



Community members in Llano del Río collecting safe water. Aug 2025.

Appeal: <b>MDRPA021</b>	Total DREF Allocation: <b>CHF 349,720</b>	Crisis Category: <b>Yellow</b>	Hazard: <b>Biological Emergency</b>
Glide Number: -	People Affected: <b>106,000 people</b>	People Targeted: <b>30,000 people</b>	People Assisted: <b>30,740 people</b>
Event Onset: <b>Sudden</b>	Operation Start Date: <b>24-06-2025</b>	Operational End Date: <b>30-11-2025</b>	Total Operating Timeframe: <b>5 months</b>
Targeted Regions: <b>Los Santos, Herrera</b>			

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# Description of the Event

PANAMA | DREF 2025

DRINKING WATER CRISIS

 Cruz Roja Panameña

 IFRC



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Targeted regions under this IFRC-DREF operation. Source: IFRC.

## Date of event

10-06-2025

## What happened, where and when?

Since late May 2025, the La Villa River — the main water source for the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos — experienced a critical situation due to severe contamination. Between 27 May and 6 June 2025, the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente) conducted field inspections in the La Villa and Estibaná river basins and identified at least 23 critical contamination points.

The main sources of pollution include pig farms, industrial discharges, and a municipal landfill in the district of Macaracas. These have contributed to the presence of animal fecal matter, sediments, and other solid waste in the river, significantly deteriorating water quality (1).

During the inspection — which covered 20 km of the La Villa River and 19 km of the Estibaná River — a substantial decline in both physical and biological water parameters was documented, posing a direct threat to public health and the well-being of local communities (2). In response to this environmental emergency, the National Government declared a state of emergency on June 10, through Resolution No. 69-25, covering both provinces. This measure led to the temporary suspension of water treatment plant operations due to high levels of turbidity and organic matter in the river (3).

The most affected districts are Chitré, Los Santos, Las Tablas, and Guararé, where thousands of people rely directly on the La Villa River for access to drinking water. The situation has generated growing concern among the population, which is now facing water supply restrictions and increased health risks.

While early mitigation measures were implemented to contain priority contamination sources and improve conditions in the river basin, disruptions and recovery actions continued throughout 2025, including additional interruptions linked to high sediment loads and the



launch of network disinfection measures in early November 2025. As a result, the impacts of the crisis extended beyond the initial emergency peak and continued to affect household coping capacity. In November 2025, MiAmbiente also strengthened watershed governance by updating and training nine La Villa sub-basin committees and initiating baseline work to support a detailed basin diagnostic under the Restoration and Sustainable Management Plan. (4)



Post-intervention CEA survey results, La Villa River response, Nov 2025.



RCSP water reservoir, La Villa, Los Santos, October 2025. RCSP



Cleaning of water reservoirs, Las Tablas, Los Santos, September 2025. RCSP



Household visit promoting safe water practices, Herrera, September 2025.. RCSP

## Scope and Scale

The water crisis in Panama's Azuero region affected the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos following contamination of the La Villa River, the main source of drinking water for both provinces. Elevated turbidity and organic pollutants were reported in raw water sources, which affected treatment processes and service continuity.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), an estimated 106,000 people depended on the La Villa River for drinking water. The river basin covered approximately 1,446 km<sup>2</sup>, reflecting the wide geographic footprint of the emergency. A total of 11 communities were affected, with the most severely impacted areas including Chitré, Las Tablas, Guararé, La Villa de Los Santos and Macaracas, as well as rural zones with limited infrastructure and higher vulnerability.

Operational impacts were reported across key water systems. The National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage Systems (IDAAN) temporarily suspended or adjusted operations due to water quality conditions, affecting several water treatment plants, including La Villa, Macaracas, Llano de Piedra and Chitré. During the emergency, IDAAN also reported that, despite plants operating at full capacity at different moments, raw water quality continued to show microbiological alterations outside regulatory standards, and water delivered through the public network in several localities was not considered fit for human consumption.

The Ministry of Health (MINSa) confirmed environmental and public health concerns associated with contamination, including the presence of hazardous microorganisms (including nematodes) and significant organic contamination linked to domestic wastewater,



agricultural runoff, and leachates from the municipal landfill in Macaracas. Contamination sources were reported to include pig farms, industrial discharges and the municipal landfill in Macaracas, contributing to animal faecal matter, sediments and other solid waste in the river. Rainfall events further dispersed contaminants, compounding the crisis.

The deterioration of water quality escalated the situation into a combined health, environmental and social emergency. The interruption and restriction of potable water affected households and institutions and increased risks of gastrointestinal diseases, parasitic infections and other waterborne illnesses, while also raising the cost and complexity of water treatment and increasing the need for sustained public risk communication. Agricultural livelihoods were also affected due to potential impacts on irrigation systems, with implications for local food production and food security in vulnerable communities.

As a preventive public health measure, the Ministry of Education (MEDUCA) suspended in-person classes in public and private schools across the districts of Los Santos, Guararé and Las Tablas as of 9 June, shifting to virtual modalities until safe water supply conditions were restored. Community life was also disrupted; for example, cultural events such as the Mañanita Sanjuanera in Chitré were cancelled due to water shortages.

