

N S D

Strengthening local Red Cross and Red Crescent action through National Society Development

COMMUNICATIONS BRIEF

*Working
together in
partnership*

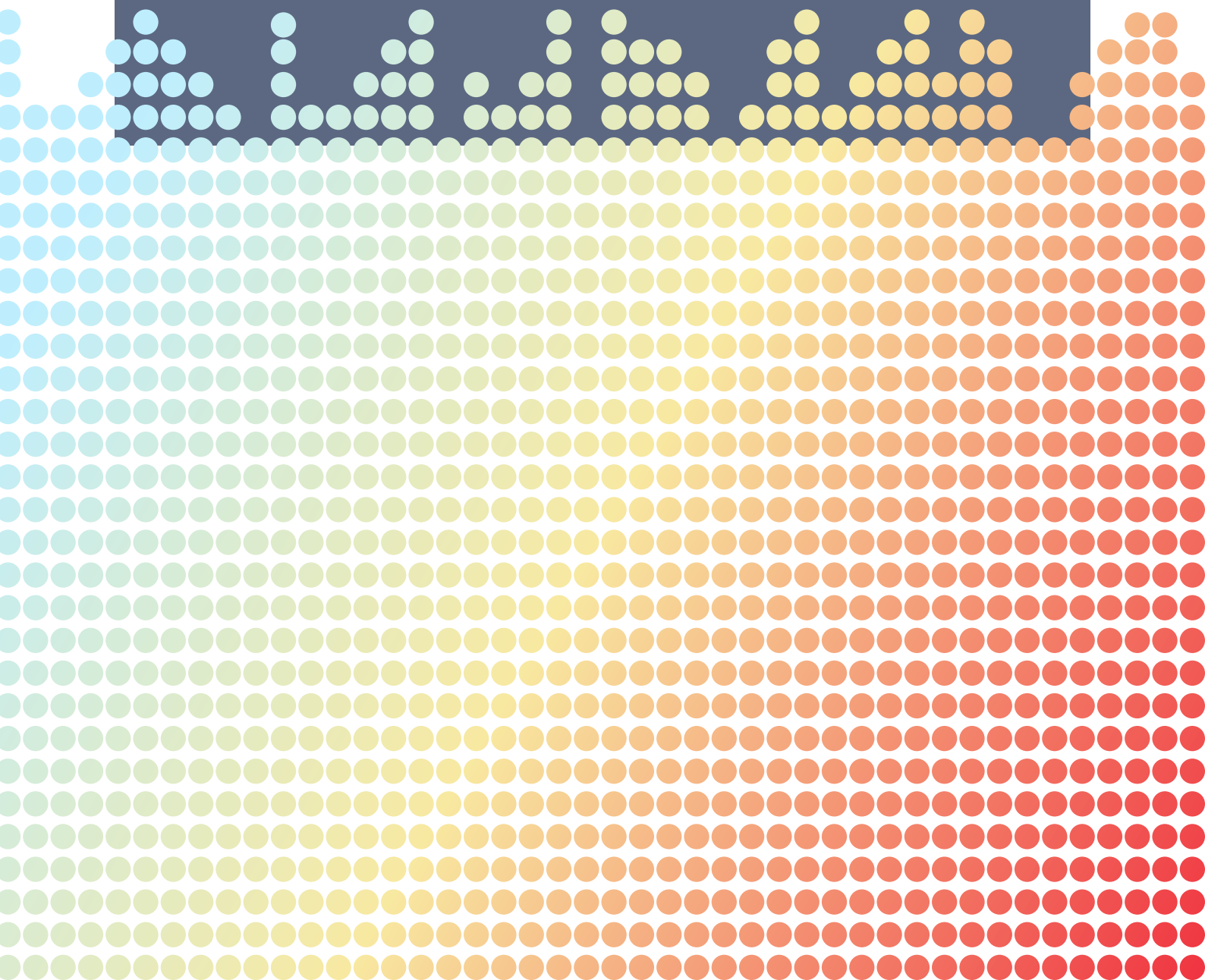


*** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** helps those facing disaster, conflict, and health and social problems. It consists of the **International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is a humanitarian network, comprised of 191 National Societies, supported by an International Secretariat. Its mission is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activity by National Societies. It does so with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, thereby helping maintain and promote human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC Secretariat serves its National Societies through technical support, coordination, facilitating cooperation, peer support and knowledge sharing, capacity building, international representation, and where requested, by managing its own humanitarian assistance operations.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organisation whose humanitarian mission is exclusively to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening International Humanitarian Law and universal humanitarian principles.



