

THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY TOWARDS LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION

A strengthened pathway for Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies to scale up locally led adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is already a major driver of humanitarian crises and will continue to escalate their severity, worsening food and water insecurity, undermining livelihoods, displacing communities and impacting health and well-being, especially among the poorest and most marginalized populations. As climate impacts intensify, adaptation is becoming an urgent priority. Locally led adaptation (LLA) is a key vehicle for addressing the climate crisis, empowering communities on the front lines to identify, lead and sustain solutions that strengthen climate resilience while responding to local needs and priorities.

Across the world, Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies are witnessing the growing impacts of climate change on the communities they serve. As highlighted in the [Climate and Environment Charter](#) for Humanitarian Organizations, urgent action is needed to reduce emissions, adapt to increasing risks and address loss and damage. With a trusted local presence in 191 countries and 280,000 branches, National Societies are uniquely positioned to scale locally led adaptation. This updated Climate Action Journey (CAJ) provides a strategic pathway to strengthen capacities, catalyses meaningful community engagement from the outset, and places community ownership at its core.

WHAT IS THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY?

National Societies are embarking on a dedicated CAJ to initiate, deepen and scale up climate action and LLA by: i) increasing their climate risk knowledge and capacity; ii) strengthening partnerships; and iii) accessing climate finance to sustain and expand impact. It allows them to engage governments as essential partners in climate risk assessment, planning and financing. And lastly, it enables them to integrate changing climate risks into different areas of their work, including complex and compounding risks, to ensure the interventions are able to withstand future shocks and stresses. This cross-sectoral approach and multi-level collaboration with governments and partners promotes the National Societies' cross-cutting capacity as well as their auxiliary role to public authorities in delivering LLA solutions that are sustained, financed and embedded in national systems. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, the CAJ offers logical steps for National Societies to empower communities to strengthen LLA, including in contexts where disruptions hamper government and other services reaching communities, thereby making locally led solutions critical.

WHO IS THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY FOR?

The Climate Action Journey is designed for Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies at all stages of their climate action, whether they are just beginning to build climate awareness, future-proofing programmes and integrating climate risks into existing projects, or already implementing locally led adaptation at scale. It is equally relevant for a National Society taking its first steps on climate as for one seeking to deepen impact, access climate finance and drive systemic, sustainable change.

At its core, the Climate Action Journey is about local action. It supports National Societies to work with and through their branches, volunteers and communities, ensuring that adaptation is genuinely led by those closest to the risks and that the most vulnerable groups who are disproportionately impacted by climate change will be able to design

Addressing climate impacts and addressing greenhouse gases emissions

Addressing the impacts of climate change (adaptation) and reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change (mitigation) are both urgent.

What are climate-smart programmes and operations? Integrating available climate and weather information – short-term weather and seasonal forecasts, and long-term climate change projections – in designing and/or adjusting all programmes and operations to ensure that, at a minimum, they do not place people at increased risk from new climate extremes and, if possible/ appropriate, empower communities to anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate shocks and long-term changes.

What is locally led adaptation? Climate change adaptation is about taking action focused on increasing resilience to the current and future effects of climate change; locally led adaptation is simply owned by local partners. [Eight principles](#) were developed to help ensure that local communities are empowered to lead sustainable and effective adaptation to climate change at the local level (Global Centre on Adaptation, 2021).

and implement meaningful action. In their auxiliary role to public authorities, National Societies are also uniquely placed to influence the policies, plans and systems that shape how communities adapt, connecting grassroots action to national climate governance and longer term resilience.

LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION AT THE CENTRE

The IFRC approaches locally led adaptation through a humanitarian lens by integrating climate risks into programmes and operations, while facilitating adaptation that is genuinely owned and led by front line communities, in both the short- and long-term. Central to this is a combination of scientific climate knowledge and the indigenous and traditional knowledge that communities have developed over generations: local understanding of weather patterns, seasonal changes and early warning signs that no dataset can fully capture.

The Climate Action Journey methodology is explicitly designed to support National Societies to operationalize [locally led principles](#). It supports enhanced local access to international climate finance and helps to influence the national and local policies that shape how resources can be allocated and prioritized by communities to enable locally led solutions. For National Societies this means aligning their existing work with this approach to enhance climate visibility, influence and funding. The Climate Action Journey reaffirms the principle that resilience starts with the people closest to the risks. Its tools, processes and support structures are designed to shift power towards communities, ensuring that adaptation is not just localized in geography, but genuinely led by those with the most at stake.

The Climate Action Journey builds directly on the IFRC's [Road Map to Community Resilience](#), which established the foundational approach of accompanying, enabling and connecting communities as primary agents of change, bringing a dedicated climate and LLA lens to existing community engagement tools, such as the Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment ([EVCA](#)) or integrated approaches to Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI).