By 30 November 2025, the water situation in Azuero remained fragile. While some mitigation actions were reported by authorities and operational parameters of treatment plants were intermittently stabilized, full recovery of raw water quality and distribution networks had not been achieved, and risks associated with microbiological contamination persisted. As a result, restrictions on direct human consumption remained in place in affected areas, and the provision of safe water through alternative sources continued to be required.

## Source Information

Source Name	Source Link
1. TVN – Water Crisis in Azuero	<a href="https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/falta-de-agua-azuero-turbiedad-río-la-villa-río-estibana-plantas-potabilizadoras-idaan_1_2193075.html">https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/falta-de-agua-azuero-turbiedad-río-la-villa-río-estibana-plantas-potabilizadoras-idaan_1_2193075.html</a>
2. National Government – Cabinet Council Declares State of Emergency in Herrera and Los Santos	<a href="https://www.presidencia.gob.pa/publicacion/consejo-de-gabinete-declara-estado-de-emergencia-en-herrera-y-los-santos">https://www.presidencia.gob.pa/publicacion/consejo-de-gabinete-declara-estado-de-emergencia-en-herrera-y-los-santos</a>
3. TVN – In-person classes suspended in three districts of Los Santos due to water crisis	<a href="https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/suspenden-clases-presenciales-tres-distritos-los-santos-tesis-del-agua_1_2193146.html">https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/suspenden-clases-presenciales-tres-distritos-los-santos-tesis-del-agua_1_2193146.html</a>
4. La Estrella de Panamá – Feces and Agrochemicals in the La Villa River	<a href="https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/heces-y-agroquimicos-en-río-la-villa-autoridades-responden-en-azuero-DI13396731">https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/heces-y-agroquimicos-en-río-la-villa-autoridades-responden-en-azuero-DI13396731</a>
5. MiAmbiente - Longer-term watershed governance measures	<a href="https://miambiente.gob.pa/miambiente-actualiza-comites-de-subcuenca-en-azuero-ante-la-emergencia-del-río-la-villa/">https://miambiente.gob.pa/miambiente-actualiza-comites-de-subcuenca-en-azuero-ante-la-emergencia-del-río-la-villa/</a>

## National Society Actions

<b>Have the National Society conducted any intervention additionally to those part of this DREF Operation?</b>	Yes
<b>Please provide a brief description of those additional activities</b>	<p>In response to this emergency, and in a complementary manner to the actions implemented under the IFRC-DREF operation, Red Cross Society of Panama carried out additional humanitarian support interventions with the direct participation of its staff and local volunteers.</p> <p>At the initial stage of the emergency, and prior to the establishment of alternative water supply mechanisms, volunteers also supported the distribution of bottled water, prioritizing households in particularly vulnerable situations.</p> <p>At the end of the DREF operation, through the Las Tablas branch, volunteers provided</p>



support in the cleaning and disinfection of household water storage tanks in affected communities. This measure served as a preventive action to reduce public health risks and improve the quality of stored water for domestic use.

In December 2025, Red Cross Society of Panama provided targeted support by installing and operating a water reservoir for three days to ensure access to safe water for 425 persons deprived of liberty in the district of Las Tablas, contributing to the continuity of basic services in an institutional setting with limited alternative supply options.

These actions were implemented in coordination with local authorities and complemented the ongoing institutional response by providing rapid community-based deployment capacity, trained volunteers, and territorial presence, enabling timely and targeted assistance while the main DREF interventions were being implemented and consolidated.

## IFRC Network Actions Related To The Current Event

<b>Secretariat</b>	<p>Red Cross Society of Panama received ongoing technical support from the IFRC Central America Country Cluster Delegation (CCD) to strengthen its response to this emergency. This support contributed to reinforcing operational planning, implementation follow-up and overall alignment with IFRC standards and requirements.</p> <p>In addition, the Regional Logistics Unit (RLU), based in Panama, was made available to support the operation by managing specific procurements with longer lead times, helping to ensure the timely availability of essential supplies.</p> <p>Red Cross Society of Panama also anticipated continued technical and administrative support from the IFRC Central America CCD throughout implementation and closure of the operation to ensure full compliance with the operational plan and IFRC procedures.</p>
<b>Participating National Societies</b>	<p>The Spanish Red Cross, in coordination with the Red Cross Society of Panama, issued a situation report to raise awareness and identify potential areas of support at the national level in response to the emergency. However, no additional operational or financial support from Spanish Red Cross was mobilized for this DREF operation.</p>

## ICRC Actions Related To The Current Event

No specific operational or financial support was received from the ICRC for this operation.

## Other Actors Actions Related To The Current Event

<b>Government has requested international assistance</b>	No
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<p><b>National authorities</b></p>	<p>Panama's national authorities implemented a range of measures to address the crisis triggered by contamination of the La Villa River. IDAAN temporarily suspended or adjusted operations at key water treatment plants in the Azuero region (including Roberto Reyna in Herrera and Rufina Alfaro in Los Santos) following anomalies detected in raw water quality, and subsequently advanced recovery actions such as network disinfection and reviews of distribution infrastructure (e.g., mapping and verification of networks, installation needs for valves and hydrants).</p> <p>At the outset of the emergency, the Government declared a state of emergency on 10 June 2025, enabling inter-institutional coordination and resource mobilization across Herrera and Los Santos. As part of immediate response measures, authorities coordinated the distribution of more than 1.1 million gallons of water using water tankers, wells and logistical vehicles, prioritizing essential services such as hospitals and health centres. Authorities also distributed bottled water at scale in both provinces.</p> <p>MiAmbiente strengthened environmental response actions by increasing monitoring (including hydrological measurements and water quality assessments) and advancing broader basin-management measures later in the year, including work with sub-basin committees as part of the basin restoration and sustainable management approach. In parallel, the Public Prosecutor's Office initiated investigations related to potential environmental offences, and SINAPROC provided logistical support for water distribution, recognizing bottled water as a temporary measure due to supply limitations and environmental considerations.</p>
<p><b>UN or other actors</b></p>	<p>On 13 June 2025, technical staff from the WASH sector of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were deployed to the area in coordination with the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), with the objective of providing technical guidance to stakeholders at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). At the time of issuing this final report, no other organization has reported actions in the framework of this emergency response.</p>

