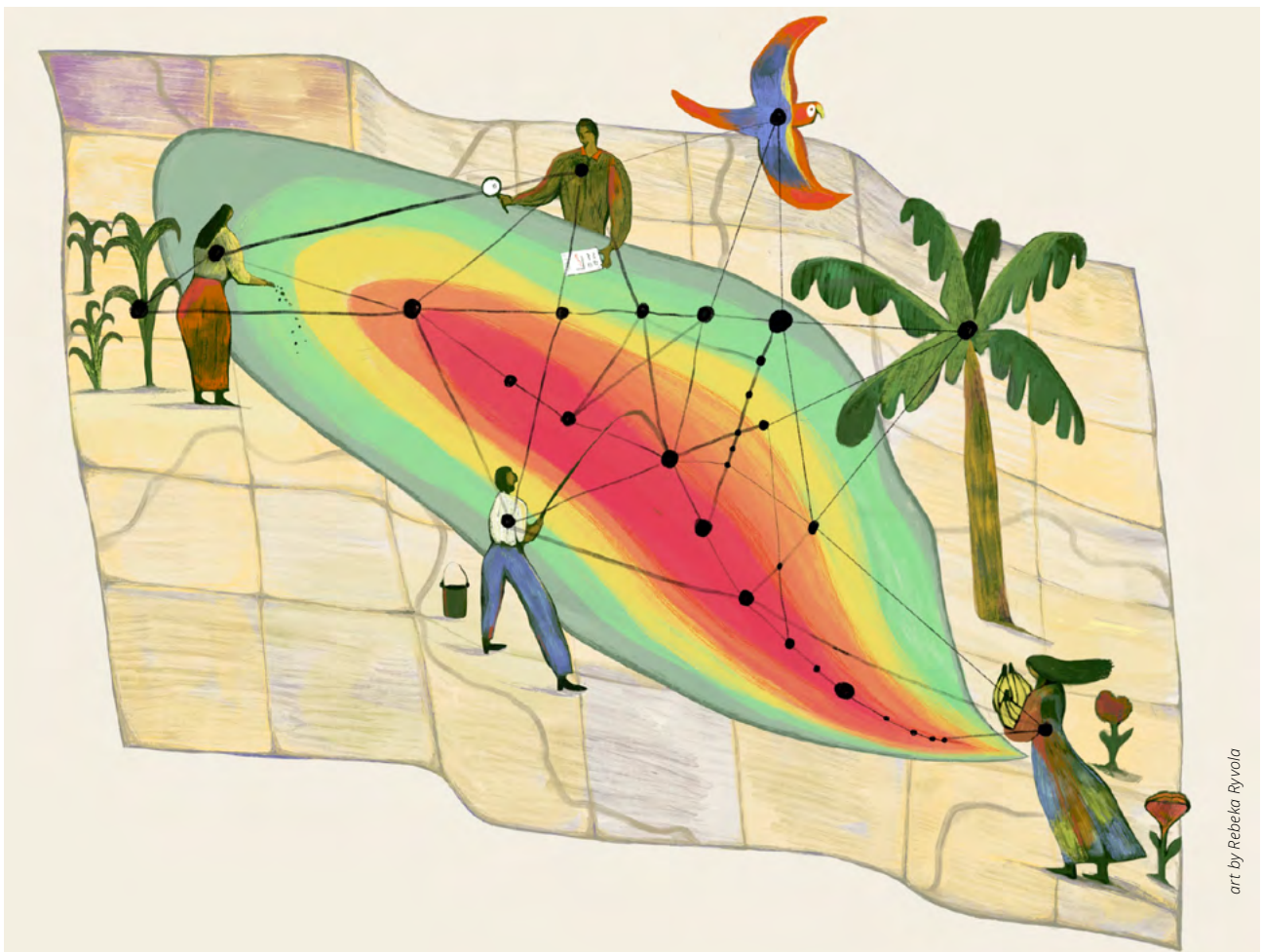
Maintaining the community-level risk perspective at each stage is crucial for the journey’s success. It starts with an understanding of climate risks (the national climate risk assessment) before undertaking a climate-smart screening of existing National Society plans and programmes; then combining this with local knowledge,

participatory risk assessments and risk perceptions on climate. The culmination of the National Society's climate action journey is the design, implementation and learning of locally led adaptation that is informed about climate risks. Locally led adaptation projects translate the journey's efforts into meaningful interventions for communities affected by current and projected climate risks.

Locally led adaptation is designed to support communities to become more resilient in the face of a changing climate. The enhanced [vulnerability and capacity assessment](#) is the key tool for translating the journey into locally led adaptation. It will require an additional climate lens, with an emphasis on avoiding maladaptation and a solid understanding of climate change projections and likely increase in future risks and uncertainties.

In addition, the [road map to community resilience](#) and community engagement and accountability both offer additional support with analysis of community risks, and in particular the climate risk perceptions of marginalized groups, design of actions, and joint learning. The focus will be on achieving a truly locally led approach rather than our more practised community-based approach.

Further guidance will be provided this year (2024). The first three steps of the climate action journey align with our approach to integrating climate risks into existing areas of work and can be found in the new guide on [climate-smart programmes and humanitarian operations](#).



**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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