



Nepal Drought Response 2025

LESSONS, LEARNING, AND REFLECTION WORKSHOP REPORT
NEPAL RED CROSS SOCIETY

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Abbreviations

AWD	Acute Watery Diarrhoea
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CHF	Swiss Franc
DC	District Chapter
DDMC	District Disaster Management Committee
DDRT	District Disaster Response Team
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DTW / DTWs	Deep Tube Well(s)
ECV	Emergency Cholera Vaccination
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EDCD	Epidemiology and Disease Control Division
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IEC	Information, Education and Communication

IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Information Management
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDMC	Municipal Disaster Management Committee
MIS	Management Information System
MSG	Management Sub-Group
NDRT	National Disaster Response Team
NHQ / NHQs	National Headquarters
NRCS	Nepal Red Cross Society
ORS	Oral Rehydration Salts
ORP	Oral Rehydration Point
Palika	Local Government Unit (Municipality)
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PNS	Partner National Society
PoA	Plan of Action
RCEC	Red Cross Emergency Clinic
SC	Sub-Chapter
SoP / SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
VAT	Value Added Tax
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

1. Background and Context

In July 2025, Nepal experienced a severe drought affecting eight districts of Madhesh Province, placing an estimated 1.2 million people at risk. Despite forecasts of above-average rainfall, cumulative precipitation recorded up to 30 August 2025 remained below normal. Madhesh Province experienced particularly limited rainfall, resulting in prolonged dry conditions and the emergence of a severe drought situation across eight districts.

The drought significantly affected agriculture, water availability, sanitation, and livelihoods in Nepal's primary rice-producing region. Seedbeds dried out, paddy saplings withered, and access to safe drinking water deteriorated as surface and groundwater sources declined. Local government - initiated water supply through existing networks; however, these measures were insufficient to meet minimum drinking, sanitation, and hygiene needs. In densely populated settlements and market areas, communities queued for extended periods of extreme heat to collect limited quantities of water.

On 23 July 2025, the Federal Government of Nepal declared all 136 municipalities across the eight affected districts of Madhesh Province as drought-affected areas¹. Despite the continuation of the monsoon season, rainfall remained below average, and groundwater recharge was insufficient, prolonging water scarcity.

In this context, a surge in Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) cases was reported on 22 August 2025 in Birgunj Metropolitan City, Parsa District. On 26 August 2025, the National Public Health Laboratory confirmed a cholera outbreak², which subsequently spread to an adjoining municipality in Bara District. The lack of access to safe drinking water due to drought conditions was identified as a key contributing factor. According to the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division (EDCD), 1,171 AWD/cholera cases were reported between 9 August and 7 September 2025, with cases peaking in late August and sustained transmission observed into early September³. This situation necessitated an integrated drought and public health response combining water supply, hygiene promotion, health interventions, and community engagement.

In response, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), with IFRC support, launched its first drought response operation through a DREF allocation of CHF 250,353 (MDRNP019) from July to December 2025, targeting 60,000 people in Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, and Sarlahi districts. The operation focused on water supply, hygiene promotion, and community engagement, with cholera prevention and response activities integrated in Parsa and Bara districts. During implementation, an outbreak of Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD), later confirmed as cholera, significantly altered the operational context and necessitated a rapid revision of the response strategy to integrate health interventions

¹ <https://www.edcd.gov.np/uploads/news/pdf/68be63dc59a46.pdf>

² <https://www.moha.gov.np/>

³ <https://www.edcd.gov.np/uploads/news/pdf/>

alongside WASH activities. The operation was implemented under a temporary operating modality, increasing administrative and operational complexity.

Through this operation, more than 60,000 people were reached through volunteers mobilised by NRCS with access to safe drinking water through water trucking, drilling and installation of boreholes and water tanks, hygiene and sanitation support including temporary latrine construction, and more than 210,000 people from district level massive campaign for cholera oral vaccination. Overall, 34,333 people (6,866 households) across eight municipalities were reached with improved water access, supported by the completion of 14 deep boreholes, installation of 31 water storage tanks, distribution of 2,996 household buckets, and provision of over 515,000 litres of safe water. Water quality testing, chlorination demonstrations, and hygiene promotion activities contributed to reduced risks of waterborne diseases, while the integration of cholera preparedness and response strengthened public health outcomes in high-risk areas. The response was implemented through the mobilization of more than 240 staff and volunteers, ensuring strong community outreach and local engagement.

NRCS organised an IFRC wide Lessons Learnt Workshop on 23–24 December 2025 in Parsa district to systematically capture learning from the drought and cholera response. The workshop brought together district teams, local government representatives, and community members, who collectively shared their reflections, experiences, challenges, and lessons from the response operations. Furthermore, IFRC and NRCS organized a half-day follow-up and validation meeting on 20 January 2026 with NRCS headquarters, national level authorities and stakeholders on the findings of the lessons learnt workshop done in Parsa in December 2025. This meeting validated the findings of the Parsa lessons learned workshop and support collective learning, accountability, and integration of key recommendations into future response planning.

2. Objectives of the Workshop

2.1 Overall Objective

To generate evidence and learning from NRCS's first drought and cholera response operation and use these insights to strengthen strategic planning and operational readiness for similar emergencies in the future.

2.2 Specific Objectives

- To determine what extent of the DREF Operation was relevant, what results were achieved, and the successes and challenges emerged during implementation.
- To discuss and document key lessons learnt to further strengthen the preparedness to respond to future emergencies.
- To generate the programmatic learning on Drought Response and Cholera Response, its operational strategy and implementation approach identifying cross-complementarities, response commonalities.

