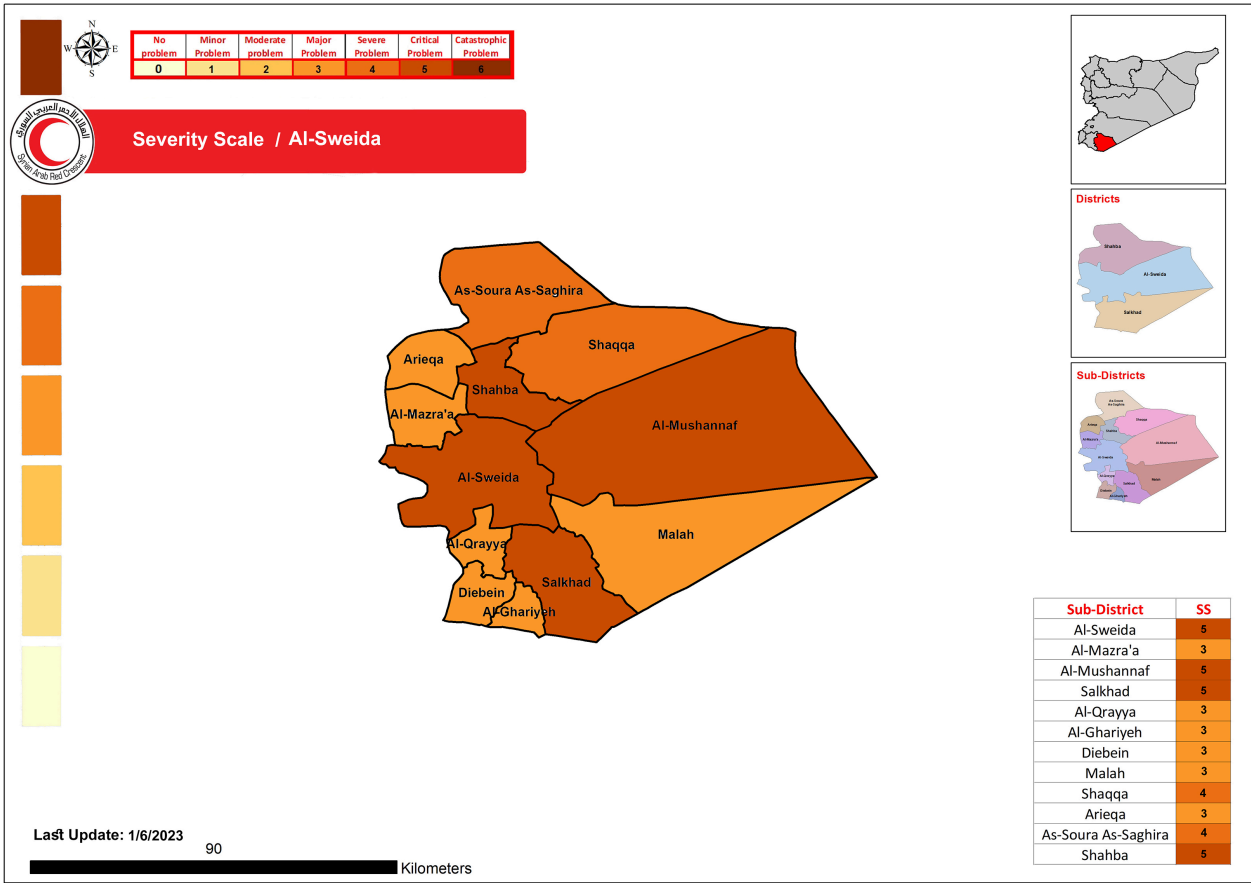




Appeal: MDRSY011	Total DREF Allocation: CHF 799,070	Crisis Category: Orange	Hazard: Drought
Glide Number: SYR-2023-000142	People Affected: 650,000 people	People Targeted: 650,000 people	People Assisted: 600,000 people
Event Onset: Slow	Operation Start Date: 23-08-2023	Operational End Date: 31-05-2024	Total Operating Timeframe: 9 months
Targeted Regions: Al-Sweida			

The major donors and partners of the IFRC-DREF include the Red Cross Societies and governments of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Britain, China, Czech, Canada, Denmark, German, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, and the Netherlands, as well as DG ECHO, Mondelez Foundation, and other corporate and private donors. The IFRC, on behalf of the National Society, would like to extend thanks to all for their generous contributions.

Description of the Event



Date when the trigger was met

08-08-2023

What happened, where and when?

After more than ten years of conflict in Syria, access to water had become one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges, further exacerbated by the effects of climate change. According to SARC's severity scale, updated in June 2023, all districts in Al-Sweida were ranked between levels 3 and 5, indicating major, severe, or critical water needs.

During the reporting period, Al-Sweida governorate experienced a sharp decline in water availability, driven by a combination of factors. The main source of drinking water, which had previously provided 15,000 cubic meters daily half of the city's needs had been lost since 2012. At the same time, the population increased by 75% between 2010 and 2022, significantly raising demand and placing greater pressure on already strained resources. The reduction in electricity supply from 24 hours per day to just 4 hours per day severely disrupted pumping operations, while the overall maintenance and technical capacity of water infrastructure had deteriorated considerably.

The worsening scarcity of water resources, compounded by climate-related shocks, led to tensions within the local community over access to water points, agricultural land, and pastures. Agriculture remained the main source of livelihood in the area, but increasing temperatures and reduced rainfall drastically diminished pasture coverage. Many pumping stations became inoperable or inaccessible due to insecurity and damage, further limiting water access.

The mismanagement of critical natural resources created conditions ripe for environmental and public health crises. One of the most serious outcomes was the 2022 cholera outbreak. In the weeks preceding this report, an increase in hepatitis A cases was also recorded in Al-Sweida, linked to the consumption of unsafe water and food. The entire governorate was at risk of severe water shortages, significantly affecting communities reliant on rain-fed agriculture and worsening the region's food security situation.

Declining purchasing power further exacerbated the impact of water scarcity. The cost of transporting 25 barrels of water reached 100,000 Syrian pounds barely enough to meet the needs of a family of five for two weeks. Dams, which previously supplied up to 22% of water needs, had largely dried up, and purification stations were projected to cease operations within months.

Additionally, there was a notable decline in livestock, particularly in the eastern and northern countryside, where Bedouin communities who relied almost entirely on livestock breeding constituted a significant portion of the population. Although the Ministry of Water Resources implemented various mitigation measures, the scale of the challenges far exceeded the available capacities.



Based on these outcomes, SARC convened a membership meeting on 8 August 2023 to discuss the existing gaps and priority needs. This meeting triggered a request for Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) support to complement SARC’s proposed intervention plan, aimed at responding to an orange category emergency targeting approximately 650,000 people.



Scope and Scale

The water crisis in Al-Sweida governorate reached critical levels during the reporting period. Surface dam levels had declined to hazardous levels, with some dams nearly dried up. Simultaneously, the main boreholes supplying water to the governorate’s network were rendered non-functional. This situation stemmed from multiple interrelated factors. Rainfall had decreased significantly in recent years, and climate change further contributed to reduced snowfall the primary source of surface dam replenishment. The crisis was compounded by persistent low electrical voltage, which disrupted the functionality of water pumps, and by ongoing technical and logistical constraints faced by the Al-Sweida Water Authority. As a result, approximately 80% of the boreholes in the governorate were reported to be out of service. The situation was further aggravated by excessive and unregulated drilling near primary water source wells, which disrupted the aquifer’s stability. The cone of depression around key wells ranged from 0 to 350 meters, and any drilling within this radius posed a severe risk to water availability. Additional stressors included illegal extraction, irrigation, and vandalism of network infrastructure.

By June 2023, official reports confirmed that the water crisis had become severe. Projections indicated that within two months, all surface dams accounting for roughly 20% of the governorate’s water supply would run dry. Moreover, unless urgent action was taken to repair and reactivate the borehole pumps, the remaining 80% of the water sources risked being lost. This situation posed a serious humanitarian threat to approximately 650,000 people, further straining community resilience and increasing vulnerabilities.

In response to the worsening crisis, a coordination meeting was held on 15 May 2023, chaired by the Ministry of Water Resources and facilitated by the SARC WASH and Rehabilitation Department. The meeting included local authorities and Movement partners and served to present the findings of the water situation assessments along with proposed response options. A follow-up coordination meeting on 27 July outlined specific commitments from partners to address the crisis.

Based on the outcomes of these discussions, SARC convened a membership meeting on 8 August 2023 to identify critical gaps and immediate needs. This process led to the formal request for Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) support to complement SARC’s proposed intervention plan for addressing the Orange-category emergency, targeting approximately 650,000 affected individuals.

National Society Actions

Have the National Society conducted any intervention additionally to those part of this DREF Operation?	No
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IFRC Network Actions Related To The Current Event

Secretariat	In addition to the regular support, IFRC is a member in the coordination meetings, and facilitated the application for DREF support to SARC in their response operation complementing other actors' contributions, aligned with SARC mandate. IFRC Syria CD conducted a filed visit to Al-Sweida for primary data and direct observations to have an in-depth understanding of the context and needs.
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Participating National Societies

RCRC actors continue their support of SARC on a regular basis, allowing The SARC to be the first responder, ready to scale up as per needs and support their response. Norwegian RC have committed to purchase high-power mobile generators to power the water pumps.

ICRC Actions Related To The Current Event

ICRC has regular program support for the affected branches to cover their running costs. In addition, the ICRC committed through this response in providing ten submersible pumps and ten motors to cover twenty wells equipped with protection systems.

Other Actors Actions Related To The Current Event

Government has requested international assistance	No
National authorities	<p>The Ministry of Water Resources and its directorate in Al-Sweida played a key role in responding to the crisis. Throughout 2023, the Ministry worked on an emergency response plan aimed at addressing the severe water shortage. Efforts focused on the rehabilitation of boreholes and the maintenance of water pumps to compensate for the significant decline in available water sources. Additional actions included the deployment of water trucking operations and the installation of new water tanks to enhance storage capacity in priority areas.</p> <p>The national authorities also led several coordination meetings with SARC and in-country partners. These meetings served to present the findings of recent water situation assessments and to agree on strategic response options. Their leadership helped ensure a coherent and complementary response, maximizing the impact of available resources and aligning interventions across humanitarian actors.</p>
UN or other actors	<p>UN agencies supported national efforts to stabilize the water crisis in Al-Sweida but were only able to cover part of the needs. Their interventions were designed to reduce the existing gaps in water access, though they fell short of meeting the Sphere standard of 125 litres per person per day. UNICEF committed to fully equip seven boreholes and provided batteries and tires for five water trucks operated by the Al-Sweida Water Corporation.</p>

Are there major coordination mechanism in place?

Coordination mechanisms were in place at both national and governorate levels. The Ministry of Water Resources led coordination nationally, while the Al-Sweida Water Directorate coordinated locally. SARC co-led the WASH sector response in Al-Sweida and played a key role in assessments and strategic planning. Regular coordination meetings, including a membership meeting convened by SARC on 8 August 2023, helped identify gaps and align partner actions. While UNICEF and others provided support, the scale of needs exceeded available resources, with gaps remaining in long-term infrastructure and livelihood resilience. No major overlaps were reported, but continued coordination was essential to avoid duplication.

Needs (Gaps) Identified



Livelihoods And Basic Needs

The combined effect of reduced water levels and prolonged drought conditions impacted the food and nutrition security of households dependent on agriculture in Al-Sweida. Significant shortages and the high cost of agricultural inputs, including diesel fuel, limited the ability to provide supplementary irrigation for cultivated crops. As the breadbasket of the country, the reduction in both rainfall and river water for irrigation was predicted to cause substantial losses, indicating a major drop in harvest.

Moreover, with poor yields and crop failures undermining revenues, farmers struggled to obtain the necessary inputs for the sowing season in November, which was expected to impact the 2024 harvest. This, in turn, affected livelihoods and food security. For livestock, the production of fodder crops was adversely affected, and pastures were in poor condition due to erratic climatic conditions. Herders were unable to access some areas in the Badia for natural grazing (particularly for sheep) due to the unstable security situation. This resulted in destocking, and animal prices dropped by at least 20–30 per cent.



Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

Low levels of water in reservoirs resulted in reduced energy production capacity, causing power blackouts across Syria. With only 1–2 hours of electricity in some locations, people were affected by reduced electricity generation and availability. Compounded by ongoing fuel shortages, water pumping stations had limited functionality, affecting safe access to and availability of drinking water for the population of Al-Sweida. The lack of water and the drought situation contributed to the deterioration of living standards, coupled with increasing costs of food, water, and basic goods due to the massive devaluation of the local currency, while the income and purchasing power of people continued to shrink. The situation was particularly challenging for internally displaced people, who faced a lack of basic infrastructure including water and sanitation. Due to the unavailability of clean water, households increasingly consumed unsafe water, with a growing number of water-borne diseases. The reduction in safe and sufficient water affected hygiene and other preventative measures, such as handwashing, which was critical to prevent the spread of disease.



Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation And Recovery

In light of the impact of climate change and prolonged water scarcity, community awareness on mitigation measures and public education was needed to build resilience through smarter usage of existing water resources and to avoid negative coping mechanisms.

Operational Strategy

Overall objective of the operation

This DREF allocation aims at supporting 650,000 people in need affected by the water scarcity crises, providing hard-WASH support in all of Al-Sweida Governorate for 9 months.

Operation strategy rationale

The overall objective of this DREF operation was to provide dignified access to clean water and humanitarian assistance to approximately 650,000 of the most vulnerable people affected by prolonged drought and resulting water scarcity in Al-Sweida governorate. This was achieved primarily through the rehabilitation of water systems at source points to ensure sufficient water collection at the main pumps that served affected communities.

Water supply in Al-Sweida relied on approximately 80% from boreholes, 15% from dams, and 1% from springs. Due to a significant decrease in rainfall and snowmelt—key sources of dam replenishment—many reservoirs dried up. Compounding this was the degradation of infrastructure due to over a decade of conflict, low electrical voltage hampering pump functionality, and logistical and technical shortcomings within the local Water Establishment. Of 310 boreholes in the governorate, 95 had gone out of service.

In response to these urgent needs, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), supported by this DREF operation, rehabilitated two main boreholes and maintained 37 additional pumps, selected based on criteria of maximum impact and reach. This filled a critical gap not covered by other actors: UNICEF had committed to drilling 7 new boreholes and maintaining water trucks, while ICRC was supporting the rehabilitation of 20 boreholes.

To complement these efforts, seven large-capacity water tanks (70–90 m³) were installed in various locations to enhance community-level water collection and availability.



Targeting Strategy

Who was targeted by this operation?

This operation aimed to assist 650,000 people (130,000 households) affected by the droughts.

Explain the selection criteria for the targeted population

SARC aimed to assist the population of Al-Sweida who were in dire need of humanitarian assistance due to the ongoing water crisis and drought conditions. These communities were severely affected by the drought and low water levels, with high levels of vulnerability and limited coping capacity as a result of the compound effects from years of crises and disasters. The following criteria were used for targeting:

- Households directly affected by the water crisis and drought conditions.

In the targeted area, SARC had established branches and sub-branches with trained staff and volunteers experienced in emergency relief operations, as well as support staff. Sex- and age-disaggregated household data were collected during beneficiary registration and were planned to be presented in this final report.

Total Targeted Population

Women	-	Rural	53%
Girls (under 18)	-	Urban	47%
Men	-	People with disabilities (estimated)	2%
Boys (under 18)	-		
Total targeted population	650,000		

Risk and Security Considerations (including "management")

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

Risk	Mitigation action
Governmental approvals to carry the intervention plan might face some delays and thus affect the implementation timeframe.	Requested implementation timeframe for this DREF consider risk of delays
Financial risks include currency devaluation, inflation of market, limitations in banking withdrawals, cash transfer impact by sanctions.	Monitoring the financial situation and market exchange rate, and taking actions accordingly that would include reservation of the transferred funds in the CHF currency until processing for payment.
Lack of enough skilled human resources in the affected areas to respond to the increased needs	SARC will mobilize more trained volunteers from the affected branches to support this particular operation.

Please indicate any security and safety concerns for this operation:

A further decline in the value of the Syrian Pound was anticipated, which inevitably exacerbated the hardships faced by the civilian population. The ongoing economic crisis and its associated impacts remained highly relevant to the humanitarian community, as needs continued to escalate. These developments amplified a range of complex threats, including potential interference in programming and disruptions during implementation.

At the local level, there were no indications of any imminent or radical changes in conflict dynamics. Despite sporadic attacks and flare-ups, relative stability largely prevailed in Al-Sweida, where both political activism and armed struggle were constrained by factors such as state repression, prolonged conflict fatigue, displacement, and severe socioeconomic challenges. Although inter-communal tensions and localized conflicts among various actors occasionally reoccurred across southern Syria, such incidents became less frequent in Al-Sweida. Nevertheless, the possibility of larger-scale confrontations being triggered by certain events could not be entirely ruled out.

Acceptance and respect for SARC in Al-Sweida governorate served as a primary mitigation measure to reduce operational risks. In addition, following the Movement Security Framework Agreement (MSFA), SARC's security support played a key role in enabling a coordinated Movement-wide response to the needs of drought-affected populations. This was achieved through leveraging SARC's extensive resources, operational networks, contingency plans, communication tools, and other established mitigation mechanisms.

Implementation



Water, Sanitation And Hygiene

Budget: CHF 735,383
Targeted Persons: 650,000
Assisted Persons: 600,000

Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
% of population reached satisfied with rehabilitation and maintenance activities	85	85
% of water supply increase	30	0
# of water tanks installed	7	7
# of submersible pumps maintained	37	37
# of boreholes fully rehabilitated	2	0

Narrative description of achievements

- The rehabilitation of two boreholes was not completed due to inflation, which led to an increase in pump costs. However, despite not completing the boreholes, SARC serviced 37 submersible pumps to ensure the people in Sweida still had access to safe water.
- A total of 37 submersible pumps were serviced in Sweida Governorate, resulting in the production of approximately 580 cubic meters of drinking water per hour. The areas targeted for this intervention were chosen due to their severe water shortages and, in some cases, complete water outages. The water provided met the minimum daily consumption needs per person, considering the widespread impact across much of the governorate.
- A total of 7 Oxfam water tanks were procured and installed in the region to enhance water storage and distribution. • •

Lessons Learnt

- Coordination with local authorities and water authorities went smoothly.
- There was a strong collaboration between the ICRC and UNICEF to ensure proper coverage. Resources were optimized through coordinated allocation between the two organizations, with both receiving pumps. SARC played a key role in leading this coordination and liaising with local authorities and water boards.
- The international procurement of Oxfam tanks was successful, and the rehabilitation of 37 pumps was completed efficiently in just six weeks following procurement, thanks to SARC's well-developed plan.
- Utilizing previous data and years of monitoring the overall situation helped in choosing the optimal timing for intervention, ensuring it



occurred before summer and before drought levels reached their peak.

- The DREF greatly enhanced response effectiveness, reaching the maximum number of people in Al-Sweida; over 600,000 people were reached with a budget of CHF 735,383. This indicates that the intervention was both efficient and impactful, maximizing the use of available resources to benefit a large population.
- The ability to adapt priorities in response to changing circumstances.
- Focusing resources and efforts on a specific area can have a greater impact than distributing them widely and diffusely.
- Focusing on the rehabilitation and maintenance of submersible pumps, along with utilizing tanks to support the distribution network, improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the water distribution system.

Challenges

- The wide geographical spread of the intervention areas required additional efforts to monitor the work and a higher level of coordination with the representatives of the water authorities and the local community. Changes in priorities during the implementation led to adjustments in the work plan, and a very flexible working mechanism was established to accommodate all field changes.
- There were several changes in priorities by the Water Board during the implementation, which required us to adjust our working mechanisms to keep up with these changes.



Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation And Recovery

Budget: CHF 53,250
Targeted Persons: 65,000
Assisted Persons: 63,000

Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
% of people satisfied with the relevance of the awareness messages	85	0
multi-assessment report issued	1	0
% of knowledge shift to clever usage of household water	10	0
# of people reached with key messages	65,000	63,000

Narrative description of achievements

- After the Water Management and Rehabilitation Team carried out maintenance and rehabilitation work on the following wells in Al-Suwayda Governorate, and to ensure water availability and support their work, the Health Awareness Team intervened to raise awareness about the messages of safe water series and water consumption rationalization in the areas supplied by these wells. This was done to highlight and promote correct behaviors regarding water conservation due to the scarcity of water in the governorate in general. The targeted areas include: (Qalaa Housing, Al-Amaliyeen Housing, AL-Etfaaea, villages under Tha'lah Station, villages under Baka Triangle, and Kharba Village). The awareness activities were conducted in these areas from April 1, 2024, until May 31, 2024.
- A two-day training workshop was held for 50 community facilitators, empowering them to become field partners in awareness-raising. The topics covered were Epidemics, Diarrheal diseases, Water conservation, Safe water chain, Communication Skills, and Community mobilization.
- Awareness campaigns were conducted within the open community by inviting them to attend sessions in suitable locations, including sessions in commercial stores, as well as home visits within schools and government departments.
- An action strategy and plan were developed within the open community, and many effective activities were prepared aimed at raising awareness and delivering information clearly and appropriately for the targeted age groups, these activities were chosen to be more effective and influential among the target group.
- The activities and awareness sessions included various age groups: children, adolescents, and adults reaching a total of 63,000 people.
- SARC utilized a diverse range of activities and tools in the campaign, making a significant impact on various groups, including both children and adults. The two activities and tools were 1) Ask Google: A flexi board in the form of a Google interface where water consumption conservation tips are written and searched for to show us search predictions: the importance of water, ways to conserve it inside the house, ways to conserve it outside the house, and the facilitator explains these ideas. 2) Water Train: It is a model made of



cardboard that contains a train track passing through several stations. Each station represents a way to conserve water consumption. The facilitator guides the train through each station and explains it.

- A multi-sectoral assessment to identify gaps in needs was not conducted due to time constraints; however, SARC effectively used existing data to determine the needs of the target population.
- A satisfaction survey was not conducted due to competing priorities and the SARC's focus on immediate response efforts.

Lessons Learnt

- Training community mobilizers significantly enhanced the process of raising awareness, particularly in hard-to-reach areas, turning them into a valuable resource for ongoing communication with the region.
- The integrated approach, combining both hard (maintenance of submersible pumps and installation of water tanks) and soft (awareness sessions), was key to the campaign's success and ensured a comprehensive intervention.

Challenges

- The campaign timeframe was limited to achieve the desired goal, but it was accomplished through intensive efforts and support from the Cholera Response Team volunteers.
- Inability to reach all schools due to the commencement of exams.
- Insufficient clothing was provided for all volunteers.
- Lack of distribution materials and hygiene items to promote correct behaviors.



Secretariat Services

Budget: CHF 10,437

Targeted Persons: 0

Assisted Persons: 0

Indicators

Title	Target	Actual
# of timely final financial report	1	0
# of lessons learned report developed	1	1

Narrative description of achievements

- An After-Action Review (AAR) was conducted in place of a lessons-learned workshop due to limited resources and logistical challenges at the affected branch. The AAR was utilized to document what occurred, why it occurred, and how to apply the insights gained to maintain strengths and address areas for improvement. The AAR was conducted through a field visit to the Sweida branch and individual sessions with the SARC and IFRC delegation teams. The AAR report will be submitted separately as part of the DREF Final Report.



Financial Report

I. Summary

Opening Balance	0
Funds & Other Income	799,070
DREF Response Pillar	799,070
Expenditure	-681,174
Closing Balance	117,896

II. Expenditure by planned operations / enabling approaches

Description	Budget	Expenditure	Variance
PO01 - Shelter and Basic Household Items			0
PO02 - Livelihoods			0
PO03 - Multi-purpose Cash			0
PO04 - Health			0
PO05 - Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	735,383	651,794	83,588
PO06 - Protection, Gender and Inclusion			0
PO07 - Education			0
PO08 - Migration			0
PO09 - Risk Reduction, Climate Adaptation and Recovery	53,250	29,380	23,870
PO10 - Community Engagement and Accountability			0
PO11 - Environmental Sustainability			0
Planned Operations Total	788,633	681,174	107,458
EA01 - Coordination and Partnerships			0
EA02 - Secretariat Services	5,112		5,112
EA03 - National Society Strengthening	5,325		5,325
Enabling Approaches Total	10,437		10,437
Grand Total	799,070	681,174	117,895



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