The importance of sustained locally led action

Humanitarian responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent disasters and conflicts highlight the vital role established local humanitarian organisations can play within the global humanitarian system. These local organisations also help address less visible but just as critical long-term crises, such as climate change, internal displacement, migration and healthcare emergencies.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Strengthening local action has always been a focus for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement ('the Movement').

- The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are active in 191 countries. In 2022, through their 225,000 local branches where staff are supported by 15.5 million volunteers, National Societies reached 237.1 million people with long-term development programmes, and 321.7 million people with crisis response and early recovery activities.
- This global network of local National Societies is central to this reach. It is able to inspire, organise and support millions of local volunteers, who are organised into tens of thousands of local 'branches'. Each of these National Societies performs its 'auxiliary role' of supplementing or complementing the humanitarian efforts of national and local authorities, as a legally independent national humanitarian actor.

This paper summarises how these National Societies strengthen their capacity to deliver more effective, efficient and sustainable local development and humanitarian action – a process we call '**National Society Development**'. It describes how the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) together with partner National Societies, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (collectively the "International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*"), work together to support this process and gives examples of how long-term investment in National Society Development translates into enhanced locally led action and local impact.

At the most local level of National Societies, **local units** or **branches** (hereafter referred to in this paper as branches) are typically groups of self-organising volunteers living in or close to crisis-affected communities. As well as knowledge of the Movement and its Fundamental Principles, volunteers generally have First-Aid, healthcare, community resilience building and response skills relevant to their respective contexts and interests. Branch activities are usually made possible by local donations of time, cash and materials, and also through access to national or international funding. Their main resources are volunteer time, skills, community trust and relationships, and local knowledge and leadership.

The ability to motivate, mobilise and support local action in vulnerable communities is central to the Movement's reach and impact. Local voluntary action delivers ongoing services and often acts as a first response to a disaster or crisis in communities not easily reached by government services, NGOs or UN agencies. The sustained presence of volunteers, supported by skilled and dedicated National Society staff, contributes to communities' resilience, preparedness, cohesion, and humanitarian and development action.

How does National Society Development lead to more effective local humanitarian action?

Each National Society is responsible for how it develops its people, structures, systems and services to meet increasing needs. Within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, National Society Development (NSD) refers to **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 includes working on fundamental organisational challenges (such as strengthening the National Society's mandate, legal base, identity and auxiliary role, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the organisation) and works to improve existing services and capacities (branch systems, human resources, volunteering, finance, to name just a few). Supporting NSD therefore contributes to better local humanitarian action. That is why **the Movement considers supporting National Society Development as central to and an enabler of the process of localisation.**

How the IFRC, ICRC and partner National Societies support NSD

The IFRC has the know-how and primary mandate/responsibility to support National Societies in their development, as well as to coordinate NSD support. It develops policies, strategies, global standards and tools to support National Societies in their transformation and development, and guides and aligns NSD support.

The ICRC supports NSD in areas related to its mandate and expertise (including International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Restoring Family Links (RFL), the Fundamental Principles, legal base and the Safer Access Framework (SAF), notably by strengthening National Societies' emergency preparedness and capacity to respond safely to situations of armed conflict and internal strife. At the request of the host National Society and in coordination with the IFRC, the ICRC may support in other areas where there are important development needs that are not addressed.

National Societies are responsible to define their own NSD needs and priorities. When acting as a support to other National Societies, they engage as peers in the defined development journeys utilising IFRC coordination mechanisms.

The IFRC NSD Framework (2013) defines the Movement's approach to NSD; the NSD Compact (2019) guides the Movement in all areas related to NSD support and the NSD policy (2022) defines the major guidelines for all NSD work.



NSD support is tailored to the needs of each National Society, and may focus on one or more of the following:

- **Accompaniment.** The IFRC, ICRC and/or partner National Societies support the leaders of National Societies as they create the conditions for their organisations to adapt, transform and grow.
- **Technical support** helps National Societies plan for change and is increasingly provided through peer exchanges between National Societies.
- **Dedicated long-term funding** for NSD invests in the longer-term vision and strategy of the National Society.

Strengthening access and management processes at the Somali Red Crescent Society

Of Somalia's 12.3 million people, 5.6 million face food insecurity and 2.8 million cannot meet their daily food needs.

