



CROIX-ROUGE MALIENNE (CRM) OR MALI RED CROSS SOCIETY

Integrity in our actions

Long-term National Society Development investments that strengthened the positioning, sustainability and impact of the Mali Red Cross Society in a fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected context





1. Background

In 2016 the World Humanitarian Summit's Grand Bargain Commitments **set out the goal of "localising" humanitarian action.**

As its own contribution to localisation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) defines National Society Development (NSD) as "the continuous effort of each National Society to achieve and maintain an accountable and sustainable organisation that delivers – through volunteers and staff – relevant services to address needs, reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience in a changing environment". NSD encompasses all aspects of the life of a National Society, including both what is referred to as Organisational Development and Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement. The policy defines these two interrelated areas as follows:

- **Organisational Development** is the part of NSD work that focuses on fundamental issues within the National Society: its mandate, legal base, identity, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the organisation or between the National Society and its environment, including the auxiliary role. Organisational Development recognises the interconnectedness of a National Society's different functions and levels, and their influence on performance and impact.
- **Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement** is the part of NSD work that focuses on improving existing services and capacities by making them more impactful, effective, widespread and better related to the National Society mandate and mission. This includes both strengthening areas of work that focus on community resilience and empowerment, and strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools. (IFRC NSD Policy, 2022.)

However, little is documented about how Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies local NSD investments strengthen their impact in line with the Movement's seven Fundamental Principles, in particular those of Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence, which exist to help staff and volunteers gain access, acceptance and trust in all communities and parties in highly conflict-sensitive contexts.

This case study was commissioned by a task force of Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (Movement) members² as part of a study of long-term National Society Development investments in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts³, to record the impact of these and how they will inform future work. It shows how the Croix-Rouge Malienne (CRM) or Mali Red Cross Society has, through successful NSD investments over the past 10 years, strengthened its unique positioning as a strong, principled, trusted, and local humanitarian actor through:

- better services
- a more effective structure
- a more sustainable organisation
- a stronger capacity for both response and community resilience building.



1 Local humanitarians are often first to respond when disaster strikes and are often able to get to areas international staff and volunteers can't. Because they're within the affected communities before, during and after crises, they're better placed to both understand people's needs, and connect them to the right ongoing support. In 2016 the Grand Bargain Commitments established a "Localisation Workstream" to "learn from successful localisation practices around the world" and introduce humanitarian processes that:

- Strengthen locally-led, accountable and principled humanitarian action
- Reset power balances between local and international actors so local humanitarians can lead and deliver relevant, sustainable services
- Use a more strategic blend of local to international resources to create more efficient, collaborative, speedy response.

2 The study taskforce was convened and led by British Red Cross and comprised of the American Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

3 The term 'investments' refers to all activities undertaken by a NS to strengthen itself, and any support given by partners to help achieve this, including money, time, expertise and other resources.

2. Executive summary



“Despite enormous efforts, since the socio-political crisis of 2012, the living conditions of people in general, and those in localities affected by conflicts/crises, remain precarious. Among the consequences of this crisis, we can cite: the massive displacement of populations, food insecurity, the insufficiency or lack of drinking water, the persistence of endemic diseases, and the emergence of new diseases. In order to have a more adapted response to the multiple needs of populations in this context of complex humanitarian crisis, it will be necessary to work towards better coordination between the different stakeholders with regard to emergency, recovery and development actions.”

Mme Assitan Coulibaly, president of Croix-Rouge Malienne

The Republic of Mali is a landlocked country in western Africa covering an area of about 1.24 million km², 51% of which is desert. The country faces several threats related to climate change. These include floods, pollution and quasi-cyclical droughts with adverse consequences on the health of the population. Cultivated land (arable land and land under permanent crops) occupies 47,000 km² – 4% of the territory. It shares borders with seven other countries, including Algeria to the north, Niger to the east, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire to the south, Guinea to the southwest, Senegal to the west, and Mauritania to the west and northwest.

The population of Mali is estimated at 21.5 million (UNFPA, 2022). It is predominantly rural (84% of the population lives in rural areas) and has a young population (more than 48% of the population is under 15 years old), and a slight predominance of males (50.19%). Several major crises over several decades have worsened vulnerabilities and increased humanitarian needs. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the effects of long-term droughts, food insecurity, inter-community violence, multifaceted insecurity in the central and northern regions of Mali, floods and other climatic risks, low health coverage, and poor access to water and sanitation. Ranked 11th out of 191 countries by the Inform Risk Index 2022 (DRMKC, 2022), Mali is one of the highest risk countries in the world.

A security crisis has greatly aggravated the humanitarian context since 2012. Persistent armed attacks, vehicle thefts and kidnapping, pose security threats to volunteers and staff trying to reach communities in territories controlled by non-State armed groups. Recent years have been marked by an exacerbation of violence in the north, and intercommunal conflicts in the centre (in Segou and Mopti regions).



The deterioration of the security situation prevents people in affected areas from accessing quality basic social services, and has a big impact on income-generating activities, as people's freedoms are limited by threats, intimidation and abuses by armed groups.

As a result of a second coup d'état in May 2021, France, the former colonial power, decided to withdraw from the country through a progressive mechanism. This further exacerbated the security situation in the country and in the three-border zone including Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Following increasing tensions between the Malian State and its international partners in 2022 and 2023, characterised by international sanctions, several of these partners withdrew from the country. These withdrawals have had a significant impact on the humanitarian situation in the country. Needs have increased and it has become more difficult to meet them. It is likely that humanitarian needs will only continue to increase in 2024.

In this complex context, the Croix-Rouge Malienne (CRM, or Malian Red Cross) has worked tirelessly, through a growing number of staff and volunteers over the years, to remain relevant, neutral, impartial and independent in its humanitarian mission. It was founded on August 20, 1965, on the basis of the Geneva Conventions of August 1949. The CRM is recognised by the Government of the Republic of Mali by Decree No. 123 of September 13, 1965. As the only national auxiliary to the public authorities, it acts independently of them while supplementing and substituting for public humanitarian services. It was admitted as a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1969.

With consistent National Society Development (NSD) investments to strengthen its neutral, impartial and independent organisational and service characteristics, CRM's acceptance and access in communities across the territories often held by non-State armed groups is founded on its long-term community presence, reliability and accountability. As a result of a protracted conflict of over 11 years, which has meant that the government has only partial control of nearly two-thirds of the country, CRM remains the only organisation that is community-based and consistently present across the country.

"The CRM is a community-based organisation. We are in the communities. We are not an organisation that is based in Bamako and will intervene in Kidal. We are in the villages through our volunteers and our members. This is what defines us and also facilitates our access to populations. We ourselves are the populations. We are volunteers from these communities. So when we intervene we do not have great difficulty accessing these communities."

Nouhoum Maïga, secretary general, CRM

As a result of its commitment to sustained NSD investments over the years, supported by partners, CRM can evidence new capacities and large increases in numbers of people reached.



An awareness-raising session run by a volunteer of Mali Red Cross in Bamako. 2010.

Measurable increases in people reached through	People reached in 2015	People reached in 2020	People reached in 2023
Disaster Response (food and non-food relief items)	25,092	53,282	119,270
Conflict-affected beneficiaries	260,000	474,231	749,439
CASH assistance – households/individuals		3,423/20,534	14,529/87,174
Emergency health services (Mobile Health Teams)		206312	259757
Number of people who exchanged news with their family using Restoring Family Links tools		12,867	14,165
CRM capacities			
Emergency relief volunteers recruited and trained	96		1,005
Number of volunteers mobilized on projects	6,832		
	3,726	3,076	
Number of youths		-	6,957
Staff	209	254	311
Number of members number		4,870	10,170
Emergency Response Team volunteers (ERT)		773	773
Warehouses	1	6	6
RFL volunteers/teams	40/-	115/06	150/07
Dissemination volunteers		351	351
Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting systems			Monitoring and Evaluation System used in all CRM projects
Number of international and local partnership MOUs signed		30	30

In order to adapt itself and survive as an organisation amid extreme pressures in its external environment, CRM focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity**. As a result, it has transitioned into a widely accepted and supported organisation demonstrating its preparedness to answer the needs of the most marginalised communities requiring economic support, protection, family reunification, education, health and environmental sustainability.