**Are there major coordination mechanism in place?**

The response to the water emergency in Panama's Azuero region was implemented through established inter-institutional coordination mechanisms at national, provincial and district levels, primarily through the Inter-institutional Emergency Operations Centre (EOC/COE) for the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, which was activated to address the contingency resulting from contamination of the La Villa River.

These coordination platforms brought together the main authorities and entities responsible for emergency management, including the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), the Ministry of Health (MINSAs), the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage Systems (IDAAN), the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente), local governments and security bodies, as well as other institutional and humanitarian actors involved in the response.

Red Cross Society of Panama actively participated in the inter-institutional COEs at provincial and district levels and maintained continuous coordination with authorities for the planning, implementation and follow-up of response actions. All activities implemented by the National Society, including safe water provision through reservoirs, support to cleaning and disinfection of household water storage tanks, community fairs and household visits, were coordinated and validated through these mechanisms, preventing duplication and ensuring a complementary response to government efforts.

In terms of positioning, Red Cross Society of Panama acted as an auxiliary humanitarian actor to public authorities, contributing operational capacity, trained volunteers and technical expertise, particularly in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). While it did not assume a formal sector lead or co-lead role, the National Society contributed to strengthening coordination mechanisms by delivering an Emergency Operations Centre (COE) management course to institutional actors, with the aim of improving inter-institutional coordination, decision-making and field implementation.

This contribution helped reinforce local COE capacities in Herrera and Los Santos, optimizing response coordination, the use of available resources and the effectiveness of interventions for the direct benefit of affected communities. Overall, inter-institutional coordination enabled a clear distribution of responsibilities among actors, and actions implemented by Red Cross Society of Panama were integrated coherently within the broader response, strengthening the effectiveness, coverage and consistency of the humanitarian intervention.



# Needs (Gaps) Identified



## Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

The Red Cross Society of Panama identified multiple structural and operational gaps in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector at provincial level, particularly in areas affected by contamination of the La Villa River. One of the main concerns observed at community level was a growing perception of distrust towards institutions responsible for water management and oversight, particularly the Ministry of Health (MINSa) and the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage Systems (IDAAN). This perception was exacerbated by limitations in inter-institutional coordination and the circulation of unverified information, which contributed to uncertainty about the safety of water being distributed.

In addition, differences in risk perception were observed across communities, seemingly influenced by previous experiences with water-related crises. These perceptions influenced community behaviours in response to official recommendations and affected the acceptance of measures implemented during the emergency.

From a technical and operational perspective, communities reported deficiencies in water supply infrastructure, housing conditions that hindered hygienic water storage, and the absence of standardized water distribution, which compromised equity and consistency in access to basic services.

Although MINSa did not officially report epidemiological outbreaks in this context, it emphasized that prolonged exposure to non-potable water could trigger the rapid spread of waterborne diseases. In the Panamanian context, these included acute diarrhoeal diseases, gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, typhoid fever and intestinal parasitosis. These illnesses represented a heightened risk, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, older adults and individuals with compromised immune systems.



## Protection, Gender And Inclusion

In the affected provinces, women, particularly those heading single-parent households, and groups in situations of vulnerability, including girls, boys, adolescents, persons with disabilities and older adults, faced differentiated impacts in the context of the emergency. Available information indicated persistent gender inequalities in Panama, including a reported 72.4% gap between men and women even under non-emergency conditions. These disparities were reflected in barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance, including difficulties in collecting water for individuals unable to carry heavy loads, limited mobility among persons with physical disabilities, and the lack of accessible information adapted to different needs (e.g., visual, auditory or cognitive impairments).



## Community Engagement And Accountability

The Red Cross Society of Panama identified several community-level needs related to communication, trust and access to information. A primary concern reported by community members was a lack of trust in the safety of the water being produced and distributed, which was not perceived as suitable for human consumption. This perception increased financial pressure on many households, which were compelled to seek alternative water sources.

In addition, some community members reported feeling unheard and insufficiently informed about where and how to access safe water for their households.

# Operational Strategy

## Overall objective of the operation

The Red Cross Society of Panama aimed to assist 6,000 families (approximately 30,000 people) in the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos affected by contamination of the La Villa River, contributing to the national response. The operation addressed immediate needs through Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) interventions, complemented by Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) actions. The operation was implemented over a total period of five months



# Operation strategy rationale

The response strategy was designed to address immediate needs arising from contamination of the La Villa River through a coordinated, efficient and people-centered approach. Implementation followed five complementary lines of action, aligned with the operational capacity and territorial presence of Red Cross Society of Panama.

