



# CHARTING THE FUTURE OF **BRANCH DEVELOPMENT**

Discussion paper

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**Cover photo:** Ukraine, March 2022. Mother and daughter volunteers of the Ukrainian Red Cross. © Marko Kovic

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*If you want to work with the community it is hard to stay in one city in a big building...So having a branch, you have the ability to adapt to the context, and connect to the people. They know you...it builds trust...we should not describe local branches as the 'smallest' component but as the most 'important'. This is our competitive advantage, because we are there. We are testing and feeling the same as the community and we are them.*

# INTRODUCTION

Establishing and developing branches is a strategic issue for National Societies since branches with a strong presence in communities have been shown to be more effective in understanding and responding to risk and vulnerability.

This research has been commissioned by International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (IFRC) National Society Development and Volunteering (NSDV) Unit, to inform the upcoming branch development consultations and the possible creation of a branch development framework. Specifically, the research aimed to support IFRC to review and capture existing good practices in branch development and to provide analysis on gaps and potential improvements to branch development practice. The research is aligned to the objective of building strong National Societies. This report articulates best practices and gaps in support to branch development and the value proposition of investing in branch development.

60 National Society representatives, including 28 branch Members, volunteers and youth, 10 IFRC and 11 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) staff at global, regional and country level were interviewed. All IFRC regions were represented in the interviews. A small number of external interviewee perspectives were also sought. The interviews explored the conditions which enable, and which inhibit branch development, best practices and capacity gaps. Three online focus groups based on the initial findings from the interviews were organised with IFRC staff (1 workshop) and National Society representatives (2 workshops). Relevant Movement reports and wider aid, organisational theory, organisational behaviour, and change management literature was also reviewed, and relevant findings integrated into this report.

A common theme that emerged is the widespread sense that we can do more to empower branches to develop themselves so that each branch has: 1) the capacity to deliver relevant humanitarian activities, even if just on a small scale; and 2) a minimum level of readiness to respond to crisis. While interviewees could point to examples of good practice in branch development, this was felt to be an area that required much more attention from all levels of the IFRC and the wider Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC) network.

The diversity of branches was another common theme throughout the research. The particular characteristics of a branch, its history, context, legal base, its people, and ways of doing things, greatly influences its ability to design and deliver relevant services in partnership with communities. Consequently, within our expansive branch network multiple realities exist. Branches that have sustained relevant services over decades with strong local support. Branches that find it difficult to sustain any service at all. Branches that have been unable to reinvigorate their Membership, youth and volunteer base and are vanishing. Branches that despite meagre resources and harsh and dangerous conditions manage to deliver essential services, primarily driven by the astonishing devotion of their Members, volunteers, youth and employees. Branches that do not believe in their own potential and rely heavily on others to direct and resource them.

Because of this diversity, there are no magic bullets or single approaches to branch development; contexts are too varied, and 'one-size fits all' proscriptions will not work. However, there are some general principles and good practices that can inform branch development across varied contexts. This report attempts to capture these principles and practices and offers a set of recommendations on how move forward in better supporting branch development across our diverse network.



# KEY FINDINGS

- **The pandemic offers the IFRC a once in a century platform to support a shift to more locally-led action**

The pandemic has shown us on a global scale that people and communities on the frontlines are often the most active and innovative in taking action. Yet, too often, they lack access to the resources and power needed to implement effectively. Locally-led action can unlock, support and leverage the enormous potential and the creativity of individuals and communities to develop solutions based on their knowledge, skills, diversity and experiences. There has never been a better time for IFRC to call for and summon more investment in branches and a refocus on the development of locally sustained Member, volunteer and youth-led services. With many branches engaging new groups during the pandemic, there is also an opportunity for the IFRC to appeal for deeper listening of existing and new community voices in order to inform a refresh of branch and National Society perspectives on vulnerability.

- **The humanitarian power of the Movement arises in branches**

Approximately 160,000 branches form the base of IFRC's 192 member National Societies.<sup>1</sup> Because of their proximity to communities, branches are well positioned to collect and respond to people's views on their needs, priorities, vulnerabilities and capacities and to facilitate community engagement. Branch Members and volunteers often come from the communities they are helping, speak the same language, understand unique cultural norms, and are present before, during, and after a crisis, and therefore are well placed to understand patterns of inclusion or exclusion and to adapt accordingly. It is for these reasons that the delivery of services by branches to prevent and alleviate the suffering of people vulnerable to and affected by disasters, conflicts, and health and social problems embodies the power of our Movement.

- **Working with the diversity across our branch network**

The nature and potential of this power changes dramatically from one branch to the next. There are examples of inspiring humanitarian action, equally there are examples of inaction. The particular characteristics of a branch, its history, context, legal base, people and ways of doing things greatly influences its ability to design and deliver relevant services in partnership with communities.

Consequently, within our expansive branch network multiple realities exist. Branches that have sustained relevant services over decades with strong local support. Branches that find it difficult to sustain any service at all. Branches who in the face of war and chaos choose to act with humanity and impartiality. Branches that have been unable to reinvigorate their Membership, youth and volunteer base and are vanishing. Branches that do not believe in their own potential and rely heavily on others to direct and resource them. Branches that despite meagre resources and harsh and dangerous conditions manage to deliver essential services, primarily driven by the astonishing devotion of their Members, volunteers, youth and employees.

Because of this diversity, there are no magic bullets or single approaches to branch development; contexts are too varied, and 'one-size fits all' proscriptions will not work. However, there are some general principles and good practices that can inform branch development across varied contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> IFRC. 2017. Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System.



## ● Finding the balance between national and locally-led action

As National Societies have grown and professionalised their operations, a focus on strategic management has become more prominent. The ever-increasing demands on National Societies to show value for money, to be accountable, to comply and manage risk, just to name a few, have created pressures to centralise decision making, management processes and service delivery. These demands may originate from a National Society's domestic environment or may be associated with a reliance on international aid and associated upward accountabilities. These reforms have been important for the delivery of essential national services but must be balanced with efforts to empower branches, their Members, volunteers and youth to self-organise, identify local needs, and generate local responses. These two approaches to service delivery entail different ways of working and competencies. For example, viewing this through a volunteering lens, a national service will benefit from strong volunteer **management** whilst supporting self-organisation in branches will require processes that engender volunteer **empowerment**.

Therefore, the focus on establishing well-functioning national systems has come at the expense of investing in branches and empowering their Membership, volunteers and youth. In many National Societies conversations that refocus attention on mapping local vulnerability and supporting the development of locally sustained Member, volunteer and youth-led services are an important element in the continued relevance of the organisation and the wider IFRC. In insecure and fragile contexts, as access to those affected by conflict becomes increasingly challenging, empowering local branches to drive their own development and preparedness for response is more critical than ever.

## ● A growing dilemma

This move toward professionalisation is generating a growing dilemma for the IFRC. On the one hand we publicise our local presence and capabilities, embodied in our volunteers, on the other, National Societies face enormous pressures to deliver results as if they were a large corporation. Measuring up to standards and demonstrating accountability is not always consistent with the realities of locally-led volunteer action and the more organic and fluid ways in which this action emerges. In many humanitarian operations, in order to deliver results, the majority of our volunteers are paid. Sooner, rather than later, this tension must be addressed and explore what it means for its dominant narratives and ways of operating.

## ● More open reimagined branches

Strategy 2030 highlights the opportunities for National Societies and their branches to become more open spaces for facilitating humanitarian action. Spaces where Members, volunteers and young people can, in addition to being involved with core RC services, be supported to design and make change in the world. Where they can self-mobilise, quickly move to action and make an impact. This requires addressing some of the hierarchies and the formality upon which many branches and National Societies operate.

Alongside this self-organising approach, technology has opened a world of online connection, belonging, and social action that better suits the busy lives of many adults and younger people. These new models of engagement present an increasing challenge to the notion that humanitarian action is necessarily mediated by an organisation. Consequently, the traditional branch is viewed by some as an antiquated model, or at best an option that needs to exist alongside other models of humanitarian engagement, such as e-volunteering, online social action and support groups, and the promotion of pro-social behaviours outside a RC institutional framework.

There are however opportunities for the RC to fully embrace these new models and to integrate aspects of these new ways of engaging into the makeup of branches. Likewise, there are opportunities for bringing to the online world the best of what a branch offers in terms of connection, belonging and the power of passionate groups. There are also opportunities for blending online and onsite engagement models.

## ● **More connected branches**

The pandemic has shown us what is possible in terms of adapting to a digital world and how technology can facilitate the connection of branches to the wider Movement and the enormous knowledge that is contained there. Branch to branch learning is highly effective, often more effective than traditional training approaches. The rapid transition to digital work across many National Societies has demonstrated the potential to establish a highly connected branch network, with amplified Member to Member, volunteer to volunteer, youth to youth collaboration enabled through new technology.

## ● **Working as a Movement in support of branches**

National Societies and their branches are still perceived as a local platform through which Movement or other global humanitarian partners reach affected or vulnerable people. Whereas this is appropriate in some cases, particularly in situations of humanitarian crisis, it should not be a National Society's primary function. Localising humanitarian reach is not the same as localising sustainable humanitarian actions. It follows that branch development continues to be perceived by some as a technical support element to enhance capacities for the delivery of international aid. Alignment to such approaches is at the expense of nurturing locally focused voluntarism that builds permanent humanitarian presence in communities.

There are positive signs that mindsets are shifting, however as highlighted in Strategy 2030, operating models that rely heavily on international aid financing continue to thwart deeper change. The work undertaken over the last two decades to articulate a more sustainable vision of Movement cooperation has influenced conversations across many parts of our network, from the very local to the global level. A number of National Societies that have traditionally hosted other Movement partners are investing in their domestic positioning, including through constitutional revisions, leveraging their auxiliary roles at the local and national level, and better promoting their work, towards a more balanced portfolio of international and local support.

## ● **The pandemic offers every branch an opportunity to reflect on its own development**

In 2017 the IFRC reached 67.3 million people with long-term services and development programmes and 32.9 million people with disaster response and early recovery activities.<sup>2</sup> In response to unprecedented needs created by the Covid-19 pandemic, many branches have experienced a significant increase in their volunteers and activities. Nine months into the pandemic IFRC's GO platform reported that more than 430 million people had been reached through health and hygiene promotion activities alone.

For many branches, Covid-19 has been a test and revelation; for some a positive experience and for others a disappointment. On the one hand, branches that have been working on developing their capacities have responded strongly in support of their communities. On the other, branches that have not invested in their development have found many deficiencies in their ability to contribute. For other branches the pandemic has provided the necessary wake up call to revitalise.

Covid-19 offers every branch an opportunity to reconnect to their core purpose, to leverage the surge of interest in volunteering towards the revitalisation of their Membership and volunteer and youth base and to reflect on how they would like to contribute to their communities into the future.

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<sup>2</sup> IFRC. 2017. Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System.







# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

## **Capture the opportunity offered by Covid to shift the IFRC's paradigm towards more locally-led action**

Launch a multi-disciplinary campaign that inspires National Societies to capture lessons from their Covid operations, and through this process, identify how branches can be empowered through revisions to policies, structures and organisational culture, to access the resources and have the power needed to implement locally-led humanitarian services, and in turn empower the communities they are part of.

2

## **Leverage the power of branch networks for learning, inspiration, action and replication**

Connecting branches between districts, provinces, nations and across the globe will amplify their learning and voice, and support their development.

In many contexts, branches are already actively connecting with their closest branch neighbours. On a less frequent basis headquarter teams support branches to connect across provinces and nation-wide. Branch to branch connection between National Societies takes place but is much less frequent. The Covid pandemic has shown us the potential of digital connection. Developing online spaces for branches to connect across the globe will increase their capacity to access the inspiration, knowledge and the skills they need to become more ready or open to development, to revitalise their volunteer base, improve their ways of working and share examples of humanitarian impact for replication. Additionally, in partnership with others there are opportunities to deliver online programmes directly accessible to branches, that are based on adult work-based learning principles and leverage peer support mechanisms.

3

## **Support the digital connection of branches**

A branch that is digitally connected can develop greater operational flexibility, as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and can better access the knowledge, communities, capabilities and resource opportunities that are available virtually. However, access to computing devices and the internet is uneven across our network. Some branches have no access to a computing device, some branch people have high speed internet at home, and many are somewhere in the middle. Even in high access countries, how much branches transition to digital technology will also be dependent on the profile of their Members and volunteers.

Potential interventions in this space:

- Support branches to partner with others to increase digital literacy in their Members, volunteers, youth and beneficiary groups.
- Develop guidance for branches on how to integrate the use of digital technologies to target youth and adults who are looking for more flexible Membership and volunteering opportunities.
- Increasing dependence on technology brings new risks, including potentially unforeseen cyber and digital threats. Educating branch people and establishing local partnerships that can help accelerate digital learning and capacities will reduce this risk.



## 4

### **Encourage and support action research on branch development**

Action research is a flexible research methodology uniquely suited to researching and supporting change. It integrates social research with exploratory action to promote development. Action research typically involves fluid and overlapping cycles of investigation, action planning, piloting of new practices, and evaluation of outcomes, incorporating at all stages the collection and analysis of data and the generation of knowledge. This research could include the following thematic areas:

- Existing and emerging alternatives to the traditional branch model
- Revitalising a branch's Membership, volunteer and youth base
- The intersections between different models of governance and branch development
- Blended models of humanitarian engagement (physical and online)
- Developing volunteer-led sustainable services at Branch level
- Finding the balance between national (top-down) and locally-led (bottom-up) action
- Opening a new branch, with sustainability in mind
- Closing a branch with dignity, as a strategic decision
- Branch development in insecure and fragile contexts
- Tensions between efficiency and volunteer-led action
- Enabling branches to grow healthily through disaster response
- Impact of branch-branch network and peer-support

## 5

### **Nurture the appropriate relational and technical competencies for branch development**

Over the last 25 years the Movement has experienced a relational turn, searching fervently for alternative ways of relating in an increasingly complex, dynamic and fluid world. Concurrently, in the external world, the social sciences have highlighted the need to move away from reductionist assumptions and the focus on the 'individual' and 'organisations' as the basic units of intervention for organisational development and change. This paradigm shift seeks to understand patterns of relationships, connections and interdependencies. Our Framework for National Society Development captures this shift and the idea that change is an emergent process, a process that is often unpredictable with outcomes that cannot be pre-determined. We have spoken about National Societies as 'living systems' and communities of interactive processes<sup>3</sup>. We know that such communities require an approach to development that supports and embraces uncertainty and the messiness of the realities of organisational life. The relational and technical competencies that we must therefore nurture in those who support branch and wider organisational development must include:

#### **Relational**

- 'Awareness of self and 'use of self'
- as a fundamental aspect of sensing into issues and situations
- to be receptive of the needs of the group
- to support without judgement and reactivity

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<sup>3</sup> This is for example very evident in an Organisational Capacity and Assessment Process where participants from all levels of the National Society come together in dialogue, where a multiplicity of voices and perspectives are cultivated. Participants often describe that the power of the process arises from the connectivity and co-dependence that comes into focus and which was previously outside participants' awareness. For many the type of dialogue nurtured through an OCAC process is the first time they have experience this in an organisation, where knowledge or truth becomes something negotiated, contested, and social, rather than something pronounced from the top of the organisation.

