



Lessons Learnt Workshop, 26 June 2025, during simulation exercises

LESSONS LEARNED WORKSHOP REPORT

MDRMN020 Dzud Emergency Appeal Implementation

(15 Mar 2024- 30 Jun 2025)

Mongolian Red Cross Society

25-27 June 2025 | Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia



1. Introduction

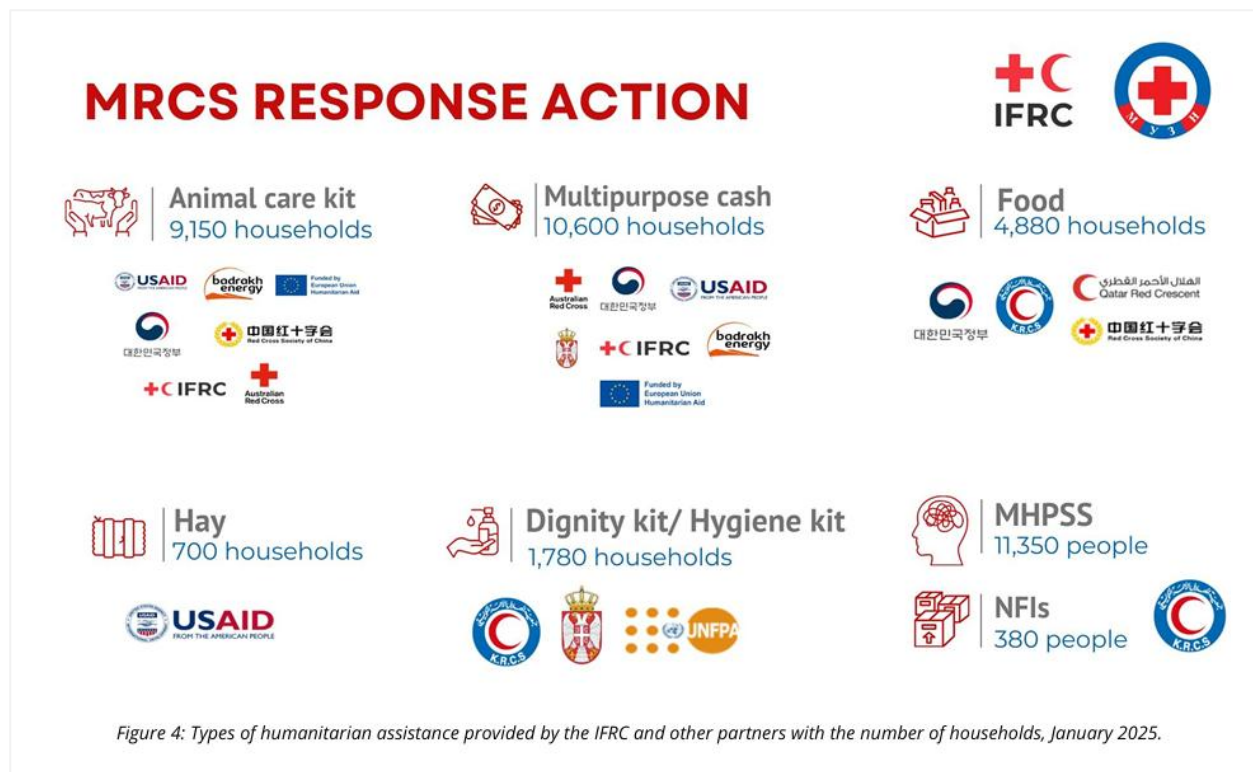
1.1 Purpose and Scope

The internal lessons learned workshop (LLW), held on 25-27 June 2025, provided a platform for the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) staff and mid-level branches to collectively reflect on the operational experience of the 2023-2025 Dzud Emergency Appeal. The purpose was to consolidate lessons, identify good practices, and document actionable recommendations to improve MRCS's future disaster response capacity.

1.2 Participants and Methodology

A total of 90 participants joined the LLW including staff from all 21 mid-level branches, headquarters staff, national disaster response team (NDRT) members in particular, and the operation management team. The workshop used participatory methods – regional presentations, group exercises by thematic and functional areas, and scenario-based reflections – to extract learning across various domains.

2. Overview of the Dzud Response



The 2023-2024 Dzud event, characterized by extreme cold, deep snow cover, and harsh climatic impacts, severely affected Mongolia's rural herder communities. In anticipation of worsening conditions, the MRCS began closely monitoring the situation in coordination with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) starting 8 November 2023. This early engagement enabled the activation of the National

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) under the State Emergency Commission on 8 December 2023, marking a pivotal step in national coordination and emergency readiness.

