

Supporting Organisational Transformation in the Light of Localization

A Practical Learning Guide

**Case studies, models, recommendations for action and
further development potential**



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Foreword

Development cooperation is undergoing a profound transformation. Across humanitarian and development systems, recognition is growing that sustainable change is neither designed nor delivered from afar; it is led by stakeholders who are rooted in, and accountable to, their communities, and who are present long after projects and funding cycles end. This shift challenges the power asymmetries, funding practices and organizational cultures that have shaped international cooperation for decades. At a time of geopolitical instability, protracted crises, climate change and mounting pressure on international solidarity, advancing genuine locally led action is both more complex and more essential than ever.

Drawing extensively on the experience of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and particularly on the long-term partnerships of the Swiss Red Cross in its international work, this practical learning guide, *Supporting Organizational Transformation in the Light of Localization*, brings together experiences, case studies and concrete steps for shaping international development practices anchored in organizational strengthening, trust and long-term partnership.

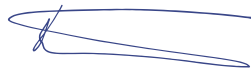
For the Movement, local action is not a new agenda. Since the Movement's inception more than 160 years ago, local leadership – supported by global solidarity when needed – has been at the heart of its operating model. Its 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, around 180,000 branches and approximately 16 million volunteers constitute the world's largest network for locally led humanitarian and development action. National Societies are permanent, nationally rooted institutions that have a legal mandate to act as auxiliaries to the public authorities. Embedded in the communities they serve, they are often the first able to reach people in situations of vulnerability. This unique architecture offers a powerful perspective on what locally led development demands of local stakeholders and the localization support they need from their partners.

Using the example of the Swiss Red Cross' own institutional transformation, the Practical Learning Guide considers how international stakeholders can transform their organizational practices and partnership models, and how an organization can put into practice the call for fundamental shifts in how sustainable development is understood and how international cooperation is practiced, recognizing local organizations as leaders and co-creators rather than implementers. Based on the practical experiences of our long-term partners, our Sister National Societies across the globe, the Learning Guide further demonstrates the implications when local stakeholders lead and manage collaborative initiatives, advancing economic, social and ecological development in ways that are contextually appropriate and durable.

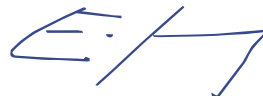
The Swiss Red Cross places National Society Development at the core of its international work. We are convinced that the commitment to empower our Sister National Societies is more than a theoretical shift; it is a necessity if our partners are to thrive in their own contexts as strong, well-governed and trusted entities acting within their mandates to deliver principled humanitarian assistance, strengthen community resilience and address global challenges – from climate change and migration to health inequities and future pandemics – at the local level.

This shift in partnership has required sustained collective investment, careful attention to power relationships and cultural realities, and a willingness to rethink how success is defined and measured in complex, non-linear transformation processes. Such an organizational shift cannot be undertaken alone.

Somaha Foundation and the Swiss Red Cross have joined forces and together offer this Practical Learning Guide as both a contribution and an invitation: a contribution to the growing body of practice-based evidence on localization, and an invitation to grant providers and practitioners to engage more deliberately and courageously in organizational change. By strengthening partnerships, improving how change and impact are measured, and centring local agency, we are convinced that development efforts will become more sustainable. Encouraging international actors to play a complementary and enabling, rather than a directive role, will reap positive change for us all. Sustainable development is a long journey. Global challenges must be addressed collectively. If each partner leads the way for sustainable development, we will achieve more together than any one of us could alone.



Nora Kronig
Director General
Swiss Red Cross



Eva Jaag
Managing Director
Somaha Foundation

Acronyms

BOCA	Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International non-governmental organization
Movement	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, comprising the ICRC, the IFRC and 191 National Societies worldwide
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSD	National Society Development
OCAC	Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification
PER	Preparedness for Emergency Response
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SNS	Sister National Society
SRC	Swiss Red Cross

Introduction

This Practical Learning Guide aims to comprehensively reflect on SRC experiences, challenges and achievements in supporting its Sister National Societies on their organizational transformation journeys. Drawing on partnerships with more than 30 Sister National Societies over the past four years, the Guide synthesizes key findings on what has shaped development efforts across thematic areas, highlighting successes, failures and lessons learned.

The SRC's experiences are rooted in the broader context of the Movement and its collective ambitions for humanitarian action in, and effective responses to, emerging global challenges, pursued through a network of 191 local entities: the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Guide therefore draws on experiences from across the Movement to illustrate how cooperation between partners must evolve in order to do justice to new forms of development cooperation. While acknowledging the Movement's exceptional nature, the Guide offers insights relevant to national and international NGOs, demonstrating how organizational transformation, partner strengthening and impact measurement can reinforce one another to advance sustainable, locally led action.

Chapter 1 outlines the **rationale and motivation for locally led action** by illustrating paradigm shifts in emergency relief and international cooperation, and by framing emerging trends and needs. Repeated disasters and protracted conflicts have made it unmistakably clear that local organizations are far from peripheral to humanitarian response; on the contrary, they play a vital role within the global humanitarian system. Long after international attention wanes, local organizations remain, confronting enduring challenges such as climate change, displacement, migration, demographic shifts and widening health-care inequalities. The chapter further defines the objectives of localization and locally led action.

The SRC is committed to enabling local players – its Sister National Societies within the Movement – to provide sustainable, locally led services that build resilience and can be scaled up when emergencies occur. Achieving and maintaining accountable and sustainable organizations requires collective investment in local basic structures that allow National Societies to become sustainable within their own contexts. This commitment lies at the core of the SRC's engagement in National Society Development.

Building on international and institutional developments, and as a means of operationalizing its strategic ambitions, the SRC established National Society Development as a dedicated programme area within its International Cooperation programme for the period 2021–2024, alongside Health and Disaster Risk Management. To guide and focus support for Sister National Societies, five thematic priorities were identified: governance, leadership and strategy; resource mobilization; institutional preparedness; project management; and volunteer management. In **Chapter 2**, the Practical Learning Guide outlines the SRC's **thematic priorities, long-term partnership approach** and **impact measurement system**.

The Guide explores how new forms of partnership, together with specific enabling factors across these five thematic priorities, can enhance effectiveness and accountability. It demonstrates how such approaches allow local partners to take the lead in collaborative initiatives that address economic, social and ecological challenges within their respective contexts, ensuring that local needs are met in the most effective and efficient way possible. **Chapter 3** explores how selected Sister National Societies strengthened their organizational capacities. Through case studies and SRC support from 2021 to 2024, the Practical Learning Guide identifies **enablers of locally led action** for more resilient and community-focused cooperation, and the challenges and lessons learned along the way.

The Practical Learning Guide ends with **Chapter 4**, which presents the **conclusions**.

1. National Society Development as an enabler of locally led action



Red Cross volunteers in Paraguay promote children's rights in community outreach activities.

In this chapter, we discuss the growing need for a deliberate shift towards more locally led action and the underlying rationale and motivations. We look at the shifts in, and stages of, international development cooperation, to better understand any remaining barriers and structural failures, and to define enabling factors and good practices.

In this chapter, we also illustrate locally led action in the Movement context, the Movement's ambitions and the practical steps it has taken to deliver humanitarian services through local organizations, volunteers and staff to build resilient communities. Each of the Movement's 191 National Societies is responsible for developing its own structures, systems and services to meet increasing needs and cope with changing environments. This responsibility is understood as the continuous effort of National Society Development. The role of any international partners is to support that effort and to improve existing services and capacities. Investment in NSD thus strengthens the leadership, ownership and long-term capacity of National Societies to deliver locally led action that is effective, accountable and sustainable, contributing to change at both the local and global levels. The SRC and the IFRC at large therefore recognize support for National Society Development as central to, and a key enabler of, the localization agenda.

1.1 Rationale and motivation for locally led action

Over the past 75 years, emergency relief and international development cooperation have evolved through distinct stages, from externally defined interventions to more collaborative approaches based on partnership and mutual learning. These shifts reflect growing recognition that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the leadership of local stakeholders.

It is important to recognize the success stories and shortcomings of these distinct convictions of how growth and development are generated and which forms of collaboration and partnership are conducive to positive change. The overview of paradigm shifts in, and changing approaches to, humanitarian response and development cooperation across the decades (see table 1) illustrates how development cooperation has evolved and shows that the underlying reasons for engaging in it have always been,

and remain, complex and diverse. While outdated terminology is written in quotation marks, the common term *aid* is used but written in italics to acknowledge that the ideal of helpers and those in need persists within emergency relief and international development cooperation.

Decade	Common practices and approaches
1950–1960	Growth-driven bilateral <i>aid</i> programmes such as the Marshall Plan aimed at linear economic progress Widespread investment in (re-)industrialization <i>“Aid to the underdeveloped world”</i>
1960–1970	Multilateral, growth-oriented development <i>aid</i> with standardized replication of Global North growth cycles Donor country representatives implement activities in recipient countries Expansion of food <i>aid</i> and emergency assistance to overcome poverty
1970–1980	Development <i>aid</i> not only addresses “basic needs”, it also drives sustainable development rooted in the interaction of economic, ecological and social factors (Club of Rome, 1972) Recognition that development is complex and non-linear: “S-shaped development” From bilateral state-led development toward market-driven reforms through structural adjustment programmes led by multilateral institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank
1980–1990	Sector-specific, knowledge-based <i>aid</i> concepts focusing on capacity building and “help for self-help” Growing number of NGOs with international technical experts funded through bilateral civil society collaboration Transfer of public health knowledge on topics like reproductive health, epidemiology and community-based behaviour change interventions
1990–2000	Intensified debate on the “how” of development <i>aid</i> : small-scale initiatives considered to have improved ownership, room for local innovation, feedback loops to avoid pitfalls of big-push programmes, e.g. weak local ownership and the cessation of activities after withdrawal of external funding Simultaneously, structural challenges were considered to require system-level solutions, such as debt restructuring initiatives like the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, while small-scale projects were considered to have insufficient scale, impact and sustainability, demand for increased monitoring and impact measurements to allow for evidence-based decision-making
2000–2015	Millennium Development Goals, which were only applicable to countries of the Global South, aimed to measure progress of all small and large-scale development efforts through pooled funding structures such as the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria
2015–2030	Sustainable Development Goals applicable to every nation, including in the Global North Multilateral, universalist, global goal setting through the Paris Climate Agreement (2005), the Sendai Framework (2015) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015) Emphasis on leaving no one behind, inclusive governance, institutions and participation (SDG 16) and partnerships (SDG 17) Both normative (values-based) and practical (effectiveness-driven) implications of localization aim to deliberately shift power, resources and decision-making to local and national stakeholders, to drive development, humanitarian action and peacebuilding in their contexts Multi-stakeholder approach becomes standard Cooperation routinely includes various state, NGO, civil society, private sector and finance participants, cities and subnational governments, philanthropies and foundations

Table 1: Paradigm shifts in, and changing approaches to, humanitarian response and international development cooperation through the decades

It is essential to understand the varying motivations of the multitude of international cooperation stakeholders – governments, multilateral partners, private donors, international and local NGOs, entities like the Movement – in order to comprehend the dynamics of international resource flows and their effects on the autonomy and priorities of partner countries and their respective communities. While altruism and humanitarian concern often play an important role when engaging in emergency relief and development cooperation, strategic interests, trade relationships and geopolitical influence have always factored into the decisions of (inter)national players to provide resources. Despite positive systemic changes over the past 75 years, from the concept of “aid for the *undeveloped*” to “development cooperation based on reciprocal learning”, development cooperation still has a long way to go.

“True localization is not just about transferring funds – it’s about trusting local expertise, respecting local leadership, and enabling communities to shape their futures on their terms.”

Lynne Muthoni Wanyeki, Regional Director of the Open Society Foundation's Africa Regional Office

While the historic analysis highlights the gaps and shortcomings of past practices, the rising humanitarian needs driven by more frequent and devastating environmental crises, geopolitical instabilities and diminishing resources underpin the urgency to act collectively.

1.2 Objectives of localization and locally led action

In 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit, major humanitarian donors and development organizations signed a broad-ranging policy agenda, the Grand Bargain, whose goal is to enhance humanitarian responses by ensuring that all those in need receive timely, high-quality, impactful and sustainable assistance. The Grand Bargain therefore outlines the need to localize humanitarian response.

Local entities deal with the bulk of developmental challenges and are therefore essential drivers of sustainable development and locally led action. They offer unique advantages, such as the ability to respond early, facilitate access and acceptance, ensure cost-effectiveness and link humanitarian efforts with long-term development (e.g. reducing the impact of future crises).

In the context of the Movement, the aim is to increase investment in local organizations and improve partnerships and coordination between international and local responders (IFRC 2020).

As such, localization means shifting control, capacity and influence from international donors to local stakeholders in recipient countries. Localization therefore generally has three dimensions: localization of resources, i.e. the transfer of financial decision-making; localization of agency, with increased local authority in decision-making on how development interventions are set, designed, implemented and evaluated; and localization of ownership of outcomes (Baguios et al. 2021).

Box 1: The key principles of localization

- 1. Empowering local actors:** Increasing the involvement and leadership of local organizations, communities and governments in humanitarian work, ensuring they play a central role in the decision-making process and that local knowledge / expertise is valued.
- 2. Increasing local funding:** Ensuring that more financial resources are allocated directly to local actors, allowing them to respond effectively to crises and build long-term resilience in their communities.
- 3. Enhancing capacities:** Strengthening the abilities of local organizations to manage humanitarian responses, improve preparedness and address the unique needs of their populations through inclusive, locally relevant approaches that reflect the needs and values of the communities being served.
- 4. Promoting sustainability:** By empowering local entities, localization aims to create more sustainable and contextually appropriate solutions that promote long-term effectiveness.
- 5. Fostering complementarity:** The goal is to ensure that both local and international actors collaborate in a way that maximizes their comparative advantages and increases the impact of their collaborative efforts based on equitable partnerships instead of one-sided donor–recipient relationships.

Implementing localization requires both structural and strategic adjustments in how humanitarian responses and development cooperation are planned and delivered, and how partnerships are shaped. For the localization of resources to materialize, the administrative processes traditionally used to collaborate in humanitarian responses and development cooperation need adjustment. Decision-making on how money is spent and how goods are procured needs to shift to local actors, with international partners refraining from overseeing spending in detail and controlling by budget line. Procurement and reporting systems need to be reformed and the risks associated with financial transactions, such as potential fraud and corruption, must be shared between donor and recipient.

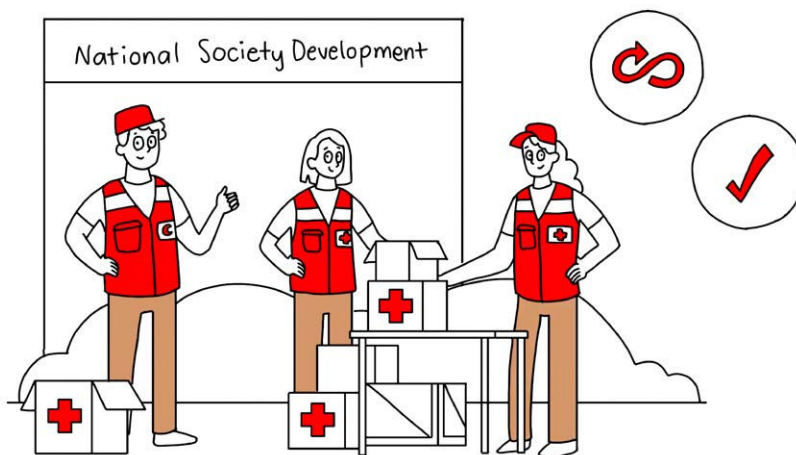
Localization of agency entails handing over decision-making to local partners, valuing local leadership, investing in local capacities and recalibrating internal incentives. The focus is on the local partner's organizational growth, investing in building local capabilities and fostering meaningful engagement with local decision-makers. The partners' engagement goes beyond programme implementation or local advocacy for a certain thematic area. A trusted partnership is the foundation for genuine localization of agency.

The third dimension of localization, in which the ownership of outcomes is handed over to the local partners, is generally associated with greater relevance, effectiveness and ownership of problem-solving, thereby leading to sustainable development. Actively supporting growing ownership of outcomes in a local partner entails that partners value local leadership, adapt to internal cultures, practices, approaches and routines – even if they are unfamiliar – and accept that they might not simply meet numerical targets. In a joint effort, partners contribute to the systemic growth and solid anchoring of the local partner in the local environment.

Implementing localization thus requires both strategic and structural adjustments in how humanitarian aid and development cooperation are planned and delivered. For localization to become current and future practice, courageous decisions – that might pose new risks – need to be taken. When embarking on partnerships, donor and recipient organizations need to clarify what they mean by localization, define what “local” entails and agree on the level of localization that makes sense in the context and as the basis for their partnership. This definition of “local” is bespoke and needs to be decided before processes are adjusted in the name of localization.

Localization also emphasizes complementarity. It seeks a balance between local and international stakeholders, to better leverage the strength of both and to enhance the overall impact and effectiveness of humanitarian response and development cooperation in specific contexts.

While global progress towards these commitments is mixed and international humanitarian systems are slow to transition, international organizations are stepping up their efforts to review and adjust their business models and partnership practices to enable and support locally led action.



National Society Development (NSD): strengthening National Societies to deliver effective community services. <https://youtu.be/P6645jNge0w>

© SRC

1.3 The Movement’s definition of National Society Development

Local action – supported, as and when needed, by global solidarity – has been at the heart of the Movement’s operating model since its inception 161 years ago. Since then, the Movement has become the biggest humanitarian network, spanning the globe and addressing humanitarian crises and development issues through its 191 National Societies.

