

**INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES**

**REAL-TIME EVALUATION**

**FINAL REPORT**

**MOROCCO EARTHQUAKE OPERATION**

**July 2024**



*Benoit Carpenter / IFRC 15 September 2023*

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## ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
<b>AfR</b>	Agenda for Renewal
<b>CEA</b>	Community Engagement and Accountability
<b>CHF</b>	Swiss francs (currency)
<b>CVA</b>	Cash and Voucher Assistance
<b>DCC</b>	Disaster, Climate and Crises Unit Geneva
<b>DL</b>	Disaster Law
<b>DREF</b>	Disaster Response Emergency Fund
<b>EA</b>	Emergency Appeal
<b>ERF</b>	Emergency Response Framework
<b>ERU</b>	Emergency Response Unit
<b>GRC</b>	German Red Cross
<b>HDCC</b>	Health, Disasters, Climate and Crises Unit MENA
<b>HeOPs</b>	Head of Emergency Operations
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Delegation
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IFRC</b>	The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East North Africa
<b>MEQ</b>	Moroccan Earthquake
<b>MRC</b>	Moroccan Red Crescent
<b>MVF</b>	Mohammed V Foundation
<b>NHQ</b>	National Headquarters
<b>NS</b>	National Society
<b>NSD</b>	National Society Development
<b>PGI</b>	Protection, Gender and Inclusion
<b>PMER</b>	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Unit
<b>PNS</b>	Participating National Society
<b>RD</b>	Regional Director MENA
<b>RO</b>	Regional Office (MENA)
<b>RTE</b>	Real-Time Evaluation
<b>USG</b>	Under Secretary General
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WOW</b>	Way of Working

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

On September 8, a 6.8 magnitude [earthquake struck Morocco](#), primarily affecting the regions of Marrakech and five nearby provinces (al-Haouz, Ouarzazate, Azilal, Chichaoua, and Taroudant). The earthquake resulted in the deaths of at least 2,901 people and injured 5,530 more, as reported by Morocco's Ministry of the Interior. The disaster presented significant operational challenges, including navigating Morocco's complex legal framework for international aid and, notably, the absence of a declared state of emergency.

### THREE CENTRAL THEMES

The Moroccan earthquake (MEQ) response was complex. The Real Time Evaluation (RTE) team identified three key trends that increased complexity and implementation challenges despite dedication and professionalism from staff and volunteers. These themes led to slower implementation and bottlenecks that diverted time and effort from operational objectives.

1. **Context Analysis:** Limited context analysis by the Middle East North Africa Regional Office (MENA RO) hindered better readiness planning. Assessing the context and building appropriate readiness systems is fundamental for a solid response plan. This responsibility lies with country teams, the regional office, and global technical units. Key areas like National Society (NS) capacity, legal base, government relations, and financial aspects were critical but overlooked in the response. Additionally, culture, language, social structures, and customs need to influence decisions such as selecting and deploying appropriate personnel. Inadequate consideration of these factors led to miscommunication and sluggish implementation.
2. **Readiness:** Limited readiness planning and the overall response system's inability to address this lack of readiness were major issues. Adequate pre-planning could have reduced time spent on non-direct operational variables, such as NS capacity, government policies, banking conditions, local business practice and visa restrictions. Many key informants emphasized that more thorough readiness planning could have mitigated delays and improved the efficiency of the response, highlighting the importance of having robust response and contingency plans.
3. **Fit for Purpose:** Slow implementation often resulted from either inflexible International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC, or "Federation") mechanisms, systems, and procedures or staff not fully understanding how to apply these. This was a key impediment to timely operational activities and a source of frustration. For example, distributions were delayed due to prolonged procurement processes caused by bureaucratic procedures. The evaluation team noted that staff were working long hours and covering multiple positions, reflecting still being in the response phase and dealing with overly bureaucratic procedures, even though this period should have concluded months ago. Creating fit-for-purpose systems and procedures is essential, and it is feasible without compromising accountability or increasing risk. This requires a concerted effort from all relevant units within the IFRC to work in an integrated manner.

The interplay of context analysis, readiness, and fit for purpose is crucial and is reflected throughout the report's findings and recommendations. In some cases, points may be repeated but in various contexts as they address different themes or issues. These issues are sometimes systemic, sometimes based on a lack of knowledge or even on behavior. The review of secondary data revealed these as recurring findings and recommendations across many evaluations, with limited follow-up on their adoption and implementation.

## Methodology

The Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) adopted a process of evaluation involving multiple interrelated tools to ensure validity, including:

- A comprehensive review of relevant documentation
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Moroccan Red Crescent (MRC) senior management, staff and volunteers, IFRC staff, and Participating National Societies (PNSs).
- Field visits to three implementing branches (Marrakesh, Chichaoua, and Taroudant ) and to the MENA RO in Beirut.

## Limitations

1. **No visits to affected communities** restricted and in-depth assessment of community engagement. Although interviews were carried out with Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) IFRC staff at various levels as well as with branch volunteers, more meaningful community participation would have enriched the evaluation.
2. **Lack of access to government officials** made it difficult to evaluate the full impact of humanitarian diplomacy efforts and the MRC's influence on government actions.

## KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The RTE team's findings fell into three broad categories: Coordination, Communication and Relations; IFRC Operational Support and Effectiveness; and Strategic and Operational Foundations which will structure the rest of the report. The three themes identified above show up throughout these categories.

### COORDINATION, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONS

The IFRC's response to the Morocco earthquake was hindered by confusion in decision-making, with unclear mandates, roles, and responsibilities across various levels. This led to inefficiencies, inconsistent messaging, and uncertainty among field staff regarding strategic and operational priorities. There was a lack of clarity about who was responsible for making decisions and carrying them out, with some staff receiving decisions they believed were within their own authority. Misalignment between organizational levels led to multiple people making decisions on similar issues without proper coordination, further exacerbated by inefficient communication, resulting in mixed messages and added ambiguity.

**Relationship with Moroccan Red Crescent:** The relationship between the IFRC and the MRC was initially strained due to a lack of a permanent IFRC presence and a lack of a country plan. However, strategic actions by the IFRC, such as sending high-level staff, improved cooperation and understanding over time. Despite improvements, there were still challenges in cultural awareness with the IFRC personnel sent and training that needed to be addressed.

**Membership Coordination:** Membership coordination was a key function of the IFRC. The response saw significant contributions from key partners like the German Red Cross (GRC), who played a crucial role due to its established presence and long-term commitment in Morocco. However, the

operation also highlighted the need for stronger networking and coordination among MENA National Societies and the importance of adhering to the principles of the [Agenda for Renewal](#) (AfR).

## IFRC OPERATIONAL SUPPORT AND EFFECTIVENESS

**Response Tools and Mechanisms:** The evaluation found that surge deployments were hindered by a lack of contextual knowledge, and coordination. Delegates often arrived unannounced, unfamiliar with the Moroccan context, and without proficiency in French or Arabic, leading to communication and coordination issues. For the first two months post-earthquake, MRC were not aware of any reports from Emergency Response Units (ERUs), even though these were published on the IFRC GO platform. This affecting operational planning and trust. Also, critical functions/personnel such as proper administration and human resources (HR) support in the initial team were missing, impacting effectiveness.

The Emergency Appeal (EA) was detailed and timely, with high funding due to the disaster's nature, donor timing, and the Moroccan diaspora. However, the optimistic funding request faced absorption challenges, and 61% of funds were highly earmarked and restrictive. Better situational analysis could lead to more realistic funding requests. Despite these challenges, scheduled reporting kept stakeholders informed.

**Context Analysis and Readiness:** Limited contextual analysis and readiness planning were significant barriers. The operation struggled with adapting to the local context, including understanding the legal, cultural, and business culture nuances of Morocco.

**Corporate Services Processes and Procedures:** The evaluation identified issues in financial and procurement procedures, which were either not flexible enough to adapt to the local context or not adequately understood by staff, leading to delays and inefficiencies. The response also highlighted challenges in HR, including high turnover and the need for better workforce planning and administrative support.

## STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

**Legal Framework and Auxiliary Role:** The absence of a clear legal status and legislative framework for the MRC limited its ability to act effectively as an auxiliary to the government. The IFRC played a crucial role in negotiating and advocating for a more significant role for the MRC in the response efforts.

**Community Engagement and Accountability:** The MRC has little experience working with community members in participatory processes. IFRC operational leadership emphasized integrating CEA into all activities, which was well-received by volunteers and local communities which led to improved planning around meeting the needs that community members themselves identified. However, additional training is still needed.

**Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI):** PGI considerations were integrated late into the response due to a lack of initial investment and prioritization even though this has been identified by the IFRC as a key area of particular need throughout an operation. The delayed deployment of a PGI delegate during the early stages of the response meant that key determinants for providing services and protecting the safety and well-being of those with special needs may not have been adequately taken into consideration. Subsequent efforts in PGI were especially appreciated by local communities which will support longer-term recovery and community preparedness.

**National Society Development (NSD):**

While there is a 2021-2025 MRC strategic plan, not all within the NS are aware of this. In addition, there is no associated approach to NSD, hindering MRC development and fundraising efforts. There are governance and management capacity issues, with gaps in policies and procedures, especially in finance, HR and volunteer management. Disaster readiness needs improvement, emphasizing the need for stronger local branch support. Additionally, the MRC needs to develop a strategy for domestic resource mobilization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**The following is a summary of the main prioritized recommendations**

### COORDINATION, COMMUNICATION, AND RELATIONS

- Decision-making must be supported by systems that prevent discrepancies and misunderstandings. The revision of the Emergency Response Framework is essential and should clearly define decision-making structures, communication lines, and the roles of all units involved. Consideration should be given to creating the following decision making structures for large-scale operations:
  - Strategic Direction Committee: Includes senior leaders from IFRC, such as the Under Secretary General, Regional Director, and a representative from the affected National Society.
  - Operational Management Committee: Composed of senior management from the IFRC HQ, Regional Office, and the affected National Society.
- Ensure all operational decisions and challenges are addressed with the involvement of MRC. IFRC related decisions must be communicated effectively and, when feasible, translated into French or Arabic.
- Pair all IFRC staff with MRC counterparts in all technical areas to build sustainability and capacity.

### OPERATIONAL SUPPORT AND EFFECTIVENESS

- Conduct thorough contextual analysis and build appropriate readiness plans and systems tailored to local conditions.
- Develop, if non-existent, and ensure staff understanding of any flexible IFRC financial and procurement procedures that are adaptable to local contexts including the ability to open bank accounts promptly, contingency plans for cash-based economies like Morocco and providing working advances to suppliers when necessary.
- Increase integration of AfR and Way of Working (WOW) into operations via training and initiatives.
- Strengthen HR involvement in emergency response planning from the beginning and establish HR systems within the National Society.
- Include administrative resources, such as administrative and finance delegates, from the outset of operations to ensure effective coordination and response to emerging challenges.

### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

- Advocate for clear legal status and a legislative framework for the MRC and formalize a status agreement between the IFRC and the Moroccan Government.
- Prioritize PGI from the onset of emergency responses, focusing on PGI analysis and risk assessments early in emergency responses, securing dedicated PGI staff and funding.
- Implement the community feedback mechanism and hotline with thorough training and communication to ensure branch acceptance and utilization.

