**Afghan Red Crescent Society**

**Yemen Red Crescent Society**

**Honduran Red Cross Society**

**Ukrainian Red Cross Society**

**Mali Red Cross Society**

**Somali Red Crescent Society**

Proximity

Integrity

Visibility

A strong National Society prepared for and responding to conflict

Reputation

Legacy

# A Call For Change

## A study of National Society Development in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

American Red Cross

Australian Red Cross

BritishRedCross

Canadian Red Cross / Croix-Rouge Canadienne

DANISH RED CROSS

Deutsches Rotes Kreuz

IFRC

ICRC

# Acknowledgements

This study owes a deep debt of gratitude to the leadership and staff of the six National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies of Afghanistan, Honduras, Mali, Somalia, Ukraine and Yemen. The core of this study is their inspiring and passionate stories, their experiences of principled locally-led humanitarian action and the recommendations of their leadership, staff, volunteers, and youth and community members.

The study would not have been possible without the strategic guidance, support and contributions of a task force convened and led by the 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).

These voices, corroborated by stories of impact and challenge, contribute to the study's ability to propose practical, evidence-based solutions and a 'Call for Change'. Its aim is to strengthen Movement-wide support to National Society Development, in an expanding number of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments across the world. It is hoped that the Call for Change will assist an increasing number of National Societies working in such contexts. This study aims to provide them with appropriate learning to strengthen their own organisational transformations and their ability to provide principled humanitarian assistance. As a result, they will be able to better serve and empower the most vulnerable and isolated people and communities that often no other humanitarian organisations can reach.

# Acronyms

BOCA    Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment
CBF     Capacity Building Fund
CBHFA   Community Based Health and First Aid
COD     Council of Delegates
DAG     Donor Advisory Group
DRCE    Disaster Response Capacity Evaluation
FDRS    Federation Databank and Reporting System
GA      General Assembly
IC      International Conference
ICRC    International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC    International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent Societies
NSDiE   National Society Development in Emergencies
NSIA    National Society Investment Alliance
OCAC    Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification
PER     Preparedness for Emergency Response
PNS     Partner National Society
RCRC    Red Cross Red Crescent
SAF     Safer Access Framework
SC      Steering Committee
SMCC    Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation
TOR     Terms of Reference
VCA     Vulnerability Capacity Assessment
WHS     World Humanitarian Summit
YABC    Youth as Agents of Behavioural change

# Contents

# Overview of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

## The RCRC Movement: Composition

**IFRC**

**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

**National Societies**

**The International Committee of the Red Cross**

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are separate bodies, but collectively form the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement as its components. Each component has its own individual status and role under the statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with collective mechanisms for ensuring their actions are well coordinated, and fit a common policy framework where appropriate.

**National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** exist in 191 countries, protected by a national Red Cross or Red Crescent Law that recognises them as voluntary aid societies, 'auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field', and respects their adherence to the Movement's seven Fundamental Principles, namely Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. Governed by their independent statutes, they act as auxiliaries, providing public humanitarian services that supplement or substitute for those offered by public authorities. National Societies are composed of members, volunteers, youth, staff and elected governance. They rely heavily on volunteers, particularly at community level, to perform humanitarian services and development work, often in the fields of health promotion, disease prevention, preparedness for emergency response, and response to crises and conflict.

**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is an international humanitarian organisation comprised of 191 National Societies. It  is a corporate body with recognised international legal personality served by an international secretariat based in Geneva, Switzerland. The secretariat and its regional and country offices serve its members through coordination, facilitating cooperation, peer support and knowledge sharing, capacity building, international representation, and where requested managing its own humanitarian assistance operations. As well as its disaster response activities, the Federation also conducts extensive development work, including supporting National Societies to strengthen disaster preparedness programmes, health and social care activities, and the promotion of humanitarian values, social cohesion and peace.

**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** has a particular mandate under international humanitarian law (IHL) to protect and support victims of armed conflict, organise relief operations, and reunite families separated during conflict. It promotes dissemination of, and compliance by all parties to conflicts with IHL, supports its development, and draws attention of local, national and international communities and institutions to universal humanitarian principles. The ICRC also works to meet the needs of internally displaced people, visits prisons, raises public awareness of the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war, traces people who have gone missing during conflicts, and helps strengthen National Society staff and volunteers' capacities to maintain humanitarian access and remain safe in volatile and insecure contexts.

**The International Conference** is the Movement's supreme deliberative body where representatives of the Movement components meet with representatives of states parties to the Geneva Conventions, the latter in exercise of their responsibilities under those Conventions and in support of the overall work of the Movement. Together, they examine and decide upon humanitarian matters, and any other related matter, of common interest.

# Definition of Terms

**The following terminologies are used throughout all Parts of this study.** They are further described in a range of key reference documents accessible through the links provided:

**Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA):** IFRC's BOCA is a self-assessment tool developed for NS branches to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organizational capacities. It is used as a first step in a branch development process. *https://branches.ifrc. org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-05/a-practical-guide-en.pdf*

**Capacity Building Fund (CBF):** IFRC's CBF supports National Societies (NS) in their work to strengthen Integrity, Transparency, Accountability, and Risk Management; Financial Sustainability; Youth and Volunteering Development; and Systems Development and Digital Transformation. *https://www.ifrc.org/ our-work/national-society-development/funds-national-society-development/capacity-building-fund*

**Disaster Response Capacity Enhancement (DRCE):** The Canadian Red Cross's Disaster Response Capacity Enhancement (DRCE) exercises help to evaluate a NS's preparedness and response capacity. They (1) test its preparedness and response mechanism and support systems (SOPs, systems, etc.); (2) contribute findings to the baseline of its current preparedness and response capacity, enabling them to prioritise and plan actions for improvement. The DRCE was a precursor to the Preparedness for Emergency Response process (see below).

**Grand Bargain:** In 2016 the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) saw the launch of the Grand Bargain, a set of ten top-level commitments signed by major donors and humanitarian organisations to reduce the cost of humanitarian aid, make it more effective, and commit to 'invest in the capacity of local and national responders'. Grand Bargain signatories committed to 'making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary', in particular in situations of armed conflict, but also in strengthening the "nexus" between humanitarian, development and peace building work. 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.

**National Society Development (NSD) Policy (2022):** The IFRC's National Society Development Policy defines 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 recognizes 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 as well as strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools." (IFRC NSD Policy, 2022). https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/202201003_IFRC-NSD-Policy-EN.pdf*

**National Society Development Framework (NSDF) (2013):** The IFRC's NSD Framework states that all NSD work should impact on the "relevance, quality, reach and sustainability of NS services." *https://www.ifrc.org/document/national-society-development-framework*

**NSD Compact (2019):** The NSD Compact is a policy document which aims to ensure that support to NSD is aligned with the priorities defined by each National Society, without duplication or gaps. It defines NSD support and how it can be effective, as well as the main roles and responsibilities for IFRC members and non-Movement actors when working together on NSD. *https://www.ifrc.org/document/national-society-development-compact*

**National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA):** The NSIA is jointly managed by IFRC and ICRC provides tailored investment to develop the capacity of National Societies to provide sustainable humanitarian services through two types of funding: 1) accelerator funding, up to a maximum of 1 million CHF for three to five years, and 2) bridge funding of up to 50,000 CHF over one year. *https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/national-society-development/funds-national-society-development/national-society-investment-alliance*

**Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC):** IFRC's OCAC is an assessment process that supports NS to review all the elements that make up a strong organisation by looking at their capacity and performance indicators, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and providing focus in their efforts to become strong and sustainable service providers. *https://www.ifrc.org/document/guidance-national-society-assessment-and-development-processes*

**Preparedness for Effective Response (PER):** IFRC's PER is a self-assessment tool that enables NS to systematically measure, analyse, prioritise and plan preparedness for response actions to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance in line with the NS auxiliary role and mandate. It considers all hazards (natural, biological, technological, among others) and is flexible enough to be used in different contexts. Although the PER is considered a thematic assessment, it is a well-developed methodology, linked to OCAC and SAF components and indicators, and globally implemented with more than 90 NSs. It provides a comprehensive picture of internal NS capacity to support emergency response as part of the national DM system. PER assessment is done at the national level but focuses on how the NS functions with its branch network. *https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/PER-Summary-1.pdf*

**Safer Access Framework (SAF):** ICRC's SAF enables NS to further their understanding of what it takes to increase and or maintain their acceptance, security and access to people in need by understanding their operational context, taking stock of the lessons the NS learned and assessing their strengths and challenges in relation to the application of the SAF elements and the Fundamental Principles. It aims to help NS increase their capacities and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal tensions. The SAF contributes to NSD by drawing attention to context- specific organisational weaknesses, through the lens of acceptance, security and access. Safer Access: A Guide for All National Societies. Geneva. *https://saferaccess.icrc.org/overview*

**Seville 2.0:** The Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville Agreement 2.0) adopted at the Council of Delegates in 2022, is the latest attempt to agree interoperability between all Movement components, including strengthening humanitarian services and impact in violence and conflict-affected environments. *https://www.ifrc.org/document/seville-agreement-2*

**Strengthening Movement Cooperation and Coordination (SMCC):** In 2015, the Council of Delegates adopted the Strengthening of Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) resolution to improve coordination and cooperation between Movement components and better capitalise on their complementary strengths. *https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2022/05/21_CoD22-SMCC-Progress-Report-FINAL-EN.pdf*

**Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC):** IFRC's Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) programme helps youth around the world promote a culture of non-violence and peace in their communities. The project teaches both young people and adults how to harness their own power, take on ethical leadership roles and inspire positive transformations in mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. *https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/inclusion-protection-and-engagement/education/youth-agents-behavioural-change*

# Executive summary

This study documents the inspiring organisational transformations of six National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies: Afghanistan, Honduras, Mali, Somalia, Ukraine and Yemen. Located in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts, each National Society made National Society Development (NSD)[1] investments to strengthen their neutral, impartial and independent services, locally-led principled humanitarian action, and organisational structures. In doing so, they became better able to reach communities that often no other organisations could reach.

The study was commissioned by a global task force to better document good practice and the challenges surrounding NSD investments in difficult contexts. The task force, convened and led by the British Red Cross, is comprised 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). The overall premise of the study was to better understand:

> ✓ which Movement-wide NSD investments and strategies have yielded the highest returns in building organisational characteristics that deliver principled assistance and increase wellbeing in targeted communities
> ✓ how sustainable capacities were strengthened to promote neutral, impartial and independent locally-led humanitarian action
> ✓ how weaknesses in Movement NSD practices in fragile, complex, conflict and violence-affected environments were addressed, and how strengths were leveraged to overcome them.

Starting with the accepted definition of NSD, **Part 1** of this study summarises the tools and Movement-wide initiatives that aim to strengthen relevant and principled organisational characteristics, locally-led humanitarian action, acceptance and access, and impact. It reconfirms the important connection between NSD investments and strengthening the ability of a National Society to deliver its 'auxiliary role' in relation to the public authorities.

Finally, it summarises the key lines of enquiry that were used to test a number of assumptions. These included whether existing NSD approaches and tools to support the delivery of principled services, volunteer and staff security, and Movement coordination are sufficient and relevant enough to help National Societies adapt to and operate successfully within, fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

**Part 2** documents the empirical evidence from the successful transformations of the six National Societies of Afghanistan, Honduras, Mali, Somalia, Ukraine and Yemen over a period of 10-15 years. The stories describe the range of strategic focused NSD investments made both by each National Society itself, as well as with the support of selected partners. They contain examples of the use of Movement tools, highlighting the perceived inadequacy of some, and the customisation of others.

Each National Society's transformational journey enabled it to reach significantly larger numbers of vulnerable people with relevant and customised services, but not without challenges. Several deficiencies were noted, both in Movement tools, as well as in support processes and modalities. In addition, some increases in the capabilities of National Societies were the result of past NSD investments and tools no longer available or used in the Movement.

**Part 3** consolidates the transversal findings from Part 2's case studies. It presents them as a *Call for Change* to better support National Societies in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts with more effective and relevant NSD investments. It collates them under the four commitments of IFRC's NSD Compact (2019)[2], namely:

> → *better identification of National Society (NS) priorities in NSD (and the roles played by internal NS and external stakeholders)*

---

1   In the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, National Society Development is defined 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".* National Society Development Policy IFRC June 2022. *https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/202201003_IFRC-NSD-Policy-EN.pdf*
2   *https://www.ifrc.org/document/national-society-development-compact*

> → *competences that match needs in each context, the role of Movement partners in providing specific technical competencies to support NS, including how the quality assurance and coordination role was played by IFRC*
> → *aligned effective support (and the modalities through which it is delivered)*
> → *learning and quality assurance (and how this is shared, or can in future be shared, with Movement-wide stakeholders and external donors).*

The findings are presented as:

> → **Successful practices** – that have led to enhanced Movement synergy and collective humanitarian impact, and which should be scaled up immediately in the form of enhanced NSD and cooperation and coordination practices across the Movement
> → **Hindering factors** – that have militated against successful organisational transformations and sustainability in fragile, complex violence and conflict-affected contexts, and which should be eliminated.

A list of 200 consolidated successful practices and hindering factors were identified from the case studies. In order to identify the most important practices to address in the immediate future, representatives from the National Societies and task force then prioritised these 200 practices into a shortlist of 50 (presented in Annex 3). The leadership from the six National Societies then carried out a second prioritization exercise in order to reduce the list of enabling and hindering practices down to 29, deemed to need the most urgent support and attention.

At a 'learning event' in London in May 2024, both the senior leadership of the six National Societies and senior representatives from each of the task force member institutions then collectively analysed the 'key issues and root causes' and proposed actions that would bring about immediate improvements to NSD practices in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

To frame the overall learning of the study, a set of 14 key messages on strengthening NSD practices and improving the quality and relevance of NSD support were agreed for dissemination across the Movement, and to support advocacy with donors. The key messages below, together with the actions proposed at the learning event against the 29 practices which had been prioritised as most urgent to address, comprise the 'Call for change'.

> **Key messages**
>
> NSD investments in specifically fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence- affected contexts must prioritise:
>
> · **Strengthening NS leadership,** through NSD investments in leadership and governance skills, sharing best practice and peer support, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
>
> · **National Society Development that is led by the National Societies (NS) themselves** and based on NSD plans and priorities. Partners should support their long-term investment in institutional development, providing reviewed and harmonised tools, personnel with experience and competencies jointly selected by NS themselves, and avoiding parallel structures.
>
> · **the need for long-term transformational support,** with investment ideally before any emergency/conflict, but at very least allowing for simultaneous longer-term support continuing during and after the emergency. IFRC's National Society Development in Emergencies guidelines should reflect the challenges of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.
>
> · **Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) support,** particularly to address the challenge of working with state and non-state actors, but also to negotiate access, building trust and acceptance with all parties and local stakeholders.
>
> · **the importance of enabling NS to build their own resources** for impartial independent humanitarian response to sustain activities beyond the emergency period.

- **the need for support in resource mobilisation** with partners facilitating direct access to donors, exploring more private sector sources, and promoting one method of calculating and supporting core costs across the Movement, and commitment from partners to abide by them.

- **the need to move from projects to supporting flagship services and programmes** linked to the NS's auxiliary, through infrastructure, skill enhancement and peer technical support in relevant areas such as emergency health, pre-hospital care, first responder, and ambulance services.

- **the need for increased support for branch and sub-branch development** including infrastructure support, as this is critical for negotiating local access and acceptance.

- **the need for greater support for the role of youth in promoting social cohesion and peace building** (e.g. Exploring humanitarian Law (EHL), Youth as agents of Behavioural Change (YABC).

- **the need for rolling out global minimum standards in supporting and protecting volunteers.**

- **the need for scaling up peer support and knowledge management systems** to share effective practices.

- **addressing donor disinterest: strengthening donors' understanding of the need for flexible** support to the longer-term organisational development processes of NS and how this enables acceptance and access.

- **the need for strengthening NSD investments in gender, diversity, inclusion and community engagement and accountability** approaches, that lay the foundations for gender and diversity-sensitive community participation and services that strengthen acceptance and access.

- **the need to invest on better understanding of Seville 2.0 across the Movement** to ensure that the provisions of the agreement are consistently implemented and or observed by partners. The implementation of Seville 2.0 should promote coordinated support based on the centrality of the NS strategy, priorities and plans, and alignment to the wider IFRC "Unified Plan", and Strengthening Movement Coordination and Coordination (SMCC) instruments.

# Part 1

## Study background, context and aims

This section details how the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) and its 191 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continue to strengthen their unique positioning and impact in the areas of localisation and locally-led humanitarian action, preparedness for response, and humanitarian effectiveness in protracted crises, complex emergencies and fragile contexts.

It defines National Society Development (NSD); sets out the study's purpose, methodologies and key lines of enquiry; and references findings from other studies. It describes NSD approaches and support mechanisms that aim to strengthen National Societies' positioning in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments. It also outlines existing tools to strengthen principled, neutral, impartial, and independent preparedness, response and recovery capacities, which in turn increase community resilience

Finally, it references key approaches to NSD and Movement coordination and cooperation. It summarises a variety of initial perceived achievements, as well as challenges, concerning harmonised and synergetic NSD investments by National Societies and those who support them.

# 1. Purpose of the study

In the absence of substantial global research and literature on successful approaches to capacity strengthening, organisational transformation and development in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence--affected contexts, the Movement has conducted multiple research initiatives of its own. Much of this research, however, focuses more broadly on the role of National Societies in disaster-affected contexts. Little specific focus has been given to the contextualised challenges they face in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments. There is even less research into the organisational adaptations and transformations supported by strategic NSD investments to strengthen National Societies' relevant, principled and well-positioned characteristics as local humanitarian actors in these highly challenging contexts.

Acknowledging that the evolution of National Societies is highly-contextualised this study set out to better document and learn from the differing strategic mix of internal and external drivers for change that led to successful NSD investments by:

- examining the transformational journeys of six NS in a range of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments, one from each region of the world,[3] drawing on their own perspectives, and taking a long-term view of their impact over at least 10 years.
- providing a better understanding of the transversal factors that helped and hindered the NS's organisational re-positioning, resilience, and humanitarian impact.
- documenting the learning and validating this at a British Red Cross-hosted learning event in May 2024, at which the six NS, together with the leadership of the task force members involved in the study, discussed and agreed a *Call for Change*: a set of proposed actions to strengthen NSD strategies for supporting relevant organisational transformations in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

# 2. National Society Development

## (i) Definition

NSD refers both to National Societies' work to develop themselves, and to external partners' support for their transformational processes. In 2013, IFRC's National Society Development Framework was approved, and defined the basic approach to NSD in the Movement. In 2019, IFRC's NSD Compact and its four "Commitments" were approved to guide the Movement in all areas related to NSD Support. In 2022, IFRC's new NSD Policy was approved, refreshing the major guidelines for all NSD work. These documents provide the framework for all organisational development and capacity strengthening work across the Movement.

The documents affirmed that NSD comprises two elements:

> ***Organisational Development:*** *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 organisation and its environment, including its 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*** *as the part of NSD work that focuses on improving existing services and capacities by making them more 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, as well as strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools.*
>
> IFRC National Society Development Policy, 2022

---

*Cash transfer and survey program at Balkh province in northern Afghanistan. The program is for IDPs who have been drastically affected by multiple shocks such as drought, conflicts, Covid-19 and poverty. Both survey and distribution process led by a joint team from ARCS staff and volunteers. The total number of the beneficiaries were 1350 households. Each family received 10500 Afghanis or 130 USD which took place in the month of June 2021.*

In its role as the umbrella organisation and network of 191 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC retains the Movement mandate to support a common, harmonised approach to NSD. One of the IFRC's key guiding documents on NSD includes an acknowledgement that conflict-sensitive settings require enhanced approaches to NSD:

> → *"Each National Society develops within a unique external environment, with specific constraints and opportunities"*
>
> → *"Each National Society evolves over time and may be required to change drastically at short notice, for instance, in response to disaster or conflict"*
>
> → *"Humanitarian crisis requires significant National Society scale-up: A large crisis that attracts global attention places significant strain on a National Society that has to manage both the short-term influx of temporary resources and the long-term implications for the National Society once the resources are spent and global interest has moved on. In particular, there is a need for any National Society involved in a large-scale response to manage the process of scaling up and scaling down so that it does not compromise its long-term development."*

IFRC NSD Framework, 2013

NSD is often seen as the core of the IFRC and Movement's contribution to localisation. IFRC's 2022 Position Paper on Localisation defines localisation as:

> *"A way of re-conceiving of the humanitarian sector from the bottom up; recognising that the overwhelming majority of humanitarian assistance is already provided by local actors. They are often the first to respond to crises, remaining in the communities they serve before, after and during emergencies, giving them practical knowledge and first-hand experience of what principled and effective humanitarian response should be.*
>
> *"Localisation is not new to the IFRC; it is fundamentally how we work. At the heart of our action are the National Societies (NSs) – local, volunteer-driven actors with trusted community access, supported by an IFRC that they collectively own and govern, from the bottom up. IFRC's mission is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all humanitarian activities by National Societies as guided by our Fundamental Principles. Within our network, there is a strong will not only to increase support for National Societies as key humanitarian actors in their own countries, but also to strengthen the capacity and authority of their community-level branches to take decisions and act swiftly in the face of crisis."*

Seen from a 'localisation of humanitarian action'[4] perspective, National Societies are the primary permanent 'local actor' of the Movement in every country context.

---

4    Grand Bargain: In 2016 the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) saw the launch of the Grand Bargain, a set of ten top-level commitments signed by major donors and humanitarian organisations to reduce the cost of humanitarian aid, make it more effective, and commit to "invest in the capacity of local and national responders". 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.

> *"The IFRC network is made up of community-based, trusted local organisations – the National Societies – who work as a network, deliver locally and influence globally. Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers across 165,000 local branches and units act as agents of change at the community level, providing support to and enhancing resilience of people in situations of vulnerability and enabling opportunities for people to voice their needs. This unparalleled presence and our investment in local action makes the IFRC a unique global network of strong local action, contributing to community resilience and empowerment, social cohesion and the promotion and maintenance of peace.*
>
> *Locally-led solutions are more likely to anticipate and respond to the emerging and fast-changing local and global needs. The scale, quality and effectiveness of our local action is, however, dependent on the ability of National Societies and their branch networks to be fit for purpose, develop their capacities and adapt to the changing environment. This continuous development and transformation is the essence of our National Society Development (NSD) work."*
>
> IFRC National Society Development Policy, 2022

NSD investments are therefore at the heart of the Movement's localisation strategy. Over time, successful NSD investments build sustained locally-led principled humanitarian action in communities that other institutions often cannot reach. However, to achieve such positioning, National Societies, with the support of partners, need to invest in short-, medium- and long-term transformational strategies that create trust, acceptance and access with all stakeholders.

A draft Resolution to be presented to the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent[5] in October 2024, focuses a localisation vision on "Empowering local leadership, capacity and delivery in principled humanitarian action and strengthening resilience". A variety of planned side meetings to be held at the International Conference on related topics will provide an opportunity for some early dissemination of the study and its key messages. Any promising opportunities for mainstreaming its 'proposed actions' within other initiatives identified during these dissemination sessions will be follow up after the International Conference.

In keeping with the spirit of the above mentioned  Resolution, this study defines 'localisation' as the strengthening and maintenance of principled, locally-led humanitarian action. The case studies demonstrate the success of NSD investments in terms of greater numbers of affected people reached with principled humanitarian assistance. They highlight NSD practices that should be taken to scale, and ones that should be eliminated as they militate against a National Society's long-term sustainability, acceptance and access, specifically in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

## (ii)  NSD and protecting a National Society's legal base and unique auxiliary role

The study highlights the importance of NSD investments that strengthen a National society's auxiliary status (legally derived) and auxiliary role (which continuously evolves in response to a specific environment's changing needs). Often managed in unique and innovative ways, National Societies in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts need to be auxiliaries to all public authorities. These authorities may be comprised of both state and non-state (often armed) actors. Where negotiated sensitively and refreshed in an appropriate manner, a modern and relevant auxiliary status and role saves lives.



*More than 660 protesters and members of the security forces received first aid treatment from Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers during the protests in Mid-February. The injured were transported to waiting ambulances outside the centre or to nearby field clinics and hospitals. One Ukrainian Red Cross Society volunteer was wounded while attempting to provide medical assistance. The International Red Cross Movement partners have been providing financial and technical support to the Ukrainian Red Cross on the ground.*

5    The International Conference is a unique forum bringing together the world's largest humanitarian network and nearly every government. It is a major event on the humanitarian calendar and the premier global forum to enhance and inspire humanitarian debates.

The study therefore researched NSD investments that led to relevant, refreshed and negotiated auxiliary status and role. Where successful, this under-emphasised aspect of NSD investment is vital to the improved perception, access and acceptance of National Societies as neutral, impartial, independent and locally-led actors, particularly in fragile, complex, conflict and violence-affected environments.

The following full definition of the auxiliary role implies a specific set of organisational characteristics, enabling National Societies to deliver services in all contexts.

"Public authorities and National Societies as auxiliaries enjoy **a specific and distinctive partnership**, entailing **mutual responsibilities and benefits**, based on **international and national laws**, in which the national public authorities and the National Society agree on the areas in which the **National Society supplements or substitutes public humanitarian services;** the National Society must be able to **deliver its humanitarian services at all times in conformity with the Fundamental Principles**, in particular that of neutrality and independence, and with its other **obligations under the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as agreed by States in the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent"**

*30th International Conference, 2007, resolution 2*

When negotiating with a diverse set of public authorities, which often include both state and non-state armed actors, National Societies often need culturally contextualised and sensitive NSD support to strengthen their overall organisational design, operational characteristics, and positioning.

In fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts, National Societies' auxiliary roles formalise their adherence to the Fundamental Principles. This should be evident both in the way they are structured and through the nature of the services they deliver. The Fundamental Principles can be seen as a toolbox and should be consciously fulfilled through a variety of NSD investments that strengthen the National Societies' capabilities to use and demonstrate the principles expected of them by all stakeholders. They can be used to bring clarity when working for the Red Cross Red Crescent:

| | |
|---|---|
| Humanity<br>Impartiality | **Objectives – two core principles that provide a mission and inspire.** |
| Neutrality<br>Independence | **Means – that make it possible to use the core principles in practice.** |
| Voluntary services<br>Unity<br>Universality | **Working style – three principles about organisation and methods.** |

This study documents examples of how each of the six National Societies, supported by their partners, addressed such challenges. It looks at how they used NSD investments to achieve and sustain appropriate, enhanced, and principled organisational characteristics that positioned them as neutral, impartial and independent in highly fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

## (iii) Movement-wide coordination of support for NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

The Movement's components share responsibilities when supporting National Societies in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts. Several attempts have been made to strengthen Movement synergy and interoperability. The IFRC and ICRC have specific mandates to help National societies be neutral, impartial and independent local humanitarian actors.
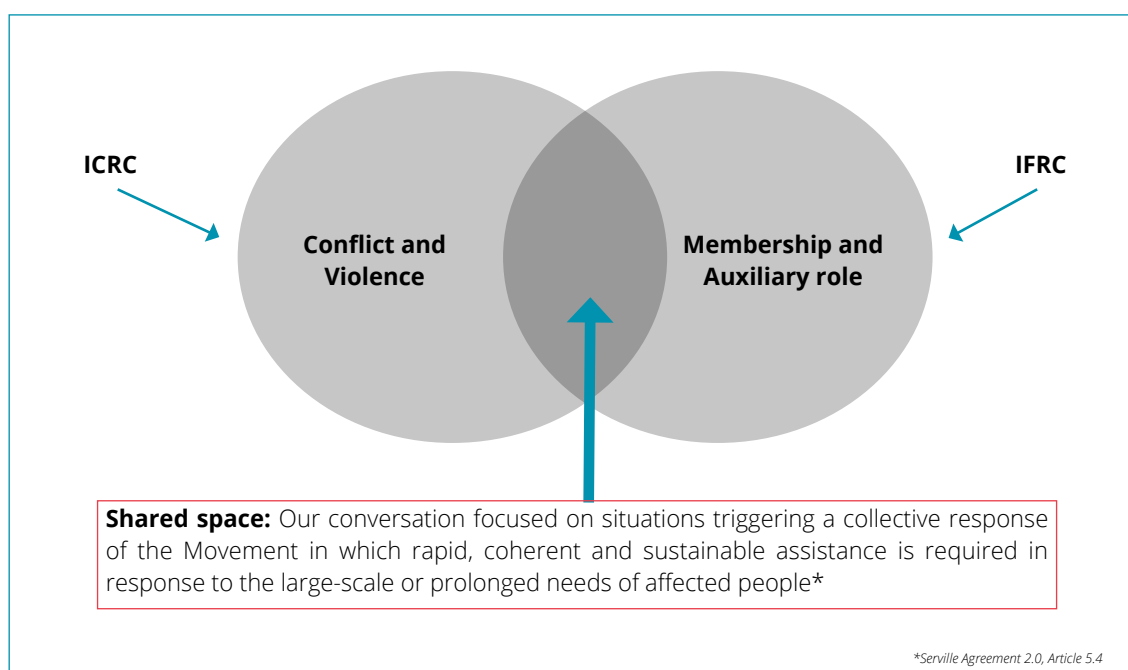
In keeping with its localisation commitments, IFRC's Strategy 2030,[6] adopted in 2019, calls for an "urgent shift of leadership and decision-making to the most local level". This includes a greater focus on the development of National Societies, particularly at branch level, to ensure their services are developed and led by local

6   *https://www.ifrc.org/document/strategy-2030*

actors, underpinned by ethical practices and supported by their strong auxiliary role. To implement Strategy 2030, the IFRC Secretariat created the Agenda for Renewal that provides more focus on delivering on its core mandates:

1) Coordination across member National Societies, ensuring an IFRC-wide approach

2) Representation of the membership internationally and regionally, including through joint humanitarian diplomacy

3) National Society Development.

At the centre of the ICRC's purpose is supporting people suffering as a result of armed conflict and violence. It is an impartial, neutral and independent organisation, with an exclusively humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to provide them with assistance. Whenever possible, the ICRC operates hand in hand with National Societies to increase its humanitarian impact.
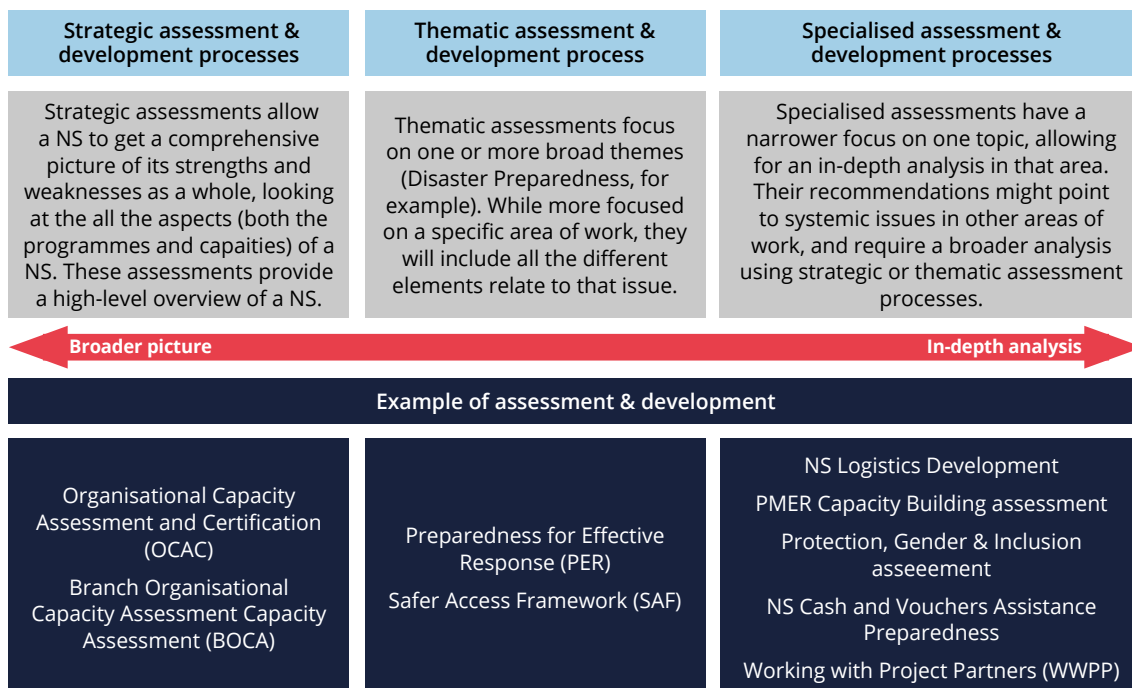
When it comes to conflict and violence, IFRC's role focuses on specific issues relevant to its member National Societies' operations and capacities. ICRC's role is to support the IFRC by contributing to NSD in areas related to its mandate and expertise. The Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville Agreement 2.0)[7] adopted at the Council of Delegates in 2022, is the latest attempt to agree interoperability between all Movement components, including strengthening humanitarian services and impact in violence and conflict-affected environments. It recognises an intersection of shared space where respective mandates converge and complement each other when supporting the delivery of humanitarian services to conflict-affected populations:



**ICRC**

**IFRC**

**Conflict and Violence**

**Membership and Auxiliary role**

**Shared space:** Our conversation focused on situations triggering a collective response of the Movement in which rapid, coherent and sustainable assistance is required in response to the large-scale or prolonged needs of affected people*

*Serville Agreement 2.0, Article 5.4*

The practice of NSD can involve a number of approaches, and can be supported by a variety of tools[8] and processes. While NSD is not solely a tool-based discipline, a number of tools are available across the RCRC Movement that enable a National Society to assess their strengths and deficits. A full timeline covering the evolution of IFRC's NSD tools and Movement-wide agreements can be found in Annex 1. However, the tools can be summarised in the following manner:

---

7    https://www.ifrc.org/document/seville-agreement-2
8    "NS Assessment and Development Processes: Guidance for National Societies", IFRC 2021 https://www.ifrc.org/document/guidance-national-society-assessment-and-development-processes

| Strategic assessment & development processes | Thematic assessment & development process | Specialised assessment & development processes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Strategic assessments allow a NS to get a comprehensive picture of its strengths and weaknesses as a whole, looking at the all the aspects (both the programmes and capaities) of a NS. These assessments provide a high-level overview of a NS. | Thematic assessments focus on one or more broad themes (Disaster Preparedness, for example). While more focused on a specific area of work, they will include all the different elements relate to that issue. | Specialised assessments have a narrower focus on one topic, allowing for an in-depth analysis in that area. Their recommendations might point to systemic issues in other areas of work, and require a broader analysis using strategic or thematic assessment processes. |

← **Broader picture**　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**In-depth analysis** →

**Example of assessment & development**

| | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC)<br><br>Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment Capacity Assessment (BOCA) | Preparedness for Effective Response (PER)<br><br>Safer Access Framework (SAF) | NS Logistics Development<br><br>PMER Capacity Building assessment<br><br>Protection, Gender & Inclusion asseeement<br><br>NS Cash and Vouchers Assistance Preparedness<br><br>Working with Project Partners (WWPP) |

National Societies may draw on this variety of assessment tools to better analyse their weaknesses, competencies, and opportunities to adapt their organisational characteristics to be positioned as neutral, impartial and independent. These tools include:

→ **Strategic assessment/development processes** to support the review or refreshing of long-term strategic plans such as:

o the **Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC)**[9] process, which provides an overview of all elements that constitute a strong NS

o the **Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA)**[10] which allows for the same at the branch level.

→ **Thematic assessment/development processe** when NS need to get a better understanding of necessary improvements in more specific areas of work. These include:

o the **Preparedness for Effective Response (PER)**[11] approach that helps to identify and plan for critical capacity strengthening of preparedness actions for response, to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance in line with the NS auxiliary role and mandate

o the **Safer Access Framework (SAF)**[12] to reduce and mitigate the risks that NS may face in sensitive and insecure contexts; and to earn the trust and acceptance of people and communities, as well as of those who control or influence access to them

→ **Specialized assessment/development processes** to strengthen a specific technical area, such as:

o the **Movement Approach for National Society Logistics Development**[13]

o the **IFRC's National Society Cash and Vouchers Assistance Preparedness**[14] (CVAP) process.