## 1. Interinstitutional and Territorial Coordination

The operation was implemented in close coordination with Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs/COEs) at national and provincial levels, ensuring alignment with public policies and avoiding duplication. At territorial level, the local branches in Chitré, La Villa and Las Tablas were activated and served as focal points to identify priority needs, organize activities, distribute supplies and carry out community follow-up. Coordination enabled joint action with government institutions, including National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), the Ministry of Health (MINSa), the National Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (IDAAN), and local authorities, and ensured that activities such as safe water provision through reservoirs, cleaning and disinfection of household water tanks, community fairs and household visits were validated through coordination mechanisms.

## 2. Community Training

A capacity-building component was implemented at two levels:

**Community Volunteers:** Volunteers were trained to disseminate key messages, focusing on hygiene promotion, safe water use and prevention of waterborne diseases to strengthen community resilience. In addition, volunteers and inter-institutional personnel received technical orientations on water and sanitation, facilitated by the National Society WASH technician and supported by IFRC technical accompaniment.

**General Population:** Information was delivered directly to families through household visits, using education portfolios designed to communicate, visually and in simple language, the importance of safe water, its health impacts and basic measures to prevent waterborne diseases. A total of 985 families were reached through household visits in Guararé, Las Tablas, La Villa and Chitré. This approach strengthened trust, facilitated dialogue and feedback, and supported the inclusion of groups often left behind in collective activities, such as older adults, caregiving women and families with mobility limitations.

## 3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Interventions

To ensure immediate and safe access to drinking water, a comprehensive WASH intervention was implemented, including:

- Installation of water storage tanks/reservoir points with elevated collection points to allow hygienic filling of household containers.
- Distribution of two jerrycans per household to support safe household water storage.
- Supply of water through tanker trucks to refill tanks, providing logistical support that complemented institutional efforts to maintain water services.
- Implementation of a logistics plan adapted to rural and urban contexts, ensuring secure and efficient routes from MINSa-approved wells to supported communities. Water trucks collected water from previously identified wells and distribution points were monitored by focal points to minimize contamination risks and support safe delivery.
- Maintenance and adaptations to reserve tanks in Azuero (including repairs, installation of new valves and system improvements) to optimize performance and prolong useful life.
- Daily water quality monitoring at supply points (wells, tankers and tanks/reservoirs), conducted by focal points and volunteers.
- Monthly cleaning schedule for tanks to maintain hygienic conditions at distribution points, complemented by regular cleaning of surrounding areas to prevent mud accumulation and keep the environment safe, orderly and accessible.
- Community fairs were organized to raise awareness on safe water and hygiene, prevention of waterborne diseases and environmental stewardship, while facilitating access to information and services from other institutions. Activities included education sessions, basic first aid/health support, community participation spaces, "mercaditos," and institutional stands from public and private actors.
- Logistical support to IDAAN through water trucking to health facilities, including five days of support to Hospital Joaquín Pablo Franco Sayas and Policlínica Miguel Cárdenas Barahona (Las Tablas), and three days of support to detention facilities (Chitré).

## 4. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

CEA was integrated through the National Society's standardized mechanism to ensure affected people were informed, engaged and able to provide feedback. Actions included:

- Monitoring community satisfaction related to the quality, quantity and accessibility of water supplied.
- Pre- and post-CEA surveys, applied house-to-house to understand coping strategies and risk awareness, complemented by a central activity in Parque Belisario Porras where surveys and sensitization were conducted.
- Mass information campaigns to increase visibility of the operation, build trust and strengthen transparency.
- Community cinemas to sensitize the population on the contamination of the La Villa River, impacts on water quality, recycling and environmental care, using short educational videos adapted for children, youth and older adults, while also strengthening social cohesion and participation.
- Accessible feedback channels, including the MATILDE WhatsApp line, suggestion boxes and surveys, enabling people to express concerns, questions or complaints and allowing adjustments based on community inputs.
- Radio information capsules and interviews to disseminate key messages, explain actions being implemented, and promote safe practices



and shared responsibility for protecting water resources.

-A public information campaign through giant screens installed in Parque Belisario Porras (Las Tablas) and Parque Unión (Chitré), broadcasting key messages on appropriate water use, hygiene practices and recycling.

## 5. Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI)

A cross-cutting PGI approach was applied to ensure dignity, safety and equity, with particular attention to people in vulnerable situations. Specific actions included:

-Installation of signage at water distribution points to improve visibility and provide key messages on safe water use, strengthening community responsibility and awareness. Signage incorporated images and simple visual content on correct water use, safe storage, cleaning of containers and care of shared spaces, so that children, older persons and people with low literacy levels could access key information without language barriers.

-Inclusive design considerations for temporary infrastructure (e.g., water tanks), taking into account the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities and pregnant women. Water distribution points were selected using DAPS-oriented criteria, prioritizing locations with flat terrain, lighting, accessibility and proximity to population centres. Ramps, chairs and covered waiting areas were incorporated to reduce physical barriers and improve safety and comfort.

-Deployment of volunteers to provide personalized support to people with reduced mobility to ensure equitable access. Volunteers also provided verbal guidance and direct support to persons with visual, hearing or mobility limitations, including help with filling water containers and transporting them to their homes when needed.

-Communication materials were placed at appropriate height to facilitate visibility for wheelchair users, children and people of short stature.

-Installation of a water reservoir at a health centre to support continuity of essential services for users.

