



DEFINITION OF MINIMUM EXPENDITURE BASKETS (MEB) IN WEST AFRICA

Experiences from Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Chad and Nigeria.
What lessons can be drawn for other countries?

Case Study



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Nathalie Cissokho

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ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
AGIR	Alliance Globale pour la Résilience
IGA	Income Generating Activities
ARC	Alliance pour la Résilience Communautaire
BIEP	Building Individual Expertise Programme
BNA	Basic Need Assessment
CaLP	Cash Learning Partnership
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CTP	Cash Transfer Programming
CWG	Cash Working Group
DFID	Department for International Development
DNPSES	Direction Nationale de la Protection Sociale et de l'Economie Solidaire
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Monitoring
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ERC	Enhanced Response Capacity
FAO	Food Agriculture Organisation
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HEA	Household Economy Approach
HI	Handicap International (Humanité et Inclusion)
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICC	Inter Cluster Coordination
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INS	Institut National de la Statistique
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LGA	Local Government Area
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
MINEPAT	Ministre de l'Economie, de la Planification et de l'Aménagement du Territoire
MPG	MultiPurpose Cash Grant
NFI	Non Food Item
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SIMA	Système d'Information sur les Marchés Agricoles
SISAAP	Système d'information sur la sécurité alimentaire et d'alerte précoce
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

Experience of cash transfer programming (CTP) in West Africa has traditionally focused on responding to chronic food crises in the Sahelian strip. Since 2015, the intensification of the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin has led to the development of an interest in cash transfers across sectors, a dynamic driven by organizations' headquarters, drawing lessons from the emergency response in the Middle East and the experimentation with **Multipurpose Cash Grants¹** (MPGs). While Global Clusters are increasingly looking at the potential of cash transfers to achieve sectoral objectives, humanitarian actors at country level in West Africa are following the trend by reflecting on the applicability of the MPG concept in their area of intervention.

Thus, in 2017, five countries in the region worked on defining a **minimum expenditure basket** (MEB), aimed at determining the average cost of the basic needs of the target populations, a preliminary step to the design of an MPG. Actors from Cameroon, Mali, Chad, Niger and Nigeria have thus embarked on a new development in the approach to cash transfers in West Africa, also marking a significant evolution in the way aid and humanitarian coordination are conceived. Indeed, the use of the MEB goes beyond the design of the MPG. By monetizing basic needs, across sectors, which can be covered locally, it allows for a clearer understanding of the scope and depth of humanitarian interventions (and social nets, where they are implemented). The MEB is not systematically the amount of future cash transfers. It makes it possible to assess the extent to which these cash transfers cover the basic needs of the beneficiaries, and to measure the gaps, and is therefore not only a coordination tool, but also an advocacy and funding support tool, including for State actors.

This case study is not a "how-to" or "good practice" guide to the definition of the MEB, which remains a very recent concept and a process necessarily rooted in context. Nevertheless, the West African experience, because it encompasses different countries, some of which share the same response to a crisis and similar contexts, offers a unique opportunity to document and compare MEB definition processes. The case study therefore aims to identify success factors, common process elements that have enabled this collective work to be completed, and that inform similar future work in the region and beyond.

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¹ Conceptualized primarily from the "[Operational Guidelines and Toolkit for Multipurpose Cash Transfers](#)", UNHCR-led ERC consortium, 2015.

RATIONALE FOR THE MINIMUM EXPENDITURE BASKET

In addition to the evolution of global discussions, the growing interest in defining minimum expenditure baskets (MEB) at country level is based on regional trends, which have prompted cash transfer programming (CTP) actors to question the amounts distributed so far:

- Recognizing the multisectoral needs of beneficiaries, particularly in recent crises in regions with significant population displacements (Northern Mali², Lake Chad Basin³);
- Documenting beneficiaries' use of unrestricted cash transfers, calculated on a sectoral basis but spent to some extent on a wide range of good and services, thereby reducing the sectoral impact while not ensuring coverage of basic needs;
- Developing social safety nets and linking them with humanitarian cash transfers, which raise the question of what is covered by aid, and for how much.



Informal IDP camp; Konduga, Nigeria, March 2018. N. Cissokho

After isolated attempts by actors to increase the amount distributed (so far based on the food basket for most CTP actors), actors are pushed towards a collective approach. Indeed, the definition of basic needs requires information across sectors. Beyond the calculation of the amount, there are several issues that the definition of the minimum expenditure basket attempts to resolve:

Harmonization

Harmonizing the amount is desirable from a coordination point of view but should not be at the expense of programmatic objectives. Until then, harmonization was mainly achieved through "alignment" with the food basket, which is not relevant for interventions in other sectors. The MEB makes it possible to integrate the different needs and pooling them promotes the harmonization of the amounts distributed, across sectors.

Linkages between sectoral needs

Sectoral needs are interrelated, and monetary support covering the needs of one sector can indirectly support, accelerate or secure interventions of other sectors (e.g. food security for nutrition or education, nutrition for health and vice versa). Thus, even if not all sectors contribute "in monetary terms" to the minimum expenditure basket, the importance of sitting down together to create a collective understanding of existing needs and how the basket can contribute to covering them quickly becomes apparent to the actors.

² 134,452 Malian refugees in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania as of February 28, 2018 and 47,706 internally displaced persons as of January 31, 2018 (UNHCR)

³ 2,306,867 IDPs in the Lake Chad Basin as of February 28, 2018 (UNHCR)

Other needs

Some needs of the beneficiaries, which are ancillary but necessary for them, are not linked to any sector. For example, the purchase of clothing, essential for displaced families, to ensure dignity, schooling and access to an activity, is not ensured by any sector in several countries. This means that it will probably be deducted from the amounts distributed to cover other needs (or that goods in kind will be exchanged to obtain clothing).

However, the programmatic reasons behind the reflections on the amount of cash transfers did not immediately spark the effort to determine the MEB. Depending on the country, different “triggers” explain this investment.

