



Navigating fragility, conflict and violence to strengthen community resilience

A HANDBOOK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PRACTITIONERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Communities in settings of fragility, conflict and violence (FCV) are disproportionately affected by disasters, as their resilience, disaster risk management and coping capacities are weakened. Effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction (DRR) in these settings is pivotal to save lives and ensure we leave no one behind amidst political and social turmoil and insecurity. Business as usual is not sufficient to navigate the challenges in FCV settings. Instead, context-specific strategies are needed. This handbook for DRR practitioners provides guidance on such strategies, including:

- **Tailored approaches:** Fragile and conflict-affected areas have unique socio-political dynamics and risks. The handbook helps in developing strategies that are specific to these contexts, ensuring that DRR measures are effective and appropriate.
- **Sensitivity to conflict dynamics:** Understanding the conflict dynamics is crucial to avoid exacerbating tensions. The handbook provides insights on conflict-sensitive approaches, ensuring that DRR actions do not unintentionally fuel conflict.

FCV settings also require strong coordination and **multi-sectoral collaboration**. DRR needs to be built on the collaboration of various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, local communities and international bodies. The handbook facilitates such coordination by providing a common framework and language. It also supports the integration of DRR into ongoing **humanitarian efforts**, ensuring that disaster risk considerations are embedded in emergency responses and long-term recovery plans. This is in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach and supports the fulfilment of the Sendai Framework targets and the Paris Agreement commitments in FCV contexts.

The handbook thus offers **practical guidance** on how to navigate FCV settings to strengthen community resilience and how to adjust our programming to ensure effective, inclusive and conflict-sensitive DRR. It consolidates existing tools and resources and presents case studies of existing DRR, drawing from the experiences of the components of the **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** (Movement) and beyond. The handbook addresses practitioners working on community-based DRR in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence, particularly within the Movement. It is aligned with a key Movement manual, the **Road Map to Community Resilience (R2R)** by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

This work complements other initiatives across the Movement, including National Society development in emergencies and National Society development in conflict, the IFRC's work on Learning from Red Cross and Red Crescent assistance in protracted crises and complex emergencies and the ICRC's work on Protracted conflict and humanitarian assistance. It also connects to initiatives outside of the Movement, such as the World Meteorological Organization's handbook on Early warning systems in FCV settings.

Visit to a mobile clinic of the Somali Red Crescent Society in the village of Doop, Sanaaq region. A SRCS volunteer is taking notes on reports from residents. The region has been suffering from drought and water shortages for two years. © A. Marrier d'Unienville / IFRC



FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON FCV SETTINGS

The impact of FCV influences our work at all levels and during all interventions. Being aware of these dynamics is crucial to reaching those most at risk in DRR programming. The Foundations chapter equips practitioners with basic knowledge on FCV settings and lays the groundwork for informed decision-making in DRR programming. Specifically, the chapter discusses:

- key FCV **terminologies** in the Movement, illustrating what fragility, conflict and violence can mean and how they interact when they coincide
- different **conflict and violence dynamics** and what different patterns of violence may mean for DRR programming
- the impact of FCV on affected populations and **community resilience**, outlining how different dimensions of community resilience may be undermined by fragility, conflict or violence
- impact of FCV settings on **our own work**, from the effects on National Societies, staff and volunteers to the ethical dilemmas they may face during their activities
- key **principles of DRR and humanitarian work in FCV settings**, recalling the importance of remaining conflict-sensitive and alert to ensure that we do no harm and design inclusive programmes.



CONFLICT-SENSITIVE DRR IN FRAGMENTED YEMEN

Recurring conflicts and the growing influence of local groups, such as political parties, resistance forces and tribes, have fragmented Yemen over the past decades. Throughout varying administrative divisions, the Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS) has served all governorates of the country for more than half a century. Established in the so-called 'southern part' in 1968 and the so-called 'northern part' in 1970, the YRCS merged in October 1993 to become one National Society. To address challenges to DRR across such fragmented territories and promote inclusive, conflict-sensitive programming, the YRCS has honed an approach that harmonizes centralized and decentralized ways of working adapted to the intricacies of its work contexts.

On the institutional level, YRCS strives for balanced representation from both the northern and southern parts of Yemen within its Governance Board. This inclusive approach fosters unity within the organization and helps mitigate interpersonal tensions arising from the country's fragmentation. Local branches are also empowered to apply their deep knowledge of local contexts and actors by adapting programming to the intricacies of different regions, addressing unique challenges and sensitivities. On the operational level, YRCS adopts community-based approaches that incorporate local customs, recognize governance actors and address existing tensions among different groups. Trust and acceptance are crucial for the success of the YRCS's initiatives, built through consistent and transparent external communication and a diverse volunteer base. This dual approach not only addresses immediate DRR needs but also fosters long-term community resilience and cohesion.

