



Image credit: Luc Alary, Canadian Red Cross

## CHANGING LIVES: STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HEALTH AND WASH IMPACTS RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. With our 192 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we are in every community reaching 160.7 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes, as well as 110 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. Our greatest strength lies in our volunteer network and our access to communities. Over the next three years, **we will harness that strength to help vulnerable communities in the Americas cope with one of the greatest challenges of our time: climate change and its impact on health and access to safe drinking water.**

A [recent IFRC study](#)<sup>1</sup> estimates that by 2050, as many as 200 million people every year could need international humanitarian aid as a result of a cruel combination of climate-related disasters and the socioeconomic impact of climate change. In the Americas, the ever-growing threat of climate change and the associated increase in extreme weather events inflict loss of life, livelihoods and infrastructure every year. In the most recent hurricane season, hurricanes Eta and Iota devastated many of the same Central American communities twice in the span of two weeks.

Raising temperatures and sea levels, more extreme weather and increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels all have direct impacts on health, including the development of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease and injuries and death due to extreme weather events, as well as the spreading of climate-sensitive communicable diseases like malaria, dengue and chikungunya. Additionally, more frequent climate-related disasters like hurricanes and floods create an obstacle to the provision of basic services such as health and access to safe drinking water.

At IFRC, we know climate change and its associated health risks are among the greatest challenges of our time, which is why we have made them two of our top [2030 Strategic Priorities](#). Over the next decade, we will continue reducing the humanitarian impacts of climate and environmental crises and closing growing gaps in health and well-being. More specifically, **we believe in empowering communities to become more resilient and better prepared to anticipate, mitigate, respond to and recover from the health impacts of climate-related disasters.**



## Exacerbated vulnerabilities

While it is a pressing global concern, climate change does not impact all people equally. Certain demographics, such as women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural populations, and impoverished rural, remote and coastal communities, are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change on health, water and sanitation.

In the Americas, these populations include:

- Dwellers in the region's small islands' coastal towns and cities, which are experiencing a constant growth in urbanization that results in overcrowding, pollution and poor sanitation.
- Women who are often in charge of securing water, food and fuel for cooking and heating, but

who have unequal access to resources, decision-making processes and mobility.

- Indigenous communities that face barriers to access medical care, resulting in higher levels of health risks.
- Rural communities that depend on the environment and the surrounding natural resources for food, cultural practices and income.
- Rural communities close to waterways or in very isolated and remote areas that face higher risks and are also harder to reach in an emergency response.
- Rural communities that often lack access to safe drinking water and wastewater treatment.
- Communities in over-developed touristic areas.



## What do we hope to achieve?

Because of their increased vulnerabilities and exposure, the communities described above also have to respond more frequently to climate-related disasters and crisis. As such, they have developed specific knowledge and skills that can be drawn upon in the fight against climate change. **We want to empower these communities in the Americas to utilize their environmental knowledge and expertise to become more resilient and better prepared to anticipate, mitigate, respond to and recover from the health impacts of climate-related disasters.**

Focusing on the most vulnerable, such as women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural populations, we will:

- ✓ Educate communities on the complex nature of climate change and its negative impacts on their health.
- ✓ Increase their access to community health, water and sanitation services.
- ✓ Prepare them to better manage the impact of climate change and contribute to a “green response” during health emergencies.
- ✓ Generate new attitudes and practices in relation to climate change through community participation, communication, education and advocacy initiatives.
- ✓ Empower them to recognize the value of their own local practices and initiatives in relation to climate change.
- ✓ Promote the adoption and integration of the project's best practices into their daily activities.
- ✓ In coordination with local authorities, advocate for the inclusion of communities' traditional knowledge and practices in relation to climate action and in climate change response plans.



## Where do we want to work?



- Antigua and Barbuda Red Cross Society
- Argentine Red Cross
- Bolivian Red Cross
- Chilean Red Cross
- Colombian Red Cross Society
- Costa Rican Red Cross
- Dominica Red Cross
- Ecuadorian Red Cross
- Salvadorean Red Cross Society
- Grenada Red Cross Society
- Guatemalan Red Cross
- Honduran Red Cross
- Jamaica Red Cross
- Paraguayan Red Cross
- Peruvian Red Cross
- Venezuelan Red Cross

This is a tentative selection of 16 countries we will be working with over the next three years in Latin America and the Caribbean. These National Societies have all expressed their interest in working on climate change initiatives. We will work alongside them and the communities they serve to reduce the negative health impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable.



Image credit: Guyana Red Cross

## CASE FOR SUPPORT

Dedicated capacity and resources are necessary to ensure that these National Societies and the communities they work with receive the necessary support, from training and guidance to the development of tools and roll out of activities at community level.

The operational budget will include workshops (virtual or face-to-face when the situation allows it), support for National Society capacity building, Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) studies, development of tools, design of training programs and modules, systematization of best practices and lessons learnt and sustainability and community ownership activities.

Funding requirement: **11.481.000 CHF**

Timeframe: **3 years**

<sup>1</sup> The Cost of Doing Nothing. The Humanitarian Price of Climate Change and How it Can Be Avoided. IFRC, 2019: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-IFRC-CODN-EN.pdf>