

UK Climate Adaptation Theory of Change



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Introduction

The British Red Cross exists to support those in crisis. Our UK Crisis and Emergency Response service works to ensure that people are able to prepare for extreme events as well as survive and recover when disaster strikes. Increasingly, such disasters are weather and climate related. Since 2020, our Crisis and Emergency Response teams have responded to over 200 severe weather and environmental flooding incidents in the UK, providing support to more than 15,000 people affected. We know that, due to climate change, we'll not only continue to face extreme weather events like floods and heatwaves, but that such events will increase in intensity and frequency.

Across the UK, climate impacts will affect more people, more severely, more often. That's why the British Red Cross Crisis and Emergency Response service is developing a climate change adaptation work plan – to best support communities to adapt to our changing climate and to better anticipate and cope with extreme weather events. Adaptation is the adjustment to and preparation for climate change and its impacts, both now and in the future.

To identify and communicate our ambitions and role in relation to climate change adaptation in the UK, we've developed this Theory of Change (ToC), which maps out our short-, medium- and long-term climate change adaptation actions and aims. The framework defines what the British Red Cross could and should do to help the people and places we support become resilient to climate shocks and stresses. The British Red Cross also invests in climate change mitigation by working to reduce our carbon footprint, which is necessary to address the causes of climate change; however this is not the scope of this Theory of Change.

While this Theory of Change is our first collated formal offer on adaptation, British Red Cross Crisis and Emergency Response has been actively engaged with climate adaptation for many years. For example, in Northern Ireland our teams have developed the Community Resilience in Urban

Areas (CRUA) toolkit and have been founding members of the Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG) planning for climate impacts. In Scotland we carried out a successful project “Enhancing Resilience in Remote Island Communities”. Working with five super rural and remote island communities the Orkney and the Shetland Isles, we looked at how best to build resilience among those communities, so they could better cope with and recover from emergencies – including those caused by climate related events. We seek to learn from and build on these lessons, initiate new work where needed, and partner, support and promote other existing climate change efforts where appropriate.



Our role and position within the climate landscape

Our diverse volunteer base connects us with the communities that experience climate impacts – volunteers in a crisis are often members of the affected communities themselves. We're committed to engaging with the people who use our services before, during and after disasters. These connections and relationships are necessary to support adaptation in the UK. As climate impacts continue to occur (with more frequency and intensity), affecting more and more people, the response landscape will also need to expand, including more varied groups. The current emphasis on public bodies as leaders in response will need to change, as citizen-led groups become more involved. And the British Red Cross already works with many of these groups such as older people and carers, refugees and asylum seekers, schools and young people.

The British Red Cross plays an active role in Policy, Research and Advocacy, using our expertise and experience to advocate for policies that support adaptation efforts at both national and global levels. In terms of operations, we currently play a central role within the emergency response ecosystem. Our Red Cross Crisis Response Teams support utility providers during power outages and extreme weather events. As we begin to develop and enhance our climate adaptation offer to complement and strengthen our response work, we recognise the need to build new relationships within the climate space for operational delivery. We also realise that local and regional engagement will be critical to the success of climate adaptation and resilience work and that this will require new ways of working for Crisis and Emergency Response personnel. We have a responsibility to make the links between extreme weather and climate change and to use our engagement with affected and at-risk communities to enable effective climate adaptation action. We also have role to play in advocating action, encouraging others to adapt as well as directly creating and embedding adaptation activities ourselves. We work across all areas of the UK and work closely with the devolved administrations, so we can support networking and knowledge-

exchange. The Red Cross is the world's largest humanitarian network, so we are also well placed to engage with other Red Cross societies internationally and facilitate knowledge-sharing with UK actors.

We also commit to careful planning and situational awareness for every unique project, to ensure we understand the community voluntary sector infrastructure locally and find our appropriate place in each context.

We recognise, however, that collaboration and coordination among diverse actors is essential for effective climate change adaptation in the UK and that many other organisations, businesses and government departments are accountable for addressing climate risk. The assumption of this Theory of Change is that partners are willing to engage with us, and that other actors also make commitments and progress on climate change adaptation in the UK.



