



AMERICAS REGION

CONCEPT NOTE – 2021

Project Title:	Changing Lives: Strategies to Address Health and WASH Impacts Related to Climate Change		
Programmatic Area:	HEALTH		
Region and Countries:	AMERICAS COUNTRIES TO BE DEFINED		
Timeframe:	3 YEARS		
Direct beneficiaries:	TO BE DEFINED	Indirect beneficiaries	TO BE DEFINED
Budget:	11,481,010 CHF		
Fund executor:	INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS (IFRC)– REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE AMERICAS		
Executive summary:	<p>Climate change is one of the greatest threats to health and wellbeing of our time. Its direct health consequences include the physiological effects of exposure to higher temperatures and the increased incidence of non-communicable diseases such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. In addition, food and water insecurity and the spread of climate-sensitive communicable diseases, as well as social responses to climate change, such as population displacement and reduced access to health services, are some of the indirect health impacts of climate change.</p> <p>In the Americas region, climate change poses a constant threat to the health of its populations: an increasingly warm climate and increasingly intense, frequent, and unpredictable weather extremes disproportionately impact the poorest and most disaster-prone communities.</p> <p>The health impacts of climate change could be greatly reduced through proven interventions in climate-resilient health systems, including health services, and through health determinants such as water, sanitation, food systems and disaster risk reduction.</p> <p>For more than two decades, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has been assessing the risks of global warming and integrating</p>		



climate adaptation into all areas of work. In addition, IFRC has been working closely with National Societies and their volunteers to understand climate change and to help their communities reduce risks.

IFRC, in collaboration with National Societies in the Americas, proposes to work with communities to strengthen their local resilience to climate change by boosting their capacities in health, water, hygiene and sanitation. We will work together on different components such as knowledge and understanding of climate change, capacity building, community health with an emphasis on climate change, preparedness and response to health emergencies with a focus on "Green Response", as well as communication, awareness, education and advocacy.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Climate change is one the greatest threats to humankind, including a severe risk to health and wellbeing. In 2019, more than 24,000 people died due to disasters triggered by natural events, and of these, more than 9,000 were killed by climate- and weather-related disasters. Disease outbreaks were the deadliest of natural hazards that year, killing 15,080 people in total, while heatwaves killed 3,738 people, storms killed 2,806 and floods killed 1,586 people.¹ A highly conservative estimate of 250,000 additional deaths each year due to climate change has been projected between 2030 and 2050; of these, 95,000 will result from childhood undernutrition, 60,000 from malaria, 48,000 from diarrhea and 38,000 from exposure of the elderly to heat.²

Beyond these unacceptable death tolls, our planet is becoming more and more inhospitable due to climate change: higher temperatures and more intense heatwaves; more frequent erratic rainfall and violent storms that wash away soil and destroy harvests and infrastructure; extended droughts, desertification, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, soil salinization and disrupted seasons are increasingly affecting lives and livelihoods. Arduously achieved development milestones are jeopardized, and existing vulnerabilities and inequalities are exacerbated. A combination of all these factors could nearly double the caseload of people needing humanitarian assistance following climate-related disasters to 200 million per year by 2050 unless immediate action is taken³.

¹ Come heat or high water. Tackling the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis together. World Disasters Report 2020. IFRC, 2020:

<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/world-disaster-report-2020>

² Fact Sheets: Climate Change and Health. World Health Organization (WHO), 2020: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

³ 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>

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic is increasing the needs of people suffering from climate-related disasters, aggravating their vulnerabilities and hampering their recovery. At least 51.6 million people had been doubly hit by climate-related disasters and COVID-19 by November 2020⁴.

In the Americas region, climate change poses an ever-growing threat. Its increasing impact was seen in the devastating effects of the recent hurricanes Eta and Iota, both of which ravaged many of the same communities in Central America in the span of two weeks in November 2020. Similar phenomena took place in 2017, with an extremely active North Atlantic hurricane season, totaling 17 named storms, 10 hurricanes and 6 major hurricanes. September 2017 saw more Atlantic named storm and hurricane days than any other calendar month on record. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma ravaged portions of the continental United States, while Irma and Maria brought devastation to several Caribbean islands.

