



# LESSON LEARNED WORKSHOP REPORT

MDRMY012 - Sabah Flood 2025

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS), with technical and financial backing from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), implemented the East Malaysia Flood 2025 DREF Operation (MDRMY012) in response to the severe floods that struck Sabah in March 2025. The operation assisted affected communities in Beaufort, Keningau, and Tenom through Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Health, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions, and supported the recovery of education and livelihoods via Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA), while integrating Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) approaches.

At the end of the operation, MRCS, with IFRC's facilitation, conducted a Lessons Learned Workshop in early July 2025 to review achievements, challenges, and best practices from the four-month implementation. The workshop aimed to capture institutional learning from the national headquarters (NHQ), Sabah Chapter, and district-level volunteers to strengthen preparedness, coordination, and future emergency response capacity.

Through group discussions and plenary sharing, participants identified operational strengths, gaps, and actionable recommendations across sectors, including management, coordination, procurement, CVA, WASH, health, and PGI integration and the workshop served as a key reflection platform for MRCS to document practical experiences and strengthen institutional systems, ensuring more efficient, accountable, and inclusive humanitarian responses in future operations.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lessons Learned Workshop for the East Malaysia Flood 2025 DREF Operation (MDRMY012) was held in early July 2025 in Sabah, bringing together 19 participants from MRCS National Headquarters, Sabah Chapter, and district volunteers, alongside two IFRC personnel and one Hong Kong Red Cross PMER representative. The session provided a structured platform to assess operational performance, highlight lessons, and identify capacity-building priorities for future emergency responses.

The workshop highlighted that the operation achieved significant impact, reaching **19,581** people (exceeding the target of 7,500) despite logistical, environmental, and coordination challenges. Participants noted strong collaboration between MRCS and IFRC, effective community engagement, and adaptive management as key success factors.

Key lessons identified include:

- The need for clear operational planning and communication between NHQ and Chapter to prevent operational delays and duplication.
- Strengthening CVA preparedness, including pre-agreed Financial Service Provider (FSP) arrangements and standardized tools to ensure timely disbursements.
- Building local procurement capacity to enable faster, more efficient supply chain management in Sabah.

- Enhancing CEA and PGI integration through improved feedback systems, inclusive targeting, and stronger community outreach.
- Sustaining volunteer welfare and support, including workload management and psychosocial care to prevent burnout.
- Institutionalizing pre-disaster readiness measures, such as updated SOPs, checklists, and rosters for rapid deployment.
- 

The workshop concluded that the DREF operation not only met immediate humanitarian needs but also strengthened MRCS's institutional systems and technical capacity. Participants committed to incorporating the identified lessons into future Disaster Response SOPs, capacity-building plans, and training modules for national and chapter-level operations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The two-day Lesson Learned Workshop utilised a participatory and reflective learning approach to evaluate the Sabah Flood IFRC-DREF operation. The methodology integrated both structured discussions and group work to draw out operational insights and improve future emergency preparedness.

### **Workshop Design and Structure**

The two-day workshop was structured around key sessions that progressively guided participants through a cycle of reflection, analysis, and planning. The agenda included:

- Timeline exercises to map critical events
- Identification of highlights and lowlights
- Presentation of post-distribution monitoring (PDM) findings
- Thematic group work to formulate lessons learned and operational recommendations
- Stakeholder feedback sharing

### **Participatory Group Work and Output Consolidation**

Participants were divided into diverse groups, representing various states and technical roles. Facilitated group discussions encouraged inclusive reflection, allowing members to identify successes, challenges, and gaps based on lived experience. The group outputs were shared during plenary sessions to validate findings and encourage cross-learning. Group outputs, plenary discussions, and stakeholder input were documented and analysed thematically. Lessons learned were categorized, and practical recommendations were developed to feed into future emergency response planning.

This methodology ensured that the workshop served not only as a reflection space but also as a platform to co-create solutions and promote accountability, learning, and continuous improvement within the MRCS emergency response system.

## **PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORKSHOP**

The workshop was attended by representatives from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Malaysian Red Cross Society (MRCS) National Headquarters (NHQ) staff, MRCS Chapter and volunteers.