Photo © Sam Atkins/BRC

Our unique offer

The British Red Cross is uniquely positioned to support climate adaptation for several reasons:

Experience in disaster response

We have decades of experience responding to disasters caused by extreme weather events, such as floods, storms, and wildfires. This experience has given the organisation insight into the direct and indirect effects of the climate change on the UK. We can also tap into the international expertise and experience of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent movement to inform and inspire domestic adaptation action. We have an established reputation on Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Anticipatory Action programming around the world.

Strong community engagement

We have a strong track record of community engagement and participatory approaches across our work. This will be crucial for future climate adaptation, to ensure that local communities are involved in decision-making processes and have a say in how adaptation measures are designed and implemented.

Focus on vulnerable populations

We focus on supporting the people in the most vulnerable situations, including those most at risk from the effects of climate change, such as people and communities already experiencing multiple causes of vulnerability (i.e. already experiencing issues with health or housing, those on low income or with limited social networks). We'll work to ensure that adaptation efforts are targeted towards those who are most in need.

Psychosocial support

We have a longstanding and respected psychosocial support offer. Evidence suggests that eco-anxiety is a normal and rational response to an existential threat such as climate change but that typical stress reduction measures are less effective than taking environmental action. This means we have a role to play to further both psychosocial support and practical climate adaptation action.

Trust

There is a high level of recognition and trust for the British Red Cross among the British public. We are also known for our fundamental principles including neutrality and impartiality. As we've earned this trust, our messages on issues such as climate change may be more likely to inspire acceptance and action.

Methodology

A strength of the British Red Cross is the diversity and breadth of our teams working across the UK. The perspectives of our staff and volunteers are integral to our understanding of how climate change affects us, and the people and places we support, and what we can do to support the UK to adapt. The Theory of Change development process included the following activities:



Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA)

We conducted a strategic climate change risk assessment to understand how our Crisis and Emergency Response service had been affected by weather and climate impacts to date, and what risks climate change may pose in the future, both for us as an organisation, and for the people who use our services. This helped identify some of the problems we seek to address via our adaptation work.

Visioning exercise

While it's important to understand and minimise climate change risks, adaptation also has the potential to bring a range of benefits. We wanted to capture the positive outcomes that could be achieved through ambitious adaptation, by defining a vision for the future.

Surveys

To ensure everyone had the opportunity to share their thoughts on what our climate change adaptation plans should be, we shared an optional online survey. This asked respondents for their thoughts on long-term outcomes and steps needed to get there, and for feedback on climate adaptation volunteering activities.

Adaptation action ideation workshops

To define and develop the activities within the Theory of Change that contribute to the desired outcomes, we held four ideation workshops to identify possible adaptation actions.

Vision

We will seek to address the identified relevant climate risks, while also taking advantage of opportunities associated with a changing climate. The positive impact that the British Red Cross is trying to contribute to through our UK Climate Adaptation work programme is summarised in our vision for 2030:

“ *Communities across the UK live well in a changing climate and are more prepared for and resilient to climate related emergencies.* **”**

Outcomes

Long, medium and short-term action is needed to address the climate crisis in the UK. We have identified the following long-term outcomes (by 2028) to work towards:

Outcome 1 – The public, alongside emergency responders and voluntary and community sector organisations, understand the risks of climate change and extreme weather and are aware of opportunities to act.