The cost of climate change has also grown exponentially in the Americas: while region-wide storm events accounted for a combined US\$135 billion in losses between 1990 and 2008, in the space of only four weeks, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria caused a total of US\$220 billion in damages, with US\$125 billion worth of damage taking place in the Small Island States of the Caribbean region alone, in what is now known as the costliest North Atlantic Hurricane season on record.

In the immediate future, climate change is expected to continue destabilizing the region. Among its projected effects are aggravating push factors for migration out of Central America due to its impact on agricultural livelihoods and increasing the incidence of communicable disease outbreaks due to its disruption of natural habitats. In the case of the Caribbean island countries, it poses an existential threat requiring urgent and effective action.

Climate change impacts on health

Climate change is also among the greatest health challenges of the 21st century, threatening to undermine over half a century of global progress.

The most direct link between climate change and ill health is air pollution, which kills eight million people each year due to exposure inside and outside of their homes⁵. Other direct health impacts include the physiological effects of exposure to higher temperatures, increasing incidences of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease and injuries and death due to extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, heatwaves, cold waves, storms and wildfires. In addition, climate change reduces the overall availability of water, especially during droughts.

Climate change also has indirect effects on health due to ecological changes, such as food and water insecurity and the spread of climate-sensitive communicable diseases, as well as societal responses to climate change, such as population displacement and reduced access to health services. Finally, there are climate-related mental health challenges in the form of eco-anxiety or what has been labelled “climate grief”.

Proven interventions in climate-resilient health, sanitation and food systems, as well as disaster risk reduction could all greatly reduce these impacts. However, immediate and effective action is needed, as any further delay will only increase the risks.

⁴ At least 51.6 million people doubly hit by climate-related disasters and COVID-19, new analysis by IFRC reveals. IFRC, 2020: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/press-release/least-51-6-million-people-doubly-hit-climate-related-disasters-covid-19-new-analysis-ifrc-reveals/>

⁵ Topics: Air Pollution. WHO, 2021: https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab_1

Communities, the first line of action in the response to climate change

While it is a pressing global concern, climate change does not impact all people equally: there is an irrefutable correlation between poverty and marginalization and exposure to the negative effects of climate change. 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. Below is a non-exhaustive list of factors that exacerbate these groups' vulnerabilities to climate change:

- Almost all towns and cities in the region's small islands⁶ are coastal and experiencing a constant growth in urbanization which results in overcrowding, pollution and poor sanitation.
- Women are often in charge of securing water, food and fuel for cooking and heating, but have unequal access to resources, decision-making processes and mobility.
- Indigenous communities face barriers to access medical care, resulting in higher levels of health risks. Indigenous populations present, for example, higher incidences of many respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, allergies, etc.
- In many areas in the region, the tourism sector inflicts a level of visitor use that surpasses the environment's ability to cope within acceptable limits of change.
- Many communities, including indigenous peoples, depend on the environment and the surrounding natural resources for food, cultural practices and income. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns affect the crops that constitute the food base for these communities.
- Rural communities close to waterways or in very isolated and remote areas face higher risks and are also harder to reach in a response.
- Rural communities often lack access to safe drinking water and wastewater treatment.

Because of their increased vulnerabilities and exposure, these communities also have to respond more frequently to climate-related disasters and crisis, becoming the first line of action in any response. As such, they have developed specific knowledge and skills that can be drawn upon in the fight against climate change. Because of their livelihoods, occupations, traditional knowledge and ways of life, they can be agents of change in this fight. For instance, the Paris Agreement⁷ explicitly recognizes the importance of indigenous peoples' knowledge and experience in climate action. Our goal at IFRC is to empower communities to understand and make the best possible use of their added value in the fight against climate change.

