

# **Evaluation of ECHO-funded cash and voucher food assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

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## About the author

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The views expressed in this report are the author's alone and the author accepts sole responsibility for any factual inaccuracies.

## Executive Summary

People in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have long faced protracted conflict and instability resulting in the displacement of populations. In order to provide households affected by new displacements with timely access to food, ECHO funded the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide food assistance. The agencies are each partners in the UNICEF Rapid Response to Population Movements (RRMP) programme, a long-running intervention which undertakes assessments and provides rapid assistance in non-food item (NFI) / shelter, education, water and sanitation and health sectors. The RRMP model was conceived with the logic that other aid agencies would complement RRMP with food assistance. This vision has not materialised in practice, prompting ECHO to support NRC, AVSI and IRC to provide food assistance in the form of cash and vouchers – modalities also utilised in RRMP interventions. This evaluation examines the appropriateness and effectiveness of the food assistance intervention, including its complementarity with RRMP, as well as the lessons on the different cash-based food assistance approaches utilised by partners.

### Programme description

Three types of cash-based food assistance activities were implemented by NRC, AVSI and IRC – food fairs, open market vouchers and cash transfers. The programme was designed with the flexibility for agencies to determine the most appropriate approach context by context. Most (85%) of the activities took the form of fairs, which are temporary markets created by aid agencies whereby vendors bring food commodities that are purchased with vouchers. NRC and AVSI also implemented cash transfer interventions, and NRC provided open market vouchers (i.e. vouchers redeemable in local markets). Because RRMP non-food item assistance often is implemented with vouchers, in many cases the aid agencies undertook two voucher activities – an RRMP one for NFI / household goods and an ECHO-funded one for food. The food assistance interventions mainly took place after or at the same time as the RRMP assistance – in some cases they were implemented prior to it or in areas that had not benefited from RRMP assistance. The agencies implemented 22 interventions reaching 58,000 people.

While broadly similar, the specific approaches of the three agencies varied. All of the partners provided the vouchers and cash transfers in dollars (as opposed to Congolese Francs), established prices ceilings for food items in fairs (on the basis of negotiations between beneficiaries and vendors), and used a standard food ration as the basis for calculating the value of the transfer. NRC varied the amount of the transfer according to the size of the household, whereas AVSI and IRC provided a standard amount based on an average household size of six people. NRC changed the food items available for purchase based on surveys of local preferences; IRC and AVSI provided the same items in each fair. Targeting and monitoring indicators and tools also varied. The lack of common indicators and minor differences in the shared ones limits the ability to compare monitoring findings across partners.

### Main findings

The food assistance intervention was very relevant because food needs were a priority among populations affected by displacement and because the cash-based approach enabled recipients to access foods corresponding to their priorities and preferences. The linking of the food assistance intervention with RRMP resulted in multisector assistance for affected populations and reduced the need to create parallel systems for rapid assessments and targeting.

Targeting households is perhaps the most challenging aspect of any humanitarian intervention, and this one was no exception. The AVSI and NRC sites visited used a household targeting approach whereby households were surveyed on their displacement status (e.g. displaced, host family), food

consumption score (FCS), social vulnerability categories (e.g. widow), and NFI possessions (for RRMP targeting). The information was then filtered in an excel spreadsheet to create the beneficiary list, with households being eliminated from the list if they had an 'acceptable' food consumption score or if they had a 'borderline' score and did not meet any of the additional criteria.

Despite being eligible for consideration in the programme, some households were skipped by agents doing the targeting in the NRC and AVSI sites visited. This weakness was linked to pressure facing the RRMP to target and intervene quickly and to not exceed estimates displaced households identified in assessments. The fieldwork did not find any evidence of inclusion error in the sites visited, though this might have occurred in other areas where people were more 'aid aware' and adjusted their answers. The targeting criteria were not publicised, and the result was a lack of awareness among local populations as to why some households were included and others were not. Their preference was that the agencies should assist all IDPs and host families. More detailed analysis of households excluded on the basis of the targeting criteria would be required to determine whether certain targeting criteria should be changed or eliminated. The evaluation found no evidence suggesting that targeting criteria should be made stricter.

The intervention was designed from the outset to provide cash and vouchers, which in theory influences geographic targeting by excluding areas where in-kind food aid is needed. In practice this predisposition to cash-based responses did influence the intervention to a small degree. For the 2013/14 programming cycle, ECHO and its partners have sought to address this issue by including the option to provide in-kind food aid.

While agencies did not track the exact quantities of different food items purchased with vouchers, the fieldwork found that expenditure patterns differed among households, and the ability to buy food according to personal preference was greatly appreciated. Food purchased lasted approximately two weeks to two months, depending on access to other food sources, the size of the family, the degree of sharing with non-beneficiaries and whether households paid for transport with their purchased food. Beneficiaries found the food to be very high quality but that the prices of certain goods were above those in local markets, indicating that the process of negotiating price ceilings resulted in higher prices for some items. Cash transfers were spent mostly on food (71-76%), with balance mainly going to towards health services, education and savings.

Because food assistance had been entirely disconnected from the RRMP prior to the ECHO-funded intervention, overall significant gains have been made with regard to timeliness. For NRC, the food assistance was provided an average of one day after RRMP assistance. Forty percent of the three agencies' food fairs were implemented side by side with RRMP fairs, meaning that there was no delay. Preference for the type of assistance (i.e. cash, fair, open market voucher, in-kind assistance) varied and was fairly evenly divided among cash, open market vouchers and food fairs, with in-kind assistance consistently ranked in last place. Preference was influenced by three factors – risk, flexibility and the type assistance that had been received.

The main benefits of the assistance, according to beneficiaries consulted, were increased food consumption, increased diversity of foods, weight gain and improved children's health. Aid agency monitoring found that FCS of IRC and NRC beneficiaries improved respectively by 52% and 124%. While changes in food consumption are not sustained once the purchased food finishes, those consulted emphasised that their situation was still better than prior to the assistance. Recipients could use the time that they had been spending to meet those needs for other purposes. Some men reported planting small fields; NRC's monitoring found that a quarter of respondents had used some of their food as seed.

A strong case can be made that this intervention was efficient compared to in-kind food aid, and it was clearly much more efficient than if non-RRMP aid agencies had been engaged to provide food assistance. The main driver of intervention's efficiency was the fact that the food assistance programme benefitted from systems already in place through RRMP (e.g. MSAs, targeting). Cash transfers appear to be the most efficient of the cash-based approaches given that they eliminated the time required count vouchers and to identify and work with dozens of vendors. However, the microfinance institution used by NRC took longer to distribute transfers than agreed and rounded the cash transfers down to the nearest dollar, which substantially extended the time required to distribute the full cash transfer for that intervention.

Coordination between RRMP and food assistance was strong primarily because the same aid agencies were providing both types of assistance, which facilitated information-sharing, joint interventions and coordinated targeting and monitoring. An opportunity for increased coordination and efficiency would be combining the food assistance and RRMP activities through piloting 'mixed' cash transfers and vouchers – whereby cash and vouchers would not be restricted to food or NFI and rather could be used for either. This approach would result in more flexibility about how recipients could spend their transfers, and therefore potentially increase effectiveness. However, there was not much demand for this model from beneficiaries or vendors, though this could be a result of bias towards the type of approach that they had experienced.

Looking outside of the intervention's intended outcomes, the most significant impact was the injection of cash into the economy. The food vouchers resulted in \$3.9 million in sales for more than 500 traders. Vendors reported that profits were used for household needs, school fees, metal sheeting for roofs, small parcels of land, debt repayment, dowry, investment in businesses and even a motorcycle. Traders who had not participated in the intervention stated that a positive benefit was an increase in the circulation of dollars in the zone. However, very little is known about the economic impacts of cash and voucher interventions in DRC. Analysis on this issue would be valuable given the millions of dollars injected annually by humanitarian actors through cash-based programmes.

Protection measures put in place by the aid agencies included contact with armed actors in the region, protection and security assessments, and placing people with mobile phones at intervals along the road the day of the intervention. In the areas visited, there were no reports of theft, other security problems or intra-village tensions. Some local guides and leaders who assisted with the identification of households during the targeting process did face problems because they were blamed – unfairly – for 'erasing' the names of some households. There was some sharing of food assistance, mainly in the form of IDP beneficiaries sharing with non-beneficiary host families. By contrast, cash and non-food items were not shared.

## **Conclusion**

Overall the ECHO-funded cash-based food assistance was a very appropriate and effective response, with a commendable degree of flexibility. It is easy to overlook the simple fact that interventions that vary their approaches according to the context, that are closely coordinated with other assistance and that do not have predetermined intervention areas and beneficiary numbers are rare in humanitarian response. In an unpredictable context like DRC, such an approach is critical for providing timely food assistance in response to new displacements.

The main strengths and weaknesses of the food assistance concern its relationship with RRMP. This link has resulted in closely more coordinated and holistic assistance for beneficiaries and efficiency gains by piggy-backing on RRMP activities and systems. At the same time, the pressure facing RRMP to intervene rapidly and not inflate beneficiary lists appears to be resulting in excluding some

households who should be included. Overall, the model of directly funding RRMP partners to provide flexible food assistance makes sense both for donors and aid agencies by increasing the efficiency and coherence of assistance through a multisector approach. Above all, it makes sense for populations under stress who do not divide their household needs into sectors.

#### *Recommendations for agencies implementing cash-based food assistance*

- Continue good practise identified in this evaluation, including determining the most appropriate food assistance intervention based on the context, varying items according to local consumption habits / preferences and adjusting the transfer value based on local market prices
- Increase the variety of items in fairs where this is practical and appropriate
- Consider all displaced and returnee households in the targeting process, even if their number exceeds those identified in previous assessments
- Do not make the criteria for inclusion in the food assistance stricter
- Undertake analysis on the targeting criteria and on households eliminated through the targeting process
- Review how host families and local vulnerable populations are targeted
- Establish common indicators and explore the potential for more standardised monitoring tools
- Pilot mixed RRMP / food assistance interventions with cash transfers and vouchers that can be used for either NFI or food
- Plan for potential problems with microfinance institutions and other cash delivery agents, including torn bills, limited capacity and lengthy negotiations
- Do not be overly prescriptive about how cash transfers should be used
- Explore options for decreasing or eliminating the time required to count vouchers
- Continue to share lessons among food assistance partners and between food assistance programmes and RRMP

#### *Recommendations for ECHO*

- Continue the model of directly funding of RRMP partners to provide to complementary food assistance
- Consider funding research on the economic impacts of cash and voucher programmes in eastern DRC
- Allow for the piloting of mixed cash and voucher interventions where recipients can purchase food and NFI according to their preference

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Acronyms .....	9
1 Introduction .....	10
Context.....	10
NRC, AVSI and IRC: cash-based food assistance to complement RRMP.....	10
Purpose and scope of the evaluation .....	11
Methodology.....	12
Organisation of the report.....	14
2 Programme design .....	15
RRMP and the food assistance gap.....	15
Design of the cash-based food assistance .....	15
3 Findings .....	20
Appropriateness / relevance.....	20
Design of the intervention .....	20
Targeting .....	23
Monitoring .....	27
Effectiveness.....	28
Use of transfers.....	29
Food prices and quality.....	30
Timing.....	30
Understanding .....	31
Preference.....	31
Most important changes.....	33
Operational challenges .....	34
Efficiency.....	36
Coordination .....	37
Impact .....	38
Protection and gender .....	40
4 Conclusion.....	42
Conclusions .....	42
OECD-DAC criteria.....	42
Coordination / complementarity of the food assistance intervention with RRMP .....	44
Advantages and shortcomings of the different partners' approaches.....	44

Recommendations .....	45
Agencies implementing cash-based food assistance.....	45
ECHO .....	46
References .....	47
Annex 1: Key informants and focus group discussions.....	48
Annex 2: Evaluation questions.....	49

## Acronyms

ARCC	Alternative Responses for Communities in Crisis
AVSI	Association of Volunteers in International Service
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
FCS	Food consumption score
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MSA	Multisector assessment
NFI	Non-food item
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
RRMP	Rapid Response to Population Movements
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

## 1 Introduction

NRC commissioned an evaluation of ECHO-funded cash and voucher food assistance interventions undertaken by NRC, AVSI and IRC in eastern DRC in 2013/14. The food assistance was implemented as a complement to the UNICEF RRMP programme. The ECHO-funded food assistance and RRMP are designed to provide rapid humanitarian response to new population movements. This evaluation examines the appropriateness, effectiveness and coherence of the food assistance intervention, including its complementarity with RRMP, as well as the lessons on the different cash-based food assistance approaches utilised by partners.

### Context

The recent history of the DRC is marred by violence and instability. The two wars that occurred between 1996 and 2003 devastated a country that had already been run into the ground by decades of rule by Mobutu Sese Seko. Presidential elections held peacefully in 2006 were won by Joseph Kabila, marking the official end of the post-war transition that began in 2003. Subsequent presidential elections took place in November 2011 amidst concerns about irregularities and abuses by security forces. Positive steps towards democracy have been juxtaposed with conflict and instability, rampant corruption and human rights violations.

People in eastern DRC have faced repeated and protracted humanitarian crises resulting from the long-standing presence of local and foreign armed groups and efforts by the national army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo) to eliminate them. While the specific groups, leaders and alliances among them shift, the overall dynamics and humanitarian consequences remain the same. There are dozens of local militia, advancing their own agenda, and several armed groups have been supported by neighbouring Rwanda – most recently the M-23. Interpretations vary about the importance of different drivers of conflict (e.g. local power struggles, ethnic identity, national identity, land tenure, mineral resources, foreign armed groups and regional political / security dynamics). However, what is certain is that instability will continue, owing to the absence of a government with a monopoly over violence, the fragility of state power, local power struggles and the political and security interests of Rwanda.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the persistence of conflict, DRC has been a major recipient of humanitarian aid in the last decade. In 2013, DRC received \$740m.<sup>2</sup> OCHA estimated that 2.9 million people were internally displaced as of December 2013, with the majority in North and South Kivu (respectively hosting 38% and 20% of the IDPs).<sup>3</sup> Armed conflicts cause 89% displacements, and 72% of IDPs live with host families.<sup>4</sup>

### *NRC, AVSI and IRC: cash-based food assistance to complement RRMP*

NRC, AVSI and IRC are each partners in the UNICEF RRMP programme.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly relevant for the evaluation because it considers the complementarity of the food assistance activities to RRMP. RRMP is a programme that monitors humanitarian needs and undertakes assessments to alert the humanitarian community about new crises and displacements in DRC. Partner NGOs are established for each province, which undertake multisector assessments (MSA) in response to new

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<sup>1</sup>Paddon and Lacaille, 2011

<sup>2</sup> OCHA Financial Tracking Service

<sup>3</sup>OCHA, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> NRC is the RRMP partner in North Kivu; AVSI and IRC are RRMP partners in South Kivu.

emergencies and population movements. In cases where other aid agencies cannot meet needs identified, these agencies provides assistance to in sectors most relevant UNICEF - NFI, WASH, education and health. RRMP has been supported by a range of donors over the years and is the largest single humanitarian response programme in DRC after food aid, with a budget of over \$37 million during 2012.<sup>6</sup> RRMP has been running in various forms since 2004.<sup>7</sup>

RRMP intends that the MSAs will be used by other aid agencies to provide assistance in sectors not covered by RRMP partners.<sup>8</sup> In the case of food, this would require that food assistance actors have the flexibility and willingness to quickly intervene in those areas to meet identified food needs. Evaluations of RRMP and its predecessor RRM found that the vision of closely coordinated food assistance has not worked in practice.<sup>9</sup> One reason put forward is that the comparative inflexibility of the World Food Programme (WFP) compared to the RRMP mechanism results in food assistance being delayed or not provided to people benefiting from RRMP.