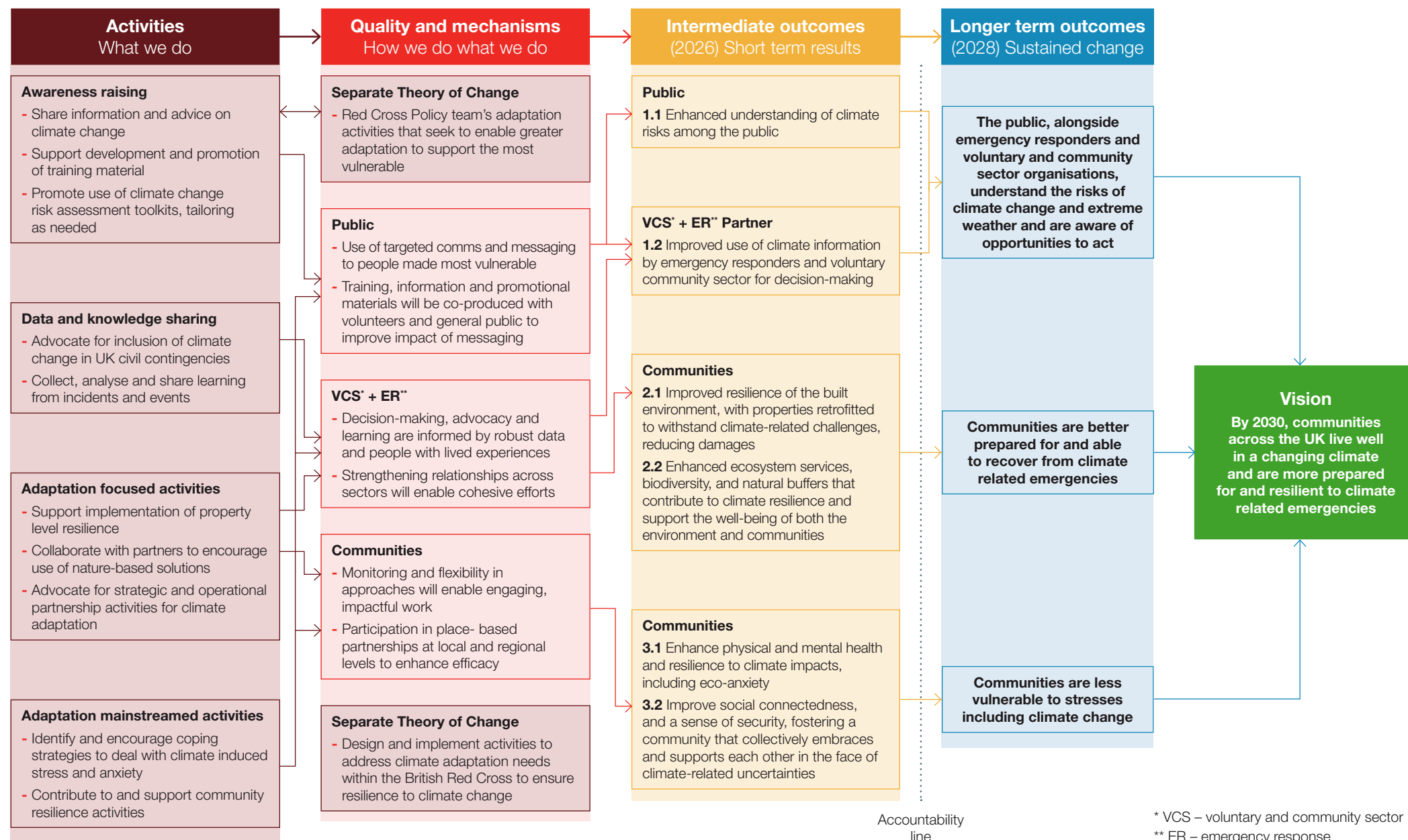
Outcome 2 – Communities are better prepared for and able to recover from climate related emergencies.

Outcome 3 – Communities’ vulnerability to stresses, including climate change, is reduced.

The Theory of Change diagram on the next page describes our operational climate adaptation activity within the Crisis and Emergency Response Service. Our work will also contribute to and benefit from other related British Red Cross activity occurring within the Policy Research and Advocacy, Community Education, and Youth Engagement teams.



Theory of Change visual diagram



Activities

We will use our expertise, knowledge, and relationships to advance adaptation. To achieve our identified objectives, we'll collaborate with selected partners in the following activities:

Outcome 1

The public, alongside emergency responders and voluntary and community sector organisations, understand the risks of climate change and extreme weather and are aware of opportunities to act.