This case study describes how the many customised NSD investments made by CRM and supported by its partners, have enabled it to respond to significant changes in its external environment. Its journey, since 2011, to define itself and be recognised for humanitarian services offered in spaces others cannot reach, serves as an example in the Movement. Through its investments, CRM has:

- strengthened its local presence through neutral, impartial and independent volunteers and services that built trust, acceptance and access in communities as well as State institutions and non-State armed groups
- managed to keep independent humanitarian space while maintaining close connections with the Ministry of Health to address public health gaps
- worked as Chair of the Localisation Alliance, in partnership with the Netherlands Red Cross, with a special focus on financial sustainability at local levels

- used the ECHO Programmatic Partnership to task Movement partners, through shared leadership principles, to be part of a coordinated joint annual plan that was framed under a wider Unified Country Plan
- developed humanitarian service points to offer displaced and migrating people and refugees a minimum package of humanitarian assistance, psychosocial support, and family reunification case management
- maintained a unified National Society, showing transformative vision and strength in leading its own development
- recruited transformative leadership that invested in integrity, transparency and accountability mechanisms
- decentralised regional leadership to assist branches to build stronger capacities and acceptance in communities
- linked actions in favour of migrating, displaced and refugee populations fleeing violence and insecurity to expand its work promoting non-violence, social inclusion and peace in communities
- increased youth-focussed support, structures and engagement, supporting youth as agents of behavioural change
- strengthened localisation in keeping with the Grand Bargain commitments, which strengthened principled, locally-led humanitarian action through sustained investments in gender and diversity-sensitive branches and community-based volunteers
- achieved a reengineered structure to deliver a changing mission, achieved through NSD investments in infrastructure that strengthened humanitarian predictability, response, accountability and acceptance
- strengthened its approach to Movement Cooperation and Coordination so it could improve organisation-wide standards in accountability, administration, and local resource mobilisation plans, taking over responsibility for its own and resources.



Boucana, a 63-year-old man living in Gao, northern Mali, an area affected by drought, violence and instability, receives two goats (one male and one female) from CRM, through a project funded by USAID/OFDA to build community resilience. 2010

3. Humanitarian context

Mali is characterised by ethnic and socio-cultural diversity and other factors that accentuate inequalities in access to essential services. The crisis in Mali began in 2012 with a rebellion in the north and a military coup that plunged the country into unprecedented political instability. Opportunistic alliances between independence movements and radical groups from Maghreb and Mashreq resulted in a security situation, particularly in the tri-border regions. This exacerbated the already alarming levels of food insecurity in some areas. Populations are exposed to increasing crime, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the presence of extremely violent armed groups and community-based conflicts.

More than 5.8 million people have been uprooted across the Sahel, and most arrive in communities with already limited resources. The number of forcibly displaced people in the central Sahel increased by 30% between 2020 and 2021, totalling 2 million, along with 132,000 refugees. Many internally displaced persons have also been forced to flee several times, further exacerbating their vulnerability, with numerous threats at national borders.

There are increasing constraints on humanitarian access in a complex emergency environment characterised by insufficient – sometimes a total lack of – infrastructure and basic services. As of 2018, the resurgence of inter-communal conflicts and renewed attacks by armed groups are leading to a new wave of violence in the country, with a wider geographic scope than before, extending into central Mali and pushing thousands more people to flee their homes. The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that in 2024, 7.1 million people in Mali will be in need of assistance, including 23% women and 54% children, and 1.3 million people will be acutely food insecure. Across the civilian population there is a growing protection issue due to the violence of the attacks but also the cumulative psychological and mental distress of repeated and/or long-term displacement. The displaced population suffers from mild to moderate mental health problems including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosis.

The gender inequality index, which reflects the very large gender disparity in the areas of reproductive health, education and access to employment, was 0.678 in Mali, ranking it 157 out of 160 countries in the world. In Mali, 45% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence⁴ – a notable increase from 32% in 2006. More than 26% of children are affected by chronic malnutrition, and approximately 300,000 children aged 6–59 months were exposed to severe acute malnutrition in 2022, a 48% increase in cases compared to the previous year (Food Security Cluster, Mali, August 2022).

In Mali, the main violations of rights are reported as violations of the right to life, liberty, property and physical integrity. In 2021, the actions of the non-State armed groups became more destructive, increasing the risks for civilian populations, including killings, cattle rustling, physical and psychological violence, early marriage, forced abduction and recruitment, various forms of gender-based violence (sexual assault, rape), and denial of access to resources and land rights for women.

More than 3 million people are in need of protection; consisting of 282,089 internally displaced people, 249,852 refugees, 30,839 returnees and 552,238 in host populations. The factors of vulnerability of displaced people are the duration of displacement, but also age, gender and disability – women account for 51%, men 49%, children 55%, older people 3%, and people with disabilities 4%. Another risk factor is the separation of families, which generates 'restoring family links' needs.

The population in Mali also faces the presence of explosive devices that target the defence and security forces, but mainly affect civilians. The prevalence of physical disabilities due to the effect of these explosive devices is high, and this reinforces the need for more accessible protection services. Humanitarian actors face security restraints that limit their access to people in need. The scarcity of protection services limits the chances of receiving referrals. Access options differ depending on the area of intervention, but in general, humanitarian interventions remain possible.

In Mali, agriculture is the main source of employment and income, with 60% of the active population involved in agriculture. The gross domestic product remains dominated by agriculture (30%) and the informal sector. Floods and droughts are annual events that result in the loss of life and property, and are the main risks in the country. In addition to these main risks, extreme climatic events (torrential rains, rising

4 National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), Planning and Statistics Unit for the Health, Social Development and Family Promotion Sector (CPS/SS-DS-PF), The DHS Program ICF August 2019.



surface water levels, storms) are increasingly violent and frequent, leading to the drying up of rivers, the appearance of many disease vectors, including malaria, and the displacement of populations.

To adapt itself and in the midst of extreme pressures and a violence-sensitive external environment, CRM focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity**. The following chapters explore the NSD investments that led CRM to be well-positioned, effective and recognised in each of these areas. CRM has transitioned into a widely accepted and supported organisation demonstrating its preparedness to answer the needs of the most marginalised communities requiring economic support, protection, family reunification, public education, health, and environmental sustainability.



A group psychosocial assistance activity carried out by CRM in Kidal in 2022.

4. Strengthening ‘proximity’

(i) Localisation

CRM's acceptance and access has always been based upon its permanent and growing presence in communities across all parts of the territory. The trust of communities and all stakeholders in its community-involving and community-based neutral, impartial and independent services dates back through decades of local services that have reached the most vulnerable people. In 2016, its community mobilisation projects for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in one region alone reached 36 villages and 51,097 people; a project to improve access to drinking water benefitted 6,720 people; and another WASH project established 61 health structures in three districts, reaching 300,941 people with new water points and latrines. Between 2021 and 2024, 34 more water points have been established in five regions including Kidal, the most remote and disputed region in the country.

In complex, conflict-affected contexts, its flagship health programmes and services, particularly in maternal and child health, have reached almost all districts, with strong, health-related capacity building, notably of volunteers or “community agents”, and also sanitary infrastructure. Beyond building nutritional recovery units, CRM became known for its flagship first aid programmes throughout the country, with trained first aid volunteers helping people who had experienced accidents, trauma or disaster, referring serious cases to specialised health structures.

“Our local presence helps us to anticipate and respond faster than others. Our Procedures and Finance Manuals are clear and improve efficiency and accountability. We have five warehouses and even links and MoUs with Government stock systems to avoid duplication, and supplement and substitute their services where appropriate and relevant. Although we need more trained personnel, our regional warehouses have stocks of first aid materials, non-food items and response materials we can mobilise at short notice after notification by the Operations Department.”

CRM National HQ manager

In relation to WASH, CRM's awareness-raising activities and infrastructure construction, support for communities to improve their conditions, and coordinated work with technical services from the State and other grassroots community organisations resulted in visible impact, and increased access and acceptance in communities.

In 2011, CRM started its Restoring Family Links work to address the huge increase in displacement and migration expected from 2012. It was the only organisation in the most conflict-affected part of the north that put up camps for refugees and internally displaced people.

“In 2011 and 2012 onwards many children arrived whose parents had stayed behind. Refugees were streaming in from Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. We set up a database to meet their reunification needs. We recruited 150 volunteers nationally. Our full programme was funded by ICRC. We scaled up further from 2013 with more recruits to support migrants who had left their countries and lost contact with their families. We became a member of the Africa restoring family links (RFL) Regional Implementation Team and Regional RFL Strategy. We even contributed to the ICRC Code of Conduct. Many other organisations such as the UN and NGOs relied on our data and database. In 2016 we connected to the Central Research Database Agency and now annually help approximately 6,000 people make connections with family members. Children are given free transport and are accompanied to get reunited with their families.”

CRM National Headquarters manager

Recognising the humanitarian challenges facing agricultural communities, CRM developed and offered specialised technical services to support communities in adopting new improved agricultural techniques that allow them to increase their agricultural yield and make broader improvements to their methods and rehabilitate and look after livestock.