- Develop a detailed integrated NSD strategy and long-term plan with the MRC for governance, finance, volunteer management, HR and disaster readiness.
- Prioritize branch development and local capacity building, strengthening IFRC-local branch relationships.
- Create and implement a domestic resource mobilization strategy to diversify funding and ensure sustainability.

## 1 Introduction and Background to the Real-Time Evaluation

### 1.1 Background

A 6.8 magnitude earthquake shook Morocco on 8 September 2023, at 11 p.m. local time. The earthquake was felt as far away as Portugal and Algeria. At least 2,901 people were killed, mostly in Marrakech and five provinces near the epicenter, and another 5,530 were injured, as reported by Morocco's Interior Ministry.

While earthquakes of this size in Morocco are uncommon, this earthquake was the deadliest in the country since 2004. The scope and scale of the disaster (Figure 1) in dispersed and hard-to-reach geographical locations, coupled with a country context where the government did not request international assistance, where national legislative frameworks for international humanitarian aid are complex to navigate, and where a country-level Movement presence and IFRC-MRC relations and coordination platforms are not fully established, all created an unfavorable environment for an effective and well-coordinated response.

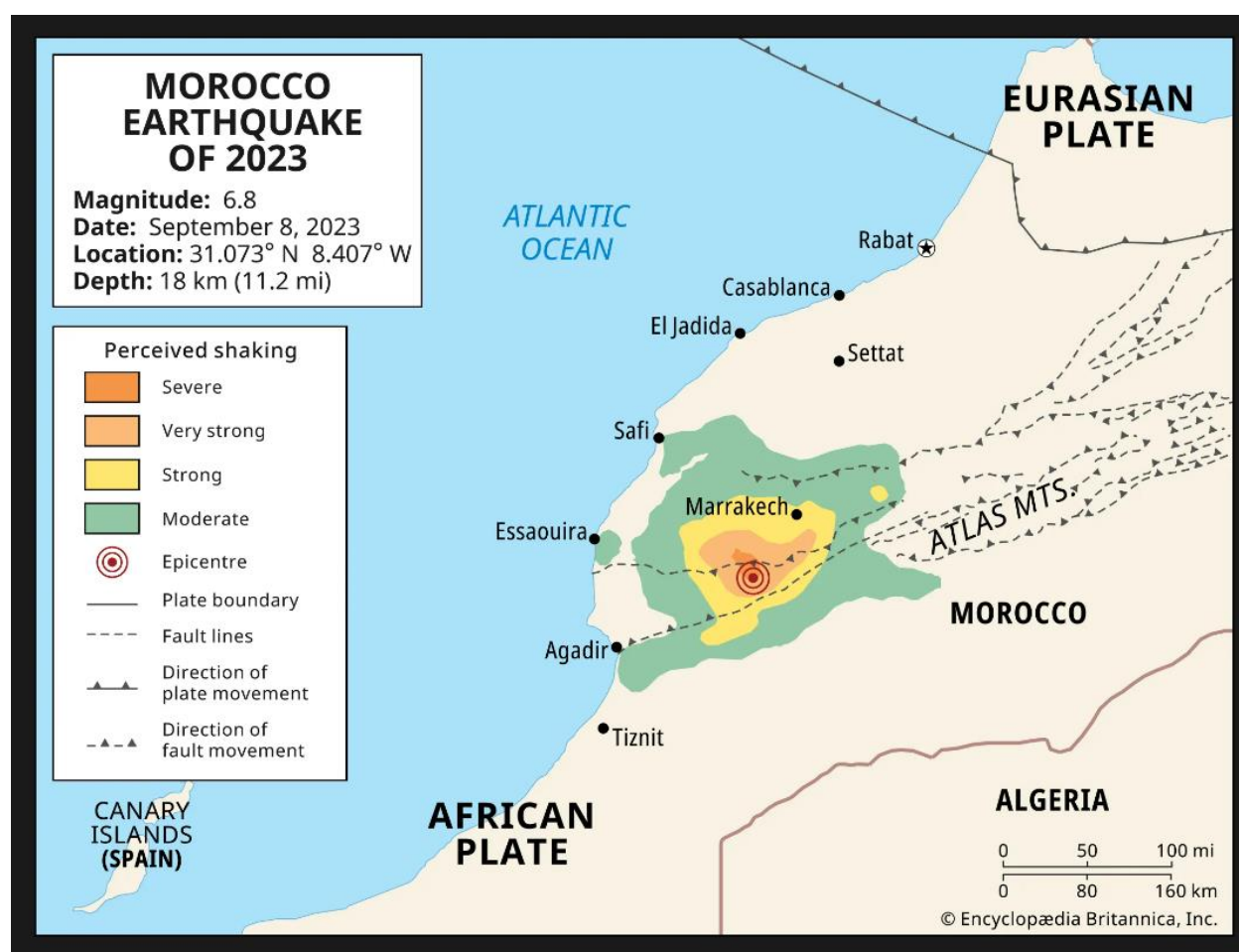


Figure 1: Morocco Earthquake of 2023

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Morocco-earthquake-of-2023>

Concurrently, and during the same month, the region was hit with multiple disasters at a time, notably Flood Storm Daniel in Libya and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with the protracted compounding impacts of the Middle East Complex Emergency and the Syria/Türkiye earthquake. This required significant effort from the IFRC MENA RO necessitating some of the focus of the RO personnel away from Morocco and towards those emergencies, but ultimately led to more localized decision-making when it comes to the MEQ response.

Within this context, and at the onset of the earthquake, the MRC, despite initial hesitation to open coordination channels with IFRC, utilized its full capacity to closely coordinate with the local authorities on the situational assessment and mobilized impressive support to affected populations using its available resources.

On the side of the IFRC, quick actions were taken to approve an allocation of 1 million Swiss francs (CHF) from the [Disaster Response Emergency Fund](#) (DREF), and the contribution was released to support the response. Within the following week, an [Emergency Appeal](#) was published with a Federation-Wide funding requirement of 100 million CHF to assist 500,000 people of the 6.6 million affected. The Operational Strategy, through MRC and building on its existing capacities and strategic priorities, supported affected populations through relief and distribution of life-saving goods and an integrated community engagement for risk reduction and behavioral change.

## 1.2 Scope, Purpose, and Objectives

The overall purpose of the RTE was to identify the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to date, and to document lessons learned to make recommendations to decision-makers on: 1) improvements/changes that will enhance the capacity required to achieve expected operational objectives of the earthquake operation; and 2) forward evidence-based recommendations designed to strengthen overall IFRC systems for future responses in complex settings focusing on coordination structures and operational intent within the IFRC Secretariat, as well as on the internal readiness of the IFRC Secretariat, in the particular case of Morocco, to respond in complex environments.

The scope of this RTE covered two main topics:

1. The value added of the IFRC's interventions for the MRC in terms of sustainable strengthening of the National Society. The RTE assessed not only how IFRC factored this into its programming, but also assessed the degree to which the IFRC has so far supported this expectation.
2. The 'fit for purpose' of IFRC systems, tools, and decision-making processes for rapid and scaled crisis response in the complex settings of the Morocco EQ response. This involved the analysis of IFRC systems and procedures including, but not limited to, surge, HR, finance, and procurement, while accounting for contextual factors like legal framework, the Emergency Appeal mechanism, NS capacity, and the NS's relationship with authorities.

This report is intended to be used internally, and the target audiences are mainly the MRC leadership, staff and volunteers, PNSs, and IFRC Secretariat Global, Regional and Country Teams.

While this report is limited in length for readability purposes, it strives to be as concise, practical, utilization-focused, and thematically structured for ease of navigation as possible. The RTE team had the opportunity to access ample valuable knowledge, information, and insights through the many Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) it carried out and decided to elaborate a detailed list of all conclusions and recommendations at the end of the report.

### 1.3 Methodology

This RTE adopted a process evaluation format most suitable to achieving the intended objectives. The processes examined how the operation is currently being implemented and how the setting, the reality, and the actions taken could influence future planning and programming in a rapidly changing context.

The methodology relied on multiple interrelated tools designed to ensure the validity of the information gathered, including:

1. Literature review of all (30) Morocco EQ response documents (See Annex I) for secondary data collection.
2. Development of key information interview questions facilitating data collection (Annex II) which were then grouped to address effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability under three thematic areas<sup>1</sup>:
  - a. Coordination, Communication and Relations,
  - b. IFRC Operational Support Effectiveness, and
  - c. Strategic and Operational Foundations.
3. Primary data collection through:
  - a. Key Informant Interviews (83) (See Annex III) both online and in-person during a field visit to both Morocco and Lebanon with:
    - MRC senior management, technical staff, and volunteers at all levels.
    - IFRC staff at the Geneva, Regional, Country Cluster, country, and operating branch offices including present staff as well as delegates involved in the earlier stages of the response.
    - Participating National Societies.
    - External Stakeholders where appropriate (to be addressed further in this report).
  - b. Field visits to the three implementing branches.
  - c. Meeting and focus group discussions held with branch staff and volunteers.
4. Qualitative data analysis of all information gathered through data collection under the three agreed-upon themes.
5. Presentations and debriefings with key stakeholders to present findings, engage in dialogue, and adjust analysis and proposed recommendations.

### 1.4 Limitations

Some of the limitations that were assumed during the inception phase were addressed as the evaluation evolved and did not cause major issues. This was the result of a high level of coordination throughout the RTE exercise and the ability of the involved teams to manage the roll out of the evaluation.

Contrary to what was stipulated in the inception report of this RTE on the risk of individuals at IFRC or the NS not being open with information, there was an open and direct dialogue and willingness to share information on the side of all stakeholders interviewed. This resulted in the availability of abundant insights and information that were validated by the RTE team through cross analysis of interviews and existing literature.

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<sup>1</sup> NB: Whilst issues of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability are addressed in detail throughout the document, the report is not structured under these headings. Rather, they are integrated into the themes being discussed.

Two relevant limitations, however, were found regarding access to stakeholders. The short duration of the field mission in Morocco that did not allow for a dedicated time to interview the affected communities. The RTE team ensured that CEA staff and branch volunteers were engaged, but it would have been better to engage in meaningful community participation to validate the information around the effectiveness and quality of the tools used by the operation.

Another limitation was the inability to engage with government officials at the national level in Morocco. This made it hard to ascertain the quality and impact of humanitarian diplomacy efforts of the NS in their role as auxiliary and to determine the nature, strength, and level of influence the NS has with government.

Finally, there is some concern that because the RTE has occurred quite late in the operation, there is limited opportunity to make adjustments/course corrections.

## 2 Key Findings – Coordination, Communication and Relations

Efficient and agile coordination and communication systems are as vital to an effective operation as they are fundamental to understanding roles and responsibilities as well as building trust in relationships. This is of particular importance given key Federation initiatives: 1) The [Agenda for Renewal](#); 2) the [Way of Working](#) as part of the Agenda for Renewal; and 3) [Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance](#), all of which are designed to outline roles and responsibilities placing Host National Societies at the center of decision-making and implementation depending on their capacity, with outside members offering timely and relevant support.

### 2.1 IFRC Internal Decision-making, Coordination and Communication

Several interviewees across the IFRC highlighted confusion in decision-making between distinct levels and units from the onset of the emergency. They reported a lack of clarity about who was mandated to make decisions, who was actually making the decisions, and the roles and responsibilities of those tasked with carrying these decisions out.

