LOCAL ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Challenges and lessons learned for National Societies in the "Global North"

Red Social Innovation
by french + spanish red-cross

Editorial Team:

Editorial Consultant
Clara Houzelot

Red Social Innovation Team
French Red Cross :
Marie Alice Manderscheid
Rosine Zadi
Spanish Red Cross :
Ana Penalver-Blanco
Gabriella Perullo

Graphic Design:
Maja Bialon

Testimonials:

Sarah Favrichon
Technical Expert, Climate Change Adaptation, Department of International Operations, French Red Cross

Hélène Grossetie-Rückert
Consultant in Resilience Hubs, Climate Adaptation & Crisis Preparedness, French Red Cross

Fleur Monasso
Locally Led Adaptation Lead, Regional Climate Focal Point for Europe, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre

Jérôme Faucet
Research, Evaluation and Training Officer, Adaptation Focal Point, URD Group (Emergency – Rehabilitation – Development)

Arnaud Ganaye
Director of Territorial Resilience Projects, CEREMA (Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning)

Vivian Dépoués
Thematic Lead – Climate Change Adaptation, I4CE (Institute for Climate Economics)

Herminia Magán
National Director, DANA Plan, Spanish Red Cross

Paloma García
Environment Officer, DANA Plan, Spanish Red Cross

Victor Manuel Segura
National DRR Officer, DANA Plan, Spanish Red Cross

Marij Zwart
WASH Technical Expert, Netherlands Red Cross

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Red Cross support for older people, Photo : Nicolas Beaumont.

Red Social Innovation Who are we?

Founded in 2021 by the French and Spanish Red Cross, Red Social Innovation brings together over 300 social innovators from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, united by a shared commitment to addressing humanitarian challenges.

Our platform connects you to 250+ social innovations, practical resources, and real-world lessons to support your innovation journey.

''Perspectives'' is our editorial initiative offering fresh insights on innovation within the Movement. Its first edition focuses on climate change adaptation in the Global North — drawing on existing tools and expertise to deliver concrete, actionable solutions for National Societies.

EDITORIAL

Consequences of the cyclone in Mayotte.
Photo : Marie Magnin.

In the interest of readability and accessible language throughout this report, we have chosen to use the terms ''Global North'' and ''Global South'' rather than ''high-income'' and ''low and middle income countries'' while fully acknowledging that these terms are increasingly regarded as imprecise. Their continued use risks reinforcing outdated power hierarchies and an oversimplified view of the world, rather than accurately reflecting today's complex and evolving global dynamics.

In recent years, several extreme climate events have struck European territories, most notably the flooding in Valencia in October 2024, the cyclone that devastated Mayotte in December 2024, and the heatwaves and wildfires that swept across the Iberian Peninsula in the summer of 2025 each mobilizing emergency response operations by the Spanish Red Cross and the French Red Cross respectively. Lessons learned from these crises have highlighted both the remarkable capacity for rapid mobilization within our Movement, and the urgent need to strengthen our preparedness in the face of climate-related emergencies that are becoming increasingly frequent and severe across Europe.

These events raised a simple but pressing question: **how could climate change mitigation and adaptation (CCA) be more systematically embedded into our own national programmes?** Within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), both mitigation and adaptation to climate change are already recognized as strategic priorities. However, existing work has largely been developed for "Global South" contexts, where climate impacts have long shaped humanitarian action. Today, a different question deserves to be asked: **how can we draw on what works, and thoughtfully adapt it to our own realities?**

National Societies already have a rich set of tools, methods, and expertise at their disposal: participatory risk assessment, community preparedness, anticipatory action, and the documentation and sharing of local knowledge. These are approaches that have been developed, tested, and proven effective, yet they remain largely underutilized within the national contexts of "Global North" countries. At a time when the need for adaptation and mitigation is accelerating, innovation does not necessarily mean building new programs or developing new areas of expertise. It can also mean finding new ways to mobilize what already exists.

This is precisely the approach proposed here. Rather than treating climate change adaptation as ''yet another programme,'' ''yet another cost,'' or ''yet another area of expertise,'' this approach invites us to explore **how the resources and know-how already present within the RCRC Movement can be repurposed, adapted, and shared** to address the climate challenges now affecting every region and community. Because innovation is not solely about invention. It is also about the capacity to shift perspective. And sometimes, that begins with a simple question: **what can we learn from ourselves?**

Glossary and lexicon

CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CRA (Community Risk Assessment)	Dashboard to identify and predict the areas most vulnerable to disasters
CRMC (Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities)	Zurich alliance tool for measuring community climate resilience
CVCA (Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis)	Climate change vulnerability and capacity analysis — CARE Tool
EVCA (Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment)	Participatory Red Cross tool for analyzing risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities with communities
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
GHG	Greenhouse gases
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
IBF (Impact Based Forecasting Portal)	Impact-Based Forecasting portal to support anticipatory action decision-making
LLA (Locally Led Adaptation)	Local adaptation to climate change, an approach that places genuine decision-making power in the hands of local actors to design, implement, and evaluate adaptation actions
IRCC Mouvement	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
Nature-Based Solutions Working with Nature Framework	An approach that draws on natural processes — such as ecosystem restoration and reforestation — to reduce the impacts of climate-related events and strengthen resilience.
PACDR (Participatory Assessment of Climate and Disaster Risks)	A participatory tool for analysing climate and disaster risks.
RSI	Red Social Innovation
NS	National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society
TACCT	An ADEME tool that supports local authorities in building a territorial adaptation strategy, from initial diagnosis through to evaluation.
The Climate Action Journey	A Red Cross Red Crescent Movement tool that empowers communities to design and scale up locally-driven adaptation measures, while helping NGOs integrate climate risks into their existing humanitarian operations.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FOR NATIONAL SOCIETIES IN THE "GLOBAL NORTH"

1.1 Introduction

As a 40% increase in the number of disasters is projected by 2030 (UNDRR, 2022), National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are particularly invested in climate change mitigation and adaptation standing, as they do, on the front lines of the humanitarian crises that result from it.

In countries of the ''Global South'' where the impacts of climate change are particularly visible (especially in regions heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock, and where capacities and resources to cope with climate shocks and stresses are limited): international aid organisations have been implementing ''**Locally Led Adaptation**'' (LLA) approaches alongside communities for several years. This ambitious and far-reaching policy agenda aims to strengthen the power and funding of local actors in humanitarian response, and in particular to enable communities to design, decide on, and implement solutions to both current and future climate impacts[1]. It is worth noting that **the European Union now favours the concept of climate resilience** over that of adaptation, particularly as debates have shifted towards questions of climate security and defence[2].

COUNTRIES OF THE ''GLOBAL NORTH'' ARE EQUALLY AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, WHICH IS FUNDAMENTALLY AND LASTINGLY RESHAPING HUMANITARIAN RISKS.

Although adaptation sits at the heart of the latest IPCC reports, **the issue is advancing slowly in ''Global North'' countries,** whose policies have until now focused primarily on reducing CO2 emissions of which they are the largest producers. While these ''mitigation'' efforts are necessary, the imperative of adaptation remains equally unavoidable, particularly as European countries are not sufficiently prepared to face the rapidly growing range of climate risks (**EEA, 2024**). Addressing this will require an unprecedented level of cooperation between public, private, and civil society actors, a space in which National Societies and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement have a vital role to play.

What does an LLA approach look like for National Societies in the ''Global North''? Why is it in their interest to engage on this issue? What existing tools, expertise, and frameworks can they draw on? And how can they become strategic actors in local adaptation without losing sight of their core social mission?

This Red Social Innovation publication, led by the French and Spanish Red Cross, aims to ''**demystify**'' the subject of local climate change adaptation by equipping innovators with the knowledge and tools they need to understand and act.

The first part begins by exploring the key definitions and issues involved in transposing the LLA approach to the context of Global North countries. The second part offers a range of case studies and tools drawn from existing initiatives within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, providing practical inspiration for readers. Finally, the third part invites reflection and opens up broader perspectives on the strategic role that National Societies can play.

1. The LLA approach differs from decentralization dynamics in that it focuses on the deployment of initiatives led by local and national actors (ALN), often on the margins of the aid system (ANALP, 2025).

2. In the remainder of this publication, we will use the two expressions (climate adaptation and climate resilience) interchangeably.