In [Mali](#), in 2016-2017, the transition from the *Cadre Commun sur les Filets Sociaux Saisonniers* (food and nutritional security) funded by ECHO to the Consortium *Alliance pour la Résilience Communautaire* is forcing humanitarian actors to question the amount distributed in order to give resources commensurate with the new objectives. The reflections are conducted in connection with discussions on the design of government social nets that are developing and on which humanitarian actors are invited to align.

In [Cameroon](#), following a joint mission by CaLP and OCHA regional offices to assist in the implementation of a Cash Working Group in the country in November 2016, funding opportunities for the implementation of an MPG in the Far North of the country have emerged. This opportunity encouraged stakeholders to launch assessments and work together to define the MEB for the identified area (Far North) from March 2017.



In Cameroon, some Nigerian refugees hosted in Maroua area received unrestricted CTP (here, the IRC project), enabling them to buy shelter items or pay rent, to buy food and clothes for the children. Transfer amount, aiming at supporting livelihoods, allowed beneficiaries to invest in small income generating activities within a few months.

In [Chad](#) and [Niger](#), work was launched later in the year (in June in the case of Chad), inspired by neighboring countries, building on expertise available in the country, and funding opportunities. In Chad in particular, CERF funding has brought together several UN agencies and the CWG to work on the potential of MPGs. In Niger, several studies contributed to increased interest in MPGs, and thus in the MEB throughout the first half of 2017; the UN inter-agency project funded by DFID for the preparation of CTPs, which included a feasibility study, and the feasibility study of MPGs conducted by World Vision in the N'Guigmi⁴ area near Diffa, which already proposed a provisional MEB. These various discussions took more time to create a collective movement because of the reduced dynamism of the Cash Working Groups (CWG), at that time, in these countries, to host and capitalize on this work.

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/feasibility-multi-purpose-cash-transfers-n-guigmi>

In [Nigeria](#), the CWGs were established gradually, with clarification of the terms of reference (ToRs) and decision-making processes between Abuja and Maiduguri in November 2016, during a CaLP mission, where the definition of the MEB had already been mentioned for Borno State. But it was only in 2017, driven by global initiatives (ERC Consortium⁵) and expert deployments, and the actual activation of the Maiduguri CWG with the identification of a coordinator at the OCHA level and the recruitment of a technical coordinator (hosted by the INGO Forum) that the work on the MEB started, motivated by the programmatic urgency to better cover the needs of affected populations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COORDINATION

THE MEB PROCESS IN THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION STRUCTURE

Cameroon, which hitherto had no active CWG in Maroua, found through this work a coordination objective that made it possible to converge efforts⁶. The Maroua CWG, which reports to Yaoundé, was quickly assigned with the task of defining the MEB⁷. A dedicated, small task force composed of local CWG leads and focal points designated by the different sectors⁸ has been set up to carry out this process. This team worked closely with all the coordination groups involved, each of which had a responsibility in the process. Thus, the task force was responsible for the common technical aspects (development of the roadmap and tools), the sectors ensured the sectoral technical work, and the Cash Working Group validated the work of the task team and reported to the intersectoral coordination group, which validated the main stages of the process (roadmap then MEB). The strong commitment of country offices in Yaoundé and the CWG⁹, the validation at different stages of the intersectoral coordination group (endorsement of the roadmap and monitoring of progress), and the monitoring by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) not only supported the working dynamics, such as the pooling of resources for data collection, but also promoted a rapid validation of the MEB and its inclusion in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), ensuring its ownership by a large number of actors.

Mali, on the contrary, already had [strong coordination](#) of cash transfer actors, both through a well-established CWG (led by Oxfam, WFP, and DNPSES¹⁰) and the *Alliance pour la Résilience Communautaire* (ARC). Clusters are activated in Mali, but the place of the CWG is not clearly defined in the humanitarian architecture, which does not facilitate intersectoral inclusion. Collaboration with the Government of Mali is closer than in other countries. However, the question of leadership for the development of the MEB raised some questions, technical coordination being ensured both through the ARC (notably for the North of the country, targeted by the MEB) and the CWG¹¹. A NorCap deployment was requested to support the process. Upon her arrival in May 2017, the deployed expert quickly led this process through [a subgroup of the CWG](#) dedicated to this work, comprised of about ten members; representatives of the DNPSES (interested in the work but regularly absent), the CWG, the ARC, and sometimes donors. Cluster Coordinators were supposed to be part of the task team, but in their absence, the different organizations represented made the link with their sector of expertise and thus contributed on a sectoral basis¹².

⁵ ERC Consortium « [Increasing the Uptake of Multi-Purpose Cash Grants in Emergency Responses for a More Efficient and Effective Humanitarian Action](#) » funded by ECHO and led by Save the Children, with the participation of DRC, CaLP, OCHA and Mercy Corps

⁶ The Yaoundé CWG was officially launched in late December 2016, the Maroua CWG met for the first time during the CaLP mission in March 2017. At the end of 2016, the volume of CTs implemented in the Maroua area in the Far North of Cameroon was very limited (mainly IRC and WFP and its partners, including Plan International).

⁷ The [terms of reference](#) of the Yaoundé CWG refer to the MEB, but the role of the CWG is to encourage regional sub-groups to develop and oversee development.

⁸ The task team was composed by 14 participants representing the CWG (WFP and IRC), 6 sectors from North Cameroon (Health, Shelter / NFI, Education, Protection, Food Security and Early Recovery) and OCHA. Some organizations were represented by the Head of Office.

⁹ The Yaounde CWG actively supported the momentum (communication around the process, resource allocation, support in report writing, dissemination of the MEB etc.).

¹⁰ Direction Nationale de la Protection Sociale et de l'Economie Solidaire. Mali's CWG has been in place since 2013, with less dynamic phases in the event of a coordinator vacancy.