9  IFRC's OCAC is an assessment process that supports National Societies to review all the elements that make up a strong organisation by looking at their capacity and performance indicators, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and focusing their efforts to become strong and sustainable service providers. *https://www.ifrc.org/document/guidance-national-society-assessment-and-development-processes*

10  IFRC's BOCA is a self-assessment tool developed for NS branches to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organisational capacities. It is used as a first step in a branch development process. *https://branches.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-05/a-practical-guide-en.pdf*

11  Although the PER is considered a thematic assessment, it is a well-developed methodology, linked to OCAC, SAF, WPNS components and indicators, and globally implemented with more than 90 NSs. It provides a comprehensive picture of internal NS capacity to support emergency response as part of the national DM system. PER assessment is done at the national level but focuses on how the NS functions with its branch network. *https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/PER-Summary-1.pdf*

12  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/*

13  *https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Movement_Approach_NS_Logistics_Development_EN.pdf*

14  *https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/disasters-climate-and-crises/cash-and-voucher-assistance*

The case studies demonstrate the manner and order in which such tools were used to support relevant organisational transformations in each context. They also document the limitations of the tools and showcase innovations made by some National Societies to adapt them to their specific contexts. Currently, there are no mechanisms in the Movement to disseminate such valuable learning and knowledge generated in these specific environments to inspire innovation in other National Societies. Strengthening peer-to-peer learning, particularly for NS in such contexts, and eliminating hindering practices are addressed in the actions of Part 3.

# 3. Positioning this study within other contemporary studies

A number of Movement initiatives have sought to strengthen National Societies' preparedness for response and recovery. However, rarely have these proposed innovative capacity-enhancing and organisation-transforming strategies that recognise the challenges of operating as principled local actors in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected emergencies.Examples of contemporary and past research and guidance that have such limitations include:

- extensive IFRC-commissioned research on **Capacity Building for Disaster Response Management**[15] which aimed to provide a solid basis for NSD in vestments both within the Movement and as contributions to national and local Disaster Response Management systems

- IFRC's Effective and Efficient Humanitarian Assistance Working Group of the Governing Board endorsing the **NS Preparedness Framework** (2021) to provide common language, principles and definitions when developing preparedness policies, strategies and plans, as well as connections to other capacity-strengthening approaches. It emphasises that preparedness requires a strong organisational culture that encourages learning, adaptation and change, linking short-term initiatives with a longer-term vision

- the **National Society Development in Emergencies Guidance** (NSDiE) created by the IFRC, with support from the Australian, British, Canadian, Norwegian, Swedish and Swiss Red Cross, in close collaboration with the ICRC. This aims to apply to all kinds of emergencies, acknowledging differences in a variety of contexts. However, it makes little mention of National Societies as effective actors in fragile, complex, and protracted conflict-affected environments. It contains six key domains: NS leadership responsibilities and business continuity; volunteering in emergencies; branch-to-NS-headquarters relationship; management of transition phases; scaling up – scaling down; external relations, coordination and partnerships

- the 2023 **DG ECHO's guidance note and multi-agency case studies on localisation**[16] was published in March 2023. The result of concerted consultations with local, national and international organisations over more than a year, the guidance sets out DG ECHO's commitment to realise the objectives and vision of the Grand Bargain. However, the 3 IFRC case studies on Partnership, NSD and pooled funds for emergency response do not draw attention to the specific NSD investment needs of NS in protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

- the 2024 IFRC-commissioned study into **protracted crises, complex emergencies and fragile contexts**[17], which was consulted upon at an IFRC global workshop in January 2024. Although it addresses a range of overlapping issues encountered in a wide set of fragile, complex and protracted crisis contexts, it does not address the specific critical success factors and challenges related to being trusted, principled National Societies in conflict-affected environments

- a 2024 Australian Red Cross study on **localisation in protracted crises and fragile settings** conducted in partnership with the Humanitarian Advisory Group and local consultants in five protracted-crisis contexts. The study explores three key domains of intermediary practice in protracted crises – risk and compliance, organisational strengthening and capacity sharing, and funding – and the implications for locally-led humanitarian action. Conducted from a partner perspective, it provides insights into the challenges, as well as opportunities, of being a better partner to local humanitarian actors in complex settings.

15  https://reliefweb.int/report/world/strategic-research-national-and-local-capacity-building-drm
16  https://www.urd.org/en/publication/cases-studies-on-localisation-policy-of-dg-echo-2/
17  https://www.ifrc.org/media/53833

There are other examples of studies on strengthening principled locally-led humanitarian action. These are, however, also limited to a descriptive approach focused on overall outcomes, rather than a documentation of specific NSD investments that strengthened a National Society's neutral, impartial and independent capacities and structures. Examples include:

- ICRC's **Safer Access Framework (SAF) case studies** in 15 National Societies[18] have documented how, since 2012, selected NS have used SAF to draw attention to and address context-specific organisational weaknesses. Key SAF orientations toward NSD include *"providing continued support to strengthen National Societies' ability to provide required humanitarian services safely"* and *"encouraging Movement partners to incorporate SAF approaches fully into their National Society developmental support programmes"*

- the British Red Cross and ICRC's **Principles to Action case studies**[19] to share lessons learned within the Movement about how the Fundamental Principles have been applied in different situations

- a 2023 Danish Red Cross study on **success factors for branch development in fragile and conflict-affected contexts**, which was accompanied by two case studies looking at specific branches of South Sudan and Ukrainian Red Cross Societies. The study looks at success factors for branches operating in fragile or conflict settings. The case studies focus solely on the branch level and analyse evidence and insights into how branch sustainability and services were successfully addressed in specific conflict-affected branch settings.

The outcomes of the above initiatives have not yet been systematically and widely disseminated across Movement components and donors in a manner that leads to changed practices. Some other studies have also called for a deeper analysis of the factors that enable National Societies to be fit for purpose in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

→ *"Movement NSD work in conflict is currently confused, with different and at times competing interpretations of the purpose of NSD, and approaches and priorities between multiple Movement actors, including NS. The study suggests that lack of prioritisation and expertise within the Movement, as well as current ways of working, are likely to mean that opportunities for NS to develop are limited"*

→ *"There is a lack of specific knowledge and research into NSD in conflict situations to support decision-making and investment, as well as analysis and tools adapted to conflict"*

→ *"Many issues can be addressed through a better framework for NSD in conflict"*

"Learning from Red Cross Red Crescent assistance in protracted crises and complex emergencies " [20]



*Honduran Red Cross Society: providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in Danli, El Paraiso.*

18  South Africa, Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Sudan, Niger, Cote D'Ivoire, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Canada (indigenous rights protests in 2012), Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Britain (Northern Ireland), Lebanon, and the Palestine *https://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/cooperating-national-societies/safer-access-all-national-societies*

19  The British Red Cross and ICRC produced three Principles to Action case studies with the National Societies of Somalia (2006), Lebanon (2012) and Syria (2015). *https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-stand-for*. The aims of the case studies were to:
   → clarify the operational relevance of the Fundamental Principles in particular contexts
   → examine the importance of the Fundamental Principles in today's humanitarian situations
   → analyse the distinctive role of the Movement in different contexts.

20  Published in 2020, it was jointly commissioned by IFRC and ICRC in coordination with the Swedish Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross within the framework of the IFRC National Society Development in Emergencies programme. Its purpose was "to jointly shape future efforts to better support the development and strengthening of National Societies during a situation of conflict, complex emergency, protracted crisis and post-conflict settings to provide effective and efficient humanitarian assistance in such situations and after the emergency". It focussed on eight countries: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Ukraine and Yemen. *https://www.ifrc.org/media/53833*

This study is a contribution to the implementation of the above recommendations. It gathers empirical evidence of successful, as well as challenging, NSD practices in real-time contexts and humanitarian responses. It therefore contains a collection of specific, innovative and previously undocumented NSD investments in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts made over a 10-15 year period of transformation.

To address the missing NSD dimensions of previous research and literature, the study showcases successful NSD practices that were specifically contextualised to fragile, complex, and conflict-affected environments to gain humanitarian access and the acceptance of all relevant actors. It also highlights inappropriate and negative trends that militate against successful Movement cooperation and coordination and proposes actions to replace these negative trends with successful practices in the 'Call for Change' in Part 3.

# 4.  Methodology

The six NS invited to participate were chosen on the basis of their:

✓  experience of a long-term, fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected humanitarian context (representing a continuum between conflict-sensitive, conflict-affected, and post-conflict environments that necessitated organisational transformation and adaptation to survive and deliver principled humanitarian services)

✓  use of multi-partner support

✓  widespread local humanitarian impact resulting in stories demonstrating community resilience and enhanced wellbeing as a result of renewed NS structures, mandates and services

✓  participation in, and benefit from, a variety of Movement NSD assessment, investment, and technical support mechanisms.

An extensive literature review was conducted of both National Society and partner documentation in each of the six countries. This was followed by interviews with a very wide variety of local stakeholders in each context. These included National Society senior governance and management leadership, programme managers, local branch members, volunteers, youth, staff, and community representatives, together with appropriate IFRC, ICRC and partner NS personnel.

An average of 30 key informants were interviewed in each of the six National Societies, together with an average of 12 key informants from Movement components and partners supporting each NS.

Stakeholders were asked to:

→  describe their operational experiences

→  articulate their role in the long-term organisational transformation as a direct result of having to respond in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments

→  identify key turning points and how NSD investments contributed to greater access, acceptance, and sustainable locally-led humanitarian capacities in communities

→  give examples of how NSD investments strengthened national positioning and local National Society structures that led in turn to stronger, safer, more prepared and resilient communities

→  describe the benefits of using IFRC and Movement tools, as well as tools from external non-Movement partners such as UN agencies and local NGOs if relevant.

The outcomes of the case studies validated an initial 'Conceptual Framework' (see section 5 below for details). This framework was used to consolidate repetitive empirical themes, which emerged from key informants in all contexts. The final triangulation of the evidence from the six operational contexts led to the consolidation of 'successful practices' that require scaling up and replication across the Movement, and 'hindering factors' that need to be eradicated and discarded.

*Drought, floods, violence and instability have put populations in northern Mali in serious jeopardy. Through a project funded by USAID/OFDA, the Mali Red Cross helps people to become more resilient by restoring their livelihoods through cash distribution*

To help facilitate action, the successful and hindering practices were framed under the IFRC's NSD Compact, which already binds the Movement's approach to harmonised support for NSD in all environments. These practices were then collectively prioritised by both the six National Societies and the Task Force, based on those felt to be most transformational to address in the immediate future.

A collective 'learning event' was hosted by the British Red Cross in London from 1–3 May 2024. At the event, senior leaders from each of the six National Societies, together with senior representatives from the member institutions of the task force collectively finalised a Call for Change, proposing actions to address these prioritised practices and considered potential strategic influencing opportunities both within and outside of the Movement.

## 5. A potential 'Conceptual Framework' that demonstrates the effect of longitudinal NSD investments on acceptance, access and humanitarian impact

The empiricial evidence gathered from the initial literature review and stakeholder interviews informed the emergence of a 'Conceptual Framework' that could guide the remaining study. This was subsequently tested and validated by the stakeholder interviews, providing examples of successful access in the most challenging of fragile, complex, violence and conflict-affected contexts.

The Conceptual Framework is depicted in the following diagram:

It comprises the five most commonly recurring 'pre-determinants' or 'pre-conditions' identified by the majority of key informants interviewed, both from National Societies and partnering institutions. These were emphasised as the key 'door openers' to successful acceptance by and access to communities and all parties to a conflict. The case studies document how each factor in a specific environment is the outcome of multiple types of successful longitudinal NSD investments, specifically contextualised in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environments. They can be summarised as follows:

| Proximity | Through provision of relevant, reliable, consistent, principled and locally sustainable volunteering, services and humanitarian accountability – supplemented by community ownership and involvement mechanisms – that build trust and credibility in communities |
| --- | --- |
| Visibility | Through safe and secure volunteering and personnel protection practices, identification of National Society volunteers and staff, and the positioning of Movement-provided long-term local assets such as clinics, warehouses and neutral and impartial needs-driven services, in areas held by state and armed non-state actors that no other organisations can reach |
| Legacy | Through benefiting from long-term positioning of local volunteers and staff, as well as health, disaster response, and protection activities which improved the longer-term credibility and dependability of the National Society and its relevant auxiliary roles with all relevant actors |
| Reputation | Through building perception of a Movement 'footprint' and 'bridge' that links the maintenance of locally-led principled humanitarian action, social inclusion and peace-building roles to national and internationally generated assistance |
| Integrity | Through an assertive transparency and accountability agenda that leads to acceptance and access, involving inclusive planning of neutral, impartial and independent services with communities and stakeholders, and implementing all activities in full accordance with the Fundamental Principles. |

These five themes became a unifying framework through which National Societies and their partners could best describe successful access and acceptance practices. The case studies in Part 2 explore in more detail how multiple NSD investments by both National Societies' leadership and their partners led to the successful creation of each 'pre-determinant' and 'pre-condition' in the different contexts. Taken together they paved a reliable pathway to reaching an increased number of affected populations that few, and sometimes no, other organisations or institutions could reach.



*The worst drought in decades is now affecting Somaliland. Somali Red Crescent Society together with its partners are doing what they can to support people struggling because of the drought. Many people have lost parts of, or all their livestock and are living in a desperate situation. (Photo: Olav A. Saltbones/Norwegian Red Cross)*

# 6.  Key lines of enquiry

## (i)  Localisation and locally-led humanitarian action - the key to acceptance and access

> *"The members, volunteers and staff of National Society branches (local units) often come from the communities they work with – they speak the same language, understand local cultural norms, and are present before, during and after a crisis. Because of this proximity, branch volunteers and staff are uniquely well positioned to listen and respond to people's views on their needs, priorities, vulnerabilities and capacities, and to facilitate community engagement.*
>
> *Crucially, they are best placed to understand patterns of discrimination, violence and exclusion, and therefore better able to ensure those who are most marginalised are included in support and assistance, and protected from harm, abuse and exploitation when necessary.*
>
> *National Societies are the 'vital force' of the Movement, and local community volunteers are similarly the 'vital force' and the backbone of National Societies – for this reason, supporting, recognising and investing in volunteers is an essential part of the IFRC's approach to localisation."*
>
> IFRC Discussion Paper on Localisation 2023

The study explored the specific way in which contextualised NSD investments were made in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts by National Societies and their partners to become and remain effective local humanitarian actors. The case studies include strong evidence of how the power of locally-led principled humanitarian action in communities, as a result of sustained NSD investments, can help enhance Movement knowledge and practice.

## (ii)  Relevance of Movement-wide NSD assessment processes and tools to differing types of violence and conflict

As referenced in the 2020 report 'Approaching NSD in Situations of Conflict and Protracted Crisis' there is a lack of general understanding of how the different phases of conflict might require different NSD strategies and tools.

In the absence of official definitions of some types of conflict, and of any central authority that classifies armed conflicts internationally, this study uses the following definitions of varying conflict-affected contexts as already defined in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), supplemented by international human rights law and national laws, and other more informal definitions:

> **"International armed conflicts"** covered by IHL, involving state(s) armed forces versus state(s) armed forces, with any use of force or occupation.
>
> **"Non-international armed conflict"** covered by IHL, which can involve state(s) armed forces versus organised armed groups, or organised armed group(s) versus other organised armed group(s).
>
> **"Other situations of violence"** – not covered by IHL, but covered by international human rights law and national laws, which can include riots, demonstrations, isolated and sporadic acts of violence, mass arrests, and forced disappearances.
>
> **"Complex emergency"**[21] – not covered by IHL, but defined as a country where there is present or past conflict, and a major natural disaster
>
> **"Protracted crisis"** – not covered by IHL, but a country in a protracted conflict or post-conflict situation, with displacement and migration issues and still highly fragile.

---

21  *https://www.ifrc.org/media/53833* This 2024 IFRC-commissioned study into "Learning from Red Cross Red Crescent Assistance in Protracted Crises and Complex Emergencies" offers an updated definitions of a "complex emergency" and "protracted crisis" (page 10)

The study set out to verify which Movement tools had helped enhance relevant organisational characteristics and transformations in fragile, complex, conflict and violence-affected contexts. It sought examples of successful NSD practices that facilitated principled, locally-led humanitarian action based on increased acceptance and access. It explored which, if any, of the IFRC's and other Movement-wide organisational assessment and National Society Preparedness for Response tools and processes included elements that could be customised, or made relevant in such contexts. The following diagram summarises the evolution of such tools, which are referenced in the case studies in Part 2.

## Evolution of NS Preparedness
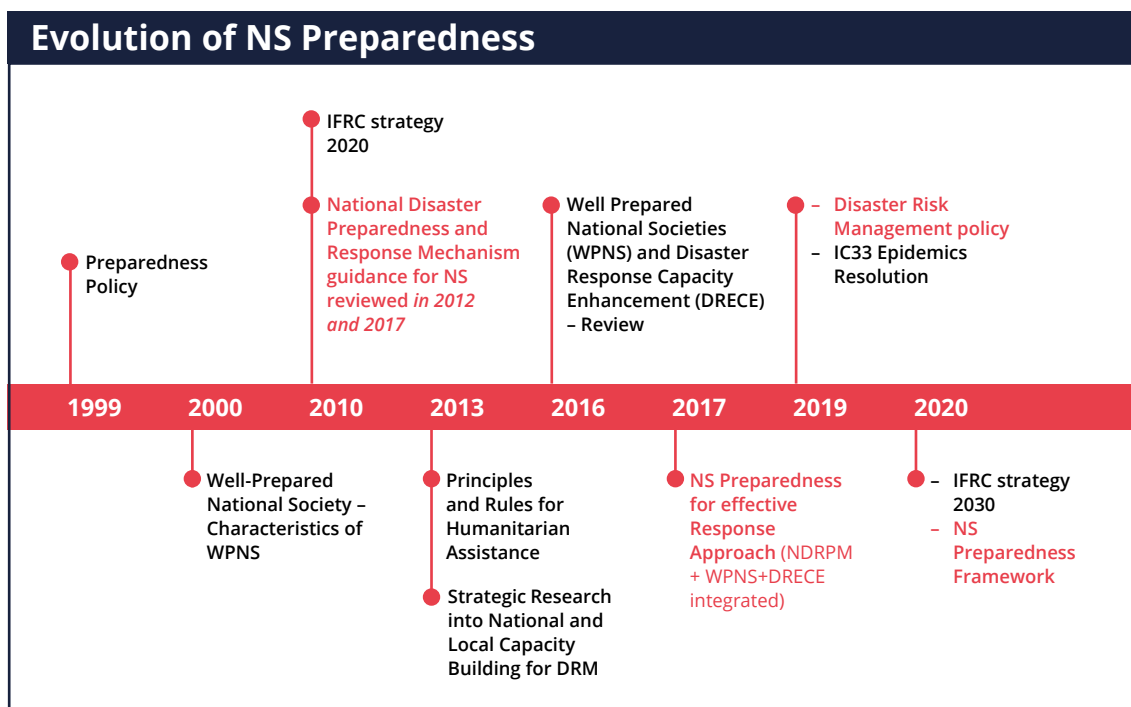


ICRC's Safer Access Framework (SAF) is the only Movement tool that enables a National Society to assess its organisational positioning, strengths and deficiencies in specifically violence and conflict-affected contexts. The study therefore explored the manner in which SAF was implemented in different contexts, and its relationship to other NSD investments and Movement-wide support.
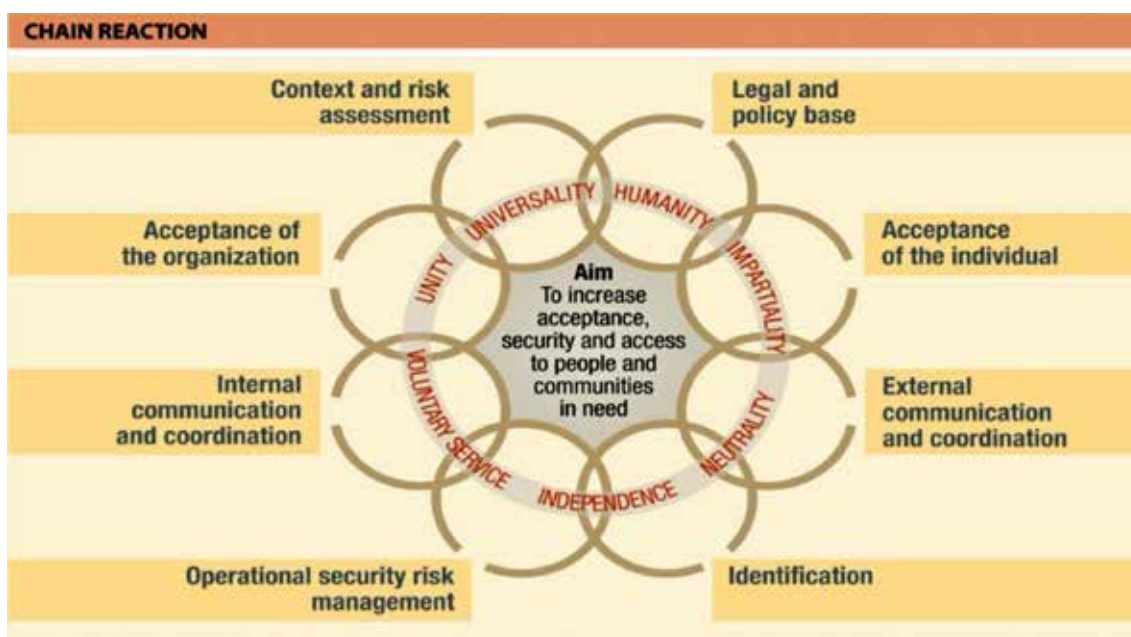
The SAF comprises eight elements, each grouping a number of actions that, if taken together with the application of the Fundamental Principles, help NS increase their acceptance, security and access to people and communities with humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts. As noted in the 2020 report 'Approaching National Society Development in Situations of Conflict and Protracted Crisis', SAF support has often strengthened operational and security management by improving coordination, human resource management, dissemination of the Movement's mandates and fundamental principles, humanitarian advocacy, communications and risk assessments. The 2020 report further notes:

> *"In relation to ICRC's significant role and influence in the area of NSD in situations of conflict and protracted crisis, while instances of ICRC making a positive contribution to the long-term health of individual NS were apparent, it also observed missed opportunities for ICRC together with the IFRC and other Movement actors to contribute to long-term NS health in situations of conflict and protracted crisis."*
>
> *"NS in conflict situations face structural and resourcing challenges, in particular business models heavily dependent on international support."*
>
> *"Movement actors are likely to remain focused on short-term operations, ignoring the legitimate needs and opportunities for branch and NS partners to adjust to 'the new normal' and become more autonomous and financially sustainable while still working with international partners. As one National Society branch respondent put it: "[an international partner] has been working with us for 25 years. We should be able to do more than we can."*

However, the current study explored whether National Societies' use of SAF focused merely on strengthening operational response mechanisms, or to what extent the implementation of SAF's eight elements have contributed to a National Society's wider transformation process It also examined whether and how SAF assessment processes complemented other IFRC and partner-generated organisational assessment and development tools, and with what impact. Finally, it analysed whether ICRC, IFRC and partners adequately prioritise SAF Plans of Action for support, and whether they're integrated into interoperable support strategies of any kind.

The current study therefore assessed whether a National Society's overall strategic NSD support needs in fragile, complex, conflict and violence-affected environments were well enough recognised and resourced by IFRC, ICRC and Partner National Societies (PNS). It also looked at whether National Societies successfully adapted any of the 'developmental' NSD tools and processes to identify and address specific organisational deficiencies in these contexts.

## (iii)  The protection of volunteers and staff

As stated in the IFRC's NSD Compact (2019):

> *"Volunteering is one of the seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. Volunteers demonstrate and promote the value of the Movement and are at the centre of everything it does. Volunteers are an embodiment of community engagement and accountability. They lead by example, all too often sacrificing their lives to save the lives of others."*



*Old town, Sana'a, Yemen, September 2017A staggering 14.5 million people don't have access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation in Yemen. More than two years of war has caused a severe water shortage across the entire country. Twice a day, the Yemen Red Crescent Society provides water for the most vulnerable people in Sana'a.*

Several tools and processes have evolved across the Movement to protect and sustain volunteerism across all environments. IFRC's latest Volunteering Policy[22] calls for the *"improved safety, security and well-being of volunteers"*. IFRC's NSD Compact contains an important reminder in its Commitment 2:

> *"National Societies provide volunteers with opportunities to serve and must prioritise sound volunteer management which allows for greater speed, flexibility and greater diversity of engagement opportunities, including the safety and security of volunteers at the heart of their NSD work and plan. A strong volunteer base and strong volunteer management, in turn, enables a National Society to accomplish its mission.*
>
> *The Volunteering Alliance, which aims to better engage, attract and protect volunteers, has committed to strengthening and empowering the volunteer base of National Societies and as such is a key partner in NSD and a priority commitment for the Compact.*
>
> *We collectively   to prioritise NS volunteering in areas such as but not limited to:*
>
> → *new ways of engagement of volunteers (including e-volunteering, corporate volunteering, spontaneous volunteering)*
>
> → *data management for volunteering*
>
> → *safety and wellbeing of volunteers (including volunteering in emergencies)."*

The 2021 'Standards to Facilitate the Safety, Security and Well-being of Volunteers – Implementation Guide'[23] were produced by the IFRC Volunteering Alliance Working Group on Volunteering in Dangerous Situations. The 13 standards are also based on IFRC's Volunteering Policy and other Movement decisions and recommendations adopted by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The guide absorbs IFRC's earlier 'Stay Safe'[24] guidelines and elements of ICRC's SAF, which set out the minimum management standards to keep volunteers safe, secure and well.

The study explored how NSD investments helped National Societies identify, prioritise and mitigate risks to volunteer safety, security and wellbeing in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts. Examples were sought of the implementation, or appropriate customisation, of best practice tools, and of local culturally contextualised processes and guidelines that ensured protection, acceptance and access. It also looked for examples of strengthened approaches to psychosocial support, and of strategies to address compensation and benefits in a way that does not undermine the culture of long-term volunteering.

## (iv) Movement cooperation and coordination

In 2022, the Movement components adopted a new Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville agreement 2.0). It emphasises the host National Society's leading role as 'convenor' of coordinated Movement response, IFRC's supporting role in the development and coordination of NSD support (Article 8.5), and ICRC's supporting role in areas related to its mandate and expertise (Article 8.6).

Seville 2.0 (2022) provides Movement strengthening mechanisms in conflict-sensitive contexts, that  link to other Movement-wide coordination mechanisms and approaches, as described in the 'Principles and Rules' (2015),[25] and 'Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) 2.0' (2013-19),[26]  and also to IFRC's commitments within the Grand Bargain's localisation workstream (2016 onwards). It is a contribution to the theme of supporting national responders. This broader commitment to strengthening local-led humanitarian action, both in principle and practice, is a key milestone of greater Movement complementarity and coordination that provides the context for support to National Societies in emergency response.[27] The following diagram summarises the key convenor and co-convenor roles as envisaged by Seville 2.0.

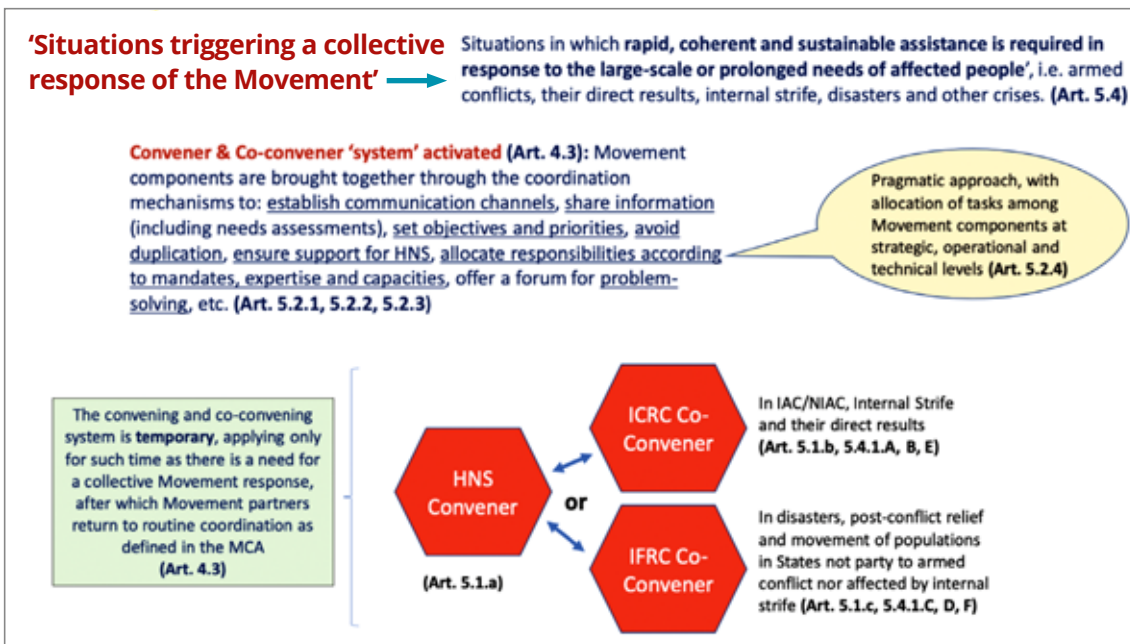22  https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/20220822_IFRC-Volunteering-Policy-EN.pdf
23  https://www.ifrc.org/document/implementation-guide-standards-facilitate-safety-security-and-well-being-volunteers
24  https://ifrcstaysafe.org/
25  https://www.ifrc.org/document/principles-rules-humanitarian-assistance
26  https://smcctoolkit.org/
27  https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders

To fulfil its role to lead and coordinate support for the organisational development of NS as its key comparative advantage,[28] IFRC has also refined the scope of global NSD investment funds in the form of its Capacity Building Fund (CBF) and, together with ICRC, the National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA).

However, a 2022 IFRC study on 'Approaching National Society Development in Situations of Conflict and Protracted Crisis' identified a number of challenges in the current Movement approach to NSD in situations of conflict and protracted crisis. These included:

→ *A culture of competition among international Movement actors leading to institutional misalignments, at times tensions between international Movement components, and a general lack of 'interoperability' between Movement components.*

→ *The Movement is often ill-equipped to support NS while there is a focus on conflict response. Contributory factors include:*

   o *Operational prioritisation, and a tendency for international actors to focus on operational capacity development and the capacity development priorities of international partners at the expense of longer-term needs expressed by NS*

   o *Multiple international Movement partners not necessarily working to a coordinated agenda, while placing individual demands on limited NS capacities*

   o *A general lack of NSD capacity and prioritisation within the Movement. In some instances, a high level of risk aversion and unwillingness to 'let go' was observed in some international partners, reducing space for NS to learn and develop themselves.*

→ *A particular challenge centring around the role and prioritisation of IFRC resourcing as the Movement component with the lead role in supporting and coordinating NSD work.*

→ *A lack of emphasis on NSD competency development for personnel deployed in-country – particularly in conflict-sensitive contexts. However, IFRC's work on the NSD Competency Framework,[29] although recent, builds on an analysis of critical enablers and the role of people, culture and leadership styles in relation to NSD success. Also the work done on the Surge Competency Framework and how NSD and PER processes can inform the work of supporting NS in responses is promising.*

---

These were further corroborated by the recommendations for "National Society strengthening" within the IFRC-commissioned "Learning from Red Cross Red Crescent Assistance in Protracted Crisis and Complex Emergencies (2024)" which emphasized the need to:

→ *Invest more in NSD corporate services as part of a longer-term plan that can be shared with key donors. Document the progress including challenges and successes towards the shared vision.*

→ *Consider the criticality of NS having clear auxiliary roles, strong legal bases and a comprehensive knowledge of the legal frameworks relevant to influencing NS readiness and response, with IFRC investing more to strengthen NS in these areas.*

→ *Hold donors accountable to their localisation pledges while simultaneously documenting and promoting why the RCRC network is the premier local actor in protracted crisis and complex emergency settings.*

The Movement components have nevertheless invested in additional improved cooperation and coordination mechanisms over the years. These include the:

- Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) process, with tools such as the Movement Response Cycle, Movement Country Plans, and Movement Contingency Plans
- Movement Coordination Framework at strategic, operational and technical levels
- Movement Coordination Agreements
- One International Appeal mechanism
- One Movement Message initiative
- IFRC's 'New Way of Working' and 'Unified Country Plan' processes.

In addition, some Partner National Societies have developed global MOUs with ICRC to benefit from a security umbrella, while supporting specific thematic elements of NSD work, such as branch development (Danish Red Cross); health institution capacity building, and finance development (Norwegian Red Cross); and Disaster Risk Reduction (German Red Cross).

This study therefore analysed how:

- Movement cooperation and coordination processes, definitions and platforms were used
- to what extent they enhanced collaborative approaches to supporting NSD investments in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts
- National Society leaders recognised the value of NSD
- NS used Movement coordination and cooperation to strategise more assertively to have their NSD agendas better supported
- partners implemented a localisation approach by establishing partnerships based on increased trust and the transfer of power and control, in step with National Society capacity.

The study aimed to document whether the implementation of Seville 2.0 and any other Movement coordination mechanisms in the six operational environments led to greater interoperability and coordination of NSD support. It sought to document good practice examples of how Movement components developed new strategic models and modalities of funding and collective support to provide more stable assistance to National Societies in such challenging environments.

The case studies that follow in Part 2 describe how a variety of Movement-wide support mechanisms and tools, used in a contextual and complementary manner, helped National Societies address the above inter-connected areas of NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts. However, they also identify inappropriate and undermining NSD practices that militated against strengthened interoperability and collective humanitarian impact.

# 7.   How to read Part 2

A set of icons is used to help the reader navigate the extensive learning in the case studies in Part 2. These icons help the reader to identify a specific type of learning opportunity within each operational environment. They are offered to inspire good practice and innovative ideas and guide the reader to other relevant documents that support learning on Movement-wide NSD policies, including research reports, case studies, tools and guidelines that are relevant in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts elsewhere.

**Practical action example**

**Must read**

**Tips or checklist**

# Part 2

## National Society case studies of organisational transformation in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

Part 2 contains the six National Society case studies, , each representing a differing mix of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected characteristics. The longitudinal stories describe organisational transformation processes, stemming from sustained 10-15 year NSD investments, both by each National Society itself, as well as from those who partnered with them.

The case studies describe the key internal and external drivers for change that challenged each National Society and the impact of NSD investments, enabling them to deliver ever stronger, more localised, neutral, impartial, independent, relevant, and quality humanitarian services. The stories include descriptions of the successes and challenges of coordinated support, as well as the key "turning point" and "most significant change" moments. They describe the roles of key stakeholders who enhanced capacities of members, volunteers, youth and staff, in both branches and at national level that resulted in the onward ability of communities to prepare for and respond to conflict and violence-sensitive humanitarian needs in a more sustainable manner.

Various Movement tools and processes are referenced throughout the 6 case studies. For information on these tools and processes please see the Definition of Terms on page 3.

## AFGHAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY
## A neutral, impartial and independent ARCS, reaching the people that others have no access to

Long-term National Society Development investments that strengthened the positioning, sustainability and impact of Afghan Red Crescent Society in a complex and fragile environment

# 1. Introduction

> *"I would like to prioritise a coordinated focus on headquarters, regional offices, branches, volunteers and staff, while developing common systems and processes, recognising the different contexts, capacities and priorities between regional offices and provincial branches that directly lead to increased and professionally delivered humanitarian services all over the country."*
>
> Mawlawi Matiul Haq Khalis, president of Afghan Red Crescent Society

As part of a wider continuous organisational transformation process over the past 20 years, the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has made consistent NSD investments to remain a neutral, impartial, independent and trusted local actor. ARCS's decades of deeply principled positioning is paying dividends now, enabling it to contribute to much-needed social cohesion, social inclusion, peace and resilience in Afghanistan.