Some respondents mentioned they were informed about decisions they believed were their responsibility to make, given their particular role in the operation. For example, several commented that the power of the Head of Emergency Operations (HeOPs), as per existing operating procedures, is being eroded with an increasing, but not clearly stated, shift towards regional decision-making. This finding does not imply favoring one approach over the other (this will be discussed in recommendations) but rather illustrates a lack of clarity about where decision-making power lies, the processes for determining this, and whether the person(s) making the decisions are best placed to do so.

Inconsistent alignment between organizational levels meant different people were making decisions around similar issues (e.g. strategy, finances, HR needs, funding) without adequate systems for ensuring coherence and clarity. This left field staff unclear on strategic and operational priorities and which ‘road’ to follow. The impact on operations was further problematic as decisions, regardless of who was making them, tended to be slow and overly risk-averse, impeding effective responses as noted by most field personnel.

This confusion was exacerbated by inefficient communication lines, resulting in mixed messages and further ambiguity about both decision-making and execution responsibilities. Internal communication systems lacked effectiveness, with insufficient information flow between the different IFRC levels leaving operational staff often unaware of who made the decisions or the rationale behind them.

The following highlight some of these issues around decision-making authority and communication:

- The sending of a high-level representative to Morocco with a less than clear mandate or strategy to improve government relations although the country team felt that the visit produced positive results
- More critical to the operations was the wide range of competing corporate service-related decisions and authority levels. On the one hand, operational staff felt stymied by what were perceived as obstructive, often patronizing, or non-existent responses to requests for flexibility, especially related to finances and procurement while the same sentiments existed on the part of RO staff who claimed that solution based alternatives, based on existing procedures, were presented but often rejected. These were perhaps the most significant blockages to an efficient

operation and will be further unpacked elsewhere in this report. In one example, the risk of taking specific financial and procurement decisions was considered acceptable (not to be confused with approved) by audit colleagues but was either rejected or not considered by corporate services personnel, leaving staff on the ground unclear on how to proceed.

- There was almost universal agreement that the Joint Task Force is of little value outside of sharing information. It is not a decision-making body and requires significant preparation time and energy from field staff.
- HR decisions were not always made with the required input from all relevant stakeholders through a consolidated workforce planning exercise. Decision-making authority was not evident.
- Cash availability was a significant challenge as there was confusion in the field as to whom cash could be transferred.
- Clear decision-making authority between, for example, the Disasters, Climate and Crises unit in Geneva, Regional Director for MENA, Head of Health, Disasters, Climate and Crises (HDCC) MENA and the HeOPs was not always obvious.
- Decisions as to the size of the Emergency Appeal, donor relations and the acceptance of earmarked pledges were not coordinated across the system.

It is not fair to conclude that all decision making was improvised or unorganized, but evidence indicates that either existing systems or people's understanding of them, do not support agile, timely and efficient processes and need to be re-evaluated. Several respondents expressed in detail the frustration around the time spent addressing how and who was involved in making decisions, something that should be clearly articulated in policy and procedures. The absence of these systems impedes an efficient emergency operation and, based on the intensity in which many interviewees responded, is detrimental to staff well-being and to building the wide range of strong relationships and trust inherent in a major response.

## 2.2 IFRC/Moroccan Red Crescent

Perhaps the most important relationship in the EQ operation is that between the IFRC and the MRC. It impacts efficiency, timeliness, and overall effectiveness.

As noted, there was some resistance from the MRC at the beginning. There was no permanent IFRC presence in Morocco, and no country plan had yet been developed. There was no consistent relationship with the IFRC since the last major operation occurred in 2004 although there was work done in Morocco during the COVID-19 outbreak with support from the RO as well as MRC participation in regional trainings and other initiatives.

The MRC was aware from the beginning of their limited capacity to respond to let alone manage, an emergency of this scale. They had very few policies or procedures, few staff, and the NS was fragmented with no established internal coordination mechanism. Importantly, their legal status in the country was not established. Work in two of the three branches involved in the operation started essentially from zero. Support from the IFRC was obviously needed, but the MRC, already inundated with pressures, was not familiar with IFRC appeal, surge, financial, or procurement systems, which often left them unclear about what was happening and what decisions were made.

This scenario created a situation where the inherent tension between the NS capacity to lead the response, as per the AfR and WOW, and the need to address the very real and immediate needs of the affected populations, was overtly present. It was clear that a well-thought-out and nuanced

strategy and approach were needed to develop strong relationships between partners and to conduct an efficient and timely emergency response operation. The decision to send a high-level IFRC staff member to better explain the need and purpose of launching an appeal was prudent and strategic. There was also a need for MENA RO, whether physical or virtual, to be more involved at the early stages of the operation. As one interviewee observed, “MENA RO’s role and involvement immediately and directly with MRC would have been key to breaking the ice between the Federation and the NS.”

While MRC staff complained that initially they were not involved enough in decision-making, this improved quickly as operational leadership, along with the HoD, placed a high level of importance on including the NS in meaningful participation. The IFRC team has done a very good job since the beginning at building effective working relations with the initially cautious MRC, especially involving them in key decisions and providing a thorough orientation to IFRC surge tools such as DREF/Emergency Response Units (ERU). This is an important reflection of the training and selection of key leadership positions, including surge. There has also been an effective delineation of responsibilities between working with MRC/Government leadership and authorities (done by the Head of Delegation (HoD)) and the operations (done by the HeOPs/Operation Manager). MRC staff at all levels interviewed were highly appreciative of the work done by the IFRC and other Federation partners.

While there should be no question as to the dedication and exemplary work done by surge staff, there were concerns voiced by the MRC around technical surge personnel who were sometimes perceived as making unilateral decisions rather than conferring with the NS surge staff who were stationed throughout the affected area, but in many cases, MRC did not know who was where. They felt that the basic courtesy of introducing staff into the National Headquarters (NHQ) (recognizing it is in Rabat and the earthquake-affected area is around Marrakech) was not respected. It is also necessary to note that the MRC acknowledged that a lack of NS counterparts contributed to this. However, it does point out the need for improved training for increased absorption by staff around the AfR and WOW, as well as around cultural awareness. This was discussed with the NS and a system was put in place to inform MRC’s management of all IFRC staff deployments in a timely and regular matter.

Despite these challenges, an important success of this operation is the increased visibility of MRC at the national and local levels. All branches reported better visibility and coordination with authorities and communities, improved professionalism, and better capacities with technical areas and planning.

Before the EQ, aside from updating the volunteers’ roster annually, there was little established communication or collaboration within the MRC’s network. IFRC presence facilitated more open communication between branches and with NHQ, which had the added value of contributing to improved relationships between IFRC and MRC. This sentiment was voiced by several respondents, including the President of the Taroudant branch, who credited the work done in cooperation with the IFRC as a key factor in increasing cross-branch communication as well as cementing their role with the local authorities as a key humanitarian organization.

### **2.3 Membership Coordination**

Membership coordination is a key function of the IFRC as mandated by its members. This often-complex task becomes even more intense during large-scale, rapid-onset disasters. The Morocco

earthquake response was no exception. Common challenges, such as the push for on-ground participation, prioritizing specific government- and donor- earmarked funding, and the desire to be a priority partner, complicated this work. Numerous partners sought different ways to get involved, all within an environment where the government was limiting external participation.

The AfR is a key initiative to facilitate the Federation working as one coordinated entity, leveraging the specific knowledge, skills, and relationships of its members to maximize resources and enhance efficiency and timeliness of response activities. Evidence points to the need for better AfR dissemination, orientation, and onboarding of all partners to ensure compliance for success. In the case of Morocco, where this was a paramount task given the MRC's limited ability to take it on, significant gaps still exist, although there were important successes, as presented below.

Partners, including PNSs, did not, as too often occurs, sufficiently lobby back donors to adapt the use of funding based on the changing context of the operation. There was an unmistakable lack of recognition of the AfR and the role of the MRC, regardless of their capacity. While the leadership of the IFRC response teams worked hard to mitigate this, the task was made increasingly more difficult by the IFRC's reluctance to say no to funding, especially earmarking that is not consistent with the appeal priorities.

Respondents mentioned that networking amongst MENA National Societies could have been stronger, given the tremendous solidarity from many countries and NSs. Several Gulf States, and by extension their NS, had more fluid relations with Morocco and were able to bring in goods much easier. However, there was a reluctance to respect the need for coordination and a tendency to engage too quickly in bilateral agreements without adequate communication with the IFRC. On the other hand, it is crucial to recognize the significant opportunity for non-traditional PNSs to actively participate as key actors and provide them with the relevant visibility they deserve.

Despite these challenges, there were important collaborative successes. Two of these stand out and are worth mentioning.

The GRC played a critical role in long-term collaboration and direction setting during the response to the Morocco earthquake. As the only PNS already present in the country, they had already developed strong relations with the MRC and had many insights into the intricacies of working in the country. In addition, they were committed to staying in the country for the foreseeable future. This combination was key in facilitating the work of the IFRC in their relations with the MRC and with authorities.

This long-term relationship was critical in developing the overall operational strategy, with the GRC playing a central role and ensuring alignment of programming, roles and efficient use of financial and HR

As a result of open and constructive dialogue and planning between partners, it was agreed that the GRC would assume a leadership role in the Chichaoua branch, including providing the field coordinator, thus ensuring quality operational management but also feeding into the sustainability of the work.

The other important collaboration centered on the work of the two deployed Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) ERUs supported by various PNSs. Several key challenges presented themselves mostly relating to the importation of key equipment necessitating a strategic re-evaluation of how best to meet needs given these constraints. This resulted in the two units integrating their work and eventually merging into one.

These examples demonstrate the need to ensure that this type of collaboration and thinking are not only dependent of the personalities involved (an important component) but that the best use of knowledge and skills become systemic and a standard way of working. **This is AfR in action.**

### 3 Key Findings – IFRC Operational Support Effectiveness

IFRC's support and response tools generally assume that National Societies can integrate them into their existing structures to varying degrees. However, in the case of the MRC, which lacks such structures, and is in a country with minimal disaster laws in place - the operations faced significant challenges.

The MEQ response tested the flexibility and adaptability of IFRC's operational support mechanisms. The lack of existing frameworks and structures within the MRC highlighted the need for more tailored and context-specific approaches. Understanding these challenges is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of future responses in similar contexts.

#### 3.1 Understanding the Context

Morocco's operational context brings specific challenges to humanitarian efforts. The country has had limited experience with natural disasters or large-scale conflicts. A significant portion of the population is rural, with around 35% of adults being illiterate and many speaking Tamazight, an indigenous language in North Africa and the Sahel region. The results of this context have implications on how operations are conducted which require flexibility from IFRC operational procedures.

Morocco relies heavily on cash transactions and values verbal agreements, often referred to as a "word of honor" culture. Additionally, Moroccan authorities have substantial control over activities within the country, impacting how humanitarian operations are carried out. Geopolitical issues also complicate logistics, such as obtaining regional visas. After the earthquake in September 2023, the Government did not declare a state of emergency, resulting in several operational consequences. For example, new bank accounts couldn't be opened, aid-laden planes faced delays, and logistical challenges persisted due to the unchanged visa issues. All these things have real bearings on conducting operational responses in country.