¹¹ Finally, the ARC consortium (as overseeing the NorCap deployment) provided the technical lead and the CWG coordinated the work.

¹² Food security, nutrition, NFI, health, education, WASH.



Stakeholders meeting in Maiduguri, Nigeria, to strengthen the MEB task team, CaLP mission, March 2018. N. Cissokho

Chad, Niger, and Nigeria had active Cash Working Groups, which met on a more or less regular basis (one meeting per month to one meeting per quarter). In the first two countries, clusters are activated and meet regularly (as well as the inter-cluster coordination group); while in Nigeria, coordination was still in the structuring phase, especially in the North East. In Chad, as in all Sahelian countries, the CWG was initially created as a sub-group of the food security cluster, but the opening to other clusters is gradually taking place. Prior to this, much of the CWG's work focused mainly technical aspects, not necessarily allowing for intersectoral integration that would have allowed work on the MEB to begin more quickly. In Niger, the CWG had an essentially strategic mandate, promoting intersectoral inclusion but with little technical capacity to initiate this work. Both countries have suffered from shortcomings in the specific coordination of CTP, despite structured national coordination and strong CTP expertise available. Both finally chose also to set up a dedicated task team to unlock discussions around the CWG and thus launch the process. The Nigerian CWG also suffered from a lack of technical coordination, combined with weaknesses in sectoral coordination. This explains in particular why, despite several quality initiatives to develop the work on the MEB (support provided by Oxfam, and the analytical work carried out within the framework of the ERC consortium), this did not materialize throughout 2017. There has been much progress on CWG strengthening and sectoral inclusion since then, but capacity and technical leadership challenges remain.

Mali, Niger¹³ and Chad led the MEB process at the capital level, while Cameroon and Nigeria relocated the MEB process to Maroua and Maiduguri. Decision factors are essentially: the geographical coverage of the basket, the specificity of the situation compared to the rest of the country, the existence of a CWG and of technical capacities in the target area.

¹³ A CWG is in the works in Diffa but had not yet been established when the work on the MEB began.

		Success Factors	Challenges
Cameroon	Coordination system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HCT involved in the strategic coordination of CTP, has pushed for the development of the MEB Strong humanitarian leadership and involvement of OCHA and the UNHCR has allowed inclusion in the HRP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sectoral Groups active but no capacity in CTP
	Cash Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newly put in place; no bias related to experience Reports to the CWG of Yaoundé, sub-group of the ICG Strong autonomy for the calculation of the MEB and strong leadership through the CWG Leads (IRC, WFP) with strong organizational technical expertise Pooling of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No active involvement from the government No sectoral representativeness Little available capacity No dedicated resources
	Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement of the managers and directors in the strategic CTP coordination and monitoring of the MEB process 	
Mali	Coordination system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clusters Enabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigated involvement of clusters in the CTP discussions
	Cash Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solid CWG and alliance, working in close collaboration on technical aspects Involvement of the DNPSES (co-lead) Technical Capacity Commitment of cluster coordinators Support of OCHA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few links with the InterCluster Low Strategic Coordination Vacancy of the CWG Coordinator position early in the process Difficulty of ownership of the work conducted by the NorCap deployment and lack of leadership by the CWG to resume the process
	Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong experience in CTP Willingness to develop the MEB 	

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Niger	Coordination system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clusters Enabled • Discussions within the HCT on CTP • Strong interest from OCHA to play a key role and from WFP and UNHCR on MEB definition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low involvement of clusters in CTP discussions • Uneven dynamic within different clusters
	Cash Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong strategic coordination, links with the ICG • Significant experience in CTP • Regular meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary dedicated resources, difficulties to maintain the dynamism of coordination at the beginning of the process • Difficulties in making progress on technical coordination when launching the process, little ownership of ad hoc initiatives
	Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness and involvement of top management of the organizations in the MEB process • Strong organizational capabilities in CTP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different levels of understanding and abilities on CTP and CTP coordination
Chad	Coordination system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clusters Enabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Involvement of clusters in CTP discussions • Uneven dynamic within different clusters
	Cash Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active CWG, strong abilities and experience in CTP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWG is very focused on food security • Links with the ICG established late
	Organizations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low management involvement in CTP • Uneven understanding and interest in the MEB
Nigeria	Coordination system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness for strategic coordination and interest in CTP • Donor support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of coordination quite low at the beginning of the process • Lack of capacity in CTP at the sectoral level
	Cash Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic CWG from mid-2017 • Clarified roles and decision making with Abuja CWG • Autonomy on MEB work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps on the coordination of the CWG • Low technical coordination • Uneven capacities among members • Low ownership of ad hoc initiatives
	Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong interest for CTP and the MEB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient resources, operational pressure and uneven capacity • Turnover

SECTOR INVOLVEMENT AND GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

In recent years, CWGs have actively sought to integrate sectoral expertise. Due to the large predominance of the food security sector in CTP experience and the structure of these groups (mostly created in the Sahel as subgroups of food security clusters/working groups), this has been made extremely difficult and has not progressed much between 2014 and 2015. However, the CWGs created or reactivated since late 2016 have been established as a subgroup of the Intersectoral¹⁴, like Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. This has created a new dynamic of CTP coordination in the region, which has inspired Chad and Mali¹⁵.

In addition, the growing interest in MPG from the headquarters of humanitarian coordination organizations and Global Clusters has been an entry point to engage sectors in CWGs, something that sector-specific discussions had not previously permitted¹⁶. These developments have also been made possible through OCHA's internal information work with coordination actors, sensitizing intersectoral coordination groups and HCTs. The question of capacities of these sectors and the relative lack of CTP experience outside food security in the region has been and remains an obstacle to this participation.