This case study describes how the leadership of ARCS – with the support of numerous Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners – made a significant range of NSD investments to strengthen its principled characteristics and gain acceptance, access and reach to assist the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in a complex, fragile and often protracted conflict context.

ARCS was formed in 1934, recognised by the ICRC in 1954 and admitted into the IFRC as its 83rd member in the same year. It has always had a strong auxiliary status and set of auxiliary roles. Over the past 40 years, it has been a flagship of principled assistance in a highly complex context in which humanitarian access has been challenging. Conscious that decades of NSD investments had helped create this principled positioning, ARCS's new leadership, appointed in August 2021, reinforced the organisation's vision of strengthening its principled characteristics, furthering its localisation objectives, and expanding its reach.

To adapt and survive in the face of extreme external pressures, ARCS focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity**. This case study explores the NSD investments that made the ARCS well-positioned, effective and recognised in each of these areas.

# 2. Humanitarian context

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. Conflict, ethnic divisions, drought, food insecurity, displacement and dysfunctional health services have all contributed to a complex and protracted humanitarian crisis.

Multiple long-term hazards and vulnerabilities make Afghanistan the fourth most fragile country in the INFORM[30] and the tenth most vulnerable country to climate change.[31] It is ranked as the world's 12th most earthquake-prone country, and 59% of the population are also affected by climate shocks.[32] A mean temperature rise of more than 1°C between 1950 and 2017 reduced the availability of food and water, and increased the spread of vector-borne diseases.

Weak community-level preparedness and a lack of contingency plans for public-health emergencies, natural hazards and conflict-related displacement leave very few people in high-risk areas with access to life-saving first aid, or psychological first aid. Over 66% of the population has experienced at least one traumatic event,[33] with over 72% of displaced households being affected by conflict. Gender inequality is stark: the 30% of women in the labour force earn 40-50% less than men, despite a high percentage being breadwinners in women-headed households.

With the suspension of international assistance since August 2021, around 24.4 million people – 55% of the population – experience high levels of acute food insecurity due to a combination of conflict, the after-effects of Covid-19, high food prices, and rampant unemployment. This includes 8.7 million people at risk

---

30  *https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Country-Risk-Profile*
31  Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index 2021
32  World Bank 2016
33  National Mental Health Survey 2018

of famine-like conditions, with 4.7 million children, and pregnant and lactating women in danger of acute malnutrition. While hostilities have subsided significantly, after years of armed conflict the country's security situation remains volatile.

More than 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan, the official languages being Dari and Pashtu.

# 3. Strengthening 'proximity'

ARCS's consistent organisational goal is to remain **neutral, impartial and independent, and reach the people other organisations have no access to'.** This led to a strong focus on strengthening its local community presence and programmes in conflict-sensitive contexts. It has used NSD investments to sustain access and acceptance in all communities held by different parties to the respective conflicts, offering principled services that no other organisations could. These included:

✓ dissemination of information on the Fundamental Principles and ARCS's mandates through new volunteer capacities on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to all parties to armed conflicts

✓ building neutral, impartial and independent capacities in volunteers and branches to transfer the human remains of those who have died as a result of armed conflict to their relatives

✓ building 45 ARCS clinics, providing basic health services and first aid, and setting up mother and child and adolescent health centres, mobile health teams and hospitals that can reach people that no other health institution can reach

✓ developing health sub-centres in extremely remote and hard-to-reach areas, supported by partners such as the Norwegian Red Cross and Qatar Red Crescent

✓ expanding and supplementing the Ministry of Health's immunisation and epidemic-control services

✓ training community volunteers to disseminate information to communities on wider health and disaster risks

✓ expanding its first aid programme, established in 1997, to all 34 of the country's provinces, covering 15,000 villages in 302 districts

✓ establishing 'grandmothers' committees' and 'community health committees' (the latter for younger females but often also the elderly) as a means of disseminating ARCS's principles and listening to community voices feedback on the organisation's work

✓ providing free treatment to 26,800 children with congenital heart defects.

ARCS's mission has evolved, with the National Society transforming from a response-focused institution into one that contributes more and more to strengthening community resilience.

> *"ARCS, as auxiliary to the public authorities, will provide timely humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people, especially during natural and human-made disasters and other emergencies, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and other relevant bodies of laws, and to disseminate information on International Humanitarian Law; strengthening a culture of peace in communities".*
>
> Mission of ARCS, Strategic Plan 2021-2025

In a country where the health system has been severely weakened by 40 years of conflict, ARCS clinics and mobile health teams (MHTs) have provided essential localised services, enabling communities to access primary health services.

ARCS's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was a turning point in expanding the organisation's work. External organisations such as the Afghan National Disaster Management Agency, UN organisations and others were invited to share vulnerability analyses and

*Helping to bring relief to the most vulnerable, Afghan Red Crescent teams conduct community assessments ahead of food distributions in drought-hit Bayman Province, west of Kabul.*

identify key niches for ARCS to fill with its auxiliary role. Its NSD and humanitarian priorities changed to include:

→ coordinating with government, all parties to the conflict, and other agencies through dissemination of messages and briefings to strengthen ARCS's auxiliary role and the shared understanding of the Fundamental Principles

→ reaching populations affected by conflict, disasters, economic hardship and climate change

→ expanding work into communities, and with internally displaced and socially excluded people, living in areas where no other humanitarian organisation can reach, through safer access programming.

→ reaching communities facing natural disasters without early-warning systems, who require first aid

→ strengthening ARCS's legal base and understanding of it, both internally and externally

→ strengthening ARCS's auxiliary responsibility for 5 Marastoons (homes for destitute, often war-affected, widows and their families) whose residents were traumatised and made destitute war widows with children by the conflict.

The numbers of people reached by ARCS as a result of sustained NSD investments in local capacities and structures are extraordinary. Between 2016-2020 it provided 17,732,134 services to people through its 46 basic health centres, 22 health sub-centres, 71 MHTs, one hospital, and more than 20,000 trained community health volunteers. It treated over 7,000 patients with a congenital heart defect, and continued working in all 34 provinces, including in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas. During the same period, ARCS's national and branch Disaster Response Teams reached 1,470,863 people with life-saving support including food, cash assistance and other essentials, as well as with long-term conflict- and natural-disaster risk reduction and preparedness operations. The key NSD investments that contributed to such principled and expanded reach and impact between 2011 and 2023 included:

✓ undertaking ICRC's Safer Access Framework (SAF) assessment for strengthening safety and security systems (see section 5 for more details)

✓ recruiting and training community-based volunteers to strengthen community risk reduction

✓ contributing to more analytical data management and monitoring in insecure areas, including through digital tools

✓ building humanitarian diplomacy skills in branch personnel, so they can better understand ARCS's neutral, impartial and independent role when they work with local government agencies and other parties on disaster preparedness

✓ dissemination on ARCS's auxiliary roles to ensure that local ARCS personnel, emergency management teams, community leaders, local officials and the public react promptly

✓ updating resource inventories and local action plans, and strengthening public alert mechanisms

✓ building local staff and volunteer capacities to deliver psychosocial support to people traumatised by conflict or disaster.

To strengthen the above processes, ARCS used a wide range of vulnerability, risk and capacity assessment tools. These included the Disaster Response Capacity Enhancement (DRCE)[34] exercise supported by the Canadian Red Cross.

*"ARCS used DRCE to look at how it could remain true to the Fundamental Principles in conflict-sensitive environments. Its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian credentials were already evident – for example by working in hard-to-reach areas. It didn't have to isolate conflict-sensitivity from its other work as it came naturally."*

IFRC



*An Afghan Red Crescent Mobile Health Team visits a community outside Kandahar. With their long history of supporting rural communities, ARCS's mobile clinics continue to provide critical healthcare and lifesaving treatment for children and women in regional and remote areas of Afghanistan.*

---

34 The Canadian Red Cross's Disaster Response Capacity Enhancement (DRCE) exercise helps to evaluate a National Society's preparedness and response capacity and agree follow-up actions

DRCE contributed to ARCS's new focus on involving the community more and understanding their needs through branch-development initiatives.

> *"We are now providing support with the help of the ICRC to 16 branches in sensitive conflict areas, in particular through community-based first aid. We have trained about 11,000 volunteers in first aid. The International Federation, within a wholesale Movement approach, continues to support the remaining branches. This network is perceived as a key element of ongoing efforts to ensure that the entire Movement has access to as broad a territory as possible, while providing an invaluable humanitarian service."*
>
> Ms Fatima Gailani, president of ARCS 2004-2016

Several ARCS processes and tools are designed to deepen localised risk assessment and first response capacities during disasters and conflicts. More integrated NSD activities within disaster management programmes can be seen in the ARCS 2008-2012 Disaster Management Strategy. It included the need for NSD investments such as:

→ strengthening branch disaster-response capacity, including providing response equipment and volunteer training

→ delivering community-based disaster preparedness training, which resulted in volunteers creating community multi-sectoral hazard mapping, and early warning system development

→ strengthening the disaster management knowledge of staff and volunteers in needs assessment of affected populations

→ applying the Code of Conduct to strengthen neutral, impartial and independent positioning and behaviours of all ARCS internal stakeholders

→ increasing community dissemination, awareness and resource mobilisation to sustain local capacities for neutral, impartial and independent local humanitarian services

→ increasing capacities of communities for developing plans of action and implementation.

ARCS's Strengthening Emergency Relief and Disaster Response Capacity of the Afghanistan Red Crescent Society (SERDRC) project was established in cooperation with Canadian Red Cross, the Global Affairs Canada (DFAIT) and IFRC. It established a baseline for ARCS core capacities. Technical support from the Canadian Red Cross in Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting and Gender and Diversity introduced innovative data collection methods and analysis that enhanced the gender mainstreaming activities and the project's outcomes. The Canadian Red Cross programme team also transferred program management skills to their ARCS counterparts and established a Programme Management Unit (PMU) which finally also strengthened ARCS' COVID-19 response. The PER therefore provided a unifying framework, which took account of a variety of other Movement self-assessment processes, such as OCAC. It offered a structured and standardised way of interacting with National Society systems and processes.

The IFRC's Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) exercise of 2018 had a major impact on ARCS. Although it wasn't specifically adjusted to conflict-sensitive environments, it helped to identify and address branch needs in conflict-affected contexts. The national BOCA report and analysis prompted the strengthening of volunteer networking, membership development and advocacy skills to improve communication with community leaders and combatants.

Conflict-related displacement has been a specific focus for ARCS. It has assisted thousands of internally displaced families and worked with communities in close coordination with all involved groups, agencies and authorities to offer shelter, medication and livelihood support. NSD investments in ARCS's restoring family links work with ICRC helped support displaced families separated by conflict and disasters.

ARCS used other support on its quest to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of people affected by conflict. This included the Red Ready[35] programme in 2018 – supported by the American Red Cross, IFRC and OFDA/USAID (now BHA/USAID) – which aimed to increase capacity, preparedness and resilience of Branches and their communities through NSD interventions. ARCS also used the IFRC's Preparedness for Emergency Response (PER) approach in 2017 to set baselines, and used the DRCE responses in 2019 to track progress. PER aims to "enable NSs [National Societies] to fulfil their auxiliary role, in line with the RCRC Fundamental Principles, by strengthening local preparedness capacities to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance to prevent and alleviate suffering. (ARCS HQ director).

---

35  In 2018, the American Red Cross and the IFRC developed a proposal for the then OFDA/USAID (now BHA/USAID) to increase the capacity, readiness and resilience of nine RCRC National Societies in East Asia and the Pacific. The aim of the initiative was to "support National Society Development in strengthening response preparedness capacity". The initiative recognised NSD – and NS preparedness – as a key element for effective local action.

# 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

ARCS's consistent NSD investments in volunteers and young people have led to strong local access and acceptance.

> *"ARCS's volunteers were known and trusted by combatants from both sides as they were permanent parts of their communities. Prior to 1997, people didn't know much about ARCS, only its Marastoon services. But after it expanded its community-based services, people understood ARCS as a special national humanitarian organisation helping people neutrally, impartially and independently. It was known to choose its volunteers in accordance with criteria such as not being affiliated with politics, having good acceptance and reputation in the community, and being from diverse parts of the community."*
>
> Partner National Society

Its NSD investments included:

- ✓ adopting a series of volunteering and youth policies
- ✓ volunteer management workshops/trainings
- ✓ basic training courses for volunteers
- ✓ a Volunteers Investment Value Audit (VIVA) case study in 2015 showcasing the role that ARCS volunteers play in dead body management and human remains transfer programmes
- ✓ developing a digital youth and volunteer management platform to be finalised in 2024.

Under its community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP) programme, ARCS provided training to community volunteers to:

- ✓ conduct small-scale disaster mitigation activities
- ✓ draw up their own preparedness plans
- ✓ suggest ways of improving the community's long-term coordination with government and non-government groups and organisations.

Communities living in vulnerable areas drew up their own hazards and vulnerability assessment and mapping exercises with ARCS support.

ARCS has used IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance Scheme to increase support for those killed or injured in the line of duty. In 2014, ARCS's Safety and Security Department worked with ICRC's Cooperation and Security Advisor to customise and undertake a six-month risk assessment exercise as part of the wider Preparedness for Response project. The assessment made the following important recommendations that required further NSD investments. These also formed the structure of a new ARCS Security Management Framework.



*Kabul, Afghanistan, 31 May 2021: Patients and staff at the ARCS COVID-19 hospital in Kabul. The fully equipped facility enhanced hospital capacity in this city of 6 million. Red Crescent health facilities were incorporated in the pandemic response, providing screening and referral systems in some of the hardest-to-reach and least safe areas. More than 670,000 people were screened through Red Crescent mobile teams and clinics.*

- ARCS should develop a policy and guidelines on safety and security for staff and volunteers
- Field trip guidelines should cover the use of emblems, logos, vehicles, and notification and contact protocols
- All 34 branches and seven regional offices should be equipped with a radio
- Criteria for selecting neutral, impartial and independent volunteers from communities should be disseminated to the branches
- Intensify dissemination of the Fundamental Principles and ARCS emblem to all branch staff and volunteers
- Increase Safer Access promotion sessions in the field
- Provide psychological support to volunteers operating in and affected by disaster- and conflict-related contexts.

Although ARCS attempted to continue to strengthen a centralised approach to volunteering standards, most of the support it received from partners did not help it make specific adjustments to the needs of volunteers in highly conflict-affected contexts. The Swedish Red Cross Volunteering in Conflict and Emergencies project and the IFRC's Stay Safe guidelines helped ARCS rethink its volunteer safety and security approaches. However, the only specific tool that it found useful was ICRC's SAF approach.

Although ARCS's SAF journey started as far back as 2005, it initiated a serious review of its safer access capabilities in 2016. In that year, a large number of training sessions on safer access were initiated with ICRC to help ARCS staff and volunteers analyse and minimise risk in conflict-affected areas. The first ARCS SAF was followed by progress reviews in August 2018 and November 2022. An ARCS SAF plan of action has been implemented through NSD investments to:

→ strengthen organisational positioning
→ minimise risk in conflict-sensitive contexts
→ achieve acceptance and access as a result of analysing and mitigating risks
→ adhere to the Fundamental Principles in all actions
→ ensure safety and security across the organisation.

The implementation of the plan of action's recommendations led to NSD investments in:

✓ **establishing an ARCS SAF Steering Committee** chaired by the ARCS under-secretary general and comprising key internal directorates of disaster management, health, youth and volunteers, legal, safety and security, HR, branch development, PMER, and international relations, with the participation of ICRC and IFRC
✓ **creating a Security Management Framework** to ensure the organisational policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans and regulations are in place – supported by a Norwegian Red Cross delegate to assist in a phased development process
✓ **promoting the ARCS Safety and Security Unit to a Directorate** at ARCS HQ with 16 national staff
✓ **conducing safety and security sensitisation** programmes at all levels of ARCS
✓ **establishing SOPs** for context and risk assessment, including training; a critical incident management plan; post-critical-incident debriefing and staff-care plan; reporting security incidents procedure; a networking framework; checkpoint behaviour; an emergency lockdown plan; and access management at ARCS sites
✓ **recruiting safety and security officers** in seven regional offices and 34 provincial branches.

The impact was immediate. Between 2019-2021, ARCS was the only organisation in Afghanistan able to send trucks of humanitarian supplies all over the country.

*"Since the change of government in August 2021 and the change in leadership levels across ARCS, many new leaders didn't know of the Fundamental Principles or SAF. We launched immediate orientations into ARCS, its Fundamental Principles and mandates, followed by refreshed SAF trainings at all levels. During the change of government in August 2021 and the establishment of the IEA authorities, all ARCS staff, volunteers and assets were saved and not touched. A very few ARCS clinics were found not to be displaying ARCS's logo and 'No weapons' signs prominently. We addressed this during the implementation of our refreshed checklists. The strengthened culture of security and safety among the staff and volunteers throughout the ARCS led to a dramatic decrease of incidents (with no incidents reported in 2022)."*

ARCS HQ manager

The subsequent follow-up SAF review in November 2022 led to further NSD investments in:

- ✓ the provision of insurance for 5,000 young people and volunteers through IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance System
- ✓ stay safe courses for volunteers
- ✓ safer access training for branches most affected by conflict and conflict-sensitive contexts, supported by annual national SAF plans of action
- ✓ psychosocial training for young people and volunteers through ARCS's regional offices
- ✓ developing and disseminating a code of conduct for, and to be signed by, young people and volunteers.

Over the years, ARCS's Dissemination and Communications Team has worked tirelessly through NSD investments to devise, develop and adapt dissemination and communications mechanisms to ensure the general population, combatants, and government and social institutions recognise and adhere to its neutral, impartial and independent positioning.

*"The ARCS emblem identifies its volunteers, staff and assets in areas in conflict between different armed forces and groups. It prevents their misunderstanding of ARCS's roles and attacks on ARCS's volunteers, staff and belongings, so that armed groups don't stop volunteer-based humanitarian activities. This emblem is an indication of neutral and impartial assistance to the victims of armed conflicts and people affected by disasters."*

ARCS – Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan information leaflet

Supported by ICRC, IFRC and a range of Movement partners, ARC's variety of past and present dissemination mechanisms have included:

- → ARCS's local Dissemination Teams providing village-level orientation on the Emblem, the FundamentalPrinciples, and its mandates and services, especially before, during and after conflict
- → building capacities for Restoring Family Links (RFL) with ICRC support, including an RFL assessment in 2019 to evaluate and strengthen services
- → building capacity in its national spokespeople to reinforce its neutral, impartial and independent position through mainstream digital and print-media channels
- → a biweekly ARCS newsletter in four languages covering its humanitarian services and achievements
- → posting messages and examples of its humanitarian work on social media in five languages
- → exploring Twitter as a means of communicating internationally with international donors and media to emphasise its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian messages and work.



*In Faryab province, photo of ARCS staff and volunteers assisting one of the beneficiaries after receiving cash assistance. 10/02/2021*



*In Faryab Province, the ARCS staff and volunteers can be seen providing cash vouchers to the beneficiaries. 10/02/2021*

# 5.   Strengthening 'legacy'

ARCS has become known for its localised and customised services to Afghanistan's most marginalised communities. In 2008, with approximately 3 million returnees and over 1.3 million IDPs in the country, it played visible roles in identifying the needs and vulnerabilities of these groups. It developed appropriate assistance projects in coordination with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other key Movement partners. Its NSD investments led to principled capacities that are sought-after today – with UN and government organisations asking ARCS for volunteers to help register returnees from Pakistan.

However, the change of government in 2021, and the ensuing more stable security situation across the country, bring dangers too. ARCS now faces an important phase of consolidating community acceptance and awareness of its neutrality, impartiality and independence, particularly as its services are now less high-profile than they were during conflict.

> *"It is usually taken for granted that people see us as a principled organisation. But people may forget the 'how to do that' and how to make a proper distinction between merely action and principled action. When there was active conflict in our country, the whole Movement was very cautious about the quality of our neutral, impartial and independent services as the safety of our volunteers and staff depended on it. Now is the time that we need to invest more in reminding people of our values and Principles, and separate our reaching out to everyone from targeting the most vulnerable and marginalised and meeting their needs first. Being neutral can more easily be understood as how to have relationships with the authorities and all parties. But impartiality is the practice of serving the most needy, and the needs of the general population get blurred in peaceful times. We have to be even more careful not to be influenced by others, and to work using our independent surveys, analysis of the most vulnerable, and neutral, impartial and independent assistance."*
>
> Dr Mohammad Nabi Burhan, secretary general of ARCS

# 6.   Strengthening 'reputation'

ARCS has maintained its neutrality, impartiality and independence through a wide range of national-level MOUs signed with consecutive governments over the decades. These include the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Education, Finance and Telecommunications amongst others. ARCS also maintained a clear understanding with the Taliban and other parties to the conflict.

> *"Our strong auxiliary role, further clarified in our revised ARCS Law of 2016, resulted in successive governments issuing instructions to all ministries and directorates to respect ARCS's mandate and expedite whatever official work and support it needed from customs, airports, Ministry of Interior permissions etc. Our foreign funding sources have never been challenged by parties to the conflict either. For example, in the past, our ARCS clinics in Kunduz and Khost under Taliban-held territory were funded by Qatar Red Crescent but later transferred to Norwegian Red Cross support. Although we were not strong in the media at that time, our actions proved we were neutral and impartial. On another occasion, a past acting president was passing through an active battle between Taliban and government forces, and at the local branch's request to the commanders of both parties, the conflict stopped to let him pass. After he passed successfully, the battle continued."*
>
> ARCS HQ senior director

Its NSD investments in expanded auxiliary services through strengthened volunteers and branches also won the respect of all parties to the conflict, as well as of local communities. To maintain its neutrality, impartiality and independence, ARCS had never used its auxiliary role and ARCS law to be part of the Afghan government's budgets. In the highly charged conflict-affected context in the months leading up to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) withdrawal from March 2021, ARCS responded by delivering neutral and impartial services. These included its Human Remains Transportation Programme (HRTP), which transferred dead bodies to both parties of the conflict. The retrieval of sometimes hundreds of bodies per day strengthened appreciation of ARCS's positioning among commanders and combatants on both sides.



*The dissemination officer for the ARCS Daykundi branch can be seen in the photo providing information to the community about ARCS and its goals. 20/12/2021*

> *"The humanitarian impact of the NSD investments that had built strong Mobile Health Teams (MHTs) over the years could be seen visibly. ARCS delivered its services without any impediment and MHTs were one of the indicators. Sometimes suspended during active combat hostilities, ARCS used 'access negotiators' to clarify misunderstandings. For example, it turned out that one complaint about sexual misconduct arose from the reality of doctors and nurses sitting in the same vehicles. The solution was to have men and women segregated in the front and behind seats. Neither party to the conflict would ever suspend their hostilities for more than a week."*
>
> IFRC

Following the change in public authorities in August 2021 onwards, ARCS's new leadership committed to continue strengthening HQ and branch staff and volunteer knowledge and skills in humanitarian diplomacy, partnership development, and innovative resource mobilisation at all levels.

> *"In recognition of our importance as a neutral, impartial and independent national organisation, in May 2023 the Afghan prime minister made a personal public announcement encouraging all IEA and other institutions in the country, as well as the people of Afghanistan, to donate to ARCS during its 'Special Week' to support its widely respected humanitarian services."*
>
> ARCS HQ senior director

Its commitments to protection, gender and social inclusion in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 have acted as a focus on the needs of women, young people, IDPs and returnees. In 2023, ARCS distributed emergency cash grants to more than 24,000 women-headed households. It also provided vocational training for women and improved their income-generating capacities in a context where other women's vocational training centres have been closed. ARCS's NSD investments included:

→ focusing on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, socio-economic integration and enhancing social cohesion through livelihood interventions, supporting both displaced and host communities, including in hard-to-reach areas

→ using its widespread local presence through its volunteers, youth members, and local services to build community trust, understanding and support

→ expanding IFRC's "Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC)[36] programme" with Danish Red Cross support to promote tolerance, co-existence and a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination

→ using its 31 youth clubs as a base for promoting peace and friendship, providing free education and computer access to non-school attendees, and demonstrating to parents and communities its neutrality, impartiality and independence

→ ensuring its consistent values of socially inclusive youth and volunteer engagement, education, women's empowerment, and equal access to ARCS's services promoted tolerance, a culture of non-discrimination, non-violence and peace.

After 40 years of war, supporting the large percentage of the population who have experienced trauma is another key ARCS target. ARCS has focused on NSD investments that include scaling up psychosocial support (PSS) through volunteers and staff, with the support of the Danish and Norwegian Red Cross, ICRC and IFRC. In 2019, ARCS mainstreamed PSS through a new dedicated PSS structure within its health department. PSS activities expanded, including the training of trainers and master trainers on PSS understanding and skills across ARCS facilities and community volunteers, and the establishment of a nationwide PSS hotline.

> *"People in communities know ARCS and how we are working. Once they know us, it's easy to gain access to communities, and mobilise volunteers even in conflict-affected areas, as community volunteers are already in contact with local commanders of armed groups."*
>
> ARCS HQ senior director

ARCS has drawn on further strategic and technical support for its clinics from the Norwegian Red Cross, with a focus on gender-based violence and improved reporting. Canadian Red Cross technical coordination extended support to ARCS's regular MHTs, with a focus on more structured community engagement,

accountability and gender-sensitive approaches. Thanks to NSD investments in training volunteers and expanding branch services, ARCS has been able to:

→ gain access and acceptance in some of the communities most affected by conflict

→ expand volunteer coverage, recruitment and integrated training modules on the Movement's history and Fundamental Principles, roles and mandates, emblems, volunteer roles and definitions, Code of Conduct, first aid and health-related topics.

# 7. Strengthening 'integrity'

In 2016, ARCS successfully updated its ARCS law. An accompanying NSD investment in a refreshed set of statutes included regulations on who could be an ARCS member, and the description of profiles that would be non-political, trusted by local communities as neutral and impartial, and represent the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the wider population. To protect ARCS from potential threats to its neutral, impartial and independent positioning, its new leadership, appointed in August 2021, has reinvigorated a long-term localisation process through re-establishing provincial assemblies. These aim to increase ARCS's accountability to its members and the communities they come from. The vision of strengthening ARCS's community base includes:

✓ mobilising five volunteers in each of the country's 54,000 villages (including local influential elders and leaders, including two women)

✓ training more community-based volunteers from vulnerable and violence-affected communities

✓ expanding their skills and roles in gathering information on local vulnerability and community needs

✓ forming first-response teams in local disasters and crises

✓ having a better balance of women and men, with two women out of every five volunteers in each village.

ARCS senior leadership's vision is to transition to a mixed elected/selected governance model, in which the above village volunteer groups elect representatives to attend 34 provincial assemblies. These in turn will elect individuals to represent the province in a national assembly, which will eventually propose the new leadership of ARCS. The final profiles of governance may be a mix of elected/selected individuals to ensure the Fundamental Principles of the National Society are respected by all those in national leadership positions.

ARCS's NSD investments in strengthening transparency and accountability have drawn on partner support. These include ICRC's "Due Diligence Assessment", IFRC and Norwegian Red Cross's support for strengthening financial capacities and systems, Danish Red Cross Regional HR Development and support from IFRC's Regional NSD Unit in Kuala Lumpur.

ARCS's organisational culture is founded on systems that ensure that even if its personnel change, its programmes and services continue. With the strength of neutral, impartial and independent values in its diverse volunteer and staff base, new people are gradually absorbed into its organisational culture.

IFRC continues to support ARCS's communications and resource mobilisation in emergencies, including through digital fundraising, as well as a domestic surge mechanism. ARCS has also scaled up cash- and voucher-based assistance as a pivotal component of its DRM strategy to enable ARCS's 34 branches to deliver a cash-based response.

# 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

ARCS has a Movement Coordination Agreement (MCA) with IFRC and ICRC. It involves regular coordination meetings at leadership level, including tripartite strategic meetings to discuss and/or address security and

political issues and operational challenges, as well as cooperation issues of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in Afghanistan. The MCA will be updated in mid-2024 to align with the new Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville agreement 2.0), giving a central position to ARCS and co-convenor role to IFRC or ICRC once the assessment is finalised.

ARCS has also developed a succession of 'NSD plans' and strategies to strengthen the coordinated support it receives from multiple partners for its own NSD priorities as set out in its strategic plans. In 2023, it launched its latest National Society Development Initiative (NSDI) with technical working groups tasked by ARCS's senior leadership with:

> →  refreshing existing ARCS policies
> →  defining new standards and targets in all areas of NSD work
> →  monitoring and reporting back on the results as a contribution to more transparent, effective and efficient services.

## 9.   Lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in complex and fragile environments

*"Transformation processes take between 10-15 years and are based on a stable succession of principled leaders."*
Partner National Society

ARCS's prioritised NSD strategies and investments have put it in a unique position to respond to the needs of individuals and populations and enhance their resilience in times of conflict as well as peace. The characteristics that distinguish ARCS from other civil society and non-governmental organisations are based on a range of NSD investments and outcomes over the past two decades, including:

having a strong and regularly updated legal base of an ARCS law and statutes that confirm its neutral, impartial and independent auxiliary status, and auxiliary roles in providing services

having strong and principled senior leadership that conducted humanitarian diplomacy to safeguard and refresh evolving auxiliary roles with public authorities at all levels

remaining positioned as completely neutral and free of political considerations

strengthening volunteering capacities to help it transition from a response-only organisation to one that better involves and empowers vulnerable people in their own communities

being trusted by all stakeholders as principled first responders

positioning itself as a promoter of social inclusion, community cohesion and peace

mobilising consistent and significant domestic income for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian services

having long-term support from partners to enhance its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian and developmental services across the country and in all territories held by conflicting groups

using strategic NSD investments to implement the Fundamental Principles

maintaining a vision of localisation, in keeping with the 'Grand Bargain' commitments, through the strategic positioning of local assets and decentralised services (such as health clinics, disaster warehouses, and prepositioned stocks)

increasing opportunities for community engagement, consultation, involvement and accountability

onboarding new personnel, leaders and volunteers to ensure a changing human resource base fully maintained allegiance to its Fundamental Principles and auxiliary role and independence

strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination, which resulted in stronger and more coherent delivery of the 'Red Pillar' footprint and services in country.
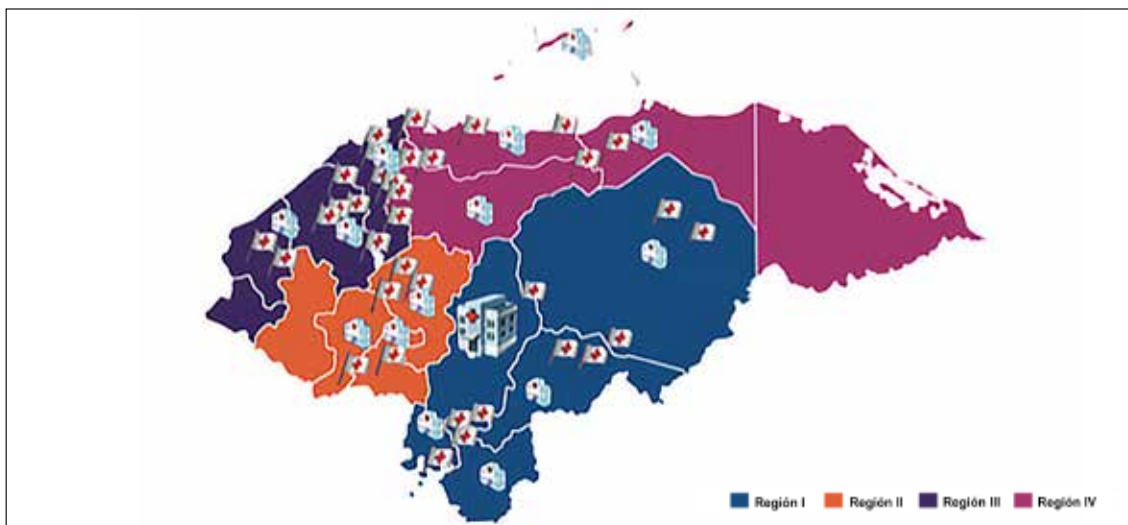
# HONDURAN RED CROSS SOCIETY
## Impartiality in humanitarian action

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

# 1. Introduction



> *"Our transformation journey was planned. With senior leadership continuity at president and vice-president level, we could manage a strategic mix of refreshment, change and continuity. Set against the goals of IFRC's strategy 2020-2030, and our regional commitments, we developed strategic plans to set objectives and monitor progress. It was necessary to be honest and analyse the context to help strengthen our local impact across the nation."*
>
> Jose Juan Castro, Honduran Red Cross president

After the election of a new president and the appointment of new senior governance and management staff, the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) accelerated a longer-term transformation process that began in 2012.

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere and its poverty rates have been rising sharply. Economic turmoil, climate change, forced displacement and a rising tide of violent crime linked to organised groups[37] and drug-trafficking necessitated a change of organisational direction at the HRC. To remain relevant and have access to and acceptance in a growing number of communities that other organisations could not reach it needed to transform itself. It needed to find new ways to be prepared – and to prepare communities – to respond political crises, social violence, natural disasters, and gender inequalities.

Its latest phase of transformation focused on NSD investments that would enhance its status as a relevant, trusted, principled, accountable and localised actor.

> *"The humanitarian consequences generated by crises, emergencies and disasters, violence, migration and forced displacement, as well as epidemics, pandemics, climate variability and change, have affected the conditions and quality of life."*
>
> Honduran Red Cross, National Development Plan 2021-2025

The government of Honduras has lacked the resources to make a significant difference to its population's quality of life. HRC's NSD investments have enabled the organisation to start filling that void, expanded its human, technical and financial capacities, as well as the number of marginalised and socially isolated communities it could reach. The HRC has become the country's lead organisation on crisis and disaster response, community health, social development, and violence prevention.

Violence is rife in Honduras, affecting large sections of the population. In response, since 2002, the HRC has been involved in several violence-prevention programmes. From the beginning, these programmes have involved humanitarian diplomacy to influence policy as a precursor to later social inclusion work.

---

Cruz Roja
Hondureña

To adapt and survive as a local, trusted, neutral, impartial and independent actor in communities facing extreme hardship, violence and social inequality, the HRC focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation and integrity.**

# 2.   Humanitarian context

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. Vulnerable to the impact of climate change, it is frequently hit by hurricanes, tropical storms, floods, drought and landslides. Poverty rates have jumped. Of the country's more than 10 million people, 73% were living in poverty in 2022, compared with 59.3% in 2018.[38] The numbers living in extreme poverty rocketed from 36.7% to 53% over the same period.

Classified as a high-risk country by humanitarian risk-analysis forum INFORM[39], Honduras faces growing inequality, driven by gender, ethno-racial, territorial and social inequalities, which contribute to differences in income levels and access to basic services. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the devastation caused by tropical storms Eta and Iota in 2020, deepened socioeconomic and gender inequalities. They also fuelled violence, food insecurity and displacement. Although generally politically stable, Honduras was the scene of a coup d'état in 2009, sparking a constitutional crisis and lingering political tensions, evident during the protests of the 2017 elections.

Marginalised urban neighbourhoods are marred by high rates of violence linked to organised groups. Weak state law-enforcement institutions and abuses by security forces, including alleged collusion with criminal organisations, have contributed to the persistence of armed violence. Although there has been a slow but steady decline in crime, the homicide rate remains at nearly 36 per 100,000 people – one of the highest in the world. Armed groups often use sexual violence – between 2005 and 2013 violent deaths of women increased by 263.4%,[40] and many girls are trafficked or forced into prostitution.