- to hold the space for the group so that individuals feel safe<sup>4</sup> to voice thoughts and emotions and to explore and experiment.
- An ability to support inquiry, a dialogue of equals<sup>5</sup>, and reflection.
- Recognising resistance and how best to work with this.
- Contracting around the support to be provided and knowing when and how to close the support.

## Technical

- Organisation behaviour including culture, power and politics, leadership, goal setting, conflict and ethics.
- Management and organisational theory including planning, leading, problems solving, decision making, organisational structure, system dynamics.
- Theories and models for change.
- Sustaining change through experimentation, as a way of raising awareness, gaining insight and trying out new ways of being and doing.



## Defining a shared language on the terminology and concepts related to branches and branch development and capturing this in a branch development framework

There is no formally adopted definition of the term 'branch' within the Movement. We cannot assume that what is obvious to one person in relation to a particular branch term or concept is viewed the same way by another. Therefore, exploring the many perspective and working towards a set of common terms as they relate to branches is important for guiding policy and practice. Common terminology will support the IFRC and the wider network to more effectively communicate and collaborate in this area; to compare and critically analyse different branch models, their advantages and downsides across varied operational contexts, as well as the various approaches to branch development. It will also be useful for communicating the role and contribution of branches to an external audience.

As part of this process the following are important:

- Genuine participation of branches in the development of guidance materials.
- Using visuals and applying plain language principles to maximise access at branch level.
- Treating these materials as living products that must be refined and refreshed regularly.
- Taking account of the more detailed recommendations under each section of this report, when creating the branch development framework.
- Demonstrating the continuum of choice available to National Societies and their branches for decision making related to operational, relational, performance and volunteering models.
- Identifying and refreshing any available guidance on the establishment, amalgamation, recessing and closing of branches.

<sup>4</sup> Understandingly individuals will not bring themselves to genuine dialogue in situations or contexts where they fear reprisals, bullying, side-lining or criticism.

<sup>5</sup> Here dialogue not only refers to communicating understanding, knowledge and learning but also to a way of relating that supports insight, discovery, growth and action through contact with others.

# BACKGROUND

A number of global elements are relevant to the future of branch development, in particular IFRC's business model, IFRC's newly adopted 10-year strategy, the localisation agenda, and the National Society Development Compact.

## IFRC's business model

iFRC's humanitarian business model has created systemic issues around the National Society Development agenda and by default branch development. Our dependence on international aid funds has meant that the IFRC has focused its attention on developing National Society capacity for project delivery rather than for relevance and sustainability. And whilst projects can help National Societies and branches to develop expertise, build new relationships and extend the scale and scope of their work, they can also take the place of more sustainable domestic services.

## Strategy 2030

The IFRC's 10-year Strategy calls for an urgent shift of leadership and decision-making to the most local level – to communities, their volunteers and branches. The first six of the seven transformations in the Strategy are particularly relevant to branches and their development:

1. Supporting and developing National Societies as strong and effective local actors
2. Inspiring and mobilising volunteerism
3. Ensuring trust and accountability
4. Working effectively as a distributed network
5. Influencing humanitarian action
6. Undergoing a digital transformation

The Strategy explicitly calls for greater focus on the development of branches, ensuring services are led and developed by local actors, underpinned by ethical practices and supported by a strong auxiliary role. It also calls for more open branches that are effective at creating spaces for self-organising action and engaging young people as change makers and leaders. The Strategy acknowledges the power of peer-to-peer and decentralised collaboration at the local, regional and global level, encouraging Movement actors to invest in technology that can make this collaboration a daily reality.

## Covid-19 has rekindled the “localisation” agenda

the term “localisation agenda” refers to the Grand Bargain agreement (2016) between humanitarian donors and agencies.<sup>6</sup> The agreement, which targets the 150 or so countries that are eligible for overseas development assistance, calls for more support for local and national responders “in order to make principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary”.<sup>7</sup> Covid-19 with its impact on local, regional and international mobility, has rekindled the “localisation” agenda, not only as a result of the good news stories about inspiring local responses, but because it has drawn attention to the fatal consequences of not having appropriate local capacities in place.

When advocating for localisation the IFRC has argued that local actors, such Red Cross and Red Crescent branches and their volunteers, are fast because they are close.<sup>8</sup> That they often have access that international players cannot. That they have local understanding of context, politics and culture, and that they are in a strong position to link preparedness and response. IFRC also argues that local humanitarian action particularly when led by volunteers is more cost effective when compared to efforts led by international personnel, remunerated at international rates. As the Covid-19 pandemic has evolved, all of these arguments have been compellingly shown to be true within and outside the RC network<sup>9</sup>, and on a scale not previously imagined.

## The National Society development compact

the National Society Development (NSD) Compact<sup>10</sup> was endorsed in IFRC General Assembly in 2019 and tackles the issue of support to National Society development. It calls on supporters of National Society development, to ensure their support is aligned to local priorities, is fit for purpose and harmonised. It contains four binding commitments which are complimented by guidance on the roles of the actors involved. The four commitments are: i) Better identification of development priorities, ii) Competences that match needs, iii) Aligned effective NSD support, and iv) Learning and quality assurance. At the heart of the Compact is the realisation that misaligned and uncoordinated support undermines the development of National Societies and their branch network.

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6 Interagency Standing Committee (n.d). Retrieved from <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain>

7 Interagency Standing Committee (n.d). Retrieved from <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders>

8 IFRC (n.d). Policy Brief. Localisation: What it means and how to achieve it. Retrieved from <https://media.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/05/Localization-external-policy-brief-4-April-2.pdf>

9 IFRC's Go Platform lists over 1900 reports from National Societies on their Covid activities.

10 IFRC. National Development Compact. 2019. A collective commitment to a global network of strong local actors. Retrieved from [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ntm6zhxfzbr8x7/AAAErNhgaMQaeiaeGf1qru5a/20200723\\_NSD\\_Compact\\_ONLINE\\_EN.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ntm6zhxfzbr8x7/AAAErNhgaMQaeiaeGf1qru5a/20200723_NSD_Compact_ONLINE_EN.pdf?dl=0)



# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## A welcomed initiative!



*"This research comes at the right time, we are emphasizing branch development, we want to make sure our branches are functioning well."*

*"COVID has led to changes in the way we operate and our Members are more open to working differently as a result. We value and celebrate what branches have been doing but we know we must be more relevant in community."*

*"Our National Society has 500 branches and a third are sleeping and need something new... We need a new generation of Members, the older people need to be there but younger people and people from more diverse backgrounds need to reinvent the whole concept of the branch here."*

*"Branch development has been on our agenda for a long time but without real meaning or focus, lately again it has emerged in our bilateral work. Branch development is key to international cooperation. So glad to have IFRC developing a frame for this."*

*"It is encouraging that the IFRC is looking at branch development...it is upping its game in National Society Development in general."*

*"We are often looking at headquarters of National Societies, we need to look at branches, turn our approach upside down, start at local level and build from there."*

There is support for greater focus on branches and their development. Some interviewees said that it was long overdue, others said they were pleased to see the discussion progressing beyond the Branch Organisational Capacity and Assessment (BOCA) process. Branch development practitioners in National Society headquarters are eager to be connected to more opportunities and sharing of experience, knowledge and expertise in this space. Since more harmonised support to branch development is a key recommendation emerging from this study, it is also encouraging that many interviewees involved in international support welcomed this focus.







## Branches are central to our history

Branches are strongly embedded in the tradition of the Movement. Branches exist in all National Societies<sup>11</sup> and have strong roots in local life. Branch development must therefore take into account the history of branches within the Movement and the particular history of each branch. Some branches have been in existence for more than a century and this history has shaped their structures, working practices and cultures. For example, the French Red Cross Paris 3e/10e branch has been responding to local needs since the great Parisian flood of 1910. The Antioquia branch of the Colombia Red Cross traces its origins back to 1915 and to the creation of the Grey Ladies, a volunteering force still in existence today within the National Society. Some branches, such as the Geneva Red Cross Branch, created in 1864, are the founding entities of their National Societies. The collective history of a network of branches can also reveal information about the evolution of the National Society. For example, many branches around the world were created under the umbrella of the British Red Cross. We still see traces of that original influence in many National Societies around the world, in their Royal Charter, their structures, the profile of their Members and their organisational cultures.

## Concepts and terminology

This section provides an overview of the key terms and concepts discussed in this document. Many of these elements have not been officially defined by the Movement. The proposed definitions and descriptions have been drawn from a variety of IFRC guidance and workshop documents or are based on responses from interviewees.

### What is a branch?



*“At the global level we need some sort of joint agreement on what is this branch development thing? What is a branch? Why do we have them? How many people do you need to be? Is it enough that you put up a sign that says RC branch? Can branches be downgraded? This would be a good conversation to have.”*

## Developing a shared working language for collaboration

There is no formally adopted definition of the term ‘branch’ within the Movement. We cannot assume that what is obvious to one person in relation to a particular branch term or concept is viewed the same way by another. Therefore, exploring the many perspective and working towards a set of common terms as they relate to branches is important for guiding policy and practice. Common terminology will support the Movement to more effectively communicate and collaborate in this area; to compare and critically analyse different branch models, their advantages and downsides, as well as the various approaches to branch development. It will also be useful for communicating the role and contribution of branches to an external audience.

## Words make worlds.<sup>12</sup>

The words we use frame our perceptions and thoughts and affect our mindsets and actions. Development buzzwords (e.g., localisation, community, empowerment, partnership, participation, sustainable) can lead to us to be numb and uncritical to their meaning and the reality and practices that lies behind. As the branch development conversation progresses it is important to be cognisant of buzzwords and how they frame, influence and reinforce our thinking and action. Underpinning these buzzwords is the use of English as a dominant language within

<sup>11</sup> With the exception of a very small number of National Societies (e.g., Monaco)

<sup>12</sup> Phrase borrowed from Andrew Corwall in Deconstructing development discourse: buzzwords and fuzzwords accessed via <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/118173/bk-deconstructing-development-buzzwords-010910-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

the Movement and this can exclude those who are not fully fluent. In 2004 the IFRC commissioned a review of organisational development tools. Many of the recommendations are still relevant today, including the importance of applying plain language principles<sup>13</sup> when developing guidance materials for National Societies.

## How can we describe a branch?



*"I have been working with the idea of branches as centres of resilience. What happens at a centre of resilience? It is a physical place where you can go and get information and services, it is a safe place for community dialogue, it is a place for youth to go, where operations are run out of."*

One way to describe a branch is to say that it is "an organisational unit, usually defined through National Society statutes, and mostly related to a geographical area". Some sub-branch structures are not legally defined but aim to bring a branch closer to communities. Some branches completely rely on community volunteers to organise activities and deliver services. A less mechanistic and more emotive description of a branch is as "a neutral space in which people from all sections of the community can come together and self-organise, strengthening community coherence and relationships".

## Two primary types of branches

There are front line branches, which are the closest level of the National Society to communities where the bulk of services are delivered. These are called local units, sub-branches or community branches depending on the context. In some contexts, all branches are front line branches (e.g., Sweden, Georgia, Solomon Islands), whilst in others there are also intermediary or supporting branches (e.g., Malaysia, Burundi, Colombia). These types of branches provide subsidiary services that cannot be delivered at local level, specialised disaster response for example, however their primary role is one of support and coordination. These are called regional, state, township, district, or provincial branches. While branches are considered permanent structures, in certain circumstances they can be temporary, linked to a time-bound issue or activity. Branch structures often mirror the administrative structures of the country. It is important to consider the type of branch and the branch's function when supporting branch development.

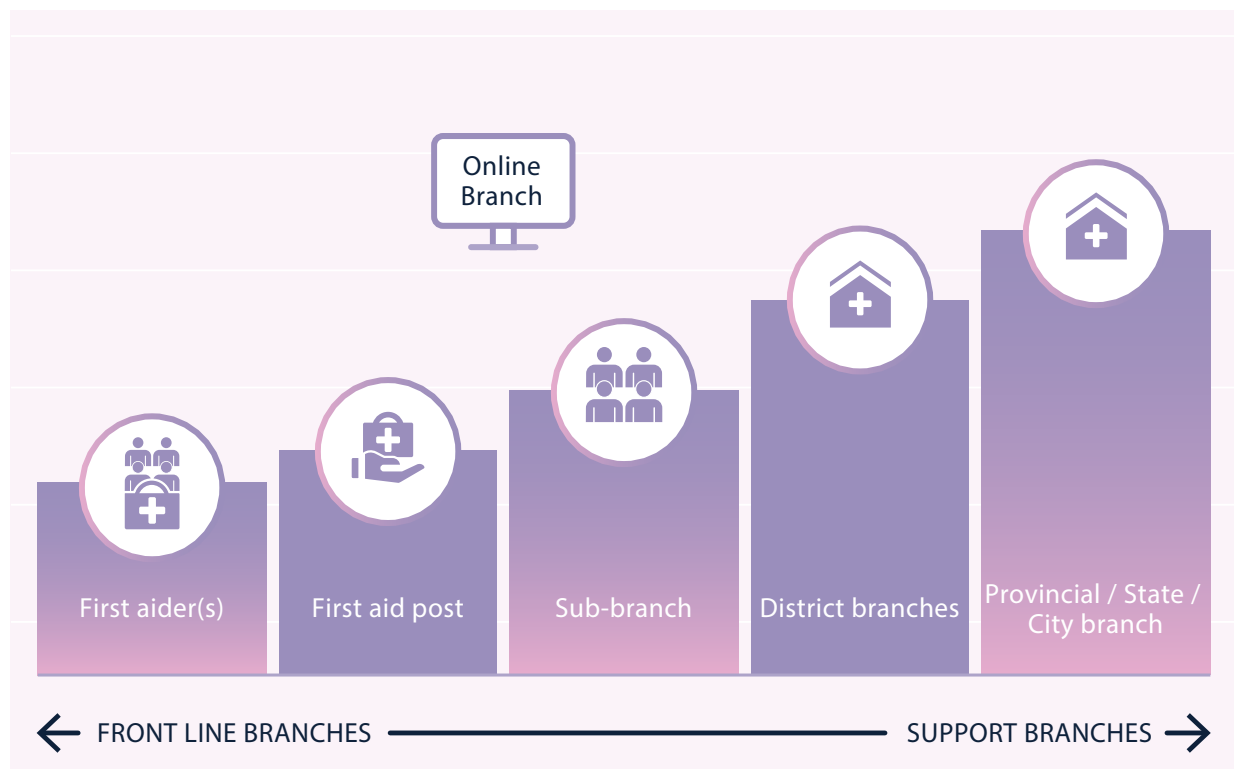
## The branch type continuum

Branches can be categorised along the typology shown in the Branch Type Continuum (figure 1). The smallest type of branch is a group of volunteers providing basic humanitarian services (e.g., first aid, support to older adults) in their own community. At the other end of the spectrum, we find a city or provincial branch that provides a range of services to a larger population, such as the management of a hospital, and may support the work of sub-branches as needed. Other member organisations report the emergence of online branches.