The task teams that have been set up by the CWGs are composed of a combination of CTP and sectoral expertise. This is particularly the case in Cameroon and Nigeria where sectoral focal points have been appointed by sector group/cluster coordinators to ensure sectoral technical input, with members of the CWG and the food security sector providing cash transfer expertise. These representatives are not necessarily the leads of sectoral groups/clusters as was the case in Mali, the profile sought being people who are available, with recognized technical legitimacy in their sector, and if possible who are employees of organizations with expertise in CTP, in order to make the link. In practice, this has made it possible, to a certain extent, to popularize the modality among the sectors, by supporting them in calculating their contribution to the MEB, in particular through the collection of additional primary data¹⁷. In Niger and Chad, not all sectors are represented and there are no "focal points" as such, which does not facilitate a comprehensive approach to basic needs, but is explained by the CTP expertise largely dominated by the food security sector, and by the type of crisis (food and nutrition) prevailing in these two countries. All countries identified sector engagement as one of the process challenges at the MEB learning workshop¹⁸ organized by CaLP and IRC in December 2017.

Besides Mali and Chad, the government's commitment has also been a major challenge. Indeed, all the countries that have worked to develop the MEB are contexts where government social safety nets are being developed or steered. Moreover, for the majority of these countries, the reflection on the MEB takes place in a context of acute crisis, the MEB aiming at covering a precise geographical zone (Far North¹⁹ for Cameroon, Diffa and North Tillabéri for Niger, Borno State for Nigeria²⁰), for populations with specific needs.

As a result, these countries have generally developed their MEB outside the social safety net discussions, despite repeated attempts to include the government and its partners (notably the World Bank). In Cameroon, MINEPAT²¹ is represented in the CWGs in Yaoundé and Maroua, but not very actively. Specifically in the MEB process, MINEPAT, regional delegations from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Livestock were invited to inform them of the ongoing process but did not participate in the task team.

In Mali, coordination between humanitarian actors, the Jigisemejiri social safety net programme and the *Direction Nationale de la Protection Sociale et de l'Economie Solidaire* (DNPSES) was very strong, with the various partners of the *Cadre Commun / Filets sociaux* since 2014 being aligned on the amount of social safety nets. DNPSES, co-lead of the CWG, coordinates the response and partners contribute to covering needs in their intervention zone for Northern Mali. In this context, the willingness of humanitarian actors to gradually contribute to the resilience

¹⁴ See Terms of Reference of Niger, Cameroon, Nigeria.

¹⁵ Mali's CWG [Terms of Reference](#), while not mentioning the group's place in the humanitarian architecture, recall the role that cash transfers play "in many sectors in providing assistance (...) to populations in emergency situations".

¹⁶ The CWG coordinators in Chad and Mali had tried to sensitize the sectors one by one between 2016 and 2017, but it was really with the launch of the work on the SEM that they began to turn to the potential of CTs.

¹⁷ As detailed below, in most countries sectors shared list of quantified items and services to be included in the MEB, and price calculation has been done at the task team level, or based on primary data collection lists.

¹⁸ www.cashlearning.org/downloads/East%20and%20Central%20Africa%20CVTWG/calp-west-africa-learning-event-fr-web.pdf

¹⁹ Logone and Chari, Mayo Sava, Mayo Tsanaga and Diamare

²⁰ This remains to be clarified, MEB coverage may in fact be limited to a few LGAs.

²¹ Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT). The Project Management Unit (PMU) implements the social nets and represents the Ministry at the Yaoundé CWG.

of populations raised the question of the amount distributed, which could only be done by including the government in these discussions. This initiated work on the MEB, but despite the government's strong interest in the process, its active participation was a challenge, especially at the beginning of the process.

In Chad, the government's commitment is reflected in the participation of certain ministries and directorates; notably the Ministry of Livestock, the Ministry of Agriculture²², the SISAAP²³, the social safety nets project, and the AGIR initiative among others. This was made possible thanks to the experience of the HEA group that inspired the task team, which is very active and which mobilizes the State a lot. However, although the Ministry of Agriculture, through the SISAAP, is leading the work on the MEB, the lack of experience of state agents on cash transfers is an obstacle to their active participation. The World Bank and social safety nets (under the direction of the Ministry of Planning) are involved in the reflections, but the influence of the work in progress regarding the amount of social safety nets is not yet defined.

In Niger, SIMA²⁴ and INS²⁵ are the most active government representatives on the task team. The *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises Alimentaires* and the Ministry of Humanitarian Action, despite its strategic importance, participated in the workshop to launch the process in November 2017 but did not attend the working meetings. The participation of the State's technical services would ensure institutional anchoring of the process, encouraging its validation and scaling up, and to this end the task team continues to work. In addition, the main donors (USAID and ECHO) participated in several meetings of the technical group.



IDPs in Diffa, Niger, March 2017. N. Cissokho

LESSONS LEARNED

As can be seen from country experiences, coordination has been a major challenge for the success of the process. In some cases, it has been a facilitator. In others, it has been the main obstacle. Some key questions can thus be drawn to assess the maturity of coordination for the success of the MEB process, and act on the main influencing factors:

At the level of the humanitarian system:

- **Vitality/integration** of coordination at national level: Are clusters activated? Are the sectors coordinated and do they meet regularly? Is there an intersectoral group in place, does the Inter-Cluster meet and make decisions? Is there strong leadership from cluster/lead sector coordinators? Is there strong leadership from the Humanitarian Country Team?

²² Also participates in the CWG.

²³ Sustainable Food Security and Early Warning Information System

²⁴ Agricultural Market Information System

²⁵ National Institute of Statistics

- **Effectiveness** of coordination at national level: Are strategic coordination aspects covered (e.g. response analysis process, coverage of needs)? Do the sectors have the necessary technical capacity? Are there technical capacities in cash transfers across sectors?
- **Inclusiveness** of coordination at national level: Is the government involved in humanitarian coordination? Is the Cash Working Group integrated into the humanitarian structure? Does it participate in intersectoral meetings? To whom does it report to? Are minutes shared with sectors?