# 3.   Strengthening 'proximity'

To deepen its acceptance in and access to communities, HRC's NSD investments aimed to increase opportunities for locally-led humanitarian action, and thereby increase 'localisation'. This involved:

→   strengthening branches
→   training and mobilising more community-based volunteers from communities affected by disasters
→   expanding the number of technical staff and their skills
→   developing new institutional policies
→   reaching new audiences through the country's media, private enterprises and educational institutions
→   using neutral, impartial and non-judgemental language such as 'armed' or 'organised' groups.

*"The strength of a National Society is in localisation. It is our goal to strengthen the capacity of every branch in the country down to the weakest so that they serve the most vulnerable. We realised we were too centralised to help local impact. Using our statutes-revision process, we decided to go for four regions to decentralise decisions, and to invest more in our personnel, infrastructure and communications. It has taken us 10 years to make the change, with targets being unified in the national development plans."*

Jose Juan Castro, HRC president



*Volunteers meeting to celebrate First Aid Day in Colinas, Santa Bárbara, 2015*

38   National Institute of Statistics of Honduras (INE), 2022
39   *https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index*
40   UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

The HRC realised it was not enough to remain merely a reliable first responder. It needed to become a permanent presence and source of positive social mobilisation in communities across the country. It needed to promote community resilience and local preparedness, and simultaneously help build a culture of social inclusion, non-violence and peace.

HRC's NSD investments led to early gains. They began to address gender-based and youth-based violence, within a wider approach to strengthening local capacities to prepare for and respond to disasters, health crises and violence. With technical and financial support from the Spanish Red Cross,[41] the HRC implemented the Regional Violence Prevention Strategy (ERPV). By the end of 2011, its outcomes included:

> →  12 educational centres implementing the Safe School modules
> →  negotiations with government agencies to jointly implement programmes to improve communities' response capacities
> →  enhanced training for volunteers and populations in at-risk areas.

By 2014, the HRC had accumulated 10 years of experience in violence prevention. A regional report on violence prevention, mitigation and response highlighted that 80% of HRC projects had focused on violence prevention, 50% on mitigation, 40% on response and 12% on the humanitarian consequences of violence (e.g. providing communities with first responder first aid). The report highlighted several gains from HRC's NSD investments.

**HRC's focus areas included:**
- ✓ the integrated development of communities
- ✓ opening safe humanitarian spaces
- ✓ migration assistance
- ✓ promoting 'friendly neighbourhoods'
- ✓ expanding economic opportunities for young people
- ✓ contributing to a Regional Americas Strategy on Violence Prevention

**Schools and educational institutions – good practices:**
- ✓ safe behaviours – identifying risks of armed violence and developing emergency plans
- ✓ using schools as neutral space to open dialogue on armed violence
- ✓ raising awareness about violence, rights, laws and safety messages
- ✓ developing policies and systems to prevent and respond to violence, disciplinary code, and referrals
- ✓ occupational and social skills programmes for young people who've dropped out of school
- ✓ school brigades, and prevention and emergency teams trained in leadership, conflict resolution and peace building
- ✓ co-designing with the Ministry of Education a curriculum on humanitarian values, dignity, discrimination, diversity and conflict resolution.

HRC's senior leadership blended these findings with other organisational self-assessment exercises. These included OCAC (in 2013 and 2019), BOCA, DRCE, PER, and SAF as the foundations of an organisation-wide change process. The HRC took conscious steps to improve its organisational effectiveness and preparedness to serve communities increasingly affected by various forms of violence.



*First aid training drill to strengthen staff capacities at an international airport, Comayagua, 2021*

41  This strategy started in 2008 as the Regional Violence Prevention Strategy (ERPV) aimed at preventing, from a development approach, all forms of violence, intolerance and discrimination towards people in the region of Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

# 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

Since 2011, initially supported by the Spanish, Swiss and Canadian Red Cross Societies, the HRC has maintained volunteering focal points in branches. HRC's IT department also created and implemented a virtual unified database – called SISTAH – for the registration, monitoring and analysis of its human resources in every branch.

The National Society's focus on young people as agents of change has a long tradition. It launched an intensive training programme for Youth Red Cross leaders in 2011. In 2018, the HRC developed and implemented its national version of the IFRC's Youth Engagement Strategy. And after a visit from the IFRC's Global Youth Commission, it conducted a self-assessment of its youth policy and strategy, followed by a 'training of trainers' to intensify its work on 'Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change' (YABC).

The HRC also prioritised strengthening safety and security systems to protect volunteers and young people. The political tension and violence caused by the country's 2009 crisis intensified HRC's approach to improving the management and protection of volunteers.

> *"This high rotation of volunteers – sometimes within two years – led to a shorter lifespan of a volunteer and the need to speed up induction and training processes. We needed to adapt to new mechanisms – such as more flexible access through volunteer apps, better psychosocial support for those working in violence-affected and disaster response situations, protection training, and the need to adapt to the culture of some communities."*
>
> HRC HQ national director

Before the ICRC's SAF assessment and training began in 2012, the HRC was not widely seen as having appropriate risk-assessment capacities to ensure volunteers, young people and staff were protected in violent and unsafe environments. With a lack of standardised toolkits and case studies to improve protection and prevention, work to strengthen the safety and security of volunteers continued but in a more ad hoc 'learning from doing' way.

> *"When visiting community-based sessions in urban communities affected by organised group violence, volunteers came to give services, including sessions on violence prevention while giving first aid training. These processes were a key factor in HRC's work with ICRC to support open access to violence-affected parts of urban centres."*
>
> Partner National Society

However, a large ICRC-funded support programme to strengthen the HRC's governance, educate volunteers and staff about the Movement's history, and provide refresher training on the Fundamental Principles and how they apply to everyday work was stopped abruptly in 2014 without an exit strategy. Several security incidents followed, based on a very short volunteer induction cycle, which the HRC felt was due to the training's curtailment. Meanwhile, IFRC had a one-person presence in Honduras and no capacity to step in to continue the process.

Using tools, IFRC reference documents, and resources from IFRC's Global Volunteering Alliance, the HRC developed its updated Policy and Strategy on Volunteering in 2014. It was aligned with IFRC's Volunteering Policy and global standards, and included new elements such as psychosocial support, networking opportunities between volunteers, strategies for recruiting volunteers from new and diverse groups, and diversifying volunteering actions. Such NSD investments have helped make sure no HRC volunteer has lost their

*Psychosocial support services for boys and girls in Apacilagua, Choluteca, 2023.*

**Cruz Roja Hondureña**

life while on duty. After the political crisis of 2009, Honduras became increasingly insecure. As a result, the HRC strengthened its security and support systems for volunteers and employees. It prioritised NSD investments in:

- ✓ identification (visibility of spaces, vehicles, people)
- ✓ mental health support
- ✓ operational security
- ✓ operational communication (for external target groups)
- ✓ internal communications
- ✓ a solidarity fund for volunteers
- ✓ application for finance from the Maurice de Madre French Fund (FFMM) for volunteers
- ✓ life insurance for employees

The key NSD investments that followed included:

- → **Establishing a security unit** to monitor, analyse and minimise security risks, and give training and guidance to prepare volunteers to work in violence-affected contexts
- → **Monitoring and controlling the social media profiles** and public posts of all volunteers and staff, immediately expelling any volunteers who have posted public material that has undermined the Fundamental Principles
- → **Upgrading the HRC Volunteering Strategy** to include volunteer safety and security training based on SAF, as well as providing appropriate equipment
- → **Establishing a new HRC uniform** – replacing uniforms that resembled those of the military or government, and changing the old red uniforms (the colour of a specific national political party) to white
- → **Increasing clear public recognition** through HRC logos on all assets
- → **Developing and disseminating a stronger HRC Volunteer Guidance Manual** including content covering the types of relations that should be developed with violent groups, the behaviours expected of volunteers, and what actions they should take when threatened or assaulted
- → **Mapping of local communities** and 'contested territories', including access routes
- → **Mobilising volunteers from violence-affected communities** to reduce the risks related to access, while also contributing to local acceptance and access of HRC when required
- → **Investing in GPS and radio-communications infrastructure** nationwide to help staff and volunteers keep safe
- → **Continuous dissemination** of information about the HRC, the RCRC Movement, and its Fundamental Principles
- → **Training on preparedness** for any form of social crisis
- → **Establishing a Movement Contingency Plan** with specific roles for every part of the Movement.

The political tensions during national elections gave the National Society a chance to prepare for any future emergency. After the political crises of 2009 and 2018, HRC staff realised that as a result of the investments, only HRC's ambulances were allowed to enter communities and carry patients. All others were not. The key NSD investments had included:

- ✓ new regulations that established a minimum age of 21 for HRC volunteers in ambulances – preventing the recruitment of young volunteers who might struggle to cope with the challenging situations they were likely to face
- ✓ better selection of volunteers going to specific response situations
- ✓ introducing new structured roles such as team leaders
- ✓ disseminating guidelines and training on respectful behaviour when dealing with police, community leaders, and communities affected by violence.

However, Movement coordination practice and mechanisms proved flawed, with weaknesses including:

- ✗ ICRC being protective of the SAF facilitation and process
- ✗ the HRC feeling unable to share the outcomes of the SAF assessment report, which undermined the ability of wider Movement partners to contribute to a harmonised NSD plan to address the gaps identified
- ✗ the inability of partners to use the highly valuable 'branch by branch' SAF reports in which leaders and volunteers had identified what had hindered further acceptance at local levels for addressing
- ✗ HRC not sharing specific branch SAF reports with wider partners except for ICRC, who would fund the follow-up action plans
- ✗ IFRC's OCAC and BOCA reports not being shared with partners and being seen as internal and confidential documents (ICRC has never received these reports)
- ✗ an inability to draw up an HRC branch development framework and action plan which all partners could collectively contribute NSD resources to.

There has, nevertheless, been a marked improvement in organisational behaviours and competencies at HRC, especially as a result of a 'lessons learned' workshop following the last elections.

> *"There has been a culture change within HRC, with branches feeling confident to talk about risks and perceived humanitarian impact."*
>
> ICRC Cooperation Team

Starting in 2011, the HRC reviewed its institutional training programme, defining a new basic training model with a focus on the Movement's Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values.

> *"In certain communities we didn't talk about 'violence' as an entry point, but rather of places which seemed to have more 'risks'. To establish longer-term trust and confidence, volunteers were trained to make visits during, for example, 'Children's Day'. While explaining about the Red Cross, its Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values, the communities would actually ask for assistance and training. There was a lot of expectation in young people of their chances to be involved in training and capacity building, and the chance to decide what they wanted to be trained in. Whenever our volunteers delivered humanitarian assistance, they got local people to help deliver it as well, spreading our values and principles through such day-to-day actions."*
>
> HRC branch council chairperson

Branches also disseminated information on the Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values through teams of volunteers who had been trained in promotion. On specific dates throughout the year, in fairs in parks or city squares, key messages were promoted about disaster preparedness, community health, non-violence and the culture of peace, respect for the Emblem, and the promotion of humanitarian principles and values. The HRC's NSD investments escalated to address the new opportunities in this expanded space by:



*Pre-hospital care for citizens in Tegucigalpa city, 2016.*

- → encouraging HRC youth volunteers to participate in violence-prevention projects
- → the HRC national youth directorate launching a campaign called Promoting Values in each of the branches, through monthly newsletters and local fairs; the radio programme Youth on the Web; and an exhibit of murals in HRC headquarters
- → implementing the Expanding Opportunities for Adolescents project in Honduran capital Tegucigalpa
- → adapting the 10 steps[42] to take a more immediate and personal perspective, emphasising the role of individual beliefs and behaviour in creating safe environments by strengthening the 'assessing risk' components to reflect more on personal attitudes and behaviours that are often expressed through violence
- → expanding the reach of HRC messages through social media channels.

---

42  The Canadian Red Cross' programme objectives were to build Red Cross capacity to prevent, address, and respond to interpersonal and community violence; use the '10 steps to creating safe environments' approach to integrate policies and practices to prevent violence; and involve multi-level institutional training as well as work with other partners on implementing 10 steps processes into all institutions and programmes.

**Cruz Roja Hondureña**

# 5. Strengthening 'legacy'

> *"HRC's legacy of commitments to expanding community-based health infrastructure since 2008 has given it a strong tradition of access and acceptance in communities. Starting with establishing community-based health committees to identify at-risk new-born till two-year-old babies and offer care to pregnant women as well as mothers and fathers gave rise to the REDES network of community health workers/volunteers."*
>
> Partner National Society

Over 10 years, HRC used integrated NSD investments to build neutral, impartial and independent health services that opened up access and increased acceptance in sensitive and violence-affected communities. This legacy gives it continuing unique access to this day. Its NSD investments included:

- ✓ providing first aid training for common injuries
- ✓ identifying 'safe points' in communities where ambulances could park
- ✓ offering free health treatments
- ✓ increasing access to health services and training health personnel in SAF before home visits
- ✓ training teachers to provide psychological first aid to identify and help people affected by violence
- ✓ training armed forces in first aid and psychological first aid.

> *"When people wanted to steal an ambulance or equipment, the organised groups would return it. Organised groups benefitted from blood and ambulance services recognising that HRC didn't pick sides and remained passionately impartial and neutral."*
>
> HRC branch representative

HRC's journey towards being widely accepted was based on a strong tradition of community-based work. This included its community development work in slums, supported by the Spanish Red Cross, which gave it the credibility to talk about and address violence.

> *"With the support of the Spanish and Norwegian Red Cross, in one community made up of 14 sub-communities we formed leadership groups, did street fairs to encourage people to come out of their homes, and built alliances with doctors and nurses to visit. We worked with the Education Secretariat so that the children from the community would be accepted into the school system who had not been accepted before, or who couldn't cope with the fear of going to school. We took food into the community, had food at community meetings, and even instituted a Red Cross monetary card (like a debit card) so that families could spend up to a certain limit in a grocery store, pay electricity bills. As a result of running programmes such as 'How to Improve our Lives' including activities such as vegetable gardening, we strengthen co-existence and social well-being."*
>
> HRC regional vice-president

This strong reputation as a local actor was supplemented by HRC's trusted blood banks, supplying clinics and hospitals across the country. To build on its growing reputation, the HRC made further organisational changes to prepare it to work in violent contexts. These included:

- → working with ICRC on an Opening Safe Humanitarian Spaces programme in schools located in communities with high levels of violence
- → a joint initiative between the HRC, the Canadian Red Cross, the Norwegian Red Cross, ICRC and IFRC on 'National Society capacities in other situations of violence (OSV)', aimed at preventing violence by linking up SAF with community-based approaches and volunteer mobilisation
- → SAF self-assessments supported by the ICRC, which had been pushing the message of "you can't prevent violence, but you can mitigate and respond to it". With ICRC preferring not to use the term "violence" but "other situations of violence (OSV)" instead, the SAF aimed to strengthen HRC's operational safety and security management practices – but it was initially perceived to be focused on the safety and security of its staff rather than on the wider 'access' components

> → Four consecutive PER assessments in 2015, 2019, 2021 and 2023 confirmed the evolution of HRC's preparedness capacity without referencing violence-sensitive preparedness
> → support from the Canadian Red Cross and ICRC to extending the HRC's Safe Humanitarian Spaces training programmes to 1,000 teachers across the country.

The implementation of recommendations from the above processes, and the specific NSD investments made through a violence-sensitive lens as a result, enabled the HRC to save the lives of volunteers and staff. Something many branch-level leaders and volunteers confirmed:

> *"We were Red Cross volunteers doing health sensitisation work in communities and the organised group members were waiting for the Red Cross vehicle. These organised group members control the roads and extort 'passage fees' to pass. Drivers from other organisations and local bus companies have been pulled out of vehicles and shot because their companies hadn't paid the fees. But the organised group members see we're with the HRC and just want to know where we're going without asking us to pay. Our Red Cross uniform is taken very seriously and contributes to our security."*
>
> HRC branch volunteer

# 6. Strengthening 'reputation'

Apart from a range of national memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Ministries to enable it to play its auxiliary roles, through its NSD investments and regionalisation process, the HRC has succeeded making sure approximately 40% of branches have MOUs with their local authorities. The remaining 60% are managed from HRC headquarters. However, HRC's unique ability to provide over and above what state institutions can offer is always visible to all.

> *"In some communities they say that no one can get in, including ambulances, so people pick up the wounded and take them to a location where they can be picked up. Generally, these communities ask for HRC ambulances, which is why we have so many ambulances in service. We have 53 branches each with ambulance services, but the city-based ones are stronger as communities suffer more from violence there. In a northern city, for example, we prioritised work with communities during wars between organised groups who gave us access between certain hours. The groups would say 'do your service and speak with the people, but come under our rules'."*
>
> HRC HQ national director

To mitigate against the recruitment of young people into organised groups, much of HRC's social inclusion and peace-building work over the subsequent years has focused on school children and young people. The intention is to break the cycle through which they end up being affected by violence. NSD investments included:

> ✓ intensive investments in youth volunteers, and the creation and management of youth services
> ✓ recruiting youth volunteers and helping them to understand their role in HRC
> ✓ creating special roles for youth volunteers in schools, providing prestige and a Red Cross identity, with recognition systems and 'Volunteer of the Year' events to keep them motivated, reducing the potential attraction of joining organised groups
> ✓ training young people on topics such as principles and values; making friends with good values; positive use of free time; and making communities stronger
> ✓ focusing on young people and their environment, providing vocational training to help them avoid unemployment or recruitment into organised groups
> ✓ working with institutions and the Health and Education Ministries and equivalents in municipalities and local authorities who support communities to bridge the generational gap.

**Cruz Roja Hondureña**

NSD investments have increased the numbers of trained volunteers and expanded branch services. The HRC has been able to use these successes to gain greater access and acceptance in some of the communities most affected by violence. The NSD investments included:

✓ expanding volunteer coverage to work with groups expelled from their land and/or repatriated after migrating

✓ building coordination skills to form roundtables and alliances with different organisations

✓ using negotiation and advocacy skills to work with communities so they're more welcoming to returnees, who are often scared to face a backlash when they return

✓ establishing service locations where only the HRC (and not even the police) are able to contact local community and/or organised group leaders and explain HRC intentions to:

o give young people opportunities

o improve the community's infrastructure

o respect the local groups' governance and regulations (e.g. leaving cars and walking into communities)

✓ ensuring that HRC's activities and services are, and are perceived to be, strictly non-political.

# 7. Strengthening 'integrity'

In accordance with its revised statutes of 2015, the HRC made NSD investments that helped mobilise a new generation of volunteers capable of stepping up to the role of board governors. To demonstrate they can implement the Fundamental Principles, volunteers have to serve a minimum of two years as active humanitarian volunteers before being able to become members of HRC and thereby stand for elected roles.

To further consolidate its positioning as a trusted, transparent and accountable national and local organisation, the HRC has revised all its internal policies and Standard Operating Policies (SoPs), helping it expand both its domestic and international partnerships. In some cases this includes receiving direct funding from foreign governments.

# 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

A turning point came in 2014/15 when, faced with overwhelming numbers of partnerships, the HRC paused several initiatives, better articulated its forward journey in its new strategic plan, and managed refreshed partnerships around that agenda.

*"Transformation processes take between 10-15 years and are based on a stable succession of principled leader. HRC took a shared leaders and collective impact approach. Its strategic plans unpacked challenges and identified and delivered on clear targets. It has displayed a deep understanding of a journey towards growth both as a contributor to others, as well as with an ability to understand best practices and learn from experiences."*

Partner National Society



*Health checks for families at a health fair in Nueva Capital, Tegucigalpa, 2022.*



*50th Anniversary of Lifesaving, 2016*

# 9. Conclusions – lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in complex, fragile and violence-affected contexts

HRC's prioritised NSD strategies and investments have resulted in a number of very positive outcomes. These have put it in a unique position to respond to individuals and communities affected by violence and other crises. As a result of its deep and structural NSD investments, the characteristics that distinguish the HRC from other civil society and governmental organisations include:

→ remaining positioned as completely neutral and free of political or religious associations, always independently verifying beneficiary lists received from municipalities during disasters and rejecting names with political ties

→ stable leadership succession, resulting in a strategic blend of experienced and new leadership, and transformation based on lessons learned

→ the strength of its auxiliary roles and relations with the national civil protection system, leading to improved first responder roles and the trust of national and local governments

→ using neutral, impartial and non-judgemental language – such as 'armed' or 'organised' groups instead of 'gangs' – to gain credibility, acceptance and access

→ the implementation of a new system for the recruitment and management of volunteers, with customised training for volunteers on identifying and managing risks in violence-affected contexts

→ the building of 'safe spaces' in communities, accompanied by community education and violence prevention and mitigation programmes

→ actions to support migrant, displaced and refugee populations fleeing violence and insecurity, leading to more work to promote non-violence, social inclusion and peace

→ the prevention of violence through investments in young people as agents of behavioural change

→ strategically positioning local volunteers and assets such as health clinics in hard-to-access communities to provide opportunities for community engagement, information dissemination, consultation, and accountability

→ localisation, in keeping with the 'Grand Bargain' commitments, that built stronger, principled, locally-led humanitarian action through sustained investments in gender-and diversity-sensitive branches and community-based volunteers

→ a reengineered structure made fit for purpose for a changing mission, achieved through NSD investments in regional and local infrastructure that strengthened humanitarian predictability and acceptance

→ an assertive approach to Movement cooperation and coordination in which the HRC met its responsibility to improve organisation-wide standards in accountability, administration and legal mechanisms to transfer resources, capacities and responsibilities to the National Society.



*Volunteers from the Council of Jesús de Otoro, Intibucá in fundraising, 2022*



*Blood donation program, 2022*

# 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. Introduction



> *"Since the socio-political crisis of 2012, despite the enormous efforts made, the living conditions of populations in general, and those in localities affected by conflicts/crises, still 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, the emergence of new diseases, etc. 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

Protracted drought, food insecurity, inter-community violence, multifaceted insecurity, floods, low health coverage and a lack of access to clean water and sanitation have made the Republic of Mali one of the highest risk countries in the world. It ranked 11th out of 191 countries on the Inform Risk Index in 2022.[43]

Mali is landlocked and more than half of its surface area is desert. About 84% of its approximately 21.5 million people live in rural areas, and more than 48% of the population are under 15.

Since 2012, Mali has faced a security crisis that has worsened the country's humanitarian situation. Persistent armed attacks, kidnapping and vehicle theft have posed a threat to humanitarian volunteers and staff working in territories controlled by non-state armed actors. Amid conflict in the north and intercommunal violence, the Croix-Rouge Malienne (CRM, or Malian Red Cross) has worked tirelessly, through a growing number of staff and volunteers, to remain relevant, neutral, impartial and independent.

CRM's consistent NSD investments have strengthened its neutrality, impartiality and independence, as well as its services, helping to foster community acceptance and access founded on the organisation's long-term community presence, reliability and accountability.

> *"The Malian Red Cross 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 Maiga, secretary general, CRM

To adapt itself and survive amid extreme conflict-related pressures, CRM has focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity.**

# 2. Humanitarian context

Extreme climatic events – torrential rains, rising surface water levels and storms – are increasingly frequent in Mali. They have seen rivers dry up, populations displaced, and disease, including malaria, become more prevalent.

In 2012, a rebellion in the north and a military coup plunged Mali into unprecedented political and institutional turmoil, fuelling instability. Independence movements and non-state armed groups clashed, particularly in the tri-border region between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, exacerbating the already alarming levels of food insecurity in some areas. Now Mali is riven by crime, heightened by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the presence of extremely violent armed groups and community-based conflicts. Constraints on humanitarian access in a complex emergency environment has sometimes led to a total lack of infrastructure and basic social services.

More than 400,000 people are internally displaced in Mali, an increase of 30% compared to 2021. Since 2018, a new wave of violence has swept the country, ignited by the resurgence of inter-communal conflicts and renewed attacks by armed groups. This renewed violence has extended into central Mali, forcing thousands more people to flee their homes. The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that, in 2024, 7.1 million people in Mali will need humanitarian assistance (23% of them women and 54% children), and 1.3 million people will be acutely food insecure.

Inequality is high in Mali, depriving particular groups of access to services. The country's gender inequality index is 0.678, ranking it 157 out of 160 countries in the world. In Mali, 45% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence.

# 3. Strengthening 'proximity'

Communities have a high level of trust in CRM's community-based neutral, impartial and independent services, after decades of delivering them close to the most vulnerable people. In this complex and conflict-affected context, CRM's flagship health programmes and services, particularly in maternal and child health, have increased volunteers' health-related capacities in almost all districts. These programme and services have also supported the development of social and sanitary infrastructure. CRM has become known for its flagship first aid programmes throughout Mali. It trains first aid volunteers to help victims of accidents, trauma or disasters, and in referring serious cases to more specialised health providers.

*"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 for their services where appropriate and relevant. Although we need more trained personnel, our regional warehouses have stocks of first aid materials, NFIs [non-food items] and response materials which we can mobilise at short notice after notification by the Operations Department."*

CRM National Headquarters manager



*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.*

From 2012, CRM has been the only organisation to establish camps for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in the most conflict-affected part of the north. CRM's Restoring Family Links services brought it closer to communities than any other organisation.

*"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. 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 annually help approximately 6,000 people make connections with families."*
CRM National Headquarters manager

In the past 10 years, CRM has adapted its organisational structure and services to be present throughout the country. Its NSD investments have enabled it to:

- ✓ conduct periodic assessments through volunteers and staff in collaboration with the community leaders and other stakeholders, identifying the needs of communities
- ✓ improve health access, as per the Universal Health Coverage programme and a commitment to 'leave no one behind' by providing health services targeting people in complex settings
- ✓ support health centre development
- ✓ strengthen networking with other community-based organisations
- ✓ provide predictable, locally acceptable services to communities, especially women, migrants and IDPs, covering sexual and reproductive health, HIV and gender inequality
- ✓ establish community surveillance early warning systems, and health promotion for positive and sustainable behaviour change.

To fulfil its auxiliary roles effectively and supplement and substitute for public humanitarian services, CRM revised its structures to have representation in the 11 regional capitals. In 2024, it has over 300 staff and 8,000 community volunteers across the country. NSD investments strengthened these decentralised structures, with operational regional committees and a network of qualified volunteers to support communities, including those that are difficult to access due to the conflict and logistical constraints.

In Mali, vulnerability and risk assessment capacities need special emphasis. As far back as 2014, in partnership with the Danish and Norwegian Red Cross Societies, CRM developed community-level disaster risk reduction (DRR) and adaptation to climate change (ACC) programmes. In 2015, with the support of the Belgian Red Cross, the Dutch Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross, it initiated an early forecast-based financing (FbF) approach. Developed by the IFRC's Climate Centre to help integrate the Early Warning Early Action model into Red Cross and Red Crescent disaster management, CRM integrated three essential pillars of FbF into its disaster and risk preparedness approaches: forecasts, actions and financial mechanisms. To accompany this, its NSD investments included:

- → setting up disaster response teams for community-based shock and hazard monitoring
- → training community volunteers on disaster risk reduction (rapid needs assessment, humanitarian assistance, first aid, psychosocial care, etc)
- → pre-positioning contingency stocks (non-food items, food, cash, etc)
- → providing conditional and/or restricted cash to support vulnerable households.

Further NSD investments were made in digitisation to improve communications, decentralise fleet structures, and strengthen reporting. As a result, CRM's national headquarters and branches have improved the way they collaborate with the state's administration and technical services. Its regional, local and community-level branches, volunteers from Emergency Brigades, and national and community Disaster Response Teams (NDRT and CDRT) provided neutral, impartial and independent services – ensuring the organisation's continued existence and acceptance.



*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*

In 2024, a tripartite agreement between CRM, the Danish Red Cross and ICRC will see the launch of a Branch Development in Conflict Contexts initiative, as part of a wider global MoU between the Danish Red Cross and ICRC. Based on the success of the pilots in Mopti and Gao, CRM and its partners now plan to extend the initiative to the rest of the regions where Branch Organisational Capacity Assessments (BOCA) have been carried out and action plans developed.

Other NSD investments through CRM's participation in the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership between DG ECHO and IFRC led to further coordinated support to risk reduction approaches. With support from the Danish Red Cross (lead EU National Society), Spanish Red Cross and Luxembourg Red Cross, CRM's capacities have been strengthened in:

→ risk communication
→ DRM
→ epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response
→ humanitarian assistance and protection for people on the move
→ community engagement
→ accountability.

With the support of the British Red Cross, CRM has enhanced its ability to run cash transfer programmes. After two years of assessment, training and the development of tools and practice, CRM is now 'cash ready', and cash accounts for 35% of its service-delivery modalities.

CRM's NSD investments gave it neutral, impartial and independent access and acceptance among remote and highly vulnerable migrant, internally displaced, and refugee communities. This in turn led to principled services that few if any other organisations could offer, such as:

→ setting up 'humanitarian service points' to monitor trends
→ partnership/collaboration agreements with organisations that work with migrants
→ training volunteers in psychosocial care and first aid for migrants and returnees
→ volunteer training on the protection and restoration of family links services for migrants
→ distributing appropriate information to migrants on the services available
→ providing humanitarian assistance (cash, food, shelter kit, hygiene products, transport fees, etc) to migrants and IDPs, either at humanitarian service points or through migrant-support organisations
→ giving migrants medical assistance at humanitarian service points in partnership with health centres
→ developing reintegration programmes for returned migrants through livelihood skills strengthening.

# 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

*"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 Malian Red Cross 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 is able to respond to its mission of auxiliary public services."*

Nouhoum Maiga, secretary general, CRM

CRM has made consistent and long-standing NSD investments in strengthening and diversifying the capacity of its nationwide local principled volunteer and youth base. In 2007, volunteer development was given increased focus with the establishment of a Department for Volunteers and Youth. The new department provided updated orientation sessions, stressing CRM's neutral, impartial and independent positioning. New volunteers received an ID card, technical training in relevant skills and small expenses to help them

conduct their work. They were also given psychosocial support: "When they came back from unsafe places, we took care of them," a CRM branch leader explained.

CRM's NSD investments in volunteer development resulted in a leap in volunteer numbers between 2006 to 2009, rising from 150 to more than 3,000. Today, its expanded network of 8,998 male and female volunteers play a variety of roles, supported by its 310 staff across the country. Despite the dangers of working in conflict zones, volunteers remain trusted in every village and play a vital role in gathering local data. Village chiefs have good relations with volunteers and offer their support.

CRM's long-term NSD investments in youth programming, included:

✓ strengthening youth-focused humanitarian education
✓ promoting Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) across the country
✓ establishing national and branch youth coordinators
✓ developing new strategic partnerships for humanitarian education in collaboration with the 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 all its branch boards. A 'youth session' was held at CRM's General Assembly, which led to the formation of a Youth Committee and the election by youth delegates from around the country of their own president and vice-president.

In 2023, the development of CRM's Youth Policy included working on a unified set of Youth Plans of Action in all regions. The aim was to create youth leaders in their own communities. In February 2024, CRM established a separate Youth Department in its headquarters. One objective of CRM is to establish youth programmes in schools and universities, including curriculum topics such as staying safe in dangerous situations, first aid, risk-reduction, and life-saving.

CRM has always made NSD investments to reinforce the security and safety of its staff and volunteers.



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

> *"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 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

To support volunteers in increasingly violent and insecure areas, CRM has worked with ICRC since 2016 on a Safer Access (SAF) approach. In 2017, CRM completed its first SAF assessment, resulting in a Plan of Action to integrate SAF activities/perspectives into all programmes and projects. CRM conducted training in SAF, but fewer sessions than expected due to lack of funding from ICRC. In 2017, a Plan of Action review prioritised three elements for intensive implementation:

→ volunteering development, including the creation of specific focal points
→ security management, including the need for a national security manager
→ 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 within it. In 2024 we hope to review and re-contextualise the next phase of our relationship."*
>
> ICRC

In 2021, CRM recruited a security coordinator at national level, supported by security focal points in all regions. 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. Branches also continue to complain about a lack of investment in infrastructure, which endangers their safety. Without radios, GPS tracking systems, or advanced training for security focal points, there is little chance of implementing safer procedures. Nevertheless, the results of NSD investments to date have clearly led to safer positioning:

> *"In 2018 there was a fire in an IDP camp. 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'. Partners contribute to the fund to support the 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 conflict-related risks, CRM has subscribed to a local complementary insurance policy to supplement that of IFRC.

For years, CRM has prioritised NSD investments that would increase its visibility and public trust through communications and public advocacy.

> *"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 increasing 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 country. Examples include:

> → in 2006, co-hosting training on IHL with ICRC for a number of influential Malian journalists
> → in 2018, as part of a programme to 'Strengthen emergency response capacities in Africa', organising a three-day humanitarian diplomacy (HD) training course for leaders, managers and staff to enable branches to plan HD activities across the territory. The vice-president of the Danish Red Cross supported as a joint trainer
> → from 2023 onwards, its Communications Department developing digital and social media communications. As a result, its Facebook followers increased to 22,000 and its Twitter followers to over 19,000, and agreements to share and communicate its neutral, impartial and independent work were made with over 30 journalists on TV and radio.

## 5.   Strengthening 'legacy'

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 Presidential Ordinance 59 of 28 March 1959. It is an auxiliary of the public authorities and acts independently of them, with an auxiliary status and roles defined by the government of the Republic of Mali by Decree No. 123 of 13 September 1965. Its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is aligned with the government's Economic and Social Development Plan. CRM remains well positioned. It does not receive state funds, although recent attempts have been made to access public authority funds. However, there are concerns amongst the Movement partners about the institutional risks of NS in general having closer ties with the state authorities. These concerns are more pronounced in partners working in conflict-affected contexts.

CRM's positioning as a principled, community-based local and national humanitarian actor has solidified since a chronic drought, with five acute phases, between 1980 and 2010. One of its long-term distinctive neutral, impartial and independent services is run from its 'Institute for Training in Social Health'. The institute was founded in 2010, when CRM received EU funding to offer senior high school graduates three years' training. The institute's manager explained what is expected of the training's graduates. "We encourage them to find jobs in rural and remote areas to help build the health of marginalised communities." 80% of students are women, and scholarships are awarded to those without funds. CRM aims to increase the availability of high-quality health workers by establishing a similar training institution in a remote region.

From 2006/07 NSD support for CRM's organisational strengthening processes came in the form of Danish Red Cross technical support for HR, volunteering and youth development. This was supplemented by the four-year placement of a Danish Red Cross Organisational Development Delegate based in Dakar. Agreement between CRM, ICRC, IFRC and the Danish Red Cross that IFRC would support NSD at CRM headquarters level led to the placement of a new IFRC NSD delegate from 2013-2016. As a complementary initiative, the Danish Red Cross offered branch-development support from 2014 onwards.

This assistance built on the findings of IFRC's Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) self-assessment process in 2011. To further assess local regional and branch capacities, CRM also undertook the IFRC's BOCA process in 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2022. Accompanied by an IFRC NSD Delegate for three years between 2013 and 2016, CRM started reorganising its structures and services to be relevant to the deteriorating security situation. NSD investments included:

- ✓ reorganising its first aid system in 2016 to match supply and demand
- ✓ strengthening advocacy capacity, focusing on the health needs of groups most at risk of and affected by conflict and community violence, such as displaced persons, migrants and people with disabilities.
- ✓ establishing mechanisms for collecting and responding to community feedback
- ✓ strengthening systems to provide integrated and responsive water, hygiene and sanitation assistance in emergency situations.

In 2019 CRM undertook 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

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

investments to improve them. The results helped identify a number of NSD investments to solve perceived weaknesses, such as:

- ✗ slow response mechanisms (data collection, processing, resource mobilisation)
- ✗ lack of a central unit to harmonise Safer Access analysis of contexts and risks
- ✗ the need to strengthen security focal points at regional level, with sufficient security equipment.

The National Society's leadership had recognised that several aspects of its organisation were weak, and prioritised them for additional support in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025. In 2022, to address these issues, CRM made NSD investments in, among other things, the recruitment of new staff, the acquisition of new material and work equipment, and the strengthening of staff skills. After using IFRC's Digital Maturity Assessment, CRM also strengthened its IT management system, and it developed and disseminated new policies, and increased governance training. These investments were supplemented by an important grant from IFRC's Capacity Building Fund to strengthen CRM's internal integrity management systems.