1.2 Climate change adaptation: What are we talking about?

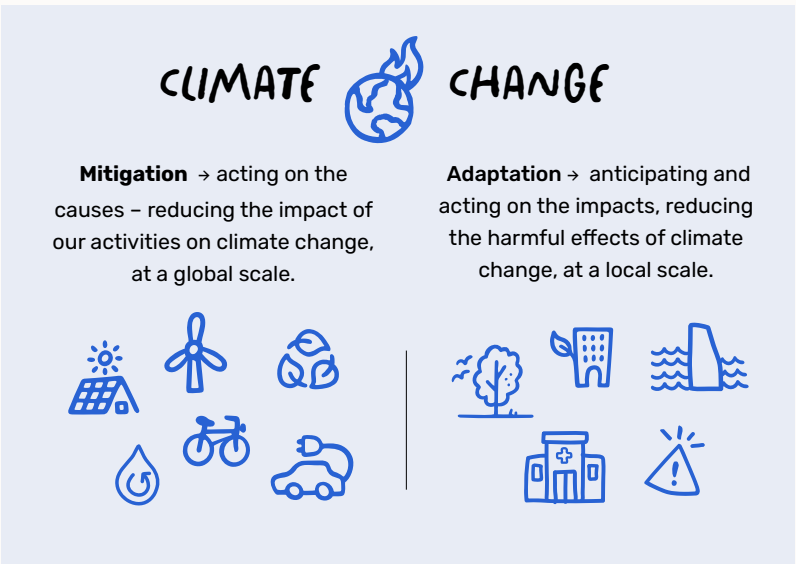
Understanding the difference between mitigation and adaptation

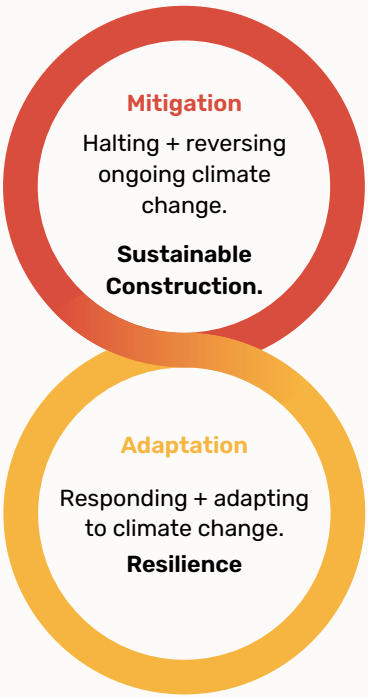
There is no longer any debate: the climate is changing, no matter what, and the impacts of global warming are already visible at every scale. Countries of the "Global North" are themselves experiencing heatwaves, droughts, floods, landslides, and rising sea levels (Durand, 2012). In response to this reality, two types of action are taking shape:

Mitigation aims to: **slow down and limit atmospheric warming** in order to preserve climate stability in the future, by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Adaptation aims to: **reduce the exposure and vulnerability of ecosystems and populations to the impacts** of climate change both those already underway and those yet to come and **to increase resilience** (the capacity to cope with and recover balance after a major disruption). The climate vulnerability of a territory is defined by the IPCC as the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with, the adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extreme events.

Locally Led Adaptation, Climate Centre. Illustration : Betje.





These two strategies must be considered in parallel:

A complementary relationship: reducing CO2 emissions at a global scale to limit climate disruption and warming is just as necessary as adapting today to existing impacts and transforming practices at the local level. Moreover, adaptation strategies can accelerate mitigation policies for example, replanting hedgerows to stabilise agricultural soils also sequesters carbon, thereby contributing to a reduction in CO2 emissions.

Pitfalls to avoid: solutions can produce unintended counterproductive effects, known as ''maladaptation'' meaning they increase, in the present or future, vulnerability to climate change or degrade living conditions, according to the IPCC. Examples include water storage structures that lose their effectiveness and become unviable due to more intense rainfall, or irrigation systems that run dry as a result of declining precipitation.

The defining features of the adaptation approach

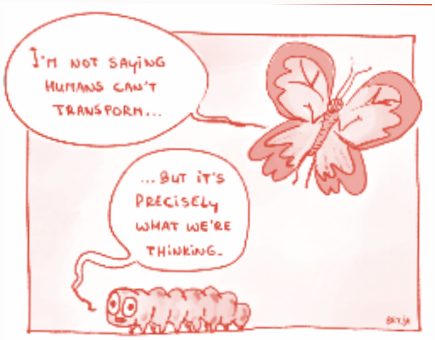
- **A locally driven momentum, embedded within national and international institutional frameworks:** adaptation must be conceived on and from the ground up. This is partly because every territory has its own specificities (geographical, demographic, social, economic, and biological) and partly because the consequences of climate change are and will be very different from one area to another. Furthermore, in Europe, funding for adaptation appears to be increasingly allocated at the local level, through initiatives financed by the EU's ''Adaptation'' mission, such as ''Pathways 2 Resilience''. The majority of adaptation funding is distributed at the level of local authorities and municipalities (Climate Center, 2026).

- **A systemic approach:** this is not solely an environmental or technical issue that each organisation can **address in isolation. It touches on every dimension of how societies are organised**, including human behaviours and practices, natural resources, land use planning, legal and financial systems, and fields such as risk reduction, health, water, and sanitation. The interdependence, complexity, and technical nature of these challenges require the blending of multiple areas of expertise and **working in cooperation** with a wide range of actors.

- **A transformative lens:** it is important to move away from the notion that ''we have always adapted'' because in the face of disruptions of unprecedented scale and speed, we cannot rely on natural or

Limitations to bear in mind: there are situations where it is no longer possible to either mitigate or adapt on the ground to irreversible effects already underway, such as areas becoming uninhabitable due to extreme heat, or islands threatened by submersion. In these cases, other types of strategies must be put in place, such as the relocation of populations, alongside consideration of compensation for losses and damages.

Supporting beneficiarries at the Oasis respite centre. Photo : Christophe Hargoues.



Locally Led Adaptation, Climate Centre. Illustration : Betje.

spontaneous adaptation alone. Adaptation demands major structural transformations, which requires both awareness and collective commitment to bring them to life. And that takes time, something that does not always align with the short-term prioritization and funding cycles that often drive decision-making. This is why adaptation may also draw, in part, on incremental measures: adjustments that introduce meaningful improvements without fundamentally reshaping existing systems.

+ **An undeniable link between social and climate justice:** the impacts of climate change deepen existing inequalities at multiple levels as it is consistently the most vulnerable populations who bear the greatest burden, while having the fewest resources available to develop and implement adaptation strategies.

Adaptation is therefore a continuous and iterative **process, one that requires a profound transformation in the way we operate, and consequently, co-designing approaches that unfold over the long term,** all within a context of uncertainty. In the face of such complexity, grounding adaptation thinking in real-world experience and within a defined territory proves to be absolutely essential!

For instance, in response to the increasing frequency of heatwaves in urban areas (alongside a reduction in cold spells), creating "cooling spaces" represents an incremental adaptation while implementing a broader urban planning programme (such as soil de-sealing, shifts in mobility practices, and the transformation of streetscapes and building orientation…) constitutes a transformational adaptation.

Incremental adaptation Cooling areas.

Transformational adaptation Rethinking urban planning, mobility, and building orientation.

1.3 The challenges of local adaptation to climate change

An approach by and for the most exposed populations

Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) refers to an approach in which **local actors** (communities, local private organizations, and civil society groups) hold **genuine decision-making power** to design, implement, and evaluate climate adaptation actions that directly affect them.

In other words, this is an approach aimed at **preparing territories and exposed populations for the impacts of climate change** such as flooding, extreme heat, droughts, by starting from the needs, knowledge, and capacities of the people who live there.

The concept of LLA is the product of a **global movement,** born out of the growing recognition that traditional top-down approaches implemented particularly in countries of the "Global South" have fallen short in terms of both effectiveness and equity, for a range of reasons: decisions made by international donors, projects designed from a distance, limited real agency for local actors, and accountability structures oriented toward funders rather than toward the communities they serve.

Red Cross support for older people. Photo : Alex Bonnemaison.

The Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) bringing together around one hundred international organisations - including the IFRC - has formalised **eight widely recognised principles** for delivering locally led adaptation actions:

#1. Devolve decision-making to the lowest appropriate level
#2. Address structural inequalities faced by marginalised groups
#3. Provide patient and predictable funding that enables local actors to lead
#4. Invest in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy
#5. Build a robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty
#6. Implement programs built on flexibility and continuous learning
#7. Ensure transparency and downward accountability
#8. Collaborative action and investment

Transposing the LLA approach to the "Global North": Three major challenges

As previously noted, the LLA approach emerged in the specific context of the development and international aid sector particularly with the aim of **rebalancing power** between the "Global North and South," as well as between communities and organisations. This is why it is **explicitly formulated to integrate the most exposed communities ("frontline communities")**, who are often rural, vulnerable, or marginalized.

Transposing the LLA approach requires **adapting the vocabulary and reframing the issues** in light of their specific environmental, social, and institutional contexts. To begin with, **how should we treat the concept of "community"**, central to LLA and historically associated with the "Global South" (though its use is contested there as well), in contexts where populations are increasingly fragmented and individualized?

The notion of "territory" refers here to an **identified geographic space** in which a **set of actors shares exposure to specific climate risks,** as well as common resources, infrastructure, and social or economic challenges. The task is therefore to identify the various "**populations**" that share certain **socio-economic characteristics and vulnerabilities** such as people living in precarious conditions, workers in a specific sector, older persons, or people with reduced mobility in order to ensure their voices are heard and taken into account.