It is through this network, which encompasses 180,000 branches and is collectively supported by around 16 million volunteers worldwide, that the Movement addresses global challenges, such as the humanitarian impact of climate change, internal displacement, migration, demographic change, health-care inequalities and the threat of future pandemics, at the local level (IFRC 2024a: 2).

The National Societies are permanently and nationally rooted actors adhering to the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – adopted by the Movement in 1965. The principle of unity dictates that every country has only one organizational structure that is encouraged to cover the entire national territory by establishing branches and chapters. These branches and chapters are primarily operated by trained volunteers recruited from the local communities. They live in the community and can be called to action in the event of a disaster. They stay within the community, supporting long-term development and local improvement.

“Localization is a necessity as we are, by design, close to the communities and can therefore identify the priority needs. Most importantly, we can react rapidly to emergencies through our volunteers and staff that are always present throughout the country and providing vital services on a daily basis.”

Georges Kettaneh, Lebanese Red Cross Secretary General

Each National Society is both independent as an organizational structure and at the same time mandated by its government to act as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. This dual role allows National Societies to operate with autonomy while maintaining formal, trusted relationships with state institutions, including for the receipt of funding.

Cooperation between National Societies is unique because humanitarian response and international cooperation are always carried out with and through the local National Society. This creates binding partnerships and, in the best case, a strong sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity.

In this context, strong, independent, self-sustained, well-functioning and trusted National Societies are key to the delivery of lifesaving, principled humanitarian action that boosts community resilience and local development. Because they are anchored in the communities they serve, National Societies are crucial local drivers of positive change and support for vulnerable communities. Through their local staff and local volunteers, they are rooted in their constituencies and are often the first or only ones to reach people others cannot.

Each National Society is responsible for its growth and how it develops its people, structures, systems and services to meet increasing needs. The scale, quality and effectiveness of local action is nevertheless dependent on the ability of National Societies and their branch networks to be fit for purpose.

Many National Societies face problems of governance, leadership and managerial, operational and financial capacity, and tend to be distracted from pursuing their own strategy and service-oriented operations by donor-driven, short-term project grants. Poor governance and low quality of services impede their acceptance by, and access to, all stakeholders and therefore aggravate their inability to mobilize domestic resources. Other systemic challenges and barriers include gaps in strategic long-term planning within the limits of their mandate and auxiliary role, often related to the lack of long-term funding, but also to their organizational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, human resources, meaningful engagement of volunteers, and the complex relationships between different parts of the organization, especially branch systems.

Yet it is often National Societies that bear the brunt in global crises and find themselves having to respond to a multitude of disasters at once. It is important not only to capture and recognize their local expertise and resilience, but also to enable National Societies to be self-determined and perform as strong and effective local stakeholders adapting to the fast-changing environment. This effort requires investment in short-, medium- and long-term organizational transformation processes. The National Societies need enhanced capacities to deliver more effective, efficient and sustainable local humanitarian and development action that translates into visible, local impact. This continuous development and transformation process is the essence of the work we call National Society Development (IFRC 2022: 4).

National Society Development addresses fundamental organizational challenges: strengthening the National Society’s mandate, legal base, identity and auxiliary role (see deep dive 1 for more information), long-term strategic direction, basic organizational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and internal relationships. It also aims to improve existing services and capacities, for example in terms of branch systems, human resources, volunteering or financial sustainability.

Box 2: Definition: National Society Development

Within the Movement, National Society Development refers to the ongoing effort of each National Society to achieve and maintain an accountable and sustainable organization that delivers – through volunteers and staff – relevant services to address needs, reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience in a changing environment. It encompasses all aspects of a National Society, including:

- **organizational development**, focusing on fundamental issues such as the National Society’s mandate, legal base, identity, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, and capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the National Society or between it and its environment, including its 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**, focusing on improving existing services and capacities by making them more impactful, effective, widespread and better related to the National Society’s mandate and mission. This involves strengthening both areas of work that focus on community resilience and empowerment and the underpinning systems, procedures and tools.

National Society Development Policy (IFRC 2022: 5)

Investment in National Society Development therefore contributes to better local humanitarian action. That is why the Movement considers supporting National Society Development as central to, and an enabler of, the process of localization.

Box 3: Local expertise and resilience are part of the solution

Based on the lived realities of local stakeholders and communities, National Societies in lower-income countries have faced at least eight distinct but often overlapping types of threat or crisis over the past ten years. In contrast, National Societies in high-income countries have reported dealing with around one or two threats. Since 1992, there has been a steady increase in the range of crises facing National Societies covered by IFRC Emergency Appeals or Disaster Response Emergency Fund operations (IFRC 2024b: 45). Recognition of the expertise of local protagonists such as the National Societies in dealing with compounded crises in their respective contexts is thus a key component of international cooperation.

Deep dive 1: The auxiliary role of National Societies

The National Societies occupy a singular space within the global humanitarian landscape. Recognized by their governments based on the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the Movement's Statutes, resolutions of International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and national legislation, they serve as voluntary aid societies and auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. This means that National Societies support their public authorities in their humanitarian tasks, helping in disaster and armed conflict situations, and contributing to various social and health services. This legally enshrined status fosters a relationship characterized by mutual responsibilities and benefits. It is a unique and defining feature that distinguishes the National Society from all other (non-governmental) organizations in the country.

In a nutshell, the National Society's auxiliary role is to support the public authorities by supplementing or substituting for public humanitarian services, particularly in times of crisis, disaster or emergency, while acting in conformity with the Fundamental Principles, in particular neutrality and independence.


The public authorities bear primary responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable persons on the national territory; the primary purpose of the National Society as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field is to supplement and/or complement their work to fulfil this responsibility. National Societies are dutybound to give serious consideration to any request by their public authorities to carry out humanitarian activities within their mandate. At the same time, National Societies are not subordinate to the government and remain independent organizations that are guided by their own principles: the Movement's Fundamental Principles. Public authorities must refrain from requesting the National Society to perform activities which conflict with the Fundamental Principles, the Movement's Statutes or its mission. Maintaining independence requires National Societies to resist any pressure or interference from the public authorities that would stop them from adhering to the Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. Also, the National Societies should pursue activities that assist the most vulnerable groups within society, even when these activities have not been requested or supported by the public authorities. Public authorities must respect any such decisions by the National Society (IFRC 2021a: 12).

The principle of neutrality requires National Societies not to take sides in hostilities or to engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. The principle of neutrality is sometimes perceived as a challenge to advocacy, but it should not be. National Societies can undertake advocacy as long as it is based on their commitment to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being (i.e. the principle of humanity), is guided solely by needs and prioritizes the most urgent cases of distress (i.e. the principle of impartiality).

The auxiliary role dates to the Movement's founding in the nineteenth century. National Societies were originally created to provide medical assistance to those wounded in battle, in support of their countries' military medical services. Today, National Societies are recognized as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field in times of both war and peace (IFRC 2021: 12).



Learn more on the topic by consulting the IFRC Guide to Strengthening the Auxiliary Role Through Law and Policy (IFRC 2021a).

The Guide is accompanied by a 30-minute online training course on the [IFRC Learning Platform](#) . An analysis of collaborative support from the Movement for strengthening the auxiliary role and a collection of best practices can be found in the Auxiliary Role Learning Report (IFRC/ICRC/ British Red Cross 2024).

2. Conceptual framework for National Society Development support



Volunteers of the Kyrgyz Red Crescent during a training activity.

This chapter presents the **conceptual framework** guiding NSD support for key thematic outcomes and the underlying impact model.

To play a more impactful and active role in NSD support, the SRC established National Society Development as a distinct programme domain in its International Cooperation Programme 2021–2024, alongside Health and Disaster Risk Management, and introduced a conceptual framework built around a holistic, long-term partnership approach that aims to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of Sister National Societies within the Movement. The SRC's approach to National Society Development is rooted in long-term, strategic partnerships rather than short-term, operational support. This means understanding the National Society's context, aligning with its long-term goals and providing the tools, resources and expertise it needs to facilitate sustainable growth and impact over time.

The framework includes a multi-level strategy that integrates capacity building and organizational development across priority areas of support. The **key outcome areas** are further defined in section 2.1.

“We need to support transformation in the National Society, and we mean organizational development support, not just capacity strengthening to pay for programmes and programme managers. We want to build long-term sustainable services”

National Society Secretary General

The conceptual framework for NSD support focuses on enabling Sister National Societies to thrive within their own contexts by delivering sustainable, locally led services as part of their mandate to act as auxiliaries to the public authorities. It is designed to enhance their effectiveness, sustainability and resilience, fostering long-term, strategic partnerships to drive meaningful impact across the Movement. The **impact measurement framework** is explained in section 2.2.

The framework comprises three key levels of engagement (see figure 1).

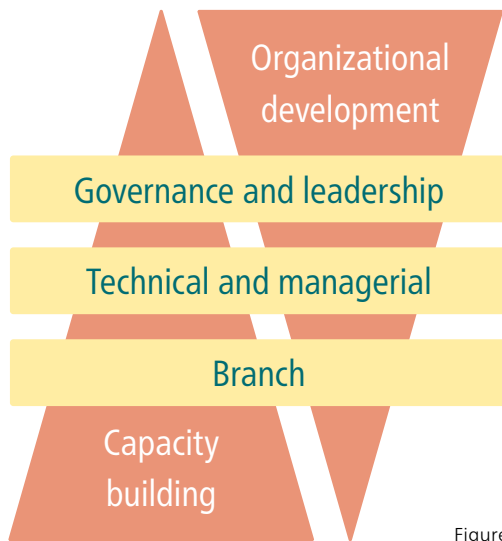


Figure 1: SRC NSD support: levels of engagement

- **Governance and leadership:** Here the focus of NSD support is on strengthening the leadership and governance structures of Sister National Societies. Effective governance and leadership are essential for improved organizational effectiveness, ensuring long-term sustainability and maintaining National Society trust and credibility vis-à-vis its stakeholders. Ultimately, support at this level enables National Societies to make informed decisions, adapt to change and deliver high-quality services to communities aligned with broader Movement goals.
- **Technical and managerial:** At the technical level, NSD support includes building organizational capacity in management processes for service delivery (e.g. disaster response, health services), providing training and skill development for staff and volunteers, and offering expert advisory input tailored to the National Society's local context and needs. The SRC focuses on improving organizational efficiency through better programming approaches that include conflict sensitivity and mainstream protection, gender and inclusion aspects, operations management, and operationalization of organizational development planning in programmatic sectors. This includes developing financial strategies for sustainability, ensuring effective resource mobilization, and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems. Additionally, the focus is on improving coordination and partnerships to maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts. All these efforts have to be planned and implemented in close collaboration between the Sister National Society and the SRC.
- **Branch:** Branches allow the National Society to cover the entire national territory. NSD support at the branch level focuses on strengthening the local capabilities of a Sister National Society to enhance service delivery, leadership and sustainability within communities. This includes improving the quality of services, ensuring active community engagement, and providing training for staff and volunteers to enhance technical skills. Additionally, branch leaders are supported in terms of governance, accountability and decision-making. Resource mobilization strategies and financial management are emphasized, to ensure organizational and service sustainability, and monitoring and evaluation systems are developed for continuous improvement. Coordination with the broader National Society and external partners is also key to fostering collaboration and sharing resources. Overall, support at this level ensures that branches are equipped to meet local needs and align with the National Society's broader development goals.

The Movement approach to NSD support

At a higher level, the SRC's engagement in this area is framed by the 2019 National Society Development Compact (IFRC 2020) and the National Society Development Policy (IFRC 2022), which provide guidance for Movement-wide NSD support aimed at maximizing the collective impact of all stakeholders.

NSD support follows a model centred on the needs and strategic priorities identified by a National Society. For this approach to be effective, collaboration must be based on a clear understanding of the National Society's needs (National Society Development Compact, [commitment 1](#)), identification of the skills and competencies to be provided ([commitment 2](#)) and the proper alignment of both. All support provided must meet required quality standards, be aligned with needs and avoid duplication ([commitment 3](#)). Additionally, it is crucial to capture the learning generated through the support ([commitment 4](#)), ultimately strengthening the wider Movement. The National Society Development Compact also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the National Society, its partners, the IFRC Secretariat, the ICRC and others providing support for organizational change.



Commitment 1

Better identification of NS priorities in NSD

Each National Society is responsible for its own development. Its leadership ensures that the organization is fit for purpose and able to identify priorities. This can be done through continuous monitoring using self-assessment tools ([see deep dive 2](#) for more information), external audits and legal revisions, with action plans developed to address any gaps identified. The priorities identified have to be incorporated into the National Society's strategic multi-year/annual plan(s). Once that has been done, the National Society will determine which priorities can be addressed internally and which require external support. According to the IFRC, 134 National Societies have conducted at least one OCAC process since the tool was designed in 2011. An overall analysis of performance by the 85 assessment attributes shows that 32 per cent of those National Societies have strong or very strong capacities, while 48 per cent indicate an explicit need for growth. The remaining 20 per cent are in line with the minimum standard benchmarks approved by the IFRC Governing Board.

“We welcome plan-driven support aligned to our Strategic Plan and we welcome national and international partnerships as they bring benchmarks in management practices, documentation, etc., to build global practice alignment. But we continue to experience a lack of funding support for our organizational transformation work, which is why we appreciate long-term partnering institutions (...) who accompany us through change.” Senior National Society leader



Commitment 2

Competences that match the needs

Each National Society has its own strengths and competencies, in addition to areas in which growth is desirable. Recognizing and sharing these strengths across the IFRC network is key. It is essential for National Societies to identify their areas of competence and determine which areas they are willing to develop to the level of excellency, so that they can offer support to others, including during emergencies. The quality of NSD support is vital for success – only the right skills and competencies will ensure effective capacity enhancement and better impact. Making such support predictable is a key commitment that will enable more effective partnerships and improved NSD efforts.

Cultural considerations, including organizational culture, are also important when providing NSD support and are a key element of effective peer support. In many cases, the best support is the closest one, from within the same country (e.g. branch to branch) or from a neighbouring country, or an environment sharing similar characteristics or challenges (e.g. South-South cooperation). This form of support has the advantage of reducing transaction costs and are already culturally and language appropriate. In other cases, when such skills and competences are not available locally or contexts are too complex, international support will be needed.



Commitment 3

Aligned effective NSD support

To maximize the effectiveness of NSD support, all efforts must align with the humanitarian needs, mandate and priorities of the National Society. The National Society Development Compact emphasizes the risks of uncoordinated support from multiple parties, which can undermine the National Society's independence, operational effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Interference by external partners and the imposition of outside interests will undermine the local partner's capacity growth. NSD support should instead focus on coordination and synergies. External partners that truly want to provide a high-quality, local response have a genuine interest in supporting National Society capacities, since they recognize the reach and impact both partners jointly have at the local level. It is important to develop better communication and mutual understanding as some external (non-Movement) partners may not have a full understanding of how a National Society works (e.g. their volunteer base, auxiliary status in the humanitarian field, global network or Fundamental Principles) and may not realize that not all National Societies are familiar with the way private sector partners, foundations and charities, United Nations agencies or academia work.



Commitment 4

Learning and quality assurance

Properly planned NSD activities, in which all participants assume their roles and responsibilities (see figure 2), benefit all those involved, with the learning generated having transformative potential for everyone. The National Society Development Compact emphasizes that all aspects of NSD cooperation and support must be jointly monitored and reviewed for success and learning. Effective NSD support must meet the needs and expectations of both the requesting National Society and the supporting partner. It should be of the highest quality and tailored to the specific situation, avoiding a one-size-fits-all or top-down approach. Partners must also be mindful of power dynamics, cultural factors and organizational differences. They must ensure that empathy and respect complement skills and competencies to reduce risks to the technical content.

Strengthening National Societies
to deliver effective community
services.

© SRC



The achievements of our National Society thus far have been made possible by the exceptional dedication and hard work of our volunteers and members across the branches and the dynamic staff at the Bhutan Red Cross Society. They remain the cornerstone of our organization, being instrumental in our growth and success. I express deep gratitude to His Majesty's Secretariat, the ICRC, the IFRC and the partner National Societies the Finnish Red Cross and Swiss Red Cross for their invaluable support, insights, technical expertise and guidance, which have propelled us forward, expanding our reach to serve the most vulnerable populations."

