

6 Key Points to Address:

Using Learning to Strengthen Cash and Voucher Assistance in the 2019 Drought Response in Somalia

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June, 2019

According to a special alert by FAO on 15 May 2019, more than 2.2 million people, almost 18% of the population of Somalia, are expected to face severe food insecurity between July and September 2019. Household resilience has been undermined by recurrent climatic shocks, overstretched social support networks and declining humanitarian assistance. As the response scales up, cash and voucher assistance (CVA) again forms a key part of the plan.

Evaluations indicate that the 2017 drought response was effective in many ways. They also show that important lessons from 2011 were not applied and highlight opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency. The six points below draw together and build on recommendations and reflections drawn from eight evaluations and studies¹. Collective action is needed to address these issues.

- 1. Impact:** Learning from 2017 underscores that the use of CVA was appropriate and unrestricted transfers were mostly used for food and other basic needs. Discussions about impact were less emphatic. For example, malnutrition increased in some areas and the effect of CVA on other indicators was questioned. The 2017 response also suffered from the absence of an overarching learning orientated M&E system, unlike in 2011 when this was established at the outset. In some cases, it is questionable whether programme expectations were realistic. There is need for clarity, from the outset, regarding what CVA is expected to achieve and for indicators to be agreed accordingly.
- 2. Transfer values:** The lack of consensus on transfer values was an issue for much of the 2017 response, despite the work on the MEB and the time and effort invested in dialogue on this. This contributed to instances of community conflict; resulted in challenges for frontline staff who could not explain differences; and raised questions about what impact the transfers were expected to achieve. Action is needed to agree transfer values for the upcoming response and clarify when, and on what basis, changes will be made. Without a clear agreement, there is a high risk that transfer values will, again, differ by agency and funding stream, even within the same location. Ideally, the frequency and minimum duration of payments should also be agreed. Communication to affected populations about the amounts, duration and frequency must be clear and, ideally, harmonized.
- 3. Risks:** Gatekeepers and taxation were recognized challenges in 2017 involving risks related to exclusion and inclusion as well as reducing the value of the transfers that affected populations would receive. Experiences from 2011 and 2017 point to the need for more focus on hard to reach communities. This may require organizations to adapt policies and procedures to balance reach and accountability, while accepting more residual risk and higher programming costs. At the macro level, a World Bank report pointed to the 'staggering risks' of mobile money due to weak regulation and a lack of 'parity between e-money and cash in banks'. While efforts were made in 2017 to foster discussion of risks, joint risk management was limited. There is need for honest and systematic discussions of risks at different levels within and between agencies, and between agencies and donors.
- 4. Coordination.** In 2017, the Nairobi level cash working group (CWG) acted as a 'self-regulated and quasi-independent' group that managed to push forward a variety of important technical discussions. There was some confusion about the role of the sub-national CWGs and performance of the groups was mixed. For CVA coordination to be more effective, there is need for a clear connection between CWG, the HCT and ICCG and for more investment in coordination functions at national and regional levels.
- 5. Modalities and mechanisms.** The choice of modality was often linked to donor or agency mandates while the choice of mechanism was linked to questions of accountability, identity and scale rather than recipient preferences. Views about the efficiency and effectiveness of different modalities and mechanisms varied, with most arguments linked to the flexibility that different modalities provided recipients and the degree of accountability achieved. There is no comparable evidence from the 2017 response to really examine the merits of these different claims. Given the volume of transfers, this evidence gap is an important omission.
- 6. Targeting, registration and accountability.** Multiple non CVA specific programme design issues enhance or limit the effectiveness of CVA. As in 2011, issues related to targeting, registration and accountability were common discussion points in the CWG in 2017. Evaluations findings related to accountability to affected populations focus on feedback mechanisms rather than broader accountability thinking. Targeting issues were linked to geography and population sub-groups. While coverage in rural and remote areas was felt to be better than in 2011, gaps and duplication existed. Some people felt the speed of response resulted in a focus on 'nearby needs'. At least one donor was frustrated by agency claims about their presence which, at times, did not seem to correlate with a true representation of capacity. While the difficult context is acknowledged, opportunities to do better remain.

¹ Reflections and Recommendations: From evaluations of the 2017 CVA Somalia Drought Response (CaLP 2019).