

Kenya, 2019. Victaline Lepore, a Red Cross volunteer, helps engage her community in preventing diseases. Kenya is one of the hotspots for emerging infectious diseases. But if diseases are detected and reported early, this can significantly prevent outbreaks from occurring. This can only be done with and through communities.

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# **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

**Conclusion and  
recommendations**



*Mozambique, 2019. Cyclone Idai and the following floods created the worst humanitarian crisis in Mozambique's recent history. John Lucas, 23, worked alongside Emergency Response Unit delegates to set up tents and prepare the Cholera Treatment Centre site.*

# WE CAN DO THIS

**What do we do about climate change?** It is beyond urgent for countries, particularly the largest emitters, to make the transformational changes to their energy, agricultural and transport sectors (among others) needed to stop temperatures rising ever upward at such an unsustainable rate. Rather than a light at the end of the tunnel, disaster-related indicators show we are headed for a brick wall.

The frequency and intensity of climatological events are increasing substantially, with more category 4 and 5 storms, more heatwaves breaking temperature records and more heavy rains, among many other extremes. Food insecurity, direct and indirect health impacts, and displacement are likewise on the rise. The humanitarian impacts are already evident today, and the IFRC estimates that the caseload of people needing humanitarian assistance following such events could nearly double to 200 million a year by 2050 unless action is taken ([IFRC, 2019](#)).

The global response to COVID-19, while still very far from a general success at the time of writing, has shown that nations around the world can mobilize, take unprecedented steps affecting their entire economies, and find the necessary resources to robustly face a major global threat. We can (and must) mobilize at least the same level of energy and boldness to reduce the calamitous path of global carbon emissions and mitigate global temperature rise. The recent experience of the pandemic has also created a window of opportunity to take step changes in preparedness for future events. A global catastrophe of the magnitude of COVID-19 could finally open this window wide enough for us to look directly into the face of the climate crisis.

What we will see through this window is that the resources we need to effectively adapt to current and imminent climate-driven disaster risks are absolutely within our reach. Yes, more money must be spent. But the relative gaps that need to be filled are almost trivial in the perspective of the COVID-19 economic bailouts that were underway at the time of writing. By way of example, Chapter 6 noted an annual shortfall of 50 billion Swiss francs between identified annual adaptation needs of 50 developing countries and the funding provided. This would be the equivalent of just 6% of the 750 billion Euro (802 billion Swiss franc) COVID-19 economic bailout scheme agreed by EU leaders in July 2020 ([BBC, 2020](#)) or 2% of the 2.2 trillion US dollar (2.1 trillion Swiss franc) COVID-19 stimulus bill adopted by the USA in March ([Cochrane and Stolberg, 2020](#)). Shaping these very investments toward a green and adaptation-focused recovery would be an excellent way to start. Moreover, upfront investment in risk reduction, early warning and early action will reduce response and recovery costs by factors ranging from 2:1 to 10:1 ([Global Commission on Adaptation, 2019](#)).

We also need some innovations and new ways of thinking, particularly in making more practical use of scientific information, matching up early warning with swifter anticipatory action on the ground and breaking out of our self-imposed conceptual, regulatory and institutional silos. Yet we already have most of the tools and knowledge we need to succeed, thanks in significant part to the unglamorous work of the global disaster risk reduction (DRR) community in recent decades.

In many ways, the global COVID-19 pandemic has provided a taste of the devastating series of new disaster risks that are unfolding around the world due to the warming climate. Global successes and failures of national control measures can, with important caveats, be read daily in COVID-19 testing data. As the examples discussed in this report make clear, if we were able to speed up the script on climate disasters, the advantages of early action and the costs of inaction would flash just as dramatically in front of our eyes. Our choices now will have a similarly decisive impact.

We need to shake off business as usual and instead back up words with action. This means implementing existing commitments on resilience (and integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk management (DRM) in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Paris Agreement on climate change, doing a much better job of ensuring that we prioritize support for the people most at risk and insisting on tangible results at community level.

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# HERE'S HOW

## By becoming climate smart

It is time to become climate smart in our development choices and our approach to DRM. For both, the key is to ensure that we are taking full account of and acting on what scientific models tell us about upcoming risks, which may be very different from those of even the most recent past.

In a world already replete with people highly exposed to natural hazards, we must, at the least, ensure the resilience of our critical infrastructure against reasonably predictable weather extremes and rising sea levels. In light of these growing risks, we need also to develop a much more thorough and nuanced understanding of existing vulnerabilities and capacities – and not just in a national aggregate, but at community level.

For DRM programming, both long-term and medium/seasonal forecasts can be critical for planning and investment, and even short-term forecasts can be used to trigger rapid anticipatory action. We must ensure that our early warning systems reach and can be understood and used by the people they are meant to protect. We must also make sure that our investments in warning are matched by investments in early action or these warnings will not save lives. Helpful commitments along these lines are included in the objectives of the Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership ([REAP](#)) launched at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019. Over 30 states and agencies have signed up to REAP's commitments, with more invited to do so. While nothing new, continuously improving our capacity and readiness for rapid response to disasters after they strike must also be part of our plan.

One critical innovation that has proved its worth at pilot level (including by some National Societies) is anticipatory approaches. These aim to reduce human suffering, losses and damage by assisting the most vulnerable populations ahead of an imminent disaster. They link predictions that a hazard might turn into a disaster to measures to prevent or at least reduce the forecasted impact. Actions include providing cash, sanitation and hygiene kits and shelter toolkits as well as safeguarding livelihood measures such as evacuating livestock. They are carried out when the forecast reaches a pre-determined threshold and are typically backed-up by a pre-arranged financing agreement. It is time to take this approach to scale by incorporating it in national DRM laws, policies and plans, and in the procedures and practices of humanitarian donors and organizations.

## By getting our priorities right

Our collective goal is to keep everyone as safe from disasters as possible, and our top priority and focus should be the people most vulnerable and most exposed to risk. This may seem obvious, but we are not consistently acting this way.

As already noted, international climate (and DRR) finance is not keeping pace with adaptation needs in low income countries. Moreover, allocations of funding are not prioritizing the countries with the very highest risk and lowest capacity, particularly when funding is assessed on a per person basis.

This is partly explained by donor concerns about aid effectiveness, transaction costs and the challenge of building resilience in complex settings, especially situations of armed conflict. But it is not the way to save lives.

This is not only an issue for donors. A number of states have adopted legal and policy frameworks for climate change adaptation and DRR that greatly over-promise governmental activities in light of the capacity they have been willing to finance from their own resources. A clear mandate to focus on the most vulnerable people – and to ensure these people participate in decision-making – is also missing from many DRM laws, national adaptation plans and DRR strategies.

While the most vulnerable groups vary widely from place to place, slum dwellers, indigenous communities, persons in remote locations, older people, persons with disabilities and persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics are among those most frequently left behind.

For humanitarian organizations, another priority must be doing no harm – this means taking a much more serious approach across the sector to greening our own activities and operations, in particular our carbon footprint and impact on the environment. We cannot offer much of a solution if we are part of the problem.

## By integrating and localizing our approach

Integration may not sound like a particularly revolutionary approach to the global climate crisis, but it is indispensable. While not quite managing to come fully together themselves, the main global regulatory frameworks (the SDGs, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement) call – to varying degrees – for integrated and coherent approaches to climate change adaptation, DRR and development. However, few national DRM laws and policies fully integrate climate change adaptation and some states employ parallel and separate institutional mechanisms and planning processes. Silos also plague international finance sources, with climate (and other environmental), development and humanitarian funding streams often operating in uncoordinated ways, leaving gaps in coverage.

Among these gaps is support for local responders and community-level action. Multilateral climate finance sources in particular are notoriously difficult for civil society to access. A particular collective blind spot is support for the long-term institutional capacity of local disaster responders, which falls through the cracks. Humanitarian, development and climate financing decision-makers each think that one of the others should handle this issue. Meanwhile, at domestic level, resources for community-level implementation of national disaster plans and policies are often lacking.

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## And the timing couldn't be better

As this report was being finalized, hundreds of thousands of new cases of COVID-19 were still being reported every day, affecting countries all over the world. Global economic growth was projected to contract by nearly 5%, the number of acutely food insecure people was projected to rise to 121 million, and over a 100 million children were at risk of missing measles vaccines, among other catastrophic indirect effects ([Omtzigt and Pople, 2020](#)). Both the IFRC and the UN had issued their largest ever humanitarian appeals to address the crisis, while DRM officials, humanitarian organizations and donors alike were finding their ability to function severely hampered by lockdown and control measures, with no definite end in sight.

Yet this is the right time to face up to climate disasters. Why? First, because we must. Despite a short-term decrease in climate emissions during lockdown, CO<sub>2</sub> levels continue to top previous records ([UN News, 2020](#)). The impacts of past global warming are still being felt in hurricanes, heatwaves and many other extreme events around the world. They won't wait until we are less financially burdened, and have finished responding to COVID-19.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the massive stimulus packages that are being developed around the world are an opportunity to build back better, not only with a **green** recovery but a **resilient and inclusive** one – using relevant funds to invest in making communities safer and more resilient to future disasters ([Hepburn et al, 2020](#); [IMF, 2020](#)).