3 Global Commission on Adaptation, Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action, 2022

4 Titz, A., Cannon, T., & Krüger, F. (2018). Uncovering 'Community': Challenging an Elusive Concept in Development and Disaster Related Work. Societies, 8(3), 71. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030071

''Communities'' are therefore not necessarily ethnic communities or predefined groupings, they can also refer to various groupings of local citizens organised into associations, collectives, and similar bodies.

With this in mind, and keeping to the spirit of the global framework defined by the GCA, it is possible to distil three key principles for applying an LLA approach in countries of the ''Global North'':

1. **Understand and act according to the specific realities** of the territory and local populations, drawing on an **analysis of climate risks, local vulnerabilities, and local knowledge** (including traditional knowledge), in order to design adaptation **solutions that are relevant, evolving, and context-specific rather than generic** (#P5, #P6, #P8).
2. **Genuinely empower local populations** by strengthening participation, governance, and accountability mechanisms at the community level, and by ensuring the **active inclusion of the most vulnerable groups**, so that those most exposed to climate impacts can influence, and even determine, adaptation priorities and solutions (#P1, #P2, #P7, #P8).
3. **Sustainably strengthen the capacity for action of all local actors** whether public, private, or civic through long-term investments (training, tools, structural support, and access to resources), so as to enable them to anticipate, adapt to, and respond to climate shocks in an autonomous and coordinated manner, going beyond a purely crisis management logic (#P1, #P3, #P4, #P6).

APRIS workshops held among volunteer in the Hauts-de-France region.

2. DRAWING INSPIRATION TO DRIVE ENGAGEMENT: INITIATIVES AND TOOLS IN SERVICE OF ADAPTATION

2.1 Humanitarian organisations and climate change adaptation: Where do we stand?

Growing awareness, yet isolated initiatives

In recent years, the consideration of climate change and its associated risks has gained increasing importance within the humanitarian sector. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is without doubt one of the pioneering actors in this field, with climate change adaptation projects dating back to the late 1990s culminating in the launch of the ''Climate Action Journey'' initiative in 2023, now active in more than 45 countries.

Climate Action Journey, Bogota 2024.

Nevertheless, **while National Societies have for several years been integrating climate-related issues into their disaster risk management** (DRM) activities and more broadly pursuing mitigation efforts, only **a limited number have established cross-cutting adaptation strategies that translate into concrete actions.** Yet this represents an essential framework for elevating adaptation as a priority issue, one that complements rather than competes with the crisis management logic within organisations.

At present, the majority of LLA initiatives are being carried out in the "Global South", within territories that have already been significantly exposed to the impacts of climate change for a number of years (GCA, 2025).

The difficulty of engaging with the subject of adaptation particularly in the ''Global North'' is shared across all actors: even states such as France have been slow to release their national adaptation plans, and this observation is echoed across many NGOs. A recent report on climate change adaptation in the international aid sector shows that, while climate awareness is progressing, **initiatives remain isolated or siloed within specific departments, driven by expert profiles, and limited in scale:**

Jérôme Faucet, Research, Evaluation and Training Officer – "Adaptation" focal point within Groupe URD.

In practice, transformation remains essentially project-centred, without any structural questioning: adaptation actions translate primarily into programmatic adjustments within sectors where organisations already hold expertise (WASH, agroecology, eco-construction, etc.), or through pilot projects exploring more innovative approaches, such as nature-based solutions or anticipatory actions. The study therefore highlights a particularly concerning blind spot: the absence of structured reflection on adapting the internal operating models of NGOs themselves. At this stage, adaptation is predominantly conceived as a programmatic response to the impacts of climate change on populations and intervention territories rather than as a strategic issue directly affecting the operational, organisational, and institutional capacities of the organisations themselves.

5 This report was produced on the basis of a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology; the team analyzed a set of documents and studies relating to the adaptation of the international aid sector to climate change (9 environmental and/or climate strategies of organizations and 30 sectoral studies and publications) and conducted 30 interviews with representatives from 22 humanitarian and development NGOs.

Several barriers to overcome

Several kinds of factors of inertia were identified within the surveyed NGOs (Faucet, 2026, p. 12–14):

- **Technical and knowledge gaps:** ''an awareness of climate issues that varies significantly across departments, hierarchical levels (headquarters/field) and national contexts''; a **limited understanding** of what climate change adaptation entails, ''which remains unclear'' and is ''frequently confused with the concept of mitigation''; ''initiatives that remain isolated or siloed within specific departments, driven by expert profiles''; a **lack of systemic understanding** outside of specialised circles; ''a lack of practical and methodological tools to guide action.''

- **Financial weaknesses:** ''the absence of dedicated, stable, and predictable funding for adaptation; funding perceived as opportunistic and poorly aligned with long term visions, limiting the continuity and depth of actions. In practice, the implementation of new tools or approaches relies largely on the internal resources (human and financial) of NGOs, which limits their capacity for action particularly for smaller organisations.''

Furthermore, a number of organisational and structural barriers appear to exist, as attested by certain experts on the matter within the Movement:

For Jérôme Faucet, the ''gap between a growing awareness of the climate challenge and the absence of any questioning of internal operating models represents one of the most significant barriers today to genuine transformation within the humanitarian and development sector. As long as adaptation remains confined to the project level without being integrated into governance frameworks, operational strategies, and decision-making processes it will remain wholly inadequate in the face of the scale of climate risks to come.'' (**Faucet, 2026**) This is why the development of a clear strategy at the national level, adapted to local contexts, remains a key factor in bringing all stakeholders on board and moving the agenda forward.

Hélène Grossetie-Rückert,
Lead Consultant, Resilience Hubs, Climate Adaptation & Crisis Preparedness

One of the main weaknesses lies in the separation between mitigation and adaptation initiatives. This division reduces the overall effectiveness of climate actions, whereas combining these two dimensions could significantly improve outcomes. Moreover, a frequent confusion between the concepts of mitigation and adaptation within the French Red Cross (FRC) network creates a sense of overload, requiring a clarification of objectives and an adaptation of terminology depending on the audience. Another major issue is the lack of centralised coordination, which can sometimes complicate the implementation of coherent and coordinated strategies. This can give rise to adaptation actions that are fragmented, small-scale, incremental, and sector-specific.

2.2 Making climate change adaptation a national strategic priority and mainstreaming a culture of adaptation

Why does this matter?

Without a climate change adaptation strategy, it will be difficult to move the issue beyond rhetoric and one-off initiatives carried by a handful of committed teams, yet fragile in the face of the relentless urgency of crises. This is why one of the pivotal steps of the **Climate Action Journey** initiated by the Climate Centre is for each National Society that wishes to do so to define its own long term climate objectives within the framework of a **multi-year strategy.**

Ultimately, placing climate adaptation at the heart of a climate strategy provides a structuring framework for:

- Establishing the importance of the issues at stake and influencing future directions,
- Carrying weight in advocacy efforts with various public and private actors,
- Securing and safeguarding funding,
- Making the transition from a one-off, project centred approach, toward more structured adaptation planning at the local level.

How to go about It?

There is no single formula for establishing a strategy, but certain good practices can be identified:

+ **Securing governance buy-in:** the strategy must be championed and driven by leadership bodies, with the active involvement of all National Society departments and units, ensuring that adequate resources are made available and that the strategy is implemented consistently across the entire organization.
+ **Grounding the reflection in a robust climate risk analysis:** one that integrates both scientific evidence and field based data, alongside internal and external assessments of the organization's adaptive capacity.
+ **Ensuring that the strategy is grounded in the existing institutional and regulatory framework:** a strategy aligned with the National Adaptation Plan strengthens the positioning of National Societies as a trusted government partner and as a key actor in climate adaptation.

- **Involving volunteers in the co-construction of the strategy** to enable greater ownership and facilitate deployment.
- **Seeking external validation:** having the strategy validated by external partners and key actors including political bodies enables National Societies to position themselves as a key actor in adaptation within their territory.
- **Ensuring operational ownership** by dedicating full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to the subject of adaptation over the long term, and by identifying focal points within each team.
- **Fostering shared headquarters/field governance for implementation** in order to break down silos and ensure the coherence and effectiveness of climate action.

Climate Action Journey, Madrid 2024.

Case study – British Red Cross: A bottom-up and participatory approach

A participatory approach aligned with the principles of locally led adaptation

The British Red Cross placed frontline actors at the heart of developing its Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) strategy, launched in 2023 in connection with its wider organisational strategy. Participatory workshops with staff and volunteers helped capture their direct experiences of climate impacts, their detailed understanding of local contexts, and their insights on current and emerging risks.

This approach recognises the value of local and operational knowledge and anchors the strategy in diverse community-based realities, rather than relying solely on top-down or assumption-based analysis. By giving frontline actors a central role in identifying priorities and climate-related challenges, the British Red Cross is laying the foundations for a more locally driven adaptation approach, aligned with the principles of subsidiarity, continuous learning, and local capacity strengthening promoted through Locally Led Adaptation (LLA).