Ururka Bisha Cas (the Somali Red Crescent Society, SRCS) is the only national institution able to access vulnerable communities across Somalia, by maintaining neutral, impartial and independent relationships with influential actors across the country.

The SRCS comprises a countrywide network of 19 regional branches, 130 district sub-branches, 1,118 employees, 5,200 active volunteers and nearly 20,000 community volunteers who can be mobilised during emergencies.



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In 2015, a new leadership focused on increasing professionalism and sustainability within the SRCS. Examples from the 2022 SRCS NSD Initiative Evaluation include:

“With Safer Access Framework training, we have been able to work in very difficult areas, even where movement is very restricted. Whereas the other actors can only work in towns, we have contact with different ideological groups in other areas”.

“Two years ago there was no regular financial reporting. We now produce a financial report each month, pay salaries on time, and discuss reports with all departments on a weekly basis”.

“Three months ago, our branch received information about the arrival of internally displaced persons (IDPs) through volunteer reports. The Coordination Office convened a Movement partner meeting the next day. Funds were committed, and SRCS facilitated free phone calls for the IDPs. A plan of action was agreed within a week and assistance given. Before, this assessment, reporting, financial management and assistance process would have taken at least three months!”

Investment in Branch Development

One of the Movement's long-standing priorities has been to improve the ability of all National Societies to support vulnerable communities, no matter where they work. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to invest more at branch level – in its mandate and relationships with local actors, in the skills of its people, infrastructure, systems and procedures. This will help to ensure dedicated staff and volunteers based in local branches have the skills and capacity to provide frontline emergency response in their own, often remote, communities.

Investment in self-sustaining local Red Cross units in Burundi

In 2021, nearly 3,000 local volunteer units of the Burundi Red Cross provided:

- Hundreds of thousands of 'acts of solidarity' by self-organising groups of volunteers responding to the basic needs of vulnerable people;
- 247,564 First-Aid responses;
- Emergency assistance to 106,825 people;
- Cash assistance to 132,651 vulnerable people with locally raised funds – four times as many people than received cash assistance through international funding.

From 2008 to 2011, the IFRC Capacity Building Fund invested 300,000 Swiss francs in the Burundi Red Cross (CRB) to develop its countrywide network of local volunteer units. Other sources of Movement funding, along with technical advice for the CRB's leadership, complemented this.

Now, 15 years on, the CRB has mobilised 624,000 volunteers, organised into 2,926 local volunteer units, to organise and carry out local humanitarian actions. The units have been self-sustaining for all this time, mobilising roughly 1 in 20 Burundians as volunteers. The impact of this organisational transformation on local humanitarian action, resilience, disaster response and peace in a conflict-affected country is incalculable.



The auxiliary role: a unique humanitarian partnership between each National Society and its public authorities

The auxiliary role is the formal relationship a National Society has with its public authorities to provide humanitarian services. The auxiliary role is formally recognised in national legislation, such as a Red Cross or Red Crescent law, and also under international law and within the Movement's statutes.

The auxiliary role of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is a unique and special status. It enables National Societies to contribute to national humanitarian preparedness and response, while remaining neutral, impartial and independent. The auxiliary role of National Societies constitutes one of the defining characteristics that distinguishes them from other NGOs, the UN system and other forms of humanitarian response.

How investing in the auxiliary role of the Mongolia Red Cross Society added value to the COVID-19 response



Successful efforts over several years to have its auxiliary role recognised in legislation, establish trusted relationships with public authorities, develop leadership and operational capacities, and prepare for epidemics, enabled the Mongolia Red Cross Society (MRCS) to contribute extensively to the country's COVID-19 response. Movement partners, including the ICRC, IFRC and British Red Cross, supported this process of national advocacy and national and local capacity development with technical advice and funding.

As COVID-19 spread, the MRCS rapidly adapted its influenza outbreak preparedness plan, developed in conjunction with Mongolia's Ministry of Health, to a COVID-19 response. Routine influenza-prevention messages were rebranded and incorporated into volunteer training and public communication materials, while prepositioned Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was made available to health facilities. Strong relationships with national and local authorities enabled joint planning and information-sharing. More than 2,000 MRCS volunteers were mobilised for contact tracing and for conducting analysis of links between clusters of cases; to share health and safety messages; to deliver food, hygiene and other supplies to people in self-isolation; to provide social connection and reassurance, and to help vulnerable people access vaccinations.

The MRCS response reached an estimated three million people – a large majority of Mongolia's population – through awareness-raising communications and community-based activities.