At the Cash Working Group level:

- Is the CWG inclusive enough of sector expertise? Is the Government represented? Are humanitarian coordination actors aware of the existence and work of the CWG? To whom does the CWG report, is the decision-making process clear?
- Is there sufficient strategic leadership to ensure the necessary inclusion and momentum? Is there sufficient technical leadership to facilitate decision-making and provide effective support to CTP actors? Are there enough capacities within the group to improve programmatic quality and work inclusively on the MEB definition?

At the organization level:

- What is the level of technical CTP and sector specific expertise ? Is there an internal exchange of expertise on these two aspects? Is there an opportunity to mobilize expertise from headquarters or neighboring/regional offices to support the process?
- Does the organization play a role in humanitarian coordination? Is there a commitment from top management at national level on issues related to CTP? What is the decision-making level of the technical actors?

In general, in the region, the lack of integration of coordination structures, the lack of visibility and clarity of the CWG's work, and the heterogeneous capacities are the main coordination obstacles encountered. Setting up the task team thus made it possible:

- To have a more dynamic and focused group, therefore making it easier to engage on a common roadmap with individually assigned roles and responsibilities;
- To relegate the "capacity building" part that the CWG plays for all the actors interested in CTP, and to concentrate only on the sectoral technical aspects necessary for the realization of the MEB;
- To ensure a stronger participation of the sectors, by engaging them on a specific work, which is directly related to their strategy and activities.

Some of the countries studied received external support to lead the process. These dedicated resources, while undeniably providing valuable technical support to the work on the MEB, slowed it down overall, as they were intended to address capacity weaknesses while the initial weaknesses were related to coordination. Thus, process issues (inclusion, appropriation in particular), when they reappeared later in the process, sometimes blocked technical progress, leading to partial or even complete resumption of work. It therefore seems essential to provide answers first on the structure and mechanisms that accommodate the MEB work, before making progress on the actual basket calculation.

The task team model as a subgroup of the CWG dedicated to the MEB calculation was undeniably positive in responding to the challenges identified above, even if it failed to overcome the specific challenges of coordination with the government. However, if the coordination structure in place (CWG, Intersectoral Coordination Group...) had allowed the above questions to be answered positively, it is not certain that the establishment of an additional structure would have been necessary.

In all these countries, despite operational constraints, lack of dedicated staff, limited capacities and coordination weaknesses, it was the collaborative approach that made it possible to move forward; through pooling resources, sharing expertise and supporting leadership, this hitherto unexplored concept was translated within a few months into an operational tool.

THE MEB CALCULATION PROCESS

Looking back at the experiences of the different countries, shared during the [learning workshop](#) organized by CaLP and IRC in December 2017, a framework with similar steps emerges:

- Setting up the coordination mechanism (in this case, the task team)
- Defining a methodology/roadmap, validated by the intercluster/intersectoral coordination group (ICC) or at least by the CWG.
- Building on what already exists; in terms of data and coordination mechanisms
- Recent, objective secondary data (validated by the sector, known methodology and source)
- After identification of data gaps; collecting primary data, more or less extensive field work.
- Calculation of the MEB

However, when looked at in detail, many disparities exist, due to the different coordination structures detailed above, and to the capacities and resources available at the country level.



Alpha Keita, a BIEP participant, shares experience from Mali on MEB definition during CaLP/IRC joint event in December 2017. N. Cissokho

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS: AMPLITUDE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL OF THE MEB

Defining the objective and “basic needs”

The minimum expenditure basket is defined as “*what a household needs – on a regular or seasonal basis – and its average cost over time. The MEB can be a critical component in the design of interventions including Multipurpose Cash Grants/Assistance (MPG/MCA), with transfer amounts calculated to contribute to meeting the MEB.*”²⁶ The definition of what should or should not be included in the basket as a “basic need” (“minimum needs”) is extremely sensitive and complex to define. It varies among target communities, sectors, agency mandates and government priorities. The amount of the cash transfer is not necessarily equivalent to the MEB. The MEB is a reference amount to know what the targeted people need to cover their basic needs. It makes it possible to know to what extent the MPG based on this MEB contributes to covering these essential needs, and is also an advocacy and financing tool for donors and the government. Indeed, it can help assess the contribution of social safety nets to meeting the needs of targeted populations.

It is not possible to capture a “real” picture of the needs of an entire population. It is therefore a question of obtaining a level of precision and realism that satisfies the greatest number of actors. It is the right balance between the most objective information possible and the definition of an overall amount that allows beneficiaries to get by (survive or live with dignity, depending on the objectives initially defined).

Some questions may help to define the objective of a possible future MPG intervention based on this MEB, and thus the amplitude and level of detail of the MEB:

- Do we wish to reduce the poverty of the target populations and offer them opportunities for recovery?
- Do we want to allow them to live with dignity, in line with SPHERE standards, through a rights-based approach²⁷? Or is the immediate humanitarian objective to enable them to survive in a particularly acute crisis?

In Mali, while the initial reflection was driven by an objective of resilience, collective discussions, humanitarian constraints and coordination with the government gradually influenced the work, which finally focused on the immediate needs²⁸ of the most vulnerable populations. Thus, the first version of the MEB submitted by the consultant did not include livelihoods/early recovery costs or ad hoc seasonal support.

In some countries, confusion over the size of the basket and the nature of the items to be included for each sector has also arisen from different calculation approaches; some sectors based on needs analysis, and others incorporating information from Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) covering a wider range of expenditure due to the multiple situations of beneficiaries, but whose “depth” of need is not established – since beneficiaries only report on possible expenditure within the limit of aid received.