Its localisation objectives were pursued alongside its auxiliary roles. To play its expected roles, CRM adapted its organisational structure and intervention approaches to changing contexts to be present throughout



the country. With this approach the CRM developed strong capacities to prepare for and respond to emergencies at a very local level with pre-positioned volunteers and assets. The organisational changes gave it higher profile auxiliary roles in, for example, the prevention and the management of outbreaks including cholera, using its local presence to focus on preventive measures, case management, awareness raising on good hygiene and sanitation activities, and distribution of kits in a neutral, impartial and independent way.

CRM's focussed and sustained NSD investments over the past 10 years have resulted in its ability to:

- ✓ conduct periodic assessments to identify the needs of communities through volunteers and staff in collaboration with community leaders and other stakeholders
- ✓ set up health actions, targeting people and groups in complex settings, for better healthcare access under the Universal Health Coverage programme
- ✓ undertake humanitarian advocacy on vaccine and medicine access (including COVID-19)
- ✓ support Health Centre development and networking with other community-based organisations
- ✓ provide predictable and appreciated local services to communities and women, migrants and displaced people on sexual and reproductive health, HIV, and gender inequality issues
- ✓ develop activities to monitor and improve sexual and reproductive health indicators in emergencies
- ✓ strengthen coordination of interventions with national authorities to ensure equitable assistance with holistic interventions covering all the needs of communities in the short, medium and long term
- ✓ strengthen the number of volunteers trained in first aid and psychosocial support
- ✓ strengthen the capacity of service providers with appropriate health training and practices (COVID-19, CBHFA/ECV/PSS/WASH)
- ✓ establish Community Surveillance Early Warning Systems
- ✓ training of trainers and volunteers on epidemiological surveillance and community-based events
- ✓ strengthen community-based surveillance for early detection, alertness and response to infectious disease outbreaks
- ✓ support health promotion for positive and sustainable behaviour change.

(ii) Adapting to regionalised contexts

Administratively, Mali has ten regions plus one capital district, 19 urban communes and 684 rural communes. The ten regions in turn are subdivided into 56 circles and 703 communes. Local authorities (circles, regions, municipalities) are autonomous entities with their own legal personality, powers and resources. They are managed by bodies elected in accordance with the principles of free administration. As entities, the regions and the municipalities are operational, and Regional Councils and City and Municipal Councils are in place.

To play its auxiliary roles effectively, CRM developed its structures to have representation in the 11 regional capitals. In 2024 it has 311 staff and 8,000 community volunteers across the country. Operationalising its Principle of Independence, CRM nevertheless uses its proximity to public authority structures at all levels to adapt its services to regional needs, as these differ considerably. With its decentralised structures, CRM is able to negotiate and agree contextualised auxiliary roles and services, giving particular support to people with specific vulnerabilities such as children and young people who are vulnerable or at risk, women and women's groups, and people with disabilities in fields such as:

- strengthening health and nutrition services, including community health, maternal and child health, malnutrition control, and surveillance and response to epidemics
- strengthening relevant crisis and disaster preparedness and management systems
- strengthening the security and resilience of communities living in vulnerable areas through support in the construction of sustainable shelters

- improving access to water and promoting improved sanitation and hygiene
- enhancing the resilience of vulnerable people by strengthening livelihoods and addressing food insecurity
- addressing the needs of displaced populations (migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees)
- improving the safety and dignity of people migrating along the deadly and dangerous land and sea-based migration routes across Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East and northern Africa in the areas of psychosocial support, legal assistance and restoring family links, to provide appropriate humanitarian services.

The CRM relies on its decentralised structure with operational regional committees and a network of qualified volunteers to assist communities, including those in difficult-to-access areas due to conflict logistical constraints.

(iii) Customising vulnerability and risk assessment tools to violence-affected contexts

In Mali, vulnerability and risk assessment capacities need a special emphasis and contextualisation. Community conflicts, insecurity and violence are an important cause of population movements within Malian territory, and in border areas. For displaced people, as well as for host communities, severing family ties, and poor access to identification services, health, shelter, clean water, and sanitation are major problems. Some communities have no safe water and sanitation infrastructure and often use surface water, which is sometimes shared with animals, consuming it without any treatment. The security situation exposes people on the move to the risks of kidnapping, forced labour and human trafficking in some areas without control.

CRM has worked on a number of approaches, with partner support, to assess and respond in a relevant, neutral, impartial and independent manner to a range of risks. As far back as 2014, in partnership with the Danish and Norwegian Red Cross Societies, it has developed the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Adaptation to Climate Change (ACC) programme at community levels.

Given recurrent humanitarian crises, in 2015, CRM initiated an early response programme based on forecasting, with the support of the Belgian Red Cross, the Dutch Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross. Forecast-Based Financing (FbF) was developed by the IFRC's Climate Centre to help integrate the Early Warning Early Action model into Red Cross and Red Crescent disaster management. It proved to be a critical support to CRM, as FbF is based on three essential pillars: forecasts, actions and the financial mechanism. To assess and determine the thresholds for triggering activities, stakeholders need reliable information on beneficiaries and hazards. To do this, it is essential to put in place a reliable system for collecting, analysing and interpreting data.

The Netherlands Red Cross set up a programme called Five Ten, which strengthened the capacities of National Societies in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. In 2017, CRM was invited by the German Red Cross to participate in the first meeting of the African FbF platform in Nairobi. Since then, CRM has participated in, and made significant contributions to, global and African Anticipatory Actions fora. It is considered an example for forecast-based actions in Africa with several countries visiting to learn from its experience.



Seed distribution to people hit by drought, food insecurity and violence in northern Mali to help them restore their livelihoods. 2010



As a neutral, impartial and independent organisation, CRM could use its commitment to locally-led humanitarian action to strengthen new ways of identifying risks in the most vulnerable communities. It made NSD investments that strengthened its ability to embed neutral, impartial and independent data collection capacities in the most vulnerable communities, such as:

- training and setting up community disaster response teams, including community-based shock and hazard monitoring teams
- training community volunteers on disaster risk reduction (rapid needs assessment, humanitarian assistance, first aid, psychosocial care, etc.)
- pre-positioning stocks and contingency background (non-food supply kits, food, cash, etc.)
- assistance to those affected by gender and diversity issues
- monitoring and evaluation of risks and relevant assistance actions
- providing conditional and/or restricted cash grants or other support to vulnerable households to protect and restart their livelihood activities in rural and urban settings

(iv) Branch and regional office development

The National Society has made NSD investments to strengthen the capacities of its staff and volunteers. Recent initiatives include enhanced digitalisation to improve communications and efficiency, although the challenge of finding a sustainable electricity supply proves to be persistent. Local and regional structures have been strengthened with computer equipment, but further attempts are being made to secure internet connections, decentralised fleet structures, and information technology to facilitate access to information, and to strengthen a reporting system.

CRM has achieved greater engagement of its district branches, and aimed to ensure they have at least minimum capacities to carry out emergency response and health promotion. With the support of the IFRC network, CRM is also building on a sustainability strategy that will encourage further local resource mobilisation (see section 8 (i) for more details).

As a result of its NSD investments in strengthening decentralised regional and branch capacities, CRM has developed good collaboration with the administration and technical services of the State both at the HQ and at the branch level. It is characterised by the presence of regional, local, and commune level branches, volunteers from Emergency Brigades, and National and Community Disaster Response Teams (NDRTs and CDRTs). To ensure principled humanitarian services, volunteers are trained in the Fundamental Principles and Code of Conduct.

In 2024, a tripartite agreement between CRM, the Danish Red Cross and the ICRC will see the extension of a three-year long 'branch development in conflict contexts' initiative, within a wider global MoU between the Danish Red Cross and ICRC. Due to the success of the models in Mopti and Gao, CRM and its partners plan to extend the initiative to the rest of the regions where Branch Organisational Capacity Assessments (BOCAs) have already been carried out and action plans developed.

(v) Adapting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) to contexts sensitive to violence and conflict

With vulnerable populations facing multiple risks across the territory, CRM has had to make NSD investments in trained community-based volunteers and structures that can operate in violence- and conflict-sensitive contexts.

To reduce health risks, it has focused mainly on community-based monitoring and health promotion. Community engagement and accountability skills among branches and volunteers have been key, to engage communities and then provide health information for communicable disease prevention. CRM has focused on branch development to better support the public authorities in early detection, contact tracing, social mobilisation and community engagement to control infections. It has played widely appreciated roles in the fields of prevention of respiratory diseases, epidemic preparedness, and prevention of genital mutilation.



Volunteer- and staff-based Disaster Response Units at the community level have been strengthened through better training. In 2024 and beyond, vulnerability and capacity assessments will be carried out to enhance and refresh assessments of new and emerging risks affecting communities.