-Capacity strengthening for volunteers and contracted staff on PGI; with support from SENADIS (Chitré), this included inclusion of persons with disabilities, relevant legal frameworks in Panama and rights-based approaches.

-Strengthening on PSEA and Code of Conduct, implemented as a priority measure from the outset to prevent harm, exploitation, abuse or inappropriate conduct during the response. To reduce risks of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation or abuse, water points were installed in central, accessible and well-lit locations, with monitoring by volunteers and contracted staff trained on PSEA, Code of Conduct and reporting mechanisms.

-Community members also had access to reporting and feedback mechanisms at distribution points to submit complaints, suggestions or report concerns.

The budget distribution reflected the operational reality of the response, allocating 57% to operational costs and 43% to support costs. This proportion reflected the requirements for daily water quality monitoring at distribution points, which demanded continuous mobilization of technical staff and volunteers, increasing transport, supervision and technical analysis costs.

Also, the prioritization of WASH sector, CEA, and PGI cross-cutting approaches by the Red Cross Society of Panama was based on a contextual analysis identifying these areas as those where the National Society provided the most added value, in line with its humanitarian mandate, technical expertise, and operational capacity. Other sectors, such as health, were not included in the strategy, given the leadership role of government authorities, particularly the Ministry of Health (MINSA), with whom close coordination was maintained to ensure complementarity.

MINSA implemented mental health support activities in affected communities (e.g., stress management and teamwork sessions). In parallel, Red Cross Society of Panama delivered targeted psychosocial support (PSS) sessions for volunteers engaged in the response, funded through the National Society's own resources. In addition, the experience highlighted the importance of brief emotional debriefing spaces at the end of operational days, access to psychosocial support through institutional or partner channels, and appropriate shift management to avoid volunteer fatigue and extended exposure to stress.

Finally, in view of the operation's closure and adjustments in the rehabilitation timeline of water treatment plants and distribution networks, Red Cross Society of Panama applied a transition approach aimed at ensuring an orderly handover, minimizing dependency risks and sustaining key practices promoted during the response. This included reinforcing community-based resilience actions (such as household visits, safe water use promotion and community fairs), maintaining feedback and information channels to reduce disengagement, and continuing coordination with authorities and WASH actors to support continuity of processes initiated during the operation. The operation concluded in line with CEA principles, ensuring that communities understood the scope and limitations of the support provided and had access to relevant referral and follow-up information where applicable.

# Targeting Strategy

## Who was targeted by this operation?

Red Cross Society of Panama implemented its emergency response in selected communities within the provinces of Herrera and Los Santos, where the primary water source was the La Villa River.



Based on coordination with the National Emergency Operations Centre (COE) and information provided by local branches, the National Society assisted 6,000 families (approximately 30,000 people) through this IFRC-DREF operation. The target population was prioritized according to vulnerability criteria, limited access to basic services and gaps in coverage by government entities. This approach supported a complementary, equitable and people-centred humanitarian response, with particular attention to those facing the greatest barriers to accessing safe drinking water.

Assistance was delivered through water reservoir points established across affected districts in Las Tablas (Santa Cruz, Arboleda, Las Palmitas, Santa Librada, La Ermita and a logistics hub on Vía Teloria), Guararé (Bella Vista and Antigua Casa de Velación), La Villa (Pozo del Obispo, La Villa branch with two tanks, Santa Ana School, Llano del Río and Policlínica San Juan de Dios) and Chitré (CAIPI-Chitré branch with two tanks, Los Olivitos, Camino a La Isla, Parque de Monagrillo and Boca Parita).

## Explain the selection criteria for the targeted population

Red Cross Society of Panama prioritized assistance based on the following technical criteria:

- Families directly affected by the disruption of safe water supply.
- Households that had not received humanitarian assistance from the government or other actors.
- Communities located in hard-to-reach areas that faced logistical barriers to water distribution.
- Areas with low socioeconomic conditions that limited response and recovery capacity.

In addition, prioritization considered the presence of people in vulnerable situations, including:

- Single-parent households.
- Older adults.
- Pregnant women.
- Children under five years of age.
- Persons with disabilities.

This prioritization approach aimed to ensure timely and equitable assistance to those facing the most significant structural barriers to accessing basic services and enabled available resources to be channelled more effectively towards populations with higher exposure and lower coping capacity during the emergency.

## Total Assisted Population

Assisted Women	14,650	Rural	70%
Assisted Girls (under 18)	1,275	Urban	30%
Assisted Men	13,775	People with disabilities (estimated)	7%
Assisted Boys (under 18)	1,040		
Total Assisted Population	30,740		
Total Targeted Population	30,000		

## Risk and Security Considerations (including "management")

Does your National Society have anti-fraud and corruption policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse policy?	Yes



Does your National Society have child protection/child safeguarding policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have whistleblower protection policy?	Yes
Does your National Society have anti-sexual harassment policy?	Yes

**Please analyse and indicate potential risks for this operation, its root causes and mitigation actions.**

Risk	Mitigation action
Misinformation or community resistance affecting the acceptance of the intervention.	The Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach was applied from the outset of the operation, ensuring that information was clear, timely and provided in accessible formats. Community leaders, local volunteers and key actors were engaged to foster trust, promote open dialogue and encourage active participation in the design and implementation of activities.
Adverse weather conditions (heavy rains, flooding) hindering access to rural communities or delaying supply deliveries.	Alternative logistics routes and contingency plans were designed to address adverse weather scenarios. Weather conditions were continuously monitored in coordination with the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC). All-terrain vehicles were utilized and delivery schedules were adjusted, as necessary, to ensure operational continuity.
Road closures or civil unrest due to water scarcity or delays in distribution.	Ongoing coordination with local authorities, community committees and security forces was established and maintained to facilitate safe access and movement of personnel and vehicles. The Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach was strengthened to promote clear and transparent communication regarding the progress of the operation. Alternative access routes were identified and validated as a precautionary measure to mitigate potential blockades or unforeseen closures, although such risks did not materialize during the implementation period.