#### 3.2 Response Tools and Mechanisms

As the primary response mechanism for the world's largest humanitarian network, the effectiveness of surge deployments must rely on flexibility, contextual analysis, and coordination. The evaluation team found that surge delegates often arrived unannounced, without sufficient knowledge of the Moroccan context, and even lacking proficiency in French or Arabic. Delegates arrived with varying levels of sensitivity to the cultural values of the communities with which they would be interacting. This language barrier and unfamiliarity with the local environment and customs hindered effective communication and coordination.

For the first two months after the earthquake, the MRC did not receive any reports from the ERUs operating in the field, which affected situational awareness and operational planning, but also reportedly affected the relationship and trust between the IFRC and MRC.

There were significant gaps in the selection of the initial deployment team. Critical roles such as risk management, finance, and administrative support—essential for establishing a robust operational foundation and all part of established surge functions—were missing. The country team or RO is

responsible for determining which functions are needed based on thorough assessment and readiness planning. Improved analysis and planning are necessary to ensure that the first team includes personnel for these crucial functions, enhancing the response's effectiveness. It is then the system's role to ensure that personnel are swiftly approved and deployed based on clear and established decision making authority. A key element in this process is expanding the pool of deployable personnel, prioritizing internal candidates from within the IFRC who are more likely to understand relevant policies and procedures.

The other important IFRC response tool to consider was the EA, which is used to open conversation with stakeholders and potential donors providing rapid initial information and the intended areas of intervention. The EA and the operation strategy were detailed and published on time.

MENA RO was the lead for resource mobilization strategy for the EA. As per standard procedures, MRC submitted a field report followed by a request for an EA and then signed off on the EA. It was noted by one of the interviewees that there was a high level of funding to MEQ operation due to factors such as the nature of the disaster, September being a high spending month for donors before the end of the year, and the large Moroccan diaspora across the world.

The funding request, however, was too optimistic given other competing emergencies around the globe. The EA was still able to generate ample funds which continues to challenge the operation in terms of absorption capacity. It is not clear what criteria was used to determine the 'ask' of the EA, but a more detailed situational analysis may lead to a more realistic funding request. As one respondent commented "We need to find a balance between what we can do while making sure we come across as capable to implement an adequate response given the size of the emergency. We are the largest humanitarian organization, and we need to show we can respond accordingly."

As already mentioned in the report the level of earmarked funds was very high and very restrictive. 61% of the funding mobilized was earmarked, either by sector, timeframe or by specific reporting requirements. Of those earmarked funds, 53% needed to be spent within the first 12 months. Donors have strict requirements, and bilateral funding needs to be prioritized due to pledge date limits by donors. Scheduled appeal based reporting forms part of this and was used effectively to keep stakeholders up to date, something not easily accomplished given the specific requirements of some donors.

### **3.3 Corporate Service Processes and Procedures**

A lack of flexibility in some corporate services and procedures, coupled with staff's limited understanding and slow, unclear decision-making process, created significant delays and barriers in the response. This issue was consistently reported at all levels, both horizontally and vertically, throughout the evaluation. These challenges raised concerns about both the efficiency and effectiveness of the response.

**Finance** Morocco operates as a cash-based economy, relying on available funds. Upon the arrival of the IFRC, there were substantial delays in financial mobilization. Although the Regional Office (RO) stated that options for making funds available were presented (e.g., transfers to the National Society or Partner National Societies), the initial surge delegates faced challenges. Interviewees who were present at the start of the earthquake response reported that the delegates were unable to access any of the funds pledged by the IFRC, resulting in a situation where "all of the delegates in the beginning were just evaluating and planning." This suggests a clear breakdown in communication.

The IFRC had no bank account set up in Morocco in part due to the lack of a status agreement. Options to create a non-resident bank account exist and while the RO has stated this was suggested, they claim the operations team did not follow-up on this until recently. The decision was made to make use of Western Union, under strict conditions, but this option was not sustainable and would impact implementation speed and capacity. The use of Western Union transfers to individuals was perceived by staff that the IFRC opened up staff to considerable personal risk. A commonly shared sentiment by staff, which one Head of Operations included in a report was that “IFRC manages financial risk by shifting it to individuals.”

It is interesting to note that while the IFRC allows for staff to assume risks, it does not, as per policy and procedures, extend the same level of flexibility to potential suppliers. One interviewee highlighted the perceived organizational risk aversion: “there was a situation which would have ‘exposed’ [the IFRC] to an amount of 2 800 CHF to give a working advance to a supplier. The financial officer refused, which delayed the process while ERU members were here, which was costing more than 2 800 CHF every day. Unfortunately, their ears were closed to any feedback.”

It was not until 10 May 2024, eight months after the earthquake, that the operation was able to open a bank account. Until then, the German Red Cross, the only delegation which was present in the country before the earthquake, provided funding to support IFRC’s work, including 15,000-euros in Marrakech as well as direct procurement of two batteries in Rabat.

Many interviewees expressed that financial staff were exerting too much influence over the response operations. As one interviewee succinctly put it: “The finance people end up controlling the program which is not the job of the finance people.” It is clear that a better understanding of policies and procedures needs to occur as part of training staff but at the same time flexibility must be built into the system.

Donor timelines and earmarked funding added further restrictions, complicating the situation with already-frozen funds, and placing MRC and IFRC in a difficult position with donors.

### Procurement

The lack of a state of emergency declaration by the Moroccan government post-earthquake meant IFRC needed to be especially adaptable to deliver aid effectively. The challenges with IFRC’s financial procedures in Morocco were closely intertwined with those of procurement. Procuring goods and services in a timely and contextually appropriate manner was hindered by the inflexibility of these procedures. This rigidity led to winterization kits being delivered in May, a supplier in the mountains needing to borrow money from his family members to prepare the goods procured by IFRC, and many accounts of local suppliers severing ties with the local MRC branch.

As mentioned in the report, Morocco operates on a word of honor culture. In a procurement context, a supplier’s promise and a handshake are sufficient to seal deals. However, IFRC’s complex requirements—demanding invoices, receipts, and photocopies of ID cards—at best confused and intimidated suppliers, and at worst introduced an element of distrust between the MRC and local suppliers, an impression which can permeate through communities.

Another observation was made on how the teams that dealt with suppliers did not speak the language or have prior knowledge of the market or the culture. There were often no MRC local staff or interpreters accompanying the procurement process. One interviewee observed that suppliers

changed their prices based on who is procuring the goods: “the cost will change when the procurer is a ‘foreigner,’” meaning a person who does not speak the local language.

The procurement systems simply were not, in all instances, fit for purpose, either for local procurement or for dealing with large corporate actors. This was also evident in the tender process, which posed significant challenges for branches like Chichaoua and Taroudant, where finding three suppliers to meet tender requirements proved impossible. One MRC branch did not receive basic office furniture until April 2024, forcing staff and volunteers to work in an inadequately furnished building for months. There was reportedly “strong and consistent” language from IFRC leadership that exceptions to the IFRC corporate service procedures could be made if they are needed but receiving them was very time-consuming and most of the time unsuccessful<sup>2</sup>. Annex IV shows a breakdown done on 20 November 2023 of flexibility requests. In addition, many staff were not aware of how these ‘exception’ clauses worked, let alone what the process was to activate them.

### Human Resources

There appears to be a very narrow view of the role of HR, particularly in emergency contexts, which has introduced additional complications to an already complex response. The fact that an HR surge position was not requested until two months after the earthquake, resulted not only in a lack of proactive involvement of HR in areas such as workforce planning, but also several issues consistently highlighted by interviewees that appeared to be easily addressable such as the burden of writing a new job description and obtaining approval for standard emergency response personnel, the absence of an organizational chart, working together with administration in operating a welcome centre in order to track and train incoming personnel, and an over-reliance on short-term contracts to fill gaps before recruiting long-term staff.

Before the earthquake, there was no HR system in place in the MRC. As is often the case, these gaps actually present an opportunity to the Federation to assist an NS in developing strong and sustainable systems including HR. A majority of those interviewed by the evaluation team reported the extremely high turnover of personnel in the beginning (reportedly around 3 weeks for many delegates) as a source of difficulty in the development of MRC and its response to the earthquake. While this is an issue primarily for surge, it has important implications for HR especially given the amount of work for such short assignments.

While there was an understanding of the importance of finding the right candidates for long-term positions and the necessity of using short-term staff in the interim, more thought was needed to find a better balance as one interviewee expressed: “I know the Federation is trying to get a good profile to last for a year and in the meantime, they need to fill the gap. But for myself, I question the pertinence of sending someone just for one month on this specific topic. I’m not sure if it’s added value for me.”

Other HR challenges were related to recruiting national staff, which could have contributed to the sustainability of a long-term availability of needed capabilities. Available profiles did not match the required knowledge and experience of the Federation’s rules, regulations, and processes, and the absence of a legal status complicated the national staff recruitment process even further. There was also a mismatch between the NS salary scale and that of the market. An interviewee mentioned that “we have been trying to recruit a national finance officer since February now, but we could not find

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<sup>2</sup> Please see attached in Annex IV a matrix of systems and procedures identified as requiring proactive adaptation to enable timely operations at scale, by the HEOps in the “HEOps Handover and End of Mission Report”.

any national staff who would accept the salary scale. Eventually an offer was accepted only after increasing the salary, bringing it closer to the market rate.”

A solid success was the IFRC working with the MRC to bring their salary scale closer to the market salary rates and align IFRC and PNS staff to it, avoiding different salary scales for the NS and its partners’ national staff.

### Administration

Administration, like HR, has not been effectively viewed as a proactive resource. In Morocco, administrative issues were largely responses to emerging problems rather than the result of forward planning. Notably, there was no administrative delegate at the start of the operation, which is essential for effective coordination as well as providing support to the overall IFRC surge teams. Areas such as organizing a welcoming service, finding adequate housing and office space would have been valuable, contributing to staff well-being and ensuring that each member was able to dedicate their time to their specific functions

One significant challenge was Morocco's housing market, which relies heavily on person-to-person deals. In response, IFRC switched from Federation-paid housing to employee-paid housing without providing sufficient notice for staff to secure accommodation while they were actively engaged in the response reducing both efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, visa issues in the region forced qualified staff who speak Arabic and French to work remotely from Beirut well into 2024 or to not get deployed at all.

### Risk Assessment

Although the Lead, Risk Management and Internal Control from Geneva visited during the first weeks of the operation to identify ways to proactively anticipate and mitigate potential challenges, adequate ongoing follow-up has not been carried out. While risk registries have been updated, these have been done by a limited number of staff with most respondents not aware of the registry and having a limited understanding of risk and the importance of maintaining a risk register. Several staff viewed dedicating budgets and personnel as unnecessary and taking away from other priorities. This gap in ongoing risk assessment, combined with previous examples of risks to personnel and the inflexibility of IFRC procedures, underscores the need for a balanced approach to managing risk while responding to needs especially in such a dynamic environment.

## 4 Key Findings – Strategic and Operational Foundations

### 4.1 Legal Framework of the Moroccan Red Crescent, the Auxiliary Role, Disaster Law, Humanitarian Diplomacy, and Visibility

#### Legal Status and Auxiliary Role of the Moroccan Red Crescent

The Moroccan Red Crescent does not have a clear legal status or a legislative framework governing its activities in the country, as His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco has not yet appointed a new MRC President. Additionally, the IFRC does not have a status agreement with the Moroccan government. These two issues have been identified by several stakeholders as the primary regulatory barriers impeding the effective and efficient implementation of the response.