CRM has also benefitted from NSD investments through its participation in the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership between DG ECHO and IFRC. With support from the Danish Red Cross (lead EU National Society), Spanish Red Cross and Luxembourg Red Cross, capacities have been strengthened in the areas of risk communication, disaster risk management, epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response, humanitarian assistance and protection to people on the move, cash and voucher assistance, and community engagement and accountability. The partnership meets the realities of extended crises with longer-term predictable funding, facilitating actions and processes with greater impact.

With the support of the British Red Cross, the CRM has benefited from a capacity building program on Cash Transfers. After two years of, assessment, training, and development of tools and practice, CRM is now 'cash ready', with cash accounting for 35% of its service delivery modalities.

The programme uses CRM's investments to date in strong and principled community-based volunteers with access and acceptance from all State and non-State armed groups. Using innovative approaches to scale up anticipatory action, new capacities are used to better anticipate the onset and trajectory of crises and protect affected communities with tailored and contextual support, as well as taking into account climate and environmental considerations.

In relation to significant health risks, especially when reaching communities in areas held by parties to a variety of conflicts, CRM's community volunteers play a crucial role. With health system coverage being low, unequal access to healthcare and low coverage of health indicators are barriers to effective service scoping and delivery. In Mali, there were 2,343 health structures in 2018. The ratio of health professionals at the national level was 6 per 10,000 inhabitants, which was still well below the WHO standard of 23 per 10,000 inhabitants. The proportion of the population with access to care in 2018 was 57% within a 5 km radius, and 86% within a 15 km radius. The displacement of populations in areas of increased insecurity following the activism of non-State armed groups has created significant further access barriers over the years.

In relation to its work to offer humanitarian assistance and protection to migrating, internally displaced, and refugee communities, CRM's NSD investments gave it neutral, impartial and independent access and acceptance to communities in remote and highly vulnerable contexts. Its capacities enabled it to better assess and respond to new and emerging risks and vulnerabilities. This in turn led to principled services that few, if any, other organisations could offer as a holistic set of services, such as:

- setting up humanitarian service points to monitor trends and deliver a full-service package
- partnership/collaboration agreement with organisations/associations that work with people who are migrating, to provide them with the humanitarian services they need
- training of volunteers on psychosocial care to support those who are migrating or returning
- volunteer training on the protection and restoration of family ties
- developing and distributing appropriate communication materials on the services available along the migration route
- distributions of humanitarian assistance (cash, food distribution in partnership with Reception Houses, shelter kits, hygiene products, transport fees, etc.) to migrating and displaced people either at humanitarian service points or through migrant support associations/organisations
- medical assistance to people who are migrating, at humanitarian service points or through partnerships with health centres
- development of reintegration programmes for people returning, through livelihood support to establish new employment and skills strengthening
- development of community engagement and accountability mechanisms to improve accountability to people on the move.



5. Strengthening 'visibility'

(i) Investments in volunteers and youth

"If there is one wish I would like to make, it is to ensure that in every family, in every household, there is a Red Cross volunteer. That there is a person who is trained in first aid and that the CRM is capable of delivering humanitarian service wherever the need arises. This will only be done with the support of the population. The CRM is a National Society of the populations of Mali. Let these populations therefore seek to know their society, and support it with human resources but also on financial and technical levels. This is our wish so that the National Society of the Red Cross of Mali can respond to its mission of auxiliary public services."

Nouhoum Maiga, secretary general, CRM

CRM has made consistent and long-standing NSD investments to strengthen, diversify, and build capacity among its territory-wide, local, principled volunteer and youth base. Volunteers come initially for a general training. Once they return and gather the local communities' needs, they follow up with specific courses in technical areas which their community needs.

Before 2007, CRM's structure located its support for volunteers and youth in a wider Social Mobilisation Department for Movement, Humanitarian Values, Communications and Youth. In 2007 a new, focused Department for Volunteers and Youth sourced new volunteers through outreach in communities and universities. Volunteer orientation sessions covering CRM's neutral, impartial and independent positioning were merged with basic training in specific sectors. Post-tests were conducted to evaluate whether they really understood the Fundamental Principles before volunteers were accepted.

Once accepted, volunteers received an ID card, more technical training in areas of interest, and small expenses to help them conduct their work. Early acknowledgement was given to their psychosocial needs and support was offered, for example, when returning from higher-risk areas.

CRM's NSD investments in volunteer development resulted in a significant leap from 2006 to 2009, with numbers rising from 150 to more than 3,000 volunteers in the course of two years. In 2009, the IFRC awarded CRM the prestigious Volunteer World Award for its efforts to promote volunteering and the concrete gains made in that area in a short time. CRM's Volunteering Policy has been adopted by the Association of National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent of French-, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Africa (ACROFA) as an example to inspire its members.

Reports from its National Volunteer Camp in 2014 demonstrate how it brought together volunteers from all Regions of Mali "to promote solidarity, mutual aid, and friendship". Held annually on International Volunteering Day on 5 December, the meeting addressed the issues of climate change and its hazards; knowledge of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement; the Ebola virus; Restoration of Family Links; and



Food distribution in Mopti to refugees who fled the conflict in northern Mali 2010.



access and acceptance issues. The 2015 theme was “Youth and citizenship, volunteering and societal values”.

CRM’s network of 8,998 volunteers plays a variety of roles, supported by its 310 staff across the territory. Its annual reports show that in some years volunteers held crisis and disaster committee meetings at branch level, displaying a strong example of “locally-led principled humanitarian action”. In spite of the dangers in conflict zones, volunteers play a vital role in gathering local data as they remain trusted in each community. Village chiefs have good relations with volunteers and offer support. The objective is to strengthen the training of volunteers, so they can specialise in different sectors. However, faced with retention challenges, CRM has set up a volunteer database with the support of the Spanish Red Cross in order to update its data. The data protection component will be strengthened in 2024.

The long-term violence and conflict in the country has affected youth and educational opportunities particularly harshly. By the end of 2023, 1,608 schools were closed due to insecurity, affecting 482,000 children and 9,600 teachers (UNICEF). CRM’s long-term NSD investments in youth have sought to restore young people’s dignity, educational opportunities, and active roles in their communities. CRM invested significant time and resources, supported by partners, to develop a flagship programme to strengthen youth-focused humanitarian education; promote Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) activities across the country; establish National and Branch Youth Coordinators to promote YABC across the country; and develop new strategic partnerships for humanitarian education, in collaboration with key stakeholders, including education authorities.

In 2022, as a result of a change in its Statutes, CRM welcomed a nationally elected youth representative onto the National Governing Board, and on all future branch boards, as part of a commitment in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 to facilitate more dynamic roles for young people and revive their participatory structures. The senior leadership enabled a youth session at CRM’s General Assembly, which led to the formation of a Youth Committee in which young delegates from around the country elected their own President and Vice-President. In 2023, CRM’s Youth Policy was revised as a result of gathering young delegates from across the country. The latest discussions include working on a unified set of Youth Plans of Action in all regions.

In February 2024, CRM established a separate Youth Department at its HQ. The objective is to establish youth programmes in schools and universities, including topics such as keeping safe in dangerous situations, first aid, risk-reduction, and life-saving books. The aim is to create young leaders in their own communities. Plans are also being explored to join with other youth organisations who use theatre to promote social inclusion and peace.

(ii) ‘Duty of care’ considerations

In the face of significant security challenges in specific areas of the territory, CRM is not immune to incidents. It experienced major incidents in 2022, with two staff deaths. CRM has always made NSD investments to reinforce the security and safety of its staff and volunteers for safe humanitarian access and safe interventions for the most vulnerable populations. Its first aid training had already saved lives, but acknowledged that volunteers are living and operating in insecure environments.

“During our first aid training we also learned about the Fundamental Principles and how we don’t distinguish between people due to their ethnicity, political affiliation, or religion. My first patient had suffered a traumatic injury to his leg after a traffic accident. I saved his life. Another patient had arrived in Mali as a refugee, but he hadn’t recovered from a surgery. I had to stop the blood flow before the emergency teams arrived and we saved his life too. I live in a suburban area with very dangerous infrastructure. One day an electricity pole caught fire. People were traumatised and I had to offer psychological support to people in the vicinity.”

CRM community first aid volunteer

However, CRM needed to support volunteers in increasing violent, conflict-affected and insecure areas. To build its capacities, it has worked with ICRC for many years on a Safer Access Framework (SAF)⁵ approach. The process started in 2016 when SAF and healthcare in dangerous contexts were first addressed together. In 2017, CRM completed its first SAF assessment, which resulted in a plan of action to integrate SAF activities/perspectives into all programmes and projects.