**Please indicate any security and safety concerns for this operation:**

Community tensions related to water scarcity could have escalated in affected areas, potentially leading to road blockades, protests or confrontational situations, which would have posed safety risks for staff and volunteers operating in the field.

To mitigate these risks, Red Cross Society of Panama maintained close coordination with local authorities, community leaders and relevant security actors to support safe access and strengthen community acceptance of the operation. Contingency routes and rapid communication mechanisms were established as precautionary measures to enable timely response should any security incidents have emerged.

All personnel involved in the operation were equipped with official National Society uniforms and visibility items to enhance safety and reinforce the legitimacy of the response in higher-risk areas. Operational security protocols were applied throughout implementation, and the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement were upheld to ensure a neutral, impartial and humanitarian approach at all times.

Has the child safeguarding risk analysis assessment been completed?	Yes
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# Implementation



## Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

**Budget:** CHF 242,605  
**Targeted Persons:** 30,140  
**Assisted Persons:** 30,740  
**Targeted Male:** 14,815  
**Targeted Female:** 15,925

### Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of households in prioritized communities with safe and regular access to drinking water during the intervention (safe water distribution, jerrycan distribution).	6,000	6,148
Number of people trained (volunteers, government staff, and community members) in safe water management and hygiene practices.	440	1,094

### Narrative description of achievements

Red Cross Society of Panama implemented a focused WASH response in the most affected areas of Herrera and Los Santos, guided by a needs assessment conducted in prioritized communities. In La Villa, Chitré, Las Tablas and Guararé, the National Society installed 21 elevated water storage tanks/reservoir points to support community-level access to safe water. The tanks were labelled and were refilled daily through the rental of two tanker trucks, enabling the distribution of 5,469,504 litres of safe water between 10 June and 12 October 2025. Daily monitoring of water quality was implemented, supported by the acquisition of water sampling kits, joint route planning and verification with MINSAs, and the rental of a 4x4 vehicle to support field follow-up.

To strengthen safe household water storage, 12,296 jerrycans (two per family) were distributed, accompanied by information sessions on hygienic storage and safe handling of water at household level. This distribution exceeded the initial plan, as post-assessment findings identified a greater number of families requiring safe water storage solutions. The operation was further reinforced through the recruitment of a WASH Coordinator and the procurement of tools, equipment and consumables required for installation and ongoing maintenance of the water distribution systems. Given the shared use of infrastructure, basic components (e.g., keys, pipes and plugs) required frequent replacement during implementation.

Capacity strengthening remained an integral component of the response. A total of 64 community volunteers and 82 government officials were trained in safe water management and hygiene promotion. In addition, community training sessions and information fairs reached 948 families, reinforcing safe water practices and hygiene awareness. A complementary information campaign on appropriate water use, hygiene and recycling was also implemented. To ensure safe implementation conditions, personal protective equipment (PPE) was provided to volunteers (e.g., boots, gloves and vests), and community clean-up activities were conducted around tank locations using cleaning supplies (e.g., gloves, garbage bags, brooms and dustpans).

Summary of activities implemented: needs assessment; purchase and installation of water storage tanks/reservoir points (in remote and central locations); tank labelling; safe water distribution through tanker trucks; procurement of tools, equipment and accessories for installation and maintenance; water sampling kits; recruitment of a WASH Coordinator; rental of a 4x4 vehicle for field monitoring; training for volunteers, government staff and communities on safe water management; community fairs and information sessions; information campaign on appropriate water use, hygiene and recycling; provision of PPE to volunteers; procurement of community clean-up materials; and community cleaning campaigns at distribution sites.

### Lessons Learnt

- Continuous training of staff and volunteers remained essential to ensure an effective and consistent response.
- Strong internal communication and coordination supported timely decision-making and strengthened operational implementation.
- Continuous monitoring and the procedures applied throughout the operation helped ensure that the water delivered met safe water



standards for the affected population.

- Adequate logistics planning and standardized equipment facilitated field implementation and improved efficiency.
- The installation of water storage and distribution systems improved coverage and contributed to greater continuity of service delivery during the response.

## Challenges

- Operational challenges were encountered due to limitations in water yield from wells such as Aromo and Tres Quebradas, as well as variability in chlorine levels in the Parque Industrial de La Arena well and in Las Cruces and Tres Quebradas. These factors required continued monitoring and operational adjustments to maintain safe water provision.