As a result of the lack of legal status and a legislative framework, the MRC did not position itself as a strong auxiliary to the government during the early stages of the response. The MRC had very little leverage with national authorities and was reluctant to engage with the government at the onset of the operation. This reluctance was compounded by the fact that the NS was not well-positioned to respond to an emergency of this scale. Consequently, the MRC hesitated to engage with the IFRC and take the lead in launching an Emergency Appeal, especially when the government was unwilling to request international assistance to respond to the earthquake. High-level visits from the IFRC helped to build confidence and assure the MRC of strong support from the IFRC and the wider Federation.

The Government of Morocco was very selective about who was allowed to support and participate in the response. The primary conduit for responding to the emergency was the Mohammed V Foundation (MVF). The MVF was involved in all aspects of the response and was set up as the central agency for collecting and distributing goods to those affected by the earthquake. This mandate is similar to that of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC), but the MRC had only moderate links to the government at the national level and limited relations at most operational branch levels. Initially, the MVF did not welcome the MRC and considered its activities duplicative. In essence, the MVF was in direct competition with the MRC. An interviewee observed, “We have collaborated with MVF before, but now not so much. We contacted them, and they told us that we work at the same level, so there is no need to duplicate efforts.” This situation hindered the MRC’s ability to showcase its role and impact as a humanitarian actor in the country. This was less the case in the Taroudant and Chichaoua branches, which had minimal links to local authorities.

At the local level, there is a provincial plan to organize aid, and the MRC, despite not being well-known to local authorities before the earthquake, participated. The Marrakesh/Safi regional branch used their auxiliary status with local authorities to play a more active role in the government-led response. In Taroudant, the governor communicates with the MRC branch annually to document volunteers and personnel so that in case of a disaster, the local authority can reach out to the MRC for support. “That is why moments after the earthquake happened late at night, the authorities called us, as part of that committee.” The MRC provides support upon the government’s request and bases its response solely on the authorities’ instructions.

Evidence from the interviews suggests that things have markedly improved over the course of the operation, and the MRC now finds itself in a more comfortable position to approach the Government, although this channel remains underutilized considering how well-positioned the MRC is to engage

in an active auxiliary role. From the operation's onset, IFRC leadership has played an important role in supporting this change, dedicating time and effort to assisting the MRC in negotiating a larger role in supporting affected populations at national and branch levels. They played a vital role in improving relations between the MRC, the MVF, and other relevant government ministries, who are now more aware of the significant contributions the MRC can make at all levels. Advocacy by the IFRC at different levels inside and outside Morocco was key to achieve this.

### Disaster Law (DL)/Humanitarian Diplomacy

Since 2016, there has been no DL program in the regional office, and despite a recent increased interest in better utilizing DL to enhance the auxiliary role of National Societies, it has remained largely invisible. Challenges in the operation, due to the lack of an established MRC legal status, could have been partially mitigated by guidance from the DL unit and the use of relevant documentation to support MRC's auxiliary role.

It was unrealistic to expect the response to proceed as 'business-as-usual' without legal status, a legislative framework, or sufficient guidance for field staff on how to navigate these challenges. As one respondent aptly put it, "There should be a clear approach and guidelines for working in countries that do not have a legislative framework or legal status. Expectations did not consider the absence of both in this context." In the view of the evaluation team, there was a lack of understanding of the value and tools of DL in this operation. Consequently, no DL surge capacity was considered to support the operation, even though a DL surge kit exists.

The MEQ operation demonstrates a situation where there would have been added value that a strong DL component could contribute to National Society and regional readiness. One interviewee stated that excluding DL from the resource mobilization strategy of the emergency appeal was a 'missed opportunity.'

During the early stages of the response, there was significant solidarity from countries and NSs in the MENA region, which were able to transfer aid quickly, though not always in a coordinated manner. PNSs already established in the country, such as the GRC, and those with strong governmental relations, such as Türkiye and Qatar, were the first to respond due to their well-established relationships. This underscores the importance of humanitarian diplomacy in advocating for the role that the IFRC could play in similar situations. Issues like the auxiliary role, DL, and Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) require humanitarian diplomacy support to facilitate acceptance, planning and coordination.

Starting in April 2024, with the support of the regional DL focal person, the IFRC presented a proposed road map to MRC on DL, IDRL and auxiliary role, indicating what is proposed to be done and starting the conversation with the NS on the way forward and learning from the MEQ response.

## 4.2 Protection, Gender and Inclusion

The area affected by the earthquake is dispersed and located in difficult terrains. Although the country has an urban middle-income setting, women and girls in these regions face restricted access to education, work, and resources. Men maintain control over social settings and finances. This context required a cultural understanding, knowledge of potential risks, and use of local languages in approaching PGI. However, the evaluation found these elements somewhat lacking in the MEQ response.

The evaluation revealed a need to advance PGI earlier in the response, including PGI analysis, data disaggregation, PGI risk analysis, and effective use of available tools to avoid serious programmatic issues. PGI is crucial in operations to ensure no harm comes to the most vulnerable populations, as well as to staff and volunteers.

Initially, MRC did not prioritize PGI, but IFRC strongly advocated for its inclusion. Efforts to secure PGI support began early in the operation. A collaborative desk context analysis supported the ERU and WASH teams, who demonstrated good PGI competence relevant to their specific tasks.

Unfortunately, an IFRC PGI delegate for the MEQ response could not deploy to Morocco until April 2024, meaning PGI was not as integrated into plans and decisions as needed early in the response. Interviews suggest that a low investment in PGI staff, restricted funding for PGI, and the cross-cutting nature of PGI resulted in a delayed response in recruiting a staff member, despite IFRC's awareness of the need. There was insufficient support from the MENA RO due to a lack of staff, and the regional PGI network was dormant. However, with IFRC's support, MRC should develop and adopt a PGI policy for practical implementation.

Local communities were highly receptive and appreciative of the application of PGI "Women told me that MRC was the only organization that spoke with women in the community". This success could be built upon, and PGI-earmarked funds could advocate for capacity building and PGI mainstreaming with the NS, especially given their cultural sensitivity and traditional context. Additionally, there is a need to examine the Moroccan Family Code (Moudawana) and legislative framework governing PGI (e.g., the law of inheritance), particularly concerning orphans.

The issue of prioritizing PGI within the IFRC surfaced several times when talking to those interviewed. "If we do not have the leadership understanding and knowledge of PGI capacities and engagement, we cannot advance the PGI agenda." There was widespread uncertainty about whether the code of conduct was shared with all staff.

The MEQ context provides an opportunity to establish PGI as a priority per guidelines. Despite careful navigation with authorities, there is openness and willingness on the part of MRC. However, long-term planning is challenging without a local counterpart in the country.

### **4.3 Community Engagement and Accountability**

Before the earthquake, there was no CEA capacity or experience within the MRC. Community approaches were very top-down, with minimal enabling environments to utilize CEA. Additionally, any CEA initiatives tended to be misconstrued as a program rather than an approach or a working foundation.

With the launch of the MEQ operation, a focus on integrated programming, coupled with a coordinated approach to MRC training, was implemented. This included CEA as a key component in all training. CEA received significant focus from the HeOPs and was quickly accepted by the MRC branch volunteers. Branches were encouraged and trained to adopt a more community-centered approach to their activities and operations.

This emphasis on CEA proved effective, as branches with limited prior programming were trained to prioritize community needs. This bodes well for future programming and building sustainable, trusting relationships with communities.

The evaluation team found CEA officers in all branches and a counterpart named for the CEA delegate. This training impacted work methods and resulted in local communities appreciating being

involved and considered. Women, for the first time, participated in focus group discussions and were approached by female staff to explain what the NS is doing, the selection criteria and how to use the distributed goods.

However, this approach is not without challenges. Surge staff who are adopting a more community-based approach noted that much work is still needed to bring quick-action-oriented operational staff onboard with this different response paradigm. Additionally, the CEA surge profile is seldom available in the region, in part due to visa restrictions, which is critical given the need for linguistic skills and cultural awareness, both of which are obligatory when working closely with communities. Another concern is that within the MENA regional Office, CEA falls under the responsibility of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluations and Reporting (PMER), and is perceived by many as having limited priority when planning operations. It should be noted that in Morocco CEA does fall under Programmes and Operations.

In the case of the earthquake operation, there were examples highlighting the need for increased awareness and training in CEA. Issues around language and cultural sensitivity, already addressed in this report, are critical in community work. Taking the time to understand the community's context and listen to people's needs is fundamental, but this caused some tension when balancing it against providing needed services quickly to communities. Issues with community outreach activities, such as setting up focus group discussions with women without first connecting with the local community, approaching communities without briefing or sensitizing them on the activities, and sending out ERU and WASH IFRC staff that were not trained on the principles of the CEA approach, caused some issues. "The ERU and WASH teams knew their work but did not know how ERU and WASH function in Morocco," observed one interviewee.

There were also concerns with understanding local customs, traditions, and culture, such as shaking hands with women, hugging, wearing a headscarf when needed, proper dress code, and working in Amazigh indigenous communities.

Another specific challenge in the MEQ context was the lack of a volunteering culture in Morocco, where volunteers were perceived by community members as "power figures" or "in charge." This led to volunteers feeling uncomfortable being placed in this position as it caused some tension with local authorities who felt some threat by this relationship. As such the NS decided to always work through the local authorities.

As a step to strengthen CEA and the manner in which staff and volunteers work with affected communities, and to better understand local needs, MRC leadership has approved a community feedback mechanism and a hotline to be launched by the end of June 2024. However, all three branches are hesitant as it represents a potential threat. The implementation of this tool will require targeted communication, engagement, and close collaboration with the branches to explain its functionality and the need for such a mechanism, and to encourage its use in line with CEA guidelines.

#### **4.4 National Society Development**

MEQ response heavily relied on IFRC's surge capacities across the board. And while that capacity was able to carry the response in coordination with MRC, it became visible a few months in that the surge rotation system cannot sustain a response without a trained national capacity for service delivery. Barriers such as identifying sustained surge support for key positions, duration of deployments, handover of files with every rotation, lack of knowledge retention and dispersed institutional memory of the response, visas, and language limitations all came to play and impacted

the effectiveness and efficiency of response. Some key positions are not yet filled after the end of the outgoing delegates' deployment.

There is no country plan in place for Morocco and, therefore, no tailored approach to NSD. The absence of a long-term well-articulated national strategic plan is a fundamental barrier to the development of a strong, well run and relevant NS. As several people interviewed stated: "We need to have a longer-term strategic plan. An organization without a strategic plan is not an organization," "All the challenges that we have right now in the field are centered around how to raise money here and how to make purchases here. We need fundraising training," and "For us, it's a big priority. Before going and strengthening the communities and volunteers, we need to build our staff's capacity."

Governance and management capacity is low in the NS, given the current absence of a governance structure or an established management and technical staff structure. The evaluation finds the work done by IFRC staff and PNSs in supporting MRC senior leadership to be extremely well thought out and of enormous value.

It is also clear that MRC also has very little in the way of policies or procedures in key areas such as finance, volunteer management, and HR Disaster readiness and response is an area that was clearly absent in the NS. Another important area is the disconnect between the NS network with limited communication between the NHQ and the branches or between branches. A result of this is the lack of branch development initiatives. As one branch President stated: "I want IFRC to know that if we are asking for support, it does not always mean asking for material and logistics support, but really to invest in our potential at this branch. I would like IFRC to be a solid partner of the branch as far as reinforcing our capacity." The absence of a domestic resource mobilization approach for MRC as a way of diversifying its domestic support is also a significant area that has yet to be explored to ensure sustainability and continued support to its core services and operations.

Many of these fundamental areas for improvement have been identified by IFRC staff, both in country and in the RO, but a detailed NSD strategy has not been developed yet, partially due to the delays in finding a suitable and experienced NSD delegate to coordinate the NSD file.

## 5 Lessons Learned

The RTE exercise was not, unfortunately, to facilitate a collective lesson learned process with respondents. However, the following represent key lessons arising from those involved in the operation and drawn from the interviews.

- 1. Plan ahead – be ready:** Adequate readiness planning can increase the speed, efficiency and effectiveness of emergency operations while the lack of such planning significantly contributes to unnecessary delays and frustration and often the late delivery of needed goods and services to impacted communities.
- 2. Understand the context:** Detailed contextual understanding and readiness planning are fundamental for effective emergency response operations.
- 3. Localized knowledge and cultural sensitivity:** Respecting and making use of local knowledge and cultural sensitivity into operations, including understanding language and social customs, greatly improves communication, trust, and effectiveness of the response.
- 4. Humanitarian diplomacy:** Sending a high-level representative to explain IFRC added value to NS and authorities builds trust and confidence.
- 5. Promoting innovation:** Dedicating energy to explaining, advocating and promoting the value of innovative solutions, even when they are initially met with skepticism, can lead to important results. It highlights the importance of clear communication and respect when addressing stakeholder concerns. Such was the case in having the MRC accept the use of CVA.
- 6. Systems and procedures that conform:** Adaptable systems and procedures, that are well known by all staff, allow for quicker and more effective responses in dynamic emergency situations. Simplified and flexible financial and procurement procedures significantly enhance the speed and efficiency of emergency operations.
- 7. Clear coordination and communication build trust:** Establishing clear decision-making roles and maintaining efficient communication channels ensures smooth coordination and builds trust among all stakeholders.
- 8. Essential functions in place:** Effective human resource strategies and strong administrative support are crucial for maintaining operational efficiency and staff well-being.
- 9. Balancing risk and delivery:** Regular risk assessments and dedicated risk management roles help in proactively addressing potential challenges, ensuring smoother operations.
- 10. The need for strong local partnerships:** Building strong relationships with local authorities and organizations enhances the overall effectiveness of response efforts.
- 11. The right people with the right profile:** Emergency response staff with thorough preparation, including cultural and linguistic training, improve communication and coordination, leading to more effective emergency responses.
- 12. Leveraging internal expertise:** Making use of internal IFRC staff often results in a quicker and smoother integration given their familiarity with policies, procedures as well as culture and customs.
- 13. The strength of the Federation network:** Collaborating with Federation members, guided by the AfR and the WOW, ensures the right people with the right resources come together for quick and effective results.

- 14. Who makes what decisions?** Clear and well-communicated decision-making processes are essential for efficient operations. Confusion and delays arise when roles, responsibilities, and authority levels are not well-defined.
- 15. Communities first:** Engaging with and being accountable to the community ensures that operations are aligned with local needs and builds trust with the affected communities.

## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The following are conclusions and associated recommendations the evaluation team considers priorities. Note that some similar recommendations span multiple themes and are listed several times, reflecting importance the evaluation team placed on these cross-cutting themes. We encourage the reader to review all the recommendations and trust they will make the related connections. In brackets at the end of each recommendation are suggestions as to who should be responsible for taking things forward and (not who should do specific tasks).

Some recommendations span multiple themes and are listed under several headings, reflecting their cross-cutting importance. We encourage readers to review all recommendations and recognize the connections between them. Each recommendation includes a suggested responsible technical unit and level in brackets.

### 6.1 Coordination, Communication, and Relations

#### IFRC Internal Decision-Making, Communication, and Coordination

**Conclusion:** The Morocco earthquake operation experienced significant **confusion in strategic and technical decision-making processes**, with unclear mandates, roles, and responsibilities. This led to inconsistent decision-making across different levels and units, causing uncertainty among field staff regarding strategic and operational priorities.

**Conclusion:** Inconsistent organizational alignment and **inefficient communication lines** exacerbated the confusion, resulting in mixed messages and insufficient information flow. This, coupled with slow and overly risk-averse decision-making, hindered effective responses to the emergency.

- **Recommendation:** Efficiency of decision-making cannot only and principally be based on personalities but needs to be grounded in systems that can avoid foreseeable discrepancies and misunderstandings. As such, the revision of the Emergency Response Framework, which the evaluation team considers critical, must include clear decision-making structures, lines of communication, and roles and responsibilities of every unit involved in an operation. The RTE team suggest, for consideration, that the following structures are immediately activated whenever a large-scale operation occurs: **(IFRC Senior Management)**
  1. **Strategic Direction Committee:** Composed of the Under Secretary General for National Society Development and Operations Coordination, the Director for Disasters, Climate and Crisis, the Regional Director, and a high-level representative from the affected National Society.
  2. **Operational Management Committee:** Composed of a limited number of key senior management personnel from the IFRC NHQ, the Regional Office, and the affected National Society.
- **Recommendation:** As part of the response readiness process, the MENA Regional and the country office needs to allocate resources and effort into conducting comprehensive strategic situational analyses. This involves gathering detailed information on potential risks, local vulnerabilities, available resources and specific policies that can affect an operation so as to facilitate quicker and more efficient decision-making during emergencies, enabling a more effective and timely response to the needs of affected communities. **(MRC, HoD, MENA HDCC)**
- **Recommendation:** Senior management should reconsider the purpose of the Joint Task Force given the significant preparatory and input energy and time required, especially for those in the

field. **(Under Secretary for National Society Development and Operations Coordination, Head of DCC)**

- **Recommendation:** IFRC leadership needs to develop and implement a process that ensures people comply with systems and decisions and are accountable especially once roles and responsibilities are clearly laid out in the revised ERF. This should be part of any performance assessment. **(Senior Management, Head of HR Geneva)**

## IFRC/MRC

**Conclusion:** The **relationship between the IFRC and the MRC** is crucial for efficient and impactful emergency operations. Initial resistance from the MRC was due to a lack of a permanent IFRC presence, an undeveloped country plan, and limited capacity within the MRC. The MRC's lack of established policies, procedures, staff, and legal status further exacerbated these challenges, highlighting their need for IFRC support.

**Internal Decision-Making and Communication** understanding and cooperation. Over time, MRC involvement in decision-making improved, reflecting effective relationship-building efforts by the IFRC. Despite some concerns about the approach of technical Surge personnel, the dedication and professionalism of the surge staff were acknowledged, emphasizing the need for better cultural awareness and training for both IFRC and MRC staff to enhance coordination and integration.

- **Recommendation:** While obvious, IFRC staff need to ensure that MRC is always advised of all decisions made that may not involve them directly including challenges and issues that may arise so that joint solutions can be found. **(MEQ Operation Manager/Field Coordinators)**
- **Recommendation:** Reporting templates and all key documents should be translated into either French or Arabic for dissemination to MRC staff at all levels. **(MENA RO/Operations Administration)**
- **Recommendation:** Surge/HeOPS/HoD/RO need to ensure that MRC names counterparts for all technical areas to ensure at least a minimal degree of sustainability and capacity development. This includes corporate service and especially finance and HR. **(MEQ Operations Manager)**

## Membership Coordination

**Conclusion:** The GRC played a pivotal role due to its established presence and long-term commitment in Morocco. Their **strong relationship with the MRC and authorities was crucial** in supporting the IFRC developing the overall operational strategy, ensuring efficient use of resources, and providing leadership in specific branches.

**Conclusion: Effective collaboration**, such as the relationship with PNS and the integration and eventual merging of two WASH ERUs, underscores the importance of systemic approaches to collaboration. These successes illustrate the need for institutionalizing knowledge and skills and finding the best fit to fill different roles to enhance operational efficiency and sustainability in future responses, embodying the principles of the AfR initiative.

**Conclusion:** The Morocco earthquake response highlighted significant **coordination challenges** among Federation members, exacerbated by the government's limited acceptance of external aid. The push for on-ground participation and earmarked funding from back donors complicated the efforts, with an evident need for better dissemination and adherence to the AfR framework to ensure a cohesive response.

**Conclusion: Networking among MENA National Societies** could have been stronger. Some Gulf States managed to engage more fluidly due to their relationships with Morocco but tended to bypass necessary coordination, opting for bilateral agreements instead.

- **Recommendation:** The Morocco EQ operation presents an important opportunity to apply AfR and WOW principles. Along with the MRC and the IFRC, the GRC and French RC who have in-country representation should both be active in any relevant planning and decision-making exercises including the efficient use of human and financial resources. This should form part of the eventual unified planning process. **(HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** The RO needs to recognize the opportunity to better engage with non-traditional regional PNSs. Better understanding of IFRC collaboration mechanisms, on the part of several regional NSs, can lead to significant support for regional initiatives. **(Regional Director MENA)**

## 6.2 IFRC Operational Support Effectiveness

**General Recommendation:** To ensure valuable insights and recommendations from previous and current evaluations are utilized effectively, senior management should establish a system for approval, implementation, monitoring, and accountability. This system should: 1) Methodically review earlier evaluations to extract key recommendations; and 2) ensure management responses to current and future review exercises are followed up including naming specific implementing units that are responsible and accountable and establish a timeline.

### Context Analysis

**Conclusion:** The Morocco earthquake response suffered from **limited contextual assessment and readiness planning**. Inadequate considerations of local capacities, legal bases and cultural aspects contributed to miscommunication and slow implementation.

- **Recommendation:** Country teams, regional offices, and global units must prioritize individual country comprehensive context evaluation for robust emergency response planning. **(Director DCC, Deputy Regional Director, Regional Head HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Time and financial resources need to be invested in developing a comprehensive readiness plan for Morocco (and all other countries) that include: **(HoD, Head of HDCC MENA)**
  1. Pre-agreements with the NS as to the basic staffing/surge complement for any disaster that can be deployed immediately.
  2. Profile for selection of all surge personnel taking into consideration language.
  3. Understanding of the market for procurement, import procedures, banking regulations, business culture (e.g. payment standards).
  4. Ensuring that NS are very clear about IFRC procedures.
  5. Contingencies for when the demand on the RO out reaches capacity.
- **Recommendation:** Because multiple operations can stretch the capacity of the RO, it is imperative that a multi-country workforce plan be developed to address the movement of staff during large events, and systems put in place for immediate activation when needed. **(Deputy Regional Director, Head of HDCC, Head of Corporate Services MENA)**

## Response Tools and Mechanisms

**Conclusion:** Slow implementation of operational activities is primarily due to **inflexible and often bureaucratic IFRC mechanisms, systems, and procedures** that fail to adapt to local contexts. This rigidity has caused delays and frustration exemplified by delayed services to affected populations and increased workloads and stress amongst staff. Key issues highlighted include the lack of clearer decision-making structures and roles, efficient internal communication, and consistent alignment and accountability mechanisms.

**Conclusion:** The evaluation highlighted several issues in surge deployments due to **poor contextual understanding** and a lack of adequate assessment of needed functions. Early deployment teams lacked critical roles in risk management, finance, and administration, affecting operational effectiveness and trust between IFRC and MRC.

- **Recommendation:** The revised ERF must reduce complexity and clarify scope and expectations including clear decision-making structures, internal communication systems and accountability mechanisms. **(Director DCC)**
- **Recommendation:** The RO leadership need to systematize, through training and creating relevant systems, better integrated planning processes for emergency response operations. This requires the active participation of operational, programmatic, and corporate service units with clear assigned decision-making responsibilities. It may be HDCC that oversees operations, but they cannot and should not be the only ones making decisions, especially around thematic areas outside of their expertise. **(Deputy Regional Director, Head HDCC, Head Corporate Services, Head PMER - MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Corporate services need to be more proactive in providing input into planning rather than simply carrying out tasks (e.g., HR needs to support decisions around workforce planning and staff wellbeing rather than only focusing on recruitment; finance needs to be solution oriented in a manner that facilitates actions in the field that staff understand and not only appear as the guardians of often inflexible procedures. **(Head of Corporate Services, Head HDCC)**
- **Recommendation:** To improve future responses, better planning based on clear contextually accurate analysis, is necessary to ensure surge teams are adequately equipped with the necessary functions, skills and knowledge, including language proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Multi-disciplinary teams across levels must be put into place to ensure surge team deployments meet the operation's needs. Additional focus needs to be placed on the use on internal IFRC staff for surge missions who are familiar with relevant IFRC policies and procedures.  
**(Director DCC, Head HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Prior knowledge of the operation's context is needed before sending out any ERU alert. Any ERU team must be clear about any particulars (e.g. import restrictions) so they can adjust plans. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** As part of the ERF revision plan and regional and country specific readiness planning, more contextual analysis is needed when determining the make-up of initial surge teams. All required functions need to be included. Cost should not be a consideration in the deployment of personnel to a large-scale rapid onset disaster. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC MENA)**

- **Recommendation:** Increased training around the AfR and WOW needs to be conducted and form part of the planning and implementation of all operations if these fundamental and key initiatives are to be successful as mandated by both the membership and the IFRC leadership. **(Under Secretary General for National Society Development and Operations Coordination and Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** The MENA RO needs to place much more energy on building their regional surge system including regional ERUs. This increases efficiency and addresses contextual variables such as culture and language. Special attention must be placed on visas and importation regulations between neighboring countries. We recommend that the RO senior management along with the Disaster Law team, work with the NS to lobby existing political coordination platforms for special consideration for regional movement of goods and personnel during times of emergency. **(Head HDCC, Deputy Regional Director, Head Corporate Services MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Operations team at country and regional levels should deploy the existing capacities within IFRC offices (both inside and outside of the region) until a permanent structure is in place. **(Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** The ERF revision process must clearly determine and articulate all decision-making responsibilities, considering contextual adjustments. This should include differentiating between strategic roles (HoD) and operational leadership (HeOPs). **(Director DCC)**
- **Recommendation:** As part of a comprehensive readiness strategy, IFRC needs to better communicate surge tools, mechanisms, objectives and procedures to all NSs well in advance of emergency events. **(Head of HDCC MENA)**

**Conclusion:** A significant portion of the funding (61%) was highly restrictive, earmarked by sector, timeframe or specific reporting requirements, with 53% needing to be spent within the first 12 months, presenting challenges in fund utilization and adherence to donor requirements.

- **Recommendation:** Implement a more thorough situational analysis to determine a realistic funding request for the Emergency Appeal, balancing between the operational and absorption capacity and the need to demonstrate the capacity of the Federation network to respond adequately to the emergency. **(Under Secretary for National Society Development and Operations Coordination, Director DCC)**
- **Recommendation:** While easier said than done, it is crucial to have all Federation members advocate for more flexible funding agreements with back donors to reduce the high level of earmarked funds, allowing for more adaptive and responsive use of resources in line with the evolving needs of the operation. As part of this, maintain ongoing dialogue with donors regarding changing situation assessments and possible challenges to manage expectations. **(Under Secretary General for Global Relations, Humanitarian Diplomacy and Digitalization)**

### Corporate Services, Processes, and Procedures

*Note that all recommendations pertaining to corporate services should be considered considering the ongoing ForeSEE exercise. We recommend that the ForeSEE team also review past evaluations and reviews as they contain solid analysis and applicable recommendations.*

**General Conclusion:** Too many procedures did not possess the flexibility needed to ensure efficient and effective response, causing delays in getting the goods and services needed to affected communities as well as being a source of much frustration for staff.

- **Recommendation:** All corporate service procedures need an immediate evaluation and reworking with community needs at the centre of adjustments. With support from relevant experts, the appetite for risk needs to be re-evaluated so more flexible procedures can be developed, and so that aversion to risk does not interfere with an efficient emergency operation. This must be a priority for the IFRC. **(Head Global Services Centre)**
- **Recommendation:** Corporate services, at all levels, need to prioritise integrating their roster into the overall surge programme. Their current roster is outdated and ineffective. **(Head Global Services, Director DCC, Head HR Global)**

## FINANCE

### Conclusion:

Financial delays and procedural challenges, often due to unclear explanations or a lack of understanding among staff, hindered the response. The organization's cautious approach to financial practices, along with occasional delays and lack of clarity in decision-making authority (e.g. operations vs. finance), contributed to these issues.

- **Recommendation:** Revised agile and efficient financial mobilization strategies need to be developed through contextually specific planning. In the case of Morocco this would include systems to respond in cash-based economies. **(Under Secretary for Management Policy, Strategy and Corporate Services, Head of Finance Global)**
- **Recommendation:** Emergency funds need to be in place with criteria and authorizations levels that can be quickly accessed by recognized staff with minimal need for bureaucratic approvals, enabling immediate action upon arrival **(Under Secretary for Management Policy, Strategy and Corporate Services, Head of Finance Global)**
- **Recommendation:** As part of effective readiness planning, explore temporary banking arrangements through pre-arranged partnerships with local financial institutions to facilitate quick access to funds during emergencies. **(Head of Corporate Service, Head of Finance MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** In contexts where opening a local bank account is not immediately possible and alternative approaches are needed (e.g. use of Western Union), policies need to be in place that protect staff from personal risk. **((Head of Corporate Service, Head of Finance, Head of HR MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Train finance staff (including surge) in risk management to balance risk aversion with operational needs. **(Director DCC, Deputy Regional Director, Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** As mentioned, several times, communicate clear decision-making responsibilities but ensure that financial staff are integrated into the process, and can provide technical input. HoDs, Operational Managers and HeOPs should be mandated with the authority to make financial decisions within established parameters to expedite the response process. **(RD, Head of Corporate Services, Deputy Regional Director, Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** In the spirit of the AfR, better utilization of existing local delegations, such as the German Red Cross in Morocco, to provide financial support for local procurement when immediate funds are not available. **(HoD Morocco, Head of Corporate Services MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Improve training and awareness for staff, especially surge, on IFRC financial procedures, the importance of these procedures and their impact on operational efficiency and

how to request and manage exceptions effectively. **(Head HDCC, Head of Corporate Services MENA)**

## PROCUREMENT

**Conclusion:** The lack of a state of emergency declaration required greater adaptability, but the inflexible systems led to delays and logistical issues. The cultural mismatch between Morocco's trust-based business practices and the IFRC's complex requirements created confusion and distrust. The procurement systems were ill-suited for both local and corporate needs, with branches struggling to meet tender requirements and obtain essential resources. Despite processes for procedural exceptions, many staff were unaware of how to request them.

- **Recommendation:** Relevant units in Geneva need to work together to develop financial and procurement procedures that are adaptable to local contexts, allowing for quicker and contextually appropriate responses. Readiness plans can help pre-planning for such eventualities. **(Director DCC, Head Global Services Centre, Head of Finance Global)**
- **Recommendation:** Until new procedures can be developed, exceptions contingencies need to be streamlined and staff need to be well-informed and able to activate these exceptions when necessary. **(Head of Corporate Services, Head HDCC Mena)**
- **Recommendation:** If the context in a country indicates that the suppliers only operate under a cash basis modality up front, a mitigation measure plan should be put in place to ensure the supplier comply with the delivery of the items according to the specifications, quality, agreed price, and timeframe.
- **Recommendation:** Emergency staff, including surge personnel, need better training in understanding cultural nuances and the ability to navigate local business practices, such as Morocco's word of honor culture. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Simplifying procurement requirements will help to allow better alignment with local practices, reducing the need for complex documentation that may confuse or intimidate local suppliers. Simultaneously, support should be provided to local suppliers to understand procurement requirements and to offer alternatives such as advance payments or financial assistance, to ensure they can fulfil contracts without undue hardship. **(Head Global Services Centre, Head of Corporate Services MENA in conjunction with OIAI )**

## HUMAN RESOURCES

**Conclusion:** The narrow view of HR in emergency contexts complicates responses, particularly in areas like workforce planning and job description approvals. Before the earthquake, MRC lacked a HR system, leading to high personnel turnover and coordination difficulties. Over-reliance on short-term contracts further hindered long-term staff recruitment.

- **Recommendation:** The role of HR needs to be expanded and take a proactive approach in workforce planning, job description pre-approvals, and onboarding to streamline the response process. To this end HR staff should be deployed immediately in large scale operations especially in contexts where NS have limited HR capacity. **(Head off Corporate Services MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Develop a strategy to better balance the use of short-term contracts and the recruitment of long-term staff to maintain continuity and effectiveness. This should include pre-planning and the development of appropriate policies and mechanisms to expedite longer-term positions quickly. **(Head off Corporate Services MENA)**

## ADMINISTRATION

**Conclusion:** A lack of proactive administration and the absence of an initial administrative delegate impaired effective coordination. Housing market challenges and visa issues, including a sudden switch to employee-paid housing and deployment difficulties, further reduced staff efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Recommendation:** Administrative staff must form part of both surge and longer-term response teams. They play a vital coordination and problem-solving role. It is suggested that administration staff in the RO be used until a more permanent recruitment process is completed. This is a key part of readiness planning. **(Head HDCC, Head off Corporate Services MENA)**

## RISK ASSESSMENT

**Conclusion:** Despite an initial comprehensive risk assessment, the absence of a dedicated risk delegate led to inconsistent risk management. The need for a structured risk management process is evident, underscored by past challenges and the rigidity of IFRC procedures.