In order to address the disconnect between food assistance and RRMP assistance, ECHO funded RRMP partners NRC and AVSI to develop their own cash and voucher food assistance approaches. In 2013, as humanitarian needs in South Kivu increased, ECHO added IRC in order to increase coverage of the intervention.<sup>10</sup> Each partner submitted individual proposals to ECHO with its own logframe and monitoring framework.

### **Purpose and scope of the evaluation**

The primary focus of this evaluation is on learning. By critically examining the interventions of NRC, AVSI and IRC, the evaluation will also contribute to accountability to its donors. The evaluation has three objectives:

1. Assess the appropriateness, effectiveness and coherence of the ECHO-funded food assistance intervention, including its complementarity with RRMP
2. Identify strengths and weaknesses in the coordination / complementarity of the food assistance intervention with RRMP, including related to targeting, timing and type of assistance provided
3. Identify the advantages and shortcomings of the different food assistance intervention approaches used by the three implementing partners

There are multiple stakeholders for this evaluation. First and foremost are NRC, IRC and AVSI in DRC, to inform their current and future programming in North and South Kivu, as well as ECHO, which is financing the intervention. The findings will also be relevant for UNICEF, which manages RRMP, and food assistance actors (e.g. WFP, the Food Security Cluster, NGOs implementing food assistance programming). The evaluation may be useful for other aid actors interested in practical lessons and evidence on cash-based interventions, particularly as multisector programming has been identified as both a research gap in cash transfer programming and an important entry point for improving coordination.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Baker et al., 2013

<sup>7</sup>The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) was created by OCHA and UNICEF in 2004. Six years later, RRM merged with the Program of Expanded Assistance to Returns (PEAR), a programme that addressed the needs of returning IDPs, to become Rapid Response to Population Movements (RRMP).

<sup>8</sup>For food needs, MSAs gather information on food consumption through assessing household Food Consumption Score.

<sup>9</sup> Baker et al., 2013

<sup>10</sup> Evaluation Terms of Reference

<sup>11</sup>Austin, 2014; Bailey, 2014

The timeframe covered by the evaluation is the 2013 programming cycle specified in the project proposals to ECHO. The evaluation does not encompass RRMP. However, because of the closely integrated nature of the food and RRMP assistance, issues related to RRMP emerged from interviews and focus group discussions. Observations relevant to the RRMP are included where relevant.

The following evaluation questions were explored, grouped according to OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action in complex emergencies (see Annex 2 for the comprehensive list of questions).

*Appropriateness and relevance.* Have aid agencies accurately identified priority needs? Did the food assistance programme objectives correspond to priority needs? Was the design of the programme appropriate to achieve the objectives? Was the targeting approach appropriate? Did the food assistance interventions succeed in reaching the most vulnerable people? How harmonised are the food assistance approaches between the different partners? Were protection risks considered in the design of the programme? Was the monitoring system appropriate?

*Effectiveness.* Have the food assistance interventions met their objectives? Was the assistance timely? How did recipients spend the various transfers? What changes occurred as a result of the food assistance? Were recipients able to purchase the goods and services that they needed? What type of assistance would beneficiaries have preferred? Were the transfer values and duration appropriate to meet programme objectives? Were there any major challenges encountered in delivering the assistance? What were the main benefits and downsides of the intervention?

*Coherence and coordination.* Has the integrated approach resulted in positive outcomes for beneficiaries? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the coordination between emergency food assistance and the RRMP interventions and the coordination of the aid agencies among themselves and with the other relevant actors? Were there any missed opportunities related to coordination and complementarity of the food assistance with RRMP?

*Impact.* Were there any evident impacts on the local economy, non-beneficiaries, community relations and intra-household relations? What types of traders benefited from the intervention?

*Protection.* Has the programme created any challenges or opportunities for contributing to the safety of recipients? Has the programme created any problems for people who face constraints related to gender, age, health status, etc.?

*Efficiency.* Was the approach of complementing RRMP with food assistance by RRMP partners an efficient way to respond to beneficiaries' needs? What are the advantages and shortcomings of this model? Are there ways that efficiency can be improved in the future? Did recipients need to pay money to access fairs, distribution sites or markets?

## **Methodology**

The evaluation approach encompassed three phases – inception, data collection and reporting. The goal of the inception phase was to promote a shared understanding of the evaluation approach; it resulted in an inception report that was approved by the evaluation steering group. Data collection took place in May 2014 in DRC, which mainly took the form of key informant interviews in Goma and

Bukavu and qualitative data collection in programming areas. The evaluator also reviewed monitoring data and data collected during a previous evaluation exercise.<sup>12</sup>

Qualitative data collection in programming areas was conducted by a team composed of the evaluator and staff from NRC and AVSI. The involvement of partner staff in the fieldwork was a strategic decision. Compared to evaluations that focus most strongly on accountability, learning-oriented evaluations usually involve those who want to do the learning.<sup>13</sup> Each day following the data collection, the team reviewed the day's findings and discussed preliminary conclusions upon its completion.

The time allocated for the fieldwork enabled visits to three sites. The identification of sites considered four variables – the aid agency, the type of assistance provided, the time passed since the intervention and accessibility to the site. The sites identified were Kayna, North Kivu (NRC open market voucher + cash distribution), Kamituga, South Kivu (IRC and AVSI joint fair) and Minova, South Kivu (AVSI food fair). Minova was replaced by Kalonge, South Kivu, which had had an AVSI food fair two weeks prior to the field visit, for reasons of accessibility. Kamituga was replaced by Kayna, North Kivu (NRC food fair) for logistical reasons and owing to concerns that IDP beneficiaries would no longer be present in Kamituga.

At the intervention sites, consultations took the form of focus groups, considering beneficiaries / non-beneficiaries, IDPs and host families, and men and women. Village leaders, participating traders and traders that did not participate in voucher activities were also interviewed in groups. The justification of these divisions was to triangulate findings among different types of stakeholders and consider the views of both men and women, while taking into account the time constraints. A total of 21 focus groups were conducted in the three sites. Seventeen key informants were interviewed in Goma and Bukavu. Annex 1 provides details on the focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

The evaluation and methodology faced several limitations. With multiple partners implementing somewhat different approaches in different areas, there are numerous variables that could contribute to outcomes (e.g. quality of implementation, transfer type, transfer value, access, different contextual factors). Most evidence on effectiveness was drawn from monitoring data and triangulated and complimented through qualitative data collection, which poses limitations for rigour because it is not controlled research and undertaken in imperfect circumstances. These limitations apply to the vast majority of evaluations in humanitarian settings with similar scopes and resources. Several staff involved in implementing the interventions had moved on, particularly from IRC. A large amount of documentation was provided to the evaluator (over 1000 pages of documents) on the interventions, limiting the detail with which it could be reviewed in the time available. Access and time limited the number and diversity of programming sites for fieldwork. None of sites providing only cash transfers could be visited, which limited the extent to which the evaluation can compare cash transfer with the other intervention types.

Because the IRC fieldwork site was replaced with an NRC one, and owing to the absence of IRC staff in DRC who were directly involved in the intervention, the experience of IRC is not represented to the same degree as NRC and AVSI. This is purely the result of the constraints facing the evaluation and not IRC's willingness to participate in it. This gap is not a significant problem because NRC and AVSI have continued with ECHO-funded food assistance activities in 2014 whereas IRC has not, and

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<sup>12</sup> An evaluation of these food assistance interventions was started by another evaluation team. Data collection was undertaken and an in-country debriefing was held. However, a decision was taken to end that evaluation contract and identify a new evaluator.

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan-Smith and Cosgrave, 2013

because the focus of the evaluation is on generating lessons on the approach as a whole and the different cash-based activities, rather than evaluating the performance of the individual aid agencies.

### **Organisation of the report**

Section 2 describes the ECHO-funded cash-based food assistance activities of NRC, AVSI and IRC. The main evaluation findings are outlined in Section 3. Section 4 provides conclusions and recommendations.

## 2 Programme design

The purpose of the food assistance intervention was to provide rapid, cash-based food assistance in response to population movements and to complement RRMP in North and South Kivu. This section describes the design of the food assistance interventions and their relationship to RRMP.

### RRMP and the food assistance gap

RRMP is the largest single humanitarian response programme in DRC after food aid, with a budget of over \$37 million during 2012.<sup>14</sup> It has been running in various forms since 2004. RRMP's strategy consists of four basic elements – pre-positioned relief supplies and funding for INGO partners, access to additional funds when needed, a continuous capacity of humanitarian surveillance, and a capacity to rapidly respond through the pre-established partnerships. RRMP plans for an intervention capacity by province, without stipulating where, how and when future interventions will occur. A provincial steering committee (the Comité de Pilotage) exists in each province and meets weekly to share information and determine assessment and intervention areas. It is composed of UNICEF, OCHA, RRMP partners and Cluster Coordinators. RRMP has the capacity to provide temporary shelter materials and NFI, water and sanitation services, emergency education kits, school rehabilitation and health interventions (in some areas). Interventions are intended to be limited responses, implemented within a period of three months.

### Design of the cash-based food assistance

ECHO first financed RRMP partners NRC and AVSI to provide cash-based food assistance as a complement to RRMP in November 2011. At that time, vouchers were commonly being used in DRC as an alternative to non-food item kits, including as part of RRMP. They had yet to be used for food assistance, with the exception of pilots and small projects.<sup>15</sup> The experience was positive and included a strong focus on lessons learned.<sup>16</sup> ECHO has continued to fund NRC and AVSI to provide cash-based food assistance as a complement to RRMP since that time.

While the programming logic and objectives of the food assistance interventions are similar across the partners, their objectives vary slightly (see Table 1). For example, the NRC specific objective refers to improving 'food security', while those of AVSI and IRC respectively seek to improve the 'food situation' and 'food consumption'. All of the three partners' activities are designed to increase access to food in the short-term and not to address longer-term food security; thus the evaluation does not evaluate NRC's activities against the objective of improving food security.

Table 1: Title and objectives of NRC, IRC and AVSI ECHO-funded food programming<sup>17</sup>

Aid agency	Programme title	Principle Objective	Specific Objective
NRC	Emergency food security response to population movements	Contribute to preserving and protecting the lives and assets of vulnerable people facing food crises exacerbated by the movements of	The food security of vulnerable persons affected by population movements and populations targeted by this intervention is improved

<sup>14</sup> This paragraph is adapted from the RRMP description in Baker et al., 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Pietrobono and Friedman, 2012

<sup>16</sup> See Pietrobono and Friedman, 2012

<sup>17</sup> Table information was translated from French to English by the author based on the project proposals.

		populations	
AVSI	Emergency food support in response to population movements in Kivu – Phase III	Contribute to the reduction of emergency food needs for Kivu populations	Improvement of the food situation of vulnerable households assisted by an emergency food response
IRC	Emergency food response to population movements in North and South Kivu	Contribute to the reduction of emergency food needs for populations of North and South Kivu	Food consumption of households targeted by the intervention is improved

NRC, AVSI and IRC collectively have provided food assistance through vouchers (coupons that can be exchanged for goods and services) and cash transfers. The programme is designed so that the precise food assistance intervention implemented in each area is flexible and determined on the basis of assessments. The logic behind this flexibility is that needs, markets, security and preference vary across the areas where assistance is provided, even within the same provinces. Three types of cash-based activities were implemented – food fairs, open market vouchers and cash transfers:

- *Food fairs.* Vouchers mainly have been provided in ‘food fairs’, which are temporary markets created by aid agencies with vendors that bring food products. Fairs are typically used when there are concerns about the capacity of the local market to meet the increased demand created by cash or market vouchers. The partners work with the participating vendors to ensure that minimum amounts of locally preferred food items are made available, which recipients purchase with their vouchers. Once the vouchers have been counted, vendors are issued a check corresponding to the value of the goods that they sold.
- *Open market vouchers.* In the case of NRC, vouchers were also provided through food vendors in local markets. In DRC these types of vouchers are often referred to as ‘open market vouchers’. Recipients can purchase food from vendors who are pre-identified. The process of spending vouchers and paying vendors is the same as with fairs; the differences is that the activities take place in a market that already exists.
- *Cash transfers.* NRC and AVSI provided recipients in two areas with cash transfers, which can be spent on anything that money can buy. NRC worked with local financial institutions to deliver the transfers; AVSI engaged Airtel to provide the cash transfers in Fizi. In two other intervention areas, NRC gave a \$25 cash transfer in addition to the NFI vouchers and food vouchers so that recipients could use the cash to meet other needs (e.g. debt repayment, health expenses) not met through the RRMP and ECHO assistance.

RRMP assistance takes the form of voucher fairs with household items (e.g. pots, clothing), vouchers used in local markets or NFI kits. Therefore, the RRMP partner is often organising two voucher activities – one for NFI / household goods and one for food. The food assistance interventions mainly took place after or at the same time as the RRMP assistance – in some cases they were implemented prior to it or in areas that had not recently received RRMP assistance. Table 2 summarises the ECHO-funded food assistance interventions. It uses the term ‘joint’ to refer to RRMP and food interventions that were implemented side by side at the same time.

