



A Malawi Red Cross Society volunteer talks to Patricia Walasi at her home in the southern Malawi township of Mangochi about the risks of cholera, and how they can be reduced within the community. Malawi's cholera outbreak, which started in March 2022, has spread to all 29 districts of the country and is the worst in many years. Climate change is likely to increase cholera risk, with local environmental factors playing a critical role in a population's exposure.

BLOG: **SPEARHEADING THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY IN MALAWI**

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and climate champion

BLOG

SEVENTY PER CENT OF MALAWI'S PEOPLE LIVE BELOW THE INTERNATIONAL POVERTY LINE, ACCORDING TO THE UN. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AT LEAST 80 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION LIVE IN RURAL AREAS, RELY ON SMALL-SCALE FARMING AND HAVE REDUCED ACCESS TO EDUCATION, HEALTH AND LIVELIHOODS SUPPORT, MAKING THE POPULATION PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

With the multiple stresses that our country faces, we are deeply concerned about the aggravating impacts of climate change. We are undertaking a climate action journey to set our institutional vision and priorities on climate to enable us to scale up climate action with the most at-risk communities we work with.

Climate hazards impacting Malawi now and in the future include seasonal droughts, strong winds, intense rainfall, tropical cyclones – like the 2023 Freddy which President Chakwera described as the most devastating disaster in our history – and floods. Malawi has experienced numerous severe floods that caused displacement, injury and death. Increasingly extreme rainfall is likely to increase the flood risk.

The Malawi Red Cross Society in collaboration with its Ministry of Natural Resource and Climate Change is a leading actor on climate action in the country and is paving the way through this climate action journey to scale up locally led adaptation. This means a holistic and strategic step-by-step approach and we have taken a number of steps so far along this journey.

Firstly, we were oriented on the journey itself and supported with climate risk assessments at national level. This involved a literature review and consultation with experts from various relevant sectors, and also looked at Red Cross experience in identifying priority communities and risks that we need to focus on with climate programming. We also mapped out relevant government and other

climate stakeholders that we need to engage with and bring onboard as a first step.

Secondly, we screened our programmes and operations for climate risk, analysing policies and strategies and asking: *Are they climate-smart?* For example, we looked at our first aid policy to say, do we have an element of climate-smart issues there? Then we looked at the best practices to bring climate into these strategies and what we can recommend going forward. Both the climate risk assessment and the screening outcomes have been summarized in a [story map](#).

As a next step, we want to come up with a proposal with communities and local partners, that is going to clearly define options for locally led adaptation. We will work in the identified areas that are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards.

In terms of our locally led adaptation options, we are also looking at the institutional priorities and targets of the National Society. The aim here is a multi-year climate strategy that encompasses everything and sets our institutional vision and priorities on climate for the next few years.

Our climate action task force validates all outcomes of this engagement. The task force is for the National Society and it has been mobilized from a wide variety of sectors. The senior leadership is part of that team. We also have colleagues from the support services and the IFRC, and even an internal auditor and the procurement person.

The climate action journey is a living process, able to be adapted whenever new experiences and lessons arise. Experiences and thoughts by National Societies are critical to shape this journey into a tool that will be most helpful to the mission and work of Red Cross Red Crescent.

The National Society has to be at the centre of the journey, defining the direction it's taking. The multi-year strategy defined the direction that we want. This way, all the partners that comes to support will not dictate what we need to do around our climate action; rather, as a National Society, this is us saying, "You have resources around climate actions – this is what you must buy into."

What are the enablers for success? There was a significant need for buy-in from our senior leadership. They are aware of this climate action journey, and they have accepted it as central. We also want to thank the IFRC and the Climate Centre for help in mobilizing the resources: we are now able to go throughout the process because we have the tools all ready.

We are looking at a holistic approach; a multi-sectoral approach to adaptation. For example, not only how climate impacts food security but also health, or who is affected and how, and so on.

As the Malawi Red Cross continues its climate action journey, we hope our lessons identified and shared will be particularly helpful and inspiring to other National Societies who wish to start their own journey.

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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