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<sup>13</sup> To see the plain language principles, go to <https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/plain-language/what-is-plain-language/>

**Figure 1** - The branch type continuum



## KEY QUESTIONS

- What is a branch? What is the essence of a branch? What types of branches exist? What are the different levels of branches and their functions?
- What types of branches could exist in the future?
- What is branch development?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a shared language and visuals on the terminology and concepts related to branches and branch development.
- Involve branches in the development of terminology and branch development materials and apply plain language principles to maximise access at branch level.
- Treat these materials as living products that must be refined and refreshed on a regular basis.



*We are stuck on what branches were rather than what they can be. The lens has to be ways of participating rather than structures...we must look at issues-based engagement rather than institutional. Young people don't need to be associated with an organisation. People already have a digital identity on social media...they want to affirm that identity. These people see themselves as a youth justice person not a Red Cross person. Branches can still be creative places for connecting to people, but they need to be more issues based.*



## Are branches important, and if so, why?

### A branch – an essential or antiquated model?

Branches have deep roots in their communities. In the majority of contexts, branches are the service delivery arms of their National Societies and therefore represent the humanitarian force of the organisation. Branches are also the knowledge brokers between communities and the National Society supporting the organisation to continuously refresh its perspectives on community capacities and vulnerabilities, ensuring national programmes are responsive to local needs. Branches are also described as a vital space for social connection satisfying a core psychological need in Members, volunteers and youth. Their Members, volunteers and youth are often connected to the branch for many years, even decades, and in some cases across generations. This enduringness is a source of trust in the RC locally, nationally and globally. For long serving branch Members, volunteers, and youth, their connection to their branch has provided a sense of identity, belonging, a source of learning and personal development, and a feeling that you can always count on someone to support you in times of need.

However, some view the traditional branch as an antiquated model for facilitating humanitarian action, or at best an option that needs to exist alongside other models of humanitarian engagement, such as online social action and social support groups, e-volunteering<sup>14</sup> and the promotion of pro-social behaviours outside an organisational framework<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, for those who are geographically distant, or have less time availability, or with mobility limitations, or with a preference for individual volunteering, access to the internet opens up a world of social action opportunities as well as a means to enhance one's online identity. These new models present an increasing challenge to the notion that volunteering is necessarily mediated by an organisation and are contributing to the decline of branches in some contexts.

Different types of communities exist beyond the traditional geographic boundaries of branches and online volunteering provides greater flexibility with regard to cause selection and location. There is therefore an opportunity to engage those who are aligned to a specific cause, in a specific branch location, or across geographic boundaries using online platforms. The creation of issue-based branches, such as a climate or a youth justice branch was touted as one way to reimagine branches. There are also opportunities for branches to become more open spaces for facilitating action and to blend e-volunteering with onsite volunteering. This requires addressing some of the hierarchies and the formality upon which many branches operate, in some instances it means diversifying the membership, really listening to the needs and ideas of Members, volunteers and youth, and providing the support they require to implement their ideas for positive change.

### The decline of branches and branch revitalisation

Other drivers contributing to the decline of branches include mobility, urbanisation, and demographics. More young people are leaving their communities to seek education and employment in cities, decreasing the potential pool of volunteers, youth and Members in their home communities. Because of their mobility and their reliance on technology young people are more aligned to causes than institutions and are less likely to seek connection to a physical branch. Branches that are able to integrate technology can offer more flexibility to their Members and volunteers and youth and attract a more diverse group of contributors. Working women are also looking for more flexible Membership and volunteering models that allow a better balance between their professional, personal and community service lives. Branches that are unable to offer this flexibility are less likely to attract this cohort. Communities have also become more diverse through migration and mobility and branches that have not adapted their working practices or broadened their connections have struggled to attract these diverse groups.

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<sup>14</sup> E-volunteering is Internet-mediated volunteering, also referred to as virtual volunteering, online volunteering, cyber volunteering or digital volunteering. With such volunteering the Internet (the use of an Internet-connected device) plays a crucial role in recruiting volunteers and delegating and completing voluntary work.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Australian Red Cross is making available online mobilisation kits to promote climate change action outside the frame of the Red Cross.

In National Societies where service delivery has been centralised and almost fully withdrawn from branches, this has also served to exacerbate branch decline. In some of these National Societies there is a realisation that the pendulum has swung too far, and that the reach of the RC has been diminished by the decline of branches and the diverse community-based services these branches delivered in the past. In such cases some efforts are being made to re-empower branch networks to re-establish a diverse tapestry of local services that responds to localised humanitarian needs.

## How do other organisations perceive branches?



*"We (a local NGO) have been surprised by what the branch has done during the pandemic. Everything was stopped but RC volunteers were everywhere. Standing in their red uniforms, giving messages in banks and supermarkets, visiting elderly people, helping people who were desperate. Most NGOs were distance working but the branch never stopped. Even before pandemic, they focused on local programmes, elderly house was a big thing, it was a first in Zugdidi. The first time somebody opened a day centre...where elderly people can come to have some joy."*

*"There was a lot of emphasis on creating our own offices at local level, but we lost sight of sustainability...we end up focusing so much on procedure and protocol we miss out on delivering services. Our model is more programme based whilst we look at RC and it always about long term community presence. We can learn from you."*

*"We want RC branches to reach the parts that cannot be reached by others because their volunteers are the very communities we want to reach. But often branches don't have the reporting and administrative capacity. How to make sure that we don't disqualify the very organisation we want to support because they don't have that basic level capacity?"*

The small number of externals interviewed expressed support for the RC branch model and the work of branches. Branches are appreciated for their proximity to communities. However, branch and wider National Society capacities in basic management processes was raised as a concern since this can sometimes limit the ability of the National Society/ and their branches to access resources from international, and sometimes local partners.<sup>16</sup> This highlights a core dilemma for the IFRC, on the one hand we publicise our presence through frontline volunteers but face enormous pressures to deliver results as if National Societies and their branches were a large well-resourced corporation rather than organisations with bare-bone facilities, pulled in different directions to serve multiple constituencies, and many with overworked employees and volunteers.

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<sup>16</sup> The limits are related to the ability of the National Society and branches to apply for funding, meet donor conditions and report on funding. Competencies (knowledge, skills, processes, systems) in developing programme or project plans, writing proposals, advocating for inclusion of overheads in budgets, and in project management - including planning, financial management, monitoring, risk management and reporting - are just a short list of what is needed to access resources.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What alternative models of humanitarian action sit alongside the branch model? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these new ways of working?
- How can branches blend onsite ways of working with the opportunities offered by virtual technology?
- What could issue based branches offer? What could virtual branches offer? How would virtual branches engage with local authorities and key stakeholder groups who might not be digitally connected?
- Motivations for volunteering can be complex and multifaceted, how can we widen our approaches to ensure it is more attractive to diverse communities and a wider audience?
- How can branches adapt to the increasing speed of Member, youth and volunteer turnover, through strategies that embrace this type of speedy engagement?
- How can branches become platforms that helps others make the change in the world they want to see, consistent with our principles and values?
- How can we deepen understanding of Members' ownership over National Societies, both as funders, through membership fees, governance (through office bearer positions and voting rights), and as knowledge brokers between communities and the wider organisation?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to capture and share stories and ideas from branches that have been successful in revitalising their Membership, volunteer and youth base.
- Continue to capture and share information about existing and emerging alternatives to the branch model, compare their relative advantage and disadvantages, highlight complementarities.
- Explore ways to blend the traditional branch model with other models of engagement.
- Develop guidance for branches on how to integrate the use of digital technologies to target youth and adults who are looking for more flexible Membership and volunteering opportunities.
- Research the relative impact of branch based and non-branch based humanitarian action on social capital and community resilience.



*With branch development the mindset of branches has changed, they are placing needs at the centre, fundraising locally, believing that can do it and make a difference. They have development plans, they do trust building in communities, they have basic budgeting strategies, they improved service delivery, they improved cooperation with local actors.*

## The WHY and the HOW of branch development – what are they?

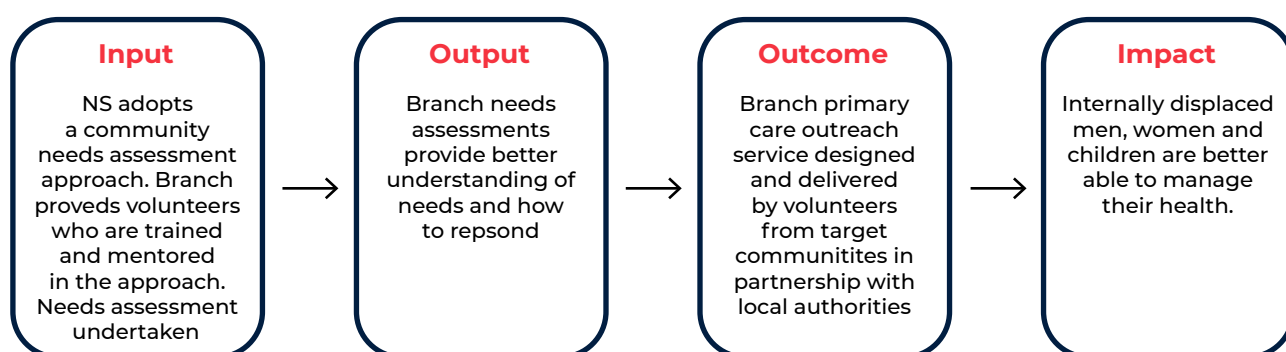
### The WHY: why does a branch develop itself?

Creating and developing branches is a strategic issue for National Societies since branches with a strong presence in communities have been shown to be more effective in understanding and responding to risk and vulnerability.

Branches articulate different reasons for developing themselves, but ultimately it is: “to enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world”.<sup>17</sup>

As a Movement we have agreed that responding to crises is no longer enough. National Societies must also strive to address the underlying causes of crises and understand the changing nature of vulnerability in the communities they serve. They must strive to reduce their impacts, better address new and emerging risks, or even prevent them from occurring. It follows that understanding and addressing the changing nature of vulnerability and risks requires a branch to invest in its own development. Figure 2 shows the model link between a branch development activity and a positive contribution to people's lives.

**Figure 2:** *THE HOW: how does a branch develop itself?*



The HOW of branch development refers to the ways of doing things that supports the achievement of the WHY. The following working practices have been identified through this study as pathways for branch development. These have been outlined in detail in the [website content](#) developed alongside of this research.

- Distributed networks (Let's connect)
- Diversity and inclusion (Everyone is welcome)
- Leadership and governance (Model the way, encourage the heart)
- Accountability (Do the right thing)
- Relationships (Better relationships better world)
- Scaling up without harm (Grow wisely)
- Innovation and digitalisation (Try new things)
- Sustainability (Stay relevant)

We can see from these pathways that HOW a branch develops itself impacts on who the branch engages, the quality of its needs assessments and the design of its services, its structures and work processes, the quality of its relationships, its resourcing choices, its communication and promotion activities, and its capacity for learning and adaptation.

<sup>17</sup> IFRC. (2019). Strategy 2030. Platform for Change. Global Reach. Local Action.



## KEY QUESTIONS

- Is the case for branch development outlined in this section compelling?
- Do the HOWs appropriately reflect the ways we achieve the WHY of branch development?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Test the web content developed as part of this research with branches, National Societies and branch development practitioners, and continue update and adapt the content based on feedback
- Integrate the material on the WHY and HOW of branch development into a package of support on branch development





## Towards a definition of branch development

The IFRC describes National Society development as working to achieve and maintain: *“an organization that consistently delivers, through volunteers and staff, relevant countrywide services to vulnerable people sustained for as long as needed and that contributes to the strength of IFRC and the Movement.”*

Any branch development definition must therefore flow from this wider characterisation. Thus branch development can be described as working to achieve and maintain: *a branch that delivers relevant local services to vulnerable people sustained for as long as needed and that contributes to the strength of the National Society.*

The “understandings” articulated about National Societies in the National Society Development Framework<sup>18</sup> are also applicable to branches:

- A branch’s survival and strength is largely dependent on the extent to which it can adapt to the opportunities and constraints of its specific environment.
- The first point of comparison for branches should be successful and sustained local non-profit organisations operating in their own local environment.
- There is an ongoing and mutually reinforcing relationship between the services that a branch delivers, how these are resourced, how the branch is organised and structured, and how it is perceived internally and externally. In a stable and sustainable branch, these relationships are in balance and develop in step with one another.

Branch development is carried out in branches individually as well as across the network of branches. At the network level branch development increases the coherence and effectiveness of the overall National Society system.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- Does this definition capture the essence of branch development?
- How can we improve this definition so that all levels of the Movement can align themselves to this definition?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a shared language and visuals on branches and branch development, translate into IFRC languages
- Involve branches in the development of the definition of branch development
- Apply plain language principles when agreeing on a definition of the branch development concept

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18 IFRC. (2020, page 9). National Society Development Framework.