As the crisis escalated, MRCS swiftly mobilized resources and deployed Local Disaster Teams to the most vulnerable and high-risk areas. These teams delivered urgent humanitarian assistance, including warm gloves, animal clothing, and psychosocial support—particularly targeting households facing compounded vulnerabilities due to remote locations, livestock losses, or limited access to services.

By 31 December 2024, MRCS had already reached approximately 49,327 individuals. In January 2025, additional emergency support was delivered to severely affected regions, ultimately reaching a total of **56,787 individuals across 13,130 households**. The comprehensive assistance package addressed both emergency relief and early recovery needs and included multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), animal care kits, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), food parcels, hygiene and dignity kits, shelter and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) support, and other non-food items (NFIs).

This wide-ranging responses was made possible through the IFRC Emergency Appeal, contributions from Participating National Societies (PNS), and other institutional donors, including, Australian Red Cross / Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Republic of Korea National Red Cross, USAID, Red Cross Society of China, Government of People's Republic of China, Qatar Red Crescent Society, Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Government of the Republic of Serbia, private sector partners, and domestic donations.

Emergency response operation:

The humanitarian outcomes of this collective effort include delivery of animal care kits to 9,150 households, MPCA to 10,600 households, food parcels to 4,880 households, hay for 700 households, hygiene or dignity kits to 1,780 households, non-food items to 380 households, and 11,350 households benefited from MHPSS services.

Recovery programme:

MHPSS counselling stations: MRCS has been working to establish MHPSS counselling stations across the country, covering all 21 provinces and 9 districts. With support from IFRC EA operation, 12 MHPSS counselling stations have been successfully established and are fully operational within MRCS provincial branches across 12 provinces.

To ensure nationwide coverage, MRCS plans to expand these counselling stations in collaboration with the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS), aiming to establish them in the remaining provincial branches over the next two years. Additionally, the initial draft of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the counselling stations is currently under review, and capacity-building training sessions for branch staff and volunteers are planned in cooperation with the JRCS and the National Center for Mental Health for the remaining branches.

To further enhance sustainability and scale up MHPSS initiatives, the MRCS is taking the lead in establishing a National MHPSS Technical Working Group. This working group, comprising government and

non-government agencies under the Ministry of Health, will play a key role in coordinating efforts and ensuring the long-term integration of MHPSS services across the country.

Animal shelter and WASH Facilities: As part of the early recovery phase of the Dzud Emergency Appeal operation, the MRCS supported 60 herder households from 30 herder groups across eight provinces with materials for constructing animal winter shelters, pit latrines, and handwashing stations. This intervention aimed to protect livestock during harsh winter conditions and improve household hygiene among rural herder families. The shelter materials included essential structural and insulation components, and procurement was conducted in accordance with IFRC standards.

The procurement agreement was finalized in late February 2025, with material deliveries beginning in mid-March and construction activities commencing by early April. By the end of June, construction was fully completed in all targeted locations. A total of 126 individuals benefited from the support. MRCS branch staff and volunteers provided guidance on the construction process and conducted regular field visits to ensure quality and monitor progress. This integrated effort significantly strengthened community resilience by promoting safer animal husbandry practices and better living conditions for vulnerable households.

Livelihood Support/Small-scale business grant: To promote income diversification among dzud-affected herder households, MRCS implemented a small-scale business grant program across ten provinces. Training sessions were delivered in partnership with national experts and organizations, covering financial management, business planning, and practical skills such as milk production and greenhouse operations. Participation in the training was a prerequisite for grant eligibility.

The grant selection process was conducted in two phases, resulting in 26 approved proposals from eight provinces. Final decisions were made by MRCS senior management, based on expert recommendations. Grants were disbursed through Khan Bank between 16 May and 20 June 2025, enabling selected households to launch or expand sustainable income-generating activities.

Capacity Building Activities: MRCS strengthened its emergency response capacity through targeted training for herders and volunteers. Eighty herders from five provinces received technical training on livestock care, health standards, and raw material preparation. In parallel, 213 volunteers across five provinces were trained in disaster risk reduction, first aid, and climate adaptation. A national livelihood consultant supported these efforts by ensuring quality delivery and contributing to internal capacity development. These initiatives enhanced branch-level preparedness and highlighted the value of early action and strong partnerships during one of the most severe Dzud events in recent decades.

Timeline

- **December 2023:** Dzud Risk Map released by the Mongolia National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring (NAMEM).
- **22 January 2024:** Dzud Map released by NAMEM, indicating that the Iron and White Dzud covered more than 80 per cent of the country.

- **02 February 2024:** CHF 499,480 is allocated from the IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the Dzud.
- **15 March 2024:** The IFRC Emergency Appeal is launched for CHF 4.5 million.
- **17 March 2024:** Operations Surge Capacity deployed by the IFRC from the Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and Country Cluster Delegation for East Asia (CCD EA) to provide in-country support in Mongolia.
- **30 June 2025:** The IFRC Emergency Operation is closed.

3. Key Findings by Sector

This section summarizes the major strengths, challenges, and recommendations shared during the Dzud LLW, organized by thematic and functional sectors. It captures reflections from both MRCS mid-level branches and headquarters, providing a foundation for future operational improvements and institutional learning.

The lessons from this Emergency Appeal underscore MRCS's growing operational maturity and its strong foundation in community trust, decentralized delivery, and adaptive response. The experience revealed that sustained investment in **branch-level capacity, pre-agreements, and technical training** directly translates into faster and more accountable delivery across sectors such as livelihoods, cash assistance, and MHPSS. The success of localized approaches—whether through provincial counselling stations, branch-led distribution, or strong volunteer engagement—demonstrates that MRCS's extensive network can serve as an operational backbone for national response when adequately resourced and guided by clear procedures. However, uneven branch capacity, volunteer data systems, and limited field-level monitoring remain key institutional bottlenecks that can hinder consistency and quality. Strengthening these internal systems is therefore critical to maintain reliability and credibility as the auxiliary role to government in the humanitarian field.

Looking forward, MRCS will need to **institutionalize and scale key good practices** identified through the LLW. This includes establishing mobile and hybrid delivery models for MHPSS and CEA to reach remote herders, expanding partnerships with financial service providers to strengthen CVA coverage, and ensuring that volunteer registration, safety, and year-round training become standard preparedness measures. Integrating lessons on coordination and logistics will reinforce MRCS's agility in future emergencies. Finally, embedding budgeted M&E, communication, and accountability mechanisms from the outset of each operation will ensure evidence-based learning and stronger public confidence. Together, these steps position MRCS to transition from an effective responder to a more **systematic, anticipatory, and community-driven humanitarian actor** in an increasingly climate-affected Mongolia.

Please see detailed findings by sector below.

3.1. Livelihoods and Small Business Grants

Strengths	Challenges
- The flexibility of the business cash grant enabled herder groups to study the market, understand their resources, abilities, and initiate a startup business together with households who experience similar difficulties in the same region with the same goal. - Technical training was reported as practical and highly appreciated by herder participants. - Animal care kits were good in quality, overall packaging and labelling, met the timely needs and contributed to livestock protection. - Livelihood support projects/small-scale business grants were timely and helped to generate sustainable income, particularly when tailored to local needs. - Long-term pre-agreement with the animal care kits suppliers were utilized.	- Nomadic movement of herder groups caused difficulty in sustained engagement and monitoring visits (M&E). - The result of the small-scale business grant program requires long-term monitoring. Due to timeframe of the operation, the result and the further impact are not available at this time.
Recommendations	
- Improve packaging quality for mineral supplements. - Ensure financial and human resources are allocated for regular M&E visits for the local branches.	

3.2. Multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA):

Strengths	Challenges
- Long-term agreement with the financial service provider (FSP) strengthened the timely CVA response. - Direct transfers via Khan Bank reduced logistical burden and were accessible nationwide. - Beneficiaries appreciated the flexibility of cash and often prioritized livestock survival and food needs. - CVA training helped build internal capacity at branch and HQ levels.	- Mismatched or inactive bank accounts, especially among elderly and Kazakh beneficiaries. - Uneven knowledge and experience of CVA programming among volunteers across the region.
Recommendations	
More pre-agreements with the available FSP can strengthen the MRCS CVA capacity as well as preventing the mismatched or inactive accounts of the beneficiaries.	

- Provide SMS confirmation of cash disbursements. However, it will require a high amount of investment or long-term effective negotiation with the national telephone operators.
- Validate recipient/beneficiary lists using joint teams comprising of RC branch staff members and officials from local authorities.
- Train branch staff and volunteers in cash assistance delivery and community messaging.
- Collect multiple contact methods (e.g., secondary phone numbers or Facebook) for follow-up.

3.3. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

Strengths	Challenges
• MRCS staff and volunteers' capacity on MHPSS in emergencies have been significantly improved. • Improved collaborations with the National Center for Mental Health during Dzud operations. • 12 provincial MHPSS counselling stations were established with trained staff and SOPs. • Veterinary and social workers supported aid delivery during distributions, enabled broader coordination within the local agencies. • Online messaging campaigns reached over 230,000 people.	• Registering and reporting the MHPSS services needs to be improved. The absence of registration caused by lack of technology or office equipment to utilize digital tools such as Kobo. • Long living distances (e.g., 260 km away from the central area) limited in-person support. • Human resource gaps led to reliance on phone-based MHPSS. • Lack of a referral pathway when further professional support is needed
Recommendations	
• Develop guidelines on use of the MHPSS room at branch level, strengthen Branch capacity. • Establish Mobile MHPSS/PFA teams (10-person group model) in emergencies. • Use printed posters and social media to reinforce MHPSS visibility. • Continue training more volunteers at all levels, including from the smallest administration units to deliver both in-person and remote MHPSS/PFA. • Maintain updated lists of individuals who require continued MHPSS or follow-up services (e.g., those who experienced severe loss, trauma, or reported distress during initial contact).	

3.4. Logistics, Distribution, Monitoring & Reporting

Strengths	Challenges
• Local distribution improved MRCS visibility and built experience among staff and volunteers. • Most provinces successfully organized aid delivery with limited delays. • Post Distribution Monitoring reports were integrated into the PowerBI dashboard.	• Disrupted road caused significant challenges in delivering relief items to herder families • Vehicle access and fuel shortages hindered timely deliveries. • However, there was insurance coverage and training guidance on safety and security. • Financial challenges for local level M&E impacted on quality reporting.

Recommendations
• Preposition safety gear and first aid kits for local staff and volunteers. • Increase M&E and coordination costs for branches. • Use mobile-friendly digital tools for PMER to supplement physical visits. • Capacity-building efforts on PMER, particularly in reporting, are needed for both mid-level and primary-level branch staff and volunteers.

3.5. Coordination and Partnerships

Strengths	Challenges
• MRCS-Government coordination improved at local and provincial levels. • MRCS coordination within HCT and other partners is expanded and strengthened. • Joint assessments and Emergency Commission engagement helped streamline aid delivery at local level. • Community trust towards the MRCS is increased.	• Uneven capacity in resources is the challenge, which sometimes affects the coordination and partnership.
Recommendations	
• Ensure that the roles, responsibilities, and legal auxiliary status of the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) are clearly outlined and recognized in soum- and province-level disaster preparedness and response plans, as well as in the Terms of Reference of local Emergency Commissions. • Promote local procurement to support local markets and reduce transportation costs, when possible.	

3.6. Volunteer Management

Strengths	Challenges
• Volunteers responded rapidly and participated in public campaigns and animal carcass disposal operations. • Engagement with youth and women's councils increased local trust. • Successfully engaged local entities and individuals to the fundraising activities. • Volunteers' capacity in the area of MHPSS, CEA, PGI, Safety and Security, aid distributions, M&E, and logistics is strengthened. • Volunteers were insured for their safety and security during the response operation.	• Gender imbalance in physically demanding tasks. • Inconsistent registration and recordkeeping of the volunteers.

Recommendations
• Refine the current IMS system to enable a unified registration and mobilization function for volunteer management. • Provide seasonal gear (winter clothing, boots, gloves) in advance. The provision of the protective gear is being supported under the IFRC Emergency Appeal for both NDRT and BDRT team members.

3.7. Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) & Communications

Strengths	Challenges
• PGI briefings and training reached over 1,000 MRCS staff and volunteers. • Communication tools (flyers, social media communications, hotline) supported accountability efforts.	• Lack of mobile services in soums, including health, MHPSS, education and other relevant basic services affected women and children disproportionately. • Poor mobile signals and freezing temperatures hindered communication.
Recommendations	
• Expand mobile communication systems, including satellite options. • Prioritize gender balance in volunteer recruitment and team composition. • Develop inclusive messaging formats for low-literacy and minority groups. • Encourage mobile services, such as mobile clinics or remote education.	

3.8 Community Engagement & Accountability (CEA)

Strengths	Challenges
• MRCS developed and disseminated a CEA feedback SOP to the senior management and technical persons for review, which standardized how staff and volunteers received and responded to community feedback. • A CEA self-assessment was conducted in May 2024, revealing increased awareness and institutional commitment to feedback mechanisms. • MRCS maintained a hotline and multiple communication channels (phone, social media, in-person) for communities to express concerns, ask questions, or share suggestions. • CEA was integrated into Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM), helping MRCS adapt future messaging and targeting.	• Information gaps persisted: only 40% of households said they received full programme information, while 17% said they received none at all. • Many herder families lacked consistent access to phones or social media, and winter conditions hindered door-to-door outreach. • Community misunderstanding about eligibility criteria or the Red Cross's role (vs. government aid) led to confusion and frustration in some areas.
Recommendations	

- Finalize the CEA SOPs and apply the SOPs to the operations at all levels.
- Increase the proactive sharing of program criteria (e.g., through community meetings, visual flyers, and SMS).
- Ensure that CEA activities are budgeted for, including translation, printing, and face-to-face meetings with remote households.
- Expand the use of multiple feedback channels, including radio, TV, and local leaders—especially in low-connectivity areas.
- Use PDM and feedback data to systematically adjust communication strategies for different demographics (e.g., Kazakh-speaking, older populations).
- Integrate community-led feedback review sessions at the end of aid cycles to build trust and accountability.

4. Summary of Priority Recommendations

4.1. Strengthen Coordination and Role Clarity

- Integrate MRCS's legal auxiliary role into local disaster preparedness plans and Emergency Commission Terms of Reference, ensuring formal inclusion in decision-making and coordination at the soum and aimag levels.

4.2. Institutionalize Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

- Finalize and implement the CEA SOP across all levels of operation.
- Proactively share program information, such as eligibility criteria and distribution schedules, using diverse and accessible formats (flyers, radio, community meetings, etc.).
- Allocate dedicated budgets for CEA-related costs: translation, printing, outreach visits, and training.
- Scale up feedback systems and integrate CEA actions into program design, monitoring, and adaptation.

4.3. Expand and Localize MHPSS

- Establish mobile MHPSS delivery mechanisms (e.g., trained volunteers, BDRTs, scheduled visits) to reach isolated or immobile groups, especially women and children.
- Continue to train local volunteers and BDRT members to deliver hybrid (in-person and phone-based) PFA.
- Improve digital tools and data systems for MHPSS service tracking and reporting.
- Maintain lists of vulnerable individuals for targeted follow-up and support after initial aid delivery.

4.4. Improve Targeting and Accessibility of Cash and Livelihood Support

- Strengthen beneficiary list validation through joint selection teams and multi-source cross-checks.

- Provide clear instructions and multiple communication touchpoints (e.g., SMS, in-person, Facebook) for cash assistance and livelihood grants.
- Continue expanding pre-agreements with financial service providers (FSPs) to address mismatch risks.

4.5. Invest in Volunteer Capacity Year-Round

- Maintain and update the national volunteer registration system and ensure coverage across all branches.
- Develop an annual training and mobilization plan for volunteers, including off-season refreshers and simulation exercises.
- Ensure all frontline responders are equipped with seasonal protective gear and basic safety tools before deployment.

4.6. Budget for M&E, Coordination, and CEA from the Outset

- Strengthen field visibility (e.g., emblem usage, photo documentation) to differentiate MRCS aid and improve accountability.

4.7. Improve Logistics and Local Preparedness

- Expand local prepositioning of relief items, including animal care kits, hygiene items, and MHPSS materials, to reduce delivery time during extreme weather.
- Promote local procurement where it is feasible to reduce costs, improve delivery timeframes, and support regional economics.
- Improve staff readiness and transport planning to address recurring access issues during winter operations.

5. Conclusion

The Dzud Lessons Learned Workshop, held from 25-27 June 2025, marked a critical moment of reflection and institutional learning for the MRCS. Facilitated at the MRCS Youth Development Center with participation of 90 people from all 21 mid-level branches, key HQ departments, and national disaster response personnel, the workshop served as a structured platform to review the 2023–2025 Dzud Emergency Appeal response.

The collective analysis confirmed that MRCS's timely activation, localized response capacity, and multi-sectoral coordination were central to mitigating the humanitarian impacts of the Dzud. Strong partnerships—with IFRC, Participating National Societies, institutional donors, and local authorities—enabled MRCS to provide critical support, including cash assistance, livestock protection, mental health services, food and hygiene aid, and shelter recovery support to tens of thousands of households across the country.

At the same time, the workshop surfaced important operational and institutional gaps. These included challenges in community communication, volunteer safety, coordination between levels, and consistent monitoring and evaluation. These issues, while complex, present clear opportunities for growth.

Looking ahead, MRCS will take forward the priority recommendations outlined in this report to:

- Update contingency and operational plans.
- Strengthen vertical and horizontal coordination structures.
- Institutionalize CEA, MHPSS, and volunteer preparedness as core components of its response system.
- And champion inclusive, locally driven solutions that align with Strategy 2030 and resilience goals.

By investing in these areas, MRCS will be better equipped not only for future Dzud events, but also for an evolving climate and risk landscape, delivering timely, trusted, and effective humanitarian support to the people who need it most.