5 The SAF was first developed by the ICRC in 2002/03, in consultation with National RCRC Societies and the IFRC. It aims to help NSs increase their capacities and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts. <https://saferaccess.icrc.org/overview/>



Training sessions were conducted, but not as many as expected by CRM due to lack of funding support from ICRC. In 2017, an action plan review prioritised three elements for intensified implementation – volunteering development with specific focal points; security management including the need for a national Security Manager; and communications development, with the support of the Finnish Red Cross.

“CRM embraced SAF as a repositioning exercise. SAF was at the centre of everything. There was a lot of interest from branches in the north that were conducting joint work with ICRC. SAF has been well integrated into SOPs and programmes. Recently, CRM ran a mine risk awareness training with an integrated SAF session. In 2024 we hope to review the progress and re-contextualise the next phase of implementation.”

ICRC

In 2021, CRM recruited a Security Coordinator at national level, supported by security focal points in all regions. ICRC started its annual SAF budget under its wider Cooperation budget from 2018. However, although SAF training and plans of action were encouraged in branches, there was often no budget from ICRC or other partners to implement them. Also, branches continue to complain about a lack of investment in infrastructure which endangers their safety and security. Without radios, GPS tracking systems, or advanced training for security focal points, there is little chance of implementing safer procedures.

As a result of CRM's NSD investments in the appointment of the National Security Coordinator and internal SAF trainings, several improvements have been noted in minimum security behaviours and internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). These include:

- ✓ volunteers and staff assessing the security situation and requesting permission from communities and the National Security Coordinator prior to travelling
- ✓ SOPs on timing of travel; giving position progress; avoiding following military vehicles; and checking with the National Security Coordinator on information about military operations and armed criminal elements in specific areas

The results of such investments have led to safe, secure positioning with a range of stakeholders.

“In 2018 there was a fire in a camp for internally displaced people. CRM volunteers responded but the local armed group stopped them. In spite of their visibility, the volunteers were interrogated. They explained the Fundamental Principles, Movement history, and the services to be delivered. They received their permission to continue with their survey. When they returned to the regional centre there was a delay in responding after the survey. The armed group contacted CRM's Headquarters and asked why they didn't distribute, confirming that they would guarantee their security. After being invited to return, the volunteers went back and everyone was happy, including the armed group, as those who needed services the most were helped.”

CRM volunteer

Although it registers its volunteers under IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance scheme, CRM has also established a Social Fund, which partners contribute to, to support families of volunteers who have been injured in road accidents, or are sick. This caters for medical transport where necessary, and ICRC takes care of all logistics.

CRM is one the first African National Societies to put in place Insurance for its volunteers through IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance scheme. Now, with the growing risk related the conflicts, CRM has subscribed to a local complementary insurance policy to supplement that of IFRC.

(iii) Dissemination and communications

CRM has, for many years, prioritised NSD investments that would increase its visibility and public trust through communications and public advocacy. In such an externally challenging context, the strategic goal of its Communications Department has been to strengthen humanitarian values in the population with human interest and impact stories.

"We carry out actions to promote and disseminate the Principles and Values of the Red Cross. Our role is to ensure that these principles are known by communities in general but also, in the context of conflicts, by the belligerents, so that there is better access for the Red Cross to the communities and the belligerents. There is a principle very dear to the Red Cross, that of neutrality, which means that the Red Cross does not differentiate between an armed group and an armed national force. Our difference is only in relation to the needs and the difficult situation in which people find themselves. Our role is the human, not their ideology. Our action is not conditioned by an ideology but by the needs of the human being."

Nouhoum Maiga, secretary general, CRM

Through joint initiatives with ICRC, CRM has made innovative NSD investments in strengthening understanding of its Fundamental Principles, the Movement's mandates, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the context of violence and conflict in many parts of the territory. Examples include:

- in 2006, co-hosting training with ICRC for a number of influential Malian journalists on IHL, but also using the mutual interest of enhancing their first aid skills (a senior Director of a Radio station said: *"It was very enriching. We were given a good introduction to first aid and IHL and we understood the activities carried out by the two organisations and the difficulties they face"*)
- in 2018, as part of a programme to strengthen emergency response capacities in Africa, CRM organised a three-day Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) training for governance, managers and staff to enable branches to train others and plan HD activities at their level across the territory. The Vice-President of the Danish Red Cross offered peer support as a trainer.

The Communications Department has also made NSD investments in developing digital and social media communications. By investing in its upgraded website and monitoring social media, CRM has succeeded in increasing its Facebook followers (as most Malians use Facebook) to 22,000 and its Twitter followers (used for more institutional communications) to over 19,000. It has agreements with over 30 journalists on TV and radio, and advertises on most telecom networks on significant days such as /Red Cross Red crescent Day on 8 May each year. The annual celebration is also accompanied by school-based awareness-raising, roadside banners, and dissemination in villages.

A crowdfunding initiative raised significant funds for refugee assistance, with others promising to volunteer and give their skills to CRM. Unfortunately, only ICRC has supported this aspect of CRM's work, with other partners not offering integrated communications budgets within their programmatic support. CRM acknowledges this is a constraint, as visibility around humanitarian impact brings more support in the longer term.

An outcome of these NSD investments in communications and awareness-raising is an unparalleled level of access and acceptance across communities and groups across the territory.

"A volunteer who had been on a mission was returning home with a group of other NGO workers. Armed robbers arrested them and asked them individually about their work. When they verified the CRM ID, they said "Ah OK you were here on a Red Cross mission. We know you are neutral and impartial. We apologise for the inconvenience and you are free to go". We realised then that even armed groups are aware of our Fundamental Principles and know our Red Cross name."

CRM head of branch



A Malian Red Cross Society volunteer preparing rice for food aid distribution in Kayes, Mali. February 2012.



6. Strengthening 'legacy'

(i) Building on past perceptions and access

CRM's positioning as a principled, community-based local and national humanitarian actor has been strengthened by the predictability of its neutral, impartial and independent services across the territory and across the decades. It has been active since a chronic drought with five major episodes between 1980 and 2010 led to the displacement of people from the north to the south. On top of the displacement, people were made vulnerable by the practice of agriculture and the settlement of populations in the flood valleys of rivers. The failure of drainage systems, haphazard occupation of space and other problems of land use caused habitat destruction, flooding of fields, loss of livestock, destruction of roads and bridges, and had a strong impact on people's livelihoods, as well as human health – with a proliferation of epidemic and endemic diseases.

One of CRM's distinctive neutral, impartial and independent services is run from its Institute for Training in Social Health. In 2010, it received EU funding to offer senior high school graduates three years' training, with encouragement to find jobs in rural and remote areas to help build the health of marginalised communities. CRM is aiming to make a further NSD investment by establishing a similar training institution in a remote region to enhance the availability of quality personnel. 80% of students are women, and scholarships are awarded to those without their own funds. The institution was so successful that until 2022 its fees covered all utilities and costs, and even left some contribution to CRM. But the COVID-19 pandemic has left it looking for financial support.

Insecure situations in the northern and central parts of the country also caused massive displacement of people, causing increasing pressure on the scarce resources of host communities, which also resulted in the proliferation of diseases, food and nutrition insecurity, exacerbation of conflict and poverty, and intercommunity crises. Furthermore, along with its neighbouring countries in the Sahel, Mali has been hit by a food security crisis linked to drought, conflict, internal displacement, the Military coup, and other factors leading to the reduction of agricultural and other food products.

To build relevant humanitarian services in such challenging contexts, CRM drew on a range of long-term partnerships to make NSD investments in many areas. These investments built a legacy of humanitarian service and impact that have built community trust, acceptance and access that no other humanitarian actors can equal across the territory. Examples include:

The Belgian Red Cross collaboration, since 2009, in health, nutrition, community resilience, agricultural production, promotion of income-generating activities, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance.

IFRC support through delegates since 2007. More recent support has focussed on building on the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) and the International Health Regulations to strengthen and expand prevention, detection and response capacities to tackle existing infectious disease threats in the country, including the Community Preparedness for Epidemics and Pandemics project in Mali.

The Danish Red Cross initiated a collaboration entitled "hope in the desert" with the Mali Red Cross in the 80s. Although stopped following the droughts in the Sahel from 2001, cooperation resumed in 2006 with a focus on 1) timely humanitarian response to victims of disasters and conflicts, 2) forecast-based action and disaster preparedness and resilience (climate change), and 3) non-communicable diseases, mental health and psychosocial support, protection and social cohesion, emergency assistance to migrating and internally displaced people and host communities, and institutional development support. More recently it is working to support the establishment of a psychosocial department in CRM, particularly related to migration, for the coming years.

The Canadian Red Cross (CRC), present in Mali since 2012, with funding from the Government of Canada, supports the efforts of CRM and the Ministry of Health in projects including improving maternal, newborn and child health.