Achieving a climate-resilient UK will only be possible with understanding, participation, and action from people across the country. For society to adapt to climate change, everyone must first be informed of and understand potential climate risks. By enhancing education and awareness of climate risks in the UK, we envision a transformed society where individuals, communities, and institutions are empowered with knowledge, skills, and a heightened sense of responsibility, leading to climate resilient practices, informed decision-making, and resilient communities in the face of climate challenges.

Awareness of climate change has been increasing in the UK over the past few years. Around one in five (21%) people, however, say they still don't know much about climate change⁴ and just over half (52%) of the population see climate change as a serious global threat but believe there is still time to deal with it⁵. Research⁶ demonstrates that, to improve public engagement on climate risks, impacts and adaptation, it can be beneficial to frame communications about climate impact around the 'shared experience' of extreme weather events (such as flooding or storms).

The British Red Cross is uniquely placed to bring together climate change education and emergency management experience and insight. This integration can help communities better understand the interconnectedness of short-term emergencies and long-term climate changes, leading to more informed decisions and joint action. We can also highlight individual roles and responsibilities in taking action by sharing messages about how people

can effect change in their own lives and communities. Through our work, a greater proportion of people in the UK could be made aware of the risks of climate change and extreme weather. We can improve understanding of adaptation solutions to motivate action.

In an increasingly politicised space, our neutrality and impartiality can help raise awareness and support action on climate change adaptation throughout communities.

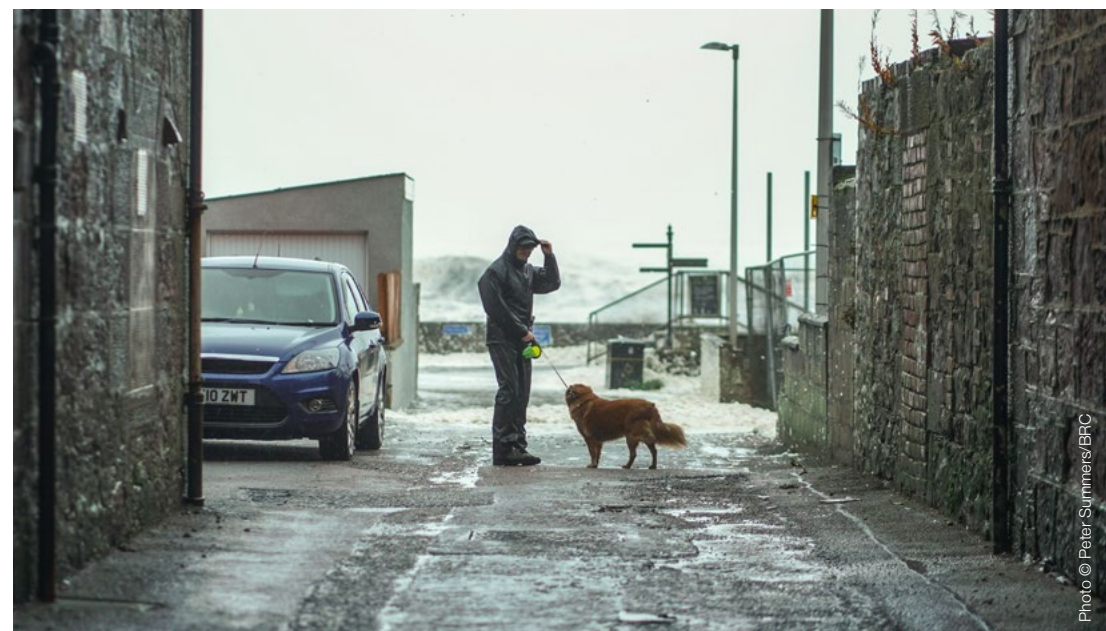


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Activities (continued)

Intermediate or medium-term outcomes and supporting activities will include:

Enhanced understanding of climate risks among the public, leading to action

Increased awareness of and engagement on climate science and climate adaptation measures fosters a culture of preparedness and resilience, achieved via:

- **Communications and messaging:** In collaboration with partners, including the Met Office, we'll continue to promote and advocate for appropriate public messaging on weather and climate. For example, we'll keep advocating for the Weather Ready Campaign and supporting dissemination of early warnings and advice.
- **Assessing risk:** We'll support local climate change risk assessments with new and existing resources (such as the [Enhanced Vulnerability Capacity Assessment](#) and [Community Resilience in Urban Areas](#) toolkits). We'll develop guidance and resources for use by community groups and resilience partnerships and forums. Emergency response teams and communities will then have an improved understanding of climate-related risks, allowing for proactive and informed decision-making during emergencies.
- **Awareness-raising and education resources to encourage action:** We'll provide tailored resources and products to the public on climate change to improve understanding of climate risks now and help raise awareness of and preparedness for climate impacts. Through our partnership with the [Royal Meteorological Society](#), as well as the pre-existing [Weather Together](#) and [Y-Adapt](#), these resources will support adult learning and engage young people, fostering a climate-literate society equipped to address climate risks.

Improved use of climate information by emergency responders and voluntary community sector for decision-making

Through the effective integration of climate information and services into decision-making processes, the Theory of Change aims to foster better-informed strategic decisions that enhance resilience and response operations to extreme weather and climate change in the UK. This outcome is characterised by the widespread use of climate and weather information, shared learning, and research, ensuring that climate considerations are seamlessly woven into all stages of the emergency management cycle.

- **Scientific climate and weather information:** This outcome will be achieved by activities incorporating climate risks into UK civil contingencies considerations. Example activities including promoting the use of the [Climate Just](#) portal, and actively participating as a super user in the [ASPECT](#) programme to co-develop climate services.
- **Lived experience and insight:** Recognising and collating lived experience and data ensures that qualitative data complements quantitative information, creating a more holistic understanding of the effects of extreme weather and climate change. This will involve coordination and learning during and after UK extreme weather events with government, emergency partners and the voluntary and community sector to support continuous learning.

Activities (continued)

Outcome 2

Communities are better prepared for and able to recover from climate related emergencies.

Communities will feel more capable, confident, and equipped to navigate climate and weather emergencies when we strengthen their capacity to adapt to, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. We'll enhance communities' capability through practical, locally tailored and people-centred long-term resilience interventions across the built environment, natural environment, and health sectors. We'll support both communities of place and interest⁷ with adaptation-focused interventions.

We will develop a service offer for Red Cross volunteers and staff to support and advise on climate adaptation in practice. Our approach will be to co-create resources and solutions with groups affected by the climate emergency. The outcomes and solutions should be indicative of the desires and wants of these communities and so, while we do not want to be prescriptive, activities may include:

- **Built environment resilience measures:** Activities under this outcome include advising and supporting the implementation of property-level adaptation to build resilience against floods and overheating. Projects may aim to provide guidance, engage communities, and implement measures that enhance resilience to specific climate challenges. The output will be to develop guidance and implement property-level adaptation measures for climate hazards. The intended outcome is to support improved resilience of the built environment. We'll signpost people to the most appropriate guidance and advice and advocate for climate resilient adaptation measures. We'll also continue to provide volunteer support to help individuals clean up and recover following an emergency.

- **Natural environment conservation and restoration measures:** Nature-based solutions are a method of adaptation that help the natural environment respond more effectively to climate impacts. We'll collaborate with partners to encourage the use of nature-based solutions and provide volunteer capacity to support these. The output will be projects for conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems that can function as buffers for disasters. The desired outcome is enhanced ecosystem services, biodiversity, and natural buffers that contribute to climate resilience and support the well-being of both the environment and communities.
- **Participating in local partnerships:** Adaptation is often led by regional or local partnerships. We will advocate for existing and future partnerships to incorporate emergency preparedness and climate change adaptation considerations further into their work plans, and support on-the-ground interventions with our volunteer resources.