A research and risk analysis phase to strengthen strategic direction

Alongside this, a UK-wide climate risk and vulnerability assessment was conducted within the Emergency Response function to complement qualitative insights with scientific evidence. In parallel, an external assessment of the organisation's capacity and preparedness to adapt to climate change provided benchmarking and helped guide internal priorities.

Developing a Theory of Change to support ownership and operational leadership

This process led to the development of a dedicated Climate Adaptation Framework (Theory of Change), which was reviewed by external experts to ensure its relevance and robustness. The recruitment of a full-time role dedicated to climate change adaptation, a first among European National Societies, within the Crisis and Emergency Response (CER) team strengthened leadership of the adaptation agenda, particularly through the lens of emergency response and first aid. This role has since evolved to cover both climate change adaptation and wider resilience within the UK Resilience team, reflecting the interconnected nature of climate risks and other domestic crises.

Implementation: building awareness and local capacity

As part of implementation, and alongside fundraising and partnership development, the British Red Cross has focused on raising internal awareness of climate change and adaptation, as well as strengthening the capacity of local teams to identify risks and implement adaptation solutions.

To support this, the organisation continues to produce knowledge products and practical resources on CCA, including:

- Briefing notes on climate adaptation drivers and policy developments
- Updates on emerging research and tools
- Factsheets on climate risks, both globally and within the UK

For example, the British Red Cross recently published a report on rising water risks, highlighting that communities do not have equal capacity to prepare for, respond to, or recover from flooding.

Updated focus: using the risk assessment

The UK climate risk and vulnerability assessment continues to inform ongoing work within the UK Resilience Directorate. In particular, it has shaped a shift from assessment to action through targeted resilience-building activities.

This includes:

- Embedding climate informed thinking into UK resilience and emergency response planning
- Supporting the identification and prioritisation of climate-related risks at local and regional levels
- Developing practical tools and guidance to help teams translate climate risks into operational actions
- Facilitating cross-organisational learning on managing compound and cascading risks
- Workshops with young volunteers to build awareness of climate risks and support education and engagement on climate resilience
- Supporting internal capacity building to ensure teams can interpret and act on climate risk data effectively

2.3 Existing tools to adapt

In order to integrate a bottom-up approach into projects and anchor climate risk and vulnerability analysis in local realities, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement does not need to reinvent the wheel: there already exists a whole set of tried-and-tested tools drawn from a range of contexts (e.g. community engagement and accountability, disaster risk management…) that could be re-adapted in service of adaptation projects in countries of the ''Global North.''

Local adaptation requires a two-way flow of information on climate risks, from the local level to the national level. (IFRC, 2025)

Mapping and understanding climate vulnerabilities and anticipating future impacts

- 5 mapping and spatial analysis tools
- Territorially grounded climate scenarios and participatory foresight workshops

Identifying adaptation and prevention measures together with local stakeholders

- 5 participatory analysis and community mobilization tools
- Local foresight and anticipation tools

Prevent and manage residual risks

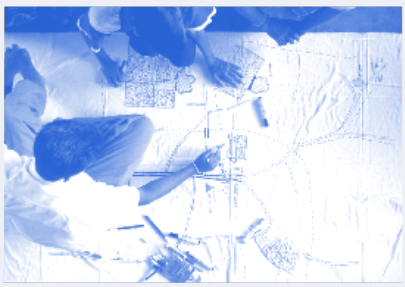
- Early warning system
- Working with Nature Framework
- The Spanish Red Cross calculator
- Community awareness and sensitization

Photo credits: Step 1 - Missing Maps, Step 2 - Ready or Not Ready Workshop, Step 3 - Red Cross Early Warning System of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The following are examples that can serve as reference points within an adaptation framework:

1. Mapping and understanding climate vulnerabilities and anticipating future impacts

This step consists of **developing a deep understanding of the climate vulnerabilities to which populations within a given territory** are exposed drawing on both **scientific environmental data** (e.g. climate projections, meteorological modelling), social data (e.g. population density, precariousness, access to services…), and **data gathered from field actors.** This includes making visible vulnerabilities that are sometimes hidden within data (social isolation, volunteer fatigue, urban fragilities, etc.) by starting from local perceptions, experiences, and priorities.



Mapping Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA). Photo : Croix-Rouge danoise.

+ Mapping and spatial analysis tools:

ClimaSens → **a climate intelligence platform** that helps the Australian Red Cross combine weather forecast data with hyperlocal demographic information. The platform not only shows where extreme heatwaves will strike, but also identifies which communities are most exposed due to factors such as age, isolation, or precarious housing conditions.

climasens.com
humanitech.org.au

The vulnerability map → **an interactive mapping tool** developed by the French Red Cross in partnership with researchers **to better understand territorial fragilities through the potential vulnerability index.** Based on a multidimensional approach using 9 indicators (monetary, socio-economic, mobility, and health), it enables the identification of at-risk areas that are sometimes overlooked, and supports more targeted action based on local realities.

Missing maps → **a collaborative project** (led by the American Red Cross, the British Red Cross, and MSF) to map **areas where humanitarian organisations intervene with populations exposed** to disasters and crises, an essential foundation for cross-referencing natural hazards, critical infrastructure, and social vulnerabilities.

missingmaps.org

Participatory GIS → the Climate Centre has piloted **participatory mapping projects where local communities themselves mark exposed areas** (flooding, landslides) on satellite imagery, then analyse household vulnerability and plan future land use. For example, it worked with the Red Cross in Timor-Leste on a mapping project for anticipatory action on flood risks.

www.climatecentre.org

www.climatecentre.org/timor-leste

MapMakoko → an example of **community mapping** carried out by Code for Africa with residents of a stilted slum settlement using drones, canoes, and open data platforms, and **HOTOSM**, "or the example of Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team Initiative."

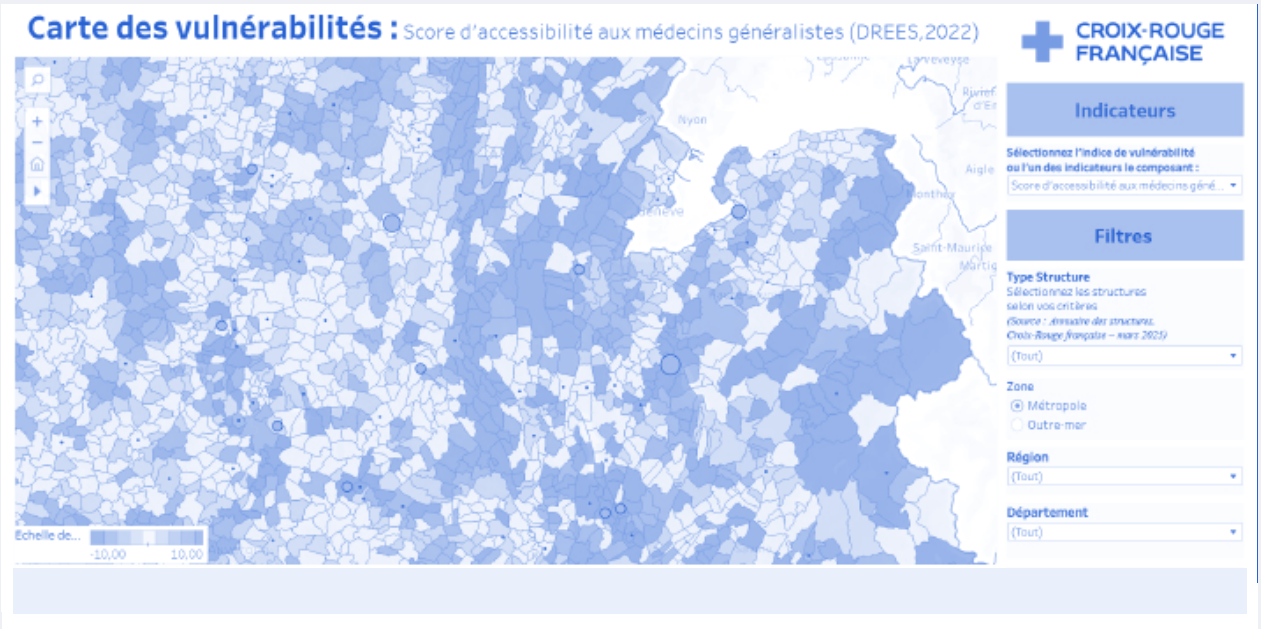
red-social-innovation.com/solution/mapmakoko

www.hotosm.org

+ **Territorialised climate scenarios and participatory foresight workshops:** for example, the French Agency for Ecological Transition (ADEME) has developed **scenarios to project territories to 2050**, and the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute proposes a **workshop** recommended by the EU. The BRC, for example, conducted **participatory territorial diagnostic workshops** bringing together volunteers, staff, and local partners as part of the development of its adaptation strategy (see Case Study p. 18).

librairie.ademe.fr

www.smhi.se



Overview of the Vulnerability Map developed by the French Red Cross.

2. Identifying adaptation and prevention measures with local populations and actors

Photo exhibition Living in 2050.

The objective is to capitalize on the knowledge and lessons learned from local actors in order to feed into adaptation plans that are anchored in the realities of territories while fostering community buy-in by involving populations as early in the process as possible. These tools are widely used in countries of the "Global South", and some are currently being adapted for application by National Societies in the "Global North".

+ Participatory analysis tools and community mobilization:

The Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (EVCA) → is a long standing Red Cross tool used for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in countries of the ''Global South''. This **participatory process** enables communities, with support from National Societies, to assess and analyze the risks they face, identify vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and potential courses of action. This approach has been revisited as part of the **Climate Action Journey**, with the aim of integrating future climate risks and the impacts of climate change into discussions with communities. The goal is to **take into account evolving hazards and projected trends, and to ensure that the measures defined with communities support long-term adaptation.** In addition, the Netherlands Red Cross is currently leading a pilot project to use the tool with the municipality of Limburg as part of flood preparedness (*see testimony down below*).

Marij Zwart, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene advisor at Netherlands Red Cross

In the Netherlands, the approach has not yet been implemented. Some colleagues internally believe that other organizations are already responsible for this work and may be better positioned to share information and mobilize communities around resilience and disaster preparedness. However, information provided by local authorities and other stakeholders is not always accessible or easy for everyone to understand, particularly for people facing language barriers, older adults, and other vulnerable groups. EVCA can therefore help make information more inclusive, strengthen communities' ability to take action, and support them in defining their own priorities.

The methodology is intended to complement existing processes led by public authorities. It adapts to existing frameworks and builds on current recommendations. Communities are not expected to develop entirely new measures from scratch; rather, they are encouraged to adopt and adapt the guidance that is already available. The process is also designed to be relatively short, taking into account the limited availability of participants in urban settings.

The TACCT approach → developed by ADEME for local and regional authorities, it provides a comprehensive framework for **building a climate change adaptation policy from start to finish across a territory,** from conducting a vulnerability assessment to monitoring and evaluating adaptation measures across the territory. TACCT helps authorities of all sizes and in all geographic settings to identify priority issues based on their exposure to climate hazards and the socio-economic sensitivity of their territory to climate change.

preparecenter.org/site/evca

tacct.ademe.fr

The Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) → a CARE tool used to gather and analyze information on communities' vulnerabilities and capacities in the face of climate change. It serves as a foundation for identifying measures at the community level or on a larger scale aimed at helping communities strengthen their resilience to climate change.

careclimatechange.org/cvca

Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities (CRMC) → Developed by the Zurich Alliance, the CRMC is an online tool and mobile application that helps communities assess and measure their resilience to climate related risks. Based on the results, communities can identify and implement measures to strengthen their resilience, and then conduct follow up assessments to track their progress over time.

zcralliance.org/crmc

Participatory Assessment of Climate and Disaster Risks (PACDR) → a methodological tool designed and used by various NGOs and community based actors to conduct participatory analyses, identify hazards, vulnerabilities, and local capacities, and define appropriate adaptation strategies and actions.

pacdr.net

+ **Foresight and local anticipation tools,** such as climate stress tests can be useful in helping stakeholders envision upcoming changes and prioritise adaptation actions:

The "Inond'action" initiative → developed by the Val-de-Marne Red Cross (France), which uses virtual reality.

valdemarne.croix-rouge.fr/inondaction

"Vivre en 2050" (Living in 2050) → developed by the French Red Cross, is an immersive exhibition that invites participants to step into the shoes of a climate migrant in France. Through a series of decisive choices, visitors experience the impacts of environmental crises on daily life and are prompted to reflect on resilience in the face of future crises.

red-social-innovation.com/en/solution/living-in-2050

3. Preventing and managing residual risks

In locally led adaptation efforts, **managing residual risk** is essential, that is, the risks that persist even after prevention and adaptation measures have been put in place. A range of existing tools can address this need by identifying in advance when and where these risks are likely to materialize, and by triggering targeted actions such as heat wave response visits, community awareness campaigns, and pre-positioning of relief supplies to limit the impact on affected populations.

Photo : Christophe Hargoues.

Early warning system → A set of **mechanisms and processes encompassing hazard monitoring, forecasting, and assessment (scientific data), communication** (dissemination of local alerts via SMS, volunteers, radio, etc.), and **disaster preparedness** enabling communities, governments, and businesses to take timely action to reduce disaster risk in the face of imminent hazardous events.

Anticipatory action → refers to an approach that **aims to act before a climate hazard escalates into a humanitarian crisis**. It relies on three core pillars: reliable forecasts (risk analysis combining scientific data with empirical knowledge), pre-defined triggers (selection of indicators and establishment of activation thresholds), and pre-arranged financing to enable timely implementation of planned actions.

www.anticipation-hub.org/meal_guidelines.pdf

Beyond the Early Action Protocol (EAP), several tools already in use across the Movement could be adapted for National Societies in the "Global North", such as:

- **Community Risk Assessment (CRA)** a dashboard that enables the identification and prediction of geographic areas most at risk of being affected by a disaster.

510.global/service/cra

- **Impact-Based Forecasting Porta (IBF Portal)** a single digital information hub designed to support decision-making by disaster management authorities during anticipatory action operations.

510.global/product/ibf

Working with Nature Framework → A Concrete application of nature-based solutions. The working with Nature Framework applies the broader **Nature-Based Solutions** concept by designing and managing projects in partnership with natural processes rather than against them. In climate change adaptation, this approach builds community and territorial resilience reducing the impacts of floods, erosion, and heatwaves while safeguarding the services ecosystems provide. A set of tools and resources is available on the IFRC's Prepare Center website.

National Societies can leverage their field presence and the trust they have built within communities to champion urban rewilding and ecosystem restoration projects in collaboration with local municipalities. The Spanish Red Cross has already reforested more than 200 hectares of woodland!

The Spanish Red Cross carbon calculator → a simple, practical tool designed to help National Societies measure their carbon footprint and access resources to reduce it.

www.cruzroja.es/calculadora

Community awareness → these tools play a key role in managing residual risks by deepening communities' understanding of climate hazards and encouraging the adoption of adaptive behaviors thereby helping to limit the impacts of climate events that cannot be fully prevented, while strengthening the broader resilience of local populations.

- For example, **Children's Vision**, a programme developed by the youth volunteers of the Lebanese Red Cross, engages young people aged 13 to 15 in activities that blend humanitarian and environmental approaches, designed to benefit their local communities.

red-social-innovation.com

- The free **Y-Adapt** resources, developed by the Climate Centre, aim to raise awareness among young people at both middle and high school levels about climate change and the risks they face, with the goal of strengthening their resilience and capacity to respond in the event of a disaster.

weadapt.org/knowledge-base/y-adapt

- For even younger audiences (ages 8–11), educational games such as **Paré pas Paré** (PIROI) and **Alerte** (PIROPS) introduce children to disaster risk concepts through a facilitation approach that is carefully tailored to their developmental needs and psychological capacities and that deliberately avoids using fear as a teaching tool. Originally designed for the island of Réunion, local units of the French Red Cross are now beginning to adapt this content for their own communities and contexts.

piroi.croix-rouge.fr/pare-pas-pare-kit-pedagogique

youtube.com/alerte

Finally, **internal communities of practice** are invaluable sources of inspiration for locally driven solutions and frugal innovations already being implemented on the ground **(Red Social Innovation Platform, International Federation's Communities of Practice, PIROI Resource Center)**. Other internal platforms, such as the Climate Center, as well as external ones like the GLA website, also serve as key references for accessing publications on good practices and lessons learned from LLA projects led by various organizations and communities across the Global South (e.g **GLA, 2025**).

ifrc.csod.com

piroi.croix-rouge.fr

3. PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE: THE RED CROSS AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER FOR TERRITORY BASED ADAPTATION POLICIES

3.1 Disasters, crises, and adaptation: toward a new role for National Societies?

Bridging climate risk management and adaptation: A shared challenge

As climate-related crises and disasters continue to grow in frequency and intensity, a critical challenge is emerging both across the Movement and for all local actors: **how to enrich existing risk management and emergency response approaches by embedding a long term logic of prevention and resilience? This means bridging anticipation and adaptation into a coherent, unified approach.** The goal is not to step back from crisis preparedness and response work that remains essential but to recognize that operating solely within a response oriented framework is no longer adequate given the scale and complexity of today's climate realities.

In other words, adapting to climate change **requires going beyond a "traditional" DRR approach.** It calls for the lasting transformation of territories, infrastructure, and public policies to make them compatible with a changing climate. In this sense, the IPCC now considers GRC as a component of adaptation, described as a broader process in that it pursues more systemic transformation objectives (AFD, 2023).

Indeed, **"classical" DRR** remains primarily structured around an event-driven and sector-based logic, **centered on prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery from identified shocks.** Climate change **adaptation** calls for a deeper approach that seeks to **anticipate the structural and long term evolution of climatic conditions.** It requires **integrating uncertainty and long-term** thinking into planning, infrastructure, and public policy, while acknowledging that past patterns can no longer serve as a sufficient framework for action. Where DRR aims to restore a previous state, adaptation implies a fundamental transformation of territories in order to structurally reduce their vulnerability in a changing climate.

The experience of a crisis often serves as a powerful catalyst for action yet it can equally become a barrier to implementing bold and lasting adaptation strategies. **In the aftermath of a disaster, there is a strong temptation to return to the way things were before, rather than pressing forward with the deeper transformation of a territory.** Building genuine resilience requires precisely **moving beyond this logic of simple recovery.**

Spanish Red Cross response during the Valencia floods. Photo: Spanish Red Cross.

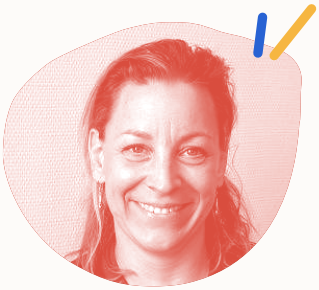
Saving lives will always come first, but we must carry out our day-to-day work in a way that does not make the climate crisis worse in the long run.

Herminia Magán, Spanish Red Cross

Historically rooted in disaster response, the RCRC Movement brings unparalleled operational expertise to crisis management: a nuanced understanding of social vulnerabilities, the capacity to mobilize rapidly, deep territorial presence, and the ability to coordinate across multiple actors. As climate related disasters continue to grow in frequency and severity, National Societies are well positioned to become strategic players in adaptation at the community and territorial level and without having to reinvent themselves. This is less about disruptive innovation than about a shift in posture. As trusted, neutral actors, National Societies are uniquely placed to build bridges and reach segments of the population that are often left out of civic and institutional life. In other words, the organization has the potential to make a meaningful impact in the area of climate adaptation by building directly on the missions and activities it already carries out.

It means going further than reactive, post-crisis management — a mode that humanitarian organizations, local authorities, and decentralized government services have generally developed strong capabilities in — and **instead embracing an anticipatory and preventive** approach, grounded in a long-term, systemic vision for the territory (France Stratégie, 2024). Bridging these two approaches requires integrating climate as a structural and cross-cutting factor, one that can amplify social, health, and humanitarian vulnerabilities.

Field observations, local knowledge, and feedback from community experiences provide a common starting point—one that is both familiar to disaster risk management (DRM) teams and essential for effective climate change adaptation.

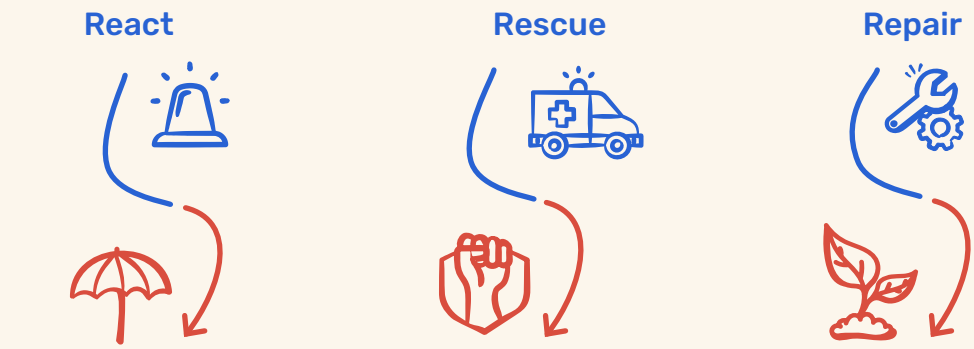


Fleur Monasso, Locally Led Adaptation Lead, Climate Centre

I think the main challenge for the domestic departments of National Societies lies in their ability to draw an explicit connection to the broader climate change adaptation narrative. When a National Society is running a large scale national programme, a disaster preparedness programme, for example, it is relatively straightforward to integrate the climate dimension into existing mechanisms such as first aid or preparedness programmes: being prepared doesn't just mean responding to past crises, it means anticipating future risks, including those arising from a changing climate. However, National Societies still find it difficult to define their positioning within this broader framework, they sometimes struggle to identify precisely what role they can and should play in the wider field of climate adaptation and climate action.

A POSTURE INNOVATION

Shifting from **response** to **prevention** and **adaptation**



A shift in posture, but an unchanged DNA: protecting vulnerable people

Dispositif ICI. Photo : Christophe Hargoues.

According to the experts consulted, integrating an adaptation logic would require National Societies of the Movement to **evolve from a posture centered on post-crisis repair toward action aimed at durably reducing its root causes.** The challenge is no longer simply to intervene when a crisis strikes, but to contribute proactively to transforming territories and strengthening the resilience of local actors in the face of climate vulnerabilities so that they are better prepared for the shocks ahead.

And this involvement would bring **mutual benefits:** engaging National Societies more actively upstream in discussions and initiatives related to crisis prevention and climate change adaptation **would strengthen the quality and relevance of local response.** Conversely, by moving beyond the DRM approach to engage in a more structured manner alongside local actors in an adaptation framework, the Movement would develop a deeper understanding of vulnerabilities, territorial dynamics, and key stakeholders which would in turn enhance its effectiveness in emergency situations.

Arnaud GANAYE, Director of Territorial Resilience Projects, CEREMA (Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning)

There is a strong need to better organize the various resources and actors within a given territory, and to place greater emphasis on preparedness planning. For example, French authorities plan, as part of their adaptation strategy, to establish municipal civil protection reserves designed to prepare and coordinate the mobilization of volunteers during crises. Yet in France, apart from the Red Cross, very few organizations truly know how to manage and supervise volunteers and it would therefore make sense to work in synergy, without necessarily placing the entire responsibility for crisis management on its shoulders. During the floods in Pas-de-Calais, for instance, large numbers of people donated clothing to the point where it became unmanageable. And when foreign firefighters arrived, basic equipment was sometimes missing such as beds to accommodate them. For future crises, better anticipation will be possible, particularly through the Inter-Municipal Safeguard Plans (PICS) , a tool designed to strengthen the links between risk prevention and crisis management. Today, there is no clear inventory of Red Cross equipment, nor a precise picture of 'who has what,' who does what when a crisis unfolds, or where resources are located. Added to this are safety concerns: when a volunteer responds to a crisis without being attached to an official reserve or recognized framework, the legal and operational situation becomes unclear if something goes wrong. The local Red Cross could take on the coordination of public citizen reserves. Firefighters cannot manage everything on their own. The case of Valencia has shown just how critical it is to coordinate all available goodwill.

outil2amenagement.cerema.fr/outils/plan-intercommunal-sauvegarde-pics

This calls for **a more proactive approach to building partnerships not only with public actors, but also with academic institutions,** something many National Societies are already doing. The British Red Cross, for instance, partnered with the London School of Economics (LSE) to explore the issue of heatwaves in England and inform UK policy on extreme heat. Several advocacy documents were co-produced, including Feeling the Heat and "**Turning up the Heat**".

Stronger engagement with local actors would also open new funding opportunities for National Societies, as adaptation finance in the Global North is increasingly channelled at the local and regional level:

LSESU Red Cross Society.

www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Turning-up-the-heat-learning-from-the-summer

Fleur Monasso, Locally Led Adaptation Lead, Climate Centre

Another major challenge lies in the urgent need to anchor climate action at the city and regional level, embedding rapidly evolving climate risks into local planning processes and community initiatives. As funding streams are increasingly directed straight to cities and regions, through EU-funded programmes such as Pathways2Resilience, for example, the local engagement of civil society organizations becomes indispensable. Red Cross sections and branches can also position themselves as essential partners for inclusive adaptation planning, and advocate for the strengths of our network within local decision-making bodies.

Pathways2Resilience – a programme funded by the European Union.

Spanish RC REX – What the valencia floods taught us about adaptation

Cruz Roja

+ An event of extraordinary magnitude, one that is only the first in a long series to come, and that underscores the urgent need to adapt to climate change.

Never before had a national environmental disaster caused such extensive damage, to the point that an unprecedented response was mobilized over four months. Thousands of volunteers arrived without coordination, inadvertently creating disorder and slowing down the work of emergency services focused on large-scale street cleaning. Neighborhood networks, by contrast, functioned effectively, establishing community support systems to share caregiving responsibilities and distribute food and essential supplies. **The challenge was to channel this solidarity into effective assistance rather than allow it to become counterproductive.**

Previously, the Spanish Red Cross had progressively worked on integrating climate risks into its strategic plan; however, **the focus had been more on mitigation** and internal sustainability than on operational preparedness for extreme events of this magnitude.

The DANA storm impacted every level of the organization, demonstrating that climate change **adaptation cannot be the responsibility of a single department, but must be addressed through an approach integrated** across the entire structure. At the strategic level, the emphasis on strengthening pre-crisis resilience is now being reinforced across all our interventions. This translates into the acceleration of preventive measures within our programmes, the revision of protocols, the development of climate-related tools, and the integration of specialized training on climate risks.

+ The challenge of developing a culture of prevention and anticipation

It is now widely recognized that investing in prevention and climate resilience is essential to ensuring the continuity of our operations and delivering quality humanitarian assistance. The key challenges we face are:

- Shifting mindsets from reactive response to a culture of prevention and risk management, one that translates into capacity strengthening beyond the emergency unit and extends to the communities we serve.
- Overcoming resistance to making climate issues a priority, given that the results of a preventive culture are not immediately visible. Saving lives will always be the priority but we must act on a daily basis without allowing our response to worsen the climate crisis in the long term.
- The lack of substantial and stable resources for community preparedness, where fragmented micro-funding or funding reserved for already-declared emergencies remains the norm.

Spanish Red Cross response during the floods in Valencia. Photo: Spanish Red Cross.

Zoom on selected Spanish Red Cross initiatives in this area

Awareness-raising and training initiatives for the population, Red Cross staff, and volunteers with a particular focus, within the framework of the **Urban Climate Resilience Project** (UCRP), on early warning systems involving the participation of IFRC members and external entities such as the National Meteorological Agency and LearnToCheck.

Creation of a "**Preparedness Agent"** role, a central figure responsible for acquiring the necessary knowledge in the field of emergency prevention and preparedness, within a community-based approach.

Distribution of 20,000 backpacks containing various items, a quick preparedness guide, and a concise basic first aid manual in an easy to-read format, aimed at strengthening the response capacities of affected communities.

Development of a public portal providing real-time information on potential risks, drawing data from official sources and offering action recommendations based on geographic location.

Funding of energy renovation works in homes occupied by people living in precarious conditions.

Reforestation and restoration of ecosystems affected by fires through the creation of carbon sinks across the national territory.

+ Greater inclusion of vulnerable people in risk and disaster prevention and management

Spanish Red Cross intervention during the floods in Valencia. Photo: Spanish Red Cross.

This crisis revealed that **pre-existing vulnerabilities were considerably exacerbated** for older people experiencing unwanted loneliness, low income families whose livelihoods were disrupted due to job losses in the affected areas, as well as self employed workers.

People with reduced mobility found themselves in an even more vulnerable situation, as they depended on communal lifts which were out of order to be able to leave their homes. The Red Cross organized and trained volunteer teams to operate stairclimber devices using specialized wheelchairs, prioritizing the transport of school age children and older people with urgent medical appointments. This activity continues today in the most vulnerable neighborhoods where lifts have not yet been repaired, enabling residents to regain access to the street and a degree of normality. **This experience taught us that accessibility must be placed at the heart of every climate emergency response protocol.**

Par Herminia Magán National Head of the Dana Plan, Victor Manuel Segura National Disaster Leader of the Dana Plan, and Paloma García National Environmental leader of the Dana Plan.

3.2 A key expertise to inform adaptation policies, address vulnerabilities, and strengthen community preparedness

Challenge

Recurring climate crises, heatwaves, floods, storms, droughts expose deep structural vulnerabilities: social isolation, energy poverty, inadequate housing, and weak solidarity networks. One of the central challenges of adaptation strategies is to tailor responses to local specificities, taking into account communities and their vulnerabilities. In other words, the "social" dimension of adaptation policies is just as important if not more so than the technical dimension. National Societies possess valuable assets that enable the development of effective and relevant climate change adaptation responses in the territories where they operate, including:

TERRITORIAL PRESENCE

National Societies benefit from a uniquely strong foothold at the local level through field based local units, health and social care facilities serving vulnerable populations, and volunteers with intimate knowledge of their territories. This positions National Societies to identify social vulnerabilities, map them against climate vulnerabilities, and ensure information flows upward. The organization serves as a bridge between technical knowledge and social reality, enabling the identification of recurring vulnerabilities and supporting action to address them. National Societies help ensure local communities' needs, practices, and cultural realities are factored into adaptation planning, reducing the risk of maladaptation.

THE ROLE OF TRUSTED INTERMEDIARY

National Societies occupy a distinctive position as trusted, neutral actors recognized by public authorities, private sector partners, and communities alike. This enables them to serve as conveners of dialogue before, during, and after crises. In this capacity, they help bridge the gap between marginalized communities, hard to reach populations, and decision makers shaping adaptation plans, ensuring their voices are heard and their specific needs and realities are reflected. National Societies also play a key role in building social acceptance around measures that may be sensitive or contested among affected populations.

AWARENESS AND MOBILIZATION

National Societies hold exceptional awareness raising potential and mobilization capacity. Drawing on their unparalleled volunteer networks, they strengthen community preparedness by engaging citizens in adaptation initiatives such as cooling spaces and neighbourhood solidarity schemes during heatwaves, and co-creating locally grounded solutions. Volunteers, as community members, are powerful agents of awareness. Existing training programmes in first aid, prevention, and safety can be expanded to incorporate climate resilience, extending their reach in a changing climate.

THREE KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO CLIMATE ADAPTATIONS

Produce data on social adaptation

Include the voices of underserved populations

Anticipate and reduce vulnerability upstream

Perspectives

If we look at the Climate Law or the adaptation plan in France, citizen engagement is a fully recognized pillar in its own right: Red Cross National Societies have **a volunteer network present on the ground** that can genuinely be relied upon. Moreover, unlike other NGOs, the organization plays **an auxiliary role to the State by virtue of its civil protection** and social action missions.

Jérôme Faucet, Groupe URD, former Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement member

There is a fundamental dimension of adaptation that is not often emphasized: the knowledge and understanding of human and social vulnerabilities in context. Red Cross teams know the areas well and are familiar with where the public is at risk—they will be the ones the most vulnerable trust. The ability to detect phenomena on the ground and capitalize on lessons learned is therefore crucial. This is precisely what an organization like the Red Cross can provide: **expertise in emergency situations, on-the-ground experience, and social work experience.**

Vivian Depoues, Thematic Lead – Climate Change Adaptation, I4CE (Institute for Climate Economics).

CENTRAL CHALLENGE

Tailoring responses to local vulnerabilities

The social dimension of adaptation policies is just as important — if not more so — than the technical dimension.

The CRCR Movement has a major role to play in strengthening a systemic approach that involves addressing different causes simultaneously and not in silos. The Red Cross is a keen observer on the ground — it can share its lessons learned on key issues such as managing heat waves, for example.

Arnaud Ganaye, Director of Territorial Resilience Projects, CEREMA (Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning)

Our status as a 'trusted third party' has enabled us to earn greater trust from the population. For example, in the context of the fight against dengue fever, the Red Cross is able to enter households to deliver prevention messages unlike representatives of the State.

Christian Pailler, former Director of the PIROI Center"

6 France is one of the few countries to have explicitly integrated citizen mobilization as a strategic focus of its adaptation plan (PNACC-3). Under measure no. 48, "Mobilizing citizens in missions related to climate change adaptation and risk prevention," the government plans, for example, to rely on young people to "register vulnerable individuals on municipal heatwave registers and conduct climate change awareness campaigns with them"; and also to create "municipal civil defense reserves."

3.3 The cultural and narative dimension of adaptation: Towards new stories

While barriers to adaptation can be material, institutional, or technical, it is increasingly apparent as demonstrated by a wide body of social science research that cultural, psychological, cognitive, and communicational dimensions are equally important **(Salmon, 2023)**. The IPCC also recognizes the impact of cultural and narrative dimensions in activating adaptation levers (IPCC, 2022, WGII).

A first challenge relates to developing the anticipatory, mobilization, and adaptation capacities of local actors and citizens in the face of climate hazards in order to enable behavioral change and reduce vulnerabilities. Yet **building a culture of risk goes beyond a purely information based logic.** Climate change, despite existing knowledge and widespread efforts to communicate it, is still often **perceived as a distant concern**. While citizens are increasingly aware of climate risks, they do not necessarily view them as more alarming than other risks economic or geopolitical and are not necessarily more inclined to change their practices (**Agnoux et al., 2025**).

Furthermore, there exists a psychological phenomenon known as ''shifting baseline syndrome,'' which occurs when individuals adjust their perception of what is ''normal'' based on the environment in which they grew up, without accounting for the environmental changes that took place before their time. As a result, each generation comes to accept a higher level of degradation as normal, without questioning the biodiversity loss, pollution, or climate change that has already occurred. This syndrome affects both local communities and public policymakers who, lacking a clear reference point for the original state of ecosystems, underestimate the actual extent of the damage and consequently, the scale of action required to address it.

The memory of disasters nonetheless constitutes a powerful lever for mobilization, both for citizens and for decision-makers: having experienced one or more disasters, 75% of French people report having changed at least one behavior or habit. Regarding local leaders, **the memory of risks influences the prioritization of actions and the degree of vigilance and anticipation;** whereas the subject tends to be approached in a more pragmatic or detached manner in the absence of a recent significant experience (**Agnoux et al., 2025**).

The DANA event showed that while weather forecasting has improved, risk perception still lags. Climate adaptation is about education and community preparedness, not just infrastructure. Many people still see extreme weather as isolated events rather than signs of climate change. In Valencia, the experience increased awareness of the climate emergency and strengthened community action.

Herminia Magán, National Head of the Dana Plan, Spanish Red Cross Projects.

The RCRC Movement also has a role to play in socio-psychological work with communities, which is complementary to and just as important as the technical dimension of adaptation issues. For example, in connection with the Pas-de-Calais floods, there will likely be an increasing number of evacuations, and populations need to be prepared for this. Yet people do not always have that reflex and particularly following a traumatic experience, they do not necessarily want to revisit it, they do not want to think about the likelihood of it happening again, and they want to find their way back to some sense of normality. There is a great deal of long-term work to be done.

Arnaud GANAYE, Director of Territorial Resilience Projects, CEREMA (Centre for Studies and Expertise on Risks, the Environment, Mobility and Urban Planning)

Recent research conducted in partnership with the French Red Cross shows that **the memory of disasters must remain alive and active in order to become a genuine lever for resilience.** And such resilience cannot be established in the heat of a crisis: it **is built upstream of crises,** proactively. It requires the joint participation of all relevant actors in keeping that memory alive: public authorities, communities, prevention and risk management professionals, among others in order to co-develop shared reference points, collective knowledge, and durable capacities for action (**Spinoza, 2022**).

To overcome cultural barriers to adaptation, there is also a need to **recreate positive imaginaries** around the subject. Research on climate narratives shows that representations highlighting desirable futures, concrete solutions, and collective benefits foster greater engagement than exclusively alarmist or technical discourse. Indeed, while such narratives reflect the gravity of the issues at stake, they can also generate demobilization, anxiety, or a sense of powerlessness. A society's capacity to transform itself also depends on the collective imaginaries that shape and guide action. (Salmon, 2023).

This is why work on representations is not a secondary concern: it constitutes a **strategic lever** for sustaining both the internal engagement of the RCRC Movement and the buy-in of partners and communities. The goal is t**o move beyond a defensive or sacrificial vision and promote an adaptation narrative grounded in hope, cohesion, social innovation, and the strengthening of community bonds.**

In this perspective, the RCRC Movement can help bring positive imaginaries of adaptation to life through the actions it already carries out, but also by proactively committing to the subject; for example, by becoming a key actor in the collection of social information and the creation of citizen narratives. Mobilizing, the stories of local residents who are not climate specialists can not only help empirically identify local vulnerabilities, but above all enable communities to take ownership of the issues and foster a bottom-up transfer of information from citizens to decision-makers and scientists, a key component of Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) approaches (**Salmon, 2023**).

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

APRIS project (Post-Research & Social Innovation Workshops): a project conducted in collaboration between the Innovation Department and the French Red Cross Foundation in the Hauts-de-France region, bridging the gap between research (Francisca Espinoza's work on the memory of disasters) and territorial action. The APRIS aims to translate scientific knowledge into narratives and operational roadmaps that can be owned and applied by local actors. The project drew on a series of workshops held with local stakeholders to illustrate how the institutional and social forgetting of crises undermines long-term preparedness and to recreate disaster narratives that keep their memory alive.

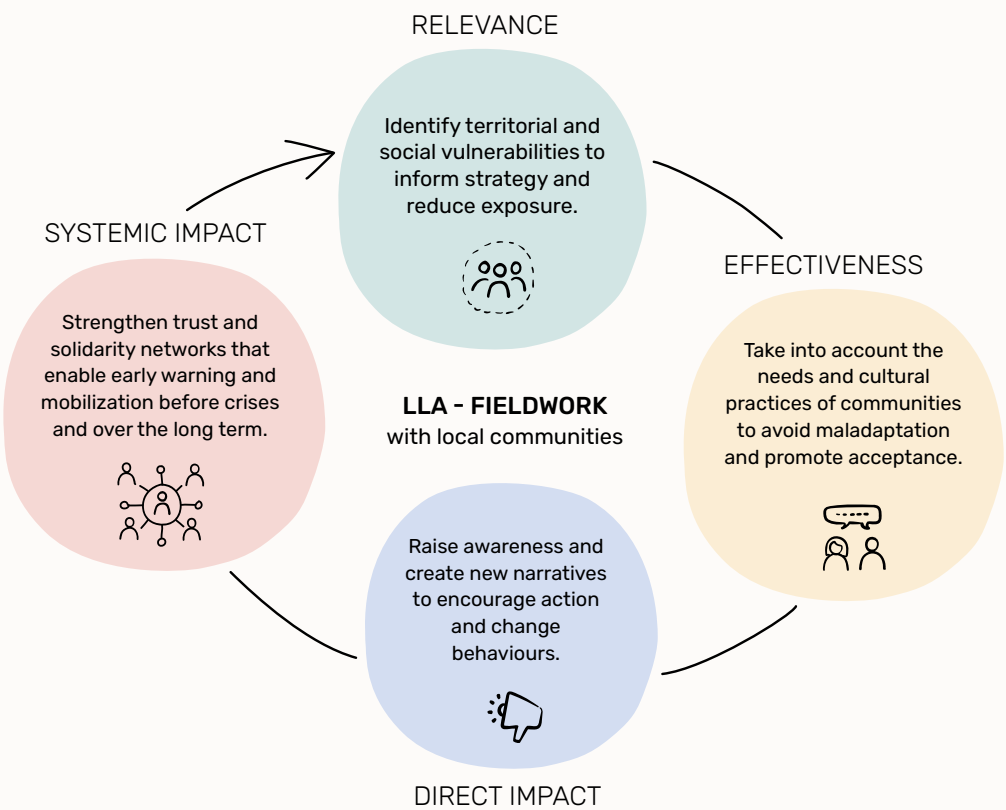
Conclusion

As the impacts of climate change intensify across the countries of the "Global North," National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent have a key role to play in contributing to territorial adaptation.

The experiences presented in this report show that local adaptation rests above all on a nuanced understanding of territorial vulnerabilities, on the active participation of communities, and on cooperation between public, civil society, and scientific actors. In this context, National Societies can play an essential bridging role between technical expertise, social realities, and collective mobilization.

More than a new programme, climate change adaptation represents a strategic and cultural shift: the challenge is not to create an entirely separate new field of action, but rather to make a shift in perspective embedding an "adaptation reflex" and progressively integrating the logics of anticipation, prevention, and long-term resilience into existing activities. In many respects, the tools, skills, and networks needed are already present within the Movement: dear innovators, all that remains is to seize them!

Red Cross response following the cyclone in Mayotte. Photo : Guillaume Binet.



10 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **"Global North" countries are also impacted by climate change, which is durably redefining humanitarian risks**

Climate disasters are becoming more frequent, more intense, and more complex permanently transforming the risks faced by territories and requiring traditional crisis management approaches to be complemented and expanded.

2. **Mitigation and adaptation must be pursued in tandem**

Reducing emissions is essential, but it is equally critical to begin preparing territories and populations today for the climate impacts that are already unfolding and those yet to come.

3. **Adaptation must take place at the local level, starting from lived realities**

A nuanced understanding of climate and social vulnerabilities, combined with the meaningful involvement of communities in decision making, are two key conditions for effective adaptation including the most vulnerable, who are often the most exposed and the least represented in citizen participation processes.

4. **Adaptation must be championed at the strategic level of National Societies**

A cross-cutting approach, dedicated governance, and clearly identified resources are necessary to move beyond isolated initiatives and ensure that adaptation is embedded across all areas of activity: risk management, social action, health, community mobilization, advocacy.

5. **The movement already has tools and expertise that can be mobilized.**

There are many existing initiatives to draw inspiration from, and proven methods such as participatory risk analysis, community engagement, and early warning systems that can be mobilized and adapted to "Global North" contexts.

6. **Climate vulnerabilities are closely linked to social vulnerabilities.**

The impacts of climate change disproportionately affect people already made vulnerable by precarity, isolation, age, health conditions, or housing circumstances. Strengthening adaptation therefore requires bridging climate policies and social action.

7. **DRM is part of adaptation strategies**

Preparing territories for future shocks requires investing in prevention, community preparedness, and long-term planning, and calls for a shift from a reactive logic to one of anticipation.

8. **Adaptation relies on dynamics of territorial cooperation**

Strengthening the resilience of territories requires developing lasting partnerships between local authorities, civil society actors, researchers, and citizens in order to co-construct responses that are tailored to local realities.

9. **National Societies can become key partners in public adaptation policies**

Thanks to their territorial presence, unique expertise, and role as trusted third parties, they can contribute to better identifying vulnerabilities and strengthening citizen participation.

10. **Adaptation implies as much a cultural shift as an operational one**

Developing a culture of risk, strengthening awareness of climate threats, and building mobilizing narratives are essential conditions for sustainably engaging local populations.

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Red Social Innovation
by french + spanish red-cross