Between 2020 and 2021, CRC also supported the efforts of CRM and the Government in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic by strengthening the capacities of health workers and community actors. Since 2021, a new project entitled Adolescent Girls' Health in Mali has been implemented and is expected to contribute to improving the reproductive sexual health and rights of adolescent girls in three districts.

The Luxembourg Red Cross has supported CRM, since 2014, in assisting conflict-affected populations. Returnees, internally displaced persons, internally displaced returnees, and host populations are all affected. Supported services include emergency shelter, rehabilitation or reconstruction of shelters for displaced, returned, returnee and refugee populations, and integration into host communities with various strategic and financial partners and through DG ECHO funds, as part of the Pilot Programmatic Partnership programme in Mali. To ensure social cohesion in communities under pressure from people arriving, it includes the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure such as boreholes and classrooms. Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools and communities are an integral part of these projects.

The Netherlands Red Cross and the CRM have been engaged in a long-term partnership focussed on supporting resilience initiatives since 2015. This includes risk and disaster preparedness at the institutional level, support for the operationalisation of the Emergency Operations Centre, as well as food security, livelihoods and health.

The Qatar Red Crescent collaborates with CRM in the fields of health, WASH and NSD.

The Spanish Red Cross (SRC) and CRM have a lasting partnership since 2000, focussed on supporting initiatives in health, environmental protection and improvement of living environments, social protection and cohesion, and food security and livelihoods. Currently the SRC, with a permanent operational presence in the branches of Segou and Timbuktu, supports the implementation of protection projects (protection, gender and inclusion, and prevention of gender-based violence), disaster management, and food security and livelihoods, in line with the CRM Strategic Plan.

The British Red Cross (BRC), although not present in the country, funds programmes that cover early action protocols, resilience, protection and migration. With the support of the BRC, the CRM has benefited from a capacity building program on Cash Transfer as an operational modality. After two years of assessment, training, and development of tools and practice, CRM is now 'cash ready', and cash accounts for 35% of its service delivery modalities.

The Norwegian Red Cross supports CRM to strengthen its financial systems.

(ii) Maintaining a Movement footprint

Active in Mali since 1965, and permanently present for more than 30 years, the ICRC has remained alongside vulnerable populations affected by the conflict, including in remote and difficult-to-access areas. It continues to support CRM at the national, regional, local and community levels to assist people affected by the conflict. However, several partners feel the need for even stronger coordination mechanisms before CRM and its Movement components find full synergy.



A volunteer prepares agriculture tools for distribution to people hit by drought, violence and instability in northern Mali. February 2012.



“With regards to Seville 2.0 [coordination agreement], there are still operational contexts within which the “Co-convenor roles” are unclear. In countries like Mali, where we have both secure and insecure areas, the Movement cannot have two co-convenors with CRM. The way joint needs assessments are conducted doesn’t always follow through into interoperable budgets and activities under a Movement plan. A joint needs assessment doesn’t always match the way budgets are agreed. This needs further discussion of we are to be truly driven by the National Society.”

IFRC

However, some new forms of interoperable support have also ensured collective Movement support has opened access to non-Movement partnerships, such as the ECHO Programmatic Partnership to strengthen NSD investments in epidemic and pandemic preparedness and readiness through local actors, community networks, and volunteers as community-based responders. The model sees a variety of Movement partners involved in offering separate but coordinated support for strengthening well-placed surveillance, early detection and early response systems to prevent and manage disease outbreaks and other health risks. Such an approach has already expanded the scale and quality of CRM’s community-level health and WASH services.

CRM is currently collaborating with non-Movement partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM). However, it ensures that all such partnerships are in alignment with the Fundamental Principles.

(iii) A new form of organisational development precipitated by violence- and conflict-affected contexts

Early NSD support to CRM’s organisational strengthening processes came in the form of Danish Red Cross support for qualified staff in HR, volunteering and youth in 2006–7 onwards, helping the Secretary General build a programmatic staff base. The support was supplemented by a Danish Red Cross Organisational Development Delegate for four years based in Dakar. A new IFRC NSD Delegate from 2013 to 2016 led to a further model, with agreements between CRM, ICRC, IFRC and the Danish Red Cross, that IFRC would support NSD at CRM HQ level, while the Danish Red Cross could offer branch development support from 2014 onwards.

CRM has been committed to leading its long-term transformation through a series of three Strategic Plans, the latest of which covers the period 2021–2025. In an attempt to analyse its capacity to answer external humanitarian needs, it was one of the first National Societies to carry out the IFRC’s Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) self-assessment process in 2011. To intensify assessment of local, regional and branch capacities, CRM also undertook the IFRC’s Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) process in 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2022. Both processes identified priorities that required NSD investments as follows:

- weaknesses in governance (participation, contribution)
- human resource needs not being analysed and adapted, with staff not having opportunities for advancement
- no general reserve funds or working capital
- dependency on donor contributions, not financing its essential activities with its own resources
- lack of efficient mobilisation of additional resources in the event of emergencies.

Accompanied by an IFRC NSD Delegate for three years (2013–2016), in response to the changing and increasing security needs across the territory, CRM started reorganising its structures and services to be relevant to changing community needs. One driver for these changes was the need for new local capacities to play auxiliary roles, and empower decentralised levels to substitute or supplement public humanitarian services where government funds were not enough. NSD investments in this area included:

- reorganising its first aid system in 2016 to match supply and demand (including financing, a first aid service organisation chart, a first aid deployment organisation chart, a commercial first aid marketing technique, training reports, educational techniques, categorisation of first aid workers, and validating the “Gestures that save” manual

- strengthening advocacy capacity focusing on the health needs of groups most at risk and affected by conflict and violence such as migrating and displaced persons, and people with disabilities
- establishing mechanisms for collecting and responding to community feedback
- strengthening capacities for installing and rehabilitating water access points for vulnerable communities and social groups
- strengthening systems to provide integrated and responsive WASH assistance in emergency situations, including to older and disabled people
- improving the egalitarian access of people from different segments of the population to infrastructure and services in vulnerable areas.

CRM undertook a wider set of self-assessment exercises to deepen the connection between its organisational capacities and the needs for greater preparedness for humanitarian response. In this context, it committed to the IFRC's Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) process to assess, measure and analyse the strengths and gaps of its preparedness and response mechanisms, and to make NSD investments to improve them. The results helped identify a number of NSD investments needed in its disaster preparedness and response systems to solve perceived weakness such as:

- dependence on a small core of competent personnel
- the centralisation of decision-making responsibilities weakening disaster management capacity response mechanism was not rapid (e.g. data collection, processing, and mobilisation of resources)
- the need for a central level unit to harmonise Safer Access capacities that would coordinate the analysis of contexts and risks
- the need for strengthened security focal points at regional level, with sufficient security equipment.

To address the above issues identified by organisational diagnostic audits, in 2022, CRM made NSD investments. These included recruiting new staff, acquiring new material and work equipment, strengthening staff skills, strengthening its IT management system using IFRC's Digital Maturity Assessment, development and dissemination of new policies, and governance training.

CRM used a wide range of NSD support modalities from different components of the Movement to implement its plans following these assessments. This included an important grant from IFRC's Capacity Building Fund, and IFRC support in different areas related to strengthening internal integrity systems. The National Society's leadership had recognised that several aspects of its organisation were weak and required additional support. These were prioritised in its subsequent Strategic Plan 2021–2025 under the themes of resource mobilisation, management of volunteers, financial management and audit, human resources management and policy creation, digital transformation, and planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

CRM's NSD investments and organisational strengths resulted in a strong organisational confidence at all levels, enabling its neutral, impartial and independent services to reach more people.

"We have the confidence to assist, protect and respond everywhere. We build the mentality in communities to help and support each other, and have the ability to discuss anything directly and independently with the local public authorities. Being part of all communities, where there's famine, illness, and pandemics, the CRM is there to warn, sensitise and empower communities to prepare, respond and recover. Where the government can't reach, they ask us to go and support the community. Because we respond quickly and transparently, the communities give us their trust and acceptance."

CRM head of region



Mohamed Dicko, 76, a displaced person from Gossi, in northern Mali, talks to a volunteer in Mopti. March 2013.



7. Strengthening 'reputation'

(i) Legal base foundations

Initially recognised as an emergency relief organisation, the CRM was founded as a non-profit humanitarian organisation on 20 August 1965, in the framework of the Geneva Conventions of August 1949 and following Ordinance 59 PCG of March 28, 1959. It is an auxiliary of the public authorities and acts independently of them. It is recognised as a public utility with auxiliary status and roles by the Government of the Republic of Mali by Decree No. 123 of 13 September 1965.

(ii) The auxiliary role and its interpretation

CRM acts as an independent auxiliary, supporting public authorities in the implementation of humanitarian and development policies and strategies. CRM's Strategic Plan 2021–2025 is aligned with the Government's Economic and Social Development Plan.