The global response to climate change: three international agreements

The global response to addressing the environmental and social determinants of health has been the synchronous adoption of three landmark United Nations (UN) agreements. They are: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster

⁶ The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries are recognized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the country groups most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. SIDS are highly vulnerable to climate change as many are low-lying, small, often remote, and economically vulnerable. Furthermore, most of these States are located in the world's tropic and subtropical regions where some of the most noticeable changes in weather patterns have been identified.

⁷ One of three landmark United Nations (UN) agreements, together with the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, aimed at addressing the environmental and social determinants of health. Signed in April 2016, in the Paris Agreement, Nations have made commitments with actions designed to keep a rise in global temperatures below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, and to try to reduce the rise to 1.5 °C.

Risk Reduction. Although the three agreements have different objectives, each includes the monitoring of targets relevant to health and climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an overarching aspiration for all sectors to work towards a secure, healthy and sustainable future for everyone in all areas of the world. The SDGs provide a framework for monitoring advances in health and determinants of health for building climate change resilience, specifically SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) and SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities).

Signed in April 2016, in the Paris Agreement, Nations have made commitments with actions designed to keep a rise in global temperatures below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, and to try to reduce the rise to 1.5 °C. At the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was asked to report on the impacts of warming by 1.5 °C and 2.0 °C. The conclusion of the report, published in October 2018, was that climate change is already affecting human health, with increasing exposure and vulnerability recorded worldwide. Furthermore, an increase of 1.5 °C is not considered “safe”.

Finally, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan in 2015. A notable inclusion in the framework is the prioritization of health risks from hazards and the need to focus on health resilience. It promotes collaboration amongst the disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and science communities to develop strategies that protect and manage health risks arising from extreme weather and climate events.

From these global agreements countries commit to the development of Disaster Risk Management plans that build surge capacities and are both proactive and reactive, to minimize the danger and impact of acute public health events.

National Societies and the IFRC supporting communities

The National Societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 192 countries, acting - in humanitarian terms - as auxiliaries to public authorities with services such as disaster response, social programs and health and community care.

National Societies - present in communities before, during and after disasters - are supported by the IFRC, whose role is to coordinate and mobilize relief assistance for international emergencies, strengthen the capacities of National Societies and promote cooperation among them. Our combined strength lies in our network of volunteers, community-based expertise and our ability to amplify the voices of the most vulnerable.

Both National Societies and the IFRC have taken advantage of this unique position to address the urgency and scale of the climate crisis through systemic and transformative actions on the ground. In addition, we strive to put communities at the center of decision-making and actions that impact their future, which contributes to building long-term and sustainable initiatives.

IFRC has been assessing the risks of global warming since 1999, as well as integrating climate change into all areas of work, ranging from health and assistance to disaster preparedness and response. A great deal of work has already been accomplished involving different National Societies, promoting evidence-based knowledge and understanding of the complex nature of climate change, to ultimately help staff, volunteers and their respective communities to reduce climate-related risks and impacts on health. On the international level, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been actively involved in conferences and fora aimed at addressing this issue. In 2002, the IFRC established the Climate Centre in collaboration with the Netherlands Red



Cross, with the aim of helping the Movement reduce the effects of climate change and extreme weather events on vulnerable people. Staffed largely by climate scientists, the Centre provides strategic knowledge and advice on climate-smart practices throughout the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and beyond.

Most recently, **IFRC's 2030 Strategy⁸** has placed **climate change and environmental crises at the top of a list of five global challenges that must be addressed in the coming decade**, with growing gaps in health and wellbeing also included among the five most pressing challenges of our time. IFRC's work to respond to climate change and environmental crises will involve a greater focus on identifying and addressing the drivers of vulnerability that are already being compounded by climate change. The graph below illustrates IFRC's proposed multi-pronged strategy to address the drivers of health and climate vulnerability at the community level: reducing vulnerabilities (pictured in the inner-most circle) and strengthening community resilience through action on the ground to support health systems resilience as well as country progress towards the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (outer ring).

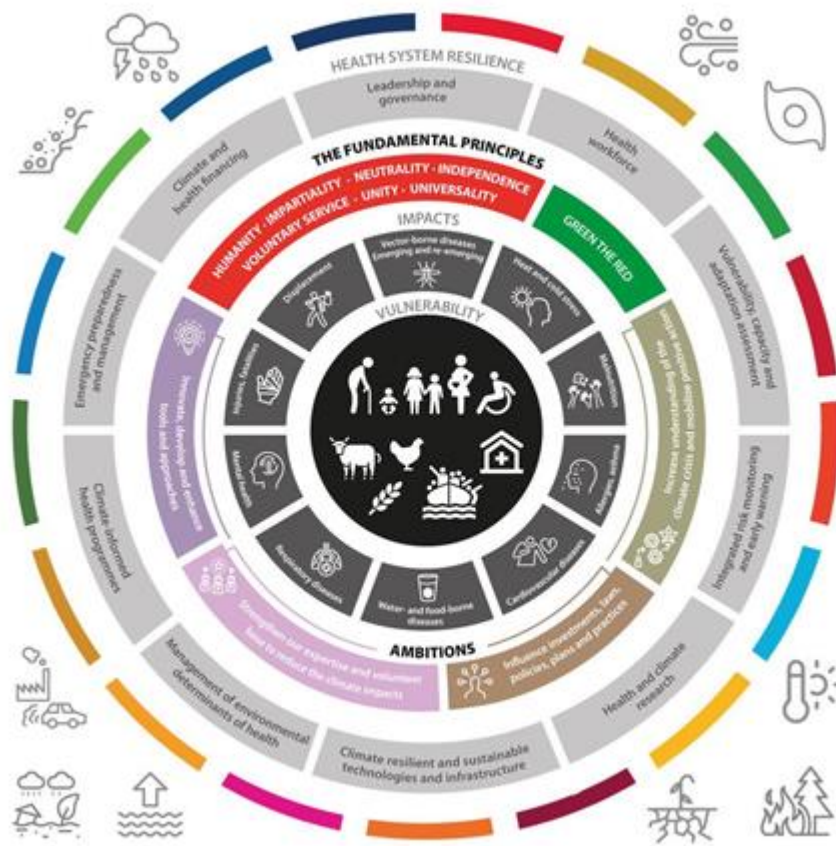


Figure 1: Addressing the drivers of health and climate vulnerability at the community level

⁸ Strategy 2030. Platform for change: global reach, local action. IFRC, 2020: <https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/S2030-EN.pdf>



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Changing Lives: Community Resilience and Readiness in the Face of Climate Change Through Health and WASH Initiatives aims to strengthen local resilience to climate change by building community capacities in health, water, hygiene and sanitation.

The expected overall result is the reduction of negative health impacts of climate change among the most vulnerable and exposed populations as a result of increased understanding and awareness of climate change, recognition of best practices in these areas, and engagement in dialogues and partnerships to further promote communities' needs.

To achieve this, the project will promote the following:

- **Knowledge and understanding of climate change**, including the measurement of communities' knowledge, attitudes, practices, and beliefs regarding climate change and its impact on health, establishing a baseline against which to measure changes as a result of the different project activities in communication, awareness raising, education and advocacy.
- **Capacity building and strengthening**, in order to enhance community practices and integrate the available information on climate change to better prepare for and reduce the impacts on health, especially in high-risk areas.
- **Community health with an emphasis on climate change**, including aspects related to WASH, and mental health and psychosocial support, among others.
- **Preparedness and response to health emergencies applying a “Green Response” approach**: Communities can better prepare for and respond to health emergencies through an environmentally sustainable approach⁹.
- **Communication, awareness raising, education, advocacy and partnership**: Activities aimed at raising awareness on the issues surrounding climate change and its effects, educating children and youth, communicating effectively for behavior change, engaging authorities for the development of public policy and regulations, as well as recognizing communities' agency in building resilience in the face of climate change.
- **Sustainability**, aiming to adopt and integrate the project's community-based actions into daily life practices from the very beginning of its implementation. The project is designed on a sustainability-based approach, which will also be built jointly with the communities and the benefitting stakeholders, including local authorities. Training on resource mobilization for the involved communities will also be included.

Project implementation methodology

The components described above will be achieved through work with community leaders, promoters and volunteers involved in health, mental health and psychosocial support, persons involved in environmental issues, as well as with Red Cross volunteers located in each project country, and with municipalities and local development actors in each of the targeted communities and countries.

Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) will be a key cross-cutting approach throughout the project cycle. Women's participation in the project's activities will be prioritized, especially the workshops designed to understanding climate change and recognizing its impact on people's lives. The different impacts climate change has on women and men will be taken into account, and the role

of women as agents of change will be made visible and their traditional knowledge will be made known.

The Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach is also transversal and is integrated throughout the project cycle. The activities proposed as part of the CEA approach include: sharing timely information with the communities to support their preparedness and primary response actions, as well as promoting physical and mental health during and after emergencies through social networks, small group sessions, newsletters and other actions. In addition, this approach seeks to establish feedback mechanisms that allow for a continuous dialogue with the communities to respond to questions, doubts and identify rumors circulating in the communities with the aim of improving, changing or perfecting the intervention. The CEA approach is key to supporting health, water, disaster risk reduction and climate change interventions by providing tools for behavior change and safe water use practices and disease protection measures.

Finally, National Society capacity building will also be a key component in the project's methodology, including the strengthening of public health programmes and policies to incorporate climate change needs, climate action training programmes and the development of protocols for an environmentally sustainable emergency and disaster response.

KEY OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

Project goals and expected outcomes

The overall objective of the project is to reduce the negative health impacts of climate change among the most vulnerable and exposed populations by strengthening local resilience to climate change through increased community capacities in the areas of health, water, sanitation and hygiene.

Outcome No. 1: Communities, with a focus on women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural peoples, understand climate change and recognize its impact on their way of life.

Communities gain a deeper understanding of climate change and its impact on their lives, especially their health.

Outcome No. 2: Communities, with a focus on women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural peoples, have access to community health services and implement WASH initiatives, allowing them to build resilience in the face of climate change.

Communities have access to community health services and water, sanitation, and hygiene initiatives to reduce the consequences of climate change on their health.

⁹ "Climate-smart programming" equates simply to "good and sustainable programming" supporting development and enabling people to anticipate, absorb and adapt to climate shocks. It stresses the need to use climate information across timescales, considering landscapes and ecosystems as key areas of intervention to reduce risk, all in close collaboration with governments, meteorological offices and the private sector.

Outcome No. 3: Communities, with a focus on women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural peoples, are better prepared to manage the impact of climate change and contribute to a “green response” during health emergencies.

Communities contribute to emergency and disaster response with an environmentally sustainable approach. They have the necessary capacities to develop adaptation strategies and nature-based solutions that allow them to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Outcome No. 4: Communities, with a focus on women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural peoples, generate new attitudes and behaviors related to climate change and its impact on their health, through community participation, communication, education and advocacy initiatives. In addition, they can better recognize the value of their local practices and initiatives.

Communities have the necessary tools, opportunities and capacities for effective community participation, communication, education and advocacy, allowing them to generate behavioral changes, motivate attitudes and practices, as well as raise awareness on their own local initiatives and actions to fight climate change.

Outcome No. 5: Communities, with a focus on women, indigenous and other ethno-cultural peoples, in coordination with local authorities, adopt and integrate the project’s activities and results into their daily practices in order to guarantee sustainability.

From the initial project stages, communities lay the foundations for project sustainability through coordination with local authorities and their firm commitments. Furthermore, by including the development of adaptation strategies and the construction of Nature-based Solutions, concrete steps are taken towards local level sustainability.

Outcome No. 6: Communities and local authorities integrate indigenous peoples' beliefs and knowledge into climate change response plans.

Local authorities and community members implement concrete actions to understand and adopt the beliefs and knowledge of indigenous peoples and to integrate them into climate change response plans.

Communities are empowered to advocate (through their local Government and grassroot organizations) for their needs and solutions in the context of climate adaptation ambitions in the country.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- Identification of knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs through a perceptions survey about climate change and its consequences on health, water, sanitation and hygiene among the members of the different participating communities, with a special focus on women.
- Development of workshops applying a dynamic and participatory approach (community produced radio programs, community theater, community cinema, etc.) to facilitate the exchange of different

perceptions and knowledge about climate change, risks and health consequences at the community level.

- Capacity building training for community leaders and members, ensuring women participation.
- Training of Red Cross volunteers from different communities on climate change and its impact on health.
- Elaboration of a training program for community health actors.
- Community health, first aid and WASH activities carried out by Red Cross volunteers integrating aspects related to climate change and its effects on community health.
- Intensification of existing community surveillance efforts for early detection, preparedness and response to outbreaks of emerging and reemerging climate-sensitive infectious disease.
- Training for psychosocial support volunteers working with the communities, increasing their awareness of the mental health risks associated with climate change and increased occurrence of disasters.
- Training workshops with Red Cross volunteers and communities to integrate emergency and disaster preparedness and response practices contributing to a “green response”.
- Development of culturally relevant gender-based communication materials (flyers, videos, etc.) for community distribution on the effects of climate change on health and measures to help build resiliency.
- Development of participatory methodologies to support the project: community radio, mobile cinemas, community theater, etc.
- Development of a campaign on health and climate change and the actions of the Red Cross.
- Trainings with the communities to empower them to engage in advocacy.
- Awareness raising and advocacy with local authorities to contribute to climate change adaptation.
- Work with youth groups to teach hygiene promotion and best “climate smart” practices through specific interventions addressing climate risks in communities and schools, and how to prevent climate change’s effects on health.
- Compilation of best practices in the work with the different communities within the project framework. Publication of case studies.
- Prioritization of local means and capacities (for example, Nature-based Solutions) in the implementation of each project activity, as well as those that can be maintained once the project is finished.
- Adoption of project measures into the communities’ common practices through the development of protocols to ensure their permanence and sustainability.
- Development of the foundation for technical and managerial capacities necessary for project sustainability by training community operators and promoters, teaching staff and community leaders.
- Facilitation of meetings between community authorities and indigenous leaders to exchange their respective knowledge on health and climate change, and effectively integrate the knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Enabling actions with the National Societies:

The project also proposes a series of activities that contribute to strengthening National Societies in their role to support their governments. These activities include:

1. Survey distribution among National Societies to determine the level of integration of climate change aspects in their different areas of work, with an emphasis on health.
2. Adaptation and expansion of the public health programs of the National Societies in order to incorporate the needs associated with climate change: support for the development of Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) strategies, response plans to health emergencies and mental health and psychosocial support programs to include the climate change component.
3. Development of tools and materials allowing National Societies and their volunteers to better work with communities in managing actions related to the direct effects of climate change.
4. Training National Societies and their volunteers on “green response” in emergencies and disasters.
5. Development of a virtual training program on climate change and its health consequences, making it accessible to health professionals from National Societies and Red Cross volunteers.
6. Promotion of climate change and health topics in different health fora in the Americas region and positioning the Red Cross as a reference actor on health and climate change.
7. Activities oriented to establish solid working relation with key partners, including grassroots organizations, private sector and academia, among others.

PROJECT TIMEFRAME

3 YEARS

BUDGET

11,481,010 CHF