- To explore the distinct characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of responding to a slow-onset emergency (drought) versus a sudden-onset crisis (cholera), and to identify the adaptive measures needed in each context.

3. Methodology

The workshop applied mixed methods (such as presentation, group discussion, question/answer, and plenary discussions) during the workshop. Methods included:

- District-wise root cause analysis: Group work sessions organised by district to examine what worked well, what did not, and why.
- Panel discussions: Structured discussions with community representatives and Palika (municipal) officials to capture external perspectives.
- Daily feedback surveys: End-of-day participant feedback to assess workshop quality and adjust facilitation as needed.
- Sharing and validation of findings: Brief sharing meeting with NRCS NHQ, IFRC and PNS and relevant stakeholders to promote collective learning, accountability, and informed planning for future responses.

The workshop was facilitated by a PMER practitioner from the IFRC Network, supported by the IFRC and NRCS PMER.

4. Participants of the workshop

The workshop was attended by a total of 38 participants (12 female and 26 male), representing a mix of community representatives, municipal representatives from affected Palikas, NRCS district and headquarters technical and coordination staff, volunteers, and IFRC representatives. Participants were drawn primarily from the drought- and cholera-affected districts of Bara, Rautahat, and Sarlahi, ensuring strong representation from operational areas. Sharing and validation workshop meeting was held in Kathmandu with participation from Epidemiology and Disease Control Division (EDCD), ECHO, UNICEF, Mercy Corps, IFRC and NRCS technical departments.

5. Workshop Proceedings and Key Findings

Day 1:

Opening and Objective

Nepal Drought Response Lessons Learnt Workshop began with an opening session and welcome remarks. The session was inaugurated by the President of the Parsa District Chapter with the ceremonial lighting of the Panas. The Director of the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) shared the objective of the workshop, which was to reflect on the learning generated from Nepal's first drought response operation implemented under a temporary operating modality during a particularly challenging phase while still successfully delivering critical water support to drought-affected communities. During opening remarks, IFRC Programme Manager also appreciated the coordination



NRCS Director giving the opening remarks during the workshop. (Photo: NRCS)

achieved at all levels despite the challenges and highlighted the workshop as an important platform to share these experiences and learn directly from community perspectives. The President of NRCS Madhesh Province Chapter encouraged participants to carry forward the learning and recommendations for future operations, noting that drought is becoming a recurring challenge in Nepal due to the impacts of climate change.

The introduction session was facilitated through an interactive exercise in which each participant shared their name along with a suitable adjective to describe themselves, helping participants become familiar with one another and build rapport.

Presentation on overall response operation of NRCS:

NRCS Programme Coordinator made a presentation about the progress of the Drought Response Operation funded by DREF against the plan, highlighting that this was NRCS's first drought operation and that the strategy was later revised to include cholera prevention and response. Despite initial delays, most planned activities were implemented, including site selection for all deep boreholes, installation of water storage tanks, initiation of water trucking, and establishment of an Oral Rehydration



NRCS Programme Coordinator presenting the progress of the operation. (Photo: IFRC)

Point. Some activities could not be fully completed, particularly water trucking, which reached only about 16 per cent of the target. Key challenges highlighted included limited availability of water trucking vendors, complex coordination with government authorities, delays in decision-making, and the added operational demands of responding to the cholera outbreak.

The major highlight of the presentation is listed below:

- 14 deep boreholes constructed (100% completion).
- 31 water storage tanks installed out of 40 planned (75%).
- 103 water trucking trips conducted out of 650 planned (16%), delivering approximately 515,000 litres of water.
- 2,996 households received water storage buckets out of 4,000 targeted (74%).
- 86 temporary toilets constructed (107%) to improve sanitation and reduce public health risks.
- 31 water user management committee formed (77%)
- 34,333 people (approximately 6,866 households) reached with improved access to safe water across eight municipalities.
- Over 60,000 people reached (100%) health and hygiene promotion through volunteer mobilization
- More than 21,000 people reached (90%) through cholera vaccination activities supported by mobilisation of 240 technical volunteers.

Findings from Group work exercise:

The response reflection session was conducted as a district-wise (Bara, Parsa and Saptari, Rautahat and Sarlahi) group work exercise focusing on root cause analysis. Participants discussed the team's work on what worked well, and the challenges encountered during the response, reviewed the mitigation measures applied, and analysed the underlying causes of key issues. The discussion also explored what districts could learn and adapt from each other to improve future responses. The session aimed to capture key lessons and actionable insights for future operations. Each district group



Presentation after the group work among participants. (Photo: NRCS)

reflections, and comments from the other participant.

was supported by assigned mentors and a note taker to facilitate the discussion and document key points.

The district-wise group work was conducted during the first half of the day and continued into the second half after lunch. Each group nominated a representative to present the key discussion points during the workshop session, followed by questions,

The district-wise presentations and key discussion points are outlined in the table below.

District	What Went Well	Key Challenges	Mitigation Measures Used	Way Forward / Recommendations
Bara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting of the most affected and marginalized communities • NRCS acted as a first responder • Coordination with stakeholders at multiple levels • Water distribution through tanks, buckets, boreholes, and pipelines • Water User Committees involved in sanitation, maintenance, and fund collection • Hygiene promotion, water quality testing, and chlorination • IEC dissemination through radio, street drama, and door-to-door visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in procurement and transportation • Limited district-level capacity on drought response • Insufficient coverage of affected areas • Lack of coordination between DDMC and LDMC and increase active engagement in NRCS interventions • Limited follow-up on recovery activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate water distribution to priority areas • Engagement of Water User Committees for operation and maintenance • Coordination meetings with local authorities and stakeholders • Use of local communication channels for awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegate roles and responsibilities for province/district chapters for procurement • Early training for staff and volunteers • Regular coordination and follow-up meetings • Strengthen stock and supply management • Include drought as a recognized disaster category in NRCS disaster category
Parsa & Saptari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate community and volunteer selection • Installation of water tanks and pipeline connections • Water distribution through taps and de-boring • Household-level water purification awareness and IEC distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination challenges with DDMC and clusters • Delays in ORP establishment • Shortage and late arrival of supplies • Unclear workplans • Human resource gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of operational strategy focus to include cholera response • Community mobilization for awareness and hygiene promotion • Use of volunteers for door-to-door engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance planning and preparedness at district level • Revision of procurement procedures • Pre-positioning of critical supplies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholera response activities including toilets, hygiene kits, ECV and PFA training • Flood response actions such as rescue, food and water distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak monitoring and reporting 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular district-level progress review meetings
Rautahat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of inclusive Water User Committees (women, Dalit, marginalized groups) • Installation of deep tube wells • Hygiene and health promotion sessions • Distribution of soap and hygiene kits • Awareness through street drama and FM radio jingles • Epidemic control and PFA orientation • Regular coordination and project committee meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited availability of water trucking vendors • Poor taste and odor of water affecting community trust • Delays in procurement and tender approval • High demand compared to supply (buckets, tanks) • Quality assurance challenges • Sustainability concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of water distribution approaches based on community feedback • Coordination with vendors and local authorities • Continuous community engagement and awareness activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen and pre-approve vendor lists • Improve water quality assurance and communication • Timely deployment of technical staff • Clear delegation of procurement authority • Strengthen sustainability planning
Sarlahi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved sanitation conditions • Increased access to safe drinking water through DTWs and buckets • Water purification awareness activities • Improved hygiene behaviors • Reduction in waterborne diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer turnover at local level • Procurement delays and supply shortages • Differences between government and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous follow-up with suppliers and stakeholders • Engagement of local government and district leadership • Hygiene promotion and community awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve time management in procurement processes • Develop and maintain supplier lists • Strengthen coordination mechanisms

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved coordination with local government 	NRCS procurement rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited vendor availability Sustainability risks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve quality checks Conduct early and clear communication with communities
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Following the presentation of districts, the following key comments were raised, discussed and also the actionable points were suggested by NRCS HQ and IFRC representatives:

Bara District

Theme	Observation / Gap	Actionable Point
<i>Disaster Classification</i>	Drought is not included in the NRCS official disaster list, creating uncertainty during activation.	Formally include drought as a recognized hazard in NRCS disaster classifications and develop minimum preparedness and response guidance.
<i>Technical Capacity</i>	District teams lacked adequate technical reference materials to guide drought response operations.	Develop and disseminate simple drought preparedness and response guidance (water options, hygiene risks, mitigation measures).
<i>Procurement</i>	Low district-level procurement thresholds delayed procurement of essential small items and services.	Review and adjust district procurement thresholds for emergency contexts.
<i>Institutional Capacity</i>	Administrative delays due to limited institutional experience with drought response.	Deploy experienced operations personnel during initial phases of new or unfamiliar response types.

Rautahat District

Theme	Observation / Issue	Actionable Point
<i>Water Supply Modality</i>	Water distributed using fire extinguishers was rejected due to smell and safety concerns.	Avoid non-standard containers; pre-identify culturally acceptable water delivery options.

<i>Alternative Options</i>	Jar water was identified as a potential alternative source of safe drinking water.	Assess feasibility in advance (supplier capacity, quality assurance, cost).
<i>Preparedness</i>	Drought preparedness treated as ad hoc and not embedded across departments.	Integrate drought-specific preparedness into departmental readiness plans.
<i>Procurement Compliance</i>	Delays occurred when suppliers could not provide VAT bills during emergencies.	Pre-identify compliant suppliers and define emergency procurement exceptions.
<i>Community Engagement</i>	Communities responded better to information shared by local youth.	Prioritise mobilisation of youth volunteers from affected communities.
<i>Participation Incentives</i>	Attendance improved when tangible materials were provided.	Replace lunch packs with practical goody bags aligned with response objectives.
<i>Operational Support</i>	IFRC and NRCS HQ field visits accelerated implementation and improved morale.	Institutionalise early and regular field support visits during emergencies.
<i>Documentation & Compliance</i>	Life-saving actions compete with documentation requirements.	Deploy rapid documentation support teams during emergencies.

Parsa District

Theme	Observation / Success / Gap	Actionable Point
<i>Coordination</i>	Early planning and management-level coordination enabled effective cholera response.	Formalise early coordination triggers and management-level decision protocols.
<i>Volunteer Deployment</i>	Two volunteers per ward strengthened vaccination outreach and visibility.	Adopt ward-level volunteer deployment as a standard model.

<i>Data Management</i>	Insufficient volunteer capacity for vaccination record updates.	Include data and record-management roles in vaccination planning.
<i>Inter-agency Coordination</i>	NRCS contributions were not formally acknowledged by UNICEF.	Clearly define and document NRCS roles in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.
<i>Planning</i>	District response plans lacked detailed health emergency coordination roles.	Update district plans to include cholera and health emergency components.
<i>Preparedness</i>	The Mapping of volunteers, vendors, service providers, and HR was incomplete.	Institutionalise regular mapping and updating of contacts and capacities.
<i>Sub-chapter Capacity</i>	Emergency response capacity varied across sub-chapters.	Institutionalise sub-chapter capacity building in annual plans and budgets.

Sarlahi District

Theme	Observation / Outcome	Actionable Point
<i>Health Services</i>	Free 24-hour ambulance services ensured timely referral and access to care.	Document as best practice and assess replication feasibility.
<i>Health Promotion</i>	Low early awareness of correct ORS use.	Integrate ORS messaging into early-stage health and hygiene promotion.
<i>Community Outreach</i>	Door-to-door outreach reduced cholera cases.	Prioritise direct community engagement during health outbreaks.
<i>Government Relations</i>	Local government formally recognized NRCS contributions.	Systematically document and leverage recognition for advocacy and partnerships.

<i>Standardisation</i>	Lack of standardized guidance for different disaster types.	Develop standardised checklists and response guidance for drought, cholera, and health emergencies.
<i>Community Trust</i>	Engagement via mothers' and youth groups improved acceptance.	Formalise collaboration with existing community structures.
<i>Information Management</i>	Limited use of MIS during response.	Strengthen MIS use for real-time tracking, coordination, and reporting.

At the end of the discussion, The President of NRCS Rautahat Chapter emphasized that, rather than comparing itself with other organizations or seeking recognition, NRCS remains focused on providing timely support to communities through its strong local presence and volunteer network, which has built a high level of trust within the community. He further highlighted that response activities continued despite significant operational challenges, including the absence of formal governance structures and staff without formal contracts. The continued delivery of support under these constraints was noted as a commendable demonstration of commitment and dedication.

A daily feedback survey was conducted at the end of the day, during which participants were asked to rate their experience using an emotion meter and share their overall impressions of the first day of the workshop. Participants were also invited to provide written feedback on areas for improvement to inform and strengthen the following day's sessions. The majority of participants (20 people) rated the day as "Very Good", indicating a high level of satisfaction with the content, facilitation, and overall flow of the sessions. A smaller number of participants (1 person) rated the day as "Okay", while no one expressed that the day was "Not Good".

Participants were also asked to provide suggestions for improving the following day's sessions. Key suggestions included:

- Ensuring regular and adequate availability of drinking water during sessions.
- Improving time management and adherence to the session schedule.
- Providing refreshments during the middle of the workshop.
- Improving food options to better meet participants' needs.
- Ensuring sessions are completed within the allocated time.
- Maintaining a stronger focus on the topic of discussion.

Day 2

Community, Municipal Perspectives and Forward Planning

Recap and Reflection

The recap of the Day 1 discussions and reflections on key issues related to water scarcity, coordination, and preparedness was done by NRCS Project Officer highlighting several critical operational challenges that had not been fully discussed on the first day. These included the revision of the water trucking budget due to its limited feasibility, a lack of trained response teams, high volunteer turnover, confusion around procurement processes, community trust issues regarding the safety of drinking water provided by NRCS, and gaps in timely monitoring, follow-up, and internal communication across NRCS levels.



Panel discussion with community representatives facilitated by NRCS. (Photo: NRCS)

A panel discussion was conducted with community representatives to hear community stories and capture community reflections and feedback. The session included nine community representatives (7 female and 2 male) from the operational districts and 3 government representatives (Chairpersons from Baudhimai Rural Municipality and Pacharauta Municipality and ward chairperson from Ramgadh-Birgunj Municipality) was facilitated by NRCS district focal points, who guided the discussion using a structured checklist and questionnaire to ensure consistency and comprehensive coverage of key issues. (Refer Annex 3 Nepal Drought response stories_ Communities voices)

"The Nepal Red Cross Society helped us build toilets for our homes. Before, we had to go to open spaces, which was risky because of snakebites. Now we feel safe and happy. This will give us a cleaner environment for our children. Nepal Red Cross taught us about sanitation and hygiene. They asked us to stop open defecation and use the new toilets properly. Volunteers showed us handwashing steps and when to wash hands. We also learnt how to make water safe by boiling or using chlorine tablets. Each

family received cash and materials like bamboo and tin sheets for toilets construction. This support has made a big difference in our lives.”

- Ms. Laluwa, Lakshmipur, Kaudena-1, HH toilet beneficiary

“Before, we had to walk long distances and wait in queues to collect water from the hand pump. Now the Red Cross has installed a water tank in our community and constructed boreholes for our Dalit community. We can easily access water for drinking and cleaning. This has made a big difference in our daily lives, and we are very happy.”

-Female, Parsa Disstrict

“We are very grateful for the support provided by the Nepal Red Cross Society, in partnership with Baudimai Municipality, to help our community cope with the effects of the drought. The installation of a water tank in Ward No. 7 has benefited the Muslim community as well as nearby households, and this investment to ensure safe and accessible drinking water for our community is highly appreciated. Using the information gathered from the community and from municipal discussions, the Red Cross has implemented interventions that are directly aligned with actual needs on the ground.”

-Pradeep Kumar Yadav, Mayor, Baudimai Municipality, Rautahat

The table below presents a structured summary of key findings from the drought and cholera panel discussions, disaggregated by community and palika representatives.

Community Representatives

Question	Key Findings
<i>What signs or changes helped you recognize the situation (drought and cholera)?</i>	Water scarcity was severe; water sources dried up; communities depended on water trucking; people spent most of their time searching for water; livestock and agriculture were affected early; vulnerable households, especially poor and agriculture-dependent families, were affected first; cholera occurred after people were forced to drink river and other unsafe water due to lack of safe drinking water.
<i>How did the situation affect water access, sanitation, hygiene, and health?</i>	People waited 2–3 days for water; after waiting up to three days without support, some households were forced to use river water despite safety concerns; no water for toilets, washing clothes, or cooking; households could not cook for 2–3 days; water was used for drinking, cooking, and livestock; unsafe water and poor hygiene caused sickness; several community members fell ill; children ate soil and junk food, resulting in sickness and lack of proper care; female-headed households were more

	severely affected as women could not travel long distances to fetch water; women skipped meals due to lack of water for hygiene.
<i>What support did you receive, and how useful was it?</i>	NRCS provided drinking water through water trucking, especially where water sources had dried up; water support was the most useful and timely assistance; NRCS was among the first responders; boreholes and water tanks were installed in selected locations; buckets, dignity kits, and essential WASH items (including sanitary pads) were distributed; volunteers supported water distribution, awareness, and coordination; access to drinking water improved compared to the initial phase and waiting time for water reduced after support.
<i>How well were you informed and guided during the response?</i>	Information and guidance were shared by NRCS volunteers at community level; hygiene and water safety messages were provided; trust in NRCS increased due to its local presence and volunteer engagement; lack of awareness on water safety and hygiene remained in some areas; some community members did not fully trust the quality of drinking water provided.
<i>What could have been done earlier or differently / what should improve in future?</i>	Need for water source protection and long-term water solutions; continuation and expansion of safe drinking water support during prolonged dry periods; regular water quality testing and clear communication on water safety; stronger awareness on water use, hygiene, and sanitation; literacy programmes requested in Dalit communities to strengthen awareness and confidence; livelihood-related trainings requested to reduce vulnerability; more regular monitoring and follow-up visits needed.

Palika (Local Government) Representatives

Question	Key Findings
<i>How did the municipality assess and respond to the situation?</i>	This was the first drought of its kind; communities and municipalities were not adequately prepared; local government resources were limited; response relied on coordination with NRCS and humanitarian partners; NRCS was recognized as one of the first organizations to provide timely water support to affected communities.
<i>How did coordination with NRCS and partners function?</i>	Coordination between NRCS and palika was generally positive; NRCS worked in coordination with municipal authorities; door-to-door outreach by NRCS was highly appreciated for improving access, trust, and engagement; timely information sharing between community, NRCS, and

	palika was critical; communication improved during the response phase despite limited systems and resources.
<i>What challenges were faced during drought and cholera response?</i>	Limited resources and capacity at local government level; high water demand in the Terai region for irrigation, livestock, and household use; unsafe water use increased cholera risk; excessive irrigation during dry periods contributed to water scarcity; political influence affected borehole site selection; regular cleaning and maintenance of water tanks was a challenge.
<i>How effective were preparedness and early warning systems?</i>	Preparedness and early warning systems were weak; contingency and preparedness plans were not sufficiently developed or used; communities were not adequately aware or prepared for drought or associated health risks; need for early preparedness and planning for compound emergencies was emphasized.
<i>What should be done differently / institutionalized for future responses?</i>	Greater emphasis on long-term and preventive support alongside emergency response; protection and preservation of natural resources; policies addressing deforestation, Chure extraction (Chure dohan), excessive irrigation, and unplanned construction that led to disappearance of ponds and wells; recognition that construction alone does not constitute development and that afforestation is equally important; stronger preparedness planning; regular maintenance of water infrastructure; joint planning and coordination with NRCS for future compound emergencies; acknowledgement that the situation improved after NRCS intervention compared to before the response.

Based on the two-day discussions and reflections from district teams, communities, local governments, NRCS, IFRC, and partners, a Drought Response Pathway was developed to consolidate key learning from the response. The pathway captures the sequence of decision-making, coordination mechanisms, and adaptive approaches required to manage slow-onset drought conditions while responding to sudden-onset public health risks such as cholera. It serves as a practical reference to guide future drought preparedness and response planning, strengthen integrated WASH–health approaches, and support more timely, coordinated, and adaptive operations in similar compound emergencies.

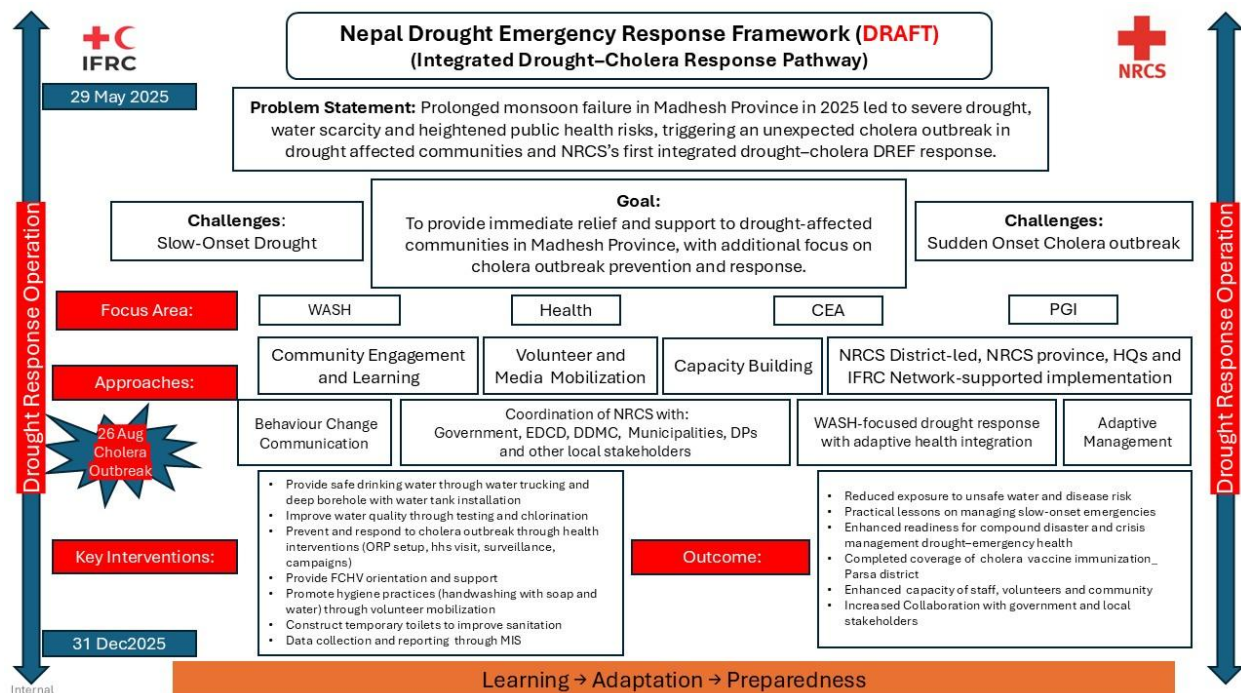


Fig 1: Integrated Drought Response Pathway

6. Lesson learned

- **Early warning indicators**, such as drying water sources and declining livelihoods, must systematically trigger early preparedness and response actions to prevent reliance on unsafe water sources and reduce the risk of disease outbreaks, including cholera.
- **Access to safe drinking water** remains the most critical life-saving intervention during drought. Emergency responses should prioritize rapid water supply while concurrently investing in long-term, climate-resilient water solutions and sustainable source protection.
- **Protracted drought conditions** require sustained and predictable support rather than short-term interventions. Ensuring continuity of water supply and expanding service coverage are essential, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized households.
- **Strong internal and external coordination**—among clusters, government counterparts, UN agencies, I/NGOs, and community structures—is critical to avoid duplication, ensure complementarity, and enable timely, harmonized drought response planning and implementation.
- **Clear risk communication and routine water quality monitoring** are essential to build community trust, promote safe water use, and prevent waterborne diseases.
- **Hygiene and sanitation awareness** must be strengthened through targeted, culturally appropriate approaches, with particular attention to low-literacy and marginalized communities.
- **Gender and vulnerability** considerations must be systematically integrated into response planning, as female-headed households and children face heightened risks due to mobility constraints and increased caregiving responsibilities.

- **Community-based volunteers** are critical to effective service delivery, coordination, and trust-building; however, their engagement requires consistent capacity building, supervision, monitoring, and follow-up.
- **Behavior change interventions**, such as street drama, door-to-door awareness activities, and learning materials developed in local languages, played an effective role in promoting safe water, hygiene, and sanitation practices, particularly among low-literacy and marginalized communities.
- **Integration of livelihood and Health and awareness support** into WASH interventions is essential to reduce long-term vulnerability and strengthen community resilience to future shocks.
- **Preparedness and early warning systems** were weak and insufficiently institutionalized, underscoring the need for proactive, coordinated planning for droughts and compound emergencies that link climate shocks with public health risks.
- **Stronger advocacy on drought and its consequences** is needed to raise awareness among stakeholders and communities, inform future programming, and support timely, well-resourced operational responses

7. Conclusion

The Lessons Learnt Workshop provided a valuable platform to reflect on NRCS's first drought response operation alongside the cholera response, capturing perspectives from communities, district teams, local governments, and partners. The response was relevant in addressing critical water, sanitation, and public health needs, particularly in highly affected and vulnerable communities. The integration of drought and cholera response activities demonstrated NRCS's ability to adapt under complex and evolving conditions and reinforced the importance of community trust and volunteer-led outreach.

At the same time, the discussions highlighted key gaps that constrained the effectiveness and efficiency of the response, including limited drought-specific preparedness and technical guidance at district level, procurement and administrative constraints, insufficient early planning for slow-onset emergencies, and weak integration of health emergency coordination roles in district response plans. Gaps in vendor mapping, timely reporting, and documentation during peak response periods were also noted.

The response also highlighted the distinct operational demands of managing a slow-onset drought alongside a sudden-onset cholera outbreak, underscoring the need for flexible preparedness, rapid decision-making, and integrated WASH-health response systems for compound emergencies. The lessons and actionable recommendations generated through the workshop provided clear direction for addressing these gaps and will inform future planning, and the design of more resilient and adaptive response models.

8. Recommendation and Action Plan

Key Recommendation Action	Responsible	Timeline	Remarks
A) Governance (Policy, Strategy)			
Review and update NRCS response manuals and checklists to include drought and emerging hazards.	Revision by EOC team	31 March 2026	The EOC to develop process documents with timeline for the revision by end of January
	Review by MSG	15 April	
	Approve by CEC	TBD	
Revise HR, financial and procurement policy of NRCS to leverage immediate action for any emergency	Revision by respective committees and departments		
	Approve by CEC		
Align province/district chapters' financial and procurement policies (updating DC threshold for procurement) with revised national policies.	Conduct orientation/consultation with all chapters by concerned department		
	Revision by concerned chapters		
	Approve by concerned CEC		
Maintain standby volunteer/staff rosters by sector. Update volunteer mobilization, safeguarding and MIS procedures. Framework agreement with potential vendors before disasters.	EOC for NHQs level	By 31 March	
	Province chapter for provincial level		
	All DC for DC level		
B) Administrative Arrangement (HR, Budget, Volunteers)			
Monsoon Operation plan should also be focused on drought to some of the possible districts for future disaster planning and awareness of raising Develop deployment procedures/SoP, ToR of surge	EOC Concerned Departments		

Define required levels of competencies, maintain updated trained volunteer rosters (NDRT, DDRT, CADRE, First Aid, RCEC), and their positions based on the competency in multiple scenario.	EOC Concerned Departments		
Conduct pre-deployment orientation on role and responsibilities at all levels	EOC Concerned Departments		
Enhance staff capacity in budget planning and DREF operation, conducting orientation on DREF process.	EOC		
C) Logistics (Procurement, Fleet, Preposition)			
Maintain minimum stocks at DC level for different disaster response	DCs EOC Concerned Departments		NRCS to define the items which can be pre-positioned and explore optimum use of resources at all levels and other alternatives such as framework agreement
Promote framework agreement specially for WASH emergencies, specifically for drinking water distribution management, water tank, pipe fitting, boreholes items/service provider etc.	CDD		
NHQs need to deploy WASH Kit-5 in this type of emergency	CDD		
Increase district chapters' thresholds for procurement of relief/construction items in time of emergencies			
Conduct pre-crisis market assessments of different items at districts to enhance timely procurement process	Concerned departments	January- March 2026	
Management of pre-deployment kits of surge.	EOC Concerned departments		NRCS to define and standardize the items for deployment kits
Review procurement process with tender timeline, threshold for emergencies to ensure timely procurement of items. (both in NRCS and IFRC).	Revision by concerned committee and departments Approve by CEC		

	IFRC		
D) Operational Management			
Review and standardize criteria for targeting operation area, target households and population, especially for this type of climate-induced, WASH related and health-related emergencies.	NHQ / Province / District	Short term	Addresses coordination gaps
NRCS need to define immediate relief activities for short-term operation (DREF) and early recovery activities for longer term	EOC Concerned Departments		
Develop plan and strategy for implementation of anticipatory actions for such type of slow-onset crisis/Health-WASH emergency	EOC Concerned Departments		
NRCS to ensure required sector-specific technical staff for on board	MSG		
Ensure mandatory use of MIS system and its reporting should be used for decision making and documentation	Circular to province/DCs Regular monitoring by IM Officer	By end of Jan	
Ensure meaningful engagement areas of province chapter for same operation			
Develop PoA at DC level based on HQ PoA, prioritizing urgent interventions and execute accordingly to avoid delays during implementation	DC		
E) Coordination			
Internal Coordination: Strengthen inter-departmental coordination at NHQ and provide one plan and guidance to district team	NHQ / IFRC		
Ensure active province engagement of governance and staff to support DREF operation			
Establish communication tree (inter-department along with SC-DC-Province-HQs)	MSG		

External and Inter Cluster Coordination: Strengthen coordination, collaboration and resource sharing with local governments and stakeholders at Province and District level.	NHQ / Province / District / Local Government	Ongoing	
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Annexes

- Annex 1 Agenda
- Annex 2 List of Participants
- Annex 3 Nepal Drought response stories_ Communities voices

Annex 1 Agenda

Nepal Drought Response 2025 Lessons, learning, and reflection workshop December 23-24, 2025

Learning Objectives:

- Understand what worked and what did not in the DREF-supported drought and cholera response, including key successes, gaps, and operational challenges across planning, coordination, and implementation.
- Apply validated lessons from community to national levels to strengthen preparedness, contingency planning, and decision-making for future drought and public health emergencies.
- Improve integrated response approaches by analyzing how drought and cholera interventions complement each other in terms of sequencing, coordination, and operational interaction.

Overall Objective:

- To generate evidence and learning from NRCS's first drought and cholera response operation and use these insights to strengthen strategic planning and operational readiness for similar emergencies in the future.

Day 1: Tuesday, 23 Dec 2025						
Time	Session Title	Activities: What, Who, How	Learning Objectives	Notes	Facilitation	Resources
8:30-9:00 AM	Registration					
9:00-9:30 AM	Opening and Welcome,	Province Chapter			Province Office, NHQ	

	Security and Logistic brief				Hotel team and Jayram	
9:30-9:50 AM	Introduction and share objective of workshop	Who is in the room, know your teammates around	Meet new friends and know their role and skills	Self-Introduction and Select a partner and ask them about their name, district, role/responsibility, and one hobby. Introduce your partner to the group. Repeat this process with two different pairs.	Diksha Khadka	
9:50-10:20 AM	Response overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Response Operation Presentation_ Districtwise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the operation started in each district, and it's the key achievements and challenges 	Power point Presentation	Kiran Acharya /Prakash Karki	DREF response plan
10:20-11:00 AM	Response Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Root cause analysis: -What is working well? -What are the challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify what worked well and key challenges in the response Analyse underlying causes to inform future improvements 	District wise group and group work exercise Each district group will be supported by the mentors and the note taker	Diksha Khadka Mentors: Tara and Jayaram Basnet (Sarlahi) Prajwal and Ram (Rautahat) Rashmi and Prakash (Parsa) Kiran and Geeta (Bara)	The findings from the KII and FGD assessments conducted prior to the workshop will be incorporated as well as representative inputs to inform the discussion and recommendations.

11:00-11:15 AM	Tea/Coffee Break					
11:15-12:30 PM	Response Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue Root cause analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What went well -Challenges faced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify what worked well and key challenges in the response. Analyse underlying causes to inform future improvements. 	District wise group and group work exercise Each district group will be supported by the mentors and the note taker	Diksha Khadka Mentors: Tara and Jayaram Basnet (Sarlahi) Prajwal and Ram (Rautahat) Rashmi and Prakash (Parsa) Kiran and Geeta (Bara)	
12:30-1:30 PM	Lunch Break					
1:30-2:45 PM	Response Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Root cause analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mitigation measures applied - What can we learn and adapt from each other? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review mitigation measures applied during the response. Capture key lessons for future action. 	Energizer: Bara and Parsa team (10 mins) District wise group and group work exercise Each district group will be guided by the district branch manager identifying the note keeper for each group	Diksha Khadka Mentors: Tara and Jayaram Basnet (Sarlahi) Prajwal and Ram (Rautahat) Rashmi and Prakash (Parsa) Kiran and Geeta (Bara)	The findings from the KII and FGD assessments conducted prior to the workshop will be incorporated as well as representative inputs to inform the discussion and recommendations.

2:45-3:00 PM	Tea/Coffee Break					
3:00-4:00 PM	Response Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Root cause analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigation measures applied Lessons learnt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review districtwise mitigation action 	30 mins working in group and then next 30 mins each group will rotate in clockwise setup (World Cafe), 7 mins in each group		
4:00-4:30 PM	Day 1 Wrap Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily Survey Parking Lot Review 			Geeta/Tara	
4:30-5:00 PM		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day I review 	Review Day I and plan for Day II		Facilitator team only	

Day 2: Wednesday, Dec 24, 2025						
Time	Session Title	Activities: What, Who, How	Learning Objectives	Notes	Facilitation	Resources
9:00-9:30 AM	Day 1 Recap and Feedback on Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recap of Day I 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the first day of the workshop 		Jayaram Basnet	
9:30-11:00 AM	Panel discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel Discussion with Community Representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hear community story Capture community reflections and feedback 	Use the checklist for panel discussion. Capture video	Umesh/Sun arman Mahato will lead to ask question	
11:00-11:15 AM	Tea/Coffee Break					

11:15-12:30 PM	Panel Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion/Plenary with Palikas representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture Palika perspectives on response effectiveness Identify municipal lessons for future preparedness 	<p>Use the checklist for panel discussion.</p> <p>Capture Video</p>	Prakash/Jayram	Will lead to ask question
12:30-1:30 PM	Lunch Break					
1:30-3:00 PM		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drought Response Recommendation discussion at different levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Community -Local Municipal -NRCS district and province 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify practical drought response recommendations at community, municipal, and NRCS levels 	<p>Energizer: Rautahat and Sarlahi team (10 mins)</p> <p>Mixed groups will be formed for this exercise followed by presentation of each group.</p> <p>Identify the Note keeper</p>	Geeta/Prajwal	
3:00-3:15 PM	Tea/Coffee Break					
3:15-3:45 PM		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the draft Drought response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share draft response framework and get feedback 	Group work and get feedback	Tara/Diksha	

		framework and Q&A				
3:45-4:15 PM		Closing session			Province Chapter	
4:15-5:00 PM		Day II review	Next step and action		Facilitator team only	
Thank You All!						

Annex 2 List of Participants

**Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF)
Nepal Drought - 2025
Lessons Learned Workshop
Participant Details**

SN	Name	Sex	District	Position	Organisation
1	Pradeep Kumar Yadav	M	Rautahat	Mayor	Baudhimai Municipality
2	Raj Kishor Prasad Yadav	M	Rautahat	President	NRCS DC
3	Shiva Prasad Subedi	M	Rautahat	Programme Focal	DREF
4	Hemant Ray Yadav	M	Rautahat	Account focal	DREF
5	Sandal Ram	M	Rautahat	Community volunteer	NRCS DC
6	Aarti Mishra	F	Rautahat	Beneficiary	Ward#1, Baudhimai Municipality
7	Rambha Kumari Shah	F	Rautahat	Beneficiary	Ward#2, Ishanath Municipality
8	Jalandhar Singh	M	Bara	Mayor	Pacharauta Municipality
9	Uday Kumar Nepal	M	Bara	Treasurer	NRCS DC
10	Sunarman Mahato	M	Bara	Programme Focal	DREF
11	Santosh Nepal	M	Bara	Account focal	DREF
12	Gauri Shankar Gautam	M	Bara	WASH Technician	DREF
13	Jaggu Majhi	M	Bara	Beneficiary	Ward#1, Pacharauta Municipality
14	Ranita Gupta	F	Bara	Beneficiary	Ward#2, Simraungadh Municipality
15	Gajendra Mukhiya	M	Bara	Community volunteer	NRCS DC
16	Satendra Ray	M	Sarlahi	Ward Chairperson-1	Parsa Rural Municipality
17	Shambhu Narayan Prasad Kushwaha	M	Sarlahi	Treasurer	NRCS DC

18	Ratan Bahadur Swar	M	Sarlahi	Programme Focal	DREF
19	Narayan Gopal Pradhan	M	Sarlahi	Account focal	DREF
20	Shiva Paswan	M	Sarlahi	Community volunteer	NRCS DC
21	Sharmila Yadav	F	Sarlahi	Beneficiary	Ward#1, Parsa Rural Municipality
22	Yasodha Patel	F	Sarlahi	Beneficiary	
23	Umesh Mishra	M	Parsa		NRCS
24	Subash Tamang	M	Parsa		NRCS
25	Daya Shankar Singh	M	Parsa		NRCS
26	Asamahini Kumari Chanudhary	F	Parsa		NRCS
27	Dipak Mali	M	Parsa	Beneficiary	
28	Chanda Devi Mali	F	Parsa	Beneficiary	
29	Bhramma Dev Yadav	M	Saptari		NRCS
30	Prajwal Acharya	M		DRM Manager	IFRC
31	Dikshya Khadka	F		Lead Facilitator	IFRC
32	Geeta Shrestha	F		PMER	IFRC
33	Rashmi Jha	F		Health	IFRC
34	Puja Koirala	F		Director	NRCS HQs
35	Tara Gurung	F		Dy. Director	NRCS HQs
36	Kiran K. Acharya	M		Coordinator	NRCS HQs
37	Jaya Ram Basnet	M		Officer	NRCS HQs
38	Ram Bahadur Chaudhary	M		Finance	NRCS HQs

Annex 3 Nepal Drought response stories Communities voices