

Frequently Asked Questions about climate change

I. Why is Climate Change a Red Cross/ Red Crescent matter?

Leading scientists indicate that the global climate is changing. As a result extreme weather is increasing, average temperature is rising, patterns of dry and wet periods are shifting, and sea levels are rising. These effects impact on the vulnerability of people.

Extreme weather: Climate change is accompanied by an increase in extreme weather events. The trend can already be witnessed: frequency, intensity and unpredictability of extreme weather is increasing.

- Increasing floods as a result of heavy rainfall, leading to also to landslides and contamination of water supplies
- More intense tropical storms, with higher wind speed and more rainfall
- Heat waves multiply, endangering especially the elderly and disabled.

Temperatures and weather patterns:

Climate change is causing higher average temperatures in most places, and affects common patterns of dry and wet periods.

- Prolonged droughts threaten food security and water availability.
- Spread of diseases: disease-carrying mosquitoes and ticks move to new areas, areas affected by malaria and dengue are shifting.

Sea level rise: The temperature rise causes sea levels to rise as glaciers melt and warmer sea water takes up more volume. Coastal flooding becomes more frequent and salt water intrusion threatens water supply and food production. These increases in vulnerability of people, particularly those on poor countries, makes climate change a matter for the Red Cross.



The Tanzanian Red Cross raises awareness on the consequences of climate change. This is a product of the Preparedness for Climate Change Programme, in which the Tanzania Red Cross participated.

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II. How does Climate Change affect the Red Cross/ Red Crescent work?

Addressing the increased vulnerability of people will mean that RC/RC relief capacity has to be increased, but also that more should be done to prepare for disasters and reduce their risk

Disaster relief: The increase in weather related disasters, food shortages, vector borne diseases and flash floods will necessitate more RC/RC assistance to affected people. This necessitates the strengthening of RC/RC capacity in relief.

Post-disaster assistance is often costly. Moreover as the number of disasters increases, development efforts are seriously threatened. Therefore, apart from strengthening the capacity for post-disaster relief, the RC/RC should also put more emphasis on pre-disaster disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Disaster preparedness: Increased numbers of disasters, often very local, necessitate the preparedness of communities to adequately respond to these: first aid, early warning, search and rescue, relief stocks, etc. **Disaster risk reduction:** By reducing vulnerability of people and strengthening livelihoods, people



become more resilient to disasters. Efforts should be aimed at food security, drinking water supplies, primary health care, and small infrastructural works, so that floods, storms, heat waves, droughts and diseases will have less effect.

III. What is the Red Cross/ Red Crescent doing so far?

The Red Cross Red Crescent is confronted with the effects of climate change because the vulnerability of people increases. For its assistance RCRC will need more capacity, but it also needs to work with communities to increase their ability to address their own vulnerability. Moreover RCRC will work to raise awareness within the Movement and with policy makers and the general public. Where possible it will highlight the negative impact of climate change on the vulnerability of people. Finally, as the science on climate change is becoming more detailed, and the Red Cross itself is gaining experience, knowledge will be analyzed, shared and applied where possible.

Awareness: Raising awareness of the impact of climate change on the vulnerability of people and of options to decrease these impacts is of prime importance. It is vital that both the general public, policy makers, civil society organisations and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement itself become more aware of these new risks.



Community awareness and Early Warning Early Action! Picture from Tanzanian Red Cross

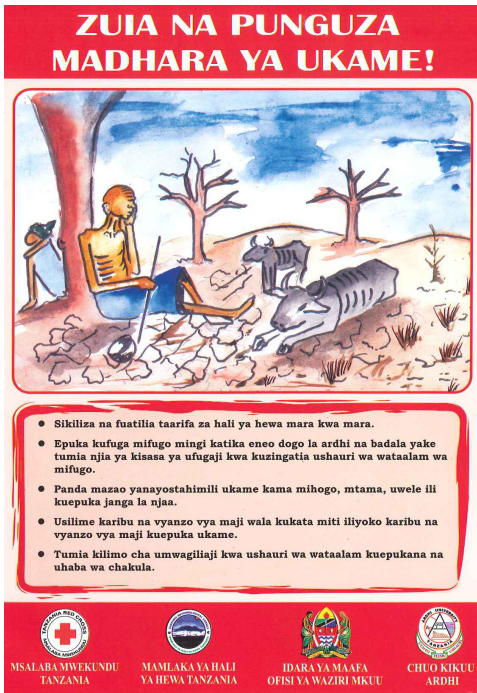
Action: Awareness needs to be put into practise in concrete programmes to decrease the risks of climate change for vulnerable people. Within the RC/RC Movement these programmes build upon the existing practises of disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and health.