## Other branch level interventions – establishing, amalgamating, recessing, closing



*“We need to ensure National Society (NS) have all the necessary information to start and also close branch, the latter also needs to be done very sensitively. In Kiribati they used a declaration they got signed by the first lady of the country for a new branch. In Tonga the island chief were also present and signed a local declaration. So there are also local protocols and how these fit into the RC protocols.”*

*“When a branch feels isolated and devoid of new ideas, it withers and dies. When a branch can reach out for help, feel connected to something bigger than itself, it has the opportunity to grow.”*

Sometimes branch development is not the appropriate frame, for example when a group is forming a branch or a decision has been made to amalgamate, recess or close a branch. It is also important to develop common terminology for these processes and to capture and share lessons in how to effectively steer each process.

The procedures for the establishment of branches should be defined in the statutes of the National Society with more detailed guidance provided in associated guidelines.<sup>19</sup> Support to branches in formation is important for ensuring appropriate processes are in place to design and deliver relevant services, to effectively communicate with local actors including local government, and to ensure that any pre-branch Members and volunteers are kept abreast of any changes in operational and communication protocols.

A decision may be taken to amalgamate branches. This may arise from the desire to merge resources and operations to strengthen RC impact and/or reduce competition in a particular area, or as a result of changes in government administrative boundaries. In such cases applying good change management approaches will be essential to manage the interests and expectations of the various internal and external stakeholders. In some instances, branches decide that temporarily ceasing operations is required. Here again good communications with all key stakeholders will be important to ensure that there are no misunderstandings and so as to facilitate the resumption of operations when this takes place. From time to time it is necessary to close a branch. This is usually a last resort – after all other possible options or solutions have been exhausted. In this case the intermediary branch or headquarters needs to ensure all stakeholders are appropriately consulted on the appropriate process for closing.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> An IFRC Institutional Development handbook from the late nineties comprising six booklets, included a booklet on branch formation.

<sup>20</sup> A National Society's statutes should define the procedures for the establishment and dissolution of branches and other entities and ensure that provision is made for needs to be met across the territory in the event that a branch is dissolved or is not functioning.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What guidance is currently available on the establishment, amalgamation, recessing and closing of branches? What do we consider as best practice in each of these scenarios?
- How can we refresh any existing IFRC guidance or adapt guidance available within National Societies and make this available to all branches?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify any available guidance within the Movement on the establishment, amalgamation, recessing and closing of branches
- Identify good practices in each of these scenarios
- Integrate guidance and good practices on each scenario into the package of support for branch development

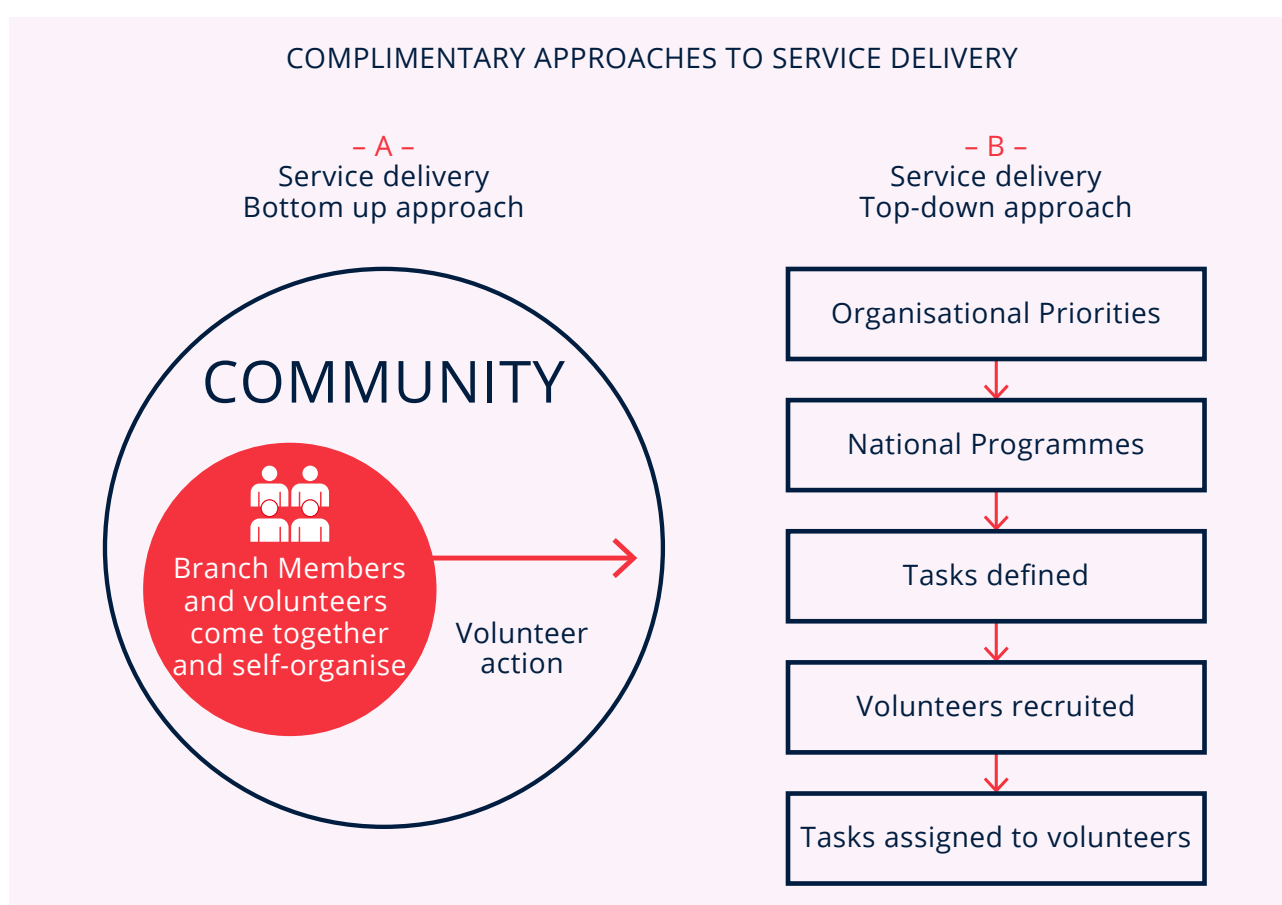


## Findings – Branch Level

### Many branches struggle but countless branches play essential roles

A consistent theme across the interviews is the view that the delivery of services in communities by branches, through their Members, volunteers, youth, and in some case employees, represents the bedrock of our Movement. Interviewees provided many examples of branches delivering essential services despite limited resources and difficult working conditions.

They also reported that many branches struggle to deliver sustainable services and that many branches are heavily reliant on headquarter or international support. While limited financial resources and a lack of autonomy were the most frequently mentioned challenge by branches, this may reflect broader issues related to the identity of branches and the relevance of services. There were several examples of branches operating in similar contexts, with one branch struggling and another doing good work for their communities. The variations were not related to resourcing but to other elements such as strategic leadership and a lack of diversity of voices in the branch.



### Top-down and bottom-up approaches to services delivery – both are important

In many branches Members<sup>21</sup>, youth and volunteers represent the core base of active humanitarians in the National Society. These individuals can play an active role in listening to communities, developing an understanding of needs and proposing and organising locally sustainable services (see model A below). The focus on managing volunteers for the delivery of top-down nationally designed projects and services (see model B below), such as emergency

<sup>21</sup> Members are often categorised as active, subscribing or honorary. The Movement's 2018 "Guidance for National Society Statutes" contains clear options for defining these categories and their rights and duties.

response, can sometimes be at the expense of supporting self-organising action at branch level (model A). The top-down approach can also involve volunteers coming from other communities to perform a time-bound task and then returning to their own community, sometimes without the knowledge of the local branch, and therefore not contributing to developing a sustainable capacity in the beneficiary community. A lack of balance between these two operating models can lead to issues with sleeping branches, disgruntled branches, poor territorial coverage, reduced capacity to meet localised needs, and poorer acceptance, access and safety and security in times of crisis.

### Why are branches “sleeping” or why do they cease to exist?

A number of interviews mentioned ‘sleeping’ branches that suffer from reduced numbers of Members and volunteers/youth, limited or no activities, and a loss of supporters. These symptoms were said to be caused by a range of variables, including the branch’s inability to attract a diverse Membership and volunteer/youth base, a lack of focus on local needs, poor integrity in the way the branch operates which leads to a loss of trust, disempowerment of branches through centralisation, and/or a disconnect between the branch and the wider National Society.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- How are branches supported to develop their capacities in vulnerability assessments and in turning this information into effective locally-led services?
- How can branches advocate for a better balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to service delivery?
- What lessons can be learned from National Societies that are successfully revitalising/re-empowering their branch network and re-establishing a balance between top-down and bottom-up service delivery?
- How can this knowledge be shared and stored so that it is easily accessible to branches around the world?
- How can branches across the world directly support each other in revitalising and developing themselves?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Developing a more conceptually and empirically rich and robust understanding of the top-down and bottom-up approach to service delivery in diverse settings and appropriate tools to assess the impact on community resilience.
- Developing online spaces for branches to access knowledge related to branch revitalisation and branch development and share examples of humanitarian impact for replication across branches.
- In partnership with others deliver online vulnerability assessment and service design learning programmes directly accessible by branches. Programmes that are based on adult work-based learning principles and leveraging peer support mechanisms.

## Uniqueness and similarity both inform branch development practice



*“How do you have one model when there are so many types of branches, far from centre, close to centre, conflict/disaster response, small/ large, resource rich/resource poor?”*

*“It is hard to find one model that will suit the diversity of branches.”*

*“How can we build a branch development framework that is relevant to the diversity of National Societies?”*

*“What guidance can be provided that will be useful to the wide diversity of branches?”*

Uniqueness and similarity are always present, simultaneously. Which you see in relation to branches depends on how you focus. Comparing branches is important for making general statements about the differences and similarities between branches and to understand the reasons why these variations exist. Most interviewees focused on the differences between branches. It is however important to also focus on the similarities since this will also help us to make sense of the information we are gathering from across the world and to identify general principles that may apply to all or to groupings of branches.

Starting with diversity. Diversity across branches arises from a branch's:

- Context - including geography, population size, historical forces, socio-political, cultural and economic variables, and the wider system of the National Society.
- Legal base - whether a branch is legally recognised, and its level of autonomy.
- People - volunteers, Members, and employees, who enact their work through their differentiated skills, knowledge, behaviours, experience and relationships.
- Networks - whether these networks are local, national or international.
- Organisational culture - the culture of a branch refers to shared assumptions, that have been learned by the branch as it has solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new people as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Branches are dynamic and evolving systems, and any changes in any of these aforementioned variables will influence the activities and 'personality' of the branch.

And now to potential similarities. All branches are guided by a common identity including the history and mission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its fundamental principles. All branches can play a role in promoting the principles and ideals of the Movement and in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of the distinctive emblems recognised by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. All branches can maintain their relevance through a diverse network of Members, volunteers, youth and partners, a branch culture that promotes diversity and inclusion in opportunity, representation and decision making, principled leadership, accountability, and an ability to adapt and scale up, or scale down, activities as the needs of communities change. Finally, striving for the sustainability of essential services is a central concern for all types of branches.



## One size does not fit all – tailored approach informed by global guidance



*“We have changed the branch development process three times since we started 4.5 years ago. We have to personalise it based on each branch, what can be done. We have not found the right formula. This works for this branch and not this branch. We have not found our clear way yet.”*

While comparisons will provide rich insights and can inform the development of common principles and standards which National Societies must follow, each National Society will operationalise these requirements in keeping with their context and will also need to tailor their approaches within their own network of branches. There can, therefore, be no single model for what a branch should look like and no single prescription for how branch development should take place.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How should these differences and similarities inform branch development? How can difference and similarity be leveraged for branch development?
- In what other ways do branches share similarities?

### RECOMMENDATION

- Be informed by branch differences and similarities when developing branch development guidance materials
- Demonstrate the continuum of choice available to National Societies and their branches for decision making related to operational, relational, performance and volunteering models
- Leverage diversity and similarity by connecting branches across the globe to share their experiences, challenges, approaches and humanitarian activities in order to inspire learning and replication.



*You have to stop competition between HQ and branches. Each level cannot do everything. Emergency programmes needs to be national. Other programmes should be delivered only locally. This balance can be reached. For whatever event, HQ has to be clear on its role and the branch has to be clear on its role. Helps to create unity.*

# Defining the capacities required at each level to support branch development

Interviewees highlighted a number of characteristics of what they consider to be effective branches. These are shown in table 1 and echo some of the BOCA and SAF indicators and the characteristics identified in the National Society development theory of change framework (the AP framework) developed by the Asia Pacific Regional Office and National Societies in 2008<sup>22</sup> (See figure 3).

**Figure 1** *Characteristics of strong branches identified by interviewees*

Ownership of it's future	Base capacities for repsonse	Enthusiastic volinteers joyful volunteers who respond fast to needs	Process for listening to volunteers
Prinicpled leadership	Good relationships with other groups and agencies	Process for listening to volunteers	Working practices that facilitate the work of volunteers
A positive identity	Good representation by community	Working practices that facilitate the work of volunteers	
Willingeness to try new things	Acceptance by community		

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the capacities required in front line branches to support resilience in communities?
- What are the capacities required in intermediate branches to support the development of front line branches?
- What are the capacities required at headquarter level to support the development of intermediate and front-line branches?
- What are the capacities required within the IFRC and the wider network to support branch development?

## RECOMMENDATION

- Refine and integrate the Asia Pacific Framework for inclusion in a global package of support for branch development

22 This framework was valuable in guiding branch development conversations with a number of Asian and Pacific Island National Societies

## Triggers and nurturing readiness for branch development



*“The story is that everything started from the armed conflict from 2008, that did not mean that we did not have development efforts before 2008. Branches were shocked because they faced the real situation of crisis and we needed to assess their capacity and see how could better respond next time. So that is why we started a branch development pilot with support from Danish Red Cross.”*

*“Well, honestly the trigger was a big management change and newly elected President. The new leadership wanted to make big change for the National Society. Public attitudes towards the organisation were quite negative. People believed RC belonged to the government. We didn’t do much community work. This is why we changed our statutes to reduce the political influence at all levels. Financial management, volunteer management has improved, we have policies and guidelines and branches are more disciplined and we respect their autonomy.”*

*“Our branch development project was launched 4.5 years ago. It was because of our leadership seeing that this was important”*





Various triggers for branch development were noted (table 2). In some instances, several variables combine to create a series of triggers, for example an internal crisis may result in new leadership which may lead to the adoption of a new direction. Understanding the triggers for branch development is important for designing guidance on branch development. Some triggers, for example external offers of support, may not be matched with a felt need for change within the branch, which is an important factor for success. In such cases developing the readiness for change is an important first step. Other triggers provide a strong rationale for change, for example an internal crisis that requires resolution and creates change readiness.

