

## Mid-term review of the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) in Nepal September-November 2024

### Introduction

#### Objective of the review

The objective of the Nepal SPA MTR was to generate insights and learnings for implementation in Nepal and SPA future focus. The main focus of the mid-term review in Nepal was to take stock on how the SPA is used in Nepal through its three-funding stream 1) Strengthening Community Resilience SPA-2: Emergency Response & SPA-3: Cross-cutting Components. It was also an opportunity for the whole programme team to come together with NRCS to review and discuss the SPA programme and identify missing elements in evidence or implementation to be improved for the final year of the SPA and to provide learning into the next SPA.

#### Methodology

A 3-hour online workshop with the consultation guide (annex) and interviews with key project from DRC staff were the main data collection for the MTR. The workshop looked at each funding stream and discussed Design and Implementation, Results & Evidence, Future Actions and Recommendations. Detailed notes can be found here, including consultation guide.

#### Background to SPA in Nepal (2022-2025)

The SPA programme in Nepal is divided into three tracks:

##### SPA-1: Strengthening Community Resilience

Aligned with the DRC Country Strategy 2022-2025, SPA-1 aims to enhance community resilience, preparedness, and response to disasters and crises. Within SPA-1, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) implemented the two-year ENCORE project in the Dang district, with technical support from DRC. The project was structured around three key outputs:

1. Strengthened NRCS Capacity: NRCS headquarters and district chapters have improved their preparedness and response abilities, coordinating closely with government mechanisms.
2. Improved Community Preparedness: Target communities are better equipped to anticipate and act before, during, and after disasters.
3. Inclusive Participation: There is greater participation of marginalized as well as vulnerable groups in municipal decision-making processes.

##### SPA-2: Emergency Response

The SPA-2 funding stream is designed to facilitate the effective and efficient implementation of anticipatory action and emergency response activities by NRCS. This is achieved through a standard emergency response protocol, which allows for flexibility in addressing the needs of those at risk or affected by emergencies.

Two methodologies have been applied by DRC in implementing this funding stream:

- Direct Fund Management: No project agreement between NRCS and DRC.
- Project Agreement Fund Management: Fund management by NRCS through a formal project agreement.
- In 2022 due to limitations posed by the pandemic, the first methodology was used, slightly modified in 2023, and by 2024, the second methodology was adopted. Regardless of the

management modality, DRC's support remains unrestricted by geography or disaster type. DRC has consistently supported NRCS in responding to floods, landslides, fires, and dengue outbreaks, with cash being the primary intervention tool. DRC continues to be the key partner in providing support to NRCS, particularly in small-scale disaster response, often being the sole PNS offering emergency relief support. One of the major achievements of this project has been the establishment and training of Emergency Response Teams (ERT). The tool was subsequently replicated by NRCS and other partners in their projects. Additionally, the second funding stream, the Project Agreement Fund Management: Fund management by NRCS through a formal annual agreement but fund release based after each crisis following an Emergency protocol from NRCS was appreciated by IFRC and expressed interest in this methodology. Though we haven't seen any results, it established a rapid funding methodology to channelize the in-country crisis modifier.

### **SPA-3: Cross-cutting Components**

SPA-3 is managed by DRC and focuses on cross-cutting components with three main outputs:

1. Capacity Building on PGI Issues: NRCS staff and volunteers have enhanced their capacity to address Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) issues in both normal and emergency settings.
2. Youth Engagement in Disaster Preparedness: Youth engagement in disaster preparedness and response has significantly increased, with various programs and workshops, such as the Youth-Led Engagement Programs (YLEP) and YELL workshops, being organized since 2022.
3. DRC Branding and Visibility: Ensuring effective communication and dissemination of DRC's activities and achievements.
4. Technical support: DRC has technical coordinator on PGI and CEA who has been continuously providing the technical support to the NRCS and other movement partners in addition to ensuring inclusion to the DRC projects and programmes. Similarly, the communication officer in DRC has been also instrument to the NRCS visibility through various social media. In addition, DRC also has been offering technical support to movement wide operations in CVA and livelihood intervention primarily in humanitarian context but not limited.

## **Findings**

### ***Project Design and implementation***

The MTR found that the overall design of the SPA programme areas closely aligns with NRCS and their strategic priorities. For example, the disaster preparedness activities are strategically aligned with NRCS's Disaster Management (DM) policy, health strategy, operational plans, and cash guidelines. A strong working relationship with NRCS facilitates easy and straightforward collaboration.

Programmes and projects are developed with NRCS on an annual basis, including project descriptions and budgets. This practice can lead to shorter-term projects and less long-term thinking in the communities where DRC operates. Given that the SPA is a four-year programme,

this practice may be worth challenging. It was also noted that it was not always clear (from HQ) how much funding the Country Office (CO) had from the SPA agreement at the beginning and during implementation, and whether multi-year contracting with NRCS was an option.

The overall design was generally based on the needs of the communities. Across the three funding tracks there are some technical recommendations such as improvement of disaster assessments & more cost-efficient logistics in some areas – particular last mile communities.

Coordination and collaboration with other PNS works well in Nepal, with direct collaboration between the Finnish Red Cross and the Hong Kong Red Cross, who have been providing funding (HK Red Cross) and technical support (Finnish Red Cross) to community-based early action initiatives.

Regarding the budget, there was some initial confusion when the team first thought it was annual but later realized it was consolidated funding. It was noted that, our finance system makes it very difficult to monitor expenditures.

The budget is perceived as relatively flexible compared to other donors. It is flexible to adjust, hence the practice (still ongoing?) of doing budget revisions every quarter. From a finance perspective, this is more challenging, but it offers more flexibility and hands-on management from a programme perspective.

Few other points which were discussed:

**Establish better baseline values in the programme.** *It was discussed that it is essential to establish clearer and more accurate baseline values for the programme. These baseline values will serve as a reference point to measure progress and assess the effectiveness of the interventions over time.*

**Improve process documentation; while some practices are in place, they are not properly documented.** *Improving process documentation will ensure that all procedures are properly recorded and accessible, facilitating better transparency and continuity.*

Ensure output and outcome levels are satisfactory **but focus on improving impact level assessments.** *Although the output and outcome levels of the programme are satisfactory, there should be a stronger emphasis on assessing the impact level. This will help in understanding the long-term effects and overall success of the interventions.*

**Evaluate the return on investment in our programme interventions.** *Conduct thorough evaluations to determine the return on investment (ROI) for the programme interventions. This will involve comparing the benefits of the interventions to their costs, providing valuable insights into their efficiency and effectiveness.*

### ***Results and evidence***

Several results were mentioned during the MTR process. Results spanned from community level results such as smaller livelihood projects that have made a difference in people lives, to more policy level results where the local government have made significant changes to the benefit of the community. It is however, a bit unclear where these types of outcome level changes are captured and whether they are used to inform programme design, implementation and other strategic decision making processes. Subsequently, learning is lost and not documented to be either scaled up by other activities/programmes or improve future programming.

Some of them, are mentioned below:

- *Livelihood Intervention:* The most vulnerable households were identified through collaboration with the local government, and they were provided with financial support as part of the livelihood intervention in the communities. Alongside, these families received assistance in developing business plans and guidance in executing them effectively. One notable example comes from Raptibheri, Dang, where a family was given four goats as part of the livelihood support program. Over the course of the project, the family successfully multiplied the number of goats, turning this initial investment into a thriving business. They had already sold goats worth NPR 300,000 (~\$2,250 USD) during the project period, and the herd continued to grow, highlighting the potential for long-term sustainability and income generation. This demonstrates the lasting economic benefits of well-targeted livelihood programs, where small investments can lead to sustainable income generation, improving livelihood and resilience.
- *Water Supply Improvement:* A critical water supply project (Drinking Water Supply System-DWSS) with an investment of NPR 8.9 million (~\$67,000 USD) in Rajapur, 335 water taps were installed, water taps across the community, directly improving access to clean drinking water. - This intervention not only enhanced community health and hygiene but also addressed pressing WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) challenges, making a tangible impact on health. The community established self-regulated monthly tariff system, each household pay certain tariff based on the amount of water they use, to regulate the operation and maintenance of the drinking water system which is a key to the sustainability of the DWSS.
- *Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction:* The project has provided substantial support to local governments in developing Local Disaster Risk Reduction Plans (LDCRPs) and District-Level Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans (DPRPs). These initiatives were designed to strengthen and improve emergency response capabilities of the local government. But in addition, to foster community leadership in disaster management, Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) were formed or made active. Local municipalities also have taken the initiative to provide additional training on their own to the CDMCs, demonstrating increased ownership and sustainability of these efforts. CDMCs have also conducted awareness programs focused on preparedness and disaster risk reduction in their own community. Furthermore, Community-Based Response Training (CBRT) and Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) training have been provided to equip communities with the skills needed to minimize potential loss of life and property. These trainings aim to position the community as the first line of response during disasters. In recent year, recognizing the specific needs of communities living near the Babai River, training focused on early action and early warning communication has also been delivered to better prepare them for potential flood risks.
- *Animal Health Camps:* Held in partnership with local governments, these camps benefited livestock farmers significantly. As a result, local governments have incorporated these camps into their annual budgets, ensuring their continuation. This illustrates how a small investment, when strategically targeted, can lead to sustained benefits and government ownership.

## **PGI**

PGI (Protection, Gender, and Inclusion) is a high priority in the strategy of NRCS. With a dedicated technical advisor from DRC (Danish Red Cross) starting in 2021, it has been possible to scale up support and capacity building in this area. Early efforts included creating a gender checklist to integrate and mainstream gender in programme implementation, specifically within the ECHO programme, and conducting a gap analysis. This analysis revealed that the programme intervention was not gender responsive. Consequently, NRCS agreed to develop a gender mainstreaming action plan addressing policy, capacity, and institutional levels.

During a workshop and interview with the PGI advisor, it was noted that PGI is well integrated into the NRCS NSD (National Society Development) strategy and has solid management buy-in. However, despite this strategic and management-level support, there is a gap in implementation. Additionally, it appears that PGI-related support from DRC is not thoroughly documented in the reports reviewed in the desk study.

While PGI is a strategic priority, there is a gap in its implementation. Many tools and techniques have been developed (at IFRC, HQ level), but they are not very operational and lack understanding at the branch and volunteer levels. As a result, PGI principles are not being applied effectively by front-line staff. It was generally noted that more resources in line with the 8th Strategic Plan with focus on protection, gender, and inclusion (PGI) was needed.

## **CEA**

### **Evidence**

In the workshop it was discussed that documentation has been solid in areas like dengue response, where weekly updates, SitReps, and vulnerability reports were regularly shared. However, gaps remain in capturing the full scope of evidence, particularly in community feedback and detailed exit surveys.

As noted above, crosscutting areas such as PGI seem to be quite under documented.

Outcome level changes is not systematically documented and only found in the final SPA report. Most of the reports reviewed for this exercise was covering activities and outputs and a few case stories.

### **Summary and overall considerations**

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of NRCS (Nepal Red Cross Society) projects, implementing three-year project cycles with clear exit strategies is essential and for the SPA there remain an untapped for DRC and NRCS to support longer term funding if the right circumstances had been there (clarity from HQ on funding level and duration of funding). The practice of having one-year projects between DRC and NRCS seems quite strong, and whether there is an appetite to change this, will be up to the project management team to decide.

At the capacity level, it's crucial to strengthen the technical capacity of district and sub-chapters, particularly in health and disaster management. Investing in training and resources will equip local chapters to respond independently during emergencies.

Defining the scope for anticipatory action funding is also important to ensure proactive rather than reactive responses.

Engaging local governments more deeply in planning and execution can enhance community ownership and sustainability of projects. This involvement ensures that projects are aligned with

local needs and priorities.

The health response underscored a need for improved technical capacity in district chapters, particularly in early detection, community-based surveillance (CBS), and climate-induced health emergencies. Investment in preparedness and coordination with government health services was also emphasized.

Discussing how the NRCS strategy and related implementation can be more long-term is vital. While annual planning with NRCS has been effective, it may hinder longer-term planning. It's important to ensure that the design and implementation of projects are informed by evidence from programme implementation and that DRC (Danish Red Cross) supports NRCS in developing a more long-term strategy.

Considering longer-term contracts with NRCS based on their overall country strategy can provide stability and continuity. Integrating systematic and regular lessons learned exercises with NRCS will ensure that programmes are informed by evidence and provide a platform for reviewing and discussing changes and lessons learned across all programmes.

It's also important to consider how cross-cutting areas like NSD (National Society Development), PGI (Protection, Gender, and Inclusion), and CEA (Community Engagement and Accountability) can be better documented and integrated into overall project implementation rather than being seen as add-ons.

Finally, addressing resource constraints such as limited funding and staffing is crucial for the successful implementation of PGI strategies. Ensuring dedicated resources for PGI activities will support their success and sustainability.

### **Desk review**

[30033 Project Management Tool 2021\\_ Encore 22-23.xlsx](#)

[30033 Encore 22-23 Project Description.docx](#)

[30033 Project Management Tool 2021\\_ Encore 22-23.xlsx](#)

[30033 Project Management Tool 2021\\_ Encore 22-23.xlsx](#)

[30033 Project Management Tool 2021\\_ Encore 22-23.xlsx](#)

### **Narrative reports**

[1st Quarter Progress Report 2022 - Final.docx](#)

[ENCORE-2nd Quarter Report\(April-June 2022\)-final - DRC.docx](#)

[ENCORE-3rd Quarter Report 2022 Revised \(July- September 2022\)-final - DRC.docx](#)

[ENCORE-4th Quarter Report 2022\(Oct-December,2022\)final - DRC.docx](#)

[Program Exit workshop and field visit plan.docx](#)

[ENCORE 22-23 programe Presentation.pptx](#)

[QPRs](#)

[Annex 1 Advocacy Report.docx](#)