The lack of clarity on what the minimum basket of expenses covers poses several difficulties:

- Inclusion of sectors in the task team; it is difficult for sectors to know which items to include in the MEB²⁹, and there may be inconsistencies between sectors, some focusing on survival items, others taking into account all the needs that can be monetized. This can be reflected in “cross-sectoral” costs (such as transport, energy, etc.).
- Low coherence of the final MEB, due to the non-alignment of the objectives to which the sectors wish to contribute, and risks that the intersectoral impact of the MPG based on this MEB will be reduced. It can also undermine the justification and thus the ownership of the MEB by all stakeholders.
- Difficulties in identifying monitoring and evaluation indicators for the future MPG.
- Does not optimize the possible link with government social safety nets because of non-alignment with national government priorities, nor prepares for MEB expansion.

²⁶ CaLP Glossary: www.cashlearning.org/resources/glossary

²⁷ For example, is the barrier to children’s schooling related to lack of income? If so, should future MPG interventions contribute to improving access to education, is this a collective priority?

²⁸ Food security, WASH, health, education, NFIs, rent and development, transportation and communication.

²⁹ For example, the first version of the MEB in Nigeria did not include all the condiments or cooking utensils that the food security sector would have liked to include, but did include communication costs.

The MEB and social nets

In the majority of the countries studied, the MEB work was not aimed at aligning or preparing linkages with government social nets, but rather with a short-term perspective of improving the effectiveness of emergency response in a specific area.

The focus of the MEB on a specific area or target group, particularly in crisis areas where needs are particularly acute compared to the rest of the population, partly explains why the amount is sometimes very high compared to the average income of the population.

In Cameroon, the only country to have finalized and validated the MEB, the total amount is 118,039 FCFA per month per household of 7.5 persons while the minimum wage is 36,270 FCFA³⁰ and the amount of social nets steered – including in the far North, but with low coverage³¹ – since 2016 is 20,000 FCFA³² per household every two months. This great disparity must be qualified by a few elements:

- The amount of the MEB is not (necessarily) the amount of the cash transfer;
- The amount of the MEB covers all monetary needs, while the social safety nets are a contribution to their coverage;
- The minimum wage takes into account economic, social and political parameters, whereas the MEB is an objective reference point based on needs;
- The needs of the target area may be more acute than in the rest of the country.

Targeting and geographic area

The targeting and choice of the geographic area of the MEB can therefore considerably influence the composition and amount of the MEB. As mentioned earlier, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger have initiated their reflection on the MEB as part of the response to a particular crisis affecting a specific region of the country. This could place limits on the expansion of the MEB and its validation by the government, if its make-up is too specific to a group or region.

In this case, countries have chosen rather broad target groups; in Cameroon, the MEB covers internally displaced persons, refugees outside camps and host populations in the departments most affected by the crisis.

In Chad, because of the government's strong involvement in the MEB work, coverage is for the whole country, but it takes into account the specific needs of different population groups. 24 strata of analysis were set up to ensure the representativeness of the different needs; at the regional level for the local populations of the Sahelian strip, at the UNHCR sub-delegation level for refugees, at the departmental level for returnees from the Central African Republic or displaced persons from the Lake. As work is ongoing, it is not determined how regional disparities will be taken into account in the final basket³³.

The question of the household/individual approach was raised in Nigeria, because of the large disparities in household sizes among beneficiary groups, and because the approach followed by the food security group favored the individual approach. If for some sectors, the individual approach makes sense (education, nutrition...) for others, the household approach is more relevant (shelters, NFIs...). In all countries, out of pragmatism, the household approach was adopted, and sectors submitted contributions based on an average of beneficiaries per household.

³⁰ Since July 30, 2014.

³¹ The pilot covered 65,000 households in the country's five poorest regions (Adamaoua, East, North, Far North and North West) and 5,000 households in Yaoundé and Douala.

³² The objective of social safety nets in Cameroon is to "help the poorest households secure their livelihoods and help them out of chronic poverty" (World Bank, "[Cash transfers: a bridge out of extreme poverty](#)", 3 March 2016). The bimonthly 20,000 FCFA are supplemented by an amount of 80,000 FCFA at one year and 24 months to initiate Income Generating Activities (IGA).

³³ For example, alignment with the average for all regions, alignment with the maximum, regional MEBs or ad hoc additional payments...

Secondary data: defining the contents of the basket

Sectors have determined the list of needs to be included in the MEB, based on sectoral analyses. Due to the lack of a collective focus on “basic needs” and the MEB objective, the sectors relied on their own analyses, some having a more restrictive approach than others. What to include? And on what basis? The lack of expertise in cash transfers within sectors may have been a challenge, but here are some examples of how needs across some sectors have been included in the MEB:

	Cameroon	Mali
Health	Consultations + Specific care based on frequent illnesses to be activated according to free care	Consultations based on average needs per household per year
Education	School fees and school materials (to be activated according to the return and transition situation)	School fees and materials
WASH	Access to water (to be activated if there is a fee), digging and maintenance of latrines (annual flat rate per household)	WASH Items, hygiene kit, latrine kit, access to water
Shelter	Materials	Rent and housing item costs

The [Operational Guidance and Toolkit for Multi-Use Cash Transfers](#)³⁴ summarizes the key steps in developing the MEB. The process was not fully followed by the countries studied; as seen above, the part on multi-sectoral needs analysis and MEB target setting was not fully exploited by individual countries, and multi-sectoral market analysis was not conducted to determine product availability and prices. Nigeria is an exception, as a basic needs analysis and a multisectoral market analysis³⁵ were conducted as part of the ERC consortium. In Cameroon and Mali, primary data collection (field surveys) was used to verify market accessibility and functioning, through questionnaires on markets but mainly among communities. It is also during this field work that prices were collected to determine the contribution based on the needs selected by each sector, to check the lists of needs identified by the sectors, to note possible differences between the target areas and groups (men and women also) and to add items that had not been identified³⁶.

Sector working groups/Clusters, faced with the experience, capacity and coordination challenges already mentioned, therefore worked based on the information available, to a greater or lesser extent. In practice, the approach followed by the sectors can be summarized by answering the following questions:

Needs analysis:

- What are the needs of our beneficiaries in terms of goods and services?