# 6.   Strengthening 'reputation'

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. It is asked to help the Ministry achieve its mandate to manage emergencies by:

- → preparing national disaster plans to prevent and mitigate the consequences of disasters
- → providing facilities for technical training and educational programmes to raise public awareness
- → establishing early warning systems and increasing the general preparedness of both Ministry staff and the general public
- → providing relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction after any disaster.

The Ministry of Health recognises CRM as a key player in social mobilisation and health emergency management. CRM is invited by the public authorities to:

- → participate in and support meetings of the various groups or platforms involved in social mobilisation
- → disseminate, promote and evaluate public health policies and strategies to the general public
- → implement the National Plan for Health Safety and International Health Regulations
- → define and implement programmes to eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases and reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality
- → participate in health coordination meetings.

CRM is strongly positioned as an actor in several clusters, including those covering shelter, protection, health and food security. Its strong auxiliary role and positioning have seen CRM invited to collaborate with institutions such as UNICEF, the Association of Charitable Foundations, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank since 2019.

With the support of its Movement partners, CRM has ensured that its staff and volunteers adopt an inclusive approach to programming, and that protection, gender and inclusion are incorporated into all its programmes. Its Gender and Diversity Policy, adopted in 2022, further reinforces such commitments. To alleviate the suffering of migrants, it adopted a Migration Strategy 2021-2025, with the support of the IFRC network. The outcomes of such NSD investments included:

- ✓ the development and implementation of more protection programmes
- ✓ 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 in communities regardless of gender, age and ethnicity
- ✓ the implementation during emergency operations of beneficiary identification activities, observing the IFRC Minimum Standards of Protection, Gender and Inclusion.

# 7. Strengthening 'integrity'

CRM's organisational transformation included many NSD investments that have strengthened its integrity. It used its statutes revision of 2022 to adapt its organisational structure and intervention approaches to the changing context. This ensured that amid violence and conflict, its decentralised and local structures were seen to be close to communities and present nationwide.

CRM used NSD investments to strengthen many of its internal parts to make it better prepared to carry out prompt, relevant, effective, and locally-led humanitarian action. This included:

- ✓ integrating a youth structure into the constitution
- ✓ introducing a Code of Conduct for all members
- ✓ strengthening the rules for internal elections
- ✓ improving the gender balance from grassroots to national levels of governance.

It has also more recently organised an annual Movement Induction Course to ensure strictly neutral, impartial and independent profiles in its governance and membership. Its wider NSD investments to strengthen transparency, accountability and trust included:

- → migrating from the SAGE accounting system in 2017 to one that could monitor and consolidate financial information from a larger number of projects with support from the Danish Red Cross training on accountability, including in the effective use of the Finance Manual and upgraded Procedures Manual at all levels
- → conducting external audits annually
- → adoption of an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy in October 2022.

As a result, it is considered a partner of choice for United Nations agencies, including the WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, OCHA, UNFPA and IOM, while taking steps to remain neutrally, impartially and independently positioned.

# 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

CRM is over-dependent on Movement partner funding for its services and salaries. As a result, its national leadership wants to diversify its funding base and access other neutral, impartial and independent funding streams for its local services. In February 2024, it organised a fundraising event, raising CHF90,000 (US$98,800) to help 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 focused on extremely vulnerable in hard-to-reach areas. These may include IDPs, 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 Malian Red Cross Society volunteer preparing rice for food aid distribution in Kayes, Mali. February 2012.*

After the deteriorating security situation from 2023 onwards forced several partners due to withdraw, CRM accelerated its strategy to enhance its local and national sustainability. NSD investments included:

- ✓ involvement in the Localisation Alliance financial sustainability programme, in partnership with the Netherlands Red Cross who have deployed a Financial Sustainability Adviser in country
- ✓ a Finance Development Assessment supported 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 branch-development programme in conflict-sensitive territories.
- ✓ grants from IFRC's Capacity Building Fund and the Joint IFRC/ICRC National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) funds to strengthen CRM's Commercial First Aid project enabling it to raise funds from charging institutions and those who can pay for first Aid training
- ✓ the establishment of a Resource Mobilisation Unit and Strategy to help mobilise resources for CRM's core and programme costs.

CRM has also committed to managing its Movement cooperation and coordination agenda in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) framework, and in alignment with the recently adopted agreement on Movement Coordination for Collective Impact (Seville 2.0). The country's Partner National Societies have co-signed the primary overarching Movement Coordination Agreement between the Malian Red Cross, the ICRC and the IFRC Secretariat. This agreement defines Movement partners' roles and responsibilities, and the coordination system operating between them. The agreement is accompanied by a Movement Security Framework which enables all Movement components to sign and abide by a collective approach to managing security under a common guidance document.

The Movement's Coordination Platform is a strategic coordination meeting that occurs every two months involving the CRM, IFRC and ICRC. The Operational Committee, incorporating the Partner National Societies, meets every month and discusses security, safety and programming. In 2023, the IFRC's Unified Country Plan process helped CRM strengthen a joint planning process. However, several partners feel the need for even stronger coordination mechanisms before CRM and its Movement components and partners achieve full synergy.

> *"With regards to Seville 2.0, 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 if we are to be truly driven by the National Society in the centre of Seville 2.0."*
> IFRC

In September 2023, to harmonise Movement support for its NSD objectives, CRM developed an NSD plan, which included seeking coordinated assistance for the following nine prioritised components of organisational strengthening: leadership; governance; branch development; finance development; resource mobilisation; security; visibility and communications; monitoring and evaluation; and human resource development.



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

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

The outcomes of CRM's sustained strategic NSD investments over the past ten years have resulted in:

→ transformative leadership at all levels that has invested in integrity and transparency

→ strengthened local presence through neutral, impartial, independent and decentralised regional branches, volunteers and services, all of which have built trust, acceptance and access with communities, as well as with state institutions and non-state armed groups

→ balancing an independent auxiliary role with the need to access diverse funding streams that keep it positioned as neutral, impartial and independent

→ maintaining stable and principled governance and senior management

→ strong, principled and relevant technical capacities and infrastructure in the form of warehouses, logistics contracts and 'humanitarian service points'

→ embracing SAF as the centre of its activities

→ using the ECHO Programmatic Partnership to task Movement partners to play supportive roles through shared leadership principles

→ actively participating in the IFRC-facilitated Unified Country Plan

→ increasing support for migrant, displaced and refugee populations to promote community non-violence, social inclusion and peace

→ increasing youth-focused support, structures and engagement

→ strengthened localisation in keeping with the 'Grand Bargain' commitments, that built strengthened principled, locally-led humanitarian action through community-based volunteers

→ reengineering its structure to make it fit for purpose for its changing mission

→ strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination to lead in its responsibility to improve organisation-wide standards in accountability, administration, and local resource mobilisation.

# URURKA BISHA CAS
# OR SOMALI RED CRESCENT SOCIETY
## Assisting everywhere in the same way

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

# 1. Introduction

Ururka Bisha Cas – or the Somali Red Crescent/SRCS – is the only national institution in Somalia to have survived decades of civil war. In a fractured political and conflict-sensitive environment, it has remained a relevant, principled and unified National Society – a remarkable achievement in the context.

Established in April 1963 and as a legal entity following a presidential decree in 1965, it was recognised by the ICRC in 1969. It became a member of the IFRC in the same year. In a competitive humanitarian space, often characterised by political allegiances and vested interests, SRCS has maintained neutral, impartial and independent relationships with influential organisations and individuals, including clan and Islamic leaders, non-state actors, armed groups, youth groups, and corporate and government representatives.
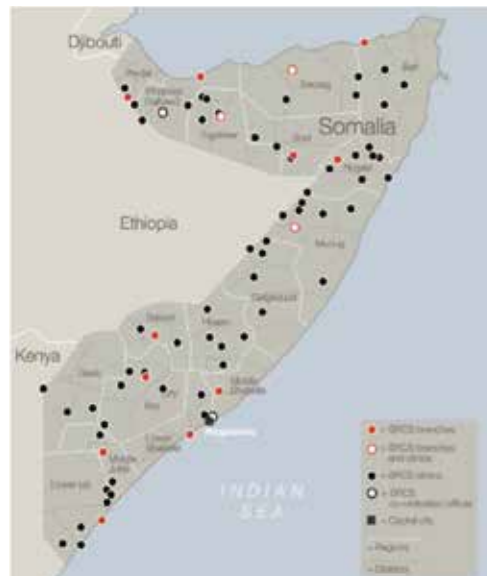


**Map of Somali Red Crescent Branches and Clinics**

> *"We are not driven by politics which have fractured our society with divisions. We concentrated on the capabilities of our National Society to implement the Fundamental Principles. We have been driven by needs – we were always with the communities, listening to them and their priorities, focusing on where no other national or international organisation can reach. We focused on voluntarism, as that is where access, outreach, dissemination and sustainability come from. In conflict-related settings, although some problems are the same, the solutions are different – focusing more on life-saving initiatives."*
>
> Yusuf Hassan, president of SRCS

SRCS has made a wide range of strategic NSD investments, which have built a vast, unified countrywide network of 19 regional branches, and 130 district level sub-branches. To adapt and survive, SRCS focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation and integrity**. This case study describes the many customised NSD investments SRCS and its partners have made. They were necessitated by key turning points in the organisation's external environment, and by the need to be seen by all external stakeholders as a unified, trusted, principled, transparent and accountable nationwide humanitarian organisation.

# 2. Humanitarian context

The collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991 sparked a devastating conflict that has cost many lives and torn apart the country's social and economic fabric. Armed conflict and political instability continue to disrupt the economy, create mass displacement and result in food shortages – and make humanitarian access very difficult. Floods, drought, environmental degradation, pest infestations and disease outbreaks – all fuelled by climate change – also take a devastating toll on Somalia's people and economy. Frequent tropical cyclones hit some parts of the country, devastating livestock, crops, homes and infrastructure, and displacing large numbers of people. Flash and river flooding caused by heavy rains across the country also regularly force people from their homes.

About 5.6 million people – almost half of Somalia's 12.3 million population – are food insecure, and 2.8 million people cannot meet their daily food requirements. It's reported that approximately 840,000 children under five are likely to be acutely malnourished, including nearly 143,000 children who are likely to be severely malnourished.[44]

# 3.  Strengthening 'proximity'

SRCS's access and acceptance among communities, government institutions and non-state armed actors have been based on its permanent local presence and services in areas no other organisation can reach.

> *"Our volunteers help people to go to different places – for health advice at our hospital or clinics. When we explain SRCS's services to communities, and that these places and services are free of charge, they say that 'other clinics come and go, but SRCS stays and gives us places for safe deliveries, nutrition advice, and addressing fistula issues. We don't import people as staff and volunteers from other places – they are local and give the community a sense of ownership."*
> Abdulkadir Ibrahim 'Afi', SRCS director of communications and organisational development

Its NSD investments over the past decade have resulted in a set of neutral, impartial and independent core community-based services. These include:

- → primary health clinics – both permanent and mobile
- → trained epidemic-prevention and response volunteers
- → a trio of rehabilitation centres for physically disabled and war-wounded people
- → one surgical referral hospital
- → first aid services, including in conflict-affected regions
- → disaster management and resilience-building support – including for livelihoods
- → a Restoring Family Links service for those separated by conflict or disasters
- → communications capacities that reach influential individuals and organisations, such as public authorities, religious groups, government authorities, clan leaders, and non-state armed groups.

> *"SRCS comes from the community itself and works with the community. As long as you are part of the community and it is connected and part of the process we can work neutrally, impartially and independently. We don't discriminate against anyone in terms of beliefs or politics. We provide services wherever there are needs, even in conflict-affected areas. We carry on, and even expand more and more by maintaining constant dialogue with community leaders and elders to reach more people that others can't reach."*
> Director of SRCS Rehabilitation Centre

Its strategies to connect with communities have helped SRCS expand its humanitarian services and won it the rare distinction of being the only organisation trusted by all parties to multiple conflicts across the country.

> *"One of our SRCS hospitals has been taken over many times by opposing armed groups, but it has never been looted. Each party to the conflict just changed the flags and the uniforms of the security guards, and sometimes even brought fuel to enable the hospital services to keep serving people. We have had no targeted incidents against SRCS because of our investments in dissemination. We have given communities tangible assets which they can touch."*
> Branch coordinator

In such a fractured and divided state, SRCS has maintained its unitary status by establishing two coordination offices to complement its branch network in territories held by different authorities. In 2015, SRCS appointed a new president for an initial four-year term, which was then extended by a further term. He initiated a participatory internal change process to further professionalise the National Society and build the engagement and commitment of all internal and relevant external stakeholders. The two executive directors in each coordination office report to the SRCS president, and are assisted by two deputy executive directors. One deputy executive director oversees the branches, operations and NSD; and the other oversees the SRCS's flagship Integrated Health Programme.

To remain relevant in conflict-affected areas, SRCS customised and adapted Movement-wide vulnerability and risk-assessment tools. Its localisation strategy consisted of supporting a branch and emerging sub-branch network to ensure long-term consistent proximity to highly vulnerable and remote communities, often living in territories governed by independent non-state armed actors and tribal and clan groups.

> *"When doing cash assessments in the middle of areas where clans are engaged in conflict, we ensure that SRCS's volunteers visiting respective areas come from that clan alone. In a town which was divided between two fighting clans, we sent two separate sets of volunteers to each side from that respective clan to hold meetings, collect data, and avoid tensions."*
>
> SRCS senior director

NSD investments have helped SRCS ensure gender-sensitivity in a challenging cultural context by specifically recruiting women and men. The investments have also allowed SRCS to facilitate female to female rehabilitation training for people who have had limbs amputated, have been paralysed by bullets or shelling, or have had nerve damage after giving birth. Vulnerability assessments carried out by volunteers in conflict-affected areas ensured that these women were referred for support.

> *"SRCS is the only national organisation working throughout the divided territories, aiming to 'assist everywhere in the same way'. Health underlies the 'unity' of the organisation as it addresses the same health issues everywhere, whereas disaster management looks for the most vulnerable and affected people. In strengthening its locally-led community-based capacities, SRCS has enabled itself to keep abreast of community needs and risks".*
>
> Partner National Society

To counter potential exposure to reputational risks, and in response to its Safer Access Framework (SAF) assessments to strengthen its operational risk and security assessment capacities, SRCS prioritised NSD investments to keep it positioned as a neutral, impartial and independent local humanitarian agency across the whole of Somalia. Between 2019 and 2023, it prioritised transparency and accountability investments that focused on minimising organisational risks. These included new policies, strategies, guidelines and manuals in health, NSD, communications, procurement, finance, HR, community resilience, first aid and pre-hospital care, internal audit, and resource mobilisation.

> *"With its NSD investments and new capacities across its programmes, SRCS has demonstrated a remarkable ability to manage dramatically increased levels of funding. From an average of US$500,000 three years ago, it is now averaging approximately US$10 million per year including its emergency relief work, vastly expanding the numbers of people reached."*
>
> IFRC

To strengthen its proximity and accountability to communities, SRCS initiated NSD investments in sub-branch development to address specific longer-term needs in selected areas. Criteria for developing sub-branches included proximity to remote communities, and the willingness of local authorities and communities to give land and/or buildings to SRCS in recognition of its neutral and impartial profile.

> *"We have expanded the network we have in every community. In each and every region we have strategically established a branch with access guaranteed by respecting the clans, armed actors, and communities in their respective region."*
>
> Yusuf Hassan, president of SRCS



*SRCS/IFRC team meeting with local community members in Ceelgerdi village, Mudug, Puntland, Somalia, in June 2022. Elders share their concerns about failed rains and prolonged drought. (Photo: Dookh Press, Hanad M. Salah).*

With the support of its partners, SRCS strengthened its local disaster-related programme and disaster preparedness work. This included mobilising neutral, impartial and independently positioned "volunteer action teams in districts to reach more communities and get more volunteers" (SRCS Branch volunteer).

> *"Coordination offices and branches who participated in the Canadian RC-sponsored IFRC Preparedness for Emergency Response (PER) process are yet to identify roles and responsibilities to activate follow-up action plans at an operational level. We need to develop more systematic Branch Emergency Response Teams (BERTS) to play our first responder roles better and link to effective logistics systems to have things ready in the right place and time before disasters strike."*
> Branch coordinator

Although IFRC's "Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification" (OCAC) assessment tool was not customised for conflict-sensitive environments, SRCS used the results to build organisational capacities to position itself as a stronger neutral, impartial and independent local humanitarian agency in the conflict-sensitive contexts in which it works. For example, investing in transparency and accountability systems – identified as gaps by the OCAC – helped SRCS to speed up humanitarian services and gain the trust and respect of armed groups and local authorities. Following the OCAC, the SRCS National Consultation Meeting came to clear agreements that a SRCS NSD Plan 2020-2023 should focus on nine key ways of strengthening the organisation. These included NSD investments in reviewing the statutes; finance system development; logistics system development; resource mobilisation; risk management; human resource development; Safer Access; and strategy development.

These were expanded by three more priorities following the NSD investment review of 2022: volunteer management, communications, and branch development.

> *"Developing your National Society in a conflict-sensitive setting is a process of moving from one place and capacities to a continuously new set of places and capacities. We realised that we were strong in programmes, local networks, and increasing staff capabilities, but that we were weaker in a strategic approach to NSD that would enhance our capacities to be a neutral, impartial, and independent local actor."*
> Yusuf Hassan, SRCS president

Some partner strategies to focus on specific branches ran the risk of creating regional imbalances just when SRCS needed to promote itself as a neutral, impartial and independent actor across all territories, distributing its resources equitably. To address this risk, SRCS became more assertive in managing Movement coordination by asking all partners to contribute to its longer-term capacity strengthening and organisational development in line with its overall new Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

To further consolidate further assessment information from all levels and bring a common approach to building minimum branch capacities and standards within this wider regionalisation strategy, SRCS decided to use the IFRC's Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) tool to find out the strengths and weaknesses of its branches. With IFRC support it conducted two BOCA 'training of trainers' in 2022, one for each coordination office, with 19 trained facilitators in one office and 12 in the other. Both training sessions included representatives from Movement components, such as the ICRC. Partners were then asked to support the BOCA exercises. The Finnish Red Cross supported 12 branches to undertake BOCAs in 2023, with each branch developing a plan of action to strengthen itself. The six remaining BOCAs will be completed in early 2024. SRCS will then hold a countrywide consultation and analysis meeting to inform a Branch Development Strategy in 2024.



*SRC visits a borehole in Balisbule, Puntland, Somalia. Only one of the community's two boreholes is functioning and it also serves the village of Gacnafale 20km away, where residents often travel overnight to collect water. This is the fourth consecutive failed rainy season across Somalia. Streams have dried up, traditional water reservoirs (berkads) are empty and many people are facing a hunger crisis.*

SRCS adapted its community-based risk reduction exercises in conflict-sensitive areas by adding the SAF context and risk analysis processes, before entering into wider discussions with the local public authorities, elders, women's groups and young people. With German Red Cross (GRC) support spanning 25 years, SRCS has accelerated its ability to develop strategic risk reduction approaches that respond to the needs of highly conflict-affected communities.

> *"To address and mitigate conflict-sensitive tensions we had to meet with community leaders of tribes and clans to explain what the project is proposed to help with and explain the criteria of how only the most vulnerable will be prioritised – the elderly, and vulnerable. We then engaged them in developing community action plans. Where there were only male heads, we encouraged them to include women, and this was achieved by separate meetings held with women only. As gender issues are very sensitive, women cannot be sent to unknown villages. So we build on our NSD investments in local community health committees, which already include respected local women."*
>
> Coordination office senior director

SRCS's Disaster Response Management Department used to be more project based. But with the support of the Canadian Red Cross since 2020, it now has a more comprehensive disaster risk management (DRM) policy, strategy and Standard Operating Procedures for emergency response, supplemented by SRCS's GRC-supported Resilience Strategy 2022-2024.

> *"Our Resilience Strategy focuses on how communities can be resilient to multiple hazards and risks in conflict-affected and protracted crisis contexts. In adapting guidance from the Movement, we asked ourselves in our own context: 'How can we strengthen the inborn resilience of Somali communities? Especially, how they can be better prepared for a wide range of crises through knowledge, practice, and change?' For SRCS, the difference between disaster risk reduction and resilience is that DRR and disaster preparedness are more disaster oriented, whereas the resilience strategy is more about the hearts of the community and how they see their overall holistic growth."*
>
> Yusuf Hassan, president of SRCS

# 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

> *"We are the only organisation who have delivered health, family reunification, and disaster response to local communities, even during the civil war when there was no strong government."*
>
> Director of SRCS Rehabilitation Centre

SRCS's volunteers and youth have often been the sole visible sign of the organisation's continuous services to the most conflict-affected communities, through:

- → mobile health teams
- → first aid and psychological first aid
- → dead body management
- → taking injured people from both sides of a conflict to hospital, and giving them pre-hospital care.

The strain on volunteers has been extraordinary, as has been their resilience. To strengthen its capacity for locally-led action, SRCS adopted its first Volunteering Policy in 2004. Further NSD investments included the establishment of:

- ✓ the Volunteering and Youth Department
- ✓ a Volunteering and Youth Manager in each coordination office in 2020, with training supported by the Swedish Red Cross in early 2023
- ✓ a task force in 2022 to redraft the SRCS Volunteering and Youth Policies.

They also included exposure and training/mentoring missions to the Kenyan Red Cross to foster peer-to-peer-support and ideas for a web-based Volunteer Management System by a National Society in a similar conflict-sensitive context.

> *"We established a few clinics per branch and used to ask community elders, who were the only authorities we dealt with at the time, to select neutral, impartial and independent people to work as volunteers. We ensured a balanced selection from different clans and sub-clans, followed by intensive dissemination and orientation into the Fundamental Principles before they could start their work. The communities used to say 'This is our National Society'."*
>
> Ahmad Jama Abdulle, SRCS vice-president

As it works in deeply conflict-affected areas, SRCS ensured adherence to a strict set of volunteer mobilisation and induction protocols, including safety and security guidelines which were updated in 2020. Strengthened NSD investments in youth work laid the foundations for a wider approach to youth-led community dissemination and services in the future, particularly in communities affected by conflict and violence. These included:

✓ first aid training for young people in secondary schools, after which they are encouraged to become SRCS volunteers

✓ youth volunteers transitioning into paid staff roles and later into senior SRCS positions as a 'feeder route' for future leaders

✓ examples of vocational training courses (sometimes up to 2-3 months) including vocational training for young women.

In 2015, SRCS conducted the ICRC's SAF assessment, with training for key internal SRCS stakeholders on context and risk analysis. In 2016, all SRCS branches undertook a context and risk analysis assessment, which was reviewed in 2017, to follow up on previous recommendations at a two year interval from previous SAF assessments.

*"Our teams of volunteers have never been attacked. We always conduct a pre-assessment, security clearance, and ask volunteers in that part of the community to prepare for the arrival as part of our unified network. These procedures were considerably strengthened after we learned about Safer Access and implemented its exercises to update context analysis, risk mapping, and operational management procedures such as checkpoint clearances and keeping all parties informed of movement, new planned programmes in advance."*
Branch coordinator

Using key investments defined in its NSD plan 2020-2023, SRCS made significant progress in improving the security and safety of staff and volunteers. These included:

✓ 'networking meetings' with armed non-state actors as well as local government authorities

✓ dedicating one full day at SRCS's annual planning meeting to SAF and networking

✓ both coordination offices updating SRCS's context and risk analysis for the third time in August 2021

✓ undertaking an Operational Risk Management assessment in 16 out of 19 branches in 2021

✓ ensuring SAF was seen as a fully integrated part of the wider NSD plan, with each coordination office having a Plan of Action. (POA)

✓ branches reporting monthly on security, political/humanitarian contexts, and trends

✓ accessing increased numbers of hard-to-reach areas

✓ developing a contingency plan for all regions hosting elections since 2021.

*"With SAF training we have been able to work in very difficult areas, even where our movement is very restricted. Whereas the other actors can only work in towns, we have contact with different ideological groups in other areas with different administrations, policies, rules and regulations, all of which we can navigate."*
SRCS branch leader



*June 2020 SRCS volunteer teams are carrying out risk communication and community engagement action to help halt the spread of COVID-19 in Somalia.*



*Across all regions of Puntland and Somaliland, SRCS has provided cash assistance to more than 2,600 vulnerable families, rehabilitated community water points, and provided hygiene and sanitation services. SRCS teams are also running eight mobile health clinics which target hard-to-reach areas with malnutrition screening, referrals and nutrition supplements.*

Nevertheless, although no SRCS volunteers or personnel have been targeted during the conflict, the further mainstreaming of SAF elements and perspectives into SRCS's wider programmes and services have been hampered by the fact that:

✗ the SAF Steering Committee's composition did not include other Movement partners

✗ SAF is solely supported by ICRC even though many of its eight elements could be supported by other partners

✗ the communications elements of SAF were allocated to a separate SRCS communications working group focusing on a wider shared ICRC/IFRC communications agenda calendars, not linked to the SAF expected outcomes in branches.

# 5. Strengthening 'legacy'

SRCS's legacy is founded on NSD investments in its flagship health programmes. The dependable, principled, localised presence of these programmes has led to SRCS's sustained acceptance and access as a neutral and impartial humanitarian agency. The NSD investments included:

→ strengthening reporting so that health and other statistics can be shared with government and other local public authorities, building confidence and access over the decades

→ diversifying from clinic-based curative health care to an 'integrated health care' approach

→ locating SRCS's ambulance services strategically and impartially to be able to respond to local needs, such as ambulances that can take people to hospitals following explosions

→ providing free IFRC-rehabilitation services to people injured during the war

→ training SRCS midwives from clinics to identify early mobility support required especially by young male and female amputees who have lost limbs to be able to reintegrate.

However, SRCS has experienced challenges concerning coordinated Movement support. Although SRCS's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 aims to transform the organisation, strengthening its relevance, safety and positioning in a conflict-sensitive environment, not all partners understand it as such. A fractured country with territories governed by different groups poses challenges for maintaining a consistent Movement footprint everywhere. Whereas the new Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement (Seville Agreement 2.0) of 2022 assumes that either IFRC or ICRC will be a 'co-convenor' to generate countrywide consistency, the reality of the territory means that SRCS will never have both co-convenors in one place. For example, where Partner National Societies (PNS) are willing to explore a specific territory, IFRC cannot provide the security umbrella necessary. This leads to PNS having 'integration agreements' with ICRC as a pragmatic solution.

Nevertheless, there have also been good examples of partners supporting SRCS staff salaries and roles rather than their own parallel teams. Movement synergies have had a powerful humanitarian impact.

*"The collective support we receive from Movement partners, and our strengthened coordination approach, has impacted greatly on our ability to reach very remote communities in a neutral, impartial and independent way. Our trainings in health and DRM attracted the Head of ECHO in Nairobi to visit, leading to the Finnish RC-supported EU-funded 'Programmatic Partnership'. SRCS was deemed to be number 1 in terms of implementation rate and reach to targeted communities amongst the 25 African countries in receipt of PP support. We could show that in a context where conflict continues, our NSD investments contributed very significantly to this success. Previously we had focussed on operations alone, but now we were building sustainable organisational capacities as well."*

Branch coordinator

However, the withdrawal of any international funds (for example, ICRC withdrawing support from 50 health facilities in 10 regions) brings considerable humanitarian risks. SRCS had to consider strategies for diversifying funds other than those it receives from its traditional partners for health services.

> *"ICRC's constant funding support to health centres over several decades had led to a sense of 'permanency' which was suddenly undermined by its global financial challenges of 2023 onwards. As an institution, our NSD inputs had included support for SAF, BOCA, logistics development, ambulance services, and construction support for coordination offices and selected branches. However, ICRC budgets do not extend to supporting local long-term sustainability strategies except through the joint NSIA global fund with IFRC. In this sense we have been challenged to include other partners to transition into work in geographical and technical areas that were previously the sole area of ICRC. We need to learn from this experience for integrating earlier approaches to sustainability of National Societies that we support into the future."*
>
> ICRC

As a result of the above strategies, and challenged by the need for sustainability, SRCS has worked to rebalance its approach to longer-term sustainability by generating local funds.

> *"We are very fortunate that each of our long-term partners have been with us significantly beyond 10 years, but we needed to ask ourselves: 'what if they leave?' We need to be more sustainable by ourselves. We used the OCAC process of 2019 to help us grow capacities that could be used in a coordinated way to increase local positioning and diversified income streams."*
>
> Yusuf Hassan, president of SRCS

SRCS's NSD plan generated specific activities to strengthen its neutral, impartial resource base and positioning. Key NSD investments included:

→ the Norwegian Red Cross offering a Resource Mobilisation Consultancy (2019)

→ a successful application to the joint IFRC/ICRC National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) fund to construct a new coordination office in Mogadishu with income-generating potential (2020)

→ plans to strengthen commercial first aid capacities as an income stream, with support from the Austrian and British Red Cross and ICRC.



*Nine-month-old Maida is screened for malnutrition at SRCS's Kenya Clinic in Burao. Children receive their first supplement at the clinic, and their mothers are given enough to take home. SRCS is working alongside the IFRC, ICRC and other Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners to provide support to people impacted by the crisis. (2023)*

# 6. Strengthening 'reputation'

> *"We are one National Society with different contexts. In certain areas we are using some rules, in other areas we use other rules – but within the Fundamental Principles, our unifying mandate and policies."*
>
> SRCS deputy executive director

To manage this complex organisational unity, SRCS has focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its unitary status over the years. This has included the unifying processes that led to the adoption a series of a five-year strategic plans (Strategic Plan 2015-2019, which was extended to 2020, and Strategic Plan 2021-2025). These guide SRCS's longer-term work to build and maintain unity through highly participatory and inclusive processes. The respect these processes have generated among all public authorities has given SRCS credibility and access.

> *"During the fighting, no one else is working there. We work in places where government and others cannot go – reaching the last mile. The government says: 'This is the role of the Red Crescent – to assist wounded people neutrally.' The armed actors also say 'These SRCS are good people and give us very appreciated service'."*
>
> SRCS deputy executive director

One way NSD investments expanded SRCS's auxiliary roles was to form a series of neutral, impartial and independent community-led community health committees, and to operate primary health clinics with a minimum number of staff and packages. This community-health infrastructure 'substituted' for public health services in remote areas and regions held by different armed groups. The communities' resulting trust in SRCS's neutral, impartial, independent and principled humanitarian services saw communities donate buildings for health facilities and provide the security for them.

> *"We collectively tell the public authority governing a territory that we want to reach the most vulnerable people, and it's our partners who are helping us. We have no state or local funding. Whenever there's a problem with any external authorities we activate the Networking Committee to sit with key counterparts to solve it. It's challenging as the leaders of non-state actor groups move and change, and we have to re-educate new ones on our terms of agreements and need for regional networking."*
>
> Ahmed Jama Abdulle, SRCS vice-president

The NSD investments strengthen locally-led volunteer-based humanitarian actions. For example, transitioning from clinic-based health care to community-based health care has helped SRCS focus on more integrated community-level and socially-inclusive outcomes.

> *"After developing women's solidarity groups of trained volunteers attached to community health committees, we aimed to promote the eradication of FGM [female genital mutilation]. In one community two older women had practiced FGM for the last 15 years. After several awareness sessions on harmful effects, we convinced them to stop the practice, and they became members of the Women's Solidarity Group. They are now promoting practices against FGM and replaced their FGM income by running a small tea shop."*
>
> SRCS branch leader

## 7.  Strengthening 'integrity'

SRCS suspended its statutes-revision process for several years due to Somalia's political divisions. However, following the 2019 OCAC assessment, statutes revision emerged as one of SRCS's nine priorities. It aims to work on new approaches to adding 'addendums' to its existing statutes, which will mean they do not have to go to government authorities for approval. This is because SRCS operates in territories governed by separate public authorities who are unlikely to agree a mandate that covers territories governed by other public authorities. SRCS's branch and sub-branch committee members are chosen on the basis of their strictly neutral, impartial and independent profile. Elected members should have credibility in the community and ideally include male, female, disabled, youth, and local business representatives.

SRCS's new leadership launched a National Society Development Initiative (NSDI) in 2018. This was designed to coordinate the efforts of all partners supporting NSD initiatives and better align them with SRCS's strategic plans and its neutral, impartial and independent organisational characteristics.

> *"Our SRCS National Society Development Initiative (NSDI) has changed the National Society and how we work. It's helped us to look at our systems and restructure ourselves. We've now prioritised some of the areas we had lost and wanted to build – we've developed policies, guidelines, and new departments to support the systems. We've also prioritised some key areas which have very difficult armed actors and groups, to reach areas where others cannot reach."*
>
> SRCS senior manager, coordination office

SRCS strengthened a number of internal and external accountability systems, maintaining its position as neutral and impartial. These included strengthening community engagement and accountability, as well as protection, gender and inclusion capacities with the support of the Canadian Red Cross. Its most recent NSD investments in digitalisation began by using IFRC's Digital Maturity Assessment tool in early 2023 with the support of the Danish and British Red Cross. The information gathering and digital systems have not only given it sector-leading capacities in the collation of local data, but also helped it report more transparently on the humanitarian impact of its services. Digitalisation has improved SRCS's patient management systems in its health facilities, cash distribution using mobile money distributions to beneficiaries through mobile banking apps, and financial software.

> *"Digitalisation has helped us be more accountable, but also lead humanitarian interventions across the territories. Due to our strengthened digitalised and rapid data gathering capabilities, public authorities are now trusting our data. All this helps us to continue to be positioned neutrally, impartially and independently in conflict-sensitive environments that lead to distrust of other organisations."*
>
> Yusuf Hassan, president of SRCS

## 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

From 2018 onwards, SRCS had started to implement a number of Movement coordination mechanisms. Despite several attempts to draft a Movement Coordination Agreement (MCA), it has still not been finalised. The drafts have been delayed by ICRC and IFRC legal departments in Geneva, who want to align them with changing global formats. However, SRCS continues to manage its cooperation and coordination assertively through the following NSD investments:

→ an annual **partnership meeting** as a strategic Movement coordination platform
→ the quarterly Steering Committee and Advisory Committee chaired by the SRCS president
→ the IFRC-led **'Unified Plan'** process
→ thematic **SRCS task forces** and **thematic working groups** with co-leads from other appropriate Movement partners.

However, SRCS has also experienced ongoing challenges in trying to strengthen Movement coordination mechanisms and align Movement support to its strategic, conflict-sensitive contexts. These include:

✗ Movement partners pushing to start programmes in areas where there are non-state armed actors, and having inappropriate demands, eg "You can have U$4 million if you do A-Z"

✗ partners and donors sometimes wanting to give large funds to a single institution – such as a primary health centre (PHC) – in a specific location for reasons that are not clear, and not allowing SRCS to use the funds for a wider number of PHCs in other areas to demonstrate its neutrality and impartiality

✗ partners favouring donations for infrastructure projects without an appropriately balanced set of additional NSD investments to build SRCS's longer-term sustainability

✗ many partners requesting bilateral programming, pressurising SRCS to deliver individual narrative and financial-donor reports, and building parallel Partner National Society teams of staff

✗ pressures from some partners to expand SRCS's partnerships with international actors (e.g. the UN) despite the fact certain non-state armed actor groups target and attack such institutions.