**Table 2** *Triggers for branch development highlighted by interviewees and author's own knowledge*

- ☐ Internal crisis
- ☐ A change of leadership and direction
- ☐ Adoption of new statutes
- ☐ A response operation
- ☐ End of operation and greater clarity on branch development needs
- ☐ Integrity issues
- ☐ New perspectives and motivation as a result of an OCAC, BOCA or SAF process
- ☐ Offers of support for branch development from partners
- ☐ Partners withdrawing support
- ☐ A change in the external environment, such as a peace agreement

**Branch readiness for development**



*“Talking from the point of view of developing National Society, I have not seen weak National Societies but the absence of commitment.”*

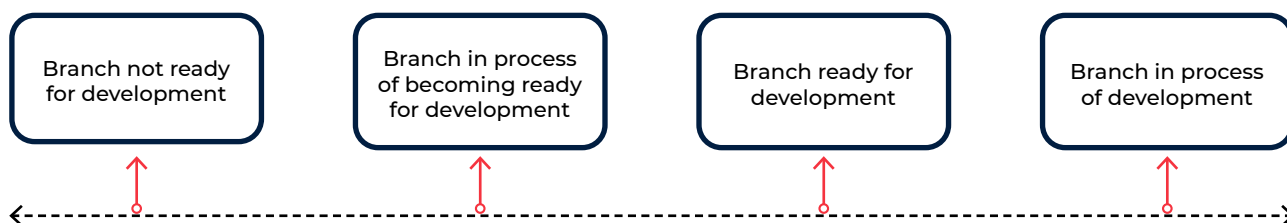
*“Before presenting the minimum branch standards to the board the branches were consulted. We needed branches with us.”*

*“Another part of branch development is related to planning and consultation with branches, this is important for ownership and commitment. So for me one of the main roles of the headquarters is to develop a branch mindset, so that local unit Members see themselves as local actors who have their own capabilities to do things.”*

Readiness for branch development is not automatic and cannot be assumed. A failure to assess branch and individual change readiness may result in significant time and energy dealing with indifference or resistance. There is a continuum along which branches become progressively more ready for development (figure 4). Some of the

factors that support the readiness for development include the existence of a felt need for change, the willingness to participate which is itself dependent on active and meaningful engagement in designing development initiatives and helping people to see their role in the new ways of doing things. Assessing a branch's readiness for change can include individual and group conversation with branch Members and volunteers to seek their reaction to any proposed development initiatives.

**Figure 4** *Continuum of branch development*



## KEY QUESTIONS

- What might create resistance to development in branches?
- When I am told that I need to develop something in myself how does that make me feel? How might I react? Can I place myself in the shoes of a branch chair, Member or volunteer who has been advised that they must develop their branch? How would that feel?
- What are the most effective approaches across different contexts to support readiness for development?
- When do we need to “hold” branches so that they feel safe enough to become curious, explore the potential for change and take small steps to start the journey? What might this “holding” involve?
- How can we promote exchange within and across branches to nurture curiosity, learning and risk taking?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate the concepts of ‘triggers’ and ‘readiness for change’ in branch development guidance materials
- Integrate in guidance materials for branch development techniques for “holding” branches until they are ready to fully drive their own development
- Connect branches within and across National Societies to promote readiness for development

## The pandemic offers every branch an opportunity to reflect on its own development



*“Covid-19 helped us in our relationship with local authorities. Our branch is helping with Covid testing, to organise for pensioners to have lines to get pensions in the bank, to collect food in supermarkets...so we have organised our volunteering and the municipality is very happy to work with us.”*

In 2017 the IFRC reached 67.3 million people with long-term services and development programmes and 32.9 million people with disaster response and early recovery activities.<sup>23</sup> In response to unprecedented needs created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the IFRC has witnessed a global surge in volunteer numbers and many branches have experienced a significant increase in their volunteers and activities. Nine months into the pandemic IFRC's GO platform reported that more than 430 million people have been reached through health and hygiene promotion activities alone.

For many branches, Covid-19 has been a test and revelation; for some positive and for others a disappointment. On the one hand, branches that have been working on developing their capacities have responded strongly in support of their communities. On the other, branches that have not invested in their development have found many deficiencies in their ability to contribute. For some branches the pandemic has provided the necessary momentum to revitalise and reform their ways of working.

Covid-19 offers every branch an opportunity to reconnect to their core purpose, to leverage the surge of interest in volunteering towards the revitalisation of their Membership and volunteer and youth base and to reflect on how they would like to contribute to their communities into the future.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- It is often reported that our mission is not always clear to others. What opportunities are there for branches to better communicate what we stand for by promoting their work during the pandemic?
- What lessons does the pandemic response offer branches in relation to their development?

<sup>23</sup> IFRC. 2017. Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System.



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*In our National Society branch support and development is managed by a separate unit to national programmes like disaster management, migration and social support. This creates a disconnect between national programmes and local action through branches.*

## Findings – National Society Level

A strategic approach provides direction, momentum and a platform for integrated support



*“We are present nation-wide and then we have more than 200 subbranches and where we also have this philosophy that if we are responding we will open a hub to make sure we are there for rehabilitation and longer-term resilience. So, for us working with branches is a high priority. Of course, it takes a lot of work and planning to ensure that all branches are working with the same strategies and the same standards. So that everyone is served with the same quality and standards. We are taking care of volunteering management, leadership of branches, financial and administrative aspects of the branch. Also, policies of the branch.”*

*“This is why we formed our first strategic plan, participating were the branches, units and departments in the HQ This plan was approved in 2019 and includes branch development, we wanted to organise the role between HQ and branches in a different way. Before war the role of HQ was limited and most leadership was through the branches but to facilitate the coordination we took on a bigger role and even implemented projects. The direction now is for HQ to step back and play a regulatory role. To do so we need to develop our branches and so we started a branch development process, we established a steering committee to lead this process based in HQ with representatives from each branch.”*

Developing and communicating a strategy for branch development, with the participation of branches, and driven by the highest levels of the National Society, will marshal support for this work. Conversations that engage national board members, executives and branch leaders in exploration and decisions about vulnerability, capacities and gaps in front line branches will create consensus on priorities and cultivate commitment to joined up approaches to branch development. In societies that are emerging from a large response operations, reviewing an existing strategy may be required to realign branch and headquarter roles and direction to the changing context.

### Disconnect between national programmes and branches

In some National Societies, branch development is perceived and managed as a stand-alone thematic area and is poorly integrated with the work of technical departments. When these departments initiate changes or action, branches are often not considered in the mix of decision making. This leads to missed opportunities for connecting national and local action and for leveraging the full strength of the network. It can also contribute to weakening branches by not sufficiently engaging them in the decision making of the organisation.



## KEY QUESTIONS

- How can a strategic approach to branch development support the delivery of relevant humanitarian services? And how can it support a better-balanced portfolio of nationally consistent services and Member, volunteer and youth-led local services?
- How can a strategic approach build coherence in support from headquarter teams to branch development?
- How can a strategic approach to branch development unify standards and create a sustainable base of financial support for the National Society?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote a strategic joined-up approach to branch development, sharing stories and materials from branches that have a well-articulated strategic approaches to branch development



## Getting the full picture: mapping vulnerability, branch activities, assets and capacity gaps



*“As a result of the analysis of the branch situation, our leadership and partners could see the big picture of the situation of the branches around the country. They became aware of the areas the branch was weak and what support was needed. This became an opportunity to be more focused and not stretch our resources too thin, and results could not be measured.”*

*“Of course, not all the branches are at the same level of efficiency but we are on our way. We have mapped which branches we need to work on.”*

Interviewees said that having a comprehensive mapping of vulnerability across the country overlayed with branch activities, assets, human and financial resources and capacity gaps, identified through National Society or Movement assessment tools and processes (i.e., VCA, BOCA, SAF, PER), had supported understanding about the need for branch development and the development of a more strategic approach to branch development. Discussions about what a strong branch looks like in that context and defining specific criteria for branches to aspire and/or comply to was highlighted by National Societies as a beneficial process for developing coherence. Mapping capacities and gaps also provides National Societies powerful evidence for negotiating and synergising local and international support. Interviewees said that where branches are highly autonomous it can be a challenge for the National Society to have a full picture of the organisation and to optimise decision-making and resources.

### Prioritising branches for development



*“In the real world we work only in priority branches. What can be done in such kind of situations? We can look at minimum development, branch development for emergencies.”*

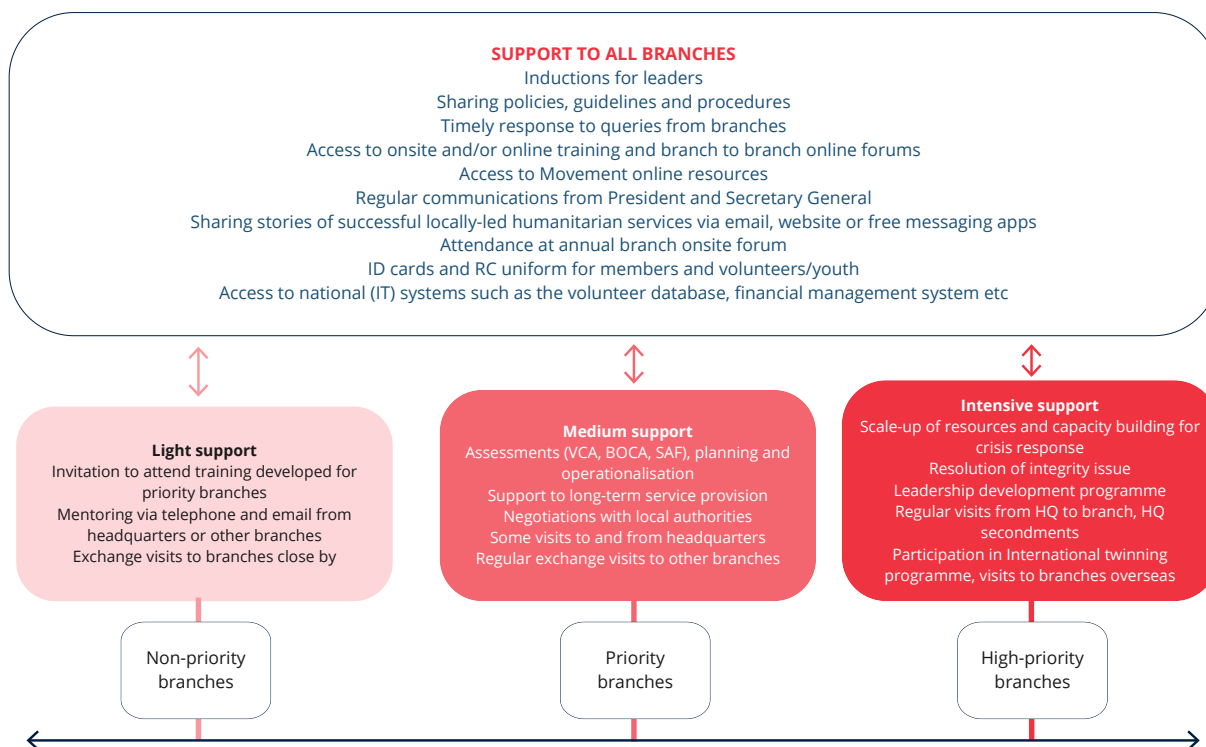
*“The steps would be, like we did, even if no funds, in these non-priority branches we engaged with the people. We did not contribute funds or equipment. We contributed with experience exchange and knowledge and if the training is for a small number of branches, we invited people from non-priority group. So at the very basic level, knowledge and engagement can develop basic branch capacities.”*

*“In 2021 we are also working on continuing our visits to the branches, the branch development steering committee now is prioritising three branches. Of course, this is a matter of context, where we can go and where we cannot, accessibility is one of the criteria and the strength and weakness of the branches.”*

Like all organisations National Societies must prioritise their actions to maximise limited resources. This often means that National Societies will identify priority branches for development initiatives. The prioritisation can be based on a number of variables including the context where the branch operates (less or more acute needs), the capacity of the branch to take full control of its development or not, integrity issues that need to be addressed, the

willingness of the branch to develop itself, conditioned funding that targets one geographic location over another. Prioritisation of branches by headquarters for development does not necessarily entail that other branches cannot benefit from some support as shown in the diagram below (figure 5).

**Figure 5** *Prioritisation of support to branches, examples for each level of support*



## KEY QUESTIONS

- How are National Societies using vulnerability mapping and other assessment tools to prioritise a phased approach to branch development?
- What minimum support should branches at different levels of the National Society receive?
- How can branches in non-priority contexts access support for their development?
- How can branches draw on the rich knowledge available in other branches in their own contexts, regionally and globally to support their work?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate the concepts of mapping and the prioritisation of support in branch guidance materials

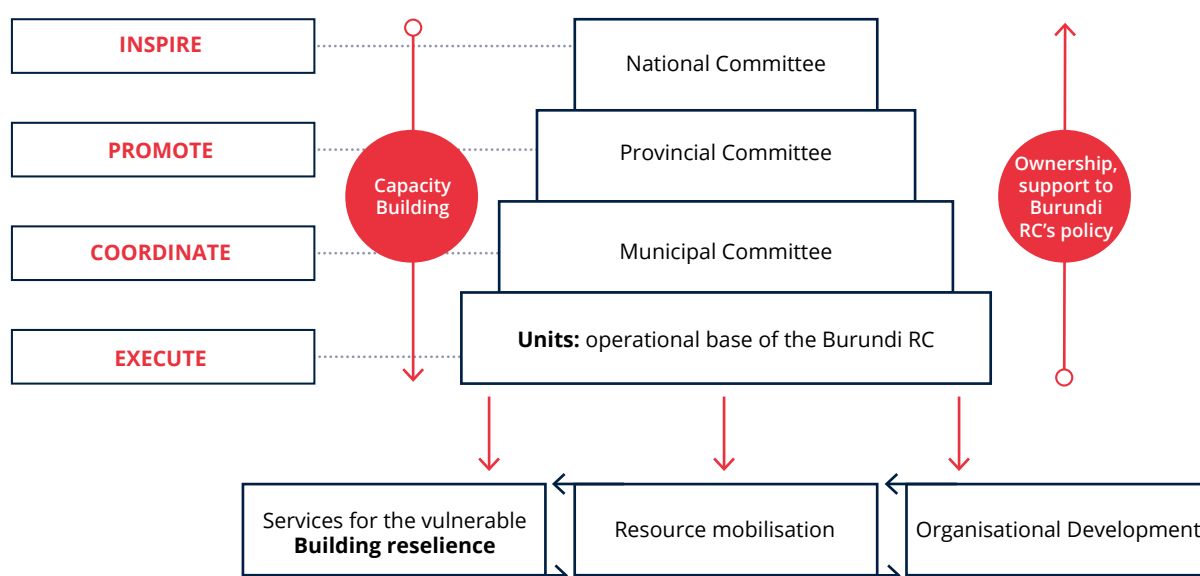
## Branch legal status is an important consideration



*“For us it was writing the role of the branch, developing a consensus on the role, having branches that do own needs assessments and shifting from donor-based activities to activities based on needs assessment. It is still too early to talk about major changes, and it will take 10 years. Need a long-term view! Shift of mind. Shift of culture.”*

*“It takes a lot of work...to ensure that all branches are working with the same strategies and standards. So that everyone is served with the same quality...noting that we have autonomous branches, they have their own statutes, their own governing board. Sometimes this makes things more difficult for coordination, but it is also valuable because the branch is responding to local needs and has full responsibility.”*

There is considerable diversity in the legal status of branches across our membership. Branch development needs to be tailored to the legal status of each branch. Some branches have an independent legal status and operate with high levels of administrative and financial autonomy. In other locations branches come under the legal status of the National Society and may have restricted functions such as fundraising and promotion. Technical advisers or partners can sometimes fail to consider this element, and this can lead to poorly defined support. In some situations, the legal status of the branch has not been updated for some time and may not reflect the changing realities in the National Society. This can lead to confusion about the role and responsibilities of branches and impact relationships and coordination. Burundi Red Cross uses the diagram below to represent the roles of each level in their system. The front-line branch (Unite Collinaire) implements, the communal branch coordinates, the regional branch promotes, and the headquarters stewards.