LOCAL LEVEL

Driving climate action to scale, and empowering communities and people most vulnerable to lead on their own climate adaptation

1. Engage, empower, lead, position

Local outputs:

- Climate focal points
- Branch leadership commitment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Local introduction to the CAJ

National outputs:

- Climate focal points and climate technical working group
- Leadership commitment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Institutional readiness for CAJ



2. Understanding climate risks

Local outputs:

- Climate risk communication for branch and community level
- Basic climate change and LLA training
- Communities' selection and mapping of most vulnerable groups

National outputs:

- National Climate Risk Assessment
- Basic climate change and LLA training



3. Community planning

Local outputs:

- EVCA with climate and LLA lens to embed scientific and indigenous knowledge in community action plans

National outputs:

- Support branch-level community engagement on climate as needed



5. Implementation, learning and strategic direction

Local outputs:

- Engage local partners, stakeholders and communities on climate
- Monitor, report and evaluate

National outputs:

- National Climate Strategy
- Climate finance investment plan



4. Mainstreaming climate change

Local outputs:

- Communities prioritize, decide, plan and budget climate actions based on community action plans
- Discussions and partnerships with in-country experts and communities

National outputs:

- Review community action plans regarding feasibility, budget and impact of climate actions
- Screening workshop



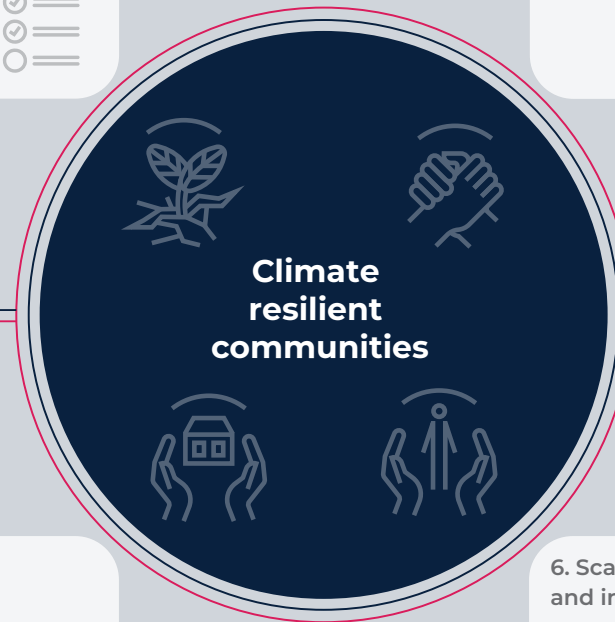
6. Scaling, fundraising and influencing

Local outputs:

- Scaling LLA and climate programming within and across communities, through enhanced funding flows and local leadership
- Feedback mechanism

National outputs:

- Climate policy and advocacy products
- Donor engagement and mapping
- Fundraising plan and climate proposals



NATIONAL LEVEL

Enable scaling up of climate action and LLA by increasing climate risk knowledge, strengthening partnerships and accessing finance

THE SIX STEPS OF THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY

The Climate Action Journey unfolds through six interconnected steps at national and local level, each carrying forward the institutional buy-in and risk knowledge established in the sections previously. 'National level' is defined as the National Society headquarters along with key national partners such as government ministries, national-level organizations, research institutes, private-sector actors, et cetera. 'Local level' refers to National Society branches, communities and local partners such as municipalities, local organizations and local businesses, et cetera.

These steps are not strictly linear and flexibility is key to addressing different contexts and positions. National Societies with existing capacity may enter at a later step, revisit earlier ones as risks and needs evolve, or advance several steps in parallel, particularly where seed funding, even if it's limited, is available.

Nevertheless, steps 1 and 2 work slightly differently. Step 1 (engage, empower, position, lead) builds the strategic foundation and shapes the process, giving the National Society ownership from the start. The following steps benefit from the high-level, cross-departmental engagement, ownership and buy-in established through this process.

Step 2 (understanding climate risk) gives every following step a foundational understanding of changing climate risks that is needed to work towards climate resilient communities and to avoid maladaptation. For these reasons, steps 1 and 2 come first. Step 2 relies on both local knowledge and access to understandable climate information and science.

From Step 3 to 6 onwards, the CAJ opens up and steps can follow one another or run in parallel, depending on what best fits the National Society's own context. Step 3 focuses on community planning, while Step 4 lays the groundwork for mainstreaming climate change into plans

and operations. Step 5 defines strategic priorities, implements climate action and facilitates learning, and Step 6 scales up LLA experience through further programming, access to finance and policy influencing.

Experience has shown that the Climate Action Journey is most effective when a number of enabling conditions are in place. These are achievable even with modest seed funding and help create the foundation for success across all steps of the Journey:

- ◆ leadership buy-in and dedicated National Society ownership – climate action must be championed at all levels, backed up by leadership
- ◆ strong collaborations and partnerships in-country
- ◆ good understanding of changing risks at all levels and across sectors
- ◆ predictable, flexible and diversified funding – reliance on single funding streams creates vulnerability, while flexibility is needed to enable LLA and to respond to community defined priorities, rather than being tied to donor demands
- ◆ flexible, modular application – the CAJ works best when adapted to context, not applied rigidly
- ◆ community trust and management of expectations – avoiding loss of credibility and damaged relationships requires an inclusive approach with the 'do no harm' principle at its core
- ◆ integration with existing National Society systems – the CAJ strengthens what exists rather than creating parallel processes.

The Climate Action Journey is the network's commitment to realizing locally led potential at scale, with quality and with communities leading the way. It offers a methodology that can be flexibly tailored, inspiring and informing other humanitarian actors to integrate climate risk and scale locally led adaptation at a time of increased complex and unprecedented risks and polycrisis.