**Table 2: Food assistance interventions – types and locations**

Intervention area	Territory	HH	Type of intervention	Value (USD) per HH <sup>18</sup>
NRC				
Mubi	Walikale	3467	Joint fair	\$83
Walikale centre	Walikale	4045	Cash transfer	\$82.5
Kikuvo	Lubero	423	Joint fair + cash transfer	\$55 + \$25
Kayna	Lubero	479	Open market vouchers + cash transfer	\$55 + \$25
Kibirizi	Rutshuru	1277	Joint fair	\$70
Pinga	Masisi/Walikale	5151	Food fair	\$82
Ruwenzori	Lubero	3183	Food fair and open market vouchers	\$65
AVSI				
Kamituga*	Mwenga	1416	Joint fair	\$65
Kilembwe	Mwenga	1513	Joint fair	\$75
Ngando	Mwenga	1463	Food fair (no RRMP)	\$75
Ngando II	Mwenga	2008	Food fair (no RRMP)	\$75
Bashimwenda	Mwenga	1618	Joint fair	\$75
Iregabarhonyi	Walungu	1434	Food fair + NFI distribution	\$75
Swima and Mboko	Fizi	2218	Cash transfer	\$40
Kalonge	Kalehe	4151	Food fair	\$80
Numbi	Kalehe	2030	Food fair (no RRMP)	\$80
Kabeya	Kabambare	3829	Joint fair	\$60
IRC				
Mungombe / Kamituga*	Mwenga	1416	Joint fair	\$65
Kilembwe	Fizi	2596	Food fair	\$65
Ziralo	Kalehe	7106	Food fair	\$66
Sebele	Fizi	3011	Food fair	\$74
Kilembwe	Fizi	4178	Food fair	\$85
TOTAL		58,020		

\*Joint intervention between IRC and AVSI with a total of 2832 HH

Table 2 shows that partners provided multiple types of interventions, reaching approximately 58,000 households. NRC implemented the widest range of cash-based interventions (i.e. cash transfers, food fairs, market vouchers) and IRC had the least variety. NRC, AVSI and IRC opted for slightly different approaches to the design of their cash-based activities (see Table 3). All of the partners provided the transfer in dollars (as opposed to Congolese Francs), established prices ceilings for items in fairs, and used a standard food ration as the basis for calculating the value of the voucher (i.e. the cost of purchasing a 2,100 kilocalorie basket in the fair). NRC varied the amount of the transfer according to the size of the household; AVSI and IRC provided a standard amount based on

<sup>18</sup> For NRC, the transfer values in the table are for a household of five persons, but the transfer was calculated according to household size and therefore varied between households.

an average household size of six people. NRC changed the food items available for purchase based on surveys of local preferences; IRC and AVSI provided the same items in each fair and adjusted the quantities based on local preferences.<sup>19</sup> The targeting and monitoring approaches also varied between the agencies, which are discussed in the next section.

**Table 3: Design of cash and voucher food assistance**

	NRC	AVSI	IRC
Types of interventions implemented	Food fair, joint fair, open market voucher, cash transfers, additional cash transfer <sup>20</sup>	Food fair, joint fair, cash transfers	Food fair, joint fair
Calculation of voucher / cash transfer	Starting point is food ration	Starting point is food ration	Starting point is food ration
Adjustment for household size or standard	Adjusted to household size or standard value based on household of five	Standard value based on household of six	Standard value based on household of six
Currency / denominations	Dollars; denominations of vouchers from \$0.25 - \$20	Dollars; denominations of vouchers from -\$0.5 - \$20	Dollars; denominations of vouchers from - \$0.50 - \$20
Selection of vendors	Selected by aid agency, working with FEC	Selected by aid agency, working FEC and / or local leaders, vendors create small groups	Selected by aid agency, working FEC and / or local leaders
Food items available in fairs	Items varied by fair based on initial assessment; fairs had average of 20 items; vendors could bring any item (except meat, fresh fish, canned tomatoes, etc.)	Items were the same in each fair – rice, manioc flour, corn flour, beans, palm oil, salt	Items were the same in each fair – rice, manioc flour, corn flour, beans, palm oil, salt
Prices	Price ceiling for each food item (determined through a dialogue between vendors and beneficiaries); bargaining permitted	Price ceiling for each food item (determined through a dialogue between vendors and beneficiaries); bargaining permitted	Price ceiling for each food item (determined through a dialogue between vendors and beneficiaries); bargaining permitted

#### *Decision on interventions*

Decisions on RRMP assessments and interventions are made through the Comité de Pilotage meetings in Goma and Bukavu. Unlike RRMP, it is the individual aid agencies that take decisions on the food assistance interventions and not the Comité. For NRC, the food assistance manager coordinated with RRMP coordinator internally and the RRMP coordinator participated in the Comité de Pilotage. NRC intentions were previously discussed internally after having checked with the Food Security Cluster and with other food security actors to assess whether the needs were covered by another organisation. In South Kivu, the AVSI food assistance manager attended the Comité de

<sup>19</sup> AVSI added dried fish in a fair near Lake Tanganyika.

<sup>20</sup> This refers to the additional cash transfer (\$25) for needs not met through NFI and food assistance vouchers.

Pilotage meetings as an observer and coordinated with the RRMP coordinator. All agencies shared information on their interventions with the Food Security Cluster. An additional forum for coordination and information-sharing in South Kivu is the Group Technique Assistance Alimentaire. AVSI and IRC requested the creation of this group in September 2013 as a platform for exchange of information on population movements and to more closely coordinate food assistance interventions. Established in collaboration with FAO and WFP, the group meets twice a month to discuss population movements and coordinate their responses. The group was just getting started during the timeframe of the evaluation.

### 3 Findings

This section discusses the findings of the evaluation, grouped according to the criteria of appropriateness, effectiveness, impact, protection and efficiency. It seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the findings in a logical manner, recognising that some findings relate to multiple criteria.

#### **Appropriateness / relevance**

Appropriateness and relevance refer extent to which the intervention was in line with local needs. The evaluation considers the extent to which 1) there was a need for a rapid food assistance intervention, 2) the intervention was attuned to local needs of populations affected by displacement and 3) the design of the programme enabled the intervention to achieve its objectives.

As identified in the previous sections, rapid and flexible food assistance has been considered a gap in DRC. Through RRMP and its predecessors, non-food assistance has become a rapid and flexible tool in DRC; whereas food assistance has not evolved in a similar fashion. The importance of flexible approaches stems from that fact that the precise size and locations of population movements in DRC cannot be predicted. The 2007 RRM evaluation identified that a consequence of delayed food assistance was some sale of NFI assistance to meet those needs. The 2013 RRMP evaluation found that food assistance was a gap because priority needs identified by MSAs were not being met.<sup>21</sup>

Consultations in intervention areas confirmed that food was a high priority. IDP focus groups consistently stated that food was their top or second most important need prior to the intervention, because food is essential to survival and they had reduced their consumption or had difficulty meeting food needs. Host families expressed that food was needed owing to their sharing of food with IDPs, though those consulted did not rank food in first place as consistently as the IDP groups. Host families indicated that hosting IDPs also resulted in needs for household items, shelter and sanitation (i.e. latrines); IDPs stated that their other priority needs were household items, school fees and healthcare / medicines.

The linking of the food assistance with RRMP, and specifically the financing of RRMP partners, was a logical approach for multiple reasons. RRMP is unique in its capacity to provide rapid assistance in response to new displacements in DRC. RRMP partners already had systems in place for targeting and quickly implementing responses. Creating and maintaining this capacity for rapid response is expensive; setting up a parallel system from scratch for food assistance would be costly and duplicative. It makes little sense for a rapid food assistance programme to be divorced from RRMP, given that close coordination with RRMP can result in more holistic assistance for affected populations. The linking of food assistance with RRMP does pose issues for targeting and the duration of assistance, which are discussed below.

#### *Design of the intervention*

As indicated in Table 2 in the previous section, agencies varied the types of cash-based interventions – vouchers in fairs, vouchers in markets and cash transfers. These variations were informed by assessments in each of the intervention areas that considered factors like the characteristics of local markets, where vendors buy their products, the ability of vendors to increase their stock and the presence of financial institutions (or other potential cash delivery agents). The shifting of approaches was advantageous because these factors vary between areas, even within the same province. The comparatively limited variations of IRC's activities are likely explained by the fact that, unlike NRC

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

and AVSI, IRC was new to the food voucher approach, and security, markets and financial infrastructure were not conducive to cash transfers and open market vouchers in their intervention areas.

In the sites visited, the cash and voucher responses were appropriate because recipients were able to access food that largely corresponded to their preferences; a previous evaluation team visiting other sites arrived at the same finding. Likewise, the justifications behind the use of fairs or market vouchers in some contexts and cash in others appear sensible and justified, based mainly on market capacity, security and the presence of financial institutions.<sup>22</sup> Given that cash was the tool with which the agencies had the least experience and the limited financial infrastructure, it is not surprising that cash was done in only two intervention areas. NRC did open market vouchers in locations where market assessments found that local supplies were sufficient and people could access markets, and organised fairs in ones where this was not the case. There is not always a 'right' or a 'wrong' answer when deciding on the intervention – another aid agency might have opted for directly distributing the cash in areas where delivery agents were not available or in areas where cash was not used owing to serious security concerns (e.g. Zialo).<sup>23</sup>

The provision of the additional \$25 transfer by NRC for health and education needs was also an appropriate activity. As discussed above, payment of school fees and medicines / health care were cited by focus groups as priority needs, particularly by IDPS. As discussed below related to effectiveness, school fees and health fees appear to have been primary uses of that money. Given that the security and financial infrastructure permitted the delivery of cash, one might assume that a transfer of 100% cash therefore would have been more appropriate in those settings. However, that is debatable – a larger transfer would have incurred different risks and many of the beneficiaries consulted preferred the combination of cash and vouchers, owing to security concerns about carrying large amounts of cash.

The value of the transfer was based on the local cost of a standard food ration – taking into account the goods that people would purchase locally. While there are alternative ways that a transfer could be calculated (e.g. considering nutritional values); the importance here is that the transfer calculation was clearly linked to the objective of increasing access to food. However, as discussed below, goods purchased with transfers were often shared and some beneficiaries paid for transport with items that they had purchased, meaning that the actual value of the assistance was lower than the transfer value. At the same time, beneficiaries are not starting at zero and do have access to other food sources, so whether or not the transfer should have been adjusted to account for sharing and transport costs is an open question.

NRC adjusted the transfer value according to the size of the household, an approach that it refers to as 'scooping' (in reference to scooping different quantities of food aid for different sized households at a food distribution). This approach is more precisely aligned to humanitarian needs because larger households are able to meet their needs to the same extent as smaller households. However, it is tricky to implement because it requires more sensitisation and households in areas familiar with the

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<sup>22</sup> These precise reasons for these decisions were not documented; this paragraph is based on discussions with staff.

<sup>23</sup> The appropriateness of approaches can change over time. Another aid agency providing cash and vouchers in DRC is Concern Worldwide. In Masisi, Concern moved from providing vouchers in fairs to an open market voucher, which an evaluation determined to be an appropriate approach with certain advantages over fairs (e.g. efficiency, choice) (Bailey, 2013). However, vendors in the Masisi open market voucher programme began to take advantage of their control over goods to limit the types of items that were redeemable with vouchers. Concern opted to revert to the fair approach in order to by-pass the power plays of these vendors.

methodology may provide inflated information on their household size.<sup>24</sup> The latter occurred in an area where NRC has previously intervened; the average household size in the second intervention was noticeably higher than the first one. Also, while the NRC beneficiaries consulted universally preferred the scooping approach, AVSI ones that received identical transfer values preferred AVSI's approach, on the logic that small households were not disadvantaged. It therefore appears that both scooping and standard transfer values are appropriate.

As discussed in the previous section, NRC, IRC and AVSI included different items in their fairs. NRC had the greatest variety, with interventions including items such as dried fish and fresh vegetables. AVSI and IRC's fairs had six staple commodities. Findings are not conclusive on whether AVSI and IRC should have increased the variety of items in their fairs. On the one hand, more variety translates to more options for beneficiaries, and might lead to stronger improvements in diet diversity if dried fish or vegetables are included. Women consulted by the previous evaluation team in Kilamba (Ngando) would have preferred peanut oil to palm oil and corn flour to cassava flour (both types of flour were included in the fair). On the other hand, beneficiaries at another AVSI site expressed little desire for more choice, stating that the commodities corresponded to what they needed, and that items like vegetables would have been 'accessories'. In the case of Kilamba, cassava flour and palm oil were both commonly consumed locally; the women consulted expressed that their ability to procure those items locally was precisely why they preferred corn flour and peanut oil, which were not as easily obtained.<sup>25</sup>

With the exception of an IRC intervention in Kilembwe, the food assistance was provided a single time. In theory, food assistance could have been provided for more than one cycle – ECHO did not place restrictions. Other food assistance to displaced populations in DRC, notably via WFP, is usually distributed for three months or more, with the logic that displaced populations need several months to establish themselves to the point of being able to meet their food needs. Had the objective of the programme been geared to supporting their livelihoods or food security, increasing the number of interventions per area would indeed have been more appropriate. However, the logic of the programme is to provide timely emergency support to new displacement. Extending food assistance in one area would impact the ability to undertake new interventions, unless the staff and logistical resources were increased to enable them to be in up to three places simultaneously. In previous ECHO-funded food assistance programming, NRC and AVSI had provided the assistance for up to three cycles, but ceased this approach because it limited their capacity to intervene in new areas. IRC did provide assistance for two cycles in Kilembwe, with the justification that the average FCS remained below the 'humanitarian alert' threshold and because the intervention took place in the lean season.

Using an FCS threshold as a trigger to provide food assistance, though, raises some issues. Many people in DRC are food insecure. An assessment of food insecurity in North Kivu province in 2013, for example, found that 60% of households faced severe or moderate food insecurity. Thresholds do not distinguish between factors associated with chronic vulnerability (e.g. poor governance, weak rule of law, limited infrastructure, lack of access to basic services) and the acute problems that result from population movements. They do not show how the situation has changed for affected populations. This is not to say that indicators like FCS should not inform intervention decisions, but rather to illustrate that they tell only part of the story.

**Box 1: Food consumption score**

<sup>24</sup> Pietrobono and Friedman, 2012

<sup>25</sup> Peanut oil is available in South Kivu but is more expensive than palm oil (by approximately 50-80% according to AVSI estimates).

The food assistance partners are using FCS as a monitoring indicator and targeting criterion. FCS is an indicator that reflects dietary diversity and food frequency. It measures the frequency of consumption of eight food groups over the period of a week. FCS has thresholds for 'poor' (<28), 'borderline' (28-42) and 'adequate' (>42) food consumption. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the FCS improves on household diet diversity score; however, IFPRI has raised concerns that the thresholds used by WFP are too low and thus can underestimate food insecurity.<sup>26</sup> The issue of different cut-offs for different cultures has also been raised in evaluations, such as African compared to Middle Eastern populations.<sup>27</sup>

### *Targeting*

There are two main levels of targeting – geographic (where the intervention will take place) and household (who will be assisted by the intervention). The geographic targeting was relatively straight-forward. As the food assistance complements the RRMP, the RRMP intervention areas are the starting point. The MSAs provide estimates on average food consumption scores and coping strategies – basic but relevant information. The food assistance managers consulted with other food assistance actors via the Food Security Cluster to avoid duplication of efforts.

The intervention was designed from the outset to provide cash and vouchers, which in theory influences geographic targeting by excluding areas where in-kind food aid is needed. In practice this predisposition to cash-based responses did influence the intervention to a small degree. In Nobili in North Kivu, security risks were too high to implement fairs; vendors were not willing to engage in the approach. NRC coordinated with WFP and one of its partners that provided food aid – a process that was more challenging for NRC compared to directly providing the food assistance, owing to the different targeting and programming approaches used by NRC and WFP and its partner. In Shabunda, South Kivu, the market and security situation makes cash-based interventions very difficult and risky. Thus cash-based food assistance was not implemented there by AVSI.

For the 2013/14 programming cycle, ECHO and its partners have sought to address this gap by having the option to provide in-kind food aid. However, an issue is that insecurity and isolation, which affect the appropriateness of cash-based interventions, also pose major challenges for food aid. AVSI has looked into the possibility of providing food aid in Shabunda, but its entire transport budget would only accommodate the transport of food aid for 2,000 beneficiaries and the affected population likely exceeded 4,000 (food aid would cost \$109 per beneficiary to transport). RRMP faces a similar challenge, but because shipping is charged by weight and NFI kits are lighter than food aid, the cost per beneficiary is reduced somewhat.

The second level of targeting is the selection of households for inclusion in the intervention. NRC, AVSI and IRC used different approaches in 2013. NRC combined the food assistance with the RRMP targeting. Local 'guides' were selected by displaced households that led an NRC agent to dwellings where IDPs and host families resided. All IDP and returnee households were surveyed on the following questions to determine their eligibility – status (i.e. IDP, host family, returnee), social vulnerability categories,<sup>28</sup> FCS and NFI possessions (to calculate the NFI 'score' for RRMP targeting). The decision to survey host families and vulnerable residents was taken on the spot by the agent based on the perceived vulnerability of the household (e.g. the quality of their dwelling). Host

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<sup>26</sup> Citation to be added

<sup>27</sup> Hedlund and McGlitchy, 2010

<sup>28</sup> For NRC, 'social vulnerability categories' refers to households that are headed by widows or children and handicapped persons and elderly.

families were asked about the number of persons / households hosted and whether they received compensation for hosting. The information was collected manually (i.e. written on paper and later entered into a computer) or through digital data collection using smartphones, which eliminates the time required for data entry. The data collected by NRC was then filtered in excel. Households with a poor FCS were retained. Households with a borderline FCS were retained if they met the NFI vulnerability cut-off for RRMP or corresponded to a social vulnerability category. All persons with FCS above 42 were excluded.

Like NRC, AVSI conducted door to door registration of IDPs and host families, identified with the help of a local guide. The agents asked questions on food security (i.e. meals per day, food stock, access to fields), access to daily labour and healthcare, and social vulnerability categories. Interviews were conducted with all IDPs and small number of host families and vulnerable resident households. The decision to register was taken on the spot based on the responses to the questions – only households who met the criteria were written on registration forms. For the 2014 programming cycle AVSI has adopted an approach that is very similar to NRC’s, and this approach was used in the site visited by the evaluation team.

Unlike AVSI and NRC, several of IRC’s interventions consisted of ‘catching up’ areas that had received RRMP assistance but not food assistance, mainly due to the lack of humanitarian alerts in their area during the span of the intervention. The sites were identified based on the FCS assessed during the MSA. For household targeting, IRC used as starting point the lists drafted for NFI assistance, by either AVSI or IRC, based on a combination of status and NFI vulnerability. IRC worked with committees and local leaders to encourage a participatory approach to targeting and in an effort to avoid the inclusion of ‘fake’ IDPs; they also employed a door to door approach to register. A spot check was conducted to verify the vulnerability of households on the list.

Both the RRMP and food assistance targeting have become increasingly based on characteristics and indicators associated with vulnerability rather than displacement status alone. In other words, criteria are usually used to eliminate some displaced, returnee and host family households who are deemed not in need of assistance or whose needs are no greater than other people in the area. The logic is to target limited resources to the neediest households, though blanket targeting is still used in areas determined to be highly vulnerable through MSAs or where there are concerns about creating tensions through targeting.<sup>29</sup> More households in the intervention areas received food assistance compared to RRMP NFI assistance,<sup>30</sup> leading some key informants to question whether the food assistance targeting should become stricter, such as through lowering the cut-offs for poor and borderline food consumption scores. This issue is discussed in more detail below. In 2014, the criteria for inclusion in RRMP became even stricter – the NFI vulnerability threshold was raised owing to a decrease in funding.

**Table 4: Displacement status of households assisted**

	IDP	Returnee	Host family	Resident
NRC	66%	5.9%	21.7%	6%
AVSI	33%	67%		0.2%
IRC	Unavailable			

The question of whether a targeting process reached the ‘right’ people is asked in two parts. Were households excluded who should have been included? Were households included that should have been

<sup>29</sup> See Baker et al., 2013 for discussion on RRMP targeting

<sup>30</sup> Key informants from IRC and AVSI and those consulted through group discussions all indicated that fewer persons affected by displacement were included in the NFI / RRMP assistance compared to the ECHO food assistance.

excluded? As no IRC sites were visited for this evaluation, the following analysis of targeting applies to NRC and AVSI.

Some households that met inclusion criteria were excluded from the programme. The main reason for exclusion was that, despite being eligible for consideration in the programme, certain households were never surveyed by the agent doing the targeting. In some cases they were outside of the area during the targeting process, which usually takes about three days (e.g. doing agricultural work away from the village, in the hospital). All of those consulted in the intervention areas indicated that the agents never re-visited villages they had already registered, so even those that returned from the fields were not included if the process had already ended in that location.

In two sites visited, focus groups expressed that some of the agents did not survey households because had run out of registration sheets or because 'the list was full'. A staff person participating in the evaluation fieldwork confirmed that this had occurred. Some areas were left out because the agent could not take the 4-6 hours that would be required to walk round-trip, and the staff would not register people except at their dwelling (thus those displaced persons could not present themselves for registration in a village where the targeting was taking place).

These weaknesses are linked to pressure facing the RRMP to target and intervene quickly. Focus groups consistently expressed that the staff doing the registering were very hurried. There is also an assumption that the number of persons registered should not exceed the initial estimates made by the MSA (or not by much). This might be behind the explanation of 'lists being full' – it is not a question of arriving with enough photocopied lists, but more likely that registration staff have implicit or explicit instructions to keep the numbers down. In the case of NRC at least, the hiring of temporary staff for targeting exercises might have played a role in exclusion error. In one NRC site visited, not a single host family was surveyed, whereas they were in nearby sites. Their exclusion appears to have been the unilateral decision (or honest mistake) made by the person doing the registering, who was a former employee working on a daily basis.

A second potential source of exclusion error was the targeting survey. Many of those consulted described the process of answering the survey questions as stressful and difficult, particularly when agents were hurried. The FCS question was cited as being particularly hard to answer. A person who had been engaged as a guide expressed that he knew that some people with whom he was familiar were giving answers that were not accurate – for example, saying that they had eaten fish multiple times when the amount was next to nothing. This is not difficult to imagine – quickly calculating the amount of times that specific food groups have been consumed in a week would be challenging for many educated people. However, given that the FCS values calculated in the targeting exercises were not wildly different than those estimated in MSAs, and the relatively high level of inclusion of those surveyed, 'wrong answers' were probably not a major cause of exclusion error.

What was the extent of exclusion error? While it is not possible to say, it does not appear to be a large amount for food assistance. Focus groups and leaders were much more critical about the larger number of households who did not benefit from RRMP NFI assistance. An elderly displaced woman even snuck into a discussion that the evaluation team was having with vendors. She wanted the team to see for themselves that an older, displaced woman with few means that had been rejected from the NFI assistance (indeed, it is hard to imagine that this was the type of person that aid agencies were looking to intentionally exclude from the assistance). The exclusion of certain households had consequences (see discussion on protection related to sharing and problems facing guides).

The fieldwork did not find any evidence of inclusion error in the sites visited (i.e. inclusion of people who did not meet the targeting criteria). All of those consulted in the intervention sites, including IDPs and host families excluded from the assistance, expressed that those assisted were 'real' displaced and host families that had significant needs. However, inclusion error might have been a problem in other sites. Three key informants from the IDP community in Walikale stated that chiefs influenced the targeting process of the food assistance and RRMP intervention, resulting in the selection of non-IDPs.<sup>31</sup> That team and some staff consulted felt that people surveyed in some areas downplayed their food consumption, aware that the response would influence their inclusion, or misrepresented themselves as IDPs when they were not displaced. This manipulation is a common challenge in DRC, and it one of the reasons NRC and AVSI use a system where the criteria for inclusion are not evident. There is no reason to think that any inclusion error was linked to the types of assistance used (i.e. vouchers and cash).

Given that the targeting criteria (i.e. displacement status, social vulnerability criteria and food consumption) are not publicised, it is not surprising that community leaders and focus group participants did not know why some households were included and some were not. A few non-beneficiaries in the AVSI intervention area had been given an explanation by AVSI staff – that the targeting had been done on the basis of their responses – but this explanation still did not clearly indicate why some households were included and others were not.

Those consulted expressed disbelief that an organisation could pick some displaced persons and not others, when they all came from the same area and faced the same problems. Their preference was that the agencies should assist all IDPs and host families, even if this means providing less assistance. Several focus group participants added that local vulnerable households should be included as well. IDPs consulted routinely advocated for the targeting of more host families, who had shared food and other items with them, and with whom IDPs had to share their own assistance if they were excluded.

Two main concerns emerged from the AVSI and NRC targeting processes. The first was that some households were skipped owing to their absence or 'full' lists. A second concern is that agents were deciding on the spot whether or not host families and local vulnerable households would be registered. For AVSI, the previous targeting system relied heavily on agents' assessments of vulnerability, and indeed some AVSI staff consulted preferred the previous system as it did not raise expectations by surveying every household and excluding some later. Thus it is possible that staff trained in this approach are succeeding in identifying the most vulnerable while also managing expectations. However, this more haphazard approach to targeting of host families and vulnerable residents could result in beneficiaries who are not the most vulnerable, especially when daily labourers are used. In Kayna, local leaders familiar with the targeting process said that some agents even skipped over IDP households where a motorcycle or other expensive items were visible, though these items actually belonged to the host family and were not indicative of the IDP household's vulnerability. An alternative approach to assessing vulnerability on the spot is to survey all host families, but this could create other problems if many of those households are then excluded once the criteria are applied.

For the targeting criteria, displacement status (i.e. displaced, returnee and host households) is an appropriate starting point because the intervention addressed consequences of displacement. As stated earlier, while FCS proved challenging for some respondents, relative consistency in FCS scores suggests that the responses were reasonably accurate. It is an indicator of food consumption that is

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<sup>31</sup> The RRMP intervention in Walikale was implemented by both NRC and Solidarités and the notes do not indicate whether this was observed to be a problem with NRC, Solidarités or both. Both of these key informants were leaders in the IDP community and members of pre-existing IDP committees that were not used in the targeting process.

more insightful than meals per day given that the latter does not consider that households might adjust the quality of quantity of food consumed at meals. The previous evaluation team felt that some households were manipulating FCS by under-reporting consumption, but that alone would not justify changing it given that the same could occur with other food consumption indicators (e.g. household diet diversity score, household food insecurity access scale).

The present targeting system used by NRC and AVSI excludes some households who have a borderline FCS, only including those who also meet other targeting criteria (i.e. social vulnerability criteria, NFI criteria). This raises two questions. First, should the pool of borderline consumption households be narrowed through additional criteria? Second, if so, are those the most appropriate criteria? Answering these questions would require a more thorough analysis of households rejected because of these criteria. Basic information would include identifying the percentage of households with borderline consumption eliminated because they did not meet additional criteria. More nuanced analysis on whether those households should have been excluded would involve identifying a sample of them and verifying their situation and challenges. The evaluation could not get into this level of detail. The agencies have been thinking through targeting challenges and targeting has been raised at RRMP meetings. The general consensus has been that inclusion error is preferable to exclusion error, but the trend has been to make the targeting process more exclusive over time.

Some key informants raised the question as to whether the criteria for inclusion should become stricter, particularly related to the thresholds for poor / borderline FCS. Their logic is that not all households affected by displacement are equally vulnerable and that needs are great in DRC – average Congolese households in the intervention areas also probably have poor food consumption. However, an important counter-argument is that displaced and returnee households are not average. Indeed, this is the entire reasoning behind having programmes that respond to displacement rapidly – household affected by displacement face specific stresses and constraints. Given that there was no evidence that the thresholds were enabling people to benefit whose need was questionable, there is little reason to think that the food assistance targeting criteria should be made more narrow. Local populations consulted unanimously expressed that more host families should be included – so that IDPs do not need to share their assistance, to reinforce social capital and to compensate host families for resources that they had shared. Aid agencies are only including a small number, on the implicit logic that these households are less vulnerable since they have resources to share. As shown by Table 4, the percentage of local and host families assisted varies among the agencies (information was not available for IRC interventions).

### *Monitoring*

Each agency had its own monitoring system and reported on a broadly similar set of indicators related to the effectiveness of the food assistance. However, there were small variations in their indicators. For example, NRC and AVSI both reported on the number of days that food assistance was provided after the RRMP assistance, whereas IRC considered whether the assistance was provided within one month. Several indicators – non-sale of NFI assistance items, reduction in coping strategies, and meals per day – were used by two of the three partners. The only indicator that was exactly the same for all three agencies was the percentage of beneficiaries with an ‘acceptable’ FCS after the intervention. The lack of common indicators and minor differences in the shared ones limit the ability to compile and compare information them across partners. For FCS, it makes sense to report on the changes in the average FCS, and percentage of households in each category, rather than only the percentage of households with an acceptable FCS. This would give a more accurate picture of changes after the intervention.

**Table 5: Monitoring indicators**

	Food assistance effectiveness	Learning
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NRC	Food consumption score (% acceptable) Coping strategies Non-sale of productive assets Number of beneficiaries Number of days after RRMP % of additional (\$25) cash transfer not spent on food / NFI Non-sale of NFI assistance	N/A
AVSI	Food consumption score (% acceptable) Meals per day Coping strategies Number of days after RRMP assistance or humanitarian alert	Number staff trained Meetings held (for sharing lessons)
IRC	Food consumption score (% acceptable, % moving from poor to acceptable) Meals per day Food assistance provided within one month of alert Non-sale of NFI assistance Non-sale of food assistance	Presentations at inter-cluster Lessons learned document Creation of working group

The timeframe of the evaluation did not allow for an in-depth examination of each agency's monitoring framework and process. However, some observations can be made about NRC, as the evaluator became most familiar with their approach. In 2013, NRC separated its monitoring and evaluation activities from its programming ones. This restructuring and increased demands on monitoring staff reduced the extent to which monitoring data was analysed and therefore able to inform the food assistance programming. Programme staff previously could access data more easily as they had monitoring people on their team.