## Balancing autonomy and control is critical



*“We had a stagnant period for 10 years, branches were ...waiting for permission, we have flipped this on its head and turned the culture into an enabling one. They don’t ask “can we do this?”. They ask, “How can we do this?”*

In contexts where branches have far-reaching autonomy, National Societies are challenged to achieve national unity. On the one hand autonomy can support responsiveness to local issues and sustainability. On the other hand, it can challenge national identity and performance. The relational dynamics which emerge from the different legal statuses of branches are managed differently. Where branches have autonomy, headquarter teams can draw on a range of communication and relational approaches to unify the work of branches, such as formal and informal communications, horizontal, upward and downward communication, regular field visits, internal collaborative efforts, recognition systems, negotiation, empathy through attentive listening. Where branches have limited autonomy, headquarters can also create spaces for contribution to decision making to engage and motivate branches. Some degree of tension is inevitable, however sometimes the imbalance between control and autonomy can result in disconnected and even alienated branches; this can lead to passivity or branches working against the organisation. This scenario is more likely where two-way accountability mechanisms and conflict resolution mechanisms are inadequate. Reinterpreting or modifying statutes can also help to resolve some of the tensions.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How can the revision of statutes realign structures at national and local levels and better inform branch development targets?
- How can the revision of the National Society law and statutes identify and described a revised set of auxiliary roles for branches?
- What good practices do National Societies apply to constructively manage the tensions created by varying levels of autonomy and control?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Document, in text and visuals, the different models of governance across National Societies and their branches and insights for branch development. Integrate into the package of support on branch development.
- Document the benefits and disadvantages of these models and the approaches and techniques that National Societies draw on to manage tensions along the control-autonomy continuum.









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*The commitment of the (branch) leadership is one of the very glaring factors. A lot of committed leaders at the grassroots level that can bring in a lot of support from the community and the corporate sector... The key factors in here would be the strong and visionary leadership. And doing a lot of good planning.*

## Leadership matters a great deal

### Commitment and ownership to branch development

Two decades of National Society development support has demonstrated that successful branch development hinges on leadership ownership of the process. Moreover, the ability of branch leaders to build a culture of trust, safety, and integrity has a bearing on how a branch is experienced and perceived and, on the success, or otherwise of branch development initiatives. Moreover, a strategic approach at the national board level also provides direction and motivation, and facilitates more integrated approaches by headquarter departments to support branch development.

### Investing in leadership development – experience and reflection are central

A well-articulated leadership development strategy is central to ensure leaders at each level can perform the basic demands of leadership (see table 3). Many National Societies already have in place elements of a leadership development programme. The leadership development initiatives mentioned by interviewees included induction, training, advising, mentoring, peer to peer support, and exchange visits. In the Asia Pacific and Americas, the IFRC has been guiding the way in defining leadership development strategies. The Americas strategy provides a holistic approach to leadership development encompassing skills training, peer exchanges, secondments, mentoring and coaching. The ICRC and IFRC are currently in the process of redesigning the Movement Induction Course and incorporating lessons from regional programmes.

**Table 3** *The basic demands of branch leadership described by interviewees and supported by research*<sup>24</sup>

Setting and communicating direction	→	Technical/professional skills, strategic thinking, problem solving, taking responsibility
Coping with the pressures of leadership	→	Persevering through adversity, self-confidence, coping with ambiguity, appropriate use of power
Securing the support of critical stakeholders	→	Negotiations, dealing with conflict, directing and motivating, developing people, dealing with performance issues,
Setting and living principles and values	→	Applying the fundamental principles, needing others, sensitivity to people
Growth of self and others	→	Work/life balance, recognising personal limits and blind spots, recognising and seizing opportunities

Decades of empirical evidence shows that that training is a minor element in developing leaders and that the key to leadership ability is experience, and first and foremost challenging experiences. Experience can teach lessons that might, over time, produce effective leaders. This approach acknowledges that leaders come with different personalities and styles but that despite these differences they can be equally effective if they are able to meet the demands of their specific context. However, experience does not guarantee learning. Alongside experience, a programme of personal reflection will support learning and most of us need assistance from an elder, a mentor, a coach, or peers with this reflection. Experience without reflection may mean that the individual fails to learn the lessons offered. It is notable that designing or identifying challenging experiences did not feature prominently in the suggestions put forward by interviewees. Potential powerful development experiences for branch leaders include

24 Nohria, Nitin, and Rakesh Khurana, eds. *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*. Harvard Business Press, 2010.

early work experiences, first supervisory role, special projects, taking on greater responsibility, headquarter posting, scaling up a branch for an operation, collaborating with other organisations, good and bad managers, traumatic events, mistakes, difficult subordinates, visits to other branches and to other National Societies, culture shock, and courses and programmes. From this list one can see that developmental experiences are often serendipitous but can in some instances be programmed (e.g., headquarter posting, special projects).

## National Culture and leadership development

National culture refers to cognitive systems and behaviours that are shared as a result of individuals' common experiences. Leaders are socialised into and internalise the cultural values and practices of the culture they grow up in. Over time they learn desirable and undesirable modes of behaviours. There is evidence for example that the level of reliance on formal rules and supervisors for guidance depends on culture. A leader in a high-power distance culture is likely to act more autocratically because any other type of behaviour may be deemed ineffective by their supervisor or those outside the organisation. Participatory leadership may be more effective in societies that have more egalitarian cultures. Bureaucratic leadership is viewed as contributing to outstanding leadership in cultures that highly value uncertainty avoidance power distance and institutional collectivism.

There are dimensions of leadership that have been shown to be desired across all cultures and others that are contingent on culture. To succeed, leadership development initiatives need to consider and acknowledge the wide range of culturally endorsed dimensions. The primary leadership factors that have been found to be endorsed across many cultures are integrity, inspirational, performance oriented, visionary, team oriented. The refuted dimensions are malevolent and self-protective. The leadership dimensions that are contingent on culture have been found to include face saving, autonomous, bureaucratic, internally competitive, status conscious, humane and self-sacrificial.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How can more systematic and evidence-based leadership development interventions support branch development?
- What challenging experiences can we offer branch leaders, within and outside the Movement, to support their development? What processes are in place to support branch leaders to reflect and learn from challenging experiences?
- How can mentoring initiatives be usefully applied to branches within and across National Societies? How can National Societies be supported to build cultures which support coaching as a management style as well as a development intervention?
- How can targeted and sustainable leadership development initiatives at each level in our system address change resistant leadership?
- How can research on the endorsed and contingent dimensions of leadership inform our leadership development interventions?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support National Societies to design evidence-based leadership development programmes that include using experiences to "form" branch leaders
- Consider endorsed and contingent dimensions of leadership when designing branch development guidance material

## Branch performance standards are a useful tool



*“Every context should have their own detailed criteria for a strong branch based on needs of the community and the needs of the National Society. Some branches should be just prepared. In some contexts, there is no possibility for longer term development and sustainability of all branches. How can a National Society with 600 branches make all its branches strong?”*

*“We had the minimum that we would like to have in each branch, two permanent social activities, responding to local needs in that sense, recognition of the RC and visibility will be improved giving us ability in order to raise more resources from local authorities.”*

In the Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA), a strong branch is referred to as “a branch that has the capacity to deliver services to vulnerable people for as long as these are needed”.<sup>25</sup> The concept ‘strong branch’ can be considered from multiple perspectives. Putting in place characteristics that define strong front line and intermediary branches can serve as an aspirational goal for branches. Burundi, Mongolia and Georgia for example, have had such performance indicators in place for several years and confirm their usefulness. BOCA provides its own guidance on branch performance along a continuum of performance and encourages planning for working towards higher levels of performance. The Safer Access Framework also offers insights on performance standards. The assessment can be the basis for the creation of locally customised branch standards of performance related to acceptance, access and safety and security. In some National Societies, branches are accredited based on a set of statutory requirements. Constitutional revision processes can therefore also be useful for reformulating the minimum requirements and standards for branches.

In fragile and insecure contexts, and in contexts of extreme poverty the highest standards of branch performance may be unachievable and may act as a demotivating force for a branch. In such instances a more pragmatic approach may be to work on the identification of minimum readiness or response capacities. Therefore, the term ‘strong branch’ may need to be understood in relative terms, a strong branch in one context may represent a set of minimum capacities whilst in another they may represent the highest standards. It must be up to each National Society to determine which approach is most suitable to its context.

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25 IFRC. 2016. BOCA toolkit facilitators notes



## KEY QUESTIONS

- What is a strong branch?
- How do National Societies and their branches adapt self-assessment tools available from Movement actors into localised branch performance standards?
- How can IFRC service delivery standards, for example around gender and diversity and community engagement and participation, also inform branch standards?
- How do constitutional requirements related to branches, as described in National Society statutes and the IFRC 2018 guidance on Statutes, inform branch standards?
- How can statutory revisions be useful for defining branch standards?
- What minimum standards need to be in place at each level of our system to support branch development?

## RECOMMENDATION

- Share branch models and standards developed by National Societies around the world
- Develop guidance on development branch standards and integrate into broader package of support for branch development



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## Developing the mechanisms, skills and emotional maturity for collaboration



*“The branches need the headquarters and the headquarters needs branches.”*

*“We had a stagnant period for 10 years, branches were waiting for permission, we have flipped this on its head and turned the culture into an enabling one. They don't ask “can we do this?”. They ask “How can we do this?”*

Developing the mechanisms, skills and emotional maturity for successful collaboration requires investment in people and processes.

National Societies and their branches are created and sustained through internal and external relationships. The purpose of branches calls for collaboration with their headquarters, communities, other branches, a range of civil society, private and public sector organisations, and in some cases international partners. Branches combine their competencies with those of others to address needs in their communities. Therefore, it is different competencies, or difference, that brings branches together with others. However, working with difference is not simple. This is because branches need to build relationships while considering their own interests and needs. They must build a positive emotional climate that fosters collaboration while also bringing differences to the table. Too much focus on positive relationships can be at the expense of representing their interests, while too strong a focus on interests makes it difficult to build trust. Overlaid with difference is interpersonal power; a feature of all relationships which can be used for harm or good.

So working together is a challenge. The key to successful collaboration is the quality of the relationships and this is characterised by the way difference is explored, recognised, and acknowledged. It is also influenced by the capacity of individuals to recognise the power they hold, to know when to exercise power over, or to empower, and to always use power in line with the principles and values of the Movement.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- What tools do we have to develop the self-awareness and relational skills of our people at each level in the system? How can mentoring and coaching initiatives support the development of self-awareness?
- Should IFRC Governance Guidelines be strengthened to incorporate a section on relational dynamics, acknowledging that they affect every aspect of an organisation and its work?
- How can governance orientation and governance renewal cycles challenge change resistant leadership?

### RECOMMENDATION

- Further develop mentoring and coaching initiatives to support the development of self-awareness and relational skills in branch leaders and branch development practitioners
- Update the governance guidelines to incorporate a section on relational dynamics
- Ensure strong governance systems are in place for appropriate renewal cycles







## Findings – Movement level

### Branch development in sensitive and insecure contexts



*“This conflict is impacting the development of branches. Right now, the headquarters and branch relationship is day to day operations but not strategic. It is challenging for headquarters to visit the branches and some are not accessible. The conflict is quite complex. You see branch leadership changing because of the pressure.”*

*“Expectations are huge. There are large needs and so the National Society is in this kind of reactive mode to respond to everything. This is more evident at branch level because branches are so influenced by local authorities. Branch goes into a cycle where asked to respond to things that government sees as important, but the branch does not have capacity, so performance poor, then are perceived to not be performing. Branches feel the pressure more, the blame more, because right there. Branches feel more accountable to local authorities than hq. Add the conflict element...the branches and hq are affected by the political situation and this impacts the relationships.”*

#### **Branch development in sensitive and insecure contexts is immensely challenging.**

The more complex and widespread the conflict the more challenging branch development becomes. The many issues that branches face during “peace” time are present and overlaid with rapid scale-ups in activity, complicated political dynamics, insecurity, and the specificities of foreign aid in conflict contexts. When disaster strikes, alongside conflict, this adds further complexity. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has required that National Societies and their partners operating in insecure contexts to introduce adapted operational protocols. Because the characteristics of conflict often differ between locations a highly localised approach to supporting branch operational capacity building and development is required.

#### **The importance of preparedness in time of peace**

The challenges of carrying out branch development during conflict highlights the critical importance of preparedness ‘in times of peace’. Branches, no matter how small in scale, that are well positioned in peace times, well recognised as community responders and respected as principled humanitarians, are much more likely to be accepted by communities and to successfully negotiate access during conflict.