With public authority officials and members of formal and unorganised armed groups frequently changing, it can be a challenge to raise and maintain awareness of CRM, its roles and principles. But the organisation remains well positioned. It does not receive State funds, due to lack of budget, although attempts have been made more recently to access public authority funds. Discussions have begun with the Chair of the national Parliament, and with senior Ministry of Health officials. A letter has also recently been sent to the State President asking him to be Patron of the National Society. There are concerns among Movement partners about the institutional risks of such closer positioning with the State authorities. These concerns are more significant among partners whose operational areas include conflict-affected contexts than for those who work in areas where there are no access issues.

In the field of disaster preparedness and management, CRM works closely with the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and Disaster Management and is a member of the National Disaster Management Coordination Forum. CRM is asked to offer inputs to help the Ministry achieve its mandates to manage disasters and similar emergencies through the following key functions:

- prepare national disaster plans to prevent and mitigate the consequences of disasters establish, assess and update national disaster plans
- ensure adequate facilities for technical training and educational projects to raise public awareness establish early warning systems and improve general preparedness of staff and the general public
- ensure that appropriate and adequate facilities are available for the provision of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction after any disaster. This includes local and international support for disaster relief, emergency services and reconstruction.

In the field of health, CRM is recognised by the Ministry of Health as a key player in social mobilisation and health emergency management. Once again, as a result of its local level connections with communities, and health monitoring capacities among community-based branches and volunteers as a result of NSD investments, CRM is invited by the public authorities to:

- participate and support the organisation of meetings of the various groups or platforms for social mobilisation
- promote, disseminate, and evaluate public health policies and strategies
- support the Ministry of Health in updating and implementing the National Plan for Health Safety, and the International Health Regulations
- define and implement programmes to help address major global health challenges such as eradicating vaccine-preventable diseases, combating malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, chronic diseases, and reducing maternal, neonatal and child mortality
- support advocacy activities and campaigns for investments in the sustainable strengthening of the healthcare system and care practices in the country
- actively participate in health coordination meetings.

Acknowledgement of its principled and trustworthy institutional capacities led to expanded auxiliary roles from 2019 onwards such as:

- an MoU with the National Institute of Public Health of the Ministry of Health on the preparation for and response to public health emergencies in Mali, planning and implementation of the International Health Regulations (RSI 2005) and International Health Security Program (GHSA)
- collaboration with the National Disaster Risk Management Platform
- partnership with the Directorate General of Civil Protection, including the joint organisation of training workshops, conferences, and joint celebration of International Risk Reduction Day
- partnership with the National Directorate of Hydraulics and Hydrometeorological Services as part of efforts and actions to reduce the impacts of climate change, implement Forecast-Based Financing, and implement early warning systems.

(iii) Building social inclusion and peace

With the support of its Movement partners, CRM has ensured that its staff and volunteers are trained to adopt an inclusive approach in its programming, and that protection, gender and inclusion are considered in all its programmes. Its Gender and Diversity Policy, adopted in 2022, further reinforces such commitments.

Given the high incidence of gender-based violence in Mali, CRM also ensures a particular focus on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence among the people it serves, particularly during cash and food distributions. With the support of Movement partners, it continues to ensure that individuals at risk, or survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, are supported with increased capacity to prevent, respond to and mitigate sexual and gender-based violence risks, through the coordinated development of programming standards and tools.

CRM has made NSD investments supported by IFRC to further mainstream protection, gender and inclusion through a range of different training, relevant policies, and the implementation of actions focused on women, people with disabilities and young people, for social cohesion and stability.

The National Society continues to promote positive change for humanity, based on humanitarian values and principles. It strengthens this positioning through awareness in local branches, as well as action through the powerful role of youth and engagement with educational institutions.

CRM has also paid particular attention to NSD investments that enable it to reduce abuses and alleviate the suffering of migrating people through a range of humanitarian actions. To strengthen their resilience, and that of the communities in which they find themselves, and strengthen advocacy for their rights, CRM developed and adopted a Migration Strategy 2021–2025 with the support of the IFRC network. The overall objectives include the prevention of suffering, reduction of vulnerabilities, saving of lives, meeting of basic needs, building of resilience, promotion of safe living conditions, and promotion of a culture of peace, non-violence and social cohesion.

The NSD investments that supported these objectives included:

- ✓ development and implementation of more programmes on protection
- ✓ conducting awareness-raising activities that included protection, especially in emergency situations advocating for the promotion of International Humanitarian Law
- ✓ ensuring social inclusion and equitable access to services provided in communities regardless of gender, age, and affiliations
- ✓ implementation, during emergency operations, of beneficiary identification activities considering the IFRC Minimum Standards of Protection, Gender and Inclusion.



8. Strengthening ‘integrity’

CRM’s organisational transformation contained many NSD investments that strengthened its management of integrity. It strove to create the right conditions to increase partnerships in order to reach more people in need, by being a partner of choice that is effective, accountable and functioning well. The IFRC’s Capacity Building Fund (CBF) was focused primarily on strengthening integrity mechanisms, but some perceive it to have been a missed opportunity to not also strengthen external integrity rather than just internal (to increase access, safety, etc). Since 2022, CRM has adhered to, and is a full member of, the IFRC’s Integrity Line platform, which promotes transparency and integrity among its members. Through its annual financial contributions to the platform, it contributes not only to its own functioning, but also demonstrates its commitment to transparency.

(i) The role of CRM’s statutes

Over time, and through several transformation processes, CRM has used its statutes to adapt its organisational structure and intervention approaches to changing contexts. These ensured that in a fragile, complex, and violence- and conflict-affected context, its local and decentralised structures were seen to be close to communities and to be present throughout the national territory.

To be better prepared to carry out prompt, relevant, effective, and locally-led humanitarian actions, CRM strengthened the nature of many of its internal bodies. With a focus on increasing diversity and community ownership, these include the supreme policy-making level of its General Assembly; a Central Committee; a Steering Committee; and 11 Regional Committees.

In 2022, CRM collaborated with Movement partners and the global Joint IFRC/ICRC Statutes Commission in Geneva to set up a committee to further review its statutes. Adopted in December 2022, it sought to further strengthen the management of organisational integrity, strengthening its procedures around good management conduct. The updated features included aspects that would continue to strengthen CRM’s community presence, principled human resource base and safety and security instruments. These included integrating a youth structure into the Constitution; introducing a Code of Conduct for all members; strengthening the rules and regulations for internal election; and improving the gender balance from grassroots to national levels of governance.

(ii) Refreshing governance at all levels to oversee a decentralised branch network

CRM has approximately 800 members country wide who form the base of its elected governance. Grassroots elections, from village to commune to national level, take place every four years for the election of regional and national boards.

Building on the tradition of a National Leadership Programme conducted between 2017 and 2018, CRM has more recently organised an annual Movement Induction Course to ensure strictly neutral, impartial and independent profiles in its governance and membership. This has been a complex undertaking, especially in the north, where for 12 years many areas have been under the control of different armed groups. As a result of its orientations, CRM’s leadership is proud that none of its staff or volunteers have been arrested or detailed over the years.

“During our Statutes revision we addressed the issue of increasing the gender balance in governance, stating that at least 30% of village to national board members should be women.”

Nouhoum Maiga, secretary general of CRM

(iv) Strengthening transparency and accountability

CRM has made several NSD investments to build its reputation as a more efficient, accountable, transparent and well-functioning partner of choice, for communities and for partners within and outside the Movement. With strong financial management systems over the years, CRM is now managing final reporting for 40

projects through a centralised financial management software system that enables each branch to send reports on each project for national consolidation. Each branch has a financial manager and relevant software. In 2017, CRM migrated from SAGE. The SAGE system was deemed to be more aligned to the needs of companies, instead of offering a system that could monitor and consolidate financial information from a larger number of projects. CRM received valuable assistance from the Danish Red Cross during the two-year migration of systems.

NSD investments have included:

- training on accountability and finance for all levels, including on CRM's Finance Manual and how to use it
- finance training for all leaders, including in a recently upgraded Procedures Manual conducting external audits annually
- adoption of an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy in October 2022.

By creating the right conditions to increase partnerships and reach more people in need, CRM's neutral, impartial and independent organisational characteristics and services have won it acclaim. As a result, it is invited to participate in several humanitarian clusters covering areas including shelter, protection, health, and food security. In addition, it is an active member of the national cash working group.

CRM also works with United Nations agencies, including WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, OCHA, UNFPA and IOM, contributing to the realisation of humanitarian intervention plans in Mali. External partnerships are governed by the guidelines on external partnerships in the Sahel region for components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The objective of these guidelines is to define a common position of Movement partners responding to humanitarian needs in the Sahel region, by agreeing on realistic limits of partnerships that Movement components can lead on and develop with external humanitarian actors while remaining neutrally, impartially and independently positioned.