*A Somali Red Crescent Society health clinic in Badweyn, NER city, Galkayo. (Photo: Olav A Saltbones.)*

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

SRCS's longitudinal NSD journey, with coordinated Movement partner support in its conflict-sensitive environment, has enabled it to work in humanitarian space not available to other actors. SRCS has achieved this through a wide range of strategic NSD investments that have included:

→ establishing 'networking meetings' with civil society organisations, armed non-state actors, leaders of armed groups, and local authorities to disseminate the Fundamental Principles, SRCS's mandates, and negotiate access

→ promoting a role that is auxiliary to 'public authorities' (not to 'government'), helping ensure its access and acceptance

→ deepening the ability to 'interpret' the Fundamental Principles through local contextualised concepts such as "How can you help us reach the most affected people?" in conflict settings

→ introducing Operational Risk Management training in 16 out of 19 branches

→ strengthening policy and strategy development: through its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, reforming HR as a delivery mechanism, and developing its NSDI plan to harmonise support

→ maintaining a set of life-saving health-focussed institutions, curative and preventive community-based health care, and surveillance services across the entire country

→ refreshing volunteering and a territory-wide network of fully insured registered volunteers

→ achieving Safer Access by improving safety, providing organisation-wide security training, and mobilising local volunteers from specific communities to facilitate community trust and ownership

→ updating transparency and accountability, including through digitalisation that enables evidence-based data gathering and reporting to corroborate its neutral, impartial and independent status

→ increasing innovative local resource mobilisation and sustainability

→ deepening localisation in keeping with the Grand Bargain commitments, that built stronger principled, locally-led humanitarian action through sustained investments in gender- and diversity-sensitive branches and community-based volunteers.

# UKRAINIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY
## "We are close to you"

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

# 1. Introduction



Карта обласних організацій Українського Червоного Хреста листопад 2023 року

> *"In the first days of the war our Emblem was considered a protection sign. We see it as a symbol of the huge work we had done. We could build on our good relations in communities and on the capacities we had strengthened over the years. As a result, many people came to support us. In 2023 we could grow to have more than 200 branches, 1,500 staff and over 8,000 registered and trained volunteers, with many other spontaneous volunteers. In the first day of war lots of people came to us to offer support as an alternative. They helped to distribute humanitarian assistance in railway stations, transport hubs, and collection and distribution sites. By the end of 2023 we had directly assisted more than 12 million people, supported the evacuation of over 300,000 people, and distributed 12 million food and hygiene kits. We felt the unity of support everywhere as a result of the trust we had built in communities for many years before that."*
>
> Dr Mykola Polishchuk, president of URCS

The Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) has had to respond to increasing humanitarian needs caused by the country's worsening social, political and economic turbulence since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. These problems were exacerbated by a humanitarian crisis triggered by the escalation of armed conflict in the east of the Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022. To become an organisation with the characteristics needed to address these challenges, URCS's leadership launched a phased organisational reform process in 2016, which continues to this day.

After the escalations of conflict in 2014 and 2022, branches close to the 'line of control' (LoC) found themselves divided by the conflict, and in two separate territories defined as the 'Government Controlled Area' (GCA) and 'Non-Government Controlled Area' (NGCA). Faced with a huge scale up of Movement resources to support Ukraine and the multiple interests of its 40 Movement partners alone, URCS undertook a deep organisational transformation from 2016 to help it adapt to the rapidly changing context and the needs of millions of displaced people. It has built modernised and relevant services, increased its sustainable organisational capacities, and strengthened its positioning as a neutral, impartial and independent national humanitarian agency, so it can contribute to creating socially cohesive, resilient, and well-prepared communities in the most affected areas of the country.

To adapt and survive, URCS focused on NSD investments that strengthened its proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity. This case study describes the many customised NSD investments URCS and its partners have made. It shows how these investments have helped position URCS as a unified, trusted, principled, transparent and accountable countrywide humanitarian organisation.

## 2.  Humanitarian context

Ukraine, the second largest country in Europe, gained its independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then it has experienced sporadic moments of economic growth followed by deep recessions and hyperinflation, generating sustained economic, political and social turbulence. The IMF lists Ukraine as one of the poorest countries in Europe, but the Ukrainian people are incredibly resilient. Humanitarian spirit and civil society organisations have grown, demonstrating people's willingness to support others.

A protracted conflict between pro-Russian separatists and the new government in the east of Ukraine, which started in February 2014, devastated people's lives and the country's economy. But the escalation that came on 24 February 2022 was to prove more destructive still. The conflict is now estimated to have affected 24 million people in Ukraine – more than half the population of 41 million – while the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased from 2.9 million before 24 February 2022 to 17.6 million in January 2023.[45] Nearly one-third of the total Ukrainian population has been forced from their homes – one of the largest human displacement crises in the world today. By October 2022, according to UN reports, more 6.2 million people had been internally displaced by the war, and over 7.6 million refugees had fled Ukraine entirely for destinations all across Europe. Over 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes. Many of those who remain in Ukraine face shelling, missile strikes and other deadly threats; the destruction of vital infrastructure like power and water supplies; and damage to their homes.

## 3.  Strengthening 'proximity'

Before 2016, URCS's branch network with its Soviet-era characteristics had functioned in an autonomous top-down manner. It had virtually no active member, volunteer or youth structures, and so no way of involving communities across the country, or of better understanding their needs. It had also been hit, in 2016, with allegations of fraud, and government funds for auxiliary services had been withdrawn. URCS faced the challenge of re-building connections with communities countrywide.

In this conflict-sensitive environment, URCS needed to strengthen its national services to adequately perform its auxiliary roles. It also needed to develop locally relevant services by listening to the voices of its new members, volunteers, and young people, who could in turn potentially raise resources from local communities to help provide such services. The NSD investments that followed the escalation of conflict in 2022 have brought new approaches to strengthening locally led action.

> *"In 2016, breaking away from state funding was a good lesson. The state-funded nurses had also been serving as staff of our branches, and they were the legs and arms of our organisation. We had to change, or to die as an organisation. Our biggest priority was developing the district branches. If they were strong, they would make their regions strong, and then the HQ would be strong."*
>
> URCS interregional manager

NSD investments were required to transform URCS into a conflict-sensitive, agile humanitarian response organisation, which could also increase community resilience. URCS's regions and a large number of their respective sub-regional structures comprised 180 legally separate registered entities – another legacy of its Soviet past. The organisation's National Committee is an executive structure, with national governance bodies being elected from the regions. Its revised statutes, approved by the National Assembly in 2021, therefore contained an updated branch structure to align to new local government decentralisation, as well as strengthened accountabilities at all levels.



*Dnipro, Ukraine, December 2018. These children and parents had to leave their homes due to the armed conflict in the East of the country. Volunteers of the URCS Dnipropetrovsk branch are holding psychosocial sessions on a regular basis for internally displaced families to help them recover emotionally. During this particular masterclass, children prepared self-made ornaments for Christmas from scented soap.*

The National Committee also opted for a decentralisation process. All 24 regional branches remained, but were to be served by decentralised support from five cluster offices. These cluster offices offer coordinated capacity building in five regions and their respective local branches. These particular reforms aimed to revitalise the local life of branches as consultative and interactive parts of their own communities, with strengthened local member and volunteer-led services across the country.

> *"The most recent war of 2022 onwards pushed URCS to develop more deeply to respond to the critical needs of the people whom it had traditionally served with more general volunteering. The Fundamental Principles helped a lot to guide our values, finding people that no others can or have reached. We realised that with changing government medical and social care systems, it is better to be independent if we wanted to advocate for people who are denied access to different parts of the government system. Our Red Cross clients are up to 10 million people out of the population of approximately 30 million. We need to help people to identify their own risks, solve problems, and develop skills to do so. We needed to start at the beginning, giving people humanitarian aid and organising safe spaces for them, and after that helping people to enter systems of support from government and other services."*
>
> National Committee senior manager

To strengthen local assessments, URCS used two tools:

> → the **Safer Access Framework** (SAF), which ICRC promotes and supports for use in conflict-affected branches
> → the IFRC's **Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment** (BOCA) tool.

In 2019, to help scope relevant local services for highly vulnerable populations, the IFRC, and the Danish and Swedish Red Cross jointly promoted and disseminated Local Needs Assessment, Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA), and Protection, and Gender and Inclusion (PGI) tools. The tools were used as a basis for annual planning and to launch relevant social services and activities. They were supplemented by volunteer-friendly guidelines to support the development of local-member or volunteer-led services, including simple budgeting and business planning templates.

> *"After responding to the escalation of the conflict in 2022 onwards, we realised URCS has a unique experience and capacity to organise support, help and protection for people. But to be sustainable we need to involve communities, volunteers and local authorities to establish sustainable social services that respond to those identifying risks and vulnerabilities in their own contexts. We need to reassess our locations and choose the right place to support people affected by war. So we are developing a map of stakeholder services and shared roles. The national authorities are looking to URCS as a strong partner after the last two years of our work. They ask us for information, support and auxiliary-role partnering opportunities to find new innovative approaches to supporting the most vulnerable."*
>
> National Committee senior manager

The 'Maidan Revolution'[46] of 2013-2014 and the resulting civil unrest and violence had already forced URCS to make many changes. It created Emergency Response Teams (ERTs), which involved many young volunteers (up to 35 years old – the nationally defined age of young people) in a very engaging approach to conflict and disaster response. ICRC supported URCS with SAF training from 2014 to be better prepared and more responsive to conflict. ICRC also funded the first wave of Volunteer and Youth Assemblies to achieve some of these goals.

An agreement between URCS, the Danish Red Cross and ICRC in 2017 led to the Danish Red Cross intensifying its role as technical lead in branch, volunteer, youth and service development. This technical lead role was supported with financial contributions from ICRC and IFRC for components such as BOCA, the Danish Red Cross-supported Branch and Volunteer Development Programme (BraVo), and pilot grants.

> *"BraVo helped us a lot. If I agree an MoU [memorandum of understanding] with a ministry to play a specific auxiliary role, I have to be sure it will be done. Regional branches always had some resources but from 2016 local branches didn't have resources. They lived in their local communities and after BraVo they saw themselves from the perspectives of beneficiaries and local authorities. These new perceptions led to targets for more effectiveness and wanting change to be seen to be better."*
>
> Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

46   *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_of_Dignity*

To strengthen organisation-wide coherence, URCS's Organisational Development Steering Committee was established in 2018 to analyse and brainstorm different organisational directions and make decisions with the involvement and approval of all partners. After the conflict escalated in February 2022, the committee was split into two separate committees to better manage growing NSD priorities. From 2022, URCS established the new NSD Steering Committee, which meets twice a year. It covers the development of finance, HR, social services, resource mobilisation and digital transformation. A separate BRaVO Steering Committee meets quarterly and covers branch and volunteer development.

ICRC had deployed a branch development/SAF delegate in November 2018 for 22 months to help branches in the LoC areas to build capacities that would enable them to achieve access, acceptance, efficiency and transparency. The SAF tool was implemented in the most conflict-affected branches first, with the aim of mainstreaming it into the wider working system of URCS over time. SAF was integrated into all URCS's branch development tools. NSD investments trained trainers to deliver SAF awareness sessions to all branches and volunteers across the country. These are coordinated by the Branch Development Unit at URCS HQ.

In January 2023, URCS fused the BOCA with the SAF – creating what is known as either the 'BOCA with SAF component' or 'BOCAF – and used this merged tool as the core of its branch development strategy all over Ukraine. In 2023 alone, URCS conducted 53 workshops using this merged tool.

> *"This new merged tool helped us to provide new approaches to a wider number of local branches to exist, be supported, and undertake new needs assessments. As part of our localisation agenda, it helped local branches to identify what they needed to support and strengthen, leading to evidence-based budgeting."*
> National Committee senior manager

ICRC's commendable SAF support to branches in the NGCA and GCA areas focused on increasing the operational capacity building of volunteers and improvement of branch infrastructures. It fell short of building sustainable institutional capacities. In 2019, URCS's first Local Branch Handbook was printed and disseminated across all regional and local branches – it is also available electronically. It provides simple and concise explanations of and reference to branch standards, policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs), setting one shared standard for the activity of all local branches in Ukraine. Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) started using the handbook to train branch volunteers and undertake clearer outreach activities.

URCS branches did not traditionally develop services to meet local needs, but as they increasingly began to adopt this role, the BraVo programme introduced the concept of 'schools of social activities' to encourage ideas for services for highly vulnerable groups such as the elderly, lonely, homeless, socially dislocated, poor and people living with a disability. URCS created two new inter-regional manager roles to support branch implementation of the new Handbook, services, and standards. The schools of social services received grants to allow branches to set up services following the local needs assessments outlined in the SoPs.

The successful impact of this model was felt after the major escalation of armed conflict in February 2022. In April 2022, two months into the renewed hostilities, URCS launched an updated model called BraVo in Emergencies (BraVoiE). It drew on learning from those branches in the Donbass region that had experienced conflict during the previous BraVo model.



*Dnipro, Ukraine – Ilona left her home in Toretsk, in the Donetsk region, by herself when she was 16. Since then her family home has been destroyed and they now stay with her in Dnipro. She received hygiene supplies and diapers for her baby from URCS, which is working hard to provide emergency services to those affected by the ongoing fighting, while also supporting recovery and reconstruction efforts. Its work is supported by the IFRC and more than a dozen partner Red Cross organisations*

> *"Before the war started in 2022 we had a strong motivated team in our regional office, with functioning heads of branches in 16 out of our 18 districts. We cooperated with public authorities, but before 2022, apart from German Red Cross support that build our infrastructure so that we reached more beneficiaries, we didn't receive much interest. But war and our experience of BraVo changed all that. We scaled up our efforts massively and now have 656 trained personnel, including 211 staff and 218 volunteers. We developed home-based care services for 220 very vulnerable elderly and disabled beneficiaries, with the German Red Cross helping us to make them three payments so that people in rural areas with no heating could have fuel etc. Our local branches coordinate with local authorities to prioritise those needing the most assistance, and send our Mobile Health Teams to areas with no other health services. We use psychosocial support events in 10 locations in libraries and schools where two professional psychologists give counselling. We have two physiotherapists who identify newly-disabled people after the war started to rehabilitate them and get them back into society. We also coordinate with state medical services to support TB patients as most are very poor."*
>
> Head of regional branch

After the escalation of the conflict in 2022, key BraVoiE NSD investments led to an increase in the number of inter-regional managers and helped support 125 out of 210 local branches conducting emergency operations in response to the conflict. Early gains have included:

→ the recruitment of some 125 organisational development (OD) specialists from high-performing volunteers, governing board members, and active Red Cross supporters

→ developing community needs assessments with pilot grants for locally-led sustainable services

→ providing branches with basic office equipment, hardware and software, and major renovation work

→ developing 'community service centres' in collaboration with the Turkish Red Crescent and German Red Cross to assess the appropriateness of their models for customisation to Ukraine's context.

URCS adapted its capacity strengthening support to the branches that remained in the NGCAs. ICRC supported them as Red Cross organisations with all required relief and assistance supplies independently as part of its ongoing dialogue with the local authorities in those regions. In this way, both parties to the conflict would be able to work independently with the branches.

URCS's NSD investments also modernised its legal base and auxiliary roles, making them more conflict-sensitive. This led to a new level of cooperation with the Ministry of Defence and the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES), and the Civil-Military Cooperation of the Armed forces of Ukraine (CIMIC). URCS's Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) were included for the first time in joint emergency control room drills and refugee camp exercises. The URCS president is a member of the government's Disaster Commission, with heads of branches holding similar positions at their respective local levels.

In July 2019, URCS had completed the IFRC's Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) self-assessment. A plan of action was drawn up, focusing on strengthening:

✓ CEA systems for disaster management activities

✓ a risk monitoring system

✓ SoPs for different types of disasters

✓ community-based early warning systems

✓ rapid response and rapid deployment systems.



*Armed conflict in Ukraine: refugees from Ukraine wait at a Polish-Ukrainian border checkpoint in Przemyśl. Children are covered with thermofoil blankets against the cold.*

The February 2022 escalation brought further new and enhanced NSD investments. These included:

> ✓ strengthened relations with government civil protection services
> ✓ signing an MoU in February 2022 to provide auxiliary role support to both SES structures and to the national police, defence, guard and border forces by reaching the 'last mile' beneficiaries through services including search and rescue, saving lives through first aid, and taking people to safe places for recovery.

> *"In our overall NSD actions, our common disaster management activities are offered in a country-wide context. War is another emergency. We had agreed different defined categories of assistance with the SES connected to the scale and location of needs. These included industrial or environmental disasters, but also combat actions and armed conflicts. In 2022 we strengthened the Disaster Management Department as a unified one, merging relief and emergency response systems in order to play better roles in the state's unified civil response system."*
>
> National Committee senior manager

URCS also adapted other community-based risk reduction approaches and processes for conflict-sensitive areas, with the support of the German, Danish and Austrian Red Cross Societies. A new Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Unit was formed to customise DRR to the different needs of specific regions. Regional risk reduction maps were developed following training of volunteers in their communities using community-focused tools. Such local capacities built on the outcomes of URCS's long-term NSD investments in community-based first aid, and in the ability of first responders to deal with the aftermath of bombings and explosions, and to provide emergency services such as free ambulances in places where the government doesn't have any.

# 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

NSD investments sought to strengthen the capacity of its volunteers and youth members – the most visible aspect of the organisation. In 2017, URCS appointed its first Youth Coordinator and held the first Youth Assembly – a forum to enable youth representatives from different regions to meet annually and discuss important issues. A Code of Conduct was introduced for volunteers and staff, in parallel with new domestic national legislation in the form of a Law on Volunteering. In 2018, the URCS governing board adopted the first URCS Volunteering and Youth Policy, which was implemented from 2020 as part of a new Youth and Volunteer Engagement Strategy. Such NSD investments in volunteer-led local action prepared branches and the populations they serve for the ensuing escalation of the conflict in 2022.

> *"In 2018 we started a Youth Academy for First Aid, adapting materials to start with children from five years upwards. We also encouraged teenagers to propose good ideas for local humanitarian projects and using an 18-month USAID grant we could give them a small financial amount to start. Examples of successful ideas included peer youth support for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), helping elderly people with how to use their first aid kits, and disseminating materials to classmates on the Fundamental Principles. In 2023, one of the biggest local companies in our area gave us support to scale up these services."*
>
> URCS city branch head

NSD investments in duty of care focused on 12 types of volunteer, in fields such as emergency response, International Humanitarian Law, humanitarian aid distribution and MHPSS. Some branches also had a 'profile coordinator' who looks after volunteers in a specific sector and provides support with training.

> *"To use the Fundamental Principles of neutrality and impartiality in fragile and conflict-sensitive situations requires diplomatic skills of the highest order. We needed to invest in NSD strategies to grow new leaders and help them gain skills in how to behave impartially, not just on 'being impartial'. We needed training across the whole leadership. Although we had created our first ever induction for volunteers in 2015, it only included one slide to unpack 'neutrality'. We needed a deeper way to have a positive influence on impartial behaviour in volunteers and staff. It was an important investment as many are still in place."*
>
> Ms Liliia Bilous, URCS ex-director general 2017-2020

Only in 2023 did URCS finally develop capacities to run its own internal SAF sessions – which were previously conducted by the ICRC – following a 'training of trainers'. The training is now being expanded to include a range of volunteer leaders elected by volunteers themselves. In 2024, IFRC's Stay Safe course is also in the final stage of an adaptation process that has taken almost two years to complete. It will be compulsory for all new and existing volunteers.

URCS made NSD investments in developing internal SoPs on 'managing spontaneous volunteers'. By 2019, as part of the ProVoice project, the Austrian Red Cross had helped URCS draft initial guidelines. The Danish Red Cross had also supported training modules on volunteer management in emergencies.

> *"We really benefitted from the URCS Guidelines on Spontaneous Volunteers when approximately 200 volunteers approached us in February 2022 after the escalation in the conflict. We conducted the short intensive induction about the Fundamental Principles, the Movement, and 'what you can, and are prohibited to, do'. We included safety and security training about what to do when air raid alarms sound, and how to give MHPSS support after they finished to people affected in the shelters. Volunteers were registered on the URCS database and given ID numbers which covered them with insurance too. In local branches, we don't need huge financial support. We just need support in how to do things and make them work."*
>
> URCS city branch head

To increase awareness of its roles and mandates, URCS also worked with the Ministry of Education to initiate IHL education programmes, as part of the school curriculum. These included first aid training to treat different injuries and classify gunshot wounds in order to save lives. The URCS branch communications kit included information to help clarify and disseminate legal base and auxiliary role definitions. Interregional managers and MTTs have used branch leader training to increase understanding of URCS's legal base and how to use it to establish a clearer public position and promote more effective negotiations with the authorities.



*Lutsk, Ukraine – Vira Antropova demonstrates physiotherapy techniques during a skills workshop ahead of the URCS Rehabilitation programme launch.*

*There is a large need for rehabilitation in Ukraine right now. This programme is designed to provide services to patients and their families where they live, while raising awareness of the importance of rehabilitation and the needs and contributions of people with disabilities.*

As a result of its longstanding work, and in spite of its reputational crisis in 2016, a 2023 market research survey confirmed URCS as the second most popular cause in Ukraine – scoring a 51% recognition rate and 74% in public confidence.

## 5. Strengthening 'legacy'

URCS's legacy is built on long-term NSD investments in flagship programmes and services with a specific relevance to conflict-sensitive contexts, including:

→ a tracing service
→ Emergency Response Teams
→ Mobile Health Teams (totalling 131 in 2023)
→ regional social, physical and medical rehabilitation centres.

These have played a significant role in maintaining access and acceptance in communities.

> *"Pre-2016 there wasn't much thought given to strategies or thinking of the future. URCS was satisfied with what it had, and not very prepared for different challenges in the world such as increasing social issues, digitalisation, and technology. We had faced the 2014 escalation of conflict in the east with manual systems. Before any further escalation in conflict and other issues, we wanted to build a network of locally-led action, but wondered how much capacity branches had to deliver without National Committee support. Although some of our existing partners at that time didn't understand and we suffered from a lack of funding. Nevertheless between 2016-2018 our new leadership focussed on systematisation, institutionalisation, and attracting new personnel*

*with a reformist approach. We needed a quicker corporate culture based on effectiveness, principles in action, and accountability to beneficiaries. Now, after the recent escalation, we saw a massive change – no matter which capacities you have, you have to mobilise all resources. Many new young people, volunteers and others have influenced our heads of branches with new ideas."*

Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

From 2016, to help address organisational instability, URCS made strategic NSD investments in new guidelines, SoPs and toolkits covering branch resource mobilisation and fundraising. MTTs were expected to provide training in resource mobilisation to branch leaders, staff and volunteers, and Danish Red Cross-supported mini-grants have produced interesting pilot income generation activities (IGAs) since 2019. IFRC's IGA training materials were adapted to fit the local Ukrainian context. In 2019, URCS conducted IFRC's OCAC process for the second time to better identify and address organisational deficiencies. To better respond to these deficiencies, URCS's Organisational Development (OD) Department was divided into three inter-related units:

| Branch Development Unit | To enhance organisational sustainability, develop potential to grow, be relevant to local needs, and oversee the development of branch heads. |
|---|---|
| Social Services Development Unit | To prioritise branches in areas of high need (identified by BraVoiE assessments), help branches develop critical social services, support in-service development methodologies, and help replicate successful results. |
| Volunteer and Youth Development Unit | Develop volunteering and youth services that respond to local needs, strengthen volunteering development and support systems, and share volunteer training resources. |

*"We were the first to sign a MoU with URCS 13 years ago. We signed a new MoU with URCS two weeks before the war started in 2022 after being happy and proud to see the transformation in the National Society over the past several years. From its dedicated neutral and impartial work helping evacuees in subway stations to having the most developed network of volunteers in place nationally, we are proud to partner with such a reputable humanitarian organisation. Through their principled leadership and transparent and accountable business structures we have provided over $10 million dollars over the past few years."*

Andriy Bublik, public and government relations director of Coca-Cola Ukraine

URCS's domestic and international resource mobilisation grew to unprecedented levels in the immediate aftermath of the conflict's escalation in February 2022, benefitting from the NSD investments from the National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) fund and other partners over the past 10 years. The three-person Resource Mobilisation Team had raised CHF67 million (US$74 million) during 2022, after the escalation, from 122,000 individuals and over 500 companies. Discussions also began with the British Red Cross and other strategic partners on investing in an endowment fund to continue to pay for its services and institutional costs in a regular and self-financed manner from three to four years onwards.

# 6.   Strengthening 'reputation'

After URCS's successful advocacy to secure it sole legal use of the Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem, there have been promising examples of branches negotiating new auxiliary role partnerships while responding to the conflict.

*"Our branch has very good relations with all local authorities in recognition of the neutral, impartial and independent social services we are offering. Our local authorities have agreed to finance our 'core' project for expanding home-based care. We provide the aid to people, and the authorities provide free transport. Sometimes the government also pays organisations for special services such as support to IDPs and even the provision of Mobile Health Teams. We have examples of some official reimbursements for such services, but these are not consistent. We also experience challenge arising from a lack of dissemination and misunderstanding as a result. For example, when a local authority asked us to give them the aid for distribution we refused, quoting our Fundamental Principles. The community realised that URCS and the Movement are one, and different from local government."*

URCS branch head

The current conflict also offers URCS a huge opportunity to build on its community connections. And URCS is already considering NSD investments that will allow it to play an effective role in community recovery and reconstruction after the conflict is over.

> *"Everything we do, every footprint, even if it's not visible now, has an impact for the future. Our main aim is not just to support people now, but to build a culture of peace and volunteerism, not just to use volunteers as a resource, but to build it from future seeds in schools and communities. From this we can achieve a big impact on strengthening social cohesion. Our volunteers are a big influence in their communities. A lot of beneficiaries have joined us as volunteers. What we do and provide is close to their heart. Volunteers have much more influence in decision-making in their communities – they help us to leave our negative emotions behind. URCS's former leadership before 2014 didn't have much vision about recruiting the younger generations who are more in touch with the realities of a changing world. We needed to choose strategies to respond to future challenges, using technologies and new skills to strengthen our transparency and accountability too. The more you show these, the more you attract people to be a social force for change."*
>
> Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

## 7.  Strengthening 'integrity'

In what will remain a conflict-sensitive context for some time, URCS has made NSD investments in promoting principled future leadership. A revitalisation of its membership system will allow members to become 'owners' of the National Society. They will contribute as funders (through membership fees), governance (through elected entitlement), and as 'connectors' or 'knowledge-brokers' with communities – with members sensitising the National Society to the needs of the most vulnerable and how to meet them.

URCS prioritised NSD investments in the following ways to strengthen its induction process for principled national, regional and local governance, both now and into the future:

- ✓ A new induction package was implemented for all branch leaders, staff and volunteers in 2019-2021
- ✓ The Local Branch Handbook was created in 2019 for local branch leaders, staff and volunteers, covering all areas of branch functioning, URCS's history and legal base, and a range of minimum standards in technical areas
- ✓ The modernised system for induction in branches, coming from the MTTs and inter-regional managers.



*Ukrainian Red Cross Information Center, Rostyslav Karpenko Maryna Hryhorova, Urkaine.*



*Major cities in Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, have been hit by missile attacks since February 2022. The Ukrainian Red Cross rapid response teams are working around the clock to provide critical support to people.*

# 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

URCS's 'strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination' (SMCC) approach resulted in the use, adaptation and operationalisation of the following Movement tools:

**Movement Coordination Mechanisms in Ukraine**

- Implementing a 3-tier Movement Coordination Mechanism comprising of 4 elements:
  - o strategic level (heads of URCS, IFRC, ICRC)
  - o operational management coordination (heads of all Movement components to monitor overall cross-sectoral progress against URCS's Strategy/One Plan) – monthly Movement Emergency Operations Platform (MEOPS) meetings
  - o NSD coordination – bi-annual NSD Steering Committee
  - o technical working groups (sectoral leads from URCS and all partners in specific technical areas)

**Movement Cooperation Agreements (MCA)**

- Signed by six out of the seven Partner National Societies present in Ukraine

**Harmonised National Society capacity building**

- Based on mapping partners' contributions to URCS's OD masterplans and roadmaps 2018-2020

**Movement Security Framework**

- Framed and managed by ICRC, signed by all Movement partners

**Movement Capacity Mapping**

- Updated "What, Where, and Who" (3W) data mapping to promote coordinated Movement planning and action
- French Red Cross-supported Information Management System database to integrate all data on branch human and financial resources, activities and programmes
- Exploring interoperability in logistics systems between Movement components.

Since 2022, a joint statement on adapting Seville 2.0 for the Ukrainian context has been the main baseline for SMCC in the country. However, the attempted implementation of Seville 2.0 saw the already highly competitive IFRC and ICRC competing for the lead.

URCS launched its One Plan 2023-2025 setting out revised strategic objectives on *"reaching people, covering gaps, empowering communities and local organizations, complimenting the government, building a strong URCS, and setting out an 'Attained clear pathway to Ukraine`s Resilience, Reconstruction & Recovery'."*[47] It is founded on three pillars: humanitarian action, resilience and recovery; sustainable development and qualified services; and auxiliary role and humanitarian diplomacy. The One Plan was framed against three further objectives: improving the Movement's complementarity; coordination with other humanitarian actors; and locally-led capacity building.

*"The URCS One Plan process left us feeling empowered. We had been concerned that all Movement support should be to support URCS to grow in strength and not invest in parallel processes and structures. We took the opportunity to publish URCS's localisation paper to help partners understand our vision on localisation and sustainability. We have modified level 2 (Movement Emergency Operations Platform) to show how we*

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

URCS's longitudinal journey since 2011 demonstrates how URCS's NSD investments, with coordinated strategic Movement partner support in its conflict-sensitive environment, resulted in:

→ transitioning from a top-down provider of national services to a community-engaging organisation

→ rebuilding public trust and confidence in local services that demonstrated neutrality, impartiality and independence

→ mobilising neutral, impartial and independent human capital in its staff and volunteer base

→ adapting Red Cross Red Crescent Movement tools such as the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) process to provide coordinated NSD support

→ adapting a recently formulated Strategic Plan 2021-2025 into an updated URCS One Plan 2023-2025 following the conflict response surge needs

→ refreshing volunteering, youth and branch development as integrated concepts

→ strengthening Safer Access, improving risk assessment, access and acceptance

→ updating transparency and accountability systems

→ deepening localisation through community-based planning

→ negotiating refreshed auxiliary roles as part of service, capacity, and sustainability plans

→ addressing 'rightsizing' and sustainability scenarios for the current scaled up structure

→ balancing short-term vs long-term support for URCS's organisational transformation strategy

→ investing in new younger principled leadership streams engaged in URCS's enhanced social cohesion and inclusion work

→ being assertive and innovative in strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination modalities for collective impact .



*Pavlograd, Ukraine, December 2018. Ekaterina (35) had to leave her small manicure studio behind when she fled the city of Donetsk at the beginning of the armed conflict in 2014. With her 10-year-old daughter, she found a new home in Pavlograd, and started to rebuild her business. Through the URCS livelihoods programme, she received financial support to enrol in professional training and buy new equipment, so she can provide for her daughter.*

# YEMEN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY
## A unified National Society "Everywhere for all"

Long-term National Society Development investments that strengthened the positioning, sustainability and impact of Yemen Red Crescent society in a fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environment

# 1.  Introduction

In a fractured state, riven by decades of conflict that have created a protracted humanitarian catastrophe, the Yemen Red Crescent society (YRCS) has maintained a unique status. It is the only neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organisation accepted in and with access to every part of the country. It has a network of 22 branches, 17 sub-branches, 12 health centres, 515 staff and approximately 12,000 volunteers, of whom more than 8,000 are active.
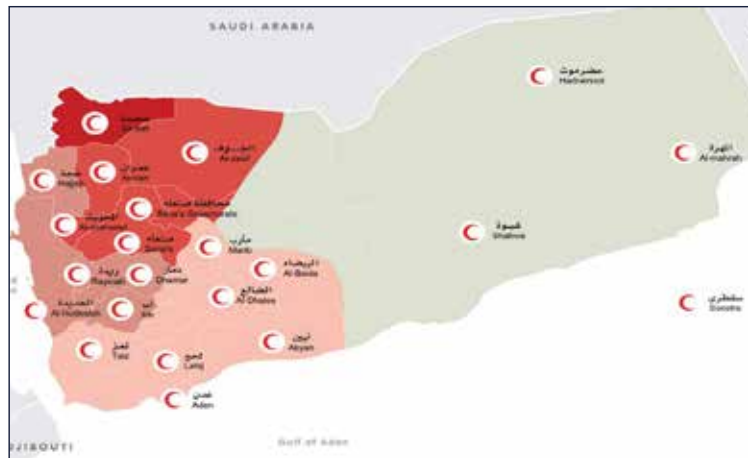


*"The YRCS has taken upon itself the humanitarian and moral responsibility of providing voluntary humanitarian services through its employees and volunteers located in all governorates of the Republic of Yemen. The YRCS focuses on providing life-saving services and preserving the dignity of those targeted during crises and in the field of disasters, health, and water, providing emergency services such as transporting prisoners, the wounded and dead; first aid; search and rescue; and sustainable services such as building schools and water networks and supporting health centres."*

Dr Fouad Mohammed Al-Maqhthi, acting president and secretary general of the YRCS

The YRCS has used a unique combination of organisational development and the Movement's tools and processes to remain a politically neutral National Society. As a result, it enjoys widespread recognition from local and national government agencies, armed groups, tribal leaders, and non-governmental and private-sector organisations. It has also managed to negotiate extensive levels of humanitarian access.

This case study shows how – to adapt and survive - YRCS focused on NSD investments that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation and integrity.** It describes the many customised NSD investments made by the YRCS and its partners, which were necessitated by key turning points in Yemen since 2011.

*"The humanitarian crisis caused by ongoing conflict has not only put more responsibility on our shoulders but has also provided us yet another opportunity to demonstrate how the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement's Fundamental Principles are actually put into action. This means YRCS has become, and will continue to become, more relevant than before. These services will not be effectively delivered unless we invest in developing and maintaining YRCS as a dynamic and strong organisation capable of providing unmet humanitarian services in the country."*

YRCS Strategic Plan 2016-2020

# 2.  Humanitarian context

With an estimated population of 30.4 million people, the Republic of Yemen falls into the UN's 'least developed country'[48] category and ranks top of the Fragile States Index[49], and second on the Global Hunger Index[50]. The country is vulnerable to climate change-related natural disasters such as heavy seasonal rainfall, floods, landslides, droughts, desertification, cholera, polio, malaria and dengue fever.

Complex governance structures, extreme poverty, natural disasters, rising living costs, a shattered health system, civil unrest and conflict have all conspired to create a protracted humanitarian catastrophe in

---

48  *https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category-yemen.html*
49  *https://fragilestatesindex.org/*
50  *https://www.globalhungerindex.org/*

Yemen. At least 56,000 people have been killed in armed violence since conflict escalated in March 2015. Half the country's health facilities have been destroyed in that time. The war and natural disasters have displaced 4.5 million people – three-quarters of whom are women and children (UNFPA, 2023), with Yemen having the second youngest population in the world. The country is in the grip of a famine affecting 17 million people.

Gender inequality persists. Restrictions on the movement of women have tightened in some parts of the country, potentially depriving women of services, especially those who need to travel to reach the increasingly sparse health centres.

# 3. Strengthening 'proximity'

NSD investments have consistently strengthened the YRCS's neutrality, impartiality and independence. Where violence and the presence of armed groups and non-state actors has restricted humanitarian access, YRCS has worked tirelessly to strengthen locally-led humanitarian action. This has required contextualised NSD investments in:

→ strengthening the humanitarian advocacy skills of local branches, sub-branches, staff and volunteers to ensure much wider consultation with key organisations and individuals – e.g. militia groups, tribal leaders, local authority representatives – to guarantee acceptance and access

→ local 'interlocutor' mechanisms through which YRCS shares humanitarian information with appropriate stakeholders, gathers information on needs, finds entry points into communities, and gains acceptance and trust

→ contextualising conflict-specific services that build community trust and appreciation (e.g. landmine clearance)

→ building local logistics infrastructure, expanding local assets such as branch buildings and warehouses enhancement, fleet management skills, and operational capacities in administration (with technical and financial support from the Danish Red Cross since 2018) to strengthen YRCS's position as an independent local actor with local authorities, armed groups and communities

→ building partnerships with local offices of the World Food Programme, the International Organisation for Migration, the UN Development Programme, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Oxfam based on YRCS's privileged access to all parts of Yemen.