#### **Conflict challenges the independence of branches**

When a branch performs well in-service delivery during conflict (e.g., Syrian Arab Red Crescent ambulance service<sup>26</sup>) there is greater trust in the branch and more independence from government and/or other parties to the conflict. However, conflict often challenges the independence of branches and their headquarters and the very unity of the National Society. If the country is divided along conflict lines it can be difficult for branches to travel and even communicate with their headquarters. Branches and headquarters may represent different ethnic groups, making communication more difficult. Consequently, branches may find it difficult to provide assistance to groups that are aligned to certain parties to the conflict.

<sup>26</sup> In many communities the government ambulance service had to stop operating as communities would not provide access but SARC ambulances kept operating, even across conflict lines.

## Security and safety should be paramount

The security and safety of volunteers should be paramount but often this is not the case. Branch volunteers and employees work under enormously stressful conditions, suffering injury, psychological trauma and sometimes death. As a result, in some NS, the turnover of branch volunteers are high. Most volunteers engaged in conflict operations are paid for their time, however volunteering opportunities are not equally available to all. The differentiated opportunities to volunteer and differences in remuneration between branch volunteers and volunteers working for Movement partners can feed into local inequalities. This undermines volunteer well-being and safety and erodes traditional volunteering practices. IFRC and CRC's study on National Society Development in situations of conflict and protracted crisis (2020) states that the dominant approach in conflict contexts appears to be one where volunteers are directed to undertake certain tasks with little participation in the design of activities. That study puts forward a number of recommendations including: that volunteers should be seen as active humanitarians rather than passive implementers; that volunteering practices should consider the longer term impact on local volunteering traditions; that processes be put in place to ensure that volunteer voices are heard and their concerns acted on; that effective psychosocial support and insurance for volunteers be standard practice in every operation; and that work be undertaken with branches to encourage non-remunerated, branch/volunteer-led activities.

## Prioritising short-term operational capacity but with an eye on the longer term

Branch development is not automatically possible or desirable at specific time points in conflict. However not prioritising branch development impacts humanitarian access, the safety and security of volunteers and employees and the risk of the branch collapsing once the crisis and international support ends. In such contexts branch development needs to be adapted to political realities. Certain topics may need to be left unsaid and the entry points for branch development may be different. Focusing on the capacity of branches to respond with acceptance, access and safety and security must be the priority but must also be viewed through a longer-term development lens.<sup>27</sup>

When some stabilisation returns, this offers the National Society and its branches the opportunity to plan beyond the day-to-day response. Stabilisation often means a reduction in international presence and financing. This ushers in new challenges for National Societies and their branches including a scaling down of conflict related activities and the need to identify what capacity and activities should be sustained for recovery and beyond. It may also mean changing relationships between headquarters and branches. As international support drops, the role that headquarters played in directing and coordinating international assistance will be diminished and a focus on supporting branches to realign their capacities and services, including transferring responsibilities back to government where appropriate, through targeted development interventions will become more central. If this is not prioritised branches exhausted from the response and with diminishing resources may spiral into decline. Another element is managing the changing nature of volunteering. Volunteers who have been involved in acute response activities need to be supported to transition to less acute activities. It also highlights improvement in approaches by not solely focusing on the operational capacities of branches but also on their longer-term positioning.

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<sup>27</sup> The Safer Access Framework (SAF) aims to strengthen a branch's ability to provide humanitarian services safely. Together, the eight elements of the SAF contribute to branch development by drawing attention to context-specific weaknesses, through the lens of acceptance, access and safety and security. This approach, when combined with technical capacity-building such as in first aid or the management of human remains, is orientated to strengthening a branch's emergency preparedness.



## KEY QUESTIONS

- How can self-assessment tools available within our network be merged, synergised at branch level?
- How can we transition from the terminology of paid volunteers to terminology that does not undermine local volunteering traditions?
- How can IFRC and the wider network develop a stronger base of branch development advisers to be deployed in insecure and fragile contexts?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct action research and learning to deepen understanding of branch development in insecure and fragile context and further consider develop case studies that present best practice approaches to supporting branch development in insecure and fragile contexts.
- Include guidance for branch development in insecure and fragile contexts as part of the branch development support package. IFRC-ICRC report on National Society Development in situations of conflict offers a much deeper overview of the challenges of working in these contexts and a set of valuable recommendations that must be considered when developing the branch development support package.





We came to implement this project in a branch that was already existing and was delivering a lot of activities in the community. It was an extremely rural area and very impoverished, our project was quite large, it provided a lot of funding and we gave per diems to the volunteers. The project brought a lot of good to the community and was able to achieve a lot but when we went back 6 months after the project had finished, the branch was doing almost no activities anymore. When we asked ‘why’ the response was that they didn’t have any money or resources to do anything and couldn’t get people to volunteer. But when we looked at it, prior to our implementing our project there were a lot of activities going on, with lots of volunteers, they just mobilised resources from within their own community, getting by with what they had. Our project upset that dynamic and seemed to have reduced their resilience in the long run as a result.

## Working collectively for branch development

### What is stopping Movement actors from supporting more sustainable locally-led action?

Many of the long-standing concerns about the way we organise ourselves internationally were raised by interviewees. National Societies and their branches are still perceived as a local platform through which Movement or other global humanitarian partners reach affected or vulnerable people. Whereas this is appropriate in some cases, particularly in situations of humanitarian crisis, it should not be a National Society's primary function. Localising humanitarian reach is not the same as localising sustainable humanitarian actions. It follows that branch development continues to be perceived by some as a technical support element to enhance capacities for the delivery of international aid. Alignment to such approaches is at the expense of nurturing locally focused voluntarism that builds permanent humanitarian presence in communities. Host National Societies themselves identify with this role, seeing themselves as cultural mediators of international aid and viewing localisation as a way to strengthen their mediation role.

There are positive signs that mindsets are shifting, however as highlighted in Strategy 2030, operating models that rely heavily on international aid financing continue to thwart behaviour change. The work undertaken over the last two decades to articulate a more sustainable vision of Movement cooperation has influenced conversations across many parts of our network, from the very local to the global level. Many host National Societies are investing in their domestic positioning- including through constitutional revisions, better leveraging their auxiliary roles at each level, better promoting their work and exploring income generation avenues- with the aim of bringing about a better balance between their portfolio of international and local support.

#### KEY QUESTIONS

- What is our imperative and will for change?
- What are the different types of resources that branches can draw on to develop themselves? Where can they be found? Which type of resourcing is more supportive of locally-led action?
- What non-financial resources can National Societies draw on to support branch development?
- How can National Societies be encouraged to identify and improve knowledge management across their own branch network?
- What are effective ways of transitioning to a better balance between domestic and foreign funding for branch development?

## Nurturing sustainable volunteering models



*“Volunteering...means you are attached to a programme six hours a day and you get a small payment for that and this means cheap labour. This is why it is important to have a connection to a branch so that there is something else in it for volunteers.”*

*“Here if no per diem people don’t want to volunteer. Just participating in a workshop requires a per diem and leaders receive more than other participants...this creates imbalance. What they did in that NS is to develop a volunteering policy. They specified what it means to be a volunteer...and you cannot be chosen for work roles if you don’t do your volunteering for the RC....We are part of the problem; we use volunteers while not doing volunteer work. They are loading and unloading materials for a full day. This should be paid work. There needs to be a common policy between partners.”*

*“We don’t like to admit it but all volunteers are paid to do what they do in this operation.”*

Volunteer action has been part of the Movement for over 150 years. However, the persistent practice of employing volunteers as low-paid casual labour is undermining community volunteering and brings into question claims that volunteering has a positive impact on development.

Interviewees highlighted many of the same remuneration concerns raised in the IFRC’s Global Report on Volunteering (GVR; 2018), including exploitative work practices; the hierarchies created when volunteers are remunerated by aid projects but not when volunteering on branch activities, or when more mobile volunteers have better access to paid volunteering than those who cannot afford the costs associated with volunteering; and the lack of strategies for supporting volunteers who come from the very communities experiencing inequality and marginalisation. These practices undermine long-term volunteering, and by exacerbating inequalities in communities may negatively impact the image of the branch and increase security risks. The Global Volunteering Report and associated research<sup>28</sup>, recommends exploring volunteer remuneration practices through a broader livelihoods lens, where volunteer remuneration, if organised appropriately, in a way that supports inclusion and reduces inequalities, can have a positive impact on individual well-being and communities. In this framework remuneration is not conceptualised as a proxy for a salary but located within an understanding of the way that promoting volunteering can support livelihood strategies.

28 Baillie Smith, M., Fadel, B., O’Loughlen, A. et al. Volunteering Hierarchies in the Global South: Remuneration and Livelihoods. *Voluntas* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00254-1>









*RC branches are judged as professional organizations although they are volunteer based.*

## A growing dilemma

The move toward professionalisation is generating a growing dilemma for the IFRC. On the one hand we publicise our local presence and capabilities, embodied in our volunteers, on the other National Societies face enormous pressures to deliver results as if they were a large corporation. Measuring up to standards and demonstrating accountability is not always consistent with the realities of locally-led volunteer action and the more organic and fluid ways in which this action emerges. In many humanitarian operations, in order to deliver results, the majority of our volunteers are paid. Sooner, rather than later, the IFRC must address this tension and explore what it means for its dominant narratives and ways of operating.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How can we transition from the terminology of 'paid volunteers' to terminology that does not undermine local volunteering traditions (e.g., community mobilisers)?
- How can we address the growing dilemma between our dominant narratives on volunteering and the realities of our industry?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage National Societies and branches in pilots that conceptualise and organise volunteering through a livelihoods lens, share lessons more broadly
- Develop alternative terminology for paid work undertaken by volunteers
- Engage National Societies and funders in conversations on the tensions between efficiency and volunteer-led humanitarian action and development

## Developing branch development competencies



*“NSD and branch development are essential and represent a specific expertise, like engineering. We cannot just put in a budget line for branch development and then hope for the best.”*

*“Branch development is a challenging process, but branch development support is missing in the RC. BOCA is just a basic step...ok so what is next? There are bits and pieces where you can contact IFRC but nowhere to ask for support when it comes to full branch development process. So the people doing branch development have nowhere to go. The IFRC learning platform, there is information on everything, but what about branch development?”*

### What competencies are required to support branch development and the associated change?<sup>29</sup>

At the heart of branch development is change. Change in beliefs, mindsets, ways of working and relating. When National Societies and their branches are considering change, the following questions are often useful:

- Why do we want to change?
- Will there be resistance, and, if so, where from? How can we gain commitment? Are we ready for change?
- Who will manage the change process? Do they have the appropriate knowledge and skills?
- Do we need external support to advise us?

Each human being processes change in a different way. And many tend to resist it and, if possible, return to the state before the change, remaining in their comfort zone. It is for this reason that any person leading and supporting branch development must be literate in change processes.

Whether we are dealing with change at the individual, group or organisational level, whether we perceive change as incremental or continuous, and whatever perspective we are viewing it from, change has to be managed: someone or some people have to take responsibility for supporting change. Whether these people are executives, team leaders, or team members, there is usually an individual or small group who bears the responsibility of being the change agent(s). Such individuals are referred to by a variety of titles –change champion, change team, project manager or project team.

Some National Societies will have skilled organisational development and change practitioners whilst others may need to bring in support for change. The knowledge and skills useful for development and change work include:

- Organisation behaviour such as culture, interpersonal relations, power and politics, leadership, goal setting, conflict and ethics
- Individual psychology including learning theory and motivation theory
- Management and organisational theory including planning, leading, problems solving, decision making, organisational structure, system dynamics
- Theories and models for change

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<sup>29</sup> IFRC's National Societies Development and Volunteering Unit is updating its understanding of the competencies required for supporting National Society Development and developing recommendations on how to increase competencies in this area within the Secretariat and the wider network.

A note on resistance and change. Resistance to change is not always wrong and can play a constructive role in the change process. It is unwise to assume that all those involved in branches share the same interests. Those who initiate and manage change are not neutral parties and may not be acting in the best interests of the National Society, the branch and/or its stakeholders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- As IFRC is planned to look into NSD Competencies, such exercise is expected to include the above points for consideration

### The BOCA Hubs

There was a mix of excitement, anticipation and disappointment expressed around the BOCA hubs. The Bangladesh Red Crescent hosted BOCA hub has been supporting BOCA processes primarily in the Asia Pacific region and hosts a database on BOCA progress across branches. Few interviewees expressed the need for clarity in how to access BOCA hub support. Others felt the hubs were too focused on structures and solely on BOCA tools rather than wider Branch Development approach and highlighted the need for developing agile communities of practice around branch development.



## The tools and processes that support branch development are not enough



*“Branch development is missing in the RC! BOCA is just a basic step, ok, so what is next? We have not found our clear way yet. So having a hub, something about branch development within the Movement would have been crucial. There are bits and pieces where you can contact IFRC but nowhere to ask for support when it comes to branch development. We want someone to ask us “So you had the BOCA, so what did you discover? What did you try? What worked and what did not work?” if you are thinking of an idea, we want to be able to contact someone to receive advice. Branch development is a challenging process! So the people doing branch development have nowhere to go. The IFRC learning platform, information on everything, but little on branch development!”*

*“We want a framework that gives a clear picture on how a branch can be developed. What would it look like? Our roles and responsibilities as a NS? HQ and branch level? How to capacitate the offices and the branch board, the existing structure actually cascading down to the community level and to the volunteers. Also, resource mobilisation, how branches are able to mobilise resources using low-cost low-tech activities. More around fundraising might be proposal writing, sourcing funds from other existing sources but not overstepping the boundary, and also how our auxiliary role plays at the provincial level. Those kinds of guidelines.”*

Existing tools and processes that were mentioned as helpful for branch development are listed below. In some contexts, intermediary branches and local branches had little or no knowledge of these tools and processes. There were reports of SAF and BOCA initiatives not resulting in the expected follow-on planning development initiatives. Branch readiness for change, and follow-up and support from headquarters were two commonly stated reasons for this scenario. Some interviewees, primarily partners, suggested that efforts should be made to develop a more integrative approach to branch development which would include integrating the Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment, the Safer Access Framework and the Preparedness for Effective Response approach however others, primarily NSs, suggest that a clearer communication on difference and commonality of each tools will allow a better selection (or in some cases a merging of tools) to respond to the need and context. Additionally interviews highlighted that for National Societies that would like to focus on their preparedness for response, PER is a useful process, but it does not provide a holistic national society development picture and lacks the NHQ and its branch to look into long-term and holistic organisational development hence the need to use other tools such as BOCA when considering a holistic development.