- **Recommendation:** A short to medium term risk delegate should be recruited immediately **(MEQ Operations Manager MEQ)**
- **Recommendation:** Much more work needs to be done to integrate risk assessment as a required element of the EQ (and all) operation(s). **(MEQ Operations Manager MEQ, Head of HDCC MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Include a risk delegate or someone well trained in risk from the beginning of operations including surge team deployments, especially in situations like that of Morocco – no status agreement/NS with few systems/specific finance and procurement challenges. **(Director DCC, Deputy Regional Director, Head HDCC MENA)**

## 6.3 Strategic and Operational Foundations

### Legal Framework of the MRC, Auxiliary Role, Disaster Law, and Humanitarian Diplomacy

#### LEGAL STATUS AND AUXILIARY ROLE OF MOROCCAN RED CRESCENT

**Conclusion:** The Government of Morocco's selective acceptance of international assistance and the principal role of the Mohammed V Foundation coupled with the lack of clear legal status and a legislative framework significantly limited, during the initial phase of the operation, the Moroccan Red Crescent's ability to act as a strong auxiliary to the government during the response and effectively showcase its role and impact as a humanitarian actor in the country.

**Conclusion:** IFRC leadership played a crucial role in negotiating a larger role for the MRC. By improving the MRC's relations with the MVF and relevant government ministries, the IFRC highlighted the MRC's potential contributions, thus enhancing their involvement and effectiveness in the emergency response.

- **Recommendation:** The MRC needs to advocate with the Moroccan government to have the King prioritize establishing a clear legal status and legislative framework for the MRC by appointing a new MRC President thus strengthening the NS's ability to operate as an effective auxiliary to the government. To this end, the country delegation, with support from the RO and the Disaster Law unit in Geneva, should place special emphasis on developing a humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy strategy and plan, explaining the MRC auxiliary role and thus securing a larger national

profile and role for the MRC as well as advocating for facilitating Federation support in the event of another emergency. **(MRC, HoD Morocco, Regional Director MENA)**

- **Recommendation:** MRC, with support from the IFRC, should advocate with the Moroccan government to formalize a status agreement with the IFRC. **(MRC, HoD Morocco, Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** It is imperative, as part of the readiness process, to plan for contingencies related to government policies, processes, and structures (e.g. visas requirements/import restrictions). If the emergency response is in a location where these elements can significantly impact the efficiency and impact of activities, such as the case of Morocco, then the appropriate human resources should be deployed from the onset in case there is no HoD present. As such, such skilled personnel should be included in any surge training programme. **(Head of DCC, Deputy Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** There is a need to increase work around the MRC auxiliary status so that the government increases request to MRC during emergencies. **(MRC, HoD Morocco)**

#### DISASTER LAW/HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

**Conclusion:** The lack of Disaster Law program in the regional office has hindered the effective utilization of DL to support the auxiliary role of National Societies.

**Conclusion:** There was an unrealistic expectation for the response to proceed as 'business-as-usual' without a legal status or legislative framework. This resulted in a lack of clear guidelines for operating in countries without these frameworks such as Morocco.

**Conclusion:** There has been no clear understanding of the value and tools of DL in the operation, leading to the exclusion of DL as part of the Surge capacity. This was a missed opportunity especially given the legal status of MRC.

**Conclusion:** The early stages of the response demonstrated the importance of established relationships and humanitarian diplomacy. Countries and NSs with strong government to government relations were able to respond quickly, highlighting the need for humanitarian diplomacy in advocating for preferential access for the Federation.

- **Recommendation:** Reintroduce and prioritize the DL program in the regional office to ensure that National Societies can effectively utilize DL to enhance their auxiliary roles. **(Deputy Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Increase awareness and understanding of the value and tools of DL among all stakeholders involved in operations, especially in the more challenging contexts, or when there is no recent prior experience in the country. This could include training sessions, workshops, and regular communication. **(Deputy Regional Director, Head HDCC, HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** When appropriate, integrate DL into the resource mobilization strategies for emergency appeals to leverage its potential in enhancing National Society and regional readiness. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC)**
- **Recommendation:** Ensure that a DL surge capacity is readily available and included in operational planning. Utilize the existing DL surge kit to support operations where legal frameworks and statuses are absent. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC)**

## Protection, Gender, and Inclusion

**Conclusion:** Insufficient investment in PGI staff and funding led to the late integration of PGI into the response plans. This resulted in potential programmatic issues and insufficient early protection initiatives for vulnerable populations.

**Conclusion:** The response to the earthquake faced significant challenges in integrating Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) considerations. This was due to much delayed deployment of a PGI capacity, a lack of cultural understanding, risk knowledge, and effective use of local languages.

**Conclusion:** The local communities were receptive to PGI efforts, particularly appreciating the focus on engaging women. However, advancing the PGI agenda requires leadership understanding, engagement, and capacity building, along with developing relevant policies to ensure sustainable and effective PGI implementation.

- **Recommendation:** Prioritize the inclusion of PGI analysis, data disaggregation, and risk assessments at the outset of emergency responses. Secure dedicated PGI staff and funding early to ensure timely and effective integration of PGI considerations into planning and decision-making. **(Head of HDCC, Deputy Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Promote PGI awareness and understanding among MRC leadership and staff through training and capacity-building initiatives. Encourage the development and adoption of PGI policies within the NS including the code of conduct. The same holds true for IFRC staff. **(MEQ Operations Manager, HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** Build on the success of PGI efforts by continuing to engage local communities, particularly women, in a culturally sensitive manner. Advocate for PGI mainstreaming and capacity building using earmarked funds and examine national legislative frameworks to address any barriers to effective PGI implementation. **(MEQ Operations Manager, HoD Morocco)**

## Community Engagement and Accountability

**Conclusion:** Before the earthquake, the MRC had no CEA capacity or experience, leading to top-down community approaches. The MEQ operation integrated CEA into all training and activities, which was well-received by volunteers and led to improved relationships with local communities. However, challenges included the need for more training in cultural and linguistic sensitivity and resistance from quick-action-oriented staff.

**Conclusion:** The emphasis on CEA resulted in local communities, including women, feeling valued and involved in decision-making processes for the first time.

**Conclusion:** The lack of a strong volunteering culture and the perception of volunteers as authoritative figures created a certain amount of discomfort and tension with local authorities. This required the MRC to work through local authorities to mitigate issues.

**Conclusion:** The MRC leadership approved a community feedback mechanism and a hotline to be launched by June 2024. However, branches were hesitant about this new tool, viewing it as a potential threat.

**Conclusion:** The RO lacked a readily available CEA surge profile, which is critical for effective community engagement, requiring linguistic skills and cultural awareness.

- **Recommendation:** Enhance and sustain CEA training programs to all IFRC surge and longer-term operation staff, focusing on cultural and linguistic sensitivity, and ensure continuous

integration of CEA as a fundamental approach to the EQ operations. **(Director DCC, Head of HDCC)**

- **Recommendation:** Standardize community outreach practices to ensure thorough briefings and sensitization of local communities before activities, fostering trust and ensuring community buy-in. **(MRC, MEQ Operations Manager)**
- **Recommendation:** Develop strategies to change the perception of volunteers to community partners through joint training sessions with local authorities and community members, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding. **(MRC, MEQ Operations Manager)**
- **Recommendation:** Ensure successful implementation of the community feedback mechanism and hotline by engaging branches in targeted communication and training sessions, emphasizing the benefits of enhancing community trust and improving service delivery. **(MRC, MEQ Operations Manager)**
- **Recommendation:** Establish a robust CEA surge profile within the region, ensuring skilled personnel with the necessary competencies are available for deployment during emergencies. **(Head of HDCC MENA)**

### National Society Development

**Conclusion:** The MEQ response heavily relied on IFRC's surge capacities, which were instrumental in coordinating with the MRC. However, this dependency exposed critical limitations, such as difficulties in maintaining sustained surge support, managing deployment durations, and ensuring effective handovers. The lack of trained national capacity hindered the sustainability of the response.

**Conclusion:** Morocco lacks a country plan and a long-term strategic approach to NSD. This absence is a major barrier to establishing a strong, efficient, and relevant NS. Interviewees emphasized the need for a comprehensive strategic plan to address current challenges, particularly in fundraising and capacity building.

**Conclusion:** The MRC is experiencing low governance and management capacity due to the absence of a formal governance structure or an established management and technical staff framework. Although the support from IFRC staff and PNSs to MRC senior leadership has been valuable, significant gaps remain in policies and procedures, particularly in finance, volunteer management, and human resources.

**Conclusion:** Disaster readiness and response capabilities are notably absent in the MRC. Additionally, there is a disconnect between the network and branch development initiatives, indicating a need for stronger local branch support and capacity building.

**Conclusion:** The MRC lacks a domestic resource mobilization strategy, which is crucial for diversifying its support base and ensuring the sustainability of its core services and operations. The absence of such a strategy limits the MRC's ability to independently fundraise and sustain its activities.

- **Recommendation:** The MRC, with support from the IFRC and Federation membership, should develop a detailed National Society Development strategy. This strategy should include a long-term strategic plan tailored to Morocco's specific needs, focusing on governance, management capacity building, and disaster readiness. Given the lack of existing systems, this process should be gradual. **(MRC, HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** MRC needs to establish formal governance and management structures. Develop and implement policies and procedures for key areas such as finance, volunteer

management, and human resources to improve organizational efficiency and accountability. **(MRC, HoD Morocco, Deputy Regional Director MENA)**

- **Recommendation:** Prioritize branch development initiatives and local capacity building. The IFRC should support the strengthening of the overall capabilities of the MRC network as well as the relationship between the MRC NHQ and branches by providing targeted support that extends beyond material and logistical assistance. **(MRC, HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** MRC, with support from partners, needs to create and implement a domestic resource mobilization strategy to diversify funding sources and ensure the sustainability of their programmes and operations. This strategy should include fundraising, training for staff and innovative approaches to attract domestic support. **(MRC, HoD Morocco)**
- **Recommendation:** IFRC should support the MRC to leverage the in-country partners to initiate unified planning at a measured pace. As in the case of the NSD strategic planning process, this process should be gradual, intentional, and systematic. **(MRC, HoD Morocco, Deputy Regional Director MENA)**
- **Recommendation:** Establish a robust Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting framework to assess the implementation and impact of the NSD strategy and other initiatives. Regularly review and adjust strategies based on feedback and performance to ensure continuous improvement and relevance. **(MRC, HoD Morocco, Deputy Regional Director MENA)**

## FINAL CONCLUSION OF THE RTE

The real-time evaluation of the Morocco Earthquake operation highlighted significant achievements and challenges faced by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Moroccan Red Crescent (MRC). Their efforts resulted in timely and effective humanitarian responses despite the complexities of the local legal framework and the absence of a declared state of emergency. The collaboration between MRC, IFRC and PNS ensured the rapid mobilization of resources and support, which was crucial in addressing the immediate needs of the affected population.

However, the evaluation also identified important areas that need improvement. Internal decision-making and communication processes within the IFRC as well as the development of flexible procedures and solid readiness plans based on detailed contextual analysis will help to ensure that response mechanisms can adapt swiftly to the unique challenges presented by each disaster. The lessons learned from this operation emphasize the importance of establishing more robust frameworks for disaster response, improving coordination with local authorities, and strengthening the legal and operational foundations to facilitate more efficient humanitarian interventions in the future. The recommendations provided aim to guide future operations to ensure even greater effectiveness, efficiency and ultimately impact in disaster response efforts.

## REPORT ANNEXES

- Annex I:** LIST OF LITERATURE REVIEWED
- Annex II:** KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS
- Annex III:** LIST OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS
- Annex IV:** ANNEX FROM THE HEOPS HANDOVER AND END OF MISSION REPORT: Systems and procedures identified as requiring proactive adaptation to enable timely operations at scale