YRCS volunteers continue carrying out an anti-cholera campaign. Volunteers are assigned in mixed-gender teams and responsible for around 20 households. © IFRC/EPA



INITIAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (R2R STAGE 1)

Stage 1 of the Road Map to Community Resilience sets the scene for connecting over the shared interest in strengthening resilience and engaging communities in the process. In FCV settings, this is a crucial step to ensure that DRR programming is conducted in collaboration with the community and in a conflict-sensitive way, and ensures the safety and security of affected populations, staff and volunteers. All of these are based on a thorough understanding of the local context and a trustful relationship with the community. The following key considerations apply for Stage 1 in FCV settings.

Assess the capacities and acceptance of the National Society to work at community level in FCV settings. This can be based on existing Movement approaches, including the IFRC's [National Society Preparedness for Effective Response Framework \(PER\)](#) and ICRC's [Safer Access Framework](#). The handbook provides extensive guidance on how to adjust these frameworks to different FCV contexts and combine them to cover the key aspects of institutional, operational and staff capacities for community-based DRR work in FCV settings. Depending on the results of the assessment, the National Society decides if the community is the right entry level for DRR programming in the given context.

Understand the conflict context and stakeholders. Conflict analysis is a crucial foundation to any work in FCV settings. A wide range of tools for such analyses are available via the IFRC's [Better Programming Initiative](#) and ICRC's [Safer Access Framework](#). Whether using a single tool for a first overview of the local context or a combination of several tools for a more comprehensive analysis – it is important to understand underlying dynamics and hidden motives of different actors in any given FCV context.

Engage according to the Fundamental Principles and a strict adherence to *do no harm* and conflict-sensitive programming. Building on Movement guidance for ethical community engagement such as the IFRC's [Community Engagement and Accountability Toolkit](#), the handbook guides practitioners on FCV-specific considerations and potential pitfalls. It introduces key elements of conflict sensitive programme management to minimize negative side effects and maximize the potential to strengthen social cohesion through DRR programming. Additional considerations relate to mainstreaming protection, gender and inclusion in DRR programming and ensuring data protection.



SAFE ACCESS TO COMMUNITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

As one of the largest local humanitarian organizations able to reach certain parts of the country, the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) found itself subject to increased pressure. In previous years, ARCS had limited numbers of local personnel to respond to community needs in some hard to reach districts. Given the diverse array of ethnic groups in many areas, personnel from outside some communities were not always welcome to provide services. By working with community leaders to select suitable volunteers and ensuring thorough induction and guidance of those put forward by the community, ARCS has since created an extensive network of representatives and volunteers who are acceptable to people and communities to provide services for those in need. This community-centred approach is being used by many ARCS branches and is undertaken as a joint initiative with the communities they serve.

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

UNDERSTANDING RISK AND RESILIENCE (R2R STAGE 2)

Stage 2 of the Road Map to Community Resilience focuses on the assessment of risk and resilience in the community, utilizing the [Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment \(EVCA\)](#). FCV contexts are multi-risk environments in which different hazards – both natural and man-made – coincide and may reinforce each other. Different FCV dynamics, such as insecurity, infrastructure damage or structural violence, can additionally increase the vulnerability of communities or specific social groups, further driving disaster risk. The following key considerations apply for Stage 2 in FCV settings.

Decide which hazards and vulnerabilities to assess. Many FCV settings are rich in hazards and drivers of vulnerability. The decision of which ones to prioritize for risk assessment and DRR programming needs to be made together with the community, to ensure a relevant focus. Protection concerns are likely a relevant part of this prioritization and can be integrated into risk assessments by applying the [IFRC Minimum standards for protection, gender and inclusion](#) or ICRC’s [Community-based protection approach](#).

Adjust the EVCA process and tools to the local context. Some EVCA tools can be challenging to apply in FCV settings. The handbook provides an overview of relevant adjustments to different tools, building on experiences of various National Societies, and outlines alternatives in case a full-fledged EVCA process is not feasible due to access restrictions, availability of stakeholders and communities, expectation management, priority of short-term needs or other factors. In addition, guidance is provided on conflict-sensitive implementation of the EVCA, for example to account for potential tensions during focus group discussions with a diverse set of community members.