Third, youth around the world have begun to organize around climate change like never before and this is an important opportunity. Their energy and innovation have already achieved “things that many of us who have been working on it for 20-odd years have failed to achieve” ([Bradley, 2019](#)) and can do even more if agencies and experts work harder to support their leadership.

Finally, as already mentioned, we now know that we have the capacity to step up when fully attuned to a global crisis, finding resources where none seemed available and taking unprecedented and rapid steps at containment. Climate change is every bit as threatening to our long-term survival and well-being as COVID-19. We have the time to react effectively before it's too late. Let's not miss our chance.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## **For governments**

- Design investments, including COVID-19 financial stimulus packages, to promote a green, resilient and inclusive society, investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Ensure that major infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, child and senior care facilities, seawalls, power plants and water and sanitation facilities, is designed (and where possible retrofitted) to withstand projected climate and weather extremes and rising sea levels, making use of environmental impact assessments as a regulatory tool.
- Review DRM laws, policies and plans to ensure they are climate smart. understood and implemented. They should consider key innovations such as forecast-based action and financing, linked to shock-resistant social protection systems.
- Invest and design integrated and people-centred early warning and early action systems that assure timely delivery of actionable warnings at community level, as well as an adequate protective response.
- Ensure decentralized access to funding for adaptation and DRM activities, particularly at the municipal level.

## **For humanitarian (and other relevant civil society) organizations**

- Embrace and strengthen climate adaptation, in particular in urban settings, and in contexts where development practitioners are less present, such as complex crises.
- Scale up the use of forecast information in planning and learn from successes in forecast-based triggers for early action.
- Continue to strengthen rapid response and scale up capacity for disasters that cannot be avoided.
- Take responsibility to transparently report and improve on global and local climate and environmental footprints, strengthen the environmental sustainability of humanitarian activities and impact, and make stronger links to the environment throughout humanitarian work.

### **For multilateral and bilateral donors**

- Design COVID-19 support packages that enable a green, resilient and inclusive recovery investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Increase ambitions to match the adaptation needs of the most vulnerable developing countries.
- Ensure allocations of climate and DRR finance cover countries that are at the very highest risk and lowest capacity.
- Change procedures so that multilateral climate finance can be accessed at local level for community-led resilience building as well as for strengthening long-term institutional and response capacities.
- Scale up support for anticipatory approaches so that many more people can receive assistance ahead of predictable shocks.
- Support humanitarian organizations to achieve a greener approach (which should include adequate budgeting for strengthening systems and allow for sustainable procurement) and coordinate among themselves to avoid contradictions in their demands on funding recipients.

### **For climate change institutions and experts**

- Embrace and promote adaptation to disaster risk caused by climate change as a critical goal of global and domestic climate action, alongside mitigation.
- Connect analytical tools (as well as policy and financing instruments) for long-term adaptation with short-term forecast-based action, and post-disaster response.
- Redouble efforts, in cooperation with humanitarian and development partners, to ensure that communities receive timely and understandable scientific information about climate-driven risks.
- Build on the experience of the humanitarian and DRR communities in managing shocks, which includes the need for multi-stakeholder approaches, and a strong focus on implementation at the local level.

### **For everyone**

- Ensure that the most vulnerable people are addressed as a matter of priority in climate change adaptation and DRM.
- Listen better to the voice of communities, to understand local knowledge, coping mechanisms, practices and needs related to climate risk, and to design culturally appropriate programmes.
- Support and empower the leadership of local civil society and communities in climate change adaptation and DRM efforts.
- Work together across silos to address climate-driven disaster risks.



*Lebanon, 2016. Syrian refugee children at an informal temporary settlement. Vulnerable groups vary widely from place to place and our role as humanitarians must be to focus on the most vulnerable, wherever they are.*

# COMMITMENT OF THE IFRC

In December 2019, the IFRC network adopted a new ten-year strategy (Strategy 2030) identifying climate change as the top global challenge we will seek to address. We committed, among other things, to:

- **integrate** climate risk management – including adaptation and mitigation – across all of our programmes, operations and advocacy and adopt better environmental management in our approaches to addressing exposure and vulnerability
- **focus** on the causes of vulnerability in livelihoods, food shortages, health and climate-related displacement, and in urban environments
- **embrace** the early action models, scientific forecasts, innovation and financing that can improve our response
- **raise** our collective voice to encourage the right level of ambition on both adaptation and mitigation and to ensure people in vulnerable situations are not left behind
- **strengthen** the Red Cross and Red Crescent Green Response Framework and strive to reduce our own climate and environmental footprint.

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