## Protection, Gender And Inclusion

**Budget:** CHF 22,960

**Targeted Persons:** 400

**Assisted Persons:** 21,500

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of people in vulnerable situations (including persons with disabilities, pregnant women, older adults, etc.) who have received assistance to ensure access to safe water.	400	21,500
Number of volunteers and operational staff updated on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, who have signed the commitment to compliance.	100	100

## Narrative description of achievements

Red Cross Society of Panama integrated Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) as a cross-cutting approach throughout the operation, incorporating PGI minimum standards into needs assessments and activity planning to address differentiated risks and vulnerabilities in affected communities. A protection risk analysis was conducted with emphasis on child protection and on varying levels of interaction between operational teams and different population groups, enabling the adaptation of protection measures to the specific context and dynamics of each group.

Through participatory assessments with communities and institutions, areas with higher concentrations of older adults and other people in vulnerable situations were identified. This analysis informed the installation of accessible water storage and distribution systems in line with DAPS (Dignity, Access, Participation and Safety) considerations, implemented in coordination with local authorities and government counterparts, including MINSA, MIDES and IDAAN. This helped to reduce barriers to safe water access for people with mobility limitations and other access constraints.

To reinforce internal capacity and uphold ethical standards, awareness and training sessions were delivered on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) policy and the Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers involved in the operation. As a result, 100 volunteers and staff signed acceptance of these policies, strengthening institutional accountability and commitment to safeguarding.

Equitable access to information was promoted through the dissemination of key messages at water distribution points, the National Society installed 21 elevated water storage tanks/reservoir points to support community-level access to safe water and installed inclusive signage, and the installation of lighting in low-visibility areas near reservoirs to improve safety and orientation. In addition, a water reservoir with accessories was installed at the Santa Ana health centre in Los Santos, supporting access to water for an estimated 155 daily users and contributing to continuity of essential services.

## Lessons Learnt

- Broad, diverse and meaningful community participation strengthened the relevance, safety and equity of the response by ensuring that decisions reflected the needs, priorities and capacities of all groups, particularly those in situations of greater vulnerability.



- Physical and communication accessibility needed to be considered from the planning stage to prevent exclusion and reduce barriers to access.
- Clear, appropriate and multi-channel communication helped prevent misunderstandings and supported informed decision-making among affected populations.
- The physical and emotional well-being of volunteers directly influenced the quality and consistency of service delivery during the response.
- Ensuring accessible information and an inclusive physical environment increased safety and facilitated the participation of all community members.

## Challenges

- Volunteer turnover required repeated briefings, refresher sensitization sessions and follow-up to ensure consistent understanding and signature of safeguarding-related policies.
- The physical and emotional burden on volunteers, linked to extended working hours during assistance delivery, highlighted the need to strengthen self-care measures and well-being support throughout the response.



## Community Engagement And Accountability

**Budget:** CHF 19,460  
**Targeted Persons:** 600  
**Assisted Persons:** 1,686  
**Targeted Male:** 0  
**Targeted Female:** 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of pre- and post-distribution surveys conducted to assess community perception and satisfaction regarding the assistance received.	600	1,686
Number of people reached through information and feedback mechanisms (community meetings, informational materials, feedback boxes, etc.).	600	2,000

## Narrative description of achievements

Red Cross Society of Panama implemented the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approach as a cross-cutting component of the operation, ensuring transparent, culturally appropriate and two-way communication with affected communities in Herrera and Los Santos.

At the outset of the response, a rapid community context analysis was conducted to understand local structures, social dynamics, cultural practices and preferred communication channels. This process included meetings with local authorities and community leaders, strengthening strategic partnerships and defining appropriate feedback and communication mechanisms for the operation.

A total of 517 baseline community surveys were conducted to assess perceptions of the intervention and levels of acceptance of the activities implemented. Although community availability limited the number of responses initially expected, the sample provided representative and actionable insights. Findings informed adjustments to the communication strategy, including reinforcing key messages on safe water, hygiene and appropriate water use through accessible channels such as community radio, informational stickers placed at water distribution points, and short micro-training sessions (10–15 minutes) delivered at distribution sites, during household visits and in community spaces.

At the end of the operation, 1,169 post-intervention surveys were conducted to measure community perception and satisfaction with the actions implemented. Results indicated high levels of acceptance and trust in the National Society's response, as well as improved knowledge regarding safe water practices.

As part of internal capacity strengthening, 60 volunteers participated in CEA training and refresher sessions, with emphasis on practical application during emergency operations and effective use of feedback mechanisms. Four community meetings were organized under the



“community cinema” format, reaching approximately 300 people. These sessions provided information on the operation, addressed concerns, raised awareness on protection of water resources and facilitated direct feedback from community members.

A continuous radio campaign promoted safe water, hygiene and community rights, expanding the reach of key messages to diverse population groups. Institutional feedback channels, including the MATILDE WhatsApp line, suggestion boxes and surveys, remained active throughout implementation, enabling community members to raise concerns and allowing timely adaptation of interventions based on identified needs.

Overall, the integration of CEA strengthened community trust, promoted participation and enabled evidence-based adjustments to the response, enhancing the relevance and inclusiveness of the humanitarian intervention.

## Lessons Learnt

- Clear, timely and two-way communication with volunteers remained essential to ensure consistent implementation and coordinated messaging.
- Continuous capacity strengthening for both contracted staff and volunteers supported quality delivery and reinforced accountability in the field.
- Promoting respect, empathy and appropriate conduct within the team contributed to a healthier working environment and strengthened operational performance.
- Pre- and post-operation surveys proved to be key tools to inform adjustments and improve the relevance of the intervention based on community perceptions.
- In-person community activities fostered participation and collective learning, as demonstrated through the community cinema approach.