The NRC post-intervention surveys and monitoring reports were both heavier than necessary. The post-intervention survey for 2013 had more than 50 questions. While a case can be made for taking advantage of monitoring exercises to glean the most possible insights, there is little point in asking questions that will not inform the programme, that will not be analysed or are not necessary for reporting. Similarly, long narrative monitoring reports are not necessary when bullet points and tables with the relevant information and recommendations will suffice. For the 2014 programme, the NRC monitoring and evaluation team has looked into lightening the surveys and process.

In contrast to NRC's more lengthy post-fair survey, IRC's survey contained less than 10 questions, asking about food consumption (food consumption score, meals per day), coping strategies and selling of assistance. The post-assistance monitoring report shared with the evaluator had very few details that would have informed programming – only changes in FCS and information on the percentage sale and theft of assistance. Given that monitoring is about more than reports, the evaluation is not well placed to comment on the extent to which it informed programming. AVSI sampled 10% of beneficiaries; the data were used internally to evaluate the level of organisation of the fair, food habits, preferences and needs.

## Effectiveness

Effectiveness and impact consider the changes that resulted from the programme. Effectiveness examines these changes as they relate to intervention objectives. Impact, discussed below, considers changes that were outside of the objectives but that nonetheless might be important. To explore effectiveness, this section analyses how food assistance transfers were used, the prices and quality of commodities, timing, understanding, preference, changes resulting from assistance, performance against proposal indicators and operational challenges.

### *Use of transfers*

Vouchers were unsurprisingly spent on the food items available through participating vendors in fairs and local markets. The agencies did not track the exact quantities of different food items sold. NRC did, however, track expenditures made in different food groups in its post-intervention monitoring (on the basis of the breakdown used for FCS). It found the vouchers were spent on cereals (43%), pulses (24%), fish/meat (13%), oil (10%), vegetables (3%), fruits (1%) and sugar (7%). It would have been more insightful if the monitoring had asked about commodities rather than food groups, in order to understand the types of items that were in highest demand.

While focus groups are not an ideal format for getting detailed information on what people purchased, the beneficiaries consulted typically spent their transfers on many of the items available as opposed to one or two commodities. The precise expenditure patterns differed according to the types and quantities of food that they needed; beneficiaries in one site purchased significant quantities of rice while those in another opted more for cassava. The basket of items purchased in the NRC intervention areas were more diverse, because their fairs had more items available, such as vegetables and multiple types of pulses. In all areas, the ability to purchase according to personal preference was greatly appreciated.

In the two NRC sites visited in North Kivu, beneficiaries expressed that they would have preferred to have meat available for purchase. Respondents in Mule, South Kivu, stated that they could not consider purchasing meat and did not need it in the fair, as it was a luxury and would not last. In Bhukira, rice ran out prior to the end of the fair, disadvantaging some of the beneficiaries, particularly given its importance as a staple commodity. Aid agencies work with vendors to try to ensure a sufficient supply of the food items in demand, through tracking how much each vendor would bring and comparing that to an estimation of the total quantities necessary (based on an analysis of beneficiary preference). Too much food and vendors would be saddled with quantities that they need to vacate, too little and some beneficiaries would not be able to buy their preferred foods, which is the *raison d'être* of vouchers.

According to the focus group participants, the food purchased with vouchers lasted from two weeks to two months.<sup>32</sup> The variation depended on the household's access to other food sources (e.g. host families with their own fields), the size of the family (larger families for AVSI finished their stock more quickly, whereas for NRC it was the opposite because larger families had received more assistance), the degree of sharing with host families and other IDPs (IDPs hosted by families not receiving assistance shared more than those whose host families were assisted), and whether households paid for transport with their purchased food (households living farther from sites were more likely to pay for transport). Of those consulted, the food assistance finished the most quickly among IDPs in Bhukira, many of whom paid for transport and shared with host families (no host families were assisted in that village).

There was no evidence of exchange of vouchers for cash in the sites visited. Participants in one focus group stressed that NRC was very vigilant to prevent such transactions, with staff walking through

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<sup>32</sup> One focus group participant indicated that the food lasted for three months, but this appeared to be exceptional.

the fair site to observe transactions and assist beneficiaries. Vendors participating in the fairs were also on the lookout because such exchange would disadvantage them by decreasing the value of vouchers going to food purchasing (presumably with the exception of any vendors that were seeking to make a profit by engaging in this activity). Some beneficiaries stated that they would have preferred the option to exchange their vouchers for cash to circumvent higher prices in the fairs and purchase from local traders, while other indicated that they preferred the system in place.

For NRC's cash transfer intervention in Walikale, post-fair monitoring found that most of the cash (71%) was spent on the food. The balance of the transfer reportedly went to savings (9%), health (8%), debt repayment (3%), education (3%) and income generating activities (3%). The microfinance institution that NRC used to distribute the cash transfer subsequently collapsed, so hopefully none of the beneficiaries had left any savings with it. According to AVSI monitoring, beneficiaries in Fizi spent 76% of the cash to buy food and the balance of the transfer mainly for education and health fees.

### *Food prices and quality*

Focus group participants unanimously expressed that the food items were of a high quality. The biggest complaint from those consulted was that the were too high for certain goods (particularly beans and manioc in Kayna, fish and rice in Bhukira, rice in Mule). In Bhukira, respondents stated that rice normally cost \$0.70 and cost \$1.10 in fair; in Mule, rice was said to be 15% more expensive than usual. High prices are a common grievance in voucher programmes in DRC.<sup>33</sup> Price is a simple question, but it is surprisingly difficult to get to the bottom of why fair prices are higher than those in local markets. As stated previously, aid agencies arrived at a price ceiling for each item in the fair by convening a discussion between beneficiaries and traders and also verified prices in local markets.

The process of having vendors negotiate price ceilings is resulting in slightly higher prices for some commodities. It is possible that this increase is justified by costs incurred by vendors, including the risk of not selling items. Aid agencies could insist on lower ceilings, but this might disadvantage smaller vendors who do not have the economies of scale of larger stockists. In some cases, respondents used comparisons that were not comparable, such as the price of manioc flour in Bukavu, where goods are cheaper. In others they indicated that the prices in their local markets were cheaper; for example, some recipients stated that they would have preferred to have received cash in order to circumvent the higher prices in the fair and go to local sellers. Another aid agency in DRC attempted to address the issue of prices by having the vouchers redeemable for a longer duration (i.e. several weeks as opposed to a single day), so that beneficiaries in theory would have more bargaining power. However, the beneficiaries still decided to spend their vouchers the first day of the intervention and the approach did not result in lower prices.<sup>34</sup>

### *Timing*

Because food assistance had been entirely disconnected from the RRMP assistance prior to the ECHO-funded food assistance, overall significant gains have been made in terms of its timeliness. For NRC, the food assistance was provided an average of one day after RRMP assistance.<sup>35</sup> Seven of AVSI's food assistance interventions were implemented in locations that also received RRMP assistance – four of those were implemented jointly. IRC had one joint food assistance and RRMP assistance intervention (implemented in collaboration with AVSI); several of their sites consisted of

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<sup>33</sup> Examples from two voucher programmes can be found in Bailey, 2013

<sup>34</sup> Bailey, 2013

<sup>35</sup> This statistic considers that Walikale intervention was 18 days after RRMP owing to challenges in planning and implementing the cash transfers, and the Pinga intervention was 11 days prior to RRMP. Seventy percent of NRC's food assistance interventions were within one day of the RRMP assistance.

assisting areas that had received RRMP assistance in the past rather than areas experiencing new displacement.

Food assistance usually required more time to organise than the NFI fairs for a few reasons. First, speed for NFI assistance has improved over time, whereas the food interventions were more recent. For NRC, the food assistance interventions were implemented an average of 12 days after RRMP assistance in their first year; this was reduced to eight days the subsequent year and to one day for project cycle considered in this evaluation. Compared to non-food assistance, greater time is often required for the assessment of local markets and supply chains and for vendors to procure and transport food to the area.

### *Understanding*

Discussions with beneficiaries indicated that the sensitisation process had been very effective. A voucher system is complicated, particularly when beneficiaries have to deal with exchange rates. People consulted described the voucher process in detail, stating that only a small number of people could not grasp the system. Those persons were accompanied by a person that they trusted or received assistance from field agents. There were no reports of people being taken advantage of by vendors. A woman in a focus group discussion brought up that the symbols printed on vouchers had assisted her in understanding their values (the vouchers have circles that correspond to the denomination of the voucher, e.g. 10 circles for \$10).

The voucher values were in dollars and not Congolese Francs (in Congo, the US dollar is a *de facto* parallel currency). The fact that the vouchers were in dollars did not pose any difficulties, except for minor challenges in an area where Ugandan shillings are commonly used. This probably would have been the case if the vouchers had been in Congolese Francs, given that people were used to dealing in shillings.

In areas receiving NRC cash transfers, the sensitisation included messages about how the transfers were meant to be used (i.e. for food Walikale, for health and education in Kayna and Kikuvo). A monitoring report from Walikale noted that not all of the cash had been used for food, and suggested that sensitisation about how to use the transfer could be increased. Given that the advantage of cash is precisely that beneficiaries can spend it on their priority needs, efforts to get them to spend 100% of the transfer on cash would be overly controlling.

### *Preference*

The evaluation team asked beneficiaries two questions about preference among cash, vouchers and in-kind assistance. The first question was, if \$10 were added to the voucher scheme, would they want it to go to the food voucher or the NFI voucher (with a follow up question as to whether they would prefer the \$10 in cash). The second was the type of transfer that they would prefer for all of assistance (cash, voucher fair, open market voucher or in-kind assistance). The responses for both questions varied among groups and areas.

For the additional \$10 voucher, focus groups in two areas (Mule and Kayna) consistently preferred that it go to food, in the other area (Bhukira) they wanted it added to NFI with the logic that household items were more difficult to obtain than food. When the potential for it to be provided in cash was queried, half of the beneficiary groups consulted expressed that cash would be preferred, on the basis that cash could be used for more needs. For those who still preferred vouchers, the reason was that they needed the items in the fair; one group of women expressed concerns that their husbands would use the money for alcohol (a male focus group in the same area expressed dismay that their wives did not have faith in them and said that they would not waste money).

Preference for the type of assistance varied among groups and was fairly evenly divided among cash, open market vouchers and food fairs. Preference was influenced by three factors – risk, flexibility and the assistance that had been received. The flexibility of cash was consistently cited as the reason behind preference for it, though some respondents also stated that cash would circumvent the problem of high prices in fairs. In-kind assistance was always ranked last because of its inflexibility. Risk – namely security – was the primary reason for preferring vouchers over cash; a smaller number of people consulted felt that there was a risk that cash might not be used in the best way, specifically by men. The type of assistance received also influenced preference. Open market vouchers were more preferred by those who had experienced this assistance, the same was true for those who had benefited from fairs. Fieldwork from the previous evaluation team indicated a preference for cash by those who had received it in Walikale because they could buy what they needed (they had also experienced NFI fairs, so those beneficiaries did have more of a point of comparison than others).

Preferences among the groups did not follow stereotypes that women always prefer assistance over which they are thought to have more control (e.g. food vouchers, food aid) and that men always prefer cash. Participants in one IDP male focus group stated that the risks for cash were too great, while a group of host family women in the same area expressed a preference for cash (when asked about the risks of large amounts of cash, one woman replied ‘we have God and our husbands.’).

In the three areas visited, the delay between the NFI and food assistance interventions was one day (in two sites) and one week (in the third site). When asked if they would prefer that the food assistance and RRMP interventions be implemented simultaneously or on different days, focus groups consistently expressed a preference for a separation between the interventions. The justification was that they would be rushed, which might result in poor decisions or items being stolen if they had to set them down while purchasing other things. They also expressed that transporting all the goods at once would be difficult. The evaluation team did not visit areas that had received the interventions at the same time, but NRC’s monitoring found that 84% of respondents who had experienced joint interventions felt that the model was a ‘good idea’ and that 93% felt that it had more advantages than disadvantages. It is therefore possible that those problems do not materialise in reality and / or that respondents are biased towards the model with which they are most familiar.

Given their preference for a separation between the food assistance and RRMP interventions, and owing to time constraints, focus groups were not systematically asked whether they would prefer a single voucher that could be used for either the food assistance or RRMP intervention. However, one group queried on this issue expressed a preference for a separation of the vouchers on the basis that it helped them to make decisions on how to respond to various household needs.

Vendors were asked this same question. Food vendors consulted unanimously were against having combined vouchers that could be used for either NFI or food, expressing that beneficiaries might prefer to spend it on NFI. In Kayna, NFI vendors preferred a combined voucher, based on the same logic that it would result in more NFI sales (interestingly, in Kayna, beneficiaries responded that they wanted the additional \$10 voucher to go to food, suggesting a higher demand for food than NFI). When a group of vendors in Kalonge were asked whether they thought that vendors should be able to bring additional food items (outside of the six commodities provided in AVSI fairs), they were not interested, and stated that any additional items should follow the same process of negotiating quantities and prices in advance, to prevent having unsold stock at the end of the fair. Food vendors’ preferences for a controlled and predictable voucher system indicate that they place great importance on minimising risks and maximising profits.

### *Most important changes*

When asked about the most important changes resulting from assistance, the most common response was improved household food consumption. This assertion is supported by monitoring findings on improvements in FCS – for IRC it increased from an average of 25 to 39 (52%) and for NRC from 20 to 46 (124%) (see Table 6 for indicators for all three partners). Focus groups reported that the assistance resulted in increased meals per day. AVSI monitoring found that the percentage of households eating two meals per day doubled after their interventions. Several participants cited increased diversity of foods consumed, weight gain (particularly for children) and improved children’s health. Changes in food consumption, though, are not sustained. Recipients reported that they eventually decrease the quantity or variety of their consumption. As stated previously, food assistance lasted from two weeks to two months. However, those consulted emphasised the importance of the assistance, stating that things were not as bad as before.

Having food needs taken care of meant that recipients could use the time that they had been spending to meet those needs for other purposes. For example, participants in two male IDP focus groups reported that they had been doing daily labour for food, and that they were now able to plant their own crops (on rented land). They rejected the notion that food assistance could make them stop working, in fact they said that it helped them to do so by giving them more energy. The food assistance also supported agricultural production through using the food as seed; NRC’s monitoring found that 24% of respondents had used some of their food for this purpose.