The key to YRCS's localisation success lies in its NSD strategies to involve and empower communities. It launched the initial phases of this work as early as during its 2013-2016 strategic plan, which consolidated the organisation's position as the leading nationwide 'localiser':

*"The stark differences in local contexts within Yemen requires localised and adapted programme approaches depending on the geographical location, community culture and customs, recognised governance actors and structures, and degree of conflict and existing tensions among different groups. Interventions are shaped differently in the mountainous regions compared to the coastal regions. YRCS relies on community leaders and members to inform the practical adaptations required from programme interventions. As such, the majority of YRCS programmes strive to adopt community-based approaches which do not solely focus on direct provision of assistance and services, but also promote the active involvement of community members."*

A 2022 German Red Cross case study: 'YRCS: A united National Society navigating within fragmented territories'



*After heavy rain and floods in 2021, a Yemen Red Crescent Society team distributes household items to support families with shelter, clean water, sanitation and hygiene. This work was supported by funding from the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).*

The YRCS continued to make NSD investments in volunteering and branch development that led to the application of the Fundamental Principles. For example, the investments helped make sure volunteers and doctors would travel on planes to accompany prisoner exchanges between warring factions, showing the neutrality of YRCS. Volunteers repeatedly explained the meaning of the Fundamental Principles to authorities and armed groups in order to gain access:

> *"Using the tribal system to help your own people doesn't always mean 'help the other group'. We explained neutrality though local customs without changing the languages."*
>
> YRCS branch leader

NSD investments have enabled the YRCS to analyse risk and vulnerability in conflict-affected contexts, strengthening the perception of YRCS's neutrality, impartiality and independence in activities such as:

✓ training branch staff and volunteers to use hazard analysis as a 'neutral way' (e.g. explaining to local people that disaster risk reduction (DRR) needs to focus on moderate and high-risk areas and cannot accommodate everyone's needs, thereby increasing community acceptance)

✓ conducting the IFRC's Disaster Management Capacity Assessment (July 2017) of British and Swedish Red Cross support for National Society preparedness, risk management, coordination and operational capacity, using the IFRC's Well Prepared National Society tool

✓ Using the IFRC's Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment tool (2017) in 16 communities to assess fragile contexts and contextualise community-based DRR to help prepare communities for conflict and violence without raising their expectations beyond what could be delivered

✓ Helping merge YRCS's Disaster Management and Health departments' separate vulnerability assessment tools into the common Emergency Vulnerable Capacity Assessment tool, which enhanced integrated questions on gender, diversity and marginalised communities that could be addressed in neutral, impartial and independent programming approaches.

However, neither the 2017 Disaster Management Capacity Assessment nor the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment report of the IFRC and British and Swedish Red Cross addressed the conflict-sensitive aspects of YRCS's mandate, capacity and approach.

There are few global guidance documents on how to use DRR to help communities prepare for conflicts. So, in 2011, as the risk of conflict increased, YRCS started working on an Integrated Conflict Preparedness Project.[51] The programme, supported by its long-term partner the German Red Cross (GRC), was designed to address and mitigate the long-term effects of conflict. YRCS expanded its work on DRR in fragile, conflict-affected and violent contexts, as part of a global steering group also comprising GRC, the Climate Centre, IFRC and ICRC. When implementing its DRR and branch development strategies, its main NSD components included:

→ merging a DRR approach into YRCS's existing programme to rehabilitate educational institutions destroyed by war

→ increasing the capacity of local branches, sub-branches, staff and volunteers to assess local vulnerabilities

→ establishing or renovating community health clinics, targeting health risks in hard-to-reach areas

→ using auxiliary roles definition that enables YRCS to "substitute" for government health centres and build them where they do not exist

→ contributing to community cohesion by establishing school safety committees, which would also develop contingency plans to address violence and mitigate against hazards

→ ensuring conflict-sensitive approaches to deploying volunteers to communities to avoid tensions and harm

→ modelling appropriate cultural risk-assessment practices that ensured protection – for example in a GRC-supported YRCS health centre where every member of staff is female, and males will not be accepted, resulting in very high acceptance and attendance by the women of the communities served.

To further deepen and harmonise the many vulnerability-and risk-assessment processes, YRCS adopted IFRC's Preparedness for Response (PER) process. It used the IFRC-supported Disaster Management Capacity Assessment (July 2017) as a first phase of assessment, based on IFRC's Well-Prepared NS assessment tool. This was followed by a second assessment tool, which later evolved into IFRC's PER process were positively received by YRCS's leadership, who used NSD investments to further build the capacity gaps identified into its Disaster Response Management Department's action plan.

> *"NSD is not a department – it's an integrated approach where every department is to ensure that 100% of its activities strengthen National Society Development to maximise the long-term benefits to the institution. When we used the PER process we found that the Disaster Response Management Department had been considerably strengthened over recent years through NSD investments, but we also learned that no department is an island. For example, as a result of risk mapping and management training for our volunteers and branches, in all branches ICRC also joined us and supported the training of youth volunteers to reduce community risks in certain affected areas as well."*
>
> Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

To strengthen its local presence – and its reputation for neutrality, impartiality and independence – YRCS focused on branch and sub-branch development. As a significant element of its overall 'localisation' strategy over the past 12 years, YRCS's NSD investments included:

> → each branch having its own steering committee in charge of planning, implementation, coordination and collaboration with local actors (e.g., political parties, armed groups, tribes)
> → Branch Disaster Response Teams (BDRTs) that are organised, trained, equipped and connected to YRCS emergency operations centres. Warehouses across the country have also been established to devolve support and increase the effectiveness of local preparedness and response actions
> → conducting ICRC's Safer Access Framework (SAF) processes that led to the creation of branch action plans
> → adopting IFRC's Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) tool in 2019 and training nine YRCS staff and volunteers, who were an equal mix of men and women, and from both northern and southern parts of the country, who had facilitated BOCAs in 18 out of 22 branches by 2022
> → with IFRC support, ensuring that the eight elements of SAF have been consistently integrated into all NSD activities, which included an effective merger with BOCA. The YRCS SAF officer is also a trained BOCA facilitator and ensured SAF elements were integrated into BOCA assessments.

YRCS's earlier phases of development between 2011-2017 saw a fractured approach to branch development. IFRC's earlier challenge to provide Movement coordination and leadership arose out of access issues to the country, which were rectified by 2017 with an intensified approach to NSD provided through an in-country NSD delegate.

Although YRCS has been concerned about financial sustainability since 2011, very few partners had responded to its resulting strategic need to strengthen local resources, sustainability and acceptance. While the Danish Red Cross had initiated a small grants scheme to selected branches, YRCS received a grant from the National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) to conduct a study to assess the feasibility of establishing a medical oxygen manufacturing plant in December 2022.



*Local branches of Yemen Red Crescent Society distribute aid including blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets and hygiene kits to families who lost their homes to floods in August 2021. The response was supported by CHF 205,332 in funding from the IFRC.*

> *"The NSIA grant has spurred YRCS to make a further investment to strengthen our positioning as a trusted local actor. We need to strengthen our internal legal base on fundraising. In April 2023 we held a workshop supported by IFRC on developing a clear fundraising policy to guide YRCS stakeholders on transparency, accountability, and responsibilities at all local and national levels. Once we have a working policy we will apply for the NSIA's Accelerator Funding to scale it up across the territory. We also expect such income to help to pay for our own salaries instead of having to rely on Movement partners for 100% of our salary costs at present."*
>
> Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

## 4. Strengthening 'visibility'

> *"We are careful in the selection of volunteers who need to be perceived as trusted local people. They need to be either from a tribe, close to a tribe, or neutral to a tribe. Screening is not always possible versus the need to select volunteers who have access. One example was when ICRC struggled with access to hospitals in Taiz. YRCS mobilised volunteers from their local 'reliable network' with credibility to bring medicines through the checkpoints."*
>
> Partner National Society

Tragically, 13 YRCS volunteers and staff lost their lives in action between 2015 and 2018. When the conflict escalated in 2015, YRCS suspended the recruitment of all volunteers and young people, who they feared would bring the politics of the conflict with them and undermine the National Society's position as a neutral, impartial and independent organisation. However, YRCS worked on several initiatives to integrate volunteer safety and security tools into all programmes, including those focused on improving access through incorporating gender- and diversity-sensitivity into its programme and service guidelines. Examples included:

→ integrating tools to ensure minimum protection standards to complement DRR programming

→ mobilising female volunteers in communities where women can play a particularly important role (e.g., to contact and support women-headed families in IDP communities)

→ appointing a YRCS gender officer in 2016, who brought with them learning from other NS in the region (e.g. the Lebanese Red Cross gender-based violence training)

→ adapting YRCS's 2013 Volunteer Management Guidelines, which were further strengthened after the SAF self-assessment in 2015/16

→ developing YRCS systems to better match specific volunteer profiles with the communities they work in

→ appointing youth representatives in 2019, supplemented by the recruitment of a youth focal point in the Organisational Development Department in 2021, who initiated a youth policy development process

→ the introduction of some 'Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change' (YABC) sessions in branches from 2021 by the new youth focal point to encourage youth activities

→ asking the Italian Red Cross to support the strengthening of YRCS's Youth Policy, adapting IFRC's Youth Engagement Strategy and delivering YABC training to more branches to contribute to social inclusion and peace as a focus of YRCS's youth wing

→ using the COVID-19 response to strengthen community engagement and accountability mechanisms that built further community trust.

Recognising that violence and conflict have disproportionate effects on women and children, YRCS established its Psychosocial Support Programme (PSS) in 2015, accompanied by significant and contextualised NSD inputs. With the title 'Psychosocial Support Reduces Fear and Raises the Smile in the Faces of Children and Women in Particular, and Communities in General', the programme was supported by IFRC and GRC. It focused on women and children, reaching internally displaced people in partnership with UNHCR. *"The best actor in the field was YRCS." (Partner National Society)*. The programme's objectives included:

→ building the capacity of volunteers at YRCS branches and establishing psychosocial support teams to respond quickly when needed

→ building the capacity of social workers in schools to provide psychosocial support activities to the largest possible number of children

> → disseminating the principles and concepts of child protection to internal and external stakeholders
> → raising awareness of safety guidelines for before, during and after shelling
> → providing first aid courses for parents and children.

After the escalation of the conflict and increasing loss of life, YRCS also invested in a range of NSD investments to enhance its duty of care towards its at-risk volunteers and staff. These included:

> ✓ eliminating volunteer deaths since 2015/16 (when 11 volunteers died and six were injured) as a result of NSD investments in duty of care
> ✓ customising and adopting IFRC's Code of Conduct to protect volunteers from risk
> ✓ establishing YRCS's own Trust Fund for Volunteers in 2020, supported by all its partners (IFRC, ICRC, the Danish Red Cross, the German Red Cross, and the Norwegian Red Cross), which provides volunteers and their families with up to US$10,000 per year in the case of fatality, serious injury or severe sickness (the IFRC's Global Volunteer Insurance Fund was found to be too cumbersome and slow).

YRCS established its Media and Publicity Department in the early 1990s. It reaches a range of audiences including influential figures, armed groups, local councils, civilians, IDPs, local NGOs, media contacts, volunteers and vulnerable communities to promote YRCS, the Movement, and the Fundamental Principles. Its priorities and NSD investments included:

> → strengthening communications to promote awareness about the magnitude of the suffering Yemen
> → training communications officers in 20 branches
> → familiarising local communities with the work, Fundamental Principles, and the Movement to facilitate access for the field teams (reaching 175 school health workers, 113 civil society members, 252 local authority staff, and 31 members of armed groups in 2021 alone)
> → helping promote equitable access to assistance for women, girls, boys and men
> → conducting awareness campaigns using Radio-TV spots, posters, brochures, signboards beside roadsides, literature, and interactive theatre
> → innovative investments in the use of social media and YRCS's website in Arabic and English and professionalising YRCS pages on social media sites.

# 5. Strengthening 'legacy'

> *"It's the outcomes of long-term NSD investments that led to a legacy that no other local organisations enjoy. Continuity of governance and management, persistent humanitarian diplomacy to navigate external politics and pressures, strong community relations through the clinic network, and volunteers who have often given more than 20-40 years of service have enabled the NS to 'keep it all together'."*
> IFRC

Following the crisis in 2015, YRCS accelerated the building of key capacities – but in such a politicised environment these new capacities came with risks. When the Ministry of Health tried to take over YRCS, threatening its integrity, YRCS, ICRC and IFRC helped the Minister understand this would threaten YRCS's very existence.

> *"The National Society, with its NSD investments in its strong national legal base, local volunteers, and enduring trust, supported by the whole Red Cross Red Crescent Movement globally, was the main message that led the authorities to respect its independence."*
> IFRC



*The Yemen Red Crescent Society intensifies its relief efforts during the pause in conflict, and mobilises its staff and volunteers to deliver relief and aid services to people across the country.*

The main reason YRCS is accepted in the communities it serves is its legacy in providing life-saving care to mothers and children at health clinics across the country. Long-term investment in disaster preparedness supported by the British and Swedish Red Cross has created significant emergency response capacity. In the three years between 2016 and 2019, YRCS responded to 4,000 emergency incidents. In 2023 alone it responded to more than 35,000 local incidents through local capacities in its volunteer and branch response teams.

After the escalation of the conflict in 2015, YRCS's strong organisational base and unified structure created a high level of trust and confidence in communities and all external stakeholders. This resulted in a huge scale up of international disaster response funds, necessitating enhanced Movement coordination. For example, the Norwegian, Danish and German Red Cross and the ICRC supported YRCS's health centre network and primary care clinics with medical costs; finance development; logistics; and protection, gender and inclusion. However, these forms of support also brought transactional costs and risks. ICRC in particular paid for YRCS staff to deliver their short-term humanitarian targets. With all of YRC's 515 staff salaries being paid by partners, including 273 by the ICRC, YRCS's long-term existence is at risk. If any form of partner funding were to reduce or be withdrawn, YRCS's structures would be at stake.

In March 2020, YRCS had planned to undertake the IFRC's Organisational Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process to identify further gaps in its organisational capacities. However, several emergencies prevailed and it is planned to undertake it in 2024.

# 6.   Strengthening 'reputation'

The crisis that began in 2015 has created a very complex relationship between YRCS and the public authorities. With the resources of public authorities becoming ever more stretched, the concept of 'auxiliary' has been tested to its limits.

> *"Although it is hardly ever at 100%, YRCS's central and branch leadership are really trying to be independent and argue for their auxiliary role. The government doesn't 'instrumentalise' the NS too much. When the conflict escalated, even the government in Sana'a tried to impose their 'own people' but YRCS's leadership managed to avoid this."*
>
> ICRC Cooperation Team

YRCS has also faced challenges relating to organising internal leadership elections according its statutes. The last full elections were held in 1997, although governing council elections were held in 2020 in response to pressure from public authorities. However, a more urgent challenge for YRCS has been maintaining a strategic balance of stable north-south representation at national governance board level. This balance fosters structural unity, soothes personal tensions stemming from national divisions, and demonstrates that YRCS takes leadership decisions that maintain its position of independence and neutrality.

> *"With our NSD investments that guaranteed a consistent national presence, if a partner or donor offer support such as the refurbishment or building of four health facilities, we say 'yes, but two in the north and two in the south'."*
>
> YRCS HQ director

YRCS adjusts to this reality by coordinating with different levels – importantly, at the national level, it coordinates with the Supreme Council for Management and Coordination of Humanitarian and International Cooperation (SCMCHA). Through NSD investments in developing its national and local 'interlocutor' system, YRCS navigates these obstacles by coordinating with ministries, non-state armed actors, and armed groups. The interlocutor system has brought significant benefits, generating sympathy, cultural understanding and respect from some members of the authorities.

*YRCS volunteer Majed teaches children living in a slum about ways to protect themselves from cholera, including how to wash their hands with soap before and after eating.*

To invest in its future leadership, YRCS has been building up youth and "youth corners" for organised youth activities in different governorates, with the support of the German Red Cross. This is also a way of strengthening its social inclusion and peace work.

School children who returned to class after the 2011 conflict didn't know much about first aid. This gave YRCS the opportunity to start with 'easy access' ideas that later led into clearer psychosocial support for children, which were also integrated into its health services. But the situation changed in 2013/14 when access and security issues became increasingly difficult for international organisations. Within this changing context, YRCS developed this second innovative approach to conflict preparedness during this period:

> **YRCS's Integrated Conflict Preparedness Project, supported by the German Red Cross from December 2012 – January 2015**
> Launched to address and mitigate the long-term effects of conflict, the original priority of the Integrated Conflict Preparedness (ICP) Project was to tackle the impact of conflict on schools.
>
> Many schools had been taken over and occupied by military forces as a result of the Arab spring demonstrations. The ICP therefore aimed to:
> → target schools for reconstruction and refurbishment with the Ministry of Education
> → encourage students, particularly girls, to return to school
> → facilitate public education campaigns to discourage young people from joining armed groups
> → distribute first aid kits and training to communities affected by ongoing conflict
> → develop a psychosocial support (PSS) programme to help young people recover from violence and promote social harmony
> → continue the PSS programme after its official end in 2016 with continued support from ECHO and the Danish Red Cross.

YRCS is always conscious of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and aims to learn about appropriate programmatic interventions from the Lebanese Red Cross and other NS. It has focused on delivering ambulance, first aid and first responder services through a range of integrated NSD investments to help achieve this nexus. Examples include:

> → using DRR programmes as early as 2013 to help local staff and volunteers take the following three steps to promote more effective locally-led action:
>   o Step 1: strengthen staff and volunteer capacities to analyse the 'connectors and dividers' between actors, including warring parties, through stakeholder mapping
>   o Step 2: assist communities to form core groups to plan risk reduction measures (e.g. community-based committees for search and rescue, first aid, etc)
>   o Step 3: support small-scale mitigation projects (e.g. early warning mechanisms, infrastructure strengthening, etc) in schools located in areas where there armed groups
> → training volunteers to negotiate with armed groups
> → countering attempts by armed groups to recruit children from schools.

# 7. Strengthening 'integrity'

> *"Whereas our existing statutes serve as a broad base to regulate the relations between the HQ and branches, we need to ensure that the next updated version achieves greater clarification in a number of areas that will further strengthen our operational capacities. These include, for example, a harmonisation of the language and roles related to volunteers and staff, the options around reinstating membership, the formalisation of codes of conduct, the formalisation of policy making processes and management systems to implement them, and the setting out of processes for capacity strengthening of governance at all levels. This updating process will be prioritised in the near future to enhance our operational capacities and impact."*
> Dr Mohammed Al Fakih, YRCS director of programmes

YRCS has managed the development and revision of its legal base with extreme care to avoid being overtaken by factional and political interests. To increase its transparency and accountability to external stakeholders who need to demonstrate trust in its operations, it has also made strategic NSD strategic investments that include:

✓ supporting local branch and sub-branch staff and volunteers to collect data both manually and using online systems, while being extremely sensitive to 'connectors and dividers' in conflict-sensitive communities

✓ adopting financial and procurement regulations in 2016 with the technical and financial support of the Norwegian Red Cross and IFRC respectively

✓ adopting a Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy in 2022 in conjunction with IFRC and the Norwegian Red Cross, with training already completed in eight branches out of 22 by 2023

✓ adopting a CASH policy, with other policies covering branch development, communications, and finance regulations and policy close to completion

✓ establishing a Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) unit and appointing a compliance officer within the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) department, with wider CEA training

✓ putting stronger feedback and compliance mechanisms in place compared to previous years that continue to strengthen trust, credibility, acceptance and access

✓ noticeably improving PMER since the establishment of this specific unit in mid-2022.

In recognition of its trusted status as the key local humanitarian agency, YRCS has also been a leading member of the national Yemen Humanitarian Forum and has trained 12 local NGOs every year since 2016.

## 8. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

Since 2011, YRCS has improved cooperation and coordination mechanisms by:

→ using the pilot Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) before it became a Movement-wide tool to build synergetic support

→ establishing agreements between ICRC and IFRC to scale up their joint contribution in a coordinated and complementary way. ICRC started by supporting IFRC with NSD costs of approximately CHF 10 million (US$11.1 million) between 2017-2023 – formalised in a trilateral agreement in August 2021 between YRCS, IFRC and ICRC

→ developing a YRCS NSD initiative from November 2018 onwards

→ creating the Enhancing Movement Response in Yemen initiative in 2019, which created an environment that enabled short- and long-term NSD, which allowed IFRC to deploy an NSD delegate.

Despite these very positive achievements on Movement cooperation and coordination, challenges remain, including:

✗ the current lack of roadmaps setting out clear targets, expected outcomes, and deliverables within specific timeframes. These would help implement the Enhancing Movement Response in Yemen workstreams to ensure coordinated contributions to operational priority areas under health, disaster management, WASH, and NSD as identified in YRCS's strategic plans

✗ the continued instability and risks of Movement funding for YRCS's NSD priorities – for example, IFRC's dependence on ICRC funds, which was undermined as a result of an ICRC decision to reduce the IFRC NSD contribution in 2019 in order to pay to procure a YRCS branch building in Al-Dhale instead.

Nevertheless, the key strategic enablers to an environment conducive to cooperation have been:

> → a **Movement Cooperation Agreement (MCA)** with a YRCS-centric approach which improved coordination, incorporating a monthly Movement strategic platform comprising YRCS, IFRC and ICRC; a monthly Movement Operational Cooperation Group comprising the YRCS Executive Director, National Programme Coordinator, and representatives of all the Movement partners and NSD; and monthly Movement technical working groups formed on a thematic basis around health, disaster management, logistics, PMER, and NSD.
>
> → the completion of IFRC's **Unified Country Plan** process in 2023 with strengthened indicators: "No one will fight for themselves and their objectives, and all partners will be guided solely by YRCS's priorities".

# 9. Conclusions – lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

The prioritised NSD strategies developed by YRCS are what have kept it a unified National Society in a fractured external environment. With a variety of support provided by its long-term Movement partners, the characteristics that have kept YRCS positioned as a principled local humanitarian actor include:

> → sustained and principled leadership, maintaining a stable north-south representation on the national governance board, which "fosters unity within its structure"
>
> → managing centralised governance within a decentralised empowered branch network that reflects local tribal and cultural characteristics
>
> → unified strategic planning processes based on active branch consultation and involvement, and the use of SAF and BOCAs to start to build common capacities and new strategic directions
>
> → enhancing heightened negotiation skills and an 'interlocutor' network at all levels of YRCS to navigate complex arrangements with multiple stakeholders and warring parties
>
> → heightened risk and vulnerability assessment capacities customised to conflict-sensitive settings (e.g. VCA, and DRR in Conflict and Violence tools)
>
> → approaches to help communities prepare for, mitigate, and respond to violence and conflict
>
> → an auxiliary role, implemented through persistent dissemination of its Fundamental Principles and humanitarian advocacy with all public authorities, parties to conflicts and affected communities that resulted in continuous acceptance and access
>
> → a focus on a few core regularly reassessed services that contributed to the longer-term resilience of the most vulnerable populations across the whole country
>
> → 'localisation' in keeping with the Grand Bargain commitments that built strengthened principled, locally-led humanitarian action through sustained investments in gender- and diversity-sensitive branches and community-based volunteers
>
> → an increasingly strategic partnership coordination framework with Movement and external partners, with more assertive partnership management that scaled up community-based services and collective impact.

# Part 3

## Learning and a "Call for Change" to improve Movement-wide and donor practices that support NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

Part 3 analyses the transversal learning across all six National Society case studies. It highlights key cross-cutting preconditions for successful organisational transformation and NSD investments that strengthen locally-led humanitarian action in complex, fragile,protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

A set of 'Key Messages', drawn from the case studies and the discussions at a learning event held in May 2024, were collectively agreed by the six National Societies and the task force. These key messages, together with the actions proposed against a set of 29 prioritised practices described in this Part 3, are framed as a 'Call for Change' to improve Movement-wide and donor support for NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

# 1.   Purpose of the study

A list of 200 'successful practices' and 'undermining factors' were identified from across the six case studies. They included both successful practices that require replication and scaling up, and undermining factors which require action to mitigate or stop. These practices were listed under the four Commitments of IFRC's "NSD Compact" (2019) which *"defines NSD support and defines the main foundations for effective NSD support as well as the main roles and responsibilities for IFRC members as well as non-Movement actors when working together on NSD."* The four Commitments are:

- Better identification of National Society priorities in NSD (and the roles played by internal  and external stakeholders)

- Competences that match the needs in each context

- Aligned effective support (and the modalities through which it was delivered)

- Learning and quality assurance (and how this was shared, or can in future be shared, with Movement-wide stakeholders and external donors).

In order to facilitate consideration of the identified practices, representatives from the task force and the National Societies then prioritised these 200 practices into a shortlist of 50 practices, identified as the most important to address in the near future. (The list of 50 is presented in Annex 3).

The leadership from the six National Societies then carried out a second prioritisation exercise, to reduce the list of enabling and hindering practices down to 29, deemed to need the most urgent support and attention. At a 3-day 'learning event' hosted by the British Red Cross in London on 1st-3rd May 2024, the senior leadership of both the six National Societies and from each of the task force member institutions collectively analysed the 'key issues and root causes' related to these 29 practices and proposed actions to bring about improvements in NSD practices in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

# 2.   Key messages

The case studies in Part 2 demonstrate that a wide range of innovative NSD investments, implemented by the National Societies themselves or supported by Movement partners, have significantly strengthened the National Societies in such contexts. However, the Case Studies also show how other practices have hindered or undermined their development, hence the need for change.

To frame the overall learnings of the study, a set of 14 key messages on strengthening NSD practices and improving the quality and relevance of NSD support have been agreed, by the six National Societies and the membership of the task force, for dissemination across the Movement, and to support advocacy with donors.

These key messages, together with the actions proposed at the learning event against the 29 practices which had been prioritised as most urgent to address (see section 3 below), comprise the 'Call for Change'. They serve to highlight what is different about NSD in  fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts, as opposed to more peaceful and developmental contexts, and that therefore need special attention:

> **Key messages**
>
> NSD provides the platform on which NS services involve, consult and reach the most vulnerable, isolated and socially excluded populations, particularly those in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts. Successful and sustained long-term NSD investments build the organisational proximity, long-term legacy, principled integrity, and locally led services that form the foundations of access and acceptance by communities, public authorities and armed State and non-State actors. **NSD investments in specifically fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts must therefore prioritise:**

- Strengthening NS leadership, with NSD investments in leadership and governance skills development with opportunities for sharing best practice and enhanced peer support. Recognising the importance of the NS leadership role in fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the NS.

- National Society Development that is led by the National Societies (NS) themselves and based on NSD plans and priorities. Partners should support their long-term investment in institutional development, providing reviewed and harmonised tools, personnel with experience and competencies jointly selected by NS themselves, and avoiding parallel structures. National Societies, and their partners, should endeavour to prioritise NSD despite the onset of any crisis that emerges or is sustained in given contexts.

- the need for long-term transformational support, with investment ideally before any emergency/conflict, but at very least allowing for simultaneous longer-term support continuing during and after the emergency (to counter-balance the emergence of emergency-funded, short-timeframe NSD interventions which emphasise capacity strengthening over organisational transformation and repositioning). IFRC's National Society Development in Emergencies guidelines should reflect the challenges of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

- Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) support, particularly to address the challenge of working with state and non-state actors, but also to negotiate access, building trust and acceptance with all parties and local stakeholders. There is a need to increase HD support in conflict at all levels, including branches (supporting NS to strengthen their auxiliary role and understanding of the unique positioning of the Red Pillar and its difference to the UN, INGOs and other actors; and the capacity of volunteers, governance and staff in negotiation skills that save lives and gain acceptance and access to communities located in territories held by armed actors).

- the importance of enabling NS to build their own resources for impartial independent humanitarian response (to counterbalance a NS's inability to receive funds from local public authorities and other politically perceived non-neutral sources and to replace funding prevented by international sanctions) to sustain activities beyond the emergency period.

- the need for support in resource mobilisation (with accompanying due diligence and accountability systems support), with partners facilitating direct access to donors, exploring more private sector sources, and also fair funding – promoting one method of calculating core costs across the Movement, supporting NS to develop core cost policies and then commitment from partners to abide by them.

- the need to move from projects to supporting flagship services and programmes linked to the NS's auxiliary role, through infrastructure and skill enhancement and peer technical support in relevant areas, such as emergency health, pre-hospital care, first responder, and ambulance services.

- the need for increased support for branch and sub-branch development including infrastructure support, as this is critical for negotiating local access and acceptance (enabling the NS to maintain neutral and impartial presence, unitary positioning, and stable proximity in communities that are located in areas held by State and non-State armed actors).

- the need for greater support for the role of youth in promoting social cohesion and peace building (e.g. Exploring humanitarian Law (EHL), Youth as agents of Behavioural Change (YABC).

- the need for rolling out global minimum standards in supporting and protecting volunteers.

- the need for scaling up peer support and knowledge management systems to share effective practices, particularly in sensitive topics such as legal base development and auxiliary role strengthening etc in such contexts.

- addressing donor disinterest: strengthening donors' understanding of the need for flexible support to the longer-term organisational development processes of NS and how this enables acceptance and access. This will require better measurement of NSD outcomes that result in more principled, sustainable, and expanded locally led humanitarian services.

- the need for strengthening NSD investments in gender, diversity, inclusion and community engagement and accountability approaches, that lay the foundations for gender and diversity-sensitive community participation and services that strengthen acceptance and access.

- the need to invest on better understanding of Seville 2.0 across the Movement to ensure that the provisions of the agreement are consistently implemented and or observed by partners. The implementation of Seville 2.0 should promote coordinated support based on the centrality of the NS strategy, priorities and plans, and alignment to the wider IFRC "Unified Plan" and Strengthening Movement Coordination and Coordination (SMCC) instruments.

## 3. Actions proposed to address the 29 NSD practices prioritised as most urgent to address

At the 'learning event' in London in May 2024, participants collectively scrutinised the 29 priority NSD practices  to identify the 'key issues and root causes' behind each. Actions to resolve these issues were proposed and discussed by event participants. These actions are deemed to address the urgent needs for change both across the Movement, and also in external donor NSD support strategies, to better support NS in  fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected  contexts. As with the original 200 practices, the practices and corresponding proposed actions are framed under the relevant Commitment area of IFRC's NSD Compact:

| IFRC NSD Compact Commitment 1 | Better identification of NS priorities in NSD: NSD support follows a pattern that focuses on the needs and strategic priorities identified by a National Society. | |
|---|---|---|
| **Prioritised issue** | **Key issues/ root cause** | **Proposed actions** |
| 1.1 Mapping and coordinating partner support to NSD plans/ National Society (NS) requests for long-term NSD support are often unmet. | • NS should lead on developing their NSD plans<br>• Many partners not aware of NSD plans or do not support due to lack of back donor support<br>• No clear learning on benefits and challenges of bilateralism and consortium models<br>• NS reporting to different institutions | • NSD plans need to be progressive and realistic. (NS)<br><br>• Advocacy to back donor on NSD. (PNS, IFRC)<br>• Promote  unified reporting formats<br>• Advocate for more coordinated approach on NSD. Unified procedures. (NS, IFRC, ICRC) |
| 1.2 NSD investments in legal base, Red Cross Law, auxiliary role and statutes revisions that maintain independence from public authority control or influence, including MOUs with successive public authorities to supplement and/or substitute for public humanitarian services. | • Not all NS have a Red Cross law (but context-specific reasons sometimes make this difficult – in divided territories for example)<br>• Joint IFRC/ICRC Statutes Commission (JSC) feedback: too vague/ universal, too delayed, not context-specific | • IFRC to disseminate "Guide for Parliamentarians" to facilitate advocacy<br>• JSC needs:<br>  o more human resources – options include NS staff on loan/secondees from NS with strong legal base<br>  o More PNS funds/technical support<br>  o Training for IFRC and PNS, HoDs and NSD delegates in legal advice advisory capacity so that they can provide support before drafts are sent to JSC |
| | • Model RC law not widely known<br>• Lack of shared examples of peer NS Laws/Statutes<br>• No systematic shared learning and peer support between NS | • IFRC to disseminate RC Model Law<br>• JSC web page to share examples of strong NS Laws and Statutes |
| | • ·No clear guidelines globally for NS Board members + induction packages | • IFRC/ICRC revising Movement Induction Course (MIC) – will it be relevant to local governance or too general and so used for induction only?<br>• NS need modules to strengthen Board member training on roles at all levels (IFRC)<br>• JSC pool of NS legal base experts exist – information on support available needs improved disseminations to all NS |

|  | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | • Need to have more consistent NS internal legal adviser capacity<br><br>• Linkages between IHL work, auxiliary roles, and IDRL (where this exists) are not always clarified.<br>• Lack of support for strengthening youth governance structures<br>• ICRC/IFRC/PNS (e.g. Canadian RC and Danish RC) support for Exploring humanitarian Law (EHL) is not consistent or well known<br><br>• There are good examples of the use of local law firms to provide support (but this can be a risk too if they don't understand the RCRC Movement, auxiliary roles etc) | • NS should have dedicated internal legal advisers – attending and receiving support from IFRC/ICRC Joint Legal Advisers annual meeting<br>• IFRC/ICRC to produce orientation material (including a visualisation of the linkages between different aspects of a NS legal base)<br><br>• IFRC revising Youth engagement Strategy (YES) at next GA – it requires conflict-specific context<br><br>• IFRC/ICRC/PNS (e.g. Canadian RC and Danish RC) to revitalise Exploring humanitarian Law (EHL) for educational institutions – needs an investment plan<br>• Youth as agents of Behavioural change (YABC) is especially relevant in conflict/violence-affected contexts and needs an investment plan for scale up.<br>• IFRC/ICRC to produce guidelines for standards/induction/principles for sub-contracted local law firms to follow |
| 1.3 Maintaining flagship services in community-based health, DM first responder, transportation of human remains, First Aid, Restoring Family Links, landmine risk education, ambulance and pre-hospital care, Rehabilitation Centres, Community Health Committees, and social cohesion and peace building programmes in remote and inaccessible communities. | • Not enough connections with PNS domestic department<br><br><br><br>• IFRC not facilitating peer NS/PNS support<br>• No flagship programme support – partners sometimes don't even know the NS's auxiliary roles and therefore don't support flagship programmes that lead to access and acceptance?<br><br>• NS leadership need assertive approach to coordination | • PNS to explore potential technical and funding alliances with their domestic departments to support NS partners' flagship programmes.<br>• IFRC should copy ICRC model of shared leadership/MOUs with key PNS to provide some NSD support<br>• Need to scale up existing examples of peer to peer NS support - partners sometimes<br>• Need Movement concept paper around flagship peer support (ambulance systems, emergency services, first responders etc), including IFRC/ICRC specified roles as facilitators.<br>• Flagship support should be aligned to each NS's Strategic and NSD Plan to operationalise its auxiliary role (New Ways of Working and Unified Plan should strengthen this process).<br>• NSDAG, in coordination with ICG, to develop best practice paper for transition from projects to programmes.<br>• There is a need for more back donor advocacy – stories of NSD investments should be described through localisation lens to demonstrate how the outcomes in strengthened local structures and human resources facilitate access and acceptance in conflict/violence affected contexts<br>• Once a flagship programme is identified PNS should provide financial and technical support if requested<br>• Movement partners should realign programme support to prioritise life-saving flagship programmes in conflict/violence contexts (e.g. First responders, ambulance services etc)<br>• RFL is a common auxiliary role/flagship programme but needs wider funding than simply ICRC – see Movement RFL Strategy agreed at CoD in 2007. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.4 | Supporting organisation-wide NSD and repositioning strategies | • IFRC needs to link NS Strategic Plans with package of Guidelines and Minimum Standards and budget resources to achieve transformation<br>• NS are often not describing their transformation strategy to help partners support different elements<br>• Some NS have no clear NSD strategy<br>• Need NSD components in all services | • Potential to use IFRC 'One Plan' process to empower NS with integrated (not standalone) NSD<br><br>• NS to articulate clear Strategic Plans and NSD Plans, setting out transition goals.<br>• See agreed actions that cover flagship services also also under 1.3 above |
| 1.5 | Strategic balancing of a strong auxiliary role with parallel investments in greater self-sustainability to mitigate against over-dependence on government or other external donors. | • Some partners think they are implementing partners<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>• NS not having a clear 'Localisation Strategy' to ensure NS priorities respected | • Change mindsets – change "Country Manager" to "Country Representative" profiles to signal ending "implementing" responsibilities.<br>• Sometimes issues are down to the lack of relevant competencies of international delegates – NS need to screen all Movement role profiles for the country (RCRC Principles and Rules (P&R) agreed at CoD already specifies no deployment unless NS accepts but rarely practiced). IFRC to redistribute P&R<br>• There are some good practices which should be scaled up – joint interviews with NS; shared shortlists for feedback. This is not always practical in surge moments, but more in recovery and development programming<br>• NS need to be able to give performance review feedback on IFRC/PNS delegates to their managers.<br>• All localisation policies and position papers should re-emphasise importance of support to auxiliary role and flagship life-saving services<br>• IFRC drafting a "Locally-led action" Resolution for IC 2024: Need to ensure it reflects conflict and violence-specific dimensions, linking NSD to access and acceptance issues<br>• Consider the possibility of each NS having a "localisation position paper" drawing from the IFRC Resolution (even though the NS Strategic Plan and NSD Plan are the key localisation documents)? Maybe better to have an ICG-adopted "Shared commitments to localisation" strategy and all NS follow – should be linked to IFRC IC Resolution |
| 1.6 | Transitioning from project-based approaches to wider organisation-wide NSD and repositioning strategies/ Showcasing "localisation" as a process of strengthening local capacities to deliver quality services at scale | • No sharing of good practices – e.g. core cost strategies, investment fund models after emergencies, no pool of experts (e.g. BRC has investment Fund experts)<br>• Lack of standardised TORs for key NS roles to facilitate transition thinking (SG/DG, Managers etc) | • Need PNS commitments to transitioning from project to programme – need to set pilots and targets.<br>• Use 6 NS case studies to share and replicate good practices and lessons learned.<br>• Each NS should have a dedicated, empowered focal point for managing institutional transformation, reporting direct to SG/DG<br>• Build skill set in Movement for senior executive leadership and transformation management – start with establishing new flagship programmes and sustainable business models as entry point for enhanced skill building |

| 1.7 | Despite some good examples, NS requests for long-term support to accompany organisational transformation processes are still often unmet | • Need for unearmarked NSD funds to support NS-led transformation<br>• NS need to have clear NSD and transformation plans | • NS/IFRC/ICRC/PNS to better describe NSD as enhancing localisation, access and acceptance.<br>• Disseminate existing good practices to replicate and scale up across partners/donors – e.g. Canadian RC using own funds to provide unearmarked 5-year NSD funds to support NS-led transition strategies; DANIDA allocating 40% of all 3-5 year funding support to NSD.<br>• ICG and IFRC/ICRC need coordinated donor advocacy to share good practices (e.g. DAG)<br>• Explore more private sector and non-traditional donor partnerships (but need to be aware of FPs and potential risks). E.g. 9/10 most climate vulnerable countries in conflict zones – use as entry point for sustainable local capacity enhancement and transformation.<br>• Moving to multi-year support– promote at Oct 2024 – COD/GA/IC.<br>• Use SMCC to facilitate transition to long-term support.<br>• Explore lessons learned with diaspora support models in conflict contexts and develop guidelines that minimise risks of politicisation. |
| 1.8 | Maintaining unitary status in fractured territories divided by conflict and separate governance systems through new Humanitarian Diplomacy mechanisms, for example, trained "interlocutors", "access negotiators", and "networking committees" and Humanitarian advocacy. Examples in the case studies include how this has resulted in senior public authority officials instructing all officials at national and local levels to respect the NS and its Fundamental Principles (Afghanistan) and Humanitarian Diplomacy training for legislative advocacy (Honduras RC) | • No IFRC HD focal points any more<br>• Who should lead/ advise on HD? IFRC/ICRC/PNS?<br>• Lack of guidelines on HD<br>• Need IFRC to play 'facilitation' role connecting NS experiences<br><br><br>• IFRC NSD Policy – too broad – need clearer guidelines to implement in local contextual ways<br>• 'Too many NSD delegates' in one country! | • IFRC HD Policy being revised – needs to integrate sharper conflict-sensitive HD elements.<br>• IFRC HD coordination and support mechanisms need clarifying and strengthening.<br>• IFRC redrafting HD in Emergencies Guidelines – these need sharper conflict-sensitive elements.<br>• Need a Movement HD investment strategy to include joint IFRC/ICRC agreed complementary roles.<br>• IFRC to facilitate peer knowledge exchange between NS who have maintained unity in divided territories.<br><br>• IFRC to develop more practical guidance.<br>• In surge contexts there can be too many NSD delegates in one country– the NS to be empowered to coordinate while IFRC facilitates coordination mechanisms |

| IFRC NSD Compact Commitment 2 | Competences that match the needs: To be effective, all collaboration through partnerships must be based on clearly identified needs on the demand side, a clearer offer of skills and competencies of the appropriate quality on the offer side, and a proper matching of the two. Globally 3 priority areas are set to highlight the collective concern and areas that need special attention when taking part in NSD support – Volunteering; Integrity, Transparency and Accountability; and Financial Sustainability. | |
|---|---|---|
| **Prioritised issue** | **Key issues/ root cause** | **Proposed actions** |
| 2.1 Long-term funding support for NSD (e.g. DANIDA and CRC) through 5 year unearmarked NSD contributions. | • No clear presentation of NSD priorities to partners by NS (Partners cannot then advocate to donors as they don't have the information)<br>• IFRC "Emergency-funded NSD" with short timeframes of DREF and Appeals | • NS need to articulate their NSD needs/ priorities better – these need to mirror the strategy. These NSD 'Plans' need to be tracked and evaluated to be able to demonstrate impact to donors in order to encourage more funding for NSD.<br>• IFRC Better socialisation of NSD 'plans' across the Movement<br>• ALL - Need to clarify role of NS more for donors – clarify the synergy between mandate and strategy of IFRC/ICRC and the role of NS<br>• IFRC needs a clear position/promotion of the importance of long term NSD during emergencies that all can then advocate to donors to encourage investment.<br>• PNS AND IFRC Facilitate NS direct access to donors (accompanying them to strengthen their capacity to liaise direct)<br>• IFRC to develop guideline for NS on how to engage with private sector donors.<br>• NS to to demonstrate impact of NSD on Communities better.<br>• NS need to be able to showcase what the NSD has achieved – the impact on communities |
| 2.2 Donors Seeing NS as "implementing partners" with no contributions to their longer-term NSD Plans and sustainability. | • Need better promotion of localisation on global level (Links with practice 1)<br>• From talks to action and paper to practice | SEE 2.1<br>ICG to share Key Messages from the study with DAG and also to consider influencing opportunities around International Conference. |
| 2.3 Inconsistent mapping of support available from multiple partners to strengthen synergy, strategic contributions, gap analysis, and collective impact. | • Absence of relevant coordination mechanism agreed by all partners<br>• IFRC: No harmonised mapping of partners' skills and competencies to ensure coherence. | • Develop a mapping of all partners competencies and capacities and skills available (IFRC)<br><br>• Develop Movement-wide knowledge management system (IFRC)<br>• Dissemination of Communities of Practices among NS (IFRC)<br>• Develop Federation-wide approaches. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2.4 | Successful SAF risk identification and management support from ICRC | • SAF integration with or linkages to other Movement tools (e.g. BOCA) are still not clear | • IFRC to lead BOCA review – including complementarity with SAF & other branch development tools (incorporating recommendations from the studies, & all NS input) Q3 and Q4 2024<br>• Improve promotion of movement related tools (e.g. BOCA, SAF, PER…) depending on context. (R/All)<br>• Movement coordination in emergencies to become more effective and sharper. (All/R)<br>• Increased investment in assessment plans (PoAs) (All)<br>• Movement coordination mechanism to be used for corporation and coordination, not just information sharing (All)<br>• Apply accompaniment approach<br>• SAF to be owned by all Movement Partners (ICRC)<br>• Development of holistic one NSD plans. |
| 2.5 | Using Movement tools such as DREF and Early Action Protocols to strengthen NSD capacities in volunteers and branch systems. | • Integration of NSD in DREF<br>• Increase the funding for NSD in conflict and emergencies<br>• Another PER version being developed with new indicators! But we haven't implemented the previous one yet! Is OCAC outdated? Task Force working on new certification linking to external certification | • Increase understanding on NSDiE and DREF (other funding tools) complementarity across the Movement (appeals, NSIA)<br>• Review DREF guidance for NSD inclusion (IFRC)<br>• Ensure revised NSDiE guidelines reflect learning from this study (IFRC)<br>• Movement assessment tools to be reviewed to enhance complementarity in crisis/ conflict contexts (PER, BOCA, SAF…) (IFRC, ICRC)<br>• Growing NSIA, CBF and improve how the funds work. (IFRC and ICRC)<br>• IFRC and ICRC Emergency Appeal guidance should be reviewed to include NSD<br>• Increase understanding of which tool to use at what point/ context (IFRC, ICRC) |
| 2.6 | Deploying culturally sensitive personnel familiar with local traditions and customs to operational contexts to provide sympathetic and empathetic support to NS stakeholders. | • Good recruitment processes in PNS<br>• Lack of NSD pool of "surge advisors" familiar with fragile, complex, violence and conflict-affected contexts and transformation processes | • Roll out of IFRC competency Framework, including more conflict-sensitive elements<br>• Use the NSD competency framework in HRM cycle (all partners)<br>• Develop a pool of experts on NSDiE within NS and surge (IFRC, PNS, NS)<br>• Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in HRM processes (ALL).<br>• NSDiE trainings for Ops manager and team leaders (IFRC+PNS)<br>• Increase use of regional response capacities RDUs (IFRC)<br>• Cultural briefing to be given to all delegates<br>• NS to be involved in delegates appraisal (Recruitment) (Partners) |

| 2.7 | PNS: Direct support to branches without contributions for NSD/ organisational transformation. | • Lack of experience and willingness from NS<br>• NS focus on projects and not NSD<br>• No clear NS cooperation policy on working with partners | • IFRC should develop an 'operational section' of the Compact – 'rules' to implement the Compact Commitments: For example, i) requirement of a minimum % contribution to the NSD Plan, ii) that all Branch Development Support should go through the NS HQ (always the point of entry iii) Guidance for provision of technical support (i.e. that the form of this needs to be agreed with the NS.<br>• This also needs to inform the IFRC Policy of Development Cooperation (being discussed in 2026)<br>• IFRC needs to implement its mandate and set examples and standards accordingly.<br>• The above is all relevant to ICRC in conflict areas – need to address gaps in Seville 2.0 but also to ensure better coordination so that support to all areas of a country is covered<br>• IFRC would need to call out PNS who are not following this Compact operational guidance.<br>• NS need to have open conversation with partners when certain individuals do not abide by the guidance. |
| 2.8 | PNS and IFRC and ICRC: Undermining localisation by running parallel teams with high administration costs instead of paying for NS personnel and investing in their capacity enhancement | • Lack of trust on NS<br>• PNS wants visibility of their work<br>• PNS develop their staff capacities with deployment instead of support to NS<br>• PNS driven by the requirement of the back donor | • NS need to be involved at all stages of programming development – need to be able to say no. This needs to be an open discussion (needs to be added to the operation guidance suggested in 2.2 IFRC)<br>• NS need to be consulted on the recruitment of any delegates – The NS needs to request for the upskilling of their own staff members.<br>• If the NS wants a delegate to be embedded they should be involved in the recruitment.<br>• When it is agreed that the partner will recruit a delegate the role should follow the 'counterpart' approach<br>• IFRC need to coordinate a shared leadership approach – shared delegates – so as not to have the same role in multiple PNS (This should be in the IFRC operational guidance discussed at 2.2)<br>• PNS/IFRC/ICRC need to be transparent about the cost of their parallel structures – do this analysis and share it |

| 2.9 | PNS: Not acknowledging specific contextual factors, especially in relation to sustainability (e.g. lack of long-term funding to support the core operations of NS in situations of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts, in preference to a short-term "project" focus). | • Personalities with limited partnership skills and attitude<br>• Lack of knowledge about context<br>• No open agreement on joint focus | • PNS/IFRC/ICRC Improve the induction for delegates and staff on NSD, especially in Conflict areas and emergencies (i.e. the need to focus also on long term needs of the NS. This needs to be included in their Job Description<br>• NS should be involved in the induction of all partner staff<br>• NS should be asked to feed into performance appraisals of PNS/IFRC/ICRC staff and delegates |
|------|------|------|------|
| 2.10 | NS: Lack of assertiveness in extracting funding for NSD support from external non-Movement partners. | • Lack of NSD institutionalisation / Expect everything from Movement<br>• Guidance on local and global MoU and integration of NSD in those<br>• Lack on NSD promotion by IFRC and ICRC | • Facilitate link between NS and local embassies/UN in country<br>• Use these case studies with embassies and UN in country to demonstrate importance of NSD<br>• In the development of NSD Plans NS need to integrate discussion of need to secure NSD funding from Non-Movement partners<br>• Use DAG and Donor support Group to facilitate funding for NSD<br>• ALL Use ongoing localisation discussions to ensure funding for NSD.<br>• ALL Improve documentation of impact of NSD IFRC. |
| 2.11 | NS: Leadership championing of integrity, transparency, accountability, and sustainability | • Lack of commitment by the NS leadership to demonstrating how successful NSD investments strengthen operationalisation of the fundamental principles in structures and services | • IFRC to develop leadership training modules together with ICRC with inputs from NSs by Dec 2024<br>• IFRC to map out Leadership development initiatives and needs and develop RC/RC plan/concept for leadership development.<br>• Partners to include a commitment to support NS sustainability<br>• Develop Corporate Governance frameworks  (NS)<br>• Develop accountability system and succession plans (NS)<br>• Create SoPs/standards (+ profiles)<br>• Improve volunteer management to develop career pathways (NS)<br>• Increase  peer-to-peer learning on leadership (IFRC)<br>• Leadership/management competencies need defining and development (IFRC, NS)<br>• Promotes existing training for NS leadership e.g. HLMS (ICRC)<br>• Include leadership training in NSD plan (NS) – Funding for NS |

| IFRC NSD Compact Commitment 3 | Aligned effective NSD support: All such support must also be of the right quality, aligned and avoiding duplication. | |
|---|---|---|
| **Prioritised issue** | **Key issues/ root cause** | **Proposed actions** |
| 3.1 Inconsistent approach to framing and agreeing "core cost" (Indirect) policies and assessments. | • Back donor pressure on PNS on working in a particular location<br>• Weak capacities to develop a comprehensive Core/Indirect Cost Policy<br>• Complicated calculation due to evolving context<br>• Should there be a clear template for shared costs?<br><br>• Need clear description of 'shared costs', 'overhead costs', and 'admin costs'<br>• Need 'shared cost of policy'?<br>• Lack of sharing of successful 'shared costs' examples from NS] | • IFRC (FDCN) to define Movement terminology and concept of core (indirect) cost recovery and finalise guidance by Q3 2024..<br>• NS need clear NS core (indirect) cost recovery policy. (NS)<br>• Need to have a common understanding and approach in the Movement of what comes under Core/Indirect Costs and what comes under NSD. (IFRC/FCDN as above)<br>• PNS need to increase investment in NS Finance Development – All NS need to have basic financial processes in place, e.g. annual audits, before they can develop core/indirect costs policies.<br>• PNS/IFRC Increased support to NS to develop Core/indirect  Cost policies but this support should be from within the Movement (so they understand the RCM systems) and should accompany the NS/work with them (not have a finance delegate just write a policy for the NS – needs understanding and ownership across the NS)<br>• Need a consistent approach to Core/Indirect Cost Development so any support should align with FDCN guidance on Core Cost Policies – accountability with IFRC<br>• All partners PNS, IFRC and ICRC need to then support the Core/indirect Cost Policy rate once it is evidenced – however NS need to allow for the partners to transition their budgets to allow for this. |
| 3.2 Ensuring a balance between funds to strengthen infrastructure with unearmarked NSD funds to build local capacities and resources in the spirit of localisation | • Lack of sufficient funds to support long term NSD.<br>• NSD funds: pool funds NSIA, CBF and more<br>• Plan for fundraising long-term for NSD | • PNS, IFRC, ICRC should ensure rebalancing institution and programme capacity for NSD.<br>• Support partners to develop and apply a policy to ensure the above. (PNS) |
| 3.3 ICRC and PNS: Payment of 100% of NS total salaries without parallel sustainability building strategies | • Using NS as implementing agency | • NS need to say NO to 100% salary support only. PNS and ICRC should not just pay 100% salaries without sustainability plan (needs to be included in the operational guidance at 2.2) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3.4 Change-resistant leadership in NS with lack of willingness to follow up on Movement self-assessment processes. | • Lack of ownership by NS leadership<br>• Lack of knowledge and skill among leadership<br>• Limited exposure to NS leadership | • Sensitisation of leadership senior management of NS (IFRC, NS)<br>• More participation opportunities for leadership of all levels on international forums (IFRC, ICRC, PNS)<br>• Contribute to PoAs of self-assessments and joint follow-up systems (all partners)<br>• Harmonise assessment tools and develop a joint master PoAs (all partners)<br>• More exposure missions<br>• Share of good examples of successful change processes (NS) |

| IFRC NSD Compact Commitment 4 | Learning and quality assurance: There is a need to capture the learning, share it, and reflect the learning to improve quality of NSD support in order to contribute to a stronger IFRC and Movement. Whenever NSD support is planned, each actor is expected to reflect these commitments and the specific roles outlined in this NSD Compact . | |
|---|---|---|
| **Prioritised issue** | **Key issues/ root cause** | **Proposed actions** |
| 4.1 NS: Lack of succession planning and institutional continuity management . | • Lack of check and balance and continuation of mechanism and policies<br>• Lack of vision among leadership<br>• Outdated and irrelevant constitution<br>• An effective governance system in place<br>• Training of leadership on NSD | • Create policies and mechanism around corporate governance frameworks.<br>• Contextualise statutory commission guidelines.<br>• Joint commission to help NS in developing their statutes, not just commenting (ICRC, IFRC)<br>• Develop training modules for NS leadership (different level) (IFRC)<br>• Provide more formal training to NS leadership (IFRC, ICRC)<br>• Ensure ongoing investment in governance.<br>• Ensure signing of Code of Conduct by governance.<br>• Increase investment in system development e.g. HR, DT, Finance (NS) |
| 4.2 No joint monitoring of NSD investments with partners/ Lack of quantitative and qualitative monitoring to track the outcomes of NSD and programmatic investments. | • Absence of relevant coordination mechanism agreed by all partners<br>• Absence of monitoring system (indicators) for NSD<br>• No practices of data sharing<br>• Lack of systematic follow up by NS to Plans of Action arising from OCAC, BOCA, PER, SAF | • Create/ use relevant coordination mechanism, NSD committees.<br>• Use benchmarks of OCAC, BOCA, SAF etc for monitoring (NS + all Partners)<br>• Impact measurement on NSD results – develop system and tools (IFRC)<br>• Partners to invest in NS data management instead of data collection.<br>• Percentage of NSD in programme funding to increase.<br>• Increase tolerance to experiment and fail<br>• NSD to be the foundation of bilateral partnership (all partners) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4.3 | IFRC Facilitation of peer support from neighbouring or similar country contexts (e.g. to address legal base complexities) | • IFRC not facilitating enough peer support<br>• No clear NSD 'Communities of Practice' for NS in conflict-affected contexts<br>• Existing Communities of Practice not known by all NS<br><br>• Contextualised Seville Agreement 2.0 (e.g. clarification of co-convenor roles in divided territories)<br>• NS lead coordinator in Movement on NSD, understanding more about roles. | • Standardise and systematise services of IFRC Country coordination teams. (IFRC)<br>• IFRC to take brokering role for peer support.<br>• Mapping of NS competencies, strengths, and capacities. (IFRC)<br>• Establish CoP for NSD in conflict affected countries. (IFRC)<br>• Movement coordination agreements (MCA) - Advocate for MCA (NS)<br>• Better guidance on the roles of different components (ICRC, IFRC) |
| 4.4 | IFRC Communities of Practice in Branch Development, sustainability, and Volunteering exist – but are not widely shared at NS leadership or practitioner levels. | • Insufficient knowledge on all the issues | • CoPs on Volunteering, Financial sustainability, Branch development being launched 2024 – need more dissemination. (IFRC, Secretariat)<br>• Link existing Communities of Practice to other existing Movement platforms and workstreams |
| 4.5 | No peer to peer/ Community of Practice focusing on NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts | • Could be new CoP or "sub-groups" within existing CoPs (e.g. volunteering in conflict and violence-affected contexts)? | • Communities of Practice needed specifically to connect NS volunteers, Branches and staff to share learning in conflict and violence contexts<br>• Branch to branch peer learning (NS-NS) |
| 4.6 | Strengthening Movement Coordination | • Lack of systematic follow up to Plans of Action after OCAC, BOCA, SAF, PER | • Coordinated NSD support in conflict environments.<br>• NSD Steering Committee to be established by each NS |

# 4. Next steps and implementation of the 'Call for Change'

At the learning event in May, participants developed a mapping of influencing opportunities and began drafting a 'road map' for the proposed actions. Whilst the actions themselves need to be integrated into the individual planning of each institution (IFRC, ICRC, PNS and NS), the study task force, together with the six National Societies, will reconvene periodically to review implementation and to ensure the inter-connectedness of the related activities. In addition, although the individual institutions involved will take steps to disseminate the learning and key messages individually, the task force will also continue to discuss and pursue collective engagement and advocacy opportunities, including coordinated donor advocacy to bring about the changed NSD practices.

## Annex 1: Timeline of NSD tool and Policy development in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

**1997** ● Seville Agreement (1997) and Supplementary Measures (2005)

**2002-3** ● Safer Access Saving Lives (icrc.org), Safer Access Framework (SAF) was first developed by the ICRC in consultation with NSs and IFRC

**2009** ● IFRC Strategy 2020

**2011** ● The Red Cross Red Crescent approach to sustainable development.pdf (ifrc.org)

Federation wide Resource Mobilization Strategy; IFRC FedNet

**2012** ● NS strategic planning guide; IFRC FedNet

**2013** ● Strengthening Movement Coordination and Coordination initiative

NSD_Framework_ONLINE_EN.pdf (ifrc.org)

IFRC Youth Engagement Strategy, 2013

**2014** ● OCAC Tool; IFRC

**2016** ● BOCA Tool; IFRC

**2018** ● Guidance for National Society Statutes | IFRC

**2019** ● Strategy 2030 EN.indd (ifrc.org)

NSD_Compact.pdf (ifrc.org) and National Society Development Info Brochure | IFRC

ICRC_Statement NSD Compact.pdf (ifrc.org)

SURGE CORE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK.pdf

**2020** ● IFRC Guidance on Duty of Care for Volunteers

NS Financial Sustainability guide; IFRC FedNet

**2021** ● AuxiliaryRole_Guide.pdf (ifrc.org)

Standards to facilitate the safety security and wellbeing of volunteers.pdf (ifrc.org)

IFRC Overview Assessment Development processes EN.pdf

Preparedness for Effective Response Leaflet and Case Studies

**2022** ● Seville Agreement 2.0 EN (ifrc.org)

IFRC NSD Policy EN.pdf

**2023** ● NSD Competency Framework

Financial Sustainability Framework (draft)

NSD in Emergencies Guidance (draft)

# Annex 2: components of IFRC's Preparedness for Emergency Response (PER) process

The National Society Preparedness for an Effective Response (PER) Approach provides a **structured and standardized** way of interacting with National Societies' **systems and processes** to contribute to and increase National Societies' preparedness, readiness, and response capacities in the **immediate** and **long term**.



**POLICY, STRATEGY & STANDARDS** — Components that provides the foundational elements for National Societies' preparedness and response systems to meet their mandate as humanitarian organizations and provide quality emergency.

- RCRC Auxiliary Role, Mandate and Law
- Disaster Risk Management Strategy
- Disaster Risk Management Policy
- DRM Laws, Advocacy and Dissemination
- Quality and Accountability

**ANALYSIS & PLANNING** — Components which enables National Societies to better understands and plan for the evolving risks and changing context.

- Hazard, Context and Risk Analysis, Monitoring and Early Warning
- Scenario Planning
- Risk Management
- Preparedness Plans and Budgets
- Business Continuity
- Emergency Response Procedures
- Response and Recovery Planning
- Pre-disaster Meetings and Agreements

**OPERATIONAL CAPACITY** — Components which facilitates National Societies' response actions, operational coordination, sector-specific needs and actions and methods of support.

- NS Specific Areas of Intervention
- Mapping of NS Capacities
- Early Action Mechanisms
- Cash Based Intervention
- Emergency Needs Assessment
- Affected population selection
- Emergency Operations Centre
- Information Management
- Testing and Learning
- Activation of Regional and International Support

**COORDINATION** — Components that describe ways National Societies can coordinate and collaborate with communities, public authorities, humanitarian actors and RCRC Movement actors.

- Coordination with Movement
- Coordination with Authorities
- Coordination with External Agencies and NGOs
- Civil Military Relations
- Coordination with Local Community Level Responders
- Cooperation with Private Sector

**OPERATIONS SUPPORT** — Components that allows National Societies to maintain the basic functions required during an emergency to be able to operate.

- Safety and Security Management
- Operations Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning
- Finance and Admin Policy and Emergency Procedures
- Information and Communication Technology
- Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain
- Staff and Volunteer Management
- Communication in Emergencies
- Resource Mobilisation

## A WELL-PREPARED NATIONAL SOCIETY CAN:

- ✓ Provide relevant humanitarian services in line with its **auxiliary role and mandate,** and be positioned as a **key partner** within its country context.
- ✓ **Analyse** the implications of **various risks** and **plan to adapt** its preparedness, readiness, and response capacities.
- ✓ Revise and adapt its **operational capacities** to deal with current and future emergencies, including **overlapping disasters and crises.**
- ✓ Enhance its **coordination and collaboration capacities** with relevant stakeholders.
- ✓ Implement **systems and procedures** to support small, mid- to large-scale operations.

## Annex 3: 50 practices that enable or undermine National Society Development in fragile, complex, protracted conflict or violence-affected contexts

The case studies in Part 2 demonstrate that a wide range of innovative NSD practices have significantly strengthened humanitarian impact in such environments. However, they also show how other practices have hindered or undermined development.

Examples of these "enabling" and "undermining" practices were extracted from across the case studies and listed under the four Commitments of IFRC's "NSD Compact" which guide the Movement and donors in all areas related to NSD Support. The initial, full list included approximately 200 practices.

To facilitate effective discussion and agreement on which actions to replicate and scale up, and which to end, the list of 200 practices was prioritised with input from the six focus National Societies and task force members, resulting in a shorter list of 50 practices for consideration. The leadership from the six National Societies then carried out a second prioritization exercise to reduce the list further, resulting in a list of the 29 enabling and hindering practices deemed to need the most urgent support and attention. At a 'learning event' in London in May 2024, the senior leadership of both the six National Societies and taskforce member institutions then collectively analysed the 'key issues and root causes' of these practices and proposed actions that would bring about immediate improvements to NSD in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts.

The following fuller list of 50 practices continues to represent an important and strategic agenda for change. Once the first 29 actions under the *"Call for Change"* (Part 3) are achieved, the remaining priorities listed below will require attention.

| NSD Compact Commitment 1: Better identification of NS priorities in NSD: NSD support follows a pattern that focuses on the needs and strategic priorities identified by a National Society. | |
|---|---|
| **Successful practices for scale up** | **Undermining factors for solutions** |
| FOR NS | FOR NS |
| • **NSD investment in legal base, auxiliary role and statutes** revisions that maintain independence from public authority control or influence, including MOUs with successive public authorities to supplement and/or substitute for public humanitarian services. <br><br> • **Maintaining flagship services** in community-based health, DM first responder, transportation of human remains, First Aid, Restoring Family Links, landmine risk education, ambulance and pre-hospital care, Rehabilitation Centres, Community Health Committees, and social cohesion and peace building programmes in remote and inaccessible communities. <br><br> • **Showcasing "localisation" as a process of strengthening local capacities to deliver quality services at scale.** <br><br> • **Strategic balancing of a strong auxiliary role with parallel investments in greater self-sustainability** to mitigate against overdependence on government or other external donors. | • **Change resistant leadership** with lack of willingness to follow up on Movement self-assessment processes. <br><br> • **Lack of systematic follow up to Plans of Action** arising from OCAC, BOCA, PER and SAF <br><br> • **Despite some good examples there is still a lack of NS who have made the strategic shift from project to programme, and sectoral capacity strengthening to organisation-wide repositioning strategies** |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Some **examples of transitioning from project-based approaches to wider organisation-wide NSD and repositioning strategies** | |
| FOR PNS<br><br>• Some examples of **longitudinal support** (sometimes 20 years and more) to accompany organisational transformation processes and programmatic development | FOR PNS<br><br>• **Direct support to branches** without contributions for NSD/organisational transformation.<br><br>• **Lack of organisational development support** in favour of operational "capacity strengthening**".**<br><br>• **Despite some good examples, NS requests for long-term NSD support are still often unmet.**<br><br>• **No clear Branch development support strategy** within localisation commitments **(relevant to all member organisations)** |
| FOR DONORS<br><br>• Some good examples of long-term funding support for NSD (DANIDA, Canadian Red Cross through 5 year unearmarked NSD contributions | FOR DONORS<br><br>• Despite the increasing examples of good practice there remains a chronic under resourcing and lack of understanding of the need for a strategic blend of **capacity strengthening** and **organizational development work**. |

**NSD Compact Commitment 2: Competences that match the needs: To be effective, all collaboration through partnerships must be based on clearly identified needs on the demand side, a clearer offer of skills and competencies of the appropriate quality on the offer side, and a proper matching of the two. Globally 3 priority areas are set to highlight the collective concern and areas that need special attention when taking part in NSD support – Volunteering; Integrity, Transparency and Accountability; and Financial Sustainability.**

| Successful practices for scale up | Undermining factors for solutions |
|---|---|
| FOR NS<br><br>• **Maintaining unitary status in fractured territories** divided by conflict and separate governance systems through new Humanitarian Diplomacy mechanisms, for example, trained "interlocutors", "access negotiators", and "networking committees" and Humanitarian advocacy. Examples in the case studies include how this has resulted in senior public authority officials instructing all officials at national and local levels to respect the NS and its Fundamental Principles (Afghanistan) and Humanitarian Diplomacy training for legislative advocacy (Honduras RC)<br><br>• **Leadership championing** of integrity, transparency, accountability, and sustainability<br><br>• **Using Movement tools** such as DREF and Early Action Protocols to **strengthen NSD capacities in volunteers and branch systems** | FOR NS<br><br>• **NS continuing to accept short-term project-specific funding** |

| FOR PNS | FOR PNS |
|---|---|
| • Increasing examples of **balanced multi-lateral and bi-lateral programming** to support a strategic menu of NSD and programmatic interests | • **Deployment of personnel with lack of holistic understanding of, and support for, interconnected NSD issues** (legal base, auxiliary role, service strengthening, Fundamental Principle implementation etc)<br><br>• **Destabilising/undermining "imported" systems** to manage finances, reporting and due diligence in parallel to the Host NS's own systems, undermining the latter |
| For IFRC | FOR IFRC |
| • **Facilitation of peer support** from neighbouring or similar country contexts (e.g. to address particular legal base complexities in fragile, complex, protracted conflict or violence-affected contexts) | • **No harmonised mapping of partners' skills and competencies**to ensure coherence or facilitate shared leadership.<br><br>• **Few resources to support follow up actions plans** (e.g. OCAC, BOCA, PER)<br><br>• **Lack of strategic support to assist NS to undertake harmonised analysis of "competing" assessment tools** (e.g. OCAC, BOCA, SAF, PER) |
| For ICRC | FOR ICRC |
| • Promotion of **NS Security Management Frameworks and SOPs** | • **Limited support for strengthening/ training local branch governance and crisis management capabilities.** |
| | FOR DONORS |
| | • Major governmental **donors who expect programming in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence- affected contexts but do not simultaneously support the necessary NSD investments in safety, security, and accountability such as PGI**<br><br>• **Not allocating a proportion of operational funding** support at global and country level to assist IFRC and respective NS to specifically support governance, volunteering, youth and staff development schemes to continue to strengthen and sustain principled humanitarian action |

| NSD Compact Commitment 3: Aligned effective NSD support: All such support must also be of the right quality, aligned and avoiding duplication. | |
|---|---|
| **Successful practices for scale up** | **Undermining factors for solutions** |
| FOR NS<br><br>• **Mapping and coordinating partner support to NSD plans.** | FOR NS<br><br>• **Lack of assertiveness** in extracting funding for NSD support from external non- Movement partners<br>• **Inconsistent approach to framing and agreeing "core cost" policies** and assessments. |
| FOR PNS<br><br>• Some welcome examples of balance between funds to strengthen **infrastructure with unearmarked NSD funds** to build local capacities and resources in the spirit of localisation | FOR PNS<br><br>• **Partners ignoring "core cost policies" when proposed by National Societies**<br>• Undermining localisation by running p**arallel teams with high administration** costs instead of paying for NS personnel and investing in their capacity enhancement.<br>• Not acknowledging specific contextual factors, especially in relation to sustainability (e.g. **lack of long-term funding to support the core operations of NS in situations of fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts**, in preference of a short-term "project" focus). |
| FOR IFRC<br><br>• **Examples of sensitive legal base support from Joint IFRC/ICRC Statutes Commission in Geneva and local counterparts** in contexts where NS's unity, legal base and auxiliary status and roles were challenged by a divided State with separate governance systems | FOR IFRC<br><br>• **Inconsistent mapping of support available from multiple partners** to strengthen synergy, strategic contributions, gap analysis, and collective impact. |
| FOR ICRC<br><br>• **Examples of inviting PNS to provide NSD support** (e.g. CBHFA) in conflict areas | FOR ICRC<br><br>• Payment of 100% of NS total salaries **without parallel sustainability building strategy** |
| | FOR DONORS<br><br>• Seeing National Societies as "implementing partners" with **no contributions to their longer-term NSD Plans and sustainability.** |

| NSD Compact Commitment 4: Learning and quality assurance: There is a need to capture the learning, share it, and reflect the learning to improve quality of NSD support in order to contribute to a stronger IFRC and Movement. Whenever NSD support is planned, each actor is expected to reflect these commitments and the specific roles outlined in this NSD Compact . ||
| --- | --- |
| **Successful practices for scale up** | **Undermining factors for solutions** |
| | FOR NS<br><br>• No joint monitoring of NSD investments with partners/**lack of quantitative and qualitative monitoring to track the outcomes of NSD** and programmatic investments.<br><br>• **Lack of succession planning** and institutional continuity management |
| FOR PNS<br><br>• **Some examples of PNS deploying culturally sensitive personnel** familiar with local traditions and customs to operational contexts to provide sympathetic and empathetic support to NS stakeholders. | |
| FOR IFRC<br><br>• **Communities of Practice** in Branch Development, sustainability, and Volunteering (although not adequately **shared at NS leadership or practitioner levels**) | FOR IFRC<br><br>• **Lack of NSD pool of "surge advisors" familiar with fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts and transformation processes**<br><br>• **No knowledge brokering mechanisms to enhance Grand Bargain local actor commitments and collate examples.**<br><br>• **No peer to peer/Community of Practice in NSD focusing on fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence -affected contexts** |
| | FOR ICRC<br><br>• **Case studies of SAF and other examples of NS's addressing situations of violence and conflict are not shared** across NS or other Movement components. |

# 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.