The Mali Red Cross (CRM), took prompt action to reduce the impact of floods in September 2022. Response teams provided immediate assistance, focusing on the protection of people and property. Evacuation measures were taken to reallocate the at-risk populations to safer areas.



9. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

(i) Strengthening sustainability and organisational resilience

CRM's efforts to be positioned as a local and national humanitarian actor, with neutral, impartial and independent funds to respond to the needs of local communities, has driven its desire to strengthen local resource mobilisation over the years. Its dependency on Movement partner budgets for services and salaries has driven its national leadership to want to diversify independent streams of funding for its local services.

As a result of its NSD investments, in February 2024, CRM organised a fundraising event and mobilised 61 million XOF (CHF 90,000) to come to the aid of 400 internal displaced people near Bamako.

"We want to use the Fundamental Principles to guide our local resource mobilisation goals. We want the people of Mali to support those whose vulnerabilities are not always visible. Our fundraising campaigns have therefore been focussed on vulnerable people in hard-to-reach areas. These may include displaced people, for example, and women and children. We want to encourage Malians to be socially responsible and see our neutral, impartial and independent services as priorities to support."

CRM National Headquarters manager

A second driver for the vision of increasing its self-sustainability has come in the form of the withdrawal of several partners due to deteriorating security conditions. As a result, and with some foresight, in 2023 onwards, CRM accelerated its strategies to enhance its local and national sustainability. NSD investments include:

- ✓ a Localisation Alliance for financial sustainability enhancement in partnership with the Netherlands Red Cross who have deployed a Financial Sustainability Adviser in Mali with a four-pillar approach comprising of
 - o finance development
 - o resource mobilisation strategy development
 - o positioning
 - o leadership commitment.
- ✓ a Finance Development Assessment, supported and conducted by the Norwegian Red Cross with a plan of action for 2024–2026 to strengthen financial management standards further
- ✓ a tripartite partnership with the ICRC and the Danish Red Cross on capacity-building for the regional branch in Gao as part of a wider process of branch development in conflict-sensitive contexts
- ✓ successful grants from IFRC's CBF and joint IFRC/ICRC National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) funds to strengthen its commercial first aid income strategies
- ✓ the establishment of a Resource Mobilisation Unit and Strategy to help mobilise resources for its core and programme costs
- ✓ a strengthened finance management system.

As sustainability is perceived to be the outcome of multiple NSD investments to strengthen interrelated organisational characteristics, CRM is also managing integrated inputs from partners that help it develop robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms (supported by IFRC), accountability mechanisms, and the development of branch capacities to undertake and test pilot Income Generation Activities (IGAs).

(ii) Using and adapting existing Movement mechanisms to enhance overall cooperation and coordination in-country

CRM has committed to manage its Movement cooperation and coordination agenda in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation⁶ (SMCC) framework, and in alignment with the recently adopted agreement on Movement Coordination for Collective Impact⁷ (Seville 2.0).

The country's participating National Societies have co-signed the Movement Coordination Agreement between the Malian Red Cross, the ICRC and the IFRC Secretariat. This agreement defines the roles and responsibilities, and the coordination system, and is accompanied by a Movement Security Framework.

CRM has consciously adopted Movement cooperation and coordination mechanisms it believes will help it to strengthen its localisation agenda. By harnessing Movement support, often with multi-partner inputs, CRM has managed to strengthen its neutral, impartial and independent locally-led humanitarian action goals. The following table demonstrates the manner in which coordinated support is organised, both geographically and thematically, to ensure non-duplication of efforts and synergetic outputs and outcomes.

Participating National Society	Geographical areas	Activities supported
Belgian Red Cross	Koulikoro and Mopti	Cash transfers, resilience and health, nutrition project
Canadian Red Cross	Koulikoro and Sikasso regions	Community health
Danish Red Cross	Ségou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal and Bamako	Resilience projects, disaster risk reduction and cash transfers, protection, social cohesion and humanitarian assistance for migrants
Luxembourg Red Cross	Timbuktu, Mopti and Bamako	Assistance, flood risk reduction, WASH, education and resilience
Netherlands Red Cross	Kayes and Bamako	Livelihoods, maternal health, disaster response preparedness, community engagement and accountability
Qatar Red Crescent	Koulikoro and Bamako	Health, WASH, food security/livelihoods
Spanish Red Cross	Kayes, Sikasso, Ségou and Bamako	Food security, WASH, health with a human rights-based approach
British Red Cross	(Not present in-country)	Early action protocols, resilience, protection and migration, cash transfer programming

To ensure coordinated implementation, CRM organises regular coordination meetings to harmonise action and support through two coordinating bodies. The Movement's Coordination Platform (CRM, IFRC and ICRC) is a strategic coordination meeting that occurs every two months. The Operational Committee, with the presence and participation of participating National Societies in the country, meets every month and includes discussions on security, safety and programming.

In 2023, the IFRC's Unified Country Plan process assisted CRM to strengthen a joint planning process, using IFRC's role to ensure coordination and compliance. There are, however, some observations by partners that the plan is still driven by operations and programmes, not necessarily with a wider sustainability vision of development for the National Society.

The use of the ECHO Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP) aimed to achieve a higher level of interoperability between all Movement components. Although yet far from optimum, it has reduced pressure, complexity and parallel reporting systems. One objective is for the operational costs of partners to be reduced, while the indirect costs to the CRM should be increased in the spirit of localisation. However, while the danger remains of EU Partner National Societies approaching ECHO for multiple other projects, some partners

⁶ <https://smcctoolkit.org/>

⁷ https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Seville_Agreement_2.0_EN.pdf



have also advocated successfully with ECHO to modify their expectations. The Danish Red Cross, for example, successfully used 'flexible' PPP funds to respond to crises while building CRM's capacities as a local responder with an NSD perspective, against pressure from ECHO to support operational responses and budget lines only.

The ICRC has been permanently present in Mali since 1992 to respond to needs amid armed conflict and other situations of violence in the country, mainly in the centre and the north. It works in close partnership with CRM and other components of the Movement, and supports it in terms of communication, strengthening of infrastructural capacities, re-establishment of family links for families separated by conflict or migration, and Safer Access Framework (SAF) training.

(iii) Harmonising Movement support for its own NSD priorities

To harmonise Movement support for its NSD objectives, and to ensure consistent and coherent support to the ongoing strengthening of its neutral, impartial and independent locally-led humanitarian services, in September 2023, CRM developed an NSD Plan, which enabled it to seek coordinated assistance for 13 prioritised components of organisational strengthening. These included:

- ✓ setting up basic infrastructure
- ✓ implementation of income-generating activities
- ✓ security reinforcement
- ✓ the development of branches
- ✓ strengthening the financial and accounting mechanism
- ✓ strengthening communication and increasing visibility
- ✓ optimisation of acquired experiences and development of skills
- ✓ development of partnerships nationally and internationally



Salamata is a blind woman living in Gao, northern Mali, an area affected by drought, violence and instability. She tells her story to volunteers from the Mali Red Cross. 2010

10. Lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

(i) Contributors to the success of transformative processes

CRM's prioritised NSD strategies and investments have resulted in a number of very positive strengths, giving it unique positioning to respond to individuals and populations affected by different forms of violence and conflict. Characteristics that distinguish CRM from other civil society or governmental organisations include:

- its ability to articulate strongly an organisational and service expansion vision, supplemented by clear NSD Plans that show partners where they can contribute resources to prioritised needs
- balancing an independent auxiliary role with the need to access diverse funding streams that keep it positioned as neutral, impartial and independent
- transitioning from a 40-project portfolio to a more programmatic one focussed on priority humanitarian needs facing the most vulnerable communities
- a sustained position as neutral and free of political or religious considerations amid highly politicised contexts
- maintaining a stable and principled governance and senior management, but introducing and balancing a strategic new set of management profiles to achieve innovative transformation
- strong, principled and relevant technical capacities, with good localised infrastructure in the form of warehouses, logistics contracts, and humanitarian service points
- embracing SAF as the centre of its activities and seeing its utility as part of an organisational repositioning exercise
- independent alignment with local authorities that deliver auxiliary roles to supplement or substitute public humanitarian services with the rights of an independent humanitarian initiative
- ability to contribute to wider regional models of localisation across Africa
- managing alignment of a diversity of Movement support mechanisms and programmes to the framework of its Strategic Plan 2021–2025.

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.



Croix-Rouge Malienne

Siège: Djelibougou, Rue 261
porte 02 Route de Koulikoro
B.P: 280 Bamako/Mali

T (+223) 20244569

E crmaliene@croix-rouge.ml