- **Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification process (OCAC).** Phase 1 pays particular attention to coherence within a National Society, for example in consolidating financial information or in ensuring dissemination of policy and process across the organisation.<sup>30</sup>
- **Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA).** BOCA is a self-assessment tool for individual branches, which is adapted by the National Society to in-country realities. The analysis helps individual branches to develop but also, as more branches carry out the self-assessment, informs national branch development policy and strategy.<sup>31</sup>

30 IFRC. OCAC

31 IFRC. BOCA.



- **Statutes revision.** The process of developing and / or revising National Society statutes can be a key process in defining roles and relationships within the branch network.<sup>32</sup>
- **Safer Access Framework (SAF).** SAF is part of the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack which is designed to support National Societies in fulfilling their humanitarian mandate and roles, particularly when working in sensitive and insecure contexts. The eight recommended actions and measures have been shown to increase acceptance, access and safety and security to people in need.<sup>33</sup>
- **Preparedness for Effective Response (PER)** is a cyclical approach designed to empower National Societies to become more creative and innovative in their disaster management actions. The PER approach provides a basis for understanding, developing and implementing continuity of operations and services within a National Society to deliver services to communities, accountability to donors, beneficiaries and partners in face of disasters and crises.<sup>34</sup>
- **Leadership development.** Formal and informal leadership are critical to the development of a branch, and the National Society more generally. A practical leadership development programme for current and future leaders is important to long-term National Society sustainability.
- **Peer learning and support** are important dynamics in promoting the development of individual branches. Cooperation and healthy competition between branches help new ideas to move through the network.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- Does the IFRC have the people with the necessary competencies required to support branch development? If not does it need to upskill a pool of practitioners or will it bring it those skills from outside?
- Could the role of BOCA support entities (such as BOCA hubs) remain focused on BOCA or on wider support to branch development and sharing of lessons and good practices? And provide a broader menu of support to branch development practitioners?
- How can we better support National Societies and their branches to transform vulnerability assessments, and self-assessment tools available within the network into an integrated locally customised branch assessment and development tool?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure National Societies and their branches have access to the necessary organisational development and change management knowledge, skills and support to effectively plan and implement branch development initiatives
- Develop an integrated framework for branch development
- Create visuals that show the relationships between different tools and processes and include in the package of branch development support materials and some examples on how customisations of these tools are done at local level.

32 IFRC. (2018). Guidance for National Society Statutes. Accessed via <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/11/Adopted-Guidance-for-National-Society-Statutes-ENGLISH-11-October-2018.pdf>

33 ICRC. Safer Access A guide for All National Societies accessed via [https://saferaccess.icrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Safer\\_Access-A-Guide-For-All-National-Societies.pdf](https://saferaccess.icrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Safer_Access-A-Guide-For-All-National-Societies.pdf)

34 IFRC. National Society Preparedness for Effective Response. [https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/what-we-do-disaster-and-crisis-national-society-preparedness-effective-response/#:~:text=Preparedness%20for%20Effective%20Response%20\(PER,national%20and%20global%20response%20systems](https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/what-we-do-disaster-and-crisis-national-society-preparedness-effective-response/#:~:text=Preparedness%20for%20Effective%20Response%20(PER,national%20and%20global%20response%20systems).



*After BOCA there is no mechanism how HQ monitors all the branches that have done BOCA. The only traditional way is to send a template and ask for progress. Not really at the point where they sit with the 30 provinces and tell us what support you need from us post BOCA. This is not yet in place within PMI. So instead national level goes to the province level who did the BOCA and do the monitoring and this is how they found that support needed and gaps. So PMI Still developing in this area.*

## Integrating BOCA and other relevant assessment tools within a wider branch development framework

Interviewees said that BOCA has been interpreted by some National Societies as the start and finish of branch development rather than as one step in the process. This perception or misperception was seen to be constraining progress on branch development in some contexts. Branches are challenged to leverage the analysis from BOCA into realistic and longer-term plans for development. Further support to the planning that follows BOCA is important, and to the development of activity proposals that seek support from partners. Additionally, some branches struggle with the operationalisation of their plans and therefore accompaniment to that process must also be considered. In order to overcome this issue one National Society reported recruiting independent local advisers to provide support to branches in the planning and operationalisation of their plans.

Earlier mentioned report on “Approaching National Society Development in situations of conflict and protracted crisis (2020)” raises similar concerns in relation to the Safer Access Framework, in that the assessment is often not followed by action and becomes an end in itself rather than one step in a longer development journey.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How can we support National Societies and their branches to transform vulnerability assessments, BOCA and other relevant assessment tools into an integrated locally customised branch assessment and development tool?
- How can we better support branches to move from assessment to planning and operationalisation?
- How can online branch to branch collaboration support branches to cross the thresholds from assessment, to planning and then action?

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Embed BOCA and other relevant branch assessment tools within a wider branch development framework and guidance materials and share examples on how these assessment tools could be used as part of the wider and long-term Branch development process.



*I communicate frequently with my friends from different branches on a casual basis and picking all the ideas they share. However on an official level, we are not supported for this because we have communication protocols we need to adhere to. Every communication has to go through the National Headquarter centrally and we cannot communicate as a distributed network*

## A distributed network: connected branches engaged in global communities of practice

### The value of connection

Branch to branch learning is highly effective, often more effective than traditional training approaches. The rapid transition to digital work across many National Societies has demonstrated the potential to establish a highly connected branch network, with amplified Member to Member, volunteer to volunteer, youth to youth collaboration enabled through new technology.

Connecting a branch within and between National Societies, and with other actors extends the value of our branch network by:

- sharing knowledge,
- solving problems,
- creating new ideas,
- detecting and making use of new opportunities,
- accessing flows of resources. \*

There are many ways branch Members, volunteers/youth and employees connect with others. These connections are presented below under four categories (figure 6). Valuing, encouraging, and nurturing these formal and informal connections are important to the success of a branch. Reducing bureaucracy where it is possible or acceptable, encouraging self-organisation, and direct peer to peer engagement locally, nationally, regionally and internationally, enables creativity, innovation and adaptability. Additionally, a branch that is digitally connected may develop greater flexibility (as witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic) and can better access the knowledge, communities, capabilities and resource opportunities that are available virtually.

A note of caution, not all connections are positive. For example, increasing dependence on technology brings new risks, including potentially unforeseen cyber and digital threats. Educating branch people and establishing partnerships that can help accelerate digital learning and capacities will reduce this risk.

**Figure 6** *The many ways branches can connect*

TYPE OF CONNECTIONS				
Associations	Membership in groups	Participation in events		
Social relations	Role-based relations e.g., branch volunteer and the volunteer coordinator	Family relations		
Interactions	Talking with someone, video conferencing	Sending an email or text message to someone	Collaborating on an activity, discussion boards, online forums	Having coffee or lunch with someone
Flows	Information	Funds	Goods	Services



## Branches adapting to the digital world



*“Branches felt more valued by being connected to HQ via zoom meetings. Now also more flexibility for board members who cannot participate physically can join board meetings on zoom.”*

*“Technology in our branch did not exist for many years. We had old PC that did not work well. With the help of donors, we managed to have a laptop, internet. Face to face has been priority for our branch but now with the pandemic we are starting to communicate virtually and so this is new for us.”*

*“Learning digital skills can be intimidating for many of our Members. We are implementing a digital mentor training programme in partnership with other organisations. A number of our people will be trained as Digital Mentors and will provide our Members with advice and support in better understanding and navigating the online world. Technology provides a powerful opportunity when people can't meet face to face.”*

The pandemic has shown us what is possible in terms of adapting to a digital world; how technology can facilitate the connection of branches to the wider Movement and beyond and the enormous knowledge and resources contained there.

The rapid transition to digital technologies driven by the pandemic has impacted many branches. Interviewees said that it is important to reflect on what digital technologies have offered branches and how we can build on this going forward. Effective integration of technology has been critical for National Societies and their branches to communicate, plan and implement activities under pandemic travel restrictions. Many branches have adapted to remote work using virtual technology to communicate internally, with their headquarters, partners, the people they serve, to access information and training and to support the delivery of services. Some National Societies have used digital technologies to do business as usual (e.g., board meetings) whilst others have experimented with new ideas (e.g., delivering training for volunteers online or launching apps to attract new volunteers).

There have been some unexpected benefits. National Societies reported cost savings related to meeting online, greater participation of branches in decision making, and better attendance in general meetings and board meetings. In some contexts, access to virtual technology has demonstrated the great opportunities offered by social media, websites and other digital tools to promote the work of branches, to communicate with supporters, and to attract more diverse Members, volunteers and youth.

However, access to computing devices and the internet is uneven across National Societies and branches. Some branches have no access to a computing device, some branch Members and Volunteer have high speed internet at home, and many are somewhere in the middle. These differences in access are referred to as the digital divide and are often due to socio-economic, geographic and demographic factors.<sup>35</sup> Even in high access countries, how much branches transition to digital technology will also be dependent on the profile of their people. Branches with a high proportion of younger people (i.e., digital natives) will find it easier to transition to digital approaches than branches with mostly older adults (i.e., digital migrants).

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<sup>35</sup> Infrastructure needed for high-speed internet is expensive and not all countries can afford such an investment. Small island nations often have less connections to the Internet than large land-locked nations. Some States restrict access to the internet. For example, in Norway, 96% of the population used the Internet in 2016. In Somalia, the percentage was 2%. In 2019, it took 30hrs, 1 minute and 40 seconds to download a 5GB movie in Yemen. In Taiwan it took 8 minutes.

## Partnering with others to connect branches



*“Health practitioners in primary care clinics in Sub-Saharan and South Asian contexts have been able to connect to our online programme. The digital platform is very significantly scaleable, cohorts of thousands are possible at minimal marginal costs. In addition to addressing real challenges through peer support, the approach builds digital literacy, and surfaces individuals with capacity to lead. It also generates significant volumes of user-generated case material (the Ambulance! project generated over 500 case studies of violence against healthcare workers – material not otherwise available to ICRC and others), which allied to participant data provides significant scope for analysis.”*

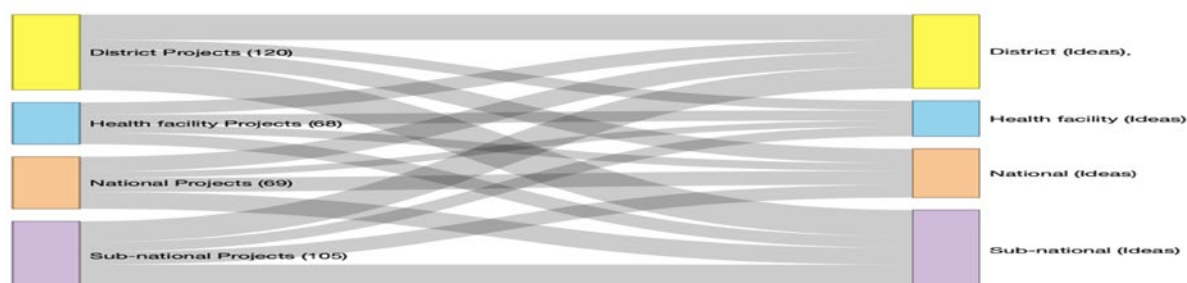
The Geneva Learning Foundation, has worked with large organisations, including WHO and the Gates Foundation amongst others, to deliver online programmes at scale (1000 plus participants) with demonstrable impact beyond knowledge retention. The Foundation’s approach connects peers on ‘live’ work projects and facilitates peer review of ideas and action plans. As the programme progresses a large repository of ideas and practices is created and shared with participants and participating organisations. Data analysis (figures 7 and 8 below) by an independent research institute specialising in learning analytics powerfully demonstrates how ideas and practices shared in the ‘Ideas Engine’ have been incorporated into action plans of participants working at different organisational levels, and in different countries.

**Figure 7** Mapping of peer citations in participant action plans

**Figure 1: Mapping of peer citations in participant action plans:**



**Figure 2: Peer citations between organizational levels in participant action plans**

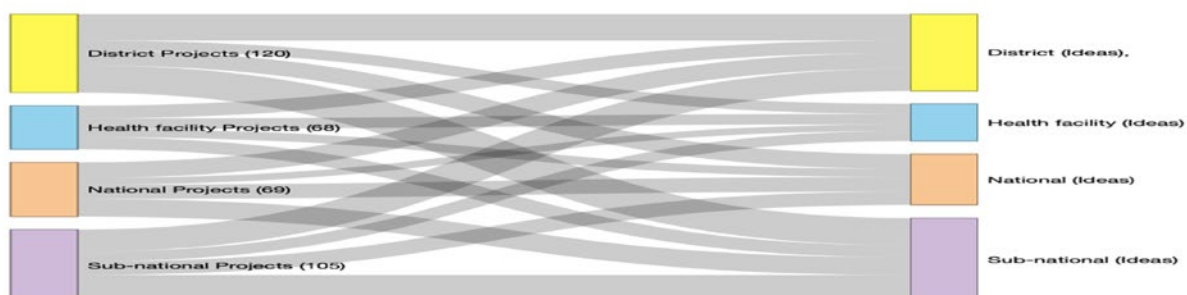


**Figure 8** Peer citations between organisational levels in participant action plans

**Figure 1: Mapping of peer citations in participant action plans:**



**Figure 2: Peer citations between organizational levels in participant action plans**



## KEY QUESTIONS

- How can we build digital branch capability? What would a digital adaptation programme for branches look like? How can we equitably bring our branch network through a digital transformation journey?
- How can youth and other digitally literate volunteers support this adaptation?
- How can we ensure that such initiatives foster locally meaningful forms of digital engagement?
- How can branches connect to digitally empowered forms of humanitarianism?
- How can branches support the promotion of digital inclusion in their communities?
- Technology is playing a greater role in volunteering, are we developing these approaches fast enough?
- Much of the cutting-edge work on technology is happening outside the RC, what partnerships will be necessary to support adaptation at branch level? What alliances must we form outside the Movement, with actors that have the knowhow, to help us connect branches and their people at scale?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Branches can usefully partner with others to support the development of digital literacy in their Members, volunteers, youth and beneficiary groups
- Branches can work towards increasing their web presence, internet connectivity, and use of new media to promote their work and engage volunteers and supporters
- Branches must educate themselves on data protection best practices
- Explore partnerships with organisations like the Geneva Learning Foundation. Organise a pilot programme for branches related to branch development and the design and delivery of locally-led services.





**The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers**. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.