Monetization of needs:

- Which of these needs are available locally to beneficiaries in sufficient quantity and quality?
- Is the lack of resources the cause of the lack of access to these needs?

Inclusion in the MEB as a basic need:

- Are recipients likely to prioritize these expenditures if they receive cash transfers?

The task teams also raised the question of including specific needs (malnutrition, displaced persons); when is this too specific to be included in the MEB? Because of the context of the crisis and the voluntary coverage of displaced persons, Mali and Cameroon have included some of these specific needs (WASH kits, rent, and accommodation).

³⁴ UNHCR, 2015, p. 25–30

³⁵ Multi Sector Market Assessment led in July 2017 by UNHCR as part of the ERC consortium's work. Other countries collected data on markets, but essentially focused on price in target areas. Availability and quality of products were assessed in some countries through field observation and forms filled within communities.

³⁶ Such as communication and transportation for Mali.

CALCULATION METHODOLOGY

Primary data collection

Each task team, once set up, drew up a roadmap determining the methodology to be followed for the calculation of the MEB. This resulted in two phases of data collection: secondary data, available at the sector level (which essentially provided the make-up of the basket as mentioned above), data gap analysis, and a complementary phase of primary data collection, notably for information related to item prices (Mali, Cameroon). In Chad and Niger, available HEA data informed the calculation of the MEB.

As task teams do not have dedicated resources for these analyses, the collaborative approach was favored, pooling available logistical and human resources. This slowed down the process³⁷, but strengthened the ownership of the information by all the actors involved, and built consensus on the MEB calculation. In Cameroon, once the roadmap had been validated by the intersectoral coordination group, the task team was responsible for developing the tools and sampling for the surveys based on data from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Primary data were collected at both household and market levels. In total, 4 departments were covered by the survey, including 12 districts and 56 localities. 46 enumerators were involved, 398 households were reached by the household questionnaire, 25 focus group discussions were held in target communities and 18 secondary markets were surveyed. Some countries, such as Chad, have mobilized budgets to carry out this work.

Here are the details of the mobilized resources and time³⁸:

Country	Zones	Organizations involved	HR requirements	Logistic means	Estimated budget	Duration
Cameroon	4 (Diamaré, Logone-Et- Chari, Mayo- Sava, Mayo- Tsanaga)	Care, UNHCR, IRC, Interco's, Codas, Plan	34 investigators	6 vehicles	N/A	26 cumulative days
Chad	24 strata of analysis across the country	Oxfam, IRC, Alliance, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF	40 team leaders and 120 investigators	40 vehicles, visibility tools, workshop costs for data analysis	€93,256 (excluding analysis phase)	13 days per team

Data quality

As described above, the sectors provided the secondary data to establish the list of items that would be included in the MEB. In Cameroon and Mali, the analysis of secondary data (data available recently validated by the cluster) made it possible to identify information gaps (price of certain items, availability of items) which gave rise to a collective collection of primary information. The common resources made available for this work not only covered the markets in order to collect information on prices, but also to check the needs prioritized by households (in the absence of a basic needs analysis at the initial stage) and to check whether there were any items or services that needed to be added to the basket.

³⁷ In Mali, security constraints significantly delayed the data collection process, as the prioritized areas were not accessible at the time of the planned survey period.

³⁸ For Chad, additional resources were mobilized for the workshops to launch the process (training of trainers' workshop on MEB tools and training on data collection tools for the MEB) for an estimated budget amount of €13,666. Costs mentioned are estimated costs, not actual.



Task team meeting in Mali with CaLP's support to review the roadmap and resume the MEB process, March 2018. A. Hamidou

In both countries, poverty lines are determined based on poverty assessments conducted by the World Bank. In the absence of the institution in the MEB task teams, it was not possible to use these thresholds to build the necessary level of consensus and ownership. The national poverty lines also have a different approach from that of the MEB; it is not a question of aligning themselves with universal needs or standards, but of taking into account the economic situation of the country and relative poverty. However, since the MEB is not the amount of the transfer, it is not necessarily a question of trying to align with the available thresholds (especially if they cover different realities, as explained above with the minimum wage) but rather of defining the amount that comes as close as possible to the real needs of the beneficiaries. However, these data should be included in future discussions on the amount of the transfer, so as not to create tensions within communities (including at the national level).

In Nigeria, primary data collection did not take place as part of the MEB process led by the task team. After opting for the sector approach, as in the other countries, the working group (which was not made up of sectoral focal points at the time) became aware of the gaps and differences in coverage, scale, data quality, etc. The working group was able to identify the gaps and differences in the quality of the data. This is one of the reasons why a multisectoral task team was finally set up in March 2018. During the elaboration of the roadmap, the approach was discussed once more and the choice of members preferred to use the Basic Need Assessment³⁹ carried out within the framework of the ERC consortium led by Save the Children, carried out one year earlier on 3 LGAs⁴⁰ in Borno State.

In different countries, the extent and level of detail of primary data collection depended on:

- The availability of secondary data
- The quality of the available data (recent, known methodology, approved by the sector...)
- The level of consensus reached by the task team with regard to these data
- The need estimated by the task team to triangulate these data

Ultimately, Nigeria is the only example in the region where a basic needs assessment underlies the MEB calculation, even if chronologically it did not come at the initial stage of the process but was re-appropriated by the task team members to avoid a new collection of primary data towards which the sectors were moving⁴¹. The time between the completion of the evaluation and its inclusion in the MEB (one year) raised questions about the quality of the data, but the sectors generally acknowledged that the order of magnitude of the needs and the items and services prioritized had remained unchanged.