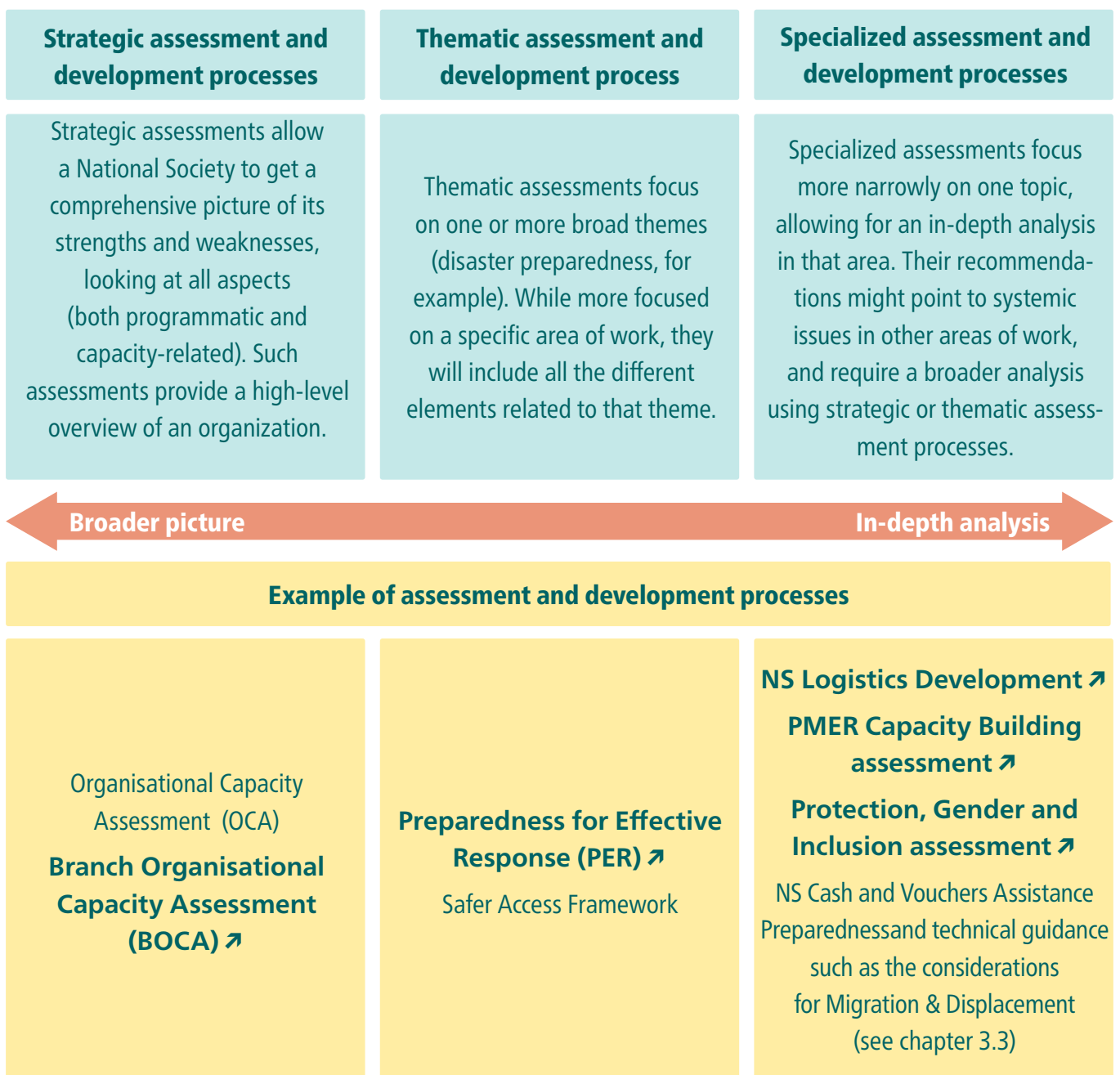
Dragyel Tenzin Dorji, Secretary-General, Bhutan Red Cross Society



Figure 2: Roles and responsibilities of Movement partners when providing or receiving NSD support

Deep dive 2: Assessment tools

The definition of NSD priorities should be based on a clear understanding of the context in which the National Society operates. Assessment processes help National Societies critically review their performance and capacities at a given point in time, identify challenges, strengths and weaknesses, and determine areas for improvement. If conducted periodically, assessments can be used to monitor progress and highlight ongoing challenges, informing updates to the NSD plan and supporting continuous learning. NSD assessments should complement other information sources, such as strategic planning processes, the regular monitoring of NSD progress, external audits and programme evaluations. These sources already provide valuable insights into the National Society's context, the quality of its governance, its structure and its operations. However, assessments are only useful if they lead to concrete development actions addressing identified weaknesses. Their recommendations, along with the additional information, help National Societies define their priorities, which should then be reflected in their strategic, development or operational plans.



Assessments should be seen as tools that help National Societies tailor their development priorities, with no set order for when or which assessments to conduct. However, findings from previous assessments should inform new assessments, and development priorities should be informed by recommendations. National Societies should not conduct too many assessments at once, as this can divert resources and delay follow-up action. Specialized assessments (e.g. on specific operational capacities) should feed into broader strategic ones, and poor results may indicate the need for further analysis or external reviews to address gaps.

In a truly localized process, National Societies should define what they expect to achieve from the process before undergoing an assessment, ensuring that the decision is not influenced by partner pressure. The National Society leadership must be fully aligned with and committed to the assessment, as its support is crucial for translating recommendations into actionable steps. Finally, it is important to consider the question of resources, including time and follow-up investment, so as to ensure that resources are available for both the assessment and any follow-up required.



Assessments are complementary; they can be used on their own or in combination. For example, a general overview using strategic assessments can be conducted alongside a more in-depth review of specific areas, e.g. thematic/specialized assessments. To learn more about assessment and for a detailed list of available processes, please consult the IFRC guidance on National Society assessment and development processes (2021b). Report (IFRC/ICRC/British Red Cross 2024).

2.1 Key thematic outcomes

In order to operationalize its strategic ambitions, the SRC identified five thematic priorities for strategic and systematic NSD support for Sister National Societies during the programmatic timeframe 2021–2024. Each thematic priority addresses a key area for growth and all five are based on the SRC's areas of expertise, including institutional competences within its domestic operations, past experience and the needs-based development of its partners.

2.1.1 Governance, leadership and strategy

The SRC views good governance, leadership at all levels of the organization and strategic development as essential for sustainable National Society transformation processes. It aims to recognize and seize opportunities for organizational change when a Sister National Society shows a clear intent to improve.

The SRC offers technical support for strategy development, including business plans, for organizational assessments and for the integration of gender and diversity considerations into the National Society's work. This support is coordinated with other Movement components and can be provided by the SRC directly or through external expertise.



Volunteers train new skills in a Volunteer Learning Programme.

In addition, the SRC encourages peer-to-peer exchanges and provides leadership counselling, highlighting the important auxiliary role of National Societies.

Empowering local action through branch development

This thematic priority concentrates on branch development, a crucial component of National Society development activities aimed at enhancing the capacities and effectiveness of local branches to deliver humanitarian services. The focus is on strengthening the local structures that directly interact with communities to ensure that National Societies cover the entire national territory, and remain responsive, sustainable and aligned with their strategic goals and mandate.

Branches are key because they serve as neutral spaces within which community members can self-organize; they facilitate volunteering opportunities and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, enhance community resilience and provide a platform for mobilizing local support.

The Branch Development Framework (IFRC 2024b) provides a vision and pathway for strengthening branch structures. It outlines how National Societies and their branches can enhance governance, operational capacity and community engagement in line with broader IFRC policies on National Society development, volunteering, youth engagement, integrity, protection, gender, inclusion and disaster risk management. Branch members' ability to recognize patterns of inclusion and exclusion allows branches to adapt services and ensure that no one is left behind. Branch development is thus both a structural and functional priority. It strengthens local governance, reinforces operational capacity and enhances the relevance of National Societies as community-based humanitarian organizations.

Box 4: Definition: Strong branch

A “strong branch” is one that consistently balances service delivery, community engagement and organizational resilience. It

- delivers relevant, high-quality services that respond to local needs and are rooted in the Fundamental Principles
- understands and reflects the diversity of its community, ensuring inclusion and accountability in decision-making and services
- builds and sustains a volunteer-based network, equipping volunteers with the tools, skills and confidence to act
- establishes trusted local partnerships, positioning itself as a key player within its local ecosystem
- sustains its operations for as long as community needs exist, with robust processes and structures
- mobilizes local resources to reinforce sustainability and reduce dependence on external inputs
- scales services up or down in times of crisis, demonstrating agility and adaptability
- contributes to the overall strength, unity and visibility of its National Society

The Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment is a self-assessment tool developed to help National Society branches identify and analyse their strengths, limitations and challenges across a wide range of organizational capacities. It serves as an important entry point in the branch development process, focusing on the basic capacities, structures and conditions that enable a branch to function and perform well.

Unlike an external audit, the BOCA is not about testing or examining the branch, but about engaging members and volunteers in a structured reflection on their current capacities and agreeing on priorities for further development. This participatory approach helps create ownership and momentum for change, inspiring branches to strengthen their services and resilience. Conducted every two to three years, it is facilitated by trained BOCA facilitators and carried out by a self-assessment team drawn from across the branch to ensure diversity of perspectives and expertise. The process leads to the creation of branch development plans that can be aggregated to inform National Society strategies and operational plans, thereby linking local realities with national ambitions.

The real value of a BOCA lies in the way it encourages branches to recognize achievements, identify areas for growth and take responsibility for their own development. By involving those closest to the communities, a BOCA strengthens accountability and reinforces the link between local priorities and the wider National Society vision. Repeated over time, it enables benchmarking, helping branches to continuously improve their organizational capacity and to remain resilient, relevant and trusted players in the communities they serve. It also promotes strategic decision-making.



Volunteers conducting a Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) in Benin.

The purpose of branch development

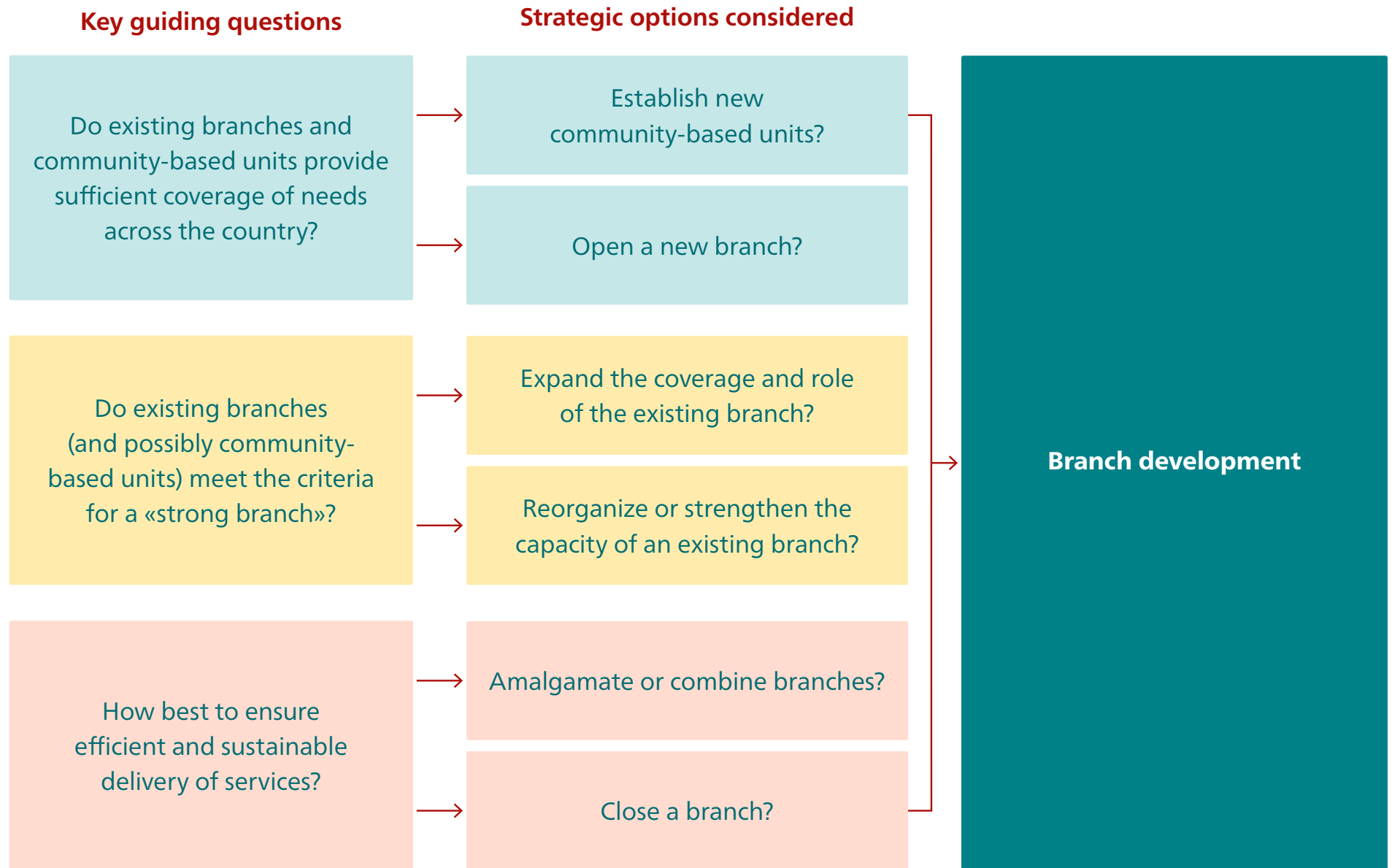


Figure 3: The purpose of branch development

The following thematic outcome statements are from SRC's results framework 2021–2024:

Outcome	National Societies receiving support have solid leadership at national and branch level that ensures good governance and strategic development.
Expected programme result I	Support the NSD efforts of x SNSs in compliance with IFRC standards on good governance, leadership and strategic planning.
Expected programme result II	Support the roll-out of National Society branch development plans of x SNSs.

Concrete enablers to enhance locally led action with regard to governance, leadership and strategy are discussed in [section 3.1](#).

2.1.2 Resource mobilization

Resource mobilization is a strategic, ongoing effort to attract and manage the financial and non-financial resources needed for an organization's sustainability and growth. It is a critical function for any humanitarian, development or civil society organization seeking long-term impact and independence. At its core, resource mobilization is about building a diverse portfolio of revenue sources to support both programmatic work and core organizational functions.

Many National Societies are highly dependent on project funding from international partners. This dependency (more than 90 per cent in some cases) means that they are vulnerable to changes in donor policy, find it harder to work according to their own priorities, struggle to cover their core costs and cannot plan for the longer term on the basis of sustained, secure revenues (INTRAC 2024).



Because of these dependencies and the potential for self-determined engagement, the SRC is particularly keen to support Sister National Society efforts to achieve financial sustainability. The SRC's support is multi-faceted and draws on the expertise of the SRC Marketing and Communication Department to provide tailored assistance.

Direct fundraising activities in Lithuania

© Lithuanian Red Cross

Resources are typically mobilized through various channels:

- **Domestic private individuals:** This includes small donations from the general public, major gifts, recurring contributions and legacy donations. Individuals are often a stable and loyal base of support when effectively engaged.
- **Domestic private companies:** Businesses can contribute through corporate social responsibility programmes, sponsorships, cause marketing, employee giving schemes or in-kind donations. They are an increasingly important source of funds in emerging economies.
- **Domestic institutions:** These include local or national government bodies and public agencies, which may provide grants, subsidies or co-funding for services delivered in the public interest.

- **Commercial services:** Organizations can generate revenues by offering services for a fee, such as workplace first-aid training, event hosting or consulting. These services leverage organizational expertise to create value.
- **Social businesses:** These are income-generating activities with a business model, such as renting out space, running shops or catering services. The profits support the organization’s mission.
- **International donors:** While still a major source of income for many, reliance on international funding is risky owing to shifting political priorities and donor fatigue. This group includes both Movement-related support and external donor funding.

The SRC supports the conduct of in-depth market studies to help identify potential domestic income sources. Such studies assess the local context, economic conditions and potential partnerships that can generate sustainable financial resources. By understanding local markets and community needs, National Societies can diversify their income streams and reduce their dependence on external funding.

The SRC also shares its extensive knowledge and best practices in fundraising, guiding National Society strategies and techniques for effective engagement with donors, government agencies and the private sector. This includes training in donor relations, grant writing and digital fundraising strategies. The SRC emphasizes the importance of transparent, ethical fundraising practices to maintain donor trust and long-term support.

The approach is enabled through the development of comprehensive resource mobilization strategies that align with the Sister National Society’s mission and goals. The strategies are designed to ensure the sustainability of operations while enhancing the National Society’s ability to mobilize resources from multiple sources, including public, private and corporate donors. The SRC also supports the strategies’ implementation, helping National Societies to manage their resources more efficiently.

Depending on specific needs, the SRC offers training and workshops for National Society staff and volunteers on fundraising, resource mobilization and marketing techniques. This ensures that the National Society is well-equipped to engage with potential donors and partners and can raise funds independently.

In addition to this expert support, the SRC promotes peer-to-peer exchanges among National Societies, allowing them to share experiences, challenges and successful strategies related to resource mobilization. By learning from each other, National Societies can enhance their fundraising capabilities and improve their financial sustainability in a collaborative manner.

Outcome	National Societies receiving support effectively mobilize resources to attain financial sustainability.
Expected programme result I	Support the efforts of x SNSs to conduct market studies and develop resource resource mobilization strategies.
Expected programme result II	Support the efforts of x SNSs to step up domestic fundraising.

Concrete enablers to enhance locally led action with regard to resource mobilization are discussed in [section 3.1](#).

2.1.3 Institutional preparedness



Life-saving ambulance services during the 2023 Türkiye–Syria earthquake response by Turkish Red Crescent and Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Under this thematic priority, the SRC supports Sister National Society efforts to enhance their disaster preparedness and response capabilities, in line with the IFRC’s Preparedness for Emergency Response (PER) approach. The focus is on building robust disaster management systems at both the central and branch levels, to ensure timely and effective responses to crises and disasters.

Depending on the needs and demand, the Sister National Society can request technical assistance for developing comprehensive disaster management frameworks, cash and voucher assistance and development of supply chains and logistics. This can further include establishing clear structures, processes and coordination mechanisms at both the central and the branch levels, to improve the overall response to emergencies while drawing on the experience and expertise of other Movement

components, in particular with regard to best practices, lessons learned and innovative approaches to disaster management. Support in supply chains and logistics may include optimizing the distribution of relief goods, ensuring the timely response delivery, and building logistical infrastructure to improve operational efficiency during emergencies.

Outcome	National Societies receiving support are ready and prepared to respond effectively in the event of a crisis or natural disaster. Should an international response be requested, the National Society provides assistance to the population affected in cooperation with other Movement components.
Expected programme result I	Support the work of x SNSs to establish solid and efficient disaster management structures enabling them to be better prepared for crises and disasters.
Expected programme result II	Support the efforts of x NSs to develop their cash and voucher-based readiness to deliver predictable, timely and effective responses to vulnerable and crisis-affected people.

Concrete enablers to enhance locally led action with regard to institutional preparedness are discussed in [section 3.1](#).

2.1.4 Project management



Local disaster committees in Honduras prevent landslides through reforestation and protective walls.

The SRC recognizes that National Societies must have robust planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning systems to meet the accountability standards set globally and by the IFRC. It provides essential support for building and strengthening these capacities through the development of comprehensive planning and monitoring frameworks, ensuring that the Sister National Society is equipped to track progress, identify challenges and adjust its operational strategies effectively.

If requested, the SRC applies its expertise in evaluation methodologies to support National Societies as they assess their programmes and measure outcomes, integrate digital tools into outcome monitoring, and enhance real-time data collection, analysis and reporting. This enables National Societies to track programme and organizational performance efficiently and to make the necessary adjustments. It helps improve National Society interventions and furnishes evidence for impact measurement.

More specifically, the SRC shares its experience in conflict-sensitive programming and gender mainstreaming to ensure that National Society programmes are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all concerned.

In terms of financial oversight, the SRC aligns its budgeting and reporting requirements with harmonized Movement standards. This ensures that National Societies adhere to best practices in financial management, promoting transparency and accountability.

Outcome	National Societies receiving support adopt a result-based project and programme management approach that promotes accountability and learning.
Expected programme result I	Support the Planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting units of x SNS in such a way that they perform in accordance with IFRC guidelines.
Expected programme result II	Support the efforts of x SNS to adopt conflict-sensitive project and service management, in line with the IFRC Better Programming Initiative.
Expected programme result III	Contribute to gender and diversity mainstreaming in x SNS.
Expected programme result IV	Contribute to the harmonized management of project finances within the Movement.

2.1.5 Volunteer management

The SRC attaches great importance to supporting Sister National Societies working to strengthen their volunteer management systems. Recognizing that volunteers are the backbone of the Movement, the SRC focuses on better understanding what motivates volunteers and how to retain and engage them effectively. It emphasizes the importance of exploring new forms of volunteering, particularly involving younger generations, to ensure that volunteer programmes are inclusive, dynamic and adaptable to changing community needs.

Drawing on its technical expertise in volunteering and youth, the SRC supports Sister National Societies by providing guidance on volunteer recruitment, training, retention and engagement strategies while fostering a culture of volunteerism that respects diversity, is inclusive of all community members and empowers individuals to take part in local humanitarian action



Guatemalan Red Cross volunteers on a home visit.

At the request of a Sister National Society, the SRC helps develop volunteer policies and frameworks that enhance the sustainability and impact of volunteer programmes, while ensuring that such programmes are in line with the National Society's overall goals and mission.

Furthermore, the SRC plays an active role in the **IFRC Global Volunteering Alliance** [↗](#), a platform for National Society collaboration and knowledge sharing. In so doing, the SRC helps promote best practices in volunteer management, advocate for volunteer rights and protection, and facilitate the integration of volunteering into the broader humanitarian efforts of the IFRC.

Outcome	National Societies use a volunteer management system that ensures the availability and support of trained and motivated volunteers and promotes a culture of volunteering.
Expected programme result I	Contribute to an improved volunteer management system in x SNS.

Concrete enablers to enhance locally led action with regard to volunteer management are discussed in [section 3.1](#).

2.2 Measuring the impact of National Society development and organizational change

The implementation of NSD support is guided by an impact model and carried out in accordance with the internal standards and the SRC Impact Measurement framework.

The expected goal of the NSD programme domain is for Sister National Societies to be able to constantly deliver relevant, nationwide services to vulnerable people, sustained for as long as needed (*domain goal*). It is assumed that through this domain goal, partners are able to reach communities and improve people's overall health and resilience (*impact level*).

Box 5: SRC impact measurement

The SRC has over 12 years of experience in systematic impact measurement in the fields of health and disaster risk reduction. This promotes evidence-based conclusions on the impact of programmes and projects implemented in collaboration with Sister National Societies in the context of the SRC's international engagement. To measure impact, project- and context-specific indicators are developed in partnership with the Sister National Society, following an initial baseline measurement. Together with a set of standard indicators, they are tracked over a programme period of at least four years. The standard indicators are pre-defined thematic indicators that are aligned with global programmes and policies, such as the SDGs. Both the SRC teams working directly with the Sister National Society abroad and headquarters-based resources help analyse and interpret the data. The results are presented in country-level or sub-regional annual reports, with the findings feeding back into the adaptation of programmes and partnerships. Additionally, the results are shared with the main donors and contribute to global reporting by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation on Switzerland's role in achieving the SDGs, in combination with data from Swiss NGOs. Impact measurement is central to the SRC's approach as a learning organization and forms a vital part of its partnerships with Sister National Societies.

In order to reach the domain goal, and in line with the foundational self-assessment tool used in the IFRC NSD approach, the OCAC, a National Society's overall capacity is assessed across five core capacities (*outcome level 2*):

- **Capacity to exist**, i.e. the legal base that allows the organization to function as a legitimate local entity: The National Society is recognized as a competent and reliable partner in selected sectors, in line with the core mandate.
- **Capacity to relate and mobilize**, i.e. the ability to engage with stakeholders, partnerships and communities, and to secure resources: The National Society has well-established relations with national and international stakeholders.
- **Capacity to organize**, i.e. the internal systems, structures and operational processes required for coherent functioning are established: The National Society has a well-functioning organizational structure and management processes that ensure that it and its activities are sustainable.
- **Capacity to perform**, i.e. the capability to deliver programmes and services effectively and responsively: The National Society delivers services according to national and international standards.
- **Capacity to grow**, i.e. systems and practices that support learning, adaptation, sustainability and future development: The National Society fosters institutional learning and innovation.

The strengthening of each of these capacities can then be measured using a variety of indicators (*outcome level 1*), which are in turn measured at the output level (essential outputs).

Outcome level 1 focuses on the capacities of National Societies to

- have solid leadership at national and branch level, ensuring good governance and strategic development;
- effectively mobilize resources to attain financial sustainability;
- be ready and prepared to respond effectively in the event of a crisis or natural disaster;
- adapt a results-based and programme management approach that promotes accountability and learning;
- use a volunteer management approach that ensures the availability and support of trained and motivated volunteers and that promotes a culture of volunteering.

Various essential outputs are needed to obtain the above outcome level:

- solid legal and statutory foundations
- a well-established member base
- active leadership (to ensure good governance)
- recognition as an auxiliary and as a reliable player in selected sectors
- existing policies and strategies based on needs and capacities
- stable relationships with international partner organizations
- an established practice of transparent communication to the public
- mobilized and secured financial resources for services and core costs
- adequate infrastructure
- well-functioning support services and core processes in human resources, finance, logistics and security/safety
- sufficient qualified staff
- volunteer management
- technical expertise to ensure quality of services in the health and disaster preparedness/response sectors
- planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting capacities
- promotion of institutional learning
- flexibility and resources for innovation.

The impact measurement framework enables stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of interventions and helps the National Societies to monitor growth and identify areas for improvement based on evidence. The key is to continuously review and interpret progress – which is more often than not non-linear in an organizational transformation journey – against the impact measurement framework together with a diverse and representative steering group.

Lastly, the impact measurement framework aims to ensure accountability to communities, donors and partners, and within the National Society, and encourages the continuation of, or greater investment in, NSD work.

Deep dive 3: Humanitarian leadership for the future

Today's global humanitarian challenges demand a shift towards leadership that is more collective and adaptive, functioning within and across systems. Traditional leadership models often centre on charismatic individuals leading change, whereas newer approaches redefine leadership as the creation of systems and conditions that allow change to be driven collaboratively and continuously throughout an organization. Leadership is not about a single person "fixing" things, but about establishing the right conditions for impactful leadership to emerge across all levels of an organization.

As the world becomes more complex, so do the Movement's National Societies, which means that leadership can no longer be concentrated at the top. The challenge is to create environments that foster leadership at all levels and build adaptive systems that are resilient to future challenges. The SRC approach moves away from developing individual transformational leaders to focus on building structures and cultures that empower everyone – regardless of their position – to help drive systemic change. Over time, this shift will lead to stronger, more agile National Societies that are ready to tackle both current and future humanitarian challenges through continuous learning and adaptation.



A volunteer from the South Sudan Red Cross leads a community activity.



Learn more on the topic by consulting the **Framework on Leadership (for the future)** [↗](#) developed by the IFRC Solferino Academy to help guide National Society leaders on their transformation journeys along the road to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

3. Success factors, good practices, barriers and shortcomings: Strengthening local capacity in practice

In chapter 3, the Practical Learning Guide explores the **transformational journeys** of selected Sister National Societies as they worked to strengthen their capacity to deliver more effective, efficient and sustainable local development and humanitarian action. It draws on case studies and the real-life experiences of both Sister National Societies and SRC colleagues to offer insights into the **success factors and good practices** that emerged during the Programme phase 2021–2024 in various technical areas, and the role that played SRC support in enabling and sustaining locally led action. It also discusses the **challenges, barriers and setbacks** encountered during implementation.

The **lessons captured focus on the four out of the five thematic areas** that were considered of particular importance to enable locally led action and had aligned SRC competencies and partner demands:

- governance, leadership and strategy, in particular branch development;
- resource mobilization, in particular domestic fundraising from private sources;
- institutional preparedness; and
- volunteer engagement, in particular volunteer motivation.

The insights are relational as well as technical, and highlight that trust-based, long-term partnerships grounded in mutual learning and shared commitment are central to meaningful and lasting change. Together, these reflections provide a nuanced understanding of what it takes to advance National Society development in complex and diverse contexts, where solutions must be adaptive, locally driven and sustained from within the National Societies themselves. The lessons learned shape further targeted strategic and technical support.

3.1 Governance, leadership and strategy

Strong governance, leadership and strategies at both national and branch levels are key to sustainable organizational development. The intended outcome of SRC support in this regard is for local players to have strong leadership at all levels, enabling good governance, strategic decision-making and effective implementation of plans. By focusing on branch development, the SRC aims to ensure that local branches can deliver essential services, operate efficiently and adapt to changing needs within their communities.



Ethiopian Red Cross Society staff during a training session.

3.1.1 Transformation journeys: Benin, Ukraine, South Sudan and Bangladesh

From 2021 to 2024, the SRC provided technical assistance and support aligned with IFRC standards to Sister National Societies strengthening their branch networks in Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Laos, Malawi, Moldova, Nepal, Paraguay, South Sudan and Ukraine. Four case studies, set out below, were selected to draw conclusions on the success factors, good practices, barriers and shortcomings experienced in strengthening local governance, leadership and strategy capacities.

Benin: Building a strong branch network

To carry out its humanitarian mission, the Red Cross of Benin relies on a network of 79 local committees across the country's 77 municipalities and a dedicated team of more than 12,000 volunteers. A key component of the National Society's development strategy has been to further enhance the capacities of its decentralized structure.

In 2024, all 79 of the local committees conducted BOCA, a reflection of the entire National Society's strong commitment. An overall analysis of the priorities identified shows that the action plans focus on diversifying resource mobilization methods and ensuring sustainable activities, strengthening National Society governance at the local level, promoting the emblem and the seven Fundamental Principles, and improving financial management, with an emphasis on budgeting, cost-effectiveness and reporting. This timely assessment and its clear results provided the Red Cross of Benin with the tools it needed to systematically tackle the challenges ahead and enhance its overall profile.

Ukraine: Branch development in emergencies



A Ukrainian Red Cross volunteer gives a cash voucher to an internally displaced person in Ivano-Frankivsk.

As part of a broad coalition of Movement partners, the SRC continued to support the Ukrainian Red Cross Society's efforts to enhance branch capacities across the country through the Branch and Volunteer in Emergencies initiative. SRC support focused on enhancing the capacity of two regional branches – Ivano-Frankivsk and Kherson – and ten local branches. Key achievements include the recruitment of specialized staff, infrastructure upgrades and strengthened volunteer management systems, contributing to a significant 27 per cent increase in the number of regular volunteers in both oblasts.

Overall, the initiative significantly strengthened the Ukrainian Red Cross Society's ability to respond to ongoing humanitarian challenges. By investing in people, processes and infrastructure, it laid a strong foundation for more resilient, responsive and community-centred humanitarian action, in times of crisis and beyond.

In Ivano-Frankivsk oblast, National Society branches delivered over 290 metric tonnes of humanitarian emergency relief – of which approximately 4 metric tonnes were provided by the SRC – to more than 40,000 people. Services emphasized a holistic response to community needs and focused on mental health/psychosocial support and mobile health care. In Kherson oblast, branches addressed critical needs by opening clothing banks and providing psychosocial support for children. Despite significant logistical and security challenges, mobile distribution models were successfully introduced, allowing for quick, safe and flexible delivery of emergency relief to vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities.

South Sudan: Promoting branch sustainability

The South Sudan Red Cross has been investing in organizational strengthening since its founding in 2012. Between 2022 and 2024, it focused on strengthening branch capacities with the support of the SRC and other Movement partners.

One of the initiative's major outputs was a comprehensive National Society survey of the effectiveness of branch income-generating activities. The survey revealed a number of challenges, including a low level of business, financial and technical know-how among staff and volunteers and the resulting implementation inefficiencies. Weak financial systems, unclear policies and poor oversight further hindered effectiveness. Branches with locally relevant activities performed better than those whose efforts were less relevant or scattered over wide areas. Economic instability, inadequate infrastructure and operational disruptions caused by environmental factors such as flooding also limited scalability and profitability. However, strong community engagement, partnerships with local authorities and guidance from National Society headquarters led to improved relevance and outcomes for some branches.

The development of a volunteer information management system improved the branches' capacities to work efficiently with volunteers. The initiative significantly enhanced leadership and governance across target branches and improved community acceptance by promoting the National Society's role and mandate.

Bangladesh: Relevance of self-assessment to build scale

The case study of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society shows the importance of self-assessment tools. The Society has been a pioneer in adopting the BOCA process, conducting assessments in 60 out of 68 branches. This has led to the development of the BOCA Lab Hub, a platform for piloting and scaling branch development innovations. The hub serves as a regional centre in Asia and the Pacific, coordinating with the IFRC and other National Societies to enhance branch capacities and share best practices.

3.1.2 Enabling and hindering factors

The case studies highlight the need for targeted capacity building, clearer policies and strategic guidance to ensure that activities have a sustainable impact. Good practices include standardized manuals with operational guidelines for all branches, standard operating procedures for financial reporting to enhance transparency, and financial management training for branch staff.

One area in which progress was made is the strengthening of policy and strategic frameworks, enabling Sister National Societies to align institutional goals with day-to-day operations. By embedding thematic priorities such as health, disaster risk management and youth engagement in their strategic plans, the National Societies improved prioritization, coherence and access to resources that directly support long-term objectives. Importantly, this type of support is often complementary to the SRC's work in other areas, such as health or disaster preparedness, where stronger governance and clearer strategies lay the groundwork for more effective service delivery.



Red Cross volunteers in Nepal promote hygiene and healthy behaviors during home visits.

It proved to be especially important to ensure business continuity and institutional resilience in contexts of disruption. With guidance on restructuring, leadership renewal and recovery planning, Sister National Societies were able to adapt to volatile environments, restore operational capacity and chart pathways to sustainable recovery. This complemented ongoing humanitarian operations, ensuring that short-term response capacities were reinforced by longer-term institutional resilience.

A further dimension was organizational learning and assessment. Sister National Societies used capacity assessments, improvement plans and lessons-learned exercises to engage in structured reflection on their strengths and weaknesses. This created clear roadmaps for organizational development and provided frameworks for more coordinated partner support.

Strengthening structures at branch level is a key component of National Society development, as branches engage directly with communities and thus play a decisive role in ensuring that National Society services are relevant, timely and grounded in local realities.

The case studies described above and a host of case studies in the thematic domain of institutional branch preparedness show that branch development is a critical success factor for community-driven action. Branches that can make independent operational decisions, access pre-positioned resources and mobilize trained volunteers are more agile and responsive. Good practices include the development of inclusive and transparent volunteer management systems, context-specific planning, and the integration of preparedness into strategic, legal and financial frameworks.

Key **enabling or hindering factors** to transformation in governance, leadership and strategy are as follows:

- Local partners must not only demonstrate a clear commitment to organizational change; they must be involved in leading the transformation journey at all levels, providing technical assistance for strategy development, organizational restructuring, business planning or organizational assessments.
- Structured reflection and self-assessments provide opportunities for organizational development roadmaps and enable more coordinated partner support. Participatory approaches increase ownership, relevance and sustainability of change.
- Change is most effective when expertise is coordinated across stakeholders and builds on self-assessments or the strategic plans of local partners.
- Clear policies and operational guidance are essential for translating strategy into day-to-day practice; transparency and standardized procedures strengthen trust and accountability (material available in the IFRC Red Solutions Hub 2025).
- Fostering peer-to-peer exchanges and leadership dialogues between organizations with similar organizational development needs or contexts is beneficial for all parties and reinforces mutual learning and knowledge sharing while strengthening the auxiliary role of National Societies or the key mandate of local organizations.
- Technical expertise can be delivered directly by peers, such as the SRC, or by external experts. It is important to provide support on a needs basis.
- Institutional resilience complements humanitarian response by linking short-term capacity with long-term sustainability.
- Branches are the primary interface with communities; strengthening them is decisive for relevance and effectiveness.

The key **lessons learned overall** from the transformation journey of Sister National Societies in governance, leadership and strategy are set out in [table 2](#).

Rationale (why)	Focus of support (what)	Approach and modalities (how)	Intended outcomes
Improve governance and organizational management	Policy frameworks, strategic plans, governance structures and management systems	Alignment with global best practices for good governance and leadership (within the Movement, based on IFRC standards), development of standardized manuals, standard operating procedures and financial reporting systems	Strong leadership at all levels Clear, well-informed decision-making and implementation at all levels
Enable sustainable organizational development and strategic coherence	Strategic vision building, organizational structure and set-up, and business planning	Coordinated technical assistance through collective work with partners and experts at national and international level in processes such as vision building, strategic development, structure alignment and business planning	Good governance established and strategic decision-making enabled
Ensure leadership continuity and accountability	Leadership training for all scenarios, including business continuity in protracted contexts	Peer-to-peer exchanges between leaders at all levels Leadership dialogue and peer learning, including with external partners	Inclusive, capable and accountable leadership ensuring continuity and effective implementation
Improve organizational resilience in volatile and disrupted contexts	Cross-sectoral collaboration and integrated organizational support across areas of implementation (e.g. health, disaster risk management, volunteer management and other partner priorities)	Capacity and competence assessments of staff, volunteers and leadership Individual and organizational learning processes	Organizations able to adapt, recover and sustain operations in volatile environments through a community base
Foster organizational learning, assessments and continuous improvement	Capacity assessments, improvement plans, learning systems	Participatory assessments, lessons-learned exercises, organizational reflection tools	Learning organizations with clear development pathways and improved performance, able to request partner support clearly
Strengthen front-line, community-based service delivery	Branch-level governance, management, and operational capacity	Tailored capacity building, operational support and branch development guidance (aligned with IFRC frameworks)	Services that are timely, inclusive, locally grounded and responsive to community needs

Table 2: Key considerations for organizational development support in the thematic area of governance, leadership and strategy

Rationale (why)	Focus of support (what)	Approach and modalities (how)	Intended outcomes
Build resilient, agile and trusted branch structures	Branch governance, leadership, systems and accountability are aligned with recognized best practices (within the Movement, based on the IFRC Branch Development Framework)	Participatory self-assessments (e.g. BOCA), coaching, mentoring and practical support	Branches that are trusted, relevant, accountable and institutionally resilient
Enhance accountability, transparency and continuity at branch level	Financial management, reporting systems, operational procedures, governance and management at branch level	Standard operating procedures for financial reporting, financial management training for branch staff Coaching, mentoring, and practical support for branch leadership, staff and volunteers	Improved accountability, continuity and organizational resilience Enhanced community trust

Table 2: Key considerations for organizational development support in the thematic area of governance, leadership and strategy

3.2 Resource mobilization

Over the past several years, the SRC has built specific expertise in helping Sister National Societies to develop sustainable fundraising from private domestic sources as the foundation for financial sustainability. Embedding fundraising into the core structure of an organization enables greater flexibility, autonomy and alignment with national priorities.

Ultimately, the aim is for each National Society to reach the point where its fundraising operations are self-sustaining. By embedding fundraising into the core fabric of the National Society's structure, this model offers a powerful pathway to building resilient and locally rooted fundraising systems that enable National Societies to align more closely with their own strategies, reduce dependence on international donor cycles, and strengthen their legitimacy and autonomy within their own constituencies.

The SRC supports the development of its Sister National Societies' capacity to broaden, diversify and increase their revenue sources, so that they can become more resilient, sustainable and independent. To do this, it follows a seven-step model "journey" (see figure 4) in which it

- (1) seeks commitment and understanding;
- (2) carries out a partner and market assessment;
- (3) facilitates the strategy and concept;
- (4) develops the infrastructure, team and training;
- (5) supports implementation: individual giving;
- (6) supports implementation: corporate fundraising;
- (7) withdraws as the Sister National Society engages in self-sustaining fundraising.

Private source domestic fundraising model

© Swiss Red Cross, 2024

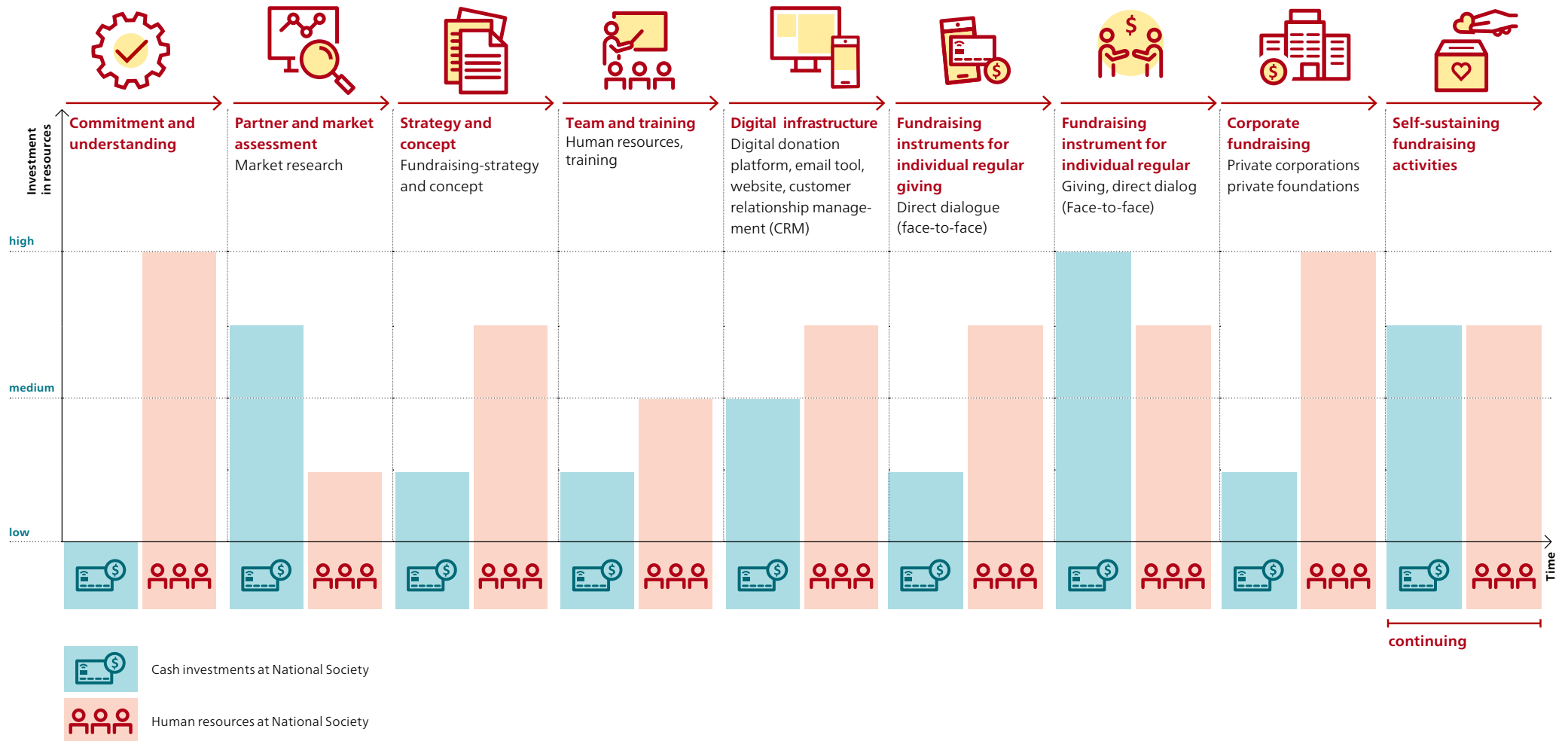


Figure 4: A model journey towards domestic fundraising from private sources

Importantly, the model does not follow a strict, step-by-step sequence. In practice, progress may be iterative or nonlinear – National Societies may revisit earlier stages, work on several components in parallel, or adapt the sequence based on context and capacity. The flexibility built into the model reflects real-world conditions and acknowledges that fundraising development is a dynamic process.

3.2.1 Transformation journeys: Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia

Between 2021 and 2024, the SRC significantly expanded its support to Sister National Societies working to strengthen their resource mobilization capacities. What began as a targeted engagement with a smaller group grew into a broader effort, reaching 18 National Societies across four geographical regions by 2024 (see table 3 below). The support was tailored to each context and focused on building sustainable, domestic fundraising capabilities as part of a wider organizational development agenda.

The SRC provided support in various ways. In most cases, support for resource mobilization was combined with broader programme cooperation embedded in long-term bilateral partnerships between the SRC and the Sister National Society concerned. In other cases, the support was an integral part of multilateral collaboration with other partners and/or ad hoc and short-term support on specific aspects.

Year	Sister National Societies supported in	Total number
2021	Bangladesh, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lithuania, South Sudan, Ukraine, Viet Nam	10
2022	Armenia, Bangladesh, Belarus, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Nepal, South Sudan, Ukraine, Viet Nam	13
2023	Armenia, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Uganda, Ukraine, Viet Nam, Zambia	17
2024	Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Ukraine, Viet Nam, Zambia	18

Table 3: SRC support for resource mobilization (2021–2024)

The SRC’s rich and varied experiences in supporting the development of domestic fundraising from private sources across a growing number of very diverse National Societies offer valuable insights into what it takes to build sustainable, locally rooted fundraising systems. These experiences demonstrate the technical and strategic dimensions of effective support; they also highlight the critical importance of timing, leadership, internal culture and context. From well-established National Societies with high public trust and ambitious strategies to those operating in more challenging environments with limited visibility or resources, each case presents a unique combination of enablers and obstacles.

A closer look at three case studies, from Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia, illustrates the range of approaches, results and lessons that have shaped the SRC’s evolving model of support and offers rich and practical insights into what enables success, the challenges commonly faced and how external support can be most effective.

In **Lebanon** ↗, a combination of strong leadership, a clear strategy for essential nationwide services and timely SRC support allowed the Lebanese Red Cross to significantly advance its fundraising efforts and mobilize large amounts of financial resources after the Beirut Port explosion and other recent emergency situations. The Lebanese Red Cross and its branches raise a substantial USD 2.1 million a year from domestic fundraising, an amount that is far in excess of the other case studies. There are many reasons for this, but a key factor is a professional team that has a clear idea of what it wants to achieve. When the Lebanese economy collapsed in 2019, the National Society managed to pivot successfully, focusing on the substantial Lebanese diaspora and external companies. Its good reputation, market readiness and diaspora support further accelerated progress. Importantly, the Lebanese Red Cross benefited from senior leadership backing and a focused, technically skilled team. With the support of the SRC, it set up a bespoke donation platform (iRaiser) within the Movement's fundraising system that allowed donations to be received and properly booked within 24 hours of disaster striking. Challenges were largely internal, involving the need to shift mindsets and secure buy-in for digital fundraising approaches. The case of the Lebanese Red Cross underscores how impactful SRC support can be when aligned with a National Society that is well-positioned and ready to grow.

In **Kyrgyzstan** ↗, the Red Crescent Society only began strengthening its domestic fundraising after a decline in international funding. Public awareness of the organization was initially low, and trust in Kyrgyz civil society's funding capacities generally limited, but different national emergencies provided brief windows of heightened support. The presence of a strong internal team, combined with the SRC's technical input and capacity-building activities, helped drive progress. Lessons learned include the importance of compelling narratives related to a concrete and visible local emergency, transparent reporting and trust building, and the value of the SRC's regional presence. It was suggested peer-learning exchanges could further strengthen momentum.

In **Georgia** ↗, the Georgian Red Cross Society placed fundraising at the heart of its organizational strategy. A stable, well-supported team, a transparent public profile of the organization's vision and mission, and clear leadership commitment were key enablers. The SRC's flexible and strategic support was instrumental in scaling efforts, including launching face-to-face (F2F) fundraising. Teams of fundraisers informed the general public in the streets of Georgian cities about the National Society's role and activities, convincing individuals to donate directly or commit to longer-term, regular donations via money transfer. This innovative but demanding model of outreach promoted visibility and local monetary contributions, but it required upfront investment, technical infrastructure and resilience until the break-even point was reached. The National Society's openness to new methods, which it adapted to the context, was a crucial success factor. The SRC and other internationally active Sister National Societies provided significant added value, facilitating long-term partnerships and furnishing visionary support for resource mobilization.

3.2.2 Enabling and hindering factors

The SRC's case studies demonstrate that strong leadership, committed internal champions and well-supported fundraising teams are essential for success. Sister National Societies should provide dedicated staff with appropriate skills and realistic remuneration, create a culture that values innovation and accountability, and secure buy-in from senior management. Peer-to-peer learning, both within the country and across regional networks, can accelerate capacity building and reinforce momentum.

Sister National Societies should implement a structured fundraising model that recognizes development as a journey requiring investment from one's own organization. This approach should combine technical tools with sustained investment in human resources, strategy, infrastructure and training. Fundraising development is rarely linear. Sister National Societies should anticipate iterative progress, revisiting earlier stages, running parallel initiatives and adapting their approach to context and capacity.

The SRC experience shows that as fundraising capacity grows, so does the balance of internal commitment, staff engagement and financial input, ultimately leading to self-sustaining operations.

An external study conducted in 2024 (INTRAC 2024) confirmed the strong relevance of the SRC's approach to strengthening capacities for domestic fundraising from private sources and the benefits of building strong domestic fundraising capacities. Together with the case studies, it identified the following key **enabling and hindering factors** to transformation in that field:

- Committed leadership and internal champions to drive domestic fundraising (support from senior management is a critical success factor);
- Dedicated staff and realistic remuneration, given the demands and competitive nature of the fundraising field;
- Relevant, practical and timely technical support and early-stage investment to initiate fundraising (patience is essential, as building a reliable donor base takes time);
- A clear, focused strategy, including for fundraising;
- A trusted financial system, providing secure ways to give;
- Clear, relatable proposals that tell the National Society story with evidence, emotion and transparency – a credible National Society with visible, strong programmes is a vital success factor;
- The SRC's peer-based, context-sensitive approach, especially when delivered through trusted relationships and complemented by flexible funding;
- When present, regional SRC staff and facilitated peer exchanges that can deepen impact and accelerate progress.

The SRC's experience in Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia demonstrates that technical support is most effective when adapted to local conditions and rooted in solid market studies and organizational readiness to invest long term through strategic steering in human resources, infrastructure and training. These lessons learned reinforce the importance of tailored, long-term support when helping National Societies develop sustainable, locally rooted fundraising systems. While each country's context differs, the overarching message is clear: domestic resource mobilization is both essential and achievable, and international protagonists like the SRC have a valuable role to play in enabling it.



Sudanese Red Crescent staff review implementation plans.

A number of **enabling factors** were also identified from the perspective of the SRC’s own organizational set-up and model.

The SRC has a dedicated coordination structure that draws on the fundraising expertise of its Marketing and Communication Department and manages collaboration with teams from the International Cooperation Department, the IFRC and other external stakeholders. This allows it to break down organizational silos and ensures coherent and flexible support. The level and type of engagement required varies depending on the specific situation of each Sister National Society.

Flexibility in entry-point level is another factor (see figure 5). If the Sister National Society’s senior leadership is hesitant to commit, the involvement of SRC leadership may be essential to build understanding and long-term buy-in. In other contexts, senior-level commitment may already be strong but technical input and hands-on technical support from the SRC’s fundraising specialists may be beneficial.

Moreover, both leadership exchanges and peer-to-peer technical support are built on institutional trust established through the long-term engagement of the SRC International Cooperation Department. The Department’s country teams play an important enabling role, ensuring the smooth integration of technical support into the wider partnership framework, providing valuable contextual insight and helping to open doors.

One of the most appreciated aspects of the SRC’s approach, according to our Sister National Societies, is the ability for fundraisers to work directly with other fundraisers, building trust, finding practical solutions and engaging in peer-based learning.

In areas where the SRC has less/no direct expertise, it partners with others that can bring in complementary specialized know-how. For example, in Georgia the Norwegian Red Cross is playing a key role in building the specific capabilities needed for face-to-face fundraising.

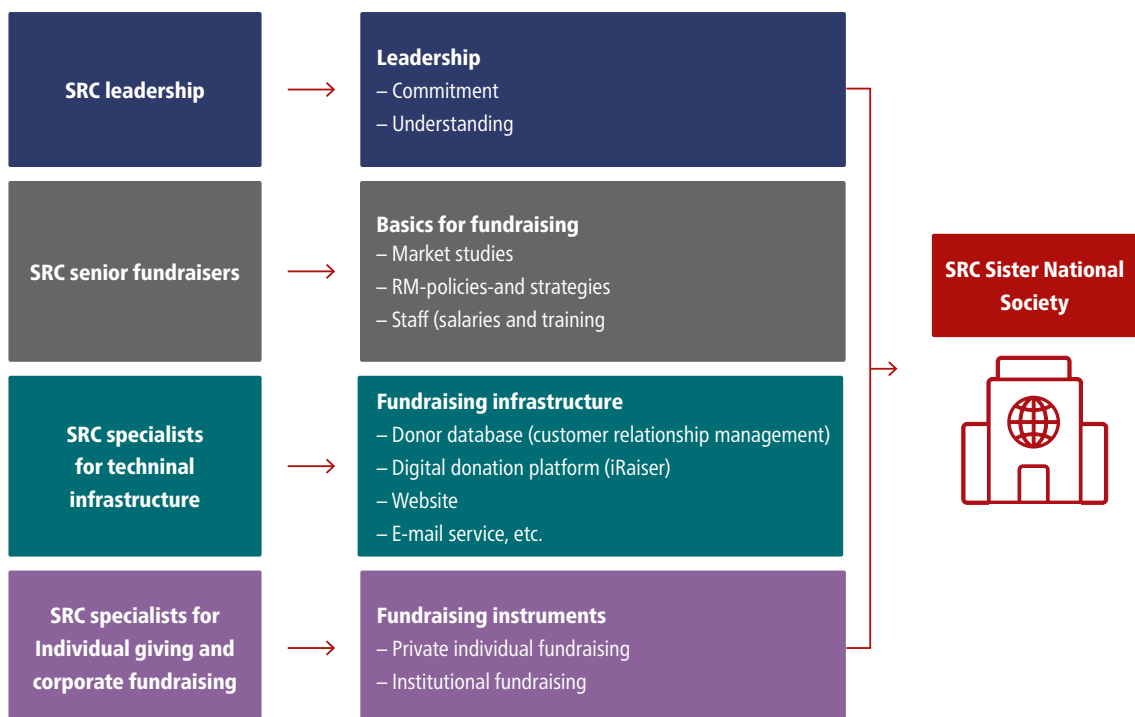


Figure 5: Different levels of development support for private source domestic fundraising



Togo Red Cross staff member working with a rural community

Despite many collective localization ambitions, a **key shortcoming** remains: many National Societies, particularly those operating in the Global South, remain heavily dependent on external, project-based international funding from Movement and other partners. In some cases, up to 90 per cent of their budgets rely on such support. This over-reliance leaves them vulnerable to shifting donor priorities and funding cuts that can threaten the very existence of their operations. While international donor funding often focuses on specific projects, it typically fails to support core costs or broader organizational development efforts. Many National Societies find themselves adjusting their strategies to donor preferences just to remain operational, rather than implementing programmes

that align with their own context-driven priorities. Despite the strong case for greater support for core costs, assistance in this area remains scarce. This may be due to various factors: perceptions that domestic markets are too limited; little appetite in the donor community to fund core activities; internal silos within the supporting organizations between fundraising and programme teams; and, ultimately, a lack of sustained will.

Perhaps the most significant **barrier** so far has been the relative ease of accessing international donor funding. When the donor climate is favourable, it often requires less effort to raise funds from international sources. But this external support can dry up rapidly, leaving organizations exposed. That's why investment in a robust private domestic donor base is so important. While it takes time, trust, skills, systems and long-term commitment to build up meaningful revenue streams from local sources, the sooner an organization embarks on that journey, the better prepared it will be for future challenges.

Investment in fundraising from private domestic donors has led to positive outcomes for the SRC's partner organizations. The benefits of building strong domestic fundraising capacities and directly enabling locally led action are as follows:

- A more sustainable funding base that is less affected by shifting international donor trends
- The **ability to cover core costs**, which donors often avoid funding but which are vital for continuity
- The ability to fund their own **organizational development**, which is key to institutional growth and adaptability
- Greater **independence** when it comes to **setting priorities** based on the organization's own strategy rather than on donor interests
- **Enhanced legitimacy and local accountability**, grounded in support from the organization's own constituency.

The SRC recommends a combination of bilateral partnerships, multilateral collaboration and ad hoc technical support, depending on the Sister National Society's maturity and immediate needs. Where the SRC lacks specific expertise, complementary partners can provide targeted support, ensuring that interventions are both practical and sustainable.

Domestic fundraising should not be siloed. If integrated into the wider organizational development agenda, including governance, strategy and service delivery, it enhances impact. The SRC approach – coordinating across internal departments and with the IFRC or other stakeholders – demonstrates the value of breaking down organizational silos, promoting coherent strategies and facilitating knowledge exchange.

Sister National Societies should continuously track fundraising progress and outcomes, adapting strategies as needed. The SRC model emphasizes learning from successes and challenges, using iterative feedback to refine practices and scale effective solutions.

Overall, ten **key lessons** were learned from the transformation journey of Sister National Societies in domestic fundraising from private sources (see box 6).

Box 6: Practitioner checklist for domestic fundraising from private sources

1. Start early and stay committed

Building domestic fundraising capacity takes time. The earlier an organization begins this journey, the more resilience it can build before donor support shifts or declines.

2. Domestic funding enables strategic freedom

Because it tends to be unearmarked, locally raised income allows organizations to cover core costs, invest in organizational development, and design programmes that reflect their own priorities and not merely donor agendas.

3. Resource mobilization is a systemic challenge

Fundraising is not just about asking for money – it requires systems, skills, strategies, a product, branding and communication, including via web-based infrastructure.

4. Context matters

Every context is different. Regulatory frameworks, donor cultures, digital infrastructure and levels of public trust vary widely. Approaches must be tailored, not templated.

5. Cross-departmental collaboration is essential

Effective fundraising support requires breaking down organizational silos. Close collaboration across programmes, leadership, finance and communication strengthens both delivery and organizational learning. In the SRC's experience, bridging international cooperation and marketing/communication functions strengthens delivery and learning.

6. Plan for phased and flexible support, especially in volatile or crisis-affected contexts

A gradual reduction in financial and technical support can be effective, but flexibility is essential. Some organizations will require longer timeframes, particularly in volatile or crisis-affected contexts.

7. Fundraising builds more than income

Investments in fundraising often spark wider organizational change, from improved data management to increased public visibility and local credibility.

8. Domestic resource mobilization advances localization

Financial autonomy is closely linked to localization. Organizations that can generate resources locally are better positioned to lead responses in their own contexts.

9. Peer learning accelerates growth

Peer-to-peer exchange platforms and cross-context learning are highly effective. It is important to create space for organizations to learn from one another as opposed to from external experts. Peer-to-peer learning enhances relevance, confidence and motivation. Movement platforms like the IFRC Virtual Fundraising Hub and cross-country exchange are invaluable in that respect.

10. Long-term vision, not quick wins

Sustainable domestic resource mobilization is not a short-term fix. It is a long-term investment in organizational independence, stability and locally rooted leadership.

Deep dive 4: Digital fundraising – iRaiser

As part of its strategic commitment to strengthening the financial sustainability of Sister National Societies, the SRC has championed the adoption of iRaiser, a secure, multilingual digital fundraising platform that helps National Societies generate **flexible domestic revenue streams** and reduce their reliance on **project-based international funding**.

Since its launch in 2020, iRaiser has been increasingly recognized as a practical and scalable tool that National Societies can use to build digital fundraising capabilities. By early 2025, 35 National Societies had joined the platform, collectively raising almost USD 45 million through a variety of campaigns, ranging from individual giving and peer-to-peer drives to corporate employee contributions. Designed for accessibility, the platform supports 135 currencies and is operational in 37 languages, making it adaptable to diverse operational contexts.

The platform's implementation has also revealed certain shortcomings. In many low-connectivity or heavily regulated markets, the lack of reliable payment gateways has been a major barrier to adoption. In response, the SRC and the IFRC have jointly piloted technical gateway solutions, improving access and usability in underrepresented countries. These adjustments have proved crucial in enabling broader participation and inclusive digital transformation.

As the learning emerging from the SRC's support suggest, the value of iRaiser extends well beyond fundraising mechanics. National Societies that adopt the platform often invest in customer relationship management systems, web development and branding, all of which enhance institutional readiness and professionalization. The SRC's support through the Virtual Fundraising Hub, regional networks and peer learning has proven critical in embedding digital fundraising as a normal and strategic function within National Society structures. However, not all National Societies enter the digital space with the same level of literacy, internal capacity or enabling regulatory frameworks. For some, integrating iRaiser with internal systems or allocating upfront resources, no matter how modest, can be a challenge. Sustained technical support, flexible funding and strong partner coordination are constant needs.

Despite these challenges, the overall trajectory is promising. With strategic support, digital fundraising has proven both feasible and impactful, even in contexts previously considered unprepared. More significantly, iRaiser has played a vital role in enhancing National Society autonomy and agility. By generating unrestricted income from domestic sources, National Societies gain greater control over how they meet community needs, sustain services and plan for the future. Digital fundraising thus directly reinforces the humanitarian imperative of local leadership, positioning National Societies not just as implementers, but as trusted and supported local actors.

Looking ahead, the SRC remains committed to scaling up and refining the iRaiser initiative. Ensuring equitable access to tools, building digital and fundraising skills, and facilitating regional learning exchanges will be key to unlocking the full potential of locally driven, digitally enabled humanitarian action. As National Societies continue to adapt to changing donor behaviour and mounting humanitarian demands, platforms like iRaiser will help them build bridges between local solidarity and sustainable humanitarian action.



The **Virtual Fundraising Hub** is a global learning and collaboration platform that empowers National Societies to strengthen their fundraising capacity and resilience. Learn more about the Hub and its offer [here ↗](#).

3.3 Institutional preparedness

To effectively fulfil their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities and work to reduce disaster risk and alleviate human suffering (see [deep dive 1](#)), National Societies must strengthen their preparedness to ensure timely and effective local responses to increasingly complex and overlapping emergencies.

National Societies worldwide, supported by the IFRC and other partners like the SRC, are actively investing in improving their preparedness for disasters and crises.

National Society Preparedness introduction video [↗](#)

Box 7: What a well-prepared National Society can do

- Provide relevant humanitarian services in line with its role as an auxiliary and with its mandate, 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 capacity to coordinate and collaborate with relevant stakeholders
- Implement systems and procedures to support small, mid-sized and large-scale operations

Institutional or National Society preparedness is a common, integrated and multi-hazard approach that brings together various initiatives aimed at strengthening preparedness, readiness and response capacity. It is designed to operate across the disaster risk management continuum – before, during and after a crisis – ensuring that all aspects of response planning and execution are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This involves working closely with local authorities and communities to understand the risks and hazards they face. Such coordination, grounded in the National Societies' role as auxiliaries and in their mandate, ensures that preparedness efforts are context-specific and aligned with national priorities. Thanks to their collective efforts, National Societies are not only improving their ability to respond to emergencies but also reinforcing their own institutional development. They are enhancing their resilience, adaptability and accountability – the foundations of a strong and sustainable National Society.

To guide and structure efforts to strengthen emergency preparedness, the IFRC has developed an approach, Preparedness for Effective Response, that offers a systematic and structured way to engage with National Society systems and processes, with a view to enhancing their preparedness, readiness and response capacities in both the short and the long term.

At the heart of this approach is the PER mechanism, which helps National Societies assess and improve their preparedness. The mechanism provides a shared language and standardized framework across the IFRC network, outlining the key functions, capacities, tools and systems that must be in place for timely, effective, and principled disaster and crisis response.

Area 1: Policy, strategy and standards

Lays the foundation, including the National Society mandate, auxiliary role, legal frameworks, disaster risk management policies, and quality and accountability standards.

Area 2: Analysis and planning

Helps National Societies understand risks and plan accordingly; encompasses risk analysis, early warning systems, scenario planning, contingency plans and business continuity strategies.

Area 3: Operational capacity

Focuses on the practical ability to respond, covering areas like emergency needs assessments, information management, cash and voucher assistance, early action protocols and emergency operations centres.

Area 4: Coordination

Provides guidance for effective National Society collaboration with communities, authorities, humanitarian stakeholders and the wider Movement, including civil-military coordination and private sector engagement.

Area 5: Operations support

Ensures National Societies have the logistics, finance, ICT, volunteer management and safety systems they need to function during emergencies.

Figure 6: The five areas of the IFRC PER mechanism

The PER mechanism is organized into five interrelated areas, each covering a critical aspect of emergency preparedness and response (see figure 6). These areas are further broken down into 37 components each defined by clear benchmarks that represent globally recognized standards and expected actions. This allows National Societies to conduct thorough self-assessments, identify strengths and gaps, prioritize actions and develop realistic improvement plans, all while promoting continuous learning and accountability.

While the PER mechanism is hazard-inclusive, it can be tailored to specific contexts, including migration and displacement (see deep dive 5), epidemic outbreaks, urban crises and climate-related risks. It can also be combined with complementary tools such as the Safer Access Framework, to strengthen operational safety in sensitive or insecure environments: The Safer Access Framework is a complementary tool (see deep dive 2) that can be used by National Societies to enhance their organizational development and emergency preparedness/response. It was developed by the ICRC and is designed to help National Societies fulfil their humanitarian mandate and roles, particularly in sensitive and insecure contexts such as armed conflicts and internal disturbances/tensions.

3.3.1 Transformation journeys: Kyrgyzstan

Between 2021 and 2024, the SRC made significant strides in advancing the preparedness and response capacities of 31 partner Sister National Societies (see table 4) across multiple regions. Its efforts consistently reinforced the importance of embedding preparedness as a cross-cutting, strategic function rather than a stand-alone project.

Year	Sister National Societies supported in	Total number
2021	Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malawi, Nepal, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria	17
2022	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Nepal, Paraguay, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine	13
2023	Armenia, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Nepal, Tajikistan, Ukraine	13
2024	Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Moldova, Nepal, Panama, Paraguay, Syria, Tajikistan, Togo, Ukraine	22

Table 4. SRC support for institutional preparedness (2021–2024)

Kyrgyzstan: Testimony to the importance of preparedness assessments

From early investments in branch-level capacity to national system strengthening, the reporting period saw a notable shift towards National Societies owning and leading preparedness efforts. The PER approach enabled National Societies like the Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan to assess their institutional readiness, identify gaps and develop tailored action plans. They made remarkable progress over the years. Watch the video to learn more about this process and the support provided by the SRC.

Testimony video from Kyrgyzstan [↗](#)

The Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan constitutes a good example of how sustained leadership commitment drives effective cash and voucher assistance preparedness. Since the early stages of its cash preparedness journey in 2016, the National Society's leadership has consistently prioritized cash and voucher assistance as the preferred response modality in both emergency and development programmes.

Senior management demonstrated strategic buy-in by aligning cash and voucher assistance with the National Society's vision, allocating financial and human resources, and embedding capacity across headquarters and branches. Dedicated focal points were established within key departments, such as Disaster Management, Health and Social Development, while staff and volunteers nationwide were trained to design and implement cash-based programmes.

This long-term, leadership-backed investment enabled the National Society to scale up cash responses effectively. A self-assessment workshop conducted in April 2021 allowed it to review progress, identify gaps and agree on priorities for consolidating and expanding capacities between 2021 and 2024. The assessment gave committed leadership and technical teams a good understanding of current capacities and clear action points to improve capacities and implementation.

By 2024, the Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan was recognized as a partner of choice for cash and voucher assistance in Kyrgyzstan, both within the Movement and among external humanitarian organizations.

The most important outputs captured by the self-assessment were as follows:

- resources were equally directed towards building the theoretical and the practical capacities of personnel (both staff and volunteers);
- constant awareness-raising activities were conducted at all levels (leadership, technical staff, volunteers at headquarters and branches);
- new tools and modalities were developed, adapted and tested;
- suitable financial service providers were assessed and contracted;
- the capacity to integrate and test digital tools for data collection was boosted;
- key messages were developed to be delivered during cash distributions;
- practical training was provided on communication with target communities during the identification and verification exercise;
- attention was also paid to communication and coordination with other relevant stakeholders.

Other important transformational journeys

From a technical perspective, growing attention to cash and voucher assistance preparedness proved to be transformative, as was confirmed by the case studies of the Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan and others. For example, the National Societies in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Syria and Tajikistan invested in internal systems to deliver scalable and accountable cash and voucher assistance, building both technical and institutional capacity. The "learning-by-doing" approach, deployed in winter support and migration responses, proved effective in building local expertise while meeting immediate needs.

In Ethiopia, readiness checks and the replenishment of contingency stocks at branch level allowed the National Society to respond immediately during landslides.

In Ukraine, improved logistics and cash assistance tools at branch level ensured services were delivered efficiently during protracted crises.

Recognizing and formalizing the National Societies' auxiliary role also emerged as a key enabler. Where legal and institutional mandates were clear – such as in Armenia and Laos – the National Societies coordinated effectively with the public authorities, provided timely assistance and participated in policy dialogues. Their legitimacy was essential for leading responses and securing national and international support.



Lao Red Cross staff during a PER assessment.

3.3.2 Enabling and hindering factors

The lessons learned with 18 Sister National Societies and SRC-supported research confirm the role of institutional preparedness as an **enabler of locally led action**, as it strengthens the Society's ability to lead localized responses, coordinate effectively with government authorities and partners, and respond rapidly to crises. The Sister National Societies' sense of leadership, adaptability and commitment to strengthening their institutional capacity are all growing. Across regions, they are championing locally led preparedness approaches that reflect the realities of their communities and build on existing national systems and structures. By supporting National Societies leading responses grounded in their context, we collectively move closer to fulfilling the Grand Bargain commitment of acting "as local as possible, as international as necessary".



Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers engage children affected by the conflict in psychosocial support activities

Preparedness is not a one-off investment or project, but a continuous organizational process of learning, adjustment and systemic improvement that allows National Societies to play their role as local actors. The National Societies have made notable progress in that direction but continue to face several persistent **challenges and barriers** that affect their preparedness efforts.

- Structural and systemic challenges: Limited branch authority, fragmented systems and siloed preparedness often hinder coordinated action and reduce the ability of branches to respond effectively to emergencies.
- Financial constraints: Short-term funding cycles, limited emergency reserves and reliance on external resources undermine long-term planning and organizational resilience. Many National Societies remain reliant on external funding, which is not always predictable or aligned with their strategic priorities, making sustained preparedness difficult.
- Capacity and human resource limitations: High staff and volunteer turnover, skill gaps and challenges in fostering inclusive practices constrain the ability of National Societies to implement and sustain preparedness initiatives effectively.
- Partnership and coordination barriers: Unequal roles, poor coordination with authorities and fragmented support can prevent National Societies from being treated as equal and empowered participants rather than mere implementers within the broader humanitarian system.
- Context-specific constraints: In fragile contexts, these challenges are often amplified. Staff and volunteer management remains a consistent constraint, and National Societies continue to rely heavily on external support, which can limit their autonomy and long-term effectiveness.

The case studies highlighted the role of institutional preparedness as a strategic driver of locally led action. As National Societies increasingly take on leadership roles in humanitarian response, several **key lessons** have emerged to advance the preparedness of local practitioners and enable them to provide timely, effective and context-appropriate responses (see box 8).

Box 8: Practitioner checklist for response preparedness

Several practical recommendations can be drawn from the 2021–2024 SRC experience in supporting locally led preparedness.

- **Institutionalize preparedness** across departments (governance, human resources, finance, logistics) to create systemic readiness.
- **Empower branches** (or other decentralized bodies/units) with decision-making authority, trained personnel and resources, to enable timely and community-driven responses.
- Support legal recognition of the National Society’s auxiliary role to enhance its coordination mandate and visibility.
- Invest in cash and voucher assistance systems and processes now, before a crisis hits, to ensure scalability and accountability. Strategic investment enables scale. Long-term investment in both human and institutional capacity allows National Societies to move from pilot initiatives to large-scale cash responses, as shown by the scale of the National Society cash and voucher response in Kyrgyzstan after long-term investment in preparedness.
- **Ensure predictable, long-term and flexible financing** aligned with the National Society’s strategic priorities.
- **Facilitate equitable partnerships**, positioning National Societies as co-leaders, not just implementers.
- **Incorporate different scenarios** into preparedness plans to remain responsive to shifting risks.
- **Leadership commitment is foundational.** Early, visible and consistent support from senior leadership is critical to successful preparedness efforts, particularly for securing resources and embedding efforts such as cash and voucher assistance preparedness.
- **Continuous learning and evaluation of assessments:** Regular self-assessments and reflection processes (for example through PER) help identify gaps, guide decision-making, and support the institutionalization of preparedness efforts. Combining conceptual understanding with practical tools, simulations, and real-life testing enhances operational confidence and effectiveness.

Deep dive 5: Enhancing National Society preparedness in the context of migration and displacement

Migration and displacement are on the rise globally, and National Societies across the Movement are finding themselves having to respond to more frequent and complex crises involving people on the move. While the Movement has extensive experience in disaster response, migration and displacement contexts require specific preparedness and operational capacity. A review of past operations and consultations with staff across the IFRC and National Societies revealed both difficulties and commendable practices in adapting to such situations. Key areas identified for strengthening the PER approach in this regard include clarifying the National Society's mandate within existing legal frameworks, improving context analysis and data collection, planning for durable solutions, ensuring inclusive and appropriate community engagement, adapting internal support functions (e.g. logistics, finance, human resources) and enhancing coordination with stakeholders.

As described at the start of chapter 3, the PER approach provides a structured and systematic process through which National Societies can assess and strengthen their readiness and operational capacity. Integrating migration and displacement considerations into this process ensures that National Societies are better equipped to anticipate and prepare, and thus to respond effectively in a way that promotes dignity and equity. Preparedness in the context of migration and displacement requires deliberate planning and a clear understanding of the specific risks faced by migrants and displaced persons, who often face legal, linguistic, cultural and institutional barriers to accessing essential services. By incorporating migration and displacement considerations into the PER process, National Societies can:

- ensure services are equitable and inclusive for all populations, including host communities;
- design more effective and dignified responses tailored to the unique needs of people on the move;
- contribute to longer-term solutions, such as reintegration, local integration or resettlement;
- coordinate better across sectors and borders, improving coherence between health, disaster risk management, WASH, livelihood and other programmes.

In partnership with the IFRC, the SRC has developed a **guidance note** [↗](#) for National Societies that offers practical recommendations for strengthening migration and displacement preparedness and response. The guidance emphasizes alignment with legal frameworks; integration of migration trends in planning; coordination with local authorities, UN bodies such as the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and other partners; and the inclusion of migration and displacement in operational procedures.

The SRC is currently supporting National Societies in Central America (Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama) piloting the operationalization of migration and displacement considerations. The aim is to strengthen the Societies' auxiliary role by enhancing preparedness and response capacities in a way that is tailored to the ongoing migration crisis in the region.



The IFRC offers a wide range of resources related to the PER approach in general, migration and displacement considerations, and considerations related to epidemics, climate and environment, and emergency response in urban setting.

Find more information [here](#) [↗](#). Learn more and gain practical insights into migration and displacement in Honduras and the work of the Honduran Red Cross in this context through this [video](#) [↗](#).

3.4 Volunteer management

Box 9: Key benefits of volunteer motivation

- **Foundation of sustainability:** Motivated volunteers ensure continuity, reliability and trust in humanitarian services.
- **Impact on well-being:** Motivation reduces burnout and increases resilience, especially in high-pressure contexts like disaster response.
- **Benefits for organizations:** Motivated volunteers bring energy, creativity and innovation, improving efficiency and adaptability.
- **Diverse drivers:** Altruism, social connections, sense of belonging and opportunities for personal growth all play a role.
- **Enabling environment:** Clearly defined roles, training, supervision, recognition, feedback and safe working conditions are essential.
- **Empowerment matters:** Involving volunteers in decision-making and showing the impact of their work strengthens engagement.
- **Dynamic nature:** Motivation changes over time; organizations must stay flexible and adapt to evolving needs and trends.

Volunteer motivation is the cornerstone of effective and sustainable volunteer-based organizations. Highly motivated volunteers are more engaged, committed and likely to remain active over time, ensuring continuity and reliability in humanitarian services. In organizations like the National Societies, this continuity is critical, as experienced volunteers build trust within communities, respond efficiently during crises and maintain high-quality service delivery. Motivation also directly affects volunteer well-being and is closely linked to empowerment.

Creating an enabling environment is key to sustaining motivation. This includes clear role definitions, appropriate training, supervision, regular evaluation, recognition and opportunities for feedback. Protection in the form of insurance coverage, psychosocial support and safe working conditions is vital. Volunteers who feel safe, valued and supported are more likely to remain committed and derive personal fulfilment from their work.

To better understand, monitor and strengthen volunteer motivation, the SRC, together with the IFRC and partners in the **Global Volunteering Alliance** [↗](#), developed MOTIRO, a motivation, engagement and well-being assessment grounded in self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000), probably the most widely tested and applied framework for understanding human motivation.



Volunteers of the Paraguayan Red Cross conduct psychological first aid courses for children and teachers in schools.

MOTIRO is an **(Motiro state of volunteer motivation video** [↗](#)) evidence-based tool that enables organizations to assess volunteer motivation across multiple dimensions, including psychological safety, youth engagement, leadership development and gender inclusion (see figure 7). The insights gained help shape volunteer management strategies, guiding programme design, recognition initiatives and training opportunities that respond to volunteer needs and expectations. By integrating

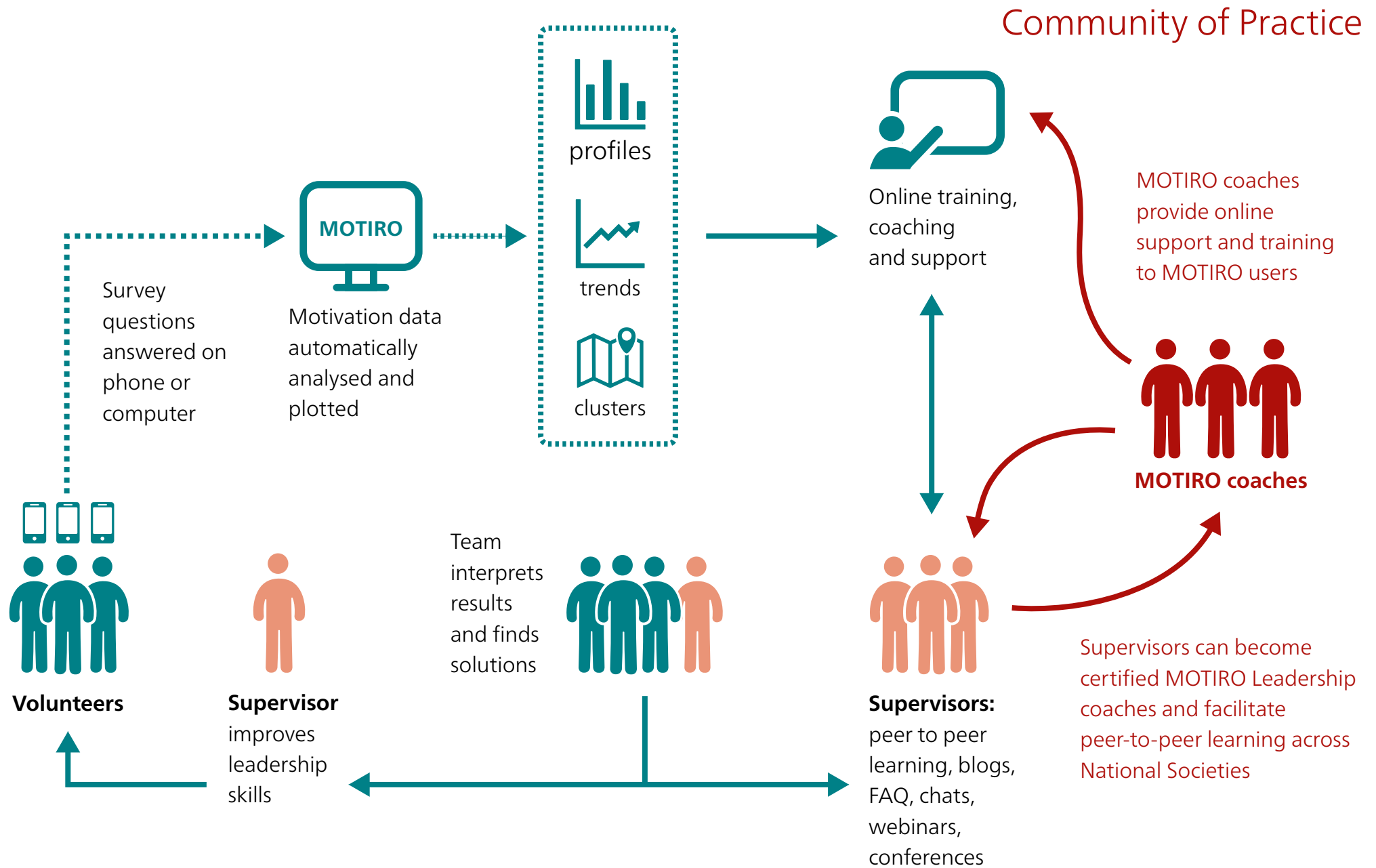


Figure 7: How to assess and enhance volunteer motivation © IFRC

this knowledge, organizations can adapt to new trends such as short-term or digital volunteering, ensuring volunteers remain both engaged and effective. MOTIRO helps teams of volunteers identify their motivational challenges and provides practical solution packs where teams can find and select low-cost tools and activities to improve volunteer and staff motivation. Importantly, it also provides team leaders with insights into how their leadership is perceived and how it can be improved to foster stronger motivation.

MOTIRO has five steps to support individual reflection, team learning, organizational change and policy development: design, survey, analysis, discussion and plan of action. Importantly, while the tool provides evidence-based analysis – including coaching solutions supported by artificial intelligence – the individuals and the team interpret and give meaning to their own survey results. Stakeholder inclusion of this kind promotes meaningful policy review, attitude and behaviour change through feedback, policy implementation and organizational development by fostering belongingness and competence.



The Motiro application is used to capture the level of motivation of a team.

3.4.1 Transformation journeys: Ukraine

Between 2021 and 2024, the SRC supported nine Sister National Societies, individually in Bhutan, El Salvador, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, South Sudan and Ukraine, and through a regional approach in Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) (see table 5). The aim of the support was to strengthen volunteer systems, enhance engagement and ensure safe and fulfilling volunteer experiences.

Year	Sister National Societies supported in	Total number
2021	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, South Sudan, Turkmenistan	4
2022	Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, South Sudan, Turkmenistan	5
2023	Bhutan, El Salvador, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, South Sudan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine	9
2024	Bhutan, El Salvador, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, South Sudan, Turkmenistan	7

Table 5: SRC support for volunteer engagement and management (2021–2024)

Ukraine: Volunteer motivation at the heart of the humanitarian response in a conflict context

When humanitarian needs surged in 2022, so did the demand for volunteers and staff in all humanitarian organizations in Ukraine, including the Ukrainian Red Cross Society. Amid chaos, mass displacement and widespread destruction, it became increasingly difficult even to retain existing volunteers, let alone recruit new ones. The Ukrainian Red Cross marked a milestone by completing its first MOTIRO cycle, enhancing its understanding of volunteer motivation and ways to strengthen it.

As a result of the MOTIRO analysis, the Ukrainian Red Cross introduced a volunteer allowance scheme, first tested during the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteers received financial compensation based on hours worked, with a threshold of 40 hours per month. While this provided temporary relief, it was clear from the start that the scheme could only be a short-term measure. By the end of 2024, insufficient funds forced its discontinuation, highlighting the urgent need to research the factors influencing volunteer motivation and to develop a new, decidedly non-financial approach.

Starting in late 2023, the Ukrainian Red Cross conducted surveys in 23 regions across the country and in Kyiv, reaching 1,769 volunteers and 574 staff from 173 teams as part of the MOTIRO cycle. Following the survey, team discussions were held, enabling staff and volunteers to review results, interpret findings and propose practical solutions to the most pressing motivational challenges. These discussions generated a comprehensive list of solutions at team, branch and regional level. In addition, workshops were organized to train specialists, reflect on the results and develop actionable recommendations.

The key findings were as follows:

- **Belonging is the strongest driver:** Recognition is the most effective lever, especially for volunteers. Belonging is the number one top priority.
- **Leader-supported autonomy is important:** The culture must be changed to involve volunteers/ staff in decisions.
- **Well-being must be strengthened:** It is important fully to implement a caring-for-carers approach.
- **Front-line engagement is strong:** Engagement and well-being in front-line teams are comparable to those in non-front-line teams.
- **Leadership and management are critical:** The most acute pain points are not being listened to and limited feedback loops.

The Ukrainian Red Cross also contributed to improving the MOTIRO platform by co-designing and supporting the development of two new features and translating all features into Ukrainian.

This successful experience positions the Ukrainian Red Cross as a hub for engagement and motivation practices within the Movement – a role that the National Society would like to explore and develop further in the coming years – and the insights gained as a result will be used to inform its Volunteering Development Strategy 2026–2030.



A Ukrainian Red Cross Society volunteer conducts a home-care visit.

3.4.2 Enabling and hindering factors

Between 2021 and 2024, the SRC's engagement with Sister National Societies underscored the central importance of strong, motivated and well-supported volunteer networks. From South Sudan's updated volunteer policies to Bhutan's creation of youth units, SRC-supported initiatives consistently reinforced the need to create safe, inclusive and supportive environments. Protecting volunteers, recognizing their contributions and ensuring that their voices are heard are essential not only for sustaining motivation but also for upholding the Movement's humanitarian values. Experiences across diverse contexts have revealed several common lessons that point to how National Societies can continue to strengthen volunteer engagement in the years ahead (see also the practitioner checklist in [box 10](#)).

- **Systematic volunteer management is indispensable.** National Societies that established or strengthened clear systems for recruitment, retention, training and recognition were better able to sustain volunteer engagement and deliver consistent services, even in fragile or rapidly changing environments. Such systems are particularly critical for younger National Societies – like the Bhutan Red Cross – where building a reliable volunteer base is a prerequisite for long-term sustainability.
- **The engagement of young people is a key driver of renewal.** Initiatives such as youth networks, volunteer camps and formalized structures have not only empowered new generations to take leadership roles, they have also ensured that National Societies remain relevant in the eyes of their communities. Young volunteers have proven to be powerful agents of change, bringing creativity, energy and innovation to the Movement.
- **The digitalization of volunteer management has transformative potential.** Tools such as volunteer databases and digital dashboards have improved transparency and accountability while reducing the administrative burden on staff and branches. Such systems allow for more efficient communication and volunteer planning/recognition, strengthening overall National Society effectiveness.
- **Regional cooperation has highlighted the strength of solidarity across borders.** Peer-to-peer exchanges, shared training platforms and regional initiatives – such as those developed in Central Asia – have shown that collaboration between National Societies fosters mutual learning, reinforces collective capacities and strengthens resilience in the face of common challenges.

Deep dive 6: Spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers

Spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers are individuals or groups who provide unpaid support during and after crises but are not formally connected to established response or voluntary organizations. They are also described in the literature as “emergent”, “bystander”, “episodic” or “local” volunteers. Unlike traditional volunteers, such as those within the Movement, they may not be pre-registered, trained or embedded in organizational structures, making it challenging for organizations to track, support and care for them.

Volunteers of this kind can be understood across four key dimensions: affiliation, time, location and structure (see Dulloo et al. 2020: 9–11).

Affiliation reflects the connection to formal organizations, ranging from fully affiliated to pre-registered and completely unaffiliated.

Time indicates when they are active within the disaster management cycle, with spontaneous volunteers often appearing during the immediate response and early recovery phases.

Location distinguishes between on-site volunteers, who may themselves be affected by the crisis, and off-site volunteers, such as digital responders.

Structure captures the degree of organization guiding the volunteers’ work. Some follow existing frameworks, while others self-organize into emergent groups.

Spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers are particularly important in crisis response, providing rapid, flexible and often locally informed support. They bring unique insights into community needs and can mobilize quickly in ways that more structured systems sometimes cannot. However, they also face significant risks owing to a lack of formal support, training or protective measures. Physical and psychological stress, overwork and burnout are common, particularly for those personally affected by the crisis.

Effectively supporting and managing these volunteers requires flexible, adaptive systems. Organizations need to provide guidance, care and integration opportunities while preserving the initiative and creativity that make spontaneous volunteers effective. Legal, safety and operational responsibilities must be balanced with the volunteers’ autonomy. Emerging volunteer groups may need help developing internal structures to ensure proper care, while fully unaffiliated individuals may require connection points to access support.

In conclusion, spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers are a growing and essential resource in humanitarian response. They complement traditional volunteer structures, provide rapid and adaptable support, and highlight the evolving nature of volunteering in crises. By recognizing and addressing their unique needs, organizations can enhance both volunteer safety and the overall effectiveness of emergency response efforts.



If you want to know more about how to “care for those who care” and how to ensure the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of volunteers using practical tools, you can explore, for example, the vast [resource library](#) of the Movement Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Hub. In terms of volunteer safety and security, it is recommended to do the award-winning [IFRC Stay Safe online training](#), which is free and open to everyone, and to consult the IFRC implementation guide on the standards facilitating volunteer safety, security and well-being (2021c).

Box 10: Practitioner checklist for volunteer engagement

1. Tailor engagement to motivation

- Identify why volunteers join (helping others, skills, social connection, personal growth).
- Align tasks and programmes with individual motivations to sustain engagement.

2. Ensure safety and well-being

- Prioritize physical, psychological and social protection.
- Provide training, protective equipment, insurance and psychosocial support.
- Give extra attention to spontaneous or unaffiliated volunteers.

3. Provide clear roles and structures

- Define expectations, responsibilities and reporting lines.
- Maintain flexibility in fast-moving or emergency contexts.

4. Foster inclusion and empowerment

- Include volunteers in decision-making and leadership opportunities.
- Recognize contributions, to strengthen engagement and initiative.

5. Adapt to volunteering trends

- Incorporate short-term, episodic and digital volunteering options.
- Ensure programmes appeal to a diverse, modern volunteer base.

6. Use data to guide decisions

- Collect and analyse surveys, monitoring tools and digital data.
- Identify engagement trends, needs for support and areas for improvement.

7. Plan for long-term sustainability

- Embed volunteer management in organizational strategy.
- Advocate for resources, training and governance to sustain programmes.

8. Prepare for crisis situations

- Develop systems to integrate, support and protect spontaneous volunteers.
- Maximize contributions without compromising safety or coordination.

3.5 Need for further research and conceptual work

Changing existing systems requires commitment, a clear vision and the stamina to see the changes through. It takes a lot of energy to change a system that was made to last, from the best intentions. Established governance structures, operational procedures and forms of partnership need to be thoroughly screened and evaluated, and alternatives developed and piloted.

Measuring the changes made and documenting progress is usually seen as an additional burden in the change process. Measuring change tends to be given lower priority than advancing on change. The failure to invest enough time and energy in documenting change makes it difficult to analyse the relation between change and effect, to cost the efforts made for change or to learn from past changes for later change processes.

It is essential to apply a robust system for measuring change and impact in order to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of NSD efforts and ultimately to continue improving the National Society's capacity to serve the community and fulfil its mandate.

NSD support involves highly intricate and evolving processes that do not always follow a clear or predictable linear path. Moreover, systemic change is multi-dimensional. This complexity means that simply measuring progress against static indicators may not provide an accurate or comprehensive picture of the changes occurring within a National Society. Current measuring tools struggle to fit the bill. Most measuring systems are based on an explanatory model of casual relationship: it is assumed that changing a certain process or improving on a certain organizational challenge will inevitably cause a certain change within the organization. These traditional causal explanations do not always work as foreseen by organizational change modelling.

The SRC initially developed a set of indicators for results-based monitoring, but it soon became clear that traditional methods, such as a logical framework (logframe) with predefined outcomes and outputs, fell short when it came to capturing the full range of effects, both intended and unintended, of NSD transformation processes. Indeed, holistic measurement of National Society organizational development and capacity growth thanks to NSD support services requires a collective effort.

In collaboration with the IFRC, the SRC therefore set out to develop a broader NSD impact measurement framework. In order to ascertain the impact of NSD support, the Movement is currently setting up a global measuring system through which the effects of such support can be demonstrated consistently over time. Measuring systemic change is challenging, and prior attempts in the form of longitudinal studies of a small number of National Societies were overly time-consuming, expensive and reliant on external evaluation specialists.

The objective of the broader NSD Impact Measurement Framework is to generate enough data throughout the Movement to obtain a holistic picture of the effects of NSD support services on the organizational change capacities of National Societies.

First, the Impact Measurement Framework will build on common outcome and output indicators (tier 1). National Societies are invited to report annually on progress and persistent gaps. This enables longitudinal tracking, comparison, aggregation and triangulation of data across the IFRC network.

Second, the value for money and cost-effectiveness of NSD support will be assessed (tier 2). It would be best to focus on a cost analysis of NSD support services that allows time to also evaluate which NSD topics actually bring the greatest benefit to a National Society over time (e.g. improved volunteer retention and satisfaction vs. one-off monetary resource mobilization). The results of these cost-benefit analyses can inform the choice of NSD support services that have spill-over effects and bring added value to the National Society, not only on the specific topic concerned but also in the form of fundamental organizational change that allows other organizational problems to be more easily addressed as follow-up.

Finally, the data collected on actual organizational growth (tier1) and the cost effectiveness of NSD support services (tier 2) are only useful if all are diligently analysed and the results fed into the three areas that are essential for improved partnerships:

- Learning on how to improve National Society development as a means of localization; formulating lessons learned and thereby also learning from failures will help partners in localization to refrain from falling into the same cooperation pitfalls that undermine the sustainable growth of the local partner;
- Innovating existing structures of NSD support to make local organizations sustainably strong and able to take on the additional tasks of driving locally led action;
- Informing communities or target groups and (funding) partners about the global progress in localization, specifically the localization of processes, the localization of agency and the localization of outcomes, based on solid evidence generated through long-term data collection.
- Standardizing indicators on a global scale will allow for better verification of how and at what speed growth in organizational capacity is taking place and what needs to be changed to further support the sustained organizational growth of local partners.

4. Conclusions

Mounting humanitarian needs, growing inequality and overall declines in funding require well-coordinated action that is firmly rooted at the local level. This will only be possible if international development cooperation moves decisively towards locally led action, i.e. beyond joint programme delivery towards true partnerships centred on the organizational transformation of local partners.

This shift demands a fundamental change in how partners define roles, responsibilities and success. Local organizations have long adapted to international funding requirements, and they continue to operate under heavy assessment burdens, rigid financial controls and implementation arrangements that often limit local decision-making and agency.

Realizing the pitfalls of current practices, the general discussion on development cooperation has turned not only to measuring and evaluating programming and operational success, but also to requesting local organizational sustainability and local agency in return for international funding and support. Funding streams that traditionally focused on programme implementation, with quantitative measurements as indicators of success, should shift to investing in the organizational transformation of local partner organizations, helping them to be institutionally fit for purpose at a time when less money is being invested in development cooperation but environmental factors are jeopardizing stable growth and food security, disasters are becoming more frequent and complex, and the income gap between social strata is globally widening, aggravating the plight of vulnerable populations.

The role of the Movement and National Society Development

The Movement is uniquely positioned to advance localization through its 191 National Societies. Statutory requirements mandate National Societies to establish branches across their territories and to mobilize volunteers, resulting in a global network of around 180,000 branches and 16 million volunteers deeply embedded in their communities. These volunteers are committed to addressing local needs over the long term, rather than through short-term project cycles.

National Societies are formally recognized in national legislation and act as auxiliaries to the public authorities while remaining independent. With organizational histories spanning up to 160 years, they enjoy high levels of trust and legitimacy within their societies.

To remain effective in rapidly changing environments, National Societies require strong organizational resilience. Their development and the NSD support they receive from partners are the pathway to strong and effective locally led responses.

Shared values and commonly used tools developed for the entire Movement allow peer-to-peer cooperation in mutual understanding and trust.

The Movement’s approach to NSD support (NSD Compact) and the SRC’s conceptual framework are a source of **general conceptual guidance** that is of relevance to National Societies and others when it comes to the organizational development of, and capacity-building support for, local organizations (see table 6).

Conceptual guidance	Key considerations
Local ownership and demand-driven change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local organizations are the primary owners of their development and are responsible for defining their vision, priorities and pathways for organizational change. – Development priorities should emerge from locally led processes, such as self-assessments, monitoring, strategic reviews and reforms. – External support should be provided in response to a stated demand, reinforcing the agency of local organizations to decide what support is needed, when and from whom.
Alignment of needs and capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It is essential to identify needs, to ensure that support responds to organizational needs and not external agendas. – Support must be competency-based, drawing on relevant technical, managerial and facilitation expertise. In the case of the SRC, this competency-based support means internal analysis of expertise and matching the demand-based requests of partners to existing competencies within the SRC.
Coordination and systemic strengthening of the partners’ roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support should strengthen the local organization’s role and legitimacy within its operating environment. In the case of the Movement, strengthening the National Society’s auxiliary role at the national and sub-national levels is considered key to any support. – Organizational development should be coordinated within the broader system of branch, national and international entities with local organizations in the lead. It is important to include different sectors (such as governance and leadership, technical and managerial) to ensure that support matches the needs of those sectors. – Quality assurance, coordination and harmonization are required to avoid duplication, fragmentation or conflicting inputs from multiple partners.
Context sensitivity and differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organizational development must be context-specific, reflecting the organization’s mandate, maturity, legal status, operating environment and exposure to risk. – Cultural and organizational norms must be understood and respected when designing and delivering support. – Trust-based, long-term relationships are critical enablers of effective organizational development. – Internal diversity matters: different units, branches, networks or volunteer structures may have varying capacities and development needs. The various voices should be included in all processes. – Adaptive approaches will allow priorities and modalities to evolve over time. – Peer-to-peer engagement and cooperation should be prioritized where appropriate.

Table 6: Key considerations for a localization-guided conceptual framework for organizational development support

Conceptual guidance	Key considerations
Multi-level coherence within complex organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A whole-of-organization perspective is required, recognizing the interdependence of governance, leadership, management, technical capacity and local presence. – Vertical and horizontal coherence should be ensured, so that support at one level reinforces capacities at others. In the case of the Movement, this point is reinforced by strengthening both the National Society as a whole and its individual branches. – Roles and responsibilities between internal structures and external partners must be clearly defined.
Sustainability and institutional resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Long-term institutional strengthening should be prioritized over short-term project outputs. – Support should build internal systems and leadership, avoiding dependency on external parties. – Predictable and coordinated engagement enables strategic planning and resilience.
Learning, reflection and adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mutual accountability and transparency should underpin all partnerships. – Joint monitoring and learning processes should be embedded in all support arrangements. – Feedback mechanisms should inform continuous improvement and future strategy. Learning should flow both ways, benefiting local stakeholders and their partners.
Connectivity beyond the immediate objectives of cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organizational development must be grounded in core values, ethics and accountability to crisis-affected communities. Within the Movement, the Fundamental Principles shared by all partners guide every action and process. – Governance, transparency and legitimacy are essential foundations for effective local leadership. – Impact on communities is the ultimate measure of successful organizational strengthening.

Table 6: Key considerations for a localization-guided conceptual framework for organizational development support

Across all thematic areas, several consistent enablers of successful organizational transformation emerged.

– **Strategic planning**

Strategic and long-term planning play a major role. An organization that has developed a shared vision and set of goals for organizational development and humanitarian work will be better able to solicit support and steer its alignment, which should be based solely on these strategic directions (matching aims with the technical support capacities of the partners supporting the organization). Preparedness, governance, fundraising and volunteer management are most effective when treated as interconnected systems rather than isolated functions. National Societies should invest in overarching NSD plans or long-term strategic plans to steer organizational change beyond thematic aims, using, for example, the Strategic Planning Guideline for National Societies (IFRC 2025)
[See chapter 3.1 Governance, leadership and strategy for more details.](#)

– **Clear policies, systems and operational guidance**

Standardized manuals, standard operating procedures, financial reporting systems and transparent procedures translate strategy into day-to-day practice and strengthen accountability.
[See especially chapter 3.1 and 3.3 Institutional preparedness for examples](#)

– **Leadership commitment is foundational**

Early, visible and sustained engagement by senior leadership enables prioritization, resource allocation and institutionalization of reforms (e.g. cash and voucher assistance development in Kyrgyzstan and fundraising from private domestic sources in Lebanon and Georgia).
[See especially chapter 3.1, and 3.2 Resource mobilization for examples](#)

– **Targeted strengthening of institutional preparedness**

A long-term perspective on organizational roles and responsibilities, when things are calm and partnership building is not in emergency operation mode, together with technical and financial investment in preparedness, enhances technical expertise and ensures that National Societies can deliver appropriate, timely and scalable cash-based humanitarian relief to vulnerable populations during crises. [See chapter 3.3 Institutional preparedness for more details](#)

– **Diversifying income and funding streams**

Technical support to diversify income streams, as opposed to project funding, enables organizations to act more independently and to develop services in line with their own strategic plans, priorities and mandates. [See chapter 3.2 Resource mobilization for more details](#)

– **Structured learning and self-assessment**

Tools such as BOCA, PER, cash and voucher assistance self-assessments and MOTIRO provide a shared language, evidence and roadmaps that strengthen ownership, coordination and sustainability. Self-assessments / assessments of organizational capacities at national and branch level are key to steering organizational change.

[See especially chapter 3.4 Volunteer management for examples](#)

– **Branch-level empowerment and decentralization**

Branches with decision-making authority, access to resources, trained volunteers and clear roles respond faster and more relevantly, and enjoy greater community trust (e.g. Ukraine, Ethiopia, Benin). [See chapter 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4 for more details](#)

– **Peer-to-peer support and promoting reciprocal learning**

The promotion of collaboration, partnership mechanisms, reciprocal learning, leadership exchanges and technical peer learning (fundraisers to fundraisers, cash and voucher assistance practitioners, volunteers to decision-makers of community-based support such as branch leaders) accelerate learning, boost relevance and foster confidence. Reciprocal learning involves a change of mindset to acknowledge that all stakeholders have some form of expertise.

[See especially chapter 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 for examples of peer-to-peer support](#)

– **Local ownership of transformation journeys**

Change is effective when Sister National Societies lead the process, using self-assessments, setting priorities and steering implementation, with partners playing a facilitative and technical support role. In order for organizations to have more local ownership, they also need flexible, long-term, needs-based support from partners. The SRC's ability to combine bilateral, multilateral and ad hoc technical support, and to mobilize internal expertise across silos, is a good example of how to support partners with flexibility and expertise.

[See case studies presented in chapter 3. Success factors, good practices, barriers and shortcomings](#)

There has clearly been progress, but the analysis also highlights **shortcomings and barriers**.

– **Replicating progress and achieving scale**

Progress achieved at national level does not automatically translate into consistent performance at branch level, just as advances made in individual branches do not necessarily result in strengthened and coherent systems at national level. In many cases, progress at branch level is difficult to replicate without the same level of initial investment, leaving other branches without the support required to advance. This underscores the importance of effective coordination among partners and of the prioritization/sequencing of interventions, to enable scale, coherence and sustainability.

– **Enduring change and disruption**

Like any organizational change, National Society development disrupts an organizational system that developed over time and is stable. Changes, even for the better, will cause disruption and often limit the attention that can be given to programme roll-out and implementation. National Society development thus has to be a constant companion of all collaboration, logging as much progress as possible between disasters and crises and focusing on greater preparedness and increased long-term, scalable service delivery that is trusted by the local community at all times.

– **Long-term commitment to unspectacular work**

National Society development is meticulous and often unspectacular work that mines the potential for improved performance within a National Society. The Society's management and leadership need to be aware that National Society development never ends; that it is a factor of a National Society's success and will help it prioritize the organizational problems identified in assessments; that they must invest constantly in organizational learning and change. Measuring progress and learning from the evidence collected, thereby truly embracing results-based management practices, allows National Societies to grow. Sometimes, especially when resources are low, it can be challenging to commit to the investments needed for National Society development, when the immediate priority appears to be to ensure a local operational presence.

– **Context-specific and uneven effects require tailor-made support**

As National Societies are highly individual, locally adapted organizational systems, not every form of NSD support will have the same effect. More funding acquired through good fundraising in a local branch does not necessarily trigger a better headquarters–branch relationship or a balanced exchange on how other branches could be equally successful. Careful anticipation and proactive management of potentially negative effects constitute real challenges and often slow the overall growth of a National Society receiving NSD support.

– **Flexibility and investment in sustainable organizational transformation depends on a flexible donor landscape**

The results clearly demonstrate that the SRC's long-term engagement enables trust building. It lays the groundwork for trusted technical exchanges on how to spearhead sustainable organizational change. At the same time, the case studies highlight that organizational change takes time and is inherently unpredictable, particularly in contexts affected by conflict and economic instability.

The SRC has been able to accompany its partners across multiple programme cycles while remaining flexible about the expected outcomes in a given project cycle only because it can draw on a diversified funding base. This includes resources generated through fundraising, investments in preparedness work by institutions such as Somaha Foundation, and programmatic funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the SRC Humanitarian Foundation. Without these flexible and diversified revenue streams, the SRC would not be able to support Sister National Societies in the same way.

While challenges and barriers remain, National Society development represents a strong opportunity to shift power, build capacity and reach communities: strengthening National Societies through organizational development is one of the most promising pathways towards meaningful localization.

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