For the NRC additional cash transfer (\$25), the benefits cited included having better standing with health centres because debts were paid, children not being sent home from school (owing to non-payment of school fees), access to health services and starting small income generating activities (e.g. selling phone credit, raising small animals). While some stated that their small business activities were still continuing, one woman (who bought peanuts for roasting) indicated that the business activity had collapsed when her child became ill and she had to pay for health fees.

While RRMP was not within the scope of this evaluation, numerous women expressed that they were now ‘more beautiful’ because they had purchased pagnes (local fabric used for clothing) through the RRMP assistance. A few respondents also expressed pride in being able to offer visitors food, which they could not do previously.

**Table 6: Performance against programme indicators<sup>36</sup>**

Indicator	Proposed	Actual
NRC		
Food consumption score (% acceptable)	70%	68%
Coping strategies reduced	70%	70%
Non-sale of productive assets	75%	90%
Number of beneficiaries	39,400	97,409
Number of days after RRMP	12	1
Increase in meals per day	80%	71%
% of ‘assistance for other needs’ cash transfer not spent on food / NFI <sup>37</sup>	80%	Not available <sup>38</sup>
Non-sale of NFI assistance (% of HH not selling assistance)	80%	97%

<sup>36</sup> These figures come from each aid agency’s reporting and monitoring.

<sup>37</sup> It makes little sense to have a specific indicator on how a cash transfer not used. Not only does this indicator provide little insight on expenditure patterns and changes occurring as the result of the transfer, it defeats the purpose of providing cash if agencies insist that it be spent in a specific way.

<sup>38</sup> The question was not properly understood by the daily worker used for the PDM survey.

AVSI		
Food consumption score (% acceptable)	80%	42%
Meals per day (% moving from 1 to 2) <sup>39</sup>	80%	99%
Coping strategies (reduction in at least 3 coping strategies)	80%	
Number of days after RRMP assistance or humanitarian alert <sup>40</sup>	21	0
Number of workshops held for training staff	1	0
Meetings held (for sharing lessons)	2	2
IRC		
Food consumption score (% acceptable)	80%	32%
Food consumption score (% moving from poor to acceptable) <sup>41</sup>	80%	Not available
Meals per day (% moving from 1 to 2)	80%	98%
Food assistance provided within one month of alert	100%	83-96%
Non-sale of NFI assistance (% of HH not selling assistance)	80%	93%
Non-sale of food assistance (% of HH not selling assistance)	80%	100%
Presentations at inter-cluster	2	1
Lessons learned document	1	1
Creation of working group	1	In progress

### *Operational challenges*

NRC and AVSI faced some challenges with the delivery agents that they engaged for the distribution of cash transfers. The microfinance institution used by NRC in Walikale made commitments to which they did not adhere, such as assurances that they would have sufficient liquidity (including small bills) to provide the transfers without ruptures in payments and the engagement of two additional staff so that lines could be created specifically for the beneficiaries. When a shortage of small bills occurred, beneficiaries were grouped together to receive a large cash transfer that they subsequently divided using local money changers. The transfer amount required distributing \$0.50 (500 FC); the microfinance institution rounded down to the dollar (e.g. distributing \$25 instead of \$25.50). NRC staff stayed a few weeks longer in order to distribute the \$0.50 to beneficiaries.

In Fizi, AVSI engaged Airtel to provide mobile transfers. Airtel did not manage to transfer the money to the SIM cards of beneficiaries. Instead, they handed out cash to the beneficiaries upon presentation of their SIM card and verification that they were on the beneficiary list. While this process defeated several of the potential advantages of electronic transfers by turning them into manual ones, it did create a distribution channel for cash in areas where it might not otherwise have been available.

Recipients consulted did not report major problems with vendors (e.g. receiving incorrect change). One example raised was a vendor who was attempting to sell pre-packaged beans that weighed one kilogram less than indicated; the beneficiary indicated that the problem was resolved by NRC staff. NRC also came across a few cases where the vendors had false bottoms in baskets and attempted to fix scales, but these cases were quickly dealt with and the vendors were ejected from the fairs. Both

<sup>39</sup> A weakness of this indicator is that it assumes baseline value and end line values; it would be more appropriate to simply consider the increase in meals per day. The calculation here considers the number of households eating one meal per day was reduced by 98% following the intervention.

<sup>40</sup> This indicator should use either the RRMP intervention or humanitarian alert as the point of reference, since they are not the same.

<sup>41</sup> Unless individual households are being tracked, which is not practical and was not the case it is not possible to know the percentage of households that moved from poor to acceptable. It is possible to know the percentage change in households with poor FCS and the percentage change in households with acceptable FCS. However, the increase in acceptable FCS could be from households moving from 'borderline' to 'acceptable'.

vendors and beneficiaries in the two NRC sites expressed that NRC should be less hurried in organising the fair and undertaking the targeting.

The agencies did not come across any cases of fraud, though there have been attempts to counterfeit vouchers in the past. Security measures included changing the colour of the voucher for each fair (and limiting the number of people who know about the colour). A previous security measure for NRC had been to add small sticker holograms to each voucher, but applying them was time-consuming and locally procured holograms were not a high quality.

Counting paper vouchers was a time-consuming task for NRC. Depending on the size of the intervention, it required up to a week. The evaluator sent a query to the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) discussion group on possible solutions. Recommendations included using bar codes (with handheld scanners), counting machines (with high quality paper printed vouchers sourced from Rwanda), and pursuing electronic transfer options, like smart cards (see Box 2).<sup>42</sup> Other challenges, reflected elsewhere in this report, included targeting and running out of certain commodities in fairs (cited by groups in one of the three intervention areas).

### **Box 2: Electronic transfers in DRC**

The infrastructure in DRC for making financial transactions, particularly in rural areas, is limited. Banks, microfinance institutions and money transfer agents are often not present in zones where humanitarian interventions take place or lack the capacity to handle large numbers of transactions. A few aid agencies involved in cash and voucher programming have therefore explored the potential for electronic transfers. Electronic transfers, or e-transfers, are transfers that rely on digital payment systems; the main forms of e-transfers used by agencies are card-based transfers (e.g. smart cards, contactless cards, ATM cards) and mobile transfers.<sup>43</sup>

Mobile money is relatively new in DRC; network coverage and the capacity / flexibility of mobile companies involved in mobile transfers are weaknesses. AVSI engaged Airtel, which ultimately distributed SIM cards but did not transfer the funds onto them; rather they paid beneficiaries upon presentation of their SIM card and verification that they were on the beneficiary list. Other aid agencies in DRC reportedly have had a similar experience. This suggests that the nascent mobile money system in DRC remains ill-prepared for the types and volumes of transactions required by aid agencies.

Mercy Corps piloted a contactless payment card through the UNICEF Alternative Responses for Communities in Crisis (ARCC) programme. People familiar with the experience noted that it eliminated the time normally required to count vouchers, that beneficiaries did not have problems with the technologies and that some of the vendors preferred the card system. However, unlike paper vouchers, where beneficiaries can keep track of how many vouchers they have left, it was more difficult to track the balance remaining on their card. The small number of point of sale terminals limited the number of vendors and therefore the number of beneficiaries that could be served in a day, and transactions by individual vendors took longer than with paper vouchers. Many of those weaknesses could be addressed by replacing point of sale terminals with a mobile phones / mobile applications – a process reportedly underway.

However, the efficiency of e-transfers is greatest when they are used for multiple transfers rather

<sup>42</sup> Concern Worldwide had used counting machines. Their vouchers were all identical values, whereas the vouchers in these interventions were not. The CaLP D-group respondent who suggested using counting machines also suggested that several be purchased, as they can break down.

<sup>43</sup> Sossouvi, 2013

than one-off activities like fairs, because the investments required to put the system in place (e.g. hardware, sensitisation) are eventually offset by the low marginal cost of additional transfers.<sup>44</sup> A CaLP study on the efficiency of e-transfers concluded that evidence does not suggest that they are systematically cheaper than manual transfers.<sup>45</sup> The eventual report on the Mercy Corps / ARRC pilot should be useful for understanding the appropriateness of electronic transfers in fairs and whether electronic transfers are ultimately more efficient than manual ones.

## Efficiency

Efficiency considers the cost of alternative approaches to achieving the same output. There is a strong case that this intervention was efficient compared to in-kind food assistance, and it was undoubtedly much more efficient than if non-RRMP aid agencies had been engaged to provide food assistance. The main driver of intervention's efficiency was the fact that the food assistance programme benefitted from systems already in place through RRMP, reducing the resources required compared to if a food assistance intervention were implemented independently. Resources were saved through combined targeting. A typical targeting mission requires at least one vehicle and eight staff for five days. Joint monitoring of the interventions also saved time and money where it was done. Efficiency has increased over time as agencies became more experienced; AVSI indicated that they were able to serve 800 households per day, while their first fairs could accommodate 500 households.

Of the different cash-based approaches, cash transfers were generally the most efficient intervention in terms of the staff time required. Cash transfer programmes eliminate the following tasks associated with vouchers - negotiating prices with beneficiaries and traders, creating contracts with dozens of vendors, training vendors on the voucher system, paying vendors, hiring daily labourers to set up the site and counting vouchers. For AVSI, the daily cost for implementing a fair was 2.4 times more expensive than for distributing cash. Cash transfers did require negotiating a contract with a financial service provider or other type of delivery agent and putting steps in place to ensure that they meet their obligations. Given the weak capacity of these providers and the fluid business environment in DRC, this takes time. NRC's intervention in Walikale though necessitated a long involvement, in part because NRC stayed longer to ensure that beneficiaries got the \$0.50 that the microfinance institution failed to distribute.

For NRC, market vouchers were more efficient than fairs, because they did not require the time and resources to establish a fair site. For vendors, they eliminate the costs of storing items near the fair site. AVSI, which implemented several joint fairs, found that combining the RRMP and food assistance fairs increased the efficiency of both interventions since certain costs could be combined.

A cost efficiency comparison with in-kind food aid would require an accurate estimation of the cost of delivering food aid in these areas, including costs incurred in the purchase and shipping of food aid from its origin to the DRC, local transport and storage and staff time. In-kind aid is difficult to fully cost because that information is usually not easily available, complete or comparable across different agencies, programmes and intervention areas. The fact that the cash and vouchers interventions involved more locally produced food compared to in-kind food aid, which is usually transported from outside of DRC, suggests cost savings on transport and storage. At the same time, vouchers interventions require substantial staff time to plan and implement. With AVSI and NRC doing a small amount of in-kind aid in 2014, this presents an opportunity to look more closely at comparative costs between different types of transfers.

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<sup>44</sup> O'Brien et al., 2013; Creti, 2014

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien et al., 2013

Efficiency also considers costs to beneficiaries and any sale or exchange of assistance at a loss. The main cost was payment for transport by some beneficiaries. In Bhukira, which was a two-hour walk from the fair, beneficiaries that chose to have their food transported by motorcycle had to provide the equivalent of \$3 worth of food or agree to work in the motorcycle driver's field for three days. In the other two sites visited, no beneficiaries consulted paid for transport.

Beneficiaries consulted in Kayna, who had received the \$25 cash transfer, indicated that some of the dollar bills had small tears in them (in DRC, dollars with small tears are not accepted as payment or are only accepted at a discount). As a result, some beneficiaries had to exchange the torn bills for perfect ones at a loss. An example was given that a \$10 torn bill could be exchanged for \$6 in undamaged bills; another respondent said that a teacher would count a \$10 bill as an \$8-\$9 payment for school fees. The two focus groups in Kayna that raised this issue indicated that it was a common rather than isolated problem in the intervention.

In the sites visited, there was no evidence of resale of items purchased with food and NFI vouchers. Those consulted stated that they did not sell items because they were able to get what they needed. However, there does appear to have been some resale in other areas. IRC monitoring found 40% of households benefiting from RRMP and food assistance fairs in Mungombe sold some NFI items to pay for medical care or buy more preferred food products (e.g. meat, fish).<sup>46</sup> However, AVSI did monitoring in the same area and did not obtain the same result. NRC monitoring found food and household items were sold respectively by 5% and 3% of beneficiaries. For the 5% of beneficiaries who sold food assistance, the vast majority (82%) sold less than one-fifth of their food, their motivations were mainly to buy other types of food (32%), pay for health services (29%) and reimburse debts (21%).

## Coordination

While not a formal OECD-DAC criterion, coordination is an important issue to consider in evaluation, and considers the use of instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in cohesive and effective manner.<sup>47</sup> There were several strengths related to coordination. The food assistance resulted in a more holistic response to populations affected by new displacements, compared to the previous disconnect between RRMP and food assistance.

Coordination between RRMP and food assistance was greatly facilitated by the fact that same aid agencies were providing both types of assistance. NRC and Solidarités (an RRMP partner) also coordinated closely in an intervention where both agencies were providing RRMP assistance and NRC was also providing food assistance. A staff member from Solidarités, who was familiar with the intervention, expressed that it would have been much more difficult if a non-RRMP agency had provided the food assistance because that agency would not already be familiar with the RRMP approaches and systems.

The linking of food assistance and RRMP has resulted in sharing lessons and approaches between the RRMP and food assistance teams within agencies and among the three partners. Food assistance and RRMP managers have exchanged on targeting challenges and criteria. IRC, which was newer to the food voucher approach, benefited from AVSI's tools and experience, and the two agencies implemented a joint intervention in Kamituga. AVSI and NRC have shared lessons in past programming cycles through workshops.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> IRC DRC, 2013

<sup>47</sup> Beck, 2006

<sup>48</sup> For the 2013 intervention, this evaluation is taking the place of a workshop learning exercise.

In the case of NRC and AVSI, coordination between the food assistance and RRMP teams has improved over time. One NRC key informant stressed that there were challenges when the approach was first put into place, describing it as a ‘forced marriage’ between RRMP and food assistance. However, the RRMP Coordinators consulted did not feel that the food assistance weighed down RRMP. On the contrary, they viewed the combination of RRMP and food assistance as advantageous, by meeting needs that RRMP could not and through efficiency gains.

This close internal coordination was promoted by the flexibility of ECHO as a donor. This factor is illustrated by NRC’s experience of receiving funding for similar activities through WFP. In 2013, WFP received funding from ECHO to provide the same type of food assistance interventions – rapid cash-based food assistance in response to recent displacement. WFP approached NRC to be the implementing partner. The main difference with the WFP programme and the ECHO one was that WFP was the aid agency through which funding was channelled. Other factors, like the general objective (rapid food assistance in response to displacement), modalities (cash-based) and implementing agency (NRC) were the same. In theory, the operational challenges and results should have been the same. In practice, the contract took months to negotiate and, owing to that delay, NRC had to spend the money in less than two months. This delay in part resulted from differences in how NRC and WFP envisioned the programme moving forward, specifically that NRC desired the same degree of flexibility to determine intervention areas, beneficiary numbers and approaches. By contrast, WFP is more rigid with its planning and typically decides its interventions well in advance (where they will be, how many people will be assisted, etc.) - which is at odds with the RRMP approach and one reason that food aid had been identified as a gap in the RRMP evaluations.