Integrate compound risk analysis to ensure a comprehensive view of risk and resilience. Compound risk analyses usually focus on identifying important drivers of risk, linked to underlying vulnerabilities within the community and their interaction with different relevant hazards, and hotspots of high risk, where high vulnerability and high exposure to different hazards coincide. The approach can be incorporated into the EVCA process for a more complete understanding of the overall risk landscape in FCV settings, in which no risk factor can be treated in isolation.



COMMUNITY ACTION PLANS (R2R STAGE 3)

Community action plans are at the heart of community-based DRR. They empower communities to take an active role in reducing risks and strengthening their own resilience. When developing the community action plan, a multi-sectoral lens recognises the multi-dimensional nature of resilience and the need to work across siloes, making DRR “everyone’s business”. Both the processes by which we develop community action plans and the activities that may be part of such plans may require adjustments to the local FCV context, to ensure inclusive and conflict-sensitive participatory planning processes, navigate potential sensitivities and account for logistical challenges.

Prepare for the process, building on prior community engagement and information on the local context. By the time the community action plan is being developed, we have already worked with the community and established trustful relationships. We should also have a good understanding of potential sensitivities, underlying drivers of risk and vulnerability and the role of

PRIORITIZING ACTIONS AND RESOURCES IN PALESTINE

The challenging context of the high frequency of violence and movement restrictions leaves many Palestinian communities in the West Bank isolated and unable to access external assistance. To strengthen resilience and self-reliance among these communities, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) prioritizes initiatives and processes that focus on empowering communities to prepare for and respond to crises. In DRR programming, for example, PRCS collaborates with local entities to form community-based DRR committees. These committees, diverse and inclusive, work alongside PRCS to identify and address priority risks, implement risk reduction measures outlined in community action plans, ensure redundancy of roles and the efficient use of resources during crises. The committees receive training and capacity-building on emergency preparedness and response, focusing on environmental management. PRCS also offers training in emergency medical services and psychosocial support, both to community committees and to other strategic community members, such as educators and counsellors. This comprehensive approach enhances the community's resilience to disasters, making it capable of responding effectively to potential risks, including climate change impacts, floods and fires.

different stakeholders in the community and beyond. Based on these, potential challenges can be anticipated and we can prepare accordingly. the anticipation of challenges and the continuous adaptation process.

Adapt the development of the community action plan as needed to accommodate local realities. In certain contexts it might be impossible to work on one comprehensive action plan due to intra-communal tensions. Instead, community members might be able to engage with each other facilitated by the National Society to bridge social divides step-by-step, increase social cohesion and connectedness to achieve longer-term resilience goals. The handbook provides guidance on how to remain flexible and further adapt as new challenges arise throughout the development of the community action plan.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (R2R STAGE 4)

Monitoring and evaluation play an important role in FCV settings, as they enable learning processes that continuously build our own capacity to operate in such contexts and scale up successful approaches. The following considerations are important to support learning processes in FCV settings.

Apply adaptive programme management based on continuous monitoring. The IFRC has identified strengthening adaptive management or cyclical planning practices as a priority issue to enhance programming and operations in protracted crises and complex emergencies. Adaptive management reflects the need to stay alert and flexible in FCV settings, and to swiftly adjust programming as the context changes. The handbook outlines key principles of adaptive management and how to incorporate them into DRR programming in FCV settings, alongside considerations for effective monitoring of the local context, the programme implementation and any conflict sensitivity risks.





Distribution of seeds and agricultural tools to women in Ajuet in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State by volunteers from the South Sudanese Red Cross. © Corrie Butler / IFRC

Engage the community in evaluation and learning to strengthen accountability. Community involvement in monitoring processes is a crucial to strengthening the accountability to affected people, capacity building and empowerment of community members and building and maintaining trust. At the same time, community members make important contributions to monitoring, evaluation and learning processes by sharing their local knowledge and contextual understanding to assess what works well and is effective in the specific FCV setting.

Consider the programme's exit strategy and how to ensure sustainability. Finally, the handbook emphasizes the importance of thinking about strategies for a conflict-sensitive phasing out from the very beginning of DRR programming. It requires careful consideration to ensure that the departure does not create a vacuum that could exacerbate existing tensions or spark new conflicts. A conflict-sensitive exit strategy should prioritise the long-term stability and sustainability of programme achievements through stakeholder engagement and a gradual phasing-out while being acutely aware of the local conflict dynamics.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan grapples with a high-risk multi-hazard context, including recurrent droughts, floods, heatwaves and disease outbreaks that contribute to forced displacement, loss of livelihoods and infrastructure damage. Further vulnerabilities and other impacts arise from civil war and intercommunal conflicts and violence. The adaptive management approach of the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) has proven the importance for proactivity, flexibility and sensitivity while operating in this complex context.