³⁹ Completed in February 2017

⁴⁰ Local Government Areas (here Maiduguri, Jere and Konduga)

⁴¹ The Basic Need Assessment was conducted in February 2017, as part of the ERC consortium, supervised by Save the Children, and the review of the results was conducted by CaLP with the cluster coordinators in September 2017. However, the MEB task team, set up after these missions, chose not to consider these results and to ask the sectors once more to identify the needs. Finally, after CaLP missions in March 2018, the new task team decided to take over the BNA results to avoid additional data collection.

Other challenges

The challenges related to the lack of initial consultation on the definition of basic needs and targets often weighed on the process until its end (calculation per individual or per household?)⁴² To what extent do we wish to include the specific needs of certain population groups? How to smooth out these particular expenses?) The technical questions also arise from the desired level of sophistication of the basket. In the end, it is always a question of calculating a "fairly good" MEB, which stakeholders can adopt (since they understand the approach) and justify, particularly in the absence of collective guidance or significant experience to identify "good practices" in terms of calculation.

The most common difficulty was the integration of costs at various frequencies (monthly – like food costs, annual – like school fees, or one-off expenses, depending on each household – like health costs, equipment for a new shelter etc.). Cameroon and Mali have chosen to "flatten" them in the monthly basket. This decision was taken mainly out of pragmatism of calculation, but depending on the amount and percentage that this expenditure represents for the other countries, it is possible that some other countries choose ad hoc payments for the periods of the year with significant additional expenditure. The revision of the Cameroon MEB is already planned to refine these aspects, as well as seasonal variations. A half-yearly review is planned, and periodically if a crisis occurs.

External support and dedicated resources

This predominance of the importance of process over technical aspects was illustrated, for instance, by the fact that despite external technical support, some countries took several months to complete their MEBs. This is the case, for example, of Nigeria, which benefited from the technical assistance of an expert deployed by the headquarters of an international NGO, as well as the evaluations conducted within the framework of the ERC consortium, which provided all the analyses needed to calculate the MEB and which would, in theory, have made it possible to calculate and integrate it into the HRP process in September 2017. But this technical support has not been optimized due to lack of ownership and understanding of the process by key actors (including the CWG and sectors)⁴³. Similarly in Mali, which benefited from the deployment of an expert, and despite regular meetings and collective primary data collection, the level of understanding and ownership of the process did not allow the MEB to be validated when the consultant's report was submitted in September 2017, and a new roadmap had to be defined for the task team in March 2018.

This is why CaLP has chosen to support MEB processes in three ways:

- Missions to support the process, in particular on coordination aspects and the constitution of task teams⁴⁴;
- Technical support missions, for the elaboration of roadmaps, and the sharing of experience of other MEBs⁴⁵; and
- Individual support to the most active leads or task team members, most of whom (Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Mali)⁴⁶ were participants in CaLP's [Building Individual Expertise Programme \(BIEP\)](#).

⁴² All countries eventually opted for the household approach but the debate continued in Nigeria throughout the process.

⁴³ The fact that the consortium coordinator could not be based in Maiduguri but in Abuja undoubtedly had an impact on this aspect.

⁴⁴ Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, one week per country – two for Nigeria.

⁴⁵ One week per country, Niger and Mali having benefited from a few additional ad hoc meetings due to frequent visits to these countries by CaLP team.

⁴⁶ In Niger, Chad and Cameroon, the task teams were led by BIEP participants (WFP, IRC). In Mali, the CWG is co-led by a member of BIEP (WFP), and the task team also included two other members of BIEP (WVI, Solidarités). The cohort consisted of a total of 14 participants, including three at the regional level (FAO and WFP). The individual support provided by CaLP through telephone/Skype conversations, document review and e-mail exchanges is difficult to quantify in terms of time, but all task teams that benefited from this additional expertise mentioned it as a success factor in the process.



BIEP members sharing their experience on MEB during a side meeting in Dakar, September 2017.
N. Cissokho

The objective of this support, whereby some missions were combined, was not to lead or guide the process; it was essential that the actors in the country carry out the work themselves, according to a methodology that they felt best suited to their resources, capacities and objectives. As seen above, external support has sometimes slowed the process due to a necessary “backtracking” due to lack of ownership. As CaLP does not have a permanent presence in the countries, it would not have been relevant to play an active role in the MEB development work. On the other hand, sharing feedback from people who had contributed to the MEB calculation in other countries, facilitating discussions and contributing to technical exchanges according to requests (without arbitrating for one position or another) made it possible to unblock certain situations and promote progress in the discussions. Overall, it seems correct to estimate that CaLP regional team dedicated about three full months to supporting these processes. This has been positive, particularly in Cameroon, the first country to validate its MEB in West and Central Africa. The leads of the task team and the CWG mention the training provided by CaLP, the technical support provided by CaLP to the task team and the participation of a member of the BIEP in the process – in addition to the success factors related to the coordination seen above. The Mali task team also notes that the support provided by CaLP has been a success factor, with the above-mentioned key points on coordination and the NorCap deployment.

Apart from Mali, no country has received resources specifically dedicated to the calculation of the MEB. Niger⁴⁷, Chad⁴⁸, Nigeria⁴⁹, however, benefited from projects and studies that directly informed the evaluations needed to calculate the MEB. Cameroon has fully capitalized on resources available at the national level, and also had no (fully or partially) dedicated resources for CT coordination – unlike Chad⁵⁰, Niger⁵¹, Mali⁵² and Nigeria⁵³.

⁴⁷ Notably the multi-agency project on preparedness funded by DFID, which included a feasibility study of a joint emergency response in CTs for the Diffa area (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA), but also the [feasibility study](#) of multiple-use CTs for the N’Guigmi area, conducted by World Vision.

⁴⁸ “Feasibility analysis of a multi-purpose cash transfer” in Chad, conducted within the framework of CERF-UFE 2018

⁴⁹ ERC Consortium “[Increasing the Uptake of Multi-Purpose Cash Grants in Emergency Responses for a More Efficient and Effective Humanitarian Action](#)” funded by ECHO and conducted by Save the Children, with DRC, CaLP, OCHA and Mercy Corