



# The Red Cross Red Crescent approach to sustainable development

Position paper

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## About us

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through our 186 member National Societies. Together, we act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by Strategy 2020 – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to 'saving lives and changing minds'.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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P.O. Box 372  
CH-1211 Geneva 19  
Switzerland  
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222  
Telefax: +41 22 733 0395  
E-mail: [secretariat@ifrc.org](mailto:secretariat@ifrc.org)  
Web site: <http://www.ifrc.org>

## The foundations of our development role

We are already well known for our vital relief work in disasters and crises, and we remain committed to be the world's leading humanitarian actor. However, the Red Cross Red Crescent is present not just *during* disasters, but also much *beforehand* and long *afterwards*. Therefore, we are well-placed to be equally effective in development work as that is a long-term business well suited to the long-term outlook, substantial capacities, and permanent presence of the Red Cross Red Crescent.

The Red Cross Red Crescent presence arises from within local communities organised through our National Societies that mobilise local people to respond to their own needs, through local branches and units. These call upon the services of millions of volunteers with many different types of skills.

At the same time, each National Society has a unique, long-established and legally-defined auxiliary partnership with its government. This gives the National Society a privileged place at decision-making tables and access to resources to address national vulnerability. Red Cross Red Crescent services are underpinned by the Fundamental Principles and values that we have developed over a long period, and that continue to inspire the setting of global norms, raising standards, shaping codes of conduct, and establishing legal frameworks.

In summary, our recognised mandate, special position in national life, tested principles and values, long proven professionalism and expertise, and international status, enable us to trigger the mobilisation and expansion of our extensive network and diverse capacities whenever needed. Taken all together, this is the foundation for the powerful Red Cross Red Crescent contribution to promoting human development.

## Our perspective on development

National Societies cover a large and long-running range of needed local and national services. They include disease prevention and health promotion, water and sanitation, blood donor recruitment, food and nutrition, disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, social assistance, as well as protection for poor, vulnerable, and marginalised groups through promoting social inclusion, and a culture of non-violence and peace.

The developmental value of these services rests on the notion that is common to them i.e. that of preventing and reducing the underlying causes of vulnerability. This intent is enshrined in our *Constitution* which defines our general

We define development as “enabling everyone to achieve their full potential, and lead productive and creative lives with dignity according to their needs and choices, whilst fulfilling their obligations and realising their rights”. Development must be sustainable, i.e., make responsible use of resources so that current needs can be met without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations. (*Strategy 2020, adopted at the 17th General Assembly, Nairobi, November 2009*)

Our specific contribution to development is through services in relation to disasters, health, and social provision that are designed to prevent and reduce the underlying causes of vulnerability. We also contribute to development by building resilient community and civil society capacities, and changing mindsets for societal and personal transformation.

## Beyond Prevention in Kenya: Home Management of Malaria

Home Management Of Malaria (HMM) is an IFRC strategy to improve access to appropriate and effective malaria treatment in the community or home through early recognition of malaria symptoms, together with prompt treatment. In Kenya, Red Cross volunteers are trained to recognize fever, to administer treatment to children under five years of age when they find it, and to advise on follow-up treatment and prevention. They are monitored and supervised by Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation (MoPHS). They carry out a vital role in educating the community on prevention methods and on what options there are for treatment when malaria does strike.

### Changing community lives through improved community health

Before the HMM project started, mothers and caregivers in HMM-targeted communities in Kenya typically walked more than two hours to the nearest health facility if their child was suffering from malaria. Some villages in Lamu were only accessible by boat and could be cut off entirely during the rainy season or high tides. Transport costs, both land and sea, were often unaffordable for the rural poor, and with health services out of reach or of low quality, children often failed to receive prompt treatment. Many died as a result.

With the HMM project, the lives of mothers and children in these vulnerable communities changed dramatically. Immediate free of charge care became available within their village. Instead of delaying for hours or even days before taking the long walk to the nearest health facility, mothers could find the local Red Cross HMM volunteer within a few hundred metres. The vast majority of caregivers began seeking treatment as soon as symptoms began, and as a result, children recovered quickly and cases of severe malaria rapidly declined. Mothers were able to continue their household work and tend to other responsibilities instead of constantly caring for ailing children.

From the beginning, the HMM project fostered a sense of community empowerment and demonstrated that local people can indeed take charge of their own health. At each stage, from village selection of the HMM volunteer, their comprehensive training and implementation of the programme, and the income generating activities they later initiated, HMM's achievements hinged on community ownership of the project.

objective as “to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world”.

Our development efforts can “do more, do better and reach further” having long realised that there is practical necessity to move beyond humanitarian relief because vulnerability is increasing. More and bigger disasters, many of them associated with changes in climate, environment and human ecology, are inflicting greater damage, loss, and dislocation with which conventional response capabilities are unable to keep pace. Other factors include periodic economic crises, growing inequalities, competition over scarce resources, demographic change, urbanisation, migration, changing disease burdens and complex patterns of violence. These interact to create novel and variable forms of vulnerability and crisis that heighten marginalisation, impoverishment and insecurity.

At the same time, there are also new opportunities for tackling human vulnerability better, faster, and on a bigger scale. This is possible due to the revolution in information and communication, social networking, science and technology, and the accumulation of knowledge and wealth that is at our collective disposal. These factors, along with historic political, economic and social shifts, are creating new capacities for innovative problem solving as well as raising expectations for greater fairness in relations among countries, especially when it comes to sharing resources. Meanwhile, people everywhere

## Building capacity in DPRK: development and disaster risk management

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regularly experiences severe flooding and droughts. Deforestation and inappropriate land use aggravate the impact of disasters and pose challenges to sustainable development. In 2006-2007, the country was hit by heavy rains causing landslides, killing 454 people, leaving 170,000 homeless and devastating livelihoods.

In 1998, the DPRK Red Cross disaster management programme was set up to reduce the risk of natural disasters, help communities protect themselves and build longer-term resilience at the local level. Its main objectives have been to raise awareness of disaster risks, how to prepare for them at the community level and, through this preparedness, to ensure that livelihoods can be sustained. During the past five years, the programme has implemented community-based development and disaster preparedness activities in 100 communities, each with an average of 3,500 inhabitants. The key programme areas are:

- Disaster management planning and organizational preparedness
- Community preparedness and disaster risk reduction
- Disaster response and recovery

In 2008, the IFRC carried out an evaluation to assess the impact of various disaster management interventions. The review showed that the DPRK Red Cross disaster management and development programmes have been successful in several areas.

In particular, the quick response during the floods in 2006 and 2007 demonstrated the effectiveness of disaster preparedness measures that had been put in place beforehand.

Thanks to the ability to mobilize large groups of community members to construct mitigation interventions, more than 100 communities were supported with structures to mitigate floods and mudflows, making the environment safer.

Specialist rescue teams were also been put in place. During the floods in 2005 and 2007, these teams saved 70 people and helped evacuate close to 5,000 people.

Additionally, since 2008, the DPRK Red Cross has increased long-term resilience by pre-positioning emergency family kits in seven warehouses across the country, for rapid deployment to 27,000 families when the need arises.

are awakening to their basic human rights and aspiring to develop and take charge of lasting solutions to their own needs and vulnerabilities.

Influenced by a changing world of such needs and opportunities, our practical development contribution is through three **inter-connected** areas:

- Services that prevent and reduce vulnerability
- Capacities that build community resilience
- Mindsets that promote societal and personal transformation

## Services to prevent and reduce vulnerability

Our development services aim to help communities become safer, healthier, and more inclusive. Livelihoods are a basic foundation for ensuring that vulnerable households have the means to live in good health, safety, and dignity. Thus the focus and priority for our service provision role is on disaster management, health, and social provision to meet essential needs.

The *specific nature of the services* varies as these are necessarily driven by local leadership, needs and circumstances, and utilise locally generated capacities and opportunities. As all work ultimately depends on the same core community base of volunteers, our preference is for integrated services although a

sectoral approach is also justified where that is the best or only feasible way to meeting a specific practical or urgent need.

## Developmental approach to disaster response

Our humanitarian values and practical experience suggest that the prevention and reduction of vulnerability is most effective when it accompanies the earliest phase of the relief response. Thus, short and long-term needs are addressed together, for maximum synergy and sustainability.

Every time that the Red Cross Red Crescent responds to a disaster, we also build better preparedness for the future through investment in the training and organisation of volunteers, early warning and communication systems, contingency stocking, and local, national, and international systems for assistance cooperation. This saves future lives and livelihoods. Our disaster response is fast and oriented to stabilise the situation as quickly as possible through a **livelihood provisioning** approach, i.e., healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter, food, psychosocial support, family reunification and protection. Help is provided to all who need it with a focus on the most vulnerable. This motivates the hope and will to get over the initial shock, prevents further losses, reduces disaster impact, and therefore, the avoidable attrition of previous development gains.

## Developmental approach to disaster recovery

We start planning for recovery immediately so as to enable people to rebuild their lives and communities as quickly as possible, thereby reducing dependence on a prolonged period of relief. This also allows people to take back control of their lives and dignity. We take a **livelihoods restoration** approach. It includes replacing productive assets and tools, regenerating livelihoods by, for example, labour intensive clearance and repair work using local skills, material, and resources, and using cash transfers where appropriate. This has the additional impact that it reduces the forced need for risky behaviour to survive and also helps the wider local and national economy to recover. Additionally, in unstable and post conflict situations, recovery services actively seek points of cooperation that foster reconciliation.

## Developmental approach to disaster risk reduction

A crucial aspect of post-disaster recovery is the incorporation of measures that will reduce future community exposure to prevalent hazards through, for example, more robust replacement infrastructure, environmental modifications, adopting safer living habits, and enabling greater community access to risk-sharing and risk-transfer mechanisms.

Risk reduction is ideally undertaken before disaster strikes. Accordingly, we help communities to map and understand local hazards and devise local measures to reduce exposure and vulnerability. This is also our contribution to climate change adaptation.

## Developmental approach to situations of chronic vulnerability

Many communities live on the edge of disaster, or frequently tip into and out of disaster. These situations of chronic vulnerability are often associated with multiple factors such as climate extremes, environmental degradation, endemic poverty, and weak governance and institutional capacities. Prolonged food insecurity is a marked feature. In these complex circumstances, we take a **livelihood provisioning** approach where we must meet acute life-saving needs but our main effort is directed at **livelihood strengthening** and **livelihood diversification**. This includes measures to protect and boost food production through improving agricultural inputs and practices, nutrition education, strengthening water, land and other environmental management, creating alternative income generation opportunities, widening access to credit and markets, and safety net schemes for chronically insecure households. Where such efforts lead to more environmentally sustainable and energy efficient living, this is also our contribution to climate change mitigation.

## Developmental approach to health

The health work of the Red Cross Red Crescent is well known to save lives during emergencies, for example, through first aid, safe blood, ambulance services, and primary and hospital medical care. Our long-term contribution to promoting good health as an integral part of good development is equally significant.

Our approach to health development is guided by local health patterns and disease burdens. The intention is, first, to promote health through education and motivation that helps to reduce risky behaviours, for example, in relation to personal hygiene, reproductive and sexual behaviour, road safety, diet, nutrition, alcohol and other substance abuse. Second, we seek to promote public health through widescale adoption of proven prevention techniques such as the provision of potable water and sanitation, use of malaria bed nets, and immunisations. Third, by expanding access to treatment and care through inclusive and affordable health systems that better link community and hospital based services so that both common and serious conditions are promptly addressed and secondary complications, disabilities, and other socio-economic impacts are reduced.

## Developmental approach to social provision and inclusion

As the world progresses, not all are well-placed to enjoy the benefits of development, due to unfair or discriminatory social attitudes, systematised marginalisation and neglect, or even hatred and violence. The intent of Red Cross Red Crescent social programming is to reach out to those who are thus excluded so that they rise above their disadvantage to realise their fuller potential as equal citizens in society. We do this through practising our principles and values in the design of all our services so that they can be accessed by disadvantaged groups. Patterns of disadvantage vary from culture to culture but often include the elderly, migrants, women and girls in certain circumstances, people with disabilities, people of different sexual orientation, and people affected by conflict. Red Cross Red Crescent services give practical help including psychosocial and livelihood support, protection, nurturing good

citizenship skills including promoting tolerance and a culture of peace, and facilitating access to publicly available services.

## Capacities that build community resilience

The Red Cross Red Crescent approach to community capacity building is through both the way our services are developed and provided, and the way our branches and units are organised and function.

Thus the diverse services described above build community capacities by being home grown out of freely given voluntary endeavour, reflecting locally decided needs and priorities, relying on local skills of leadership and organisation, and sustaining themselves principally through local ownership. These are also the characteristics of *resilient* community development i.e. they enable communities to build the capacities to adapt and cope with recurrent disasters and other crises, thereby protecting and building further on the development gains already achieved.

The organisation of National Societies grows out of these locally accountable services. Thus our members and volunteers are schooled in the privileges and obligations of democratic involvement. At the same time, National Societies also aim to be digitally well connected, well-managed, and socially networked as part of a cohesive global movement that can learn from accumulated Red Cross Red Crescent experience and the latest other knowledge and research. Thus, our worldwide network is resilient to changing needs and vulnerabilities by being able to draw on varied capacities across a diverse network.

In summary, strong National Societies and their services provide an exemplar for the growth of a well-informed and responsible civil society as well as for the strong public institutions that make for an effective modern state which is, of course, ultimately responsible for the well-being and development of its citizens.

## Mindsets that promote societal and personal transformation

The Red Cross Red Crescent development approach to building our community services and capacities emphasises the importance of tackling the causes of vulnerability. These are often deeply rooted in social attitudes and habits that have arisen over time but which must be re-oriented in the face of growing and new vulnerabilities and tensions.

In stimulating such transformation in mindsets, we practice several approaches. We seek to lift up the thinking that inspires and underpins our services through setting further norms and standards and promoting their acceptance across the generations and with key audiences such as governments and military. This continues the tradition that started with the development of the Fundamental Principles, humanitarian values and international humanitarian law that are now globally accepted, and extends them. This means, for example, seeking to update the interpretation of our principles and values to contemporary problems such as patterns of violence that go beyond historic wars. It also implies moving forward to develop new norms,

and eventually laws, in disaster response, risk reduction, violence mitigation, and the promotion of a wider culture of volunteering in society.

A crucial aspect of the IFRC contribution to social transformation is through building-up a culture of non-violence. We define this as ensuring the dignity and well-being of all human beings along with respect for diversity, and resolving differences in a constructive and peaceful manner. Our community-based volunteers that are working in many different service areas, but always according to our Fundamental Principles, show what this means in practice.

We use the auxiliary role of National Societies and the International Federation's representation at the United Nations and status agreements with many countries, to advise and support states in their development responsibilities to assist, reduce, and prevent vulnerability. Our work is contributing directly to the current Millennium Development Goals and seeks to inject stronger values and a community perspective into future national and international development frameworks, goals, and targets.

Our evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy draws attention to the causes and consequences of vulnerability, gives voice to vulnerable people, and demonstrates the value of resourcing Red Cross Red Crescent work and leadership in the areas of our mandate and comparative advantage.

## Our impact in development

The results of our developmentally-oriented endeavours are reported alongside all our other work through our Federation-wide Reporting System. Our impact, through described services, capacities, and mindset transformation, contributes ultimately to sustainable national development efforts in the following areas: reduced disaster losses, better population health, and enhanced social inclusion and well-being.



# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** / It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** / In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** / The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** / It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** / There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** / The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

“Today, it is clear: the lines between humanitarian and development actors and their actions are diminishing and we must recognize and reinforce the continuum of effective interventions that reduce vulnerability, save lives and enhance human dignity. The unique contributions of the Red Cross Red Crescent include our deep and long-term foundations at the community level, the fact that we are in communities long before and long after emergencies, and our constant engagement from ‘preparedness through recovery’ in the face of growing crises around the world. In our development approach to disasters, the Red Cross Red Crescent helps communities to restore or improve their pre-disaster living conditions and to develop sustainable solutions for livelihoods, shelter, health and water and sanitation.”

**Bekele Geleta, Secretary General**



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of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
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**Contact information**

[Secretariat@ifrc.org](mailto:Secretariat@ifrc.org)

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva