



STRENGTHENING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE THROUGH A PGI LENS

Lessons from Somali Red Crescent drought emergency response

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Somali Red Crescent volunteer engaging with community members on WASH Services. A 68-year-old woman living with disability, caring for a 10-member household, faced challenges accessing water due to long distances. With the installation of nearby water kiosks at Halabokhad IDP site, she and her neighbors can now safely access water at any time, reducing distance, time burden, and risks of GBV

Internal



Photo description: Somali Red Crescent staff and volunteers distributing dignity kits to women.
Photo credit: Somali Red Crescent

Background

Somalia has been facing a prolonged drought driven by consecutive failed rainy seasons, including the near-total failure of the 2025 Deyr rains (October–December). This has resulted in acute water scarcity, forcing communities to depend on unsafe and distant water sources, thereby increasing the spread of waterborne diseases such as acute watery diarrhoea and cholera. Concurrently, the depletion of livelihoods particularly among pastoral communities has triggered displacement, as families had to move in search of water, food, and essential services. Many displacement sites remained overcrowded and lacked adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, further compounding public health risks.

Within this context, vulnerable groups including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities faced heightened barriers to accessing WASH services. Women and girls, who were primarily responsible for water collection, were exposed to protection risks such as gender-based violence, particularly when traveling long distances to access WASH facilities. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) needs were often unmet due to cultural barriers that restricted open discussion and access to information on menstruation. Similarly, the elderly and persons with disabilities encountered physical barriers in accessing water points and sanitation facilities.

During the emergency, Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) delivered WASH interventions to improve access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion services. Recognizing that persistent social inequalities, protection concerns, and accessibility challenges continued to hinder equitable access, for vulnerable populations, SRCS integrated Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) into its WASH programming, so as to ensure that assistance was not only delivered efficiently but in a manner that was safe, dignified, and inclusive.

In Halabokhad, Mudug and Puntland, this approach included constructing six water kiosks to reduce travel distances and waiting times, especially for women and children. Gender-segregated latrines were built to enhance privacy and safety, while menstrual hygiene interventions including the distribution of dignity kits addressed the specific needs of women and girls. Community engagement was central to the response, with local leaders and water management committees comprising of women, men, and persons with disabilities who were involved in managing water points which helped ensure that the needs and perspectives of diverse community members were considered in water management and maintenance activities.

Additionally, a PGI and safeguarding refresher training was conducted for staff and volunteers to strengthen inclusive and protective approaches in the emergency response.

Who was Supported and How

The intervention targeted drought-affected communities in Halabokhad, Mudug in Puntland with a focus on vulnerable groups including women, girls, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities. To improve sanitation, 10 twin latrines were constructed, designed with separate units for men and women, each with distinct, clearly designated entrances to ensure privacy, dignity, and safe access for all users. Accessibility considerations were incorporated into the design, including leveled gentle slopes to facilitate use by persons with disabilities and elderly individuals. The location and design of the facilities was informed by community consultations, where the community provided input to ensure the latrines were appropriately constructed and were close enough, yet ensuring privacy and protection, especially for women and children

Access to safe water was strengthened through the construction of 6 water kiosks, reducing the distance and time required for collection. This enhanced equitable access, especially for women and children who often bear the responsibility for water collection as well as the elderly and persons with disabilities who previously faced barriers in accessing water.

The Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) in Emergencies was applied during the response. The SRCS integrated PGI principles across all sectors to ensure that assistance was safe, dignified, and accessible to all affected groups. Key PGI considerations such as community engagement, protection of vulnerable groups, gender sensitivity, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) were incorporated into planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities.

The response also addressed menstrual hygiene management (MHM) through the distribution of dignity kits to 150 adolescent girls of reproductive age. This was complemented by hygiene promotion and awareness sessions conducted by trained female SRCS volunteers, targeting schoolgirls, teachers, and school committees. The sessions covered personal hygiene, safe water use, and MHM, while also integrating protection messaging on safety, dignity, and privacy. Girls were encouraged to seek support from trusted teachers if they faced any challenges or needed help.



Photo : Beneficiary who resides in Shilinxaraare Village receiving water trucking support from the SRCS as part of an emergency appeal supported by the IFRC

Successes

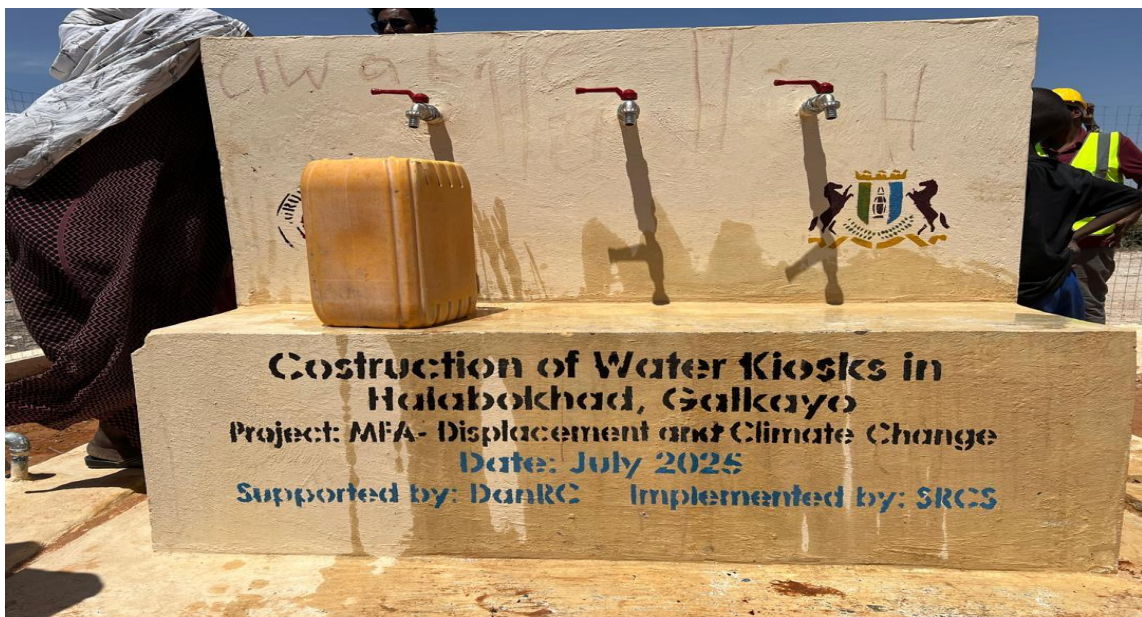


Photo : water kiosks constructed in Hlabokhad implemented by Somali Red Crescent.

Constructing water kiosks and sanitation facilities closer to communities improved access especially for women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly, reducing travel distances, physical strain, and exposure to protection risks.

The distribution of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) kits, with complementary hygiene awareness sessions, improved the knowledge on menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls enabled adolescent girls to manage menstruation with dignity, contributing to reduced school absenteeism and greater participation.

Training SRCS staff and volunteers on PGI , Safeguarding and Prevention, mitigation and Response to SGBV enhanced their capacity to provide gender-sensitive, inclusive, and respectful WASH interventions .

Inclusive targeting prioritized girls , women-headed households, persons with disabilities, and older persons, ensuring that assistance reached the most vulnerable .

Challenges and Difficulties

Cultural sensitivities around discussing menstrual hygiene and protection-related topics posed initial barriers, with such issues not being openly addressed which sometimes limited open participation by women and girls.

Limited WASH infrastructure, including insufficient latrines and water supply in some schools, restricted the ability to fully meet the needs of all targeted populations

Time constraints within school schedules also limited the duration and depth of Menstrual hygiene promotion and awareness sessions.

Low awareness of menstrual hygiene among some students required more time and effort to ensure understanding and adoption of improved practices.



Photo : The SRCS Disaster and Risk Management Director, in collaboration with the Puntland Water Development Authority, is assessing traditional boreholes in Dhinowada Dhigdhig village, located in the Jarriban District of the Mudug region. The well is close to be buried by the fast expanding sand dune in the area which has already covered and buried villages in the area and forced its residents to move into the neighboring IDP settlements.

Lessons Learned

1. Integrating menstrual hygiene management (MHM) kits with age-appropriate menstrual awareness sessions ensures that girls not only receive essential kits but also understand how to manage their, and dispose of them safely, improving health, dignity, and protection outcomes
2. Designing inclusive and gender-sensitive WASH facilities enhances safety and dignity across the community. The provision of gender-segregated latrines improves privacy and security for women and girls, while the strategic placement of water points and sanitation facilities closer to communities reduces travel distances and increases accessibility, particularly for older persons and persons with disabilities
3. Collaboration with teachers, school committees, and local leaders builds trust, cultural acceptance, and local ownership, supporting sustainability beyond the emergency response.
4. Training staff and volunteers on PGI standards, PSEA, SGBV risk mitigation, and referral mechanisms equip teams to deliver safe, inclusive, and responsive WASH services.
5. Community engagement ensures the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups in WASH activities and water committees. By consulting the community, the siting of water kiosks and latrines is informed to ensure facilities are safely located and accessible. In addition, consideration of older persons and persons with disabilities during site selection ensures that water points are strategically positioned to enhance accessibility and ease of use for all.



Photo 1 : Shilin-Xaraare community receiving emergency water tracking support during drought response activities

Photo 2 : Shilin-Xaraare community committee members participating in a KII discussion during the drought impact assessment in Shilin-Xaraare village in Jariban district



Photo 3 : Water challenge assessment conducted at borehole in Jariban district during the drought impact assessment

Photo 4 : Completed water kiosks construction as part of Shilin-Xaraare borehole rehabilitation intervention