⁷ Communities can be defined by geographic location, ethnicity, occupation, a shared interest or affinity or other common bonds.

Activities (continued)

Outcome 3

Communities are less vulnerable to stresses including climate change.

Climate change affects people from all walks of life in the UK, but climate impacts will disproportionately affect those on the lowest incomes and in the most vulnerable circumstances. The Red Cross movement seeks to prioritise the people who need help most and will look at the disproportionate impact of hazards in a community. We recognise that communities may be affected by a range of stresses (such as the rising cost of living, or poor health) that may be exacerbated further by the climate crisis. Different vulnerability to climate hazards results from a range of social, economic, historical, and political factors. According to the EEA (2022), projected climate change, an ageing society and persisting socio-economic inequalities mean that differences in vulnerability and exposure to climate change and extreme weather are likely to continue. This outcome aims to incorporate climate change adaptation considerations into broader activity to reduce vulnerability, thus mainstreaming adaptation across functions (within Crisis and Emergency Response and other services including Health and Independent Living and Refugee Services).

This work reaffirms our long-term focus on working where 'risk is high, and resource is low'. We'll continue to consider carefully, and with a diversity, equity and inclusion lens, who is most likely to be exposed to and effected by climate hazards. We have extensive experience working with under-served and disadvantaged groups. We can build on the strengths of these existing relationships with local partners in the community and emergency response sectors. Through targeted activities, the organisation will reach individuals in areas experiencing climate disadvantage, ensuring that adaptation interventions and support are fairly distributed.

There are also a range of co-benefits of achieving this adaptation vision. Adaptation can provide a triple dividend: it avoids economic losses, brings positive gains, and delivers additional social and environmental benefits. Adaptation can also strengthen adaptive capacity of individuals and contribute to broader community resilience. We hope to achieve and promote these co-benefits to reduce vulnerability to wider stresses as well. This Theory of Change envisions a society that not only adapts to the challenges of a changing climate but thrives and lives well amid these transformations. This outcome is characterised by mental and physical health and well-being, equitable access to resources, and resilient communities.

- **Health and well-being:** We'll develop products and projects to enhance physical and mental health and resilience to climate impacts, including eco-anxiety. We'll continue to develop and implement trauma-informed care practices to support people following extreme weather events.
- **Community resilience:** A society resilient to climate change also requires social connectedness, and a sense of security from belonging to a community of people who embrace and support each other in the face of emergencies. Our climate adaptation and community resilience activities will thus support and shape each other. Working in collaboration with the community resilience team, we'll design activities to do this, learning from the activities of the AVIVA funded [Building Resilience Together](#) initiative.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning is critical to effective climate change adaptation. When we develop a clear and robust process to monitor, evaluate and learn from adaptation work processes, practices and actions, we can achieve better understanding of whether a specific action or series of interventions works (NAP Global Network, 2023). This Theory of Change is directed by three key outcomes, our method of monitoring, evaluation, and learning will reflect this by using an outcome-based approach. We have identified both process and output indicators for each outcome, as well as reflecting on how learning will be collated, shared and actioned.



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Conclusion

Adaptation measures can help individuals, communities and organisations across the UK to prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change. Everyone has a role to play in addressing climate change. The British Red Cross recognises our responsibility to support those in need to adapt to our changing climate. This Theory of Change demonstrates our Crisis and Emergency Response team's commitment to UK climate adaptation planning and implementation. It will also be supported by, and feed into, the work of our Policy, Research and Advocacy team on climate change adaptation. The outcomes and activities outlined in this Theory of Change will also be supported by internal action to ensure our own British Red Cross people, assets and operations are resilient to climate change and climate shocks.

Our adaptation work aligns with and supports national level policies, plans and frameworks including the National Adaptation Plan and National Resilience Framework. We look forward to working with partners and stakeholders across Government agencies, local authorities, emergency service providers, the private sector, charities, academia and civil communities.

Thank you.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact:

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