This approach includes three key features. First, continuous monitoring to adjust or reschedule activities, which includes regular meetings to review the local context and an openness to reflection and learning. Second, multi-sectoral interventions and mainstreaming of DRR allow flexible and adaptive adjustment to ever-increasing humanitarian needs. Modification of strategies and actions ensure that the interventions remain relevant and impactful. Third, SSRC's contingency planning approach acknowledges that the context can change at any time due to regional- or community-level conflicts, population movement or natural hazards, among others. SSRC headquarters and branches define and test multi-hazard contingency plans that capture various operational scenarios, to assess whether each branch as well as the national headquarters are prepared and logistically set for significant contextual changes.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

The experiences of different National Societies can teach us a lot about DRR in FCV settings. In collaboration with those National Societies, the handbook showcases extensive examples from Bangladesh, Colombia, Lebanon and South Sudan, each illustrating different aspects of DRR and different FCV-related challenges.

The **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society's** activities in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar within the Government of Bangladesh's Cyclone Preparedness Programme illustrate approaches to ensure that existing DRR programming effectively covers camp populations in settings of mass displacement and minimizes the risk of tensions between displaced populations and host communities.

The **Colombian Red Cross** experiences highlight different approaches to negotiating safe access with non-state armed groups, particularly in remote areas. They also show the value of supporting government agencies in the local implementation of national strategies, to ensure communities receive the assistance they need.

The **Lebanese Red Cross'** example explores how to start building community resilience in a context characterized by instability and distrust, with a special focus on school-based DRR programming as an entry point for DRR programming and the role of community emergency response teams to strengthen local response capacities.

The **South Sudan Red Cross** is presented with a complex multi-risk environment in which conflict exacerbates disaster risk and vice versa. Their experiences show how to integrate livelihood and protection concerns in multi-sectoral DRR programming and how to strengthen internal capacities at branch level in anticipation of natural and conflict-related hazards that can isolate branches due to access disruptions.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Next to its practical guidance, the handbook advocates on behalf of DRR practitioners working and living in FCV settings worldwide. The following targeted recommendations for investment are towards donors and multilateral organizations, and will create an institutional environment that is conducive to programming in complex crisis settings:

- **Invest in communities for resilience:** We must better understand the disaggregated risk and resilience factors that communities and vulnerable groups – like refugees and IDPs – face in FCV settings. The Movement holds that the most effective scale for reducing risk and building resilience in FCV is with communities, and data and resources at this level are needed especially. Communities must be empowered to set resilience agendas and the ways to achieve them in partnership with the Movement. Funding mechanisms must be flexible and adaptable to support these strategies in FCV contexts with heightened uncertainty and costs for safety and security and to provide a longer timeframe for learning.

- **Invest in integrated risk assessment frameworks:** The field of DRR is increasingly aware of the need to consider complex risk interactions, including cascading and compound risks. This can be supported through the development and implementation of risk assessment frameworks integrating natural and FCV-related risks that identify how they intersect. Approaches should include advanced modelling techniques to predict effects based on interdisciplinary research and localized studies.
- **Invest in holistic approaches to address multi-risk environments:** Effective DRR in FCV-affected areas requires a holistic approach addressing the root causes of risk. Deeper engagement and cross-sectoral partnerships are needed beyond *do no harm* and conflict sensitivity approaches to explore the potential to bridge social and political divides; including through workable approaches to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, disaster and humanitarian diplomacy and environmental peacebuilding. This specialized cross-silo knowledge can also be developed through training, skill-up hubs and collaborative platforms to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the pathways out of risk and towards safety in FCV, alongside the need to learn from approaches that have not worked or inadvertently created more risk.
- **Invest in the protection of civilian populations in FCV settings, humanitarian diplomacy and adherence to international humanitarian law:** Armed conflicts and other types of FCV settings increasingly feature an ever-growing number of actors organized in overlapping webs of alliances, proxies and other types of support relationships. When armed actors fight alongside each other in loose coalitions with unclear coordination, this can lead to a diffusion of responsibility with heightened risks to civilians and others not fighting, especially before, during and after disaster impact. Those who provide support to parties to armed conflicts, however, have the potential to positively influence these parties to enhance the protection of civilians and others not fighting. Their influence over each other can be leveraged to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

The full handbook '*Navigating fragility, conflict and violence to strengthen community resilience. A handbook for disaster risk reduction practitioners*' is available online at:
<https://preparecenter.org/resource/navigating-fcv-drr-handbook/>



Schoolchildren participate in a disaster preparedness drill with the Lebanese Red Cross. © Lebanese Red Cross

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