- a. **Facilitator:** The workshop was facilitated by the MRCS PMER Officer.
- b. **Participants:** 30 participants attended the workshop from various stakeholders:
  - IFRC APRO: 1 person (DREF Coordinator)
  - Surge Personnel: 1 Operation Coordinator
  - MRCS NHQ: 6 persons
  - MRCS Chapter: 1 person
  - MRCS Volunteers: 12 persons
  - Hong Kong Red Cross: 1 PMER

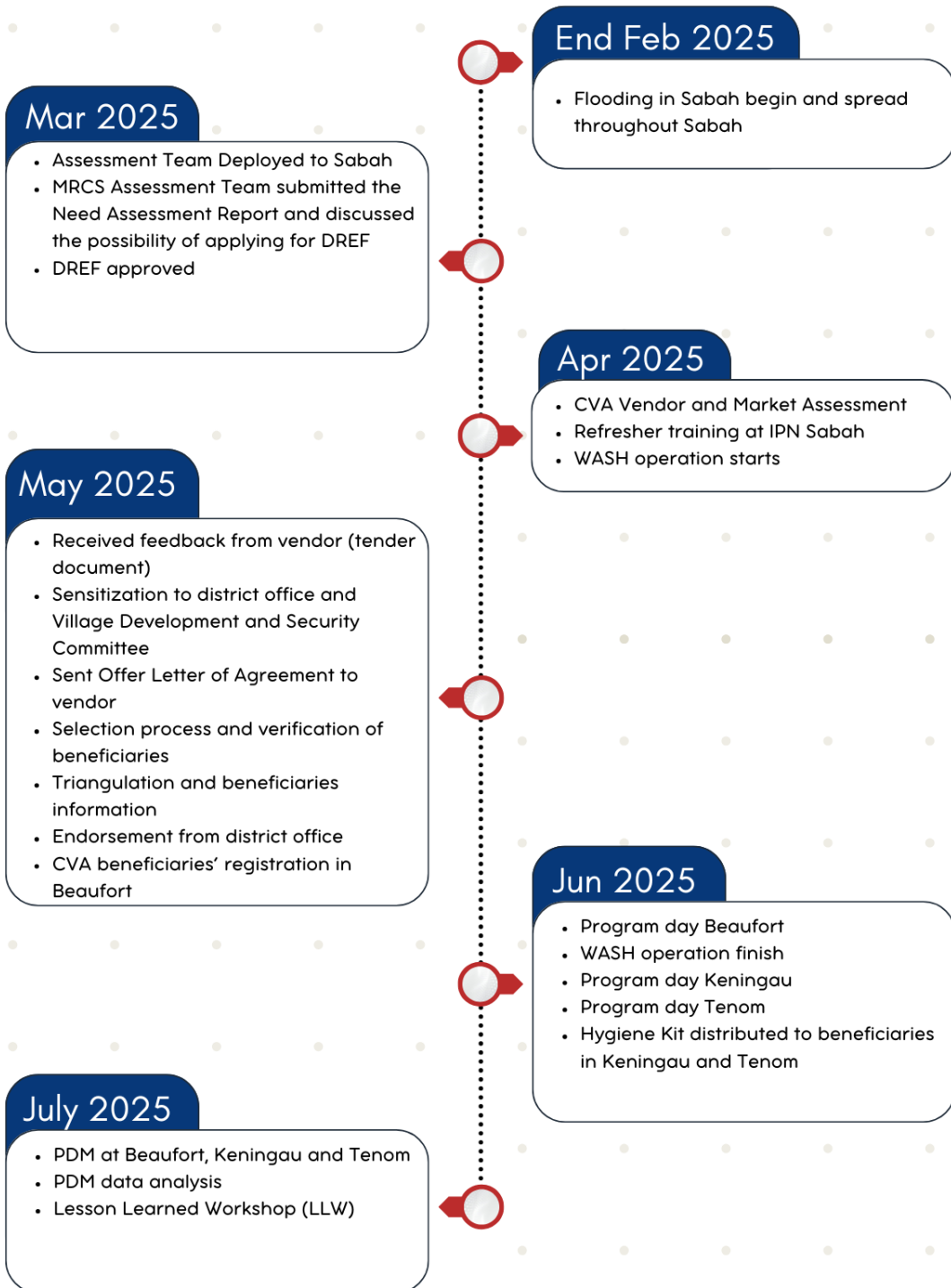
## KEY EVENTS OF THE DREF OPS OF SABAH FLOOD

The workshop began with a Timeline Exercise, where participants were asked to list all the significant events that occurred during the operation from End of February until July 2025. After the participants compiled the events, a discussion ensued between them and the facilitators to ensure consensus on the recorded events and to identify any potential omissions. The following is a summary of the events that were listed by the participants:



Following the summary of events, the participants and facilitators engaged in a thorough discussion to verify the accuracy of the timeline and to identify any events that might have been overlooked. This collaborative process ensured that the timeline was comprehensive and reflected all critical aspects of the operation.

# SABAH FLOOD 2025 TIMELINE



## HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS OF THE DREF OPS

The "Highlights and Lowlights" session aimed to identify, reflect upon, and discuss the events listed in the timeline activities. In this session, highlights were defined as the positive or successful events, while lowlights referred to the less favourable or challenging events. Participants were asked to categorize each event as either a highlight or a lowlight based on their experiences and perspectives. This categorization and discussion process provided valuable insights into the operation's dynamics, highlighting both successful strategies and areas needing improvement. It facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the operation's progress and set the stage for future planning and strategy development.

Following is the list of the events that received the most votes from the participants for the highlights and lowlights category:

Highlights	Explanation	Impact/Best Practices
Engagement with local vendor for Chapter Sabah	Chapter Sabah successfully engaged local vendors for hygiene kit procurement and education vouchers as this is the first time this initiative was implemented by Chapter Sabah.	Engagement with local vendors enhanced efficiency, supported the local economy, and strengthened Chapter Sabah's operational and administrative capacity through independent management of vendor engagement and procurement.
Health program during the operation	Beneficiaries have improved access to healthcare services through MRCS in collaboration with the District Health Office.	MRCS' collaboration with the District Health Office created a referral pathway and better access to medical services for affected communities.
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	<p>Hygiene kits and hygiene promotion activities were effectively conducted by trained volunteers.</p> <p>MRCS-treated water was tested and was deemed to be safe to be supplied to the communities for daily usage by Jabatan Air Negeri Sabah (JANS). JANS advised Chapter to register its water purifier machines and assets to strengthen its capacity in future responses.</p> <p>MRCS successfully treated 111,220 litres water and distributed to the 150-household affected.</p>	<p>Training of volunteers and coordination with JANS contributed to more sustainable and well-managed WASH interventions in future responses.</p>

Lowlights	Explanation	Impact/Lesson
Poor planning	The poor planning led to uncoordinated implementation, increased transportation costs, and inefficient use of limited resources. The low number of volunteers further caused overwork and burnout.	Without a structured plan, decision-making and logistics became more reactive rather than strategic. Future operations must include a detailed and realistic plan of action aligned with available resources, timelines, and volunteer capacity to ensure smooth implementation.
Low understanding of ENAP	The lack of technical understanding affected the accuracy and consistency of data collection, particularly in assessing state internal actions and NHQ's support needs.	This resulted in weak analysis and less informed decision-making. Continuous ENAP training, simulation, and refresher sessions should be conducted to build the assessment capacity of both NHQ and Chapter teams.
Procurement shifts from IFRC warehouse to local supplier	The planned hygiene kit procurement via the IFRC pipeline became unviable after the Myanmar earthquake depleted regional warehouse stocks that MRCS initially intended to draw from.	MRCS require to opt for local supplier to meet the operational timeline
Intervention was not timely relevant	Hygiene kits were distributed two months after the disaster, making them less relevant for the community. Findings from PDM also showed that there is a need to customize the items in the hygiene kit based on each household needs.	Late implementation reduced the effectiveness of assistance. Activities must be executed within a timely window and in suitable venues to ensure relevance and beneficiary satisfaction.
Volunteer Mobilisation and Welfare Issues	Due to limited manpower, volunteers worked long hours (more than 8 hours), multitasked, and received inadequate allowances. Some volunteers assigned to specific tasks were excluded from early coordination and briefings.	Volunteer management must be improved through fair allowances, sufficient rest periods, early involvement in planning, and better manpower distribution to prevent burnout and maintain motivation.
CVA implementation faced vendor resistance and beneficiaries' verification complications.	Many vendors did not agree to use MRCS vouchers due to the requirement mismatched, while the beneficiary's verification process was time-consuming and required coordination with district offices.	The CVA system needs simplification and stronger vendor engagement. Verification mechanisms should be reviewed to improve efficiency, inclusivity, and timeliness of cash assistance delivery.

Safety measures were not adequately implemented during operations.	For WASH water treatment camp, no safety or security briefing was conducted. The base camp setup was poor. Incidentally, a car theft incident involving a volunteer's car occurred.	Safety and security protocols must be mandatory in every operation. Proper briefing, logistical planning, and adherence to safety standards will help protect staff and volunteers while maintaining operational discipline.
Targeted number of migrant beneficiaries was not fully achieved	Low numbers of Migrant received CVA due to the reluctant of local authorities. It only involved small number of migrants, whom those assimilated with locals or married to locals.	Beneficiary selection criteria must be reviewed to promote inclusivity and ensure equitable access to humanitarian assistance for all affected groups, including migrants.
IEC materials	Due to internal coordination problem, visibility of IEC materials and key messages were not disseminated, resulting in low community engagement and awareness.	IEC planning should be integrated from the start of every operation to ensure visibility, deliver key messages, and strengthen community communication and trust.
Community misinformation led to perceived politization of CVA, creating confusion and risking MRCS' neutrality and credibility	Some beneficiaries reported perceptions that the CVA was politicized after a politician claimed he had given money to MRCS which was not distributed; in reality, the CVA under MDRMY012 was allocated only to beneficiaries in Beaufort.	This misinformation caused confusion in the community and risked undermining MRCS's credibility and neutrality, underscoring the need for clear, proactive information-sharing to prevent misunderstandings.
Volunteer safety, privacy, morale and operational efficiency	Harassment of volunteers during beneficiary verification and PDM calls (accusations of scamming/flirting when using personal numbers), undermining volunteer safety, privacy, morale, and operational efficiency.	This situation affected volunteer safety, privacy, and morale. It also caused discomfort and reduced efficiency in carrying out verification and data collection activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The final session of the workshop focused on recommendation activities. During this session, participants were working in groups and needed to outline both strategic and operational recommendations based on the lessons learned throughout the workshop. The goal was to translate these insights into a concrete action road map. This road map would serve as a guide for

future operations, ensuring that the successful strategies are replicated and the challenges encountered are addressed.

Highlights/ Lowlights	Impact/Lesson	Recommendation
Engagement with Local Vendors (Chapter Sabah)	This strengthened operational and administrative capacity, enhanced efficiency, and supported the local economy through localized procurement.	Continue empowering Chapter to engage local vendors with proper procurement guidance and oversight. Develop a vendor database and standardized evaluation system to ensure quality and consistency across operations.
Health Program Collaboration with District Health Office	Partnerships enhanced community health outcomes and reduced response time for medical support.	Sustain and formalize collaboration with the District Health Office through MoUs or joint contingency plans to ensure consistent coordination during future emergencies.
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)	Training and coordination efforts strengthened Chapter's capacity and ensured sustainability of WASH interventions.	Establish continuous volunteer training programs and formalize collaboration with JANS to maintain technical compliance and improve preparedness in future operations.
Poor planning	Absence of a structured plan led to uncoordinated implementation, higher transportation costs, and volunteer burnout.	Develop a detailed operational plan aligned with resources, timelines, and volunteer capacity. Require all operations to include a pre-implementation action plan validated by NHQ and Chapter.
Lack of Communication between NHQ and Chapter	Weak communication caused overlap and inefficiency in response.	Establish a clear communication protocol between NHQ and Chapter, including mandatory notification and approval mechanisms for deployments and major actions.
Low Understanding of ENAP Assessment	Weak assessment reduced evidence-based decision-making.	Conduct continuous ENAP training, simulation exercises, and refresher courses for both NHQ and Chapter to strengthen assessment capacity.
Deployment Process Not Outlined with MRCS' DM SOP	Personnel deployed were not qualified or properly briefed, reducing operational efficiency and safety. It may undermine the effectiveness of field operations.	Ensure deployment strictly follows the DM SOP. Pre-deployment briefings, clear selection criteria, and defined responsibilities must be standardized across operations.
Procurement Shifts and Lack of Guidelines	Procurement from IFRC warehouse was disrupted due to external events. Chapter lacked proper procurement guidance and did not follow standard procedures which caused confusion and delays.	Disseminate and train all Chapter on the procurement handbook. Conduct periodic refresher sessions and ensure digital access to updated procurement SOPs.
Unsuitable Implementation	Late and poorly planned implementation weakened	Implement strict activity scheduling and site assessment protocols to

and Delayed Distribution	community trust and reduced assistance impact.	ensure relevance, timeliness, and suitability of distributions.
Volunteer Mobilisation and Welfare Issues	Low morale and burnout reduced volunteer effectiveness.	Introduce a volunteer welfare policy emphasizing fair allowances, proper rest hours, and early inclusion in coordination and planning.
CVA Implementation Challenges	Inefficiencies delayed assistance and reduced inclusivity.	Simplify CVA procedures, enhance vendor engagement through early orientation, and digitize verification processes to ensure timely, inclusive assistance.
Poor safety planning led to a volunteer's vehicle being stolen during the WASH operation.	Lack of safety measures and clear planning put volunteers at risk and showed the need for better security preparation.	Make safety and security briefings mandatory. Develop a standardized field safety checklist and designate security focal persons for all operations.
Unavailability of IEC Material for dissemination	Poor communication reduced awareness and visibility.	Integrate IEC planning from the onset of every operation, ensuring timely dissemination of key messages and materials to strengthen community trust and engagement.
Community misinformation led to perceived politization of CVA, creating confusion and risking MRCS' neutrality and credibility	This misinformation created confusion among communities and risked damaging MRCS's credibility and neutrality. Clear information sharing is needed to avoid misunderstanding.	Proactive CEA measures such targeted briefings with local leaders and a strict political-neutrality protocol.
Volunteer safety, privacy, morale and operational efficiency	This situation affected volunteer safety, privacy, and morale. It also caused discomfort and reduced efficiency in carrying out verification and data collection activities.	Provide volunteers with official MRCS contact numbers or SIM cards for communication with beneficiaries. Conduct proper briefings to beneficiaries before calls to ensure trust, safety, and understanding of the verification process.

## CONCLUSION

The Lessons Learned Workshop helped MRCS reflect on the achievements and challenges of the East Malaysia Flood 2025 operation. Despite facing coordination and logistical issues, the operation successfully reached more people than planned and supported affected communities effectively. Strong cooperation with IFRC, local authorities, and volunteers contributed to this success.

However, the workshop also highlighted areas to improve, including better planning, clearer communication between NHQ and Chapter, stronger CVA and procurement systems, and improved volunteer welfare and safety. The lessons gathered will guide MRCS to strengthen its preparedness, coordination, and response for future emergencies.

## ANNEX 1

List of Participants- Attended:

No	Name	Department/ Chapter	Department
1	Dato' Danial Iskandar	NHQ Staff	Secretary General
2	Datuk Asnan Yunus Chung	NHQ Staff	Sabah Chapter Chairman
3	Jerome Conahap	NHQ Staff	Disaster Management
4	Muzaidin Bin Mujilim	NHQ Staff	Disaster Management
5	Rajyashyree A/P Rajagopal	NHQ Staff	Public Health
6	Wan Nur Fatin Binti Wan Mazlan	NHQ Staff	Procurement
7	Syafina Darlila Binti Ahmad Jaidi	NHQ Staff	PMER
8	Qurratu Aini	NHQ Staff	Finance
9	Hairuddin	Chapter Staff	Sabah Chapter/ Field Coordinator
10	Dennyllven Moses	volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ WASH
11	Azrimahwati	Chapter Staff	Sabah Chapter/CVA
12	Marcella	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/Mobile Health
13	Kevin	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/MHPSS
14	Leslie Chan	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/CEA
15	Amira Bolin	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ Finance & Admin
16	Sharon	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ Comms
17	Joshua Alexandar	Kedah	Sabah Chapter/Volunteer representative
18	Azra Elia Amri	IFRC	IFRC
19	Farah Nur Wahyuni	IFRC	IFRC
20	Sara Lan	IFRC/HK RC	PMER
21	Ony	IFRC	Ops Manager
22	Wendy Leong	Volunteer	MRCS NHQ/WASH
23	Norsahizah	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/MHPSS
24	Anita	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ Comms
25	Fredzex	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ Beaufort
26	Sharif Husdey	Volunteer	Sabah Chapter/ WASH