



SCALING-UP LOCALLY LED ADAPTATION:

A humanitarian perspective
and lessons learned

By the International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies and the Red Cross Red
Crescent Climate Centre

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Cover photo: Distribution of food and kitchen items to people affected by floods in Mwanakhu camp in Mulanje district.
Credit: Saara Mansikkamäki / Finnish Red Cross

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1. SUMMARY

Everyone everywhere will have to adapt to climate change – some will be able to, many will not. Vulnerability – often driven by poverty, exclusion and humanitarian impacts – will continue to be the dominant factor that prevents people from adapting. Only through locally led adaptation (LLA) will benefits be felt within the timelines necessary to help significant numbers of people in make-or-break adaptation scenarios.

Without being locally led, adaptation will not serve those most vulnerable to climate change. By promoting local everywhere, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) seeks to make finance go further and to act faster with greater reach, dignity and choice for those who suffer the most. This document summarizes initial lessons learned from over 20 countries where the IFRC network is changing its own practices to integrate climate risks and invest at the most local level to increase community resilience to the climate crisis.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- LLA is a relevant approach for humanitarian actors and in humanitarian contexts, breaking down development and humanitarian silos.
- LLA requires a two-way flow of local to national climate risk information, which enhances understanding, risk perceptions and dialogues.
- How LLA is rolled out matters for empowering, building trust and avoiding maladaptation.
- Partnerships are critical for LLA in humanitarian contexts and for bridging silos.

LLA FINANCE, POLICY AND PLANNING

- LLA finance needs to be accessible, flexible, diverse and sustainable.
- Investment is needed in local capabilities and institutional strengthening to enable LLA planning, implementation and financial management.
- Climate finance should enable flexible programming, in line with community priorities and informed by community decision-making.
- Funding should move away from rigid humanitarian/ climate/development funding silos to diversify funding and ensure seamless programming.
- Local-to-national climate and disaster planning and policy processes should integrate community perceptions, information, coping strategies and priorities.
- Flexible implementation timelines allow for trust building, prioritization and decision-making processes.

2. INTRODUCTION

LLA has become a key approach to addressing the climate crisis; designed and led by communities, for communities. The [Eight Principles of LLA](#), adopted in 2021, have since been endorsed by over 130 supporters, including the IFRC. These principles aim to give local actors leadership over adaptation decision-making as well as the management of resources for climate change adaptation and resilience. Currently, very little climate finance is localized – less than 17 per cent of global climate finance directly reaches local communities (UNEP, [Adaptation Gap Report](#), 2023).

As a humanitarian network, the IFRC approaches LLA through a humanitarian lens, integrating climate risks in humanitarian programmes and operations and facilitating LLA in communities, including in humanitarian contexts. This builds on the localization agenda of the humanitarian sector, outlined in the [Grand Bargain](#), [Grand Bargain 2.0](#) (2021–2023) and their successor dated 2023–2026, which focuses on localization, quality funding and the participation of affected communities. IFRC's commitment to LLA aligns with its institutional mandate, including the IFRC Strategy 2030, the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations](#) and the [IFRC Global Climate Resilience Platform](#).

LLA helps to deliver on targets outlined in the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals. The [Framework for Global Climate Resilience](#), adopted at COP28 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in 2023, explicitly acknowledges the role of LLA which is also part of the ongoing negotiations at COP30 in Belém, Brazil, on indicators under the [Global Goal on Adaptation](#).

The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted to the UNFCCC in 2025 – also known as [NDC 3.0](#) – have increasingly prioritized adaptation. The latest review indicates that just under 20 per cent of NDCs submitted (as of 9 November 2025) include either direct mention of 'locally led adaptation' or a related term (e.g. 'locally led climate action', 'locally tailored adaptation', etc.)¹. This confirms that many national governments already prioritize LLA as an approach that is essential to climate resilience, through finance that reaches the local level and strengthens local ownership. However, despite the increasing use of "locally-led" terminology since 2021, an analysis of climate financial flows between 2016 and 2023 showed that less than half a percent of reported climate funding was explicitly allocated to such actions. (Source: [Locally implemented or locally led? Tracking finance for community climate action](#))

This paper outlines the initial lessons learned across the IFRC network, building on a systematic institutional LLA process initiated in 45 countries. It puts forward recommendations for scaling-up the full potential of LLA in increasing the resilience of communities at the frontline of the climate crisis.



Illustration:
Rebeka Ryvola
de Kremer

¹ These references are included in the following NDCs: Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Cap Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritania, Moldova, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, UK (NDC review conducted by the IFRC and its Climate Centre, November 2025).

3. IFRC NETWORK APPROACH TO LLA: THE CLIMATE ACTION JOURNEY

In 2023, the IFRC launched an innovative, institution-wide [Climate Action Journey](#) (CAJ) approach, developed with and for its network of National Societies. The CAJ offers a systematic process to initiate, deepen and scale-up climate action and LLA by increasing climate-risk knowledge and capacity; strengthening partnerships for action; and, ultimately, accessing climate finance. It brings new methods for integrating climate risks into humanitarian work and empowering communities to anticipate, adapt to and avert changing climate risks – now and in the future – through increased LLA.

So far, the IFRC network has:



ROLLED OUT CAJ IN **45** COUNTRIES



HOSTED
35 CLIMATE
WORKING GROUPS



PRODUCED
25 LOCAL
COMMUNITY
ADAPTATION
AND RESILIENCE
PLANS



GUIDED
25 CLIMATE
STRATEGIES



REACHED
25,000 PEOPLE



CONDUCTED
25 COMMUNITY
VULNERABILITY
AND CAPACITY
ASSESSMENTS
WITH AN LLA LENS



FACILITATED
30 NEW
GOVERNMENT
PARTNERSHIPS ON
CLIMATE

In the 45 countries where the CAJ has been introduced – through the IFRC's National Societies, their local branches and the communities they serve – the work was supported by a range of projects and donors. Led by local actors², the focus was on programmatic approaches while breaking project silos. The discussion below summarizes key elements of the CAJ and compares these to the LLA principles. These initial findings are based on an evaluation of qualitative interviews and assessments on the CAJ in 23 countries.

² The CAJ has been integrated into a range of projects under the IFRC Global Climate Resilience Platform, funded by a number of donors including Spain's International Development Cooperation Agency, known as AECID (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo), the Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) of the European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Irish Aid, the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (up to January 2025).

4. LESSONS LEARNED: INITIAL FINDINGS

4.1. The Climate Action Journey provides a strategic **institutional approach** for enabling locally led adaptation

The CAJ provides a unique approach for National Societies to prepare for LLA. Initial findings highlight the importance of a **holistic, strategic approach** to enable the integration of climate considerations into humanitarian work as well as furthering LLA as a way of working.

An **enabling environment** was identified as a critical starting point. This includes a commitment and buy-in to the climate integration and LLA approaches from leadership level through to local branches. This allows for greater resource commitment, partnership strengthening and strategic prioritization.

Changing climate risks are **increasingly being integrated across all levels and disciplines**, such as disaster management, food security, health, livelihoods, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This has been coupled with a strengthening of **institutional capacities** to champion LLA – from national-level leadership to district- and local-level branches and communities.

The Climate Action Journey gives a holistic approach that is needed – across implementation, modalities and awareness-raising. It is not the responsibility or ownership of one person or department, but of everyone, including community members."

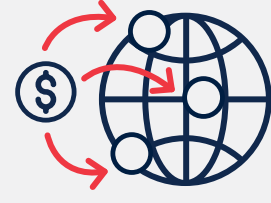
RED CROSS OF SERBIA



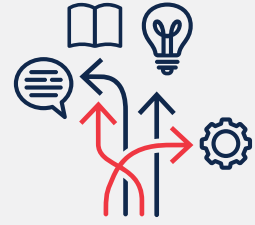
"If only we knew what happens around that last bend."



LLA 1
Principle
Devolving decision-making to the lowest appropriate level



LLA 4
Principle
Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy



LLA 6
Principle
Flexible programming and learning



Serbia, floods. The Serbian Red Cross rescue team are on the front line of the response to the torrential rains and floods affecting the country. Credit: Serbian Red Cross

4.2. Locally led adaptation requires a two-way flow of **local to national climate risk information** that enhances understanding, risk perceptions and dialogues

Understanding climate risk and uncertainty is at the heart of the CAJ, with a focus on enhancing local access to and use of climate data – both historical and current weather data as well as climate projections. Central to the CAJ is the integration of scientific, local and Indigenous knowledge to build community trust, empower decision-making and strengthen local ownership of climate action. Climate risk assessments were conducted together with key national stakeholders – in particular, hydrometeorological agencies – and tailored to humanitarian contexts and work. This information was profiled in accessible ‘story maps’ to guide further discussion and decision-making.

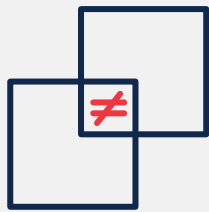
Community vulnerability and capacity assessments (EVCA) were carried out, with an added climate lens (building on the climate risk assessments) and strengthened components around decision-making and **inclusive adaptation planning**, ensuring that different community groups were included in the process. The EVCA tools facilitated genuine participatory engagement and enhanced awareness of localized climate risks – for example, through historical maps that highlighted changes in drought or flood patterns, or resource maps that linked climate impacts to food, health, livelihoods and water security. Critically, the two dimensions of enhanced climate science and local knowledge form the basis of **locally led decision-making** around adaptation options and design as well as the implementation of LLA. The CAJ strengthens components around locally led processes for discussing, deciding upon and designing climate-risk informed actions enabled by more flexible finance.

When we went on the ground with the EVCA we said, “We are not doing the assessments ourselves, we are only facilitating the process. The actual identification of the risks, vulnerabilities, capacities, solutions is being done by community members. Our role is just to facilitate.”

MALAWI RED CROSS SOCIETY

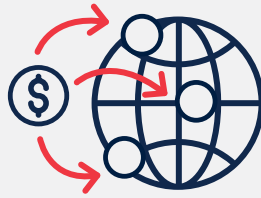


marginalized communities



LLA 2
Principle

Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, people with disabilities, people who are displaced, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized ethnic groups



LLA 4
Principle

Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy



LLA 5
Principle

Building a robust understanding of climate risk and uncertainty



3 million people are affected by the drought in Malawi by March 2016. As a drought relief response Malawi Red Cross have implemented cash transfers to a total of 10 000 beneficiaries in the districts of Nsanje and Phalombe. Credit: Thea Rabe/ Norwegian Red Cross

4.3. **Process matters** for empowering, building trust and avoiding maladaptation

From the outset, assessments and dialogues on enhancing climate risk understanding need to be coupled with ensuring assessments are turned into locally led priorities that have secured **funding for implementation**. During the EVCA and other participatory assessments, communities identified existing coping strategies for dealing with current and changing risks, such as the intensity and frequency of droughts, floods and cyclones/hurricanes. This mapping of coping strategies along with local observations provided the basis for identifying adaptation options. These options were included in **Community Adaptation and Resilience Plans** and used by communities for prioritization and decision-making. Having **funding available** to implement prioritized actions was a cornerstone of trust-building in addition to a commitment to LLA.

The need to **enable dialogues and guidance** around identified options also emerged strongly – for example, working on drought-resistant agriculture in areas of northern Nigeria required new types of local expertise to face unprecedented extreme drought and unpredictable rainfall. In Gambia, boreholes had worked in the past but risked maladaptation in newly water scarce areas. Dialogues with climate experts helped to assess the ongoing feasibility of boreholes in the context of increasingly erratic rainfall. Engagement by IFRC community volunteers, together with staff who brokered partnerships with new local actors, created authentic dialogue, trust-building and genuine information exchange. In some cases, this led to transformational community-level change in terms of adaptation, resilience and community ownership.

Previously, we would just collect information and move on. Here, the community was able to prioritize and identify what they felt would help them improve their situation. They felt honoured and respected, that their voices were truly heard... for example, in one district, they said it was a very good approach, because instead of bringing pre-planned projects, this approach allowed the community to co-design solutions. Participation was high and the community had real ownership in the process."

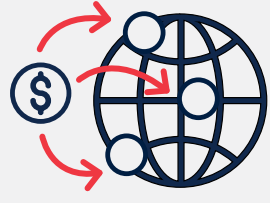
NIGERIAN RED CROSS



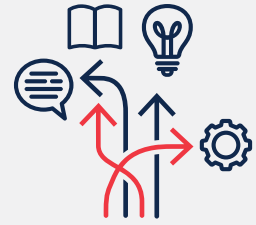
Illustration: Rebeka Ryvola de Kremer art, Venezuela workshop



LLA 1
Principle
Devolving decision-making to the lowest appropriate level



LLA 4
Principle
Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy



LLA 6
Principle
Flexible programming and learning



LLA 7
Principle
Ensuring transparency and accountability



The Red Cross team sensitizing the women of the Maradun community in Nigeria as they gather around for the Mother's Club meeting. The Mothers' Club (MC) is a holistic approach that promotes women's empowerment and resilience (and that of their households and communities). Credit: IFRC

4.4. Partnerships are critical for LLA in humanitarian contexts and for bridging cross-sectoral silos

Humanitarian actors traditionally engage closely with government stakeholders such as **disaster management or health authorities**. The process of integrating LLA and climate risks into humanitarian work has also **strengthened engagement with national ministries** such as agriculture, climate, environment and forestry, breaking silos and opening doors for joint climate action.

National-level collaboration was critical for facilitating local-level engagement. Government agencies were particularly interested in **community-level climate information**, participatory approaches and the potential for facilitating LLA action on the ground, supported by the National Societies. Strengthened capacities to address changing climate risks across the National Societies, upwards from community level, increased the visibility and credibility of the IFRC as a **strong humanitarian actor on climate issues**.

At national level this led to integrating humanitarian and community perspectives into climate forums, climate working groups and climate policy and planning processes that were previously inaccessible. Such access to influencing, financing and supporting delivery through new national partnerships is critical for devolved decision-making by communities.

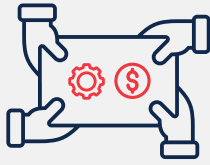
At community level new partnerships emerged thanks to the efforts of national and local actors. For example, in Malawi, communities engaged with local agricultural extension workers on drought-resistant agriculture; in Nigeria, local universities were involved in advising on rainfed agricultural options; and, in Nepal, environmental NGOs partnered on heat planning.

Although we already had a reputation as a reliable actor in various areas, the Climate Action Journey strengthened those relationships through a climate lens. It even led to invitations to meetings where no other non-governmental actors were included, positioning us as a key stakeholder in this field."

GEORGIA RED CROSS SOCIETY



Rebeka Ryyola / CartoonStock.com



LLA 8

Principle
Collaborative action and investment

Community action planning in Laikipia and Isiolo (Kenya), where the main hazard is drought, aggravated by development and tourism. Credit: KRCS/ICHA/PFR



KORBESA COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN			
	ACTIVITY	WHEN	RESPONSIBLE PERSON
1	dissemination of information on waterage	30 th of June 2017	Participant, chief and md.p
2	C.B.O - Control and management of utilization of waterage in waterless location	Immediately	Participant, chief
3	Registration of C.B.O as association	Immediately	Participant only
4	Capacity building for C.B.O	July/August 2017	md-p
5	charcoal business	at shift time	md-p

4.5. LLA finance needs to be **accessible, flexible, diverse and sustainable**

A critical factor in enabling LLA has been **donor flexibility**; in particular, with regards to **actions that are prioritized, designed and implemented by and for communities**. The CAJ process includes negotiating with each donor on the broad thematic areas they will support, while identifying ineligible areas in advance of community-level engagement – for example, a donor may broadly indicate support for activities in climate-resilient food and water systems, but not in climate-sensitive public health concerns.

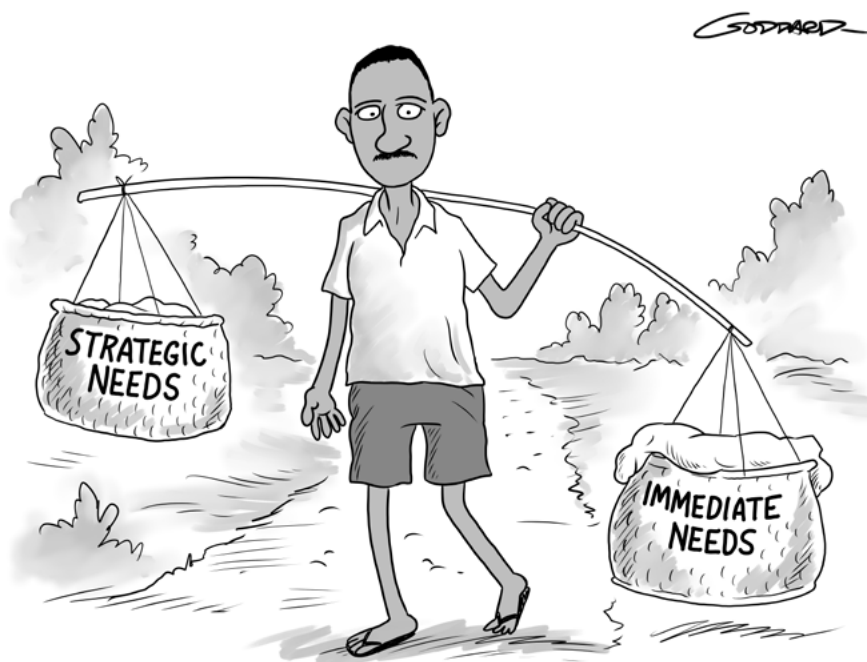
The community-level EVCAs have fully enabled communities to assess, discuss and prioritize their activities – with or without an adaptation focus. Dialogue with stakeholders has been open from the beginning, **seeking transparency** around some of the **parameters of funding** – for example, restricting maladaptive practices. Such open dialogue has also led to new partnerships (for example, across government) to identify multiple sources of funding (including non-climate-related) to support a broad range of community priorities.

The importance of **funding diversity** was another key lesson learned. When funding expires without warning, community trust is undermined. It became critical to identify alternative sources of funding to continue the work and honour the commitments made to local communities around LLA. This included the launch of a new multi-donor [IFRC Global Climate Resilience Platform: Pooled Fund](#) designed to provide fast and flexible funding to National Societies engaged LLA and community resilience efforts.

As part of its humanitarian 'reset', IFRC has [committed to a target of 75 per cent](#) of funding being channelled directly to local actors. Enabling local financial management and planning also means **investing in local organizational development** and structures; for example, around longer term project and financial management capabilities and systems. This helps to address barriers to local organizations' and communities' access to finance, such as by improving understanding of funding processes and donors' expectations.

One of the key aspects is to allow communities to manage things on their own, including funds and other resources, making the process truly locally led."

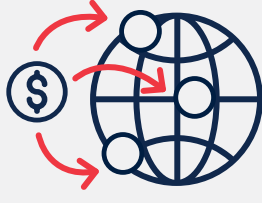
MALAWI RED CROSS SOCIETY



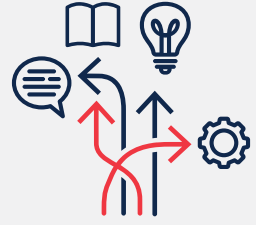
Clive Goddard / CartoonStock.com



LLA 3
Principle
Providing patient and predictable funding that can be accessed more easily



LLA 4
Principle
Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy



LLA 6
Principle
Flexible programming and learning



LLA 7
Principle
Ensuring transparency and accountability



Members of Chitsanzo group cash transfer, clearing some drainage for waterways. Credit: Malawi Red Cross Society

5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Rolling out LLA in a humanitarian network involves strengthening capacities; enhancing resilience; changing mindsets; shifting from short- to long-term programming; and furthering locally led decision-making, financial management and implementation. LLA is an empowering approach that highlights the importance of enabling structures, flexible and diverse finance as well as the scope to scale-up from local level. LLA is a relevant approach for humanitarian actors in humanitarian contexts as it can break down silos between development and humanitarian work, long- and short-term programming, and historical, current and future risk information by putting communities at the centre of all actions.

A new version of the CAJ and LLA approach of the IFRC network is under development. It will:

- **simplify tools and language** used around climate
- **strengthen community agency in assessments**
- **streamline** national processes while initiating community actions
- **adjust timelines** to enable trust and genuine community engagement
- **support local climate leadership** skills to enable and support increased responsibility
- **embed partnership-building and resource mobilization** as key institutional
- focus on strengthening **local capacities** for financial management.

The IFRC network is seeking to apply locally led approaches as a default. This includes investing more at local level with a 75 per cent target; shifting more decision-making to local level; and supporting community priorities across timespans to account for both current and future risks.

In policy and funding terms this means:

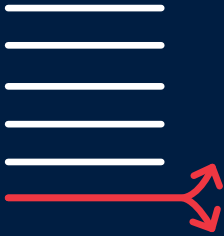
- investing more in local capabilities and institutional strengthening to enable LLA planning, implementation and financial management down to the most appropriate local level
- enabling flexible programming of adaptation finance, in line with community priorities and informed by community decision-making – not prescribed from the get-go
- moving away from rigid humanitarian/climate/development funding silos to diversify funding sources and ensure funds can be applied seamlessly across climate-related disaster preparedness and recovery efforts, while sustaining longer term adaptation programming
- integrating community perceptions, information, coping strategies and priorities in local to national planning and policy processes around climate and disaster management
- enabling flexibility in timelines for trust-building, prioritization and decision-making processes.

With the growing intensity of climate-related disasters around the world and communities increasingly affected by compounding and cascading crises, LLA provides a critical solution that can save lives and livelihoods by helping people cope with interconnected shocks and stressors.

*The locally led adaptation approach put people and communities at the centre of everything. It focused on understanding people and their knowledge, combining both scientific and Indigenous perspectives."*

BOX: EIGHT LLA PRINCIPLES

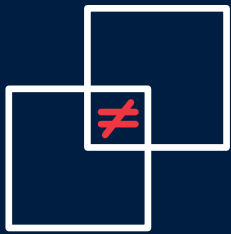
The principles for LLA were developed in 2019 and 2020 under the Global Commission on Adaptation, formally launched at the 2021 Climate Adaptation Summit.³



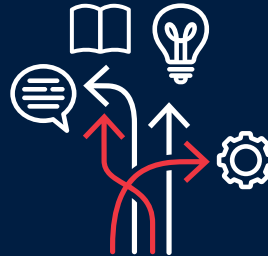
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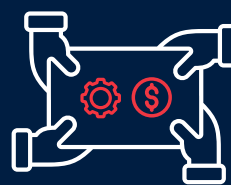
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Ensuring transparency and accountability



LLA 4
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Investing in local capabilities to leave an institutional legacy



LLA 8
Principle
Collaborative action and investment



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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