Advocacy: It is important to communicate the Red Cross/Red Crescent approach to climate risk reduction to policymakers, other international civil society organisations and scientists. Moreover the Red Cross/Red Crescent has a responsibility to highlight the impact of climate change on vulnerable people and to advocate for policies and measures, and funds that will reduce these impacts.

Analysis: Addressing the humanitarian consequences of climate change is a rather new area of work and the urgency to learn and scale up in a short time frame is considerable. Analysing the successes and failures of the RCRC approach to climate change risks and the programs that are implemented will be a key component of the RCRC Climate centres activities.

At national level, the RCRC National Societies are the key players. At international level, the Federation delegations and Secretariat, supported by the RCRC Climate Centre, play an important role. Moreover the Climate Centre supports National Societies in increasing their understanding of the implications of climate change for their work, and in addressing the impacts of climate change on Red Cross Red Crescent programmes.





Poster of the Tanzanian Red Cross to raise awareness.

IV. Adaptation vs. Mitigation

The discussion on how to address climate change takes place along two lines:

- 1) Greenhouse gas mitigation focuses on tackling the causes of climate change, adaptation on dealing with the consequences.
- 2) Greenhouse gas mitigation: The main cause of climate change are human induced greenhouse gasses, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂). The focus of the climate change debate is on how these emissions can be reduced.

This is a global debate where governments are the key players. The Kyoto protocol is the best known agreement in this field.

Adaptation: Even if greenhouse gas emissions were to stop today the global climate would still continue to change, given that the greenhouse gases that have already been emitted stay in the atmosphere for many decades. The consequences of climate change will therefore also continue to affect vulnerable people. These effects will manifest themselves at local level, and it is here that organizations like the Red Cross Red Crescent play a key role.

As a humanitarian organization the Red Cross Red Crescent does not have expertise on how to achieve reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. It will therefore not play a role in the political debate on policies and measures that aim at greenhouse gas mitigation. (However, the RCRC agrees that emission reduction is important). Instead, the key focus of the Red Cross Red Crescent in awareness, action, advocacy and analysis is on adaptation.

	Disaster management community	Climate change community
Mitigation	Reducing the impact of disasters	Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
Adaptation		Helping people to cope with or reduce the impact of climate change. This is the same meaning as 'mitigation' in the disaster management context

V. What IS and what IS NOT Climate Change?

Climate change becomes such a hot topic that many people tend to relate all disasters to climate change. Especially the RCRC, whose credibility and expertise is based on understanding and dealing with disasters, it is important to clearly distinct climate change related disasters from other natural disasters.

Disasters caused or aggravated by climate change: Climate change will have an effect on weather-related disasters. This implies more extreme weather with heavy rainfall, floods, storms, heat waves. It also implies higher average temperatures and prolonged dry or



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wet periods with extreme hot and cold days and with a spread of vector borne diseases. And it implies sea level rise with coastal erosion and flooding on coastal areas. But keep in mind that no single disaster is ever 'caused' solely by climate change. All climate change does is to increase the risks.

Disasters not caused or aggravated by climate change: Climate change does not lead to so called geo-physical disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruption and tsunamis.

VI. I work in the RC/RC / I am a RC/RC volunteer: what's your advice to me?

Do-s	Don't-s
<p>Focus on climate change adaptation Strengthen the community's capacity to deal with the increasing risks of climate change and reduce their vulnerability through risk reduction efforts</p>	<p>Involve in debates on climate change mitigation Although RCRC agrees that the emission of green house gasses should be reduced to prevent further climate change, it does not take a position on policies and measures how to achieve this</p>
<p>Advocate with governments in developing climate change adaptation policies and strategy</p>	<p>Advocate with governments on how greenhouse gas reduction policies and strategy</p>
<p>Work closely with meteorological institutes to: 1. map climate risk of communities in order to develop adaptation programmes 2. ensure weather forecast is linked to early warning at community level</p>	<p>Take the role of the Meteorological Institute or climate scientists RC/RC is no experts in the science of climate change. Any question on scientific aspect of climate change should be referred to the appropriate government agency or institute.</p>
<p>Mainstream climate change adaptation into existing programmes of National Societies</p>	<p>Parachute scientific data and jargon on climate change to the communities</p>



Samoa Red Cross youth volunteers demonstrated to participants of the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable how they communicate climate change with communities, October 2008. Bec McNaught.

For more information, please contact: the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre at climatecentre@redcross.nl

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