## Secretariat Services

**Budget:** CHF 2,800

**Targeted Persons:** 0

**Assisted Persons:** 0

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0

## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of field monitoring visits conducted during the operation.	1	1

## Narrative description of achievements

As part of IFRC technical support to Red Cross Society of Panama, a field monitoring visit was conducted by the Disaster Risk Management Coordinator from the IFRC Central America Country Cluster Delegation. The visit enabled direct observation of progress, identification of good practices and the provision of technical recommendations to strengthen implementation. In addition, virtual support was provided to the lessons learned workshop, reinforcing the quality of the institutional learning process.

## Lessons Learnt

- Field monitoring visits strengthened operational quality and supported timely, evidence-based decision-making.



## National Society Strengthening

**Budget:** CHF 40,551

**Targeted Persons:** 100

**Assisted Persons:** 60

**Targeted Male:** 0

**Targeted Female:** 0



## Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
Number of volunteers and operational staff equipped with visibility kits.	100	60
Number of lessons learned workshops conducted at the end of the operation.	1	1

## Narrative description of achievements

Red Cross Society of Panama strengthened operational and management capacities during the operation, supporting a more effective response to the La Villa River contamination emergency. Key personnel were recruited, including a Finance Specialist and a WASH Coordinator, to reinforce financial management, procurement follow-up and technical implementation in line with the operational plan and in coordination with local authorities. The planned recruitment of a Water Quality and Supply Monitoring Officer did not materialize due to the lack of suitable candidates; following an internal assessment, the National Society designated three technical focal points for water quality and supply monitoring, one per intervention area, enabling closer field oversight and more agile decision-making.

To enhance operational security and field identification, visibility kits (caps and t-shirts bearing the emblem) were distributed to 60 volunteers and staff engaged in the response, reflecting the consistent level of active participation throughout implementation. Personal protective equipment (PPE) was also procured and distributed to support safe working conditions. In addition, volunteer recognition kits were provided to strengthen motivation, well-being and a sense of belonging during extended response activities.

Administrative capacity was reinforced through the procurement of office materials, supporting the day-to-day management of the operation. Visibility and information materials were also developed and deployed, including banners and informational materials, strengthening institutional recognition and transparency towards communities and authorities.

As part of institutional learning, three local lessons learned workshops were conducted (one per branch) and one overall lessons learned workshop was held in person, enabling the systematization of experiences, identification of good practices and areas for improvement, and strengthening institutional capacities for future humanitarian responses. The lessons learned process was supported through technical accompaniment, including engagement from the IFRC Central America CCD PMER Senior Officer.

## Lessons Learnt

- Adequate logistics planning proved fundamental to support volunteers effectively and ensure a timely and well-coordinated response.
- Fairness, recognition and appreciation were key factors in maintaining volunteer motivation and sustained engagement throughout the operation.
- Continuous capacity building remained essential to strengthen local response teams and enhance preparedness for future emergencies.



# Financial Report

## DREF Operation

### FINAL FINANCIAL REPORT

#### MDRPA021 - Panama - Biological River Pollution

Operating Timeframe: 24 jun 2025 to 30 nov 2025

Selected Parameters			
Reporting Timeframe	2025/6-2026/2	Operation	MDRPA021
Budget Timeframe	2025/6-11	Budget	APPROVED

Prepared on 23/Mar/2026

All figures are in Swiss Francs (CHF)

### I. Summary

<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Funds &amp; Other Income</b>	<b>349.720</b>
DREF Response Pillar	349.720
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>-306.137</b>
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>43.583</b>

### II. Expenditure by planned operations / enabling approaches

Description	Budget	Expenditure	Variance
PO01 - Shelter and Basic Household Items			0
PO02 - Livelihoods			0
PO03 - Multi-purpose Cash			0
PO04 - Health			0
PO05 - Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	242.605	220.916	21.689
PO06 - Protection, Gender and Inclusion	22.960	22.722	238
PO07 - Education			0
PO08 - Migration			0
PO09 - Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Recovery	21.344	373	20.971
PO10 - Community Engagement and Accountability	19.460	19.669	-209
PO11 - Environmental Sustainability			0
<b>Planned Operations Total</b>	<b>306.369</b>	<b>263.681</b>	<b>42.688</b>
EA01 - Coordination and Partnerships			0
EA02 - Secretariat Services	2.800	225	2.575
EA03 - National Society Strengthening	40.551	42.231	-1.681
<b>Enabling Approaches Total</b>	<b>43.351</b>	<b>42.457</b>	<b>894</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>349.720</b>	<b>306.137</b>	<b>43.583</b>

[Click here for the complete financial report](#)

## Please explain variances (if any)

By the end of the operation, total expenditures reached CHF 306,137 compared to an allocation of CHF 349,720, leaving an unspent balance of CHF 43,583. In February 2026, the National Society returned the unspent funds to the IFRC DREF. Regarding the amount reflected under PO09 - Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Recovery, it is related to the way the funds were initially allocated in the system. The expenditure recorded under this line corresponds to an exchange rate adjustment associated with those funds.

The main variances are linked to efficiencies in the implementation of WASH interventions, as well as adjustments in operational and



support costs. While the response maintained its planned scope and achieved its targets, cost optimization in logistics, procurement, and field implementation resulted in lower expenditure than initially budgeted.



# Contact Information

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[Click here for reference](#)