AVSI had a more positive experience implementing voucher interventions with WFP, but still faced challenges related to the flexibility of WFP compared to ECHO. Two of the three interventions that AVSI implemented with WFP funding were one-month contracts and the third was a two-month contract. This short duration poses problems for contracting staff. WFP was also more prescriptive about the value of the voucher transfer.

The food assistance interventions were coordinated with other aid actors through the Food Security Cluster and the sharing of information in the Comité to Pilotage (by the RRMP Manager, who was familiar with the food assistance interventions). Key informants reported that challenges facing the Food Security Cluster included gaps in sustained leadership and the large number of organisations attending meetings, making it appropriate for information-sharing but not for strategic coordination and decision-making on food assistance interventions. As the Group Technique Assistance Alimentaire in South Kivu was newly formed, its effectiveness as a more strategic forum remains to be seen. There is not a technical food assistance group in Goma and the decision-making for the food assistance interventions does not entail a formal approach like RRMP. However, there is no obvious need for a new coordination structure solely to fulfil this purpose, particularly given that the Food Security Cluster leads and RRMP partners all attend the Comité de Pilotage.

An opportunity for increased coordination and efficiency would be combining the activities through more joint fairs and piloting mixed fairs and cash transfers where the transfers could be spent on both food and non-food assistance. This approach would result in more flexibility about how recipients could spend their transfers, and therefore potentially increase effectiveness. However, mixed fairs would require even more flexibility from ECHO and UNICEF, and there was not an appetite for this model from beneficiaries or from food vendors (see preference). Joint fairs are not always practical because the food assistance requires more time to assess food markets.

## **Impact**

Impact refers to the wider effects of an intervention on individuals, communities and institutions; impacts can be intended and unintended, positive and negative.<sup>49</sup> The most relevant impacts for this intervention are those related to traders participating in the voucher programme and other economic benefits. The food vouchers resulted in \$3.9 million in sales for vendors. The cash transfers resulted in an injection of \$88,720 by AVSI and €249,134 (~\$339,000) by NRC.

The \$3.9m was paid to 498 traders; the average payment was \$5,534 per trader (see Table 7 and Figure 1). Traders reported that the profits earned in a single intervention could take months to earn under normal circumstances. They reported that profits were used for their family's needs, school fees, metal sheeting for roofs, purchase of small parcels of land, debt repayment, dowry payment, and investment in their businesses through increased stock. One vendor purchased a new motorcycle (which costs about \$800). Another, who had been displaced from his village and eventually settled in the area, used the money to build his own house. Traders are not dependent on the voucher activities, rather their inclusion and subsequent profits are more akin to a windfall.

Because of the significant profits to be made, there is substantial demand for inclusion as a trader. Some agencies in the past have even done lotteries to determine inclusion. In one site visited for this evaluation, discussions were held with traders about the intervention, and dozens of vendors showed up because people assumed that the agencies were registering traders. One evaluation team member literally had to use his entire body weight to shut a door as traders were trying to push through to join the discussion, even though it had been explained that no registration was taking place.

In the three sites visited, there were different views about whether the selection process was fair. In Kalonge, a group of vendors who participated and a group who had not both expressed that the process was fair and transparent. Two vendors consulted in Mule, which was part of the same intervention, felt that too much power had been given to the Fédération des Entreprises du Congo (FEC) (a national business association with local branches). In Kayna, while the process was perceived as fair, vendors who did not participate expressed that a lottery system would have been fairer. The previous evaluation team found key informants in one site were satisfied that the agency had not gone through the FEC in that case, out of concern for their influence. Given the high demand for inclusion in the intervention, the fact that there were not many complaints about the process from traders who did not participate suggests that the vendor selection process went well in the areas visited.

Key informants in Mule expressed the fair had resulted in increased trade in their village. In Kirumba, traders who had not participated in the intervention stated that a positive benefit was that it had increased the circulation of dollars in the zone. In general though, not much is known on the economic impacts of cash and voucher interventions in DRC. This would be insightful given the millions of dollars being injected annually by humanitarian actors through cash-based programmes.

**Table 7: Payments to food vendors**

	NRC	AVSI**	IRC	Total
Total vendors	172	111	215	498
Total payments	\$1,232,162	\$1,397,907	\$1,293,191	\$3,923,260
Average payment	\$3,836	\$12,594	\$5,563	\$6,534
Median payment	\$2,170	\$10,686	\$4,264	\$4,670
Largest payment	\$23,600	\$38,122	\$33,582	\$38,122

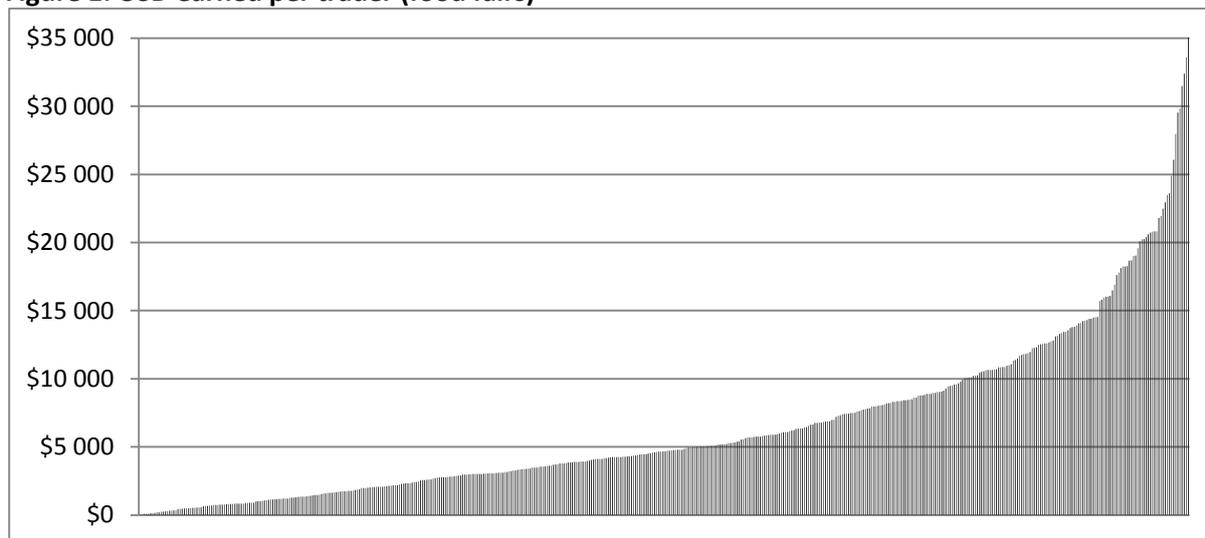
<sup>49</sup> Adapted from OECD-DAC (2001) *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-based Management* and OECD-DAC (1999) *Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies*.

Smallest payment	\$39	\$1,874	\$127	\$39
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\* The NRC figures draw from data on total payments (using an exchange rate of 1.36 dollars per euro) and lists of payments to vendors; the latter were not complete so this table underestimates the total number of vendors.

\*\* AVSI vendors worked in 'solidarity groups', whereby one vendor was registered, who handled the payment to others in the group. As a result, the total number of vendors was greater and the average payment was less than indicated in this table.

**Figure 1: USD earned per trader (food fairs)**



### Protection and gender

Protection refers to the safety, dignity and integrity of affected populations, including risks related to gender. Protection also considers people who face constraints related to factors like age, health status and family status (e.g. widowed). Protection measures put in place by the aid agencies included contact with armed actors in the region, protection and security assessments, and having people with mobile phones placed at intervals along the road when beneficiaries were returning with their goods.

In the areas visited, there were no reports of theft and security problems travelling to and from the intervention sites (e.g. payment at barriers), nor were any major problems reported by the aid agencies. Security measures put in place by aid agencies were appreciated. NRC monitoring found that 80% of beneficiaries felt safe during the receipt of assistance and that 3% of cash transfer beneficiaries had some of their cash stolen when returning to their home.

The fact that some households benefited from assistance and others did not resulted in jealousies in two of the areas visited. For example, one beneficiary focus group described that people said things like, 'where is your food now?' and 'now you can work in my field' when beneficiaries had finished the food purchased. However, those consulted said that there were no major problems for the beneficiaries, and NRC monitoring found that only 4% of beneficiaries had reported threats from neighbours. The fact that beneficiaries shared food assistance with others might have mitigated potential problems (see below). In the third site, Mule, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries stressed that there was a strong solidarity between displaced households and the local population and that the assistance had not lessened that solidarity.

Some local guides and leaders who assisted with the identification of households did face problems because they were blamed for 'erasing' the names of some households (when in fact the aid

agencies, and not the guides, had eliminated those households by applying the targeting criteria). In Mule, participants in a non-beneficiary focus group gave the example that they 'do not say hello to the guides any more'. In Kayna, the IDP guides were told by NRC that they were not eligible for assistance after they had been selected by the local population (on the basis that they were 'working' for NRC). However, the guides were paid only \$5/day for a few days of work, while the RRMP and food assistance was worth \$140 (for a household of six). Given that they were displaced, at a minimum they should have been surveyed for potential inclusion.

There was some sharing of food assistance, mainly in the form of IDP beneficiaries sharing with their host families if they did not benefit, as well as with other displaced households not included in the assistance. For example, one group indicated that a household with 10kg of manioc flour might share 3kg with their host family; another stated that a household with 16kg of rice might give away two gobelets (0.5kg) each to a few families. Those consulted indicated that this sharing was done voluntarily and primarily because host families had helped them. While the non-beneficiary host families consulted appreciated the sharing, they felt that the amount was not very much and that they should have been included in the assistance. Focus groups reported no or extremely limited sharing of NFI items purchased in the RRMP fairs (participants in one beneficiary focus group asked the facilitator, 'why would we share our assistance?'; in another group, participants interrupted the facilitator with a local expression meaning 'impossible!'). Cash reportedly was never shared. When asked about the sharing of cash by households who had received the \$25 transfer, several focus group participants laughed and indicated that cash would never be shared because they needed it so much.

Beneficiaries did express that some vendors – and to a lesser extent, NGO staff – were rude and impatient with them. A guide stated that some people became stressed when agents conducting targeting would pressure them to answer questions more quickly; he expressed concern that 'people who are already traumatised should not be traumatised again'. Some staff consulted who were involved in targeting exercises expressed that they faced tensions and in some cases threats to their safety from local populations who thought that they were responsible for excluding them. In one location, staff essentially had to flee because the situation became so tense. These examples underscore the sensitivities of the targeting process and the stresses facing both staff and local populations.

The woman of the household was encouraged to be the direct recipient of the transfer by all three aid agencies, meaning that she usually received the cash or vouchers (ultimately it was up to the household to decide). No focus groups, including the male ones, raised any problems with this approach. In the case of the cash transfer, those consulted indicated that women received it but then handed the money over to their husbands. Thus aid agencies should be aware that designating a woman as the household recipient does not mean that she will control the assistance. The women consulted still preferred this system of having the women as recipients of the cash – this way they knew exactly how much money was received (and their husbands could not pretend that it was less).

Beneficiaries consulted indicated that decisions were made jointly between the husband and wife about how vouchers and cash transfers would be spent, though they indicated that the husband had the last word (which follows normal decision-making patterns). In some cases children were also involved in decisions. NRC monitoring found that, for the cash transfers, the decision on its use was made by the wife in half of the households surveyed, followed by the husband (26%) and all of the family (21%). The benefits of the intervention cited by men and women were similar.

## 4 Conclusion

Overall the ECHO-funded cash-based food assistance was a very appropriate and effective response, with a commendable degree of flexibility. It is easy to overlook the simple fact that interventions that vary their approaches according to the context, that are closely coordinated with other assistance and that do not have predetermined intervention areas and beneficiary numbers are rare in humanitarian response.

### Conclusions

#### *OECD-DAC criteria*

The intervention was appropriate given the prioritisation of food needs by those consulted, and the long-standing observation that a more rapid and flexible approach to food assistance was needed. The linking of the food assistance with RRMP was logical because it resulted in multisector assistance for affected populations, and cash and voucher approaches were appropriate in the intervention areas given markets, risk and preference. The close ties with RRMP eliminated the need to create parallel systems for rapid food assessments and targeting, as well as promoted efficiency by using the same aid agencies for both types of assistance.

Food assistance can be provided through in-kind food aid, vouchers and cash. Only two of the three approaches were available to the aid agencies, which affects the ability to assist solely on the basis of need, given that some areas could not be assisted with vouchers or cash. This influenced the coverage of assistance to a small degree. Both AVSI and NRC have the option to provide food aid in the most recent cycle of ECHO funding. At the same time, if one considers the possibility of extending this food assistance model to other RRMP partners, it is not very practical for each RRMP partner to establish comparative advantages in food aid, given the level of investment that would be required compared to the extent to which it would be used. Other food aid actors, like WFP, could bring added value by planning to do in-kind interventions in areas like Shabunda that are known to be inappropriate or very challenging for cash-based interventions.

There are nearly always trade-offs between speed and quality of targeting in rapid interventions. The evidence of exclusion error, even if not large, suggests a need to shift away slightly from the pressure for speed, while recognising that targeting will never be perfect in a complicated context like DRC. Whether to be more open about targeting criteria, which increases transparency but increases risks of inclusion error, is up to individual agencies. The important message is that the risks of different approaches need to be recognised and dealt with to the extent possible, and that aid agencies should take reasonable steps to avoid the exclusion of the people that their programme is intended to assist.

Concerning the targeting criteria, it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion on whether households with borderline FCS should be narrowed down using additional criteria. More analysis on the number and types of households excluded on the basis of not meeting those additional criteria would be useful. There are two scenarios that would suggest that those additional criteria should be dropped. If the vast majority of 'borderline' households meet at least one of the criteria, then asking about and filtering for additional criteria is an inefficient use of time. The second scenario would be if analysis of excluded 'borderline' households suggests that they are in fact no less vulnerable than those who are included. Given that the FCS threshold does not appear to be resulting in inclusion error, this evaluation found no reason to lower it from 42. Whether or not more host families should be assisted is a matter of judgement on how best to use resources. An alternative would be to assist more host families with less assistance.

While RRMP was outside the scope of this evaluation, the raising of the 'NFI vulnerability score' threshold is concerning. The RRMP targeting process is already excluding some households affected by displacement who face significant needs and stresses, and who would have been helped in earlier programming cycles. The decrease in funding could be managed through reducing the value of the voucher rather than making the criteria stricter.

The intervention was effective. Beneficiaries were able to access quality and locally preferred foods and overall were very satisfied with the cash-based approaches. Timeliness and reliability were significantly improved from the previous approach of relying on other food assistance actors to complement RRMP. The voucher process was well understood owing to strong sensitisation. However, in areas where cash is used, the sensitisation by NRC was arguably too prescriptive by telling beneficiaries that the cash was meant to purchase specific goods and services. The duration that the food assistance lasts varied among households and intervention areas, and it could be made more standard in several possible ways – increasing the transfer value for households located further from intervention sites to cover transport, reducing the transfer value for host families, reducing the transfer value for larger households when 'scooping' is used and using the 'scooping' approach where it is not. The alternative is to accept that the individual circumstances of households will result in variations in how long it lasts.

Prices for certain items were high, and aid agencies are considering whether and how this should be addressed. Vouchers are cartels – they empower a certain number of businesses to control a market and recipients have no option but to purchase their goods through them. Aid agencies determine how much recipients will spend, with whom they will spend it and the items on which it will be spent. Agencies therefore must decide what kind of cartel they want to create – the number of vendors included, their size / capacity, local vendors or ones from farther afield, etc. All of these decisions have implications for programming. Smaller businesses do not have the stock capacity of economies of scale of larger ones, but supporting local vendors is positive from the standpoint of promoting local development and livelihoods. A reasonable assumption is that investments in traders from the intervention areas would more greatly benefit the local economy compared to working with larger vendors who are mainly based outside of it. If the prices negotiated by beneficiaries and vendors are higher than local market prices, agencies should verify the reason and determine if it is acceptable. Insisting on lower prices might favour larger stockists over small local vendors. The aid agencies have been considering many these issues; discussing them in future meetings and learning events might prove beneficial.

Looking outside of the intervention's intended outcomes, the most significant impact was the \$3.9m going to traders participating in the voucher scheme. While it is evident that large amounts of money are being injected, little is known about the impact of these cash injections. As there are numerous aid agencies in eastern DRC implementing cash-based interventions, research on their economic impacts would be valuable. Given the political and conflict dynamics in eastern DRC, as well as the dire need to support development, the question 'where does the money go?' is particularly important in this setting.

The different monitoring indicators used by agencies poses a challenge for learning and evidence. Harmonising the monitoring approaches, at least to a certain degree, would provide a more coherent picture of the likely effectiveness of the interventions across the different areas. Standardising all of the monitor tools is not necessary given that aid agencies have their own internal monitoring systems (though standard tools would be very practical for future evaluation and learning exercises, and for other RRMP agencies if this approach were replicated. At a minimum a few shared indicators would be advisable. Above all, monitoring should encompass essential issues and the monitoring process needs to be nimble enough to inform programming.

### *Coordination / complementarity of the food assistance intervention with RRMP*

Coordination between food assistance and RRMP assistance was maximised because the same aid agencies provided both types of assistance. This complementarity resulted in increased efficiency by sharing resources and improved coverage of needs. However, the weaknesses of RRMP influence the food assistance, namely the pressure to intervene quickly. Overall, the model of directly funding RRMP partners to provide food assistance makes sense both donors and aid agencies by increasing the efficiency and coherence of assistance through a multisector approach. Above all, it makes sense for populations who do not divide their household needs into sectors.

The next logical step is to pilot mixed interventions, meaning interventions where the transfers could be used for food and non-food items, if the donors financing the respective programmes are willing. For cash transfers, this approach would simply require combining the value of the RRMP assistance and the value of the food assistance to provide a single cash transfer. For vouchers, this would necessitate working with vendors in an effort to ensure minimum amounts of stock, recognising that a mixed voucher increases the uncertainty about what beneficiaries would purchase. One option is to 'test the waters' by providing a certain amount of vouchers (e.g. \$10- \$20) at joint fairs that can be spent on either type of assistance. Partners could consult with other NGOs in DRC that have implemented multisector fairs. Mixed interventions would raise administrative issues about reconciling programmatic costs and the transfers different budgets, which would need to be thought through in advance.

Piloting of mixed interventions is not an urgent priority – vendors and beneficiaries are happy with the separation, it is administratively simpler for aid agencies and the food assistance component often requires more planning. However, it is possible that preference is biased towards experience, and there are obvious potential gains for efficiency and effectiveness if agencies can become as adept at multisector fairs as they are at food and NFI fairs. Mixed interventions could lay the framework for rapid multisector assistance at a large scale. Therefore they should be trialled if a conducive context is identified, assuming that donors are on board.

### *Advantages and shortcomings of the different partners' approaches*

Several good practices were identified. The main ones are undertaking response analysis and varying the cash-based approach based on the context, conducting thorough sensitisation on the voucher systems, adjusting items in fairs according to local preferences and adjusting the transfer value according to local prices. The main variation in the approaches of the partners was that NRC adjusted the transfer value according to household and had increased variety of food commodities. Different targeting processes were used, but because all three sites visited had experienced the same targeting approach, it is not possible to draw conclusions on whether one targeting approach was more appropriate than another.

The practice of adjusting the transfer according to household size worked well for NRC and their beneficiaries consulted, the same was true of the provision of a standard transfer size by AVSI. Therefore individual agencies should decide which approach to take according to context. There is a case to be made for increasing the variety of items in future AVSI fairs, which would offer recipients more choice and potentially lead to better improvements in dietary diversity, but this evaluation cannot draw a conclusion given that beneficiaries consulted did not express a desire for more variety in the site visited. NRC has the largest variety of interventions, and AVSI could explore open market interventions in the future in areas with sufficient market capacity. Of greater importance though is that the aid agencies are analysing response options and selecting food assistance interventions according to the context. In an unpredictable context like DRC, such a flexible approach is critical for providing timely and appropriate food assistance in response to new displacements.

## Recommendations

### *Agencies implementing cash-based food assistance*

- *Continue with good practices identified in this evaluation.* These include including determining the most appropriate food assistance intervention based on the context, adjusting the transfer value based on local prices and including items in fairs based on local preferences.
- *Increase the variety of items in fairs where this is practical and appropriate.* The fairs and open market vouchers should have as much variety as is practical considering local food availability and preferences. In certain contexts, staple commodities might remain the most appropriate approach. Aid agencies should make decisions on a context by context basis.
- *Consider all displaced and returnee households in the targeting process.* All displaced and returnee households identified in programming areas should be considered for inclusion in the intervention, even if the number is greater than that identified through the MSA. If it is, the agencies should take sensible steps to determine whether this is a result of inclusion error, an underestimation by the MSA or population movements since the MSA. The *de facto* solution must not be to stop surveying affected populations or skipping households. Reasonable measures should be in place to avoid and catch possible exclusion error, including households away from their dwelling during the targeting. Guides should not be excluded from consideration for assistance.
- *Do not make the criteria for inclusion in the food assistance stricter.* Aid agencies should not lower the FCS cut-off from 42, unless they find convincing evidence that the threshold is resulting in the inclusion of households that should not benefit from assistance.
- *Undertake analysis on the targeting criteria and households eliminated through the targeting process.* This analysis should consider the number and types of households excluded because of the criteria (i.e. those eliminated because they have acceptable FCS, those eliminated because they have borderline FCS and do not meet additional criteria). If the analysis finds that vulnerable households are being excluded, then the targeting approach should be changed, such as through dropping additional criteria.
- *Review how host families and local vulnerable populations are targeted.* The decision to survey host families and local vulnerable populations is made on the spot by field agents. Aid agencies should internally review whether this approach is the most appropriate and if additional guidance is required.
- *Establish common indicators and explore the potential for more standardised monitoring tools.* At a minimum agencies should report on a small number of common indicators, such as changes in average FCS and changes in percentage of households with poor, borderline and acceptable FCS. Questions that do not inform the intervention or reporting to donors should be eliminated. Data collected should be analysed with sufficient speed and flexibility to inform the intervention.
- *Pilot mixed interventions (cash, market voucher, fair).* If the donors of ECHO-funded food assistance and RRMP allow for it and a conducive context is identified, agencies should pilot mixed interventions where there are no restrictions on the amount of the transfer that can be spent on RRMP NFI items and food.
- *Plan for potential problems with microfinance institutions and other cash delivery agents.* Aid agencies should keep in mind that assurances by cash delivery agents related to their capacity might not materialise in practice. They should avoid cash transfer amounts that require small bills and ensure that beneficiaries can exchange any damaged bills with the delivery agent or the aid agency.
- *Do not be overly prescriptive about how cash transfers are used.* Aid agencies are justified in explaining to beneficiaries why they are giving them money. However, households though have multiple priorities, and aid agencies should not attempt to restrict how cash is used solely to correspond to their own objectives. If food is indeed a high priority as identified assessments, the cash will be used for it.

- *Explore options for decreasing or eliminating the time required to count vouchers.* Options include counting machines, bar codes and electronic transfers. A CaLP D-Group discussion thread exists on this topic and includes contact information for aid agencies that have pursued / are pursuing these mechanisms.<sup>50</sup>
- *Continue to share lessons among food assistance partners and between food assistance programmes and RRMP.* A practical exercise would be for partners to review the findings and recommendations of this evaluation and determine any priority actions resulting from it. The issues of high prices in fairs and the types of vendors being supported by voucher interventions should be considered as a topic for discussion in future learning events.

#### *ECHO*

- *Continue the model of directly funding of RRMP partners to provide to complementary food assistance.* To the extent that rapid food responses are required and RRMP partners remain in place, the current model is a highly appropriate one for responding to those needs. ECHO should share lessons with other donors and encourage the approach in other RRMP intervention areas as appropriate.
- *Consider funding research on the economic impacts of cash and voucher programmes in eastern DRC.* This research could consider multiplier effects, the types of traders and businesses benefiting from the interventions, links to conflict and political dynamics. The scope should consider all cash based interventions in DRC rather than those funded through this intervention.
- *Allow for the piloting of mixed cash and voucher interventions where recipients can purchase food and NFI according to their preference.* A mixed intervention might result in some ECHO food assistance funding being used by beneficiaries for purposes other than food.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://dgroups.org/groups/calp/calp-en>

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## Annex 1: Key informants and focus group discussions

### Key informants interviewed

Name	Organisation	Position
Achu Samba Awa	NRC	Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator
Anna Piccinni	IRC	Grants Manager
Anne-France White	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Annabelle Vasseur	ECHO	Assistant Technique - Bukavu
Cecilia Pietrobono	UNICEF	ARCC Programme Coordinator
Chiara Gaburri	NRC	Food Security Programme Manager
Domitillé Galli	NRC	RRMP Coordinator
David Mudilo	WFP / Food Security Cluster	Co-Responsable Cluster Sécurité Alimentaire
Filippo Mazzarelli	UNICEF	RRMP Coordinator
Frédéric Bonamy	DG ECHO	Assistant Technique - Goma
Giacomo Fassi	AVSI	Chef de Projet - Sécurité Alimentaire
Guillaume Kahomboshi	FAO / Food Security Cluster	Food Security Cluster Lead
Lucie Eches	Solidarités international	Coordinatrice RRMP
Pietro de Nicolai	AVSI	Coordinateur RRMP
Sonja Dixon	NRC	Head of Finance
Steven Michel	UNICEF	Emergency Specialist

### Focus group discussions

Site	IDP - Benef		Host - Benef		Host - Non-benef		IDP - Non-benef		Leaders		Vendors		Non-vendors		Total persons
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
Kayna	13	9	15	4	4	0	1	0	1	9	7	12			<b>75</b>
Bukira (Massambo)	16	7	0	0	1	6	14	12	1	5	2	4	4	2	<b>74</b>
Mule (Kalonge)	12	5	9	10	14	0	12	0	6	19	0	2			<b>89</b>
Kalonge											1	15	6	6	<b>28</b>
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>266</b>

<b>Total groups</b>	<b>21</b>
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**Mixed group** These groups combined men and women or different types of households (i.e. host family, IDP)

## Annex 2: Evaluation questions

### Appropriateness and relevance

- Have aid agencies accurately identified priority needs?
- Did the food assistance programme objectives correspond to priority needs?
- Were the food assistance approaches (i.e. vouchers and cash) appropriate to mitigate negative impacts at the household level and meet food needs?
- Was the design of the programme appropriate to achieve the objectives, including the use of cash and vouchers and the complementarity with RRMP?
- Was the targeting approach appropriate, including the linking of food assistance with NFI targeting? Did the food assistance interventions succeed in reaching the most vulnerable people? Did the provision of cash and vouchers (as opposed to other forms of assistance) appear to influence the targeting process (at both the geographic and household levels)?
- How harmonised are the food assistance approaches between the different partners (e.g. the types of transfers provided, the calculation of transfer values)?
- Were protection risks considered in the design of the programme?
- Was the monitoring system appropriate and did the agencies take into account monitoring results and feedback during implementation?

### Effectiveness

- Have the food assistance interventions met their objectives?
- Was the assistance timely?
- How did recipients spend the various transfers?
- What changes occurred as a result of the food assistance?
- In the case of vouchers, did the fairs / traders provide the goods that recipients needed? Were the prices and quality of the goods adequate? Were people able to access fair sites with relative ease and understand the process?
- In the case of cash, were recipients able to purchase the goods and services that they needed? Were they able to access their cash transfers with relative ease? Were they able to spend the cash transfers with relative ease?
- What type of assistance would beneficiaries have preferred and why (e.g. cash, voucher, in-kind, combination, other types of programmes)?
- Were the transfer values and duration appropriate to meet programme objectives?
- Were there any major challenges encountered in delivering the assistance?
- Were there any delays? If so, what caused the delays and what were the consequences?
- What were the main benefits of the intervention? What were the main downsides? Were there any missed opportunities?

### Coherence and coordination

- Has the integrated approach (RRMP + food assistance) resulted in positive outcomes for beneficiaries?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the coordination between emergency food assistance and the RRMP interventions? What were the results of this coordination?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of coordination of the aid agencies among themselves, with the other relevant actors (e.g. food security cluster, microfinance institutions, government)? How could coordination be improved?
- Were there any missed opportunities related to coordination and complementarity of the food

assistance with RRMP?

Impact

- Were there any evident impacts (positive or negative) on the local economy, non-beneficiaries, community relations and intra-household relations?
- What types of traders benefited from the intervention (e.g. small, medium, large; how many; from local areas, etc.)?

Protection

- Has the programme created any challenges or opportunities for contributing to the safety of recipients?
- Has the programme created any problems for people who face constraints related to gender, age, health status, etc.?

Efficiency

- Was the approach of complementing RRMP with food assistance by RRMP partners an efficient way to respond to beneficiaries' household needs? What are the advantages and shortcomings of this model?
- Are there ways that efficiency can be improved in the future (in general and specifically related to the coordination with RRMP)?
- Did recipients need to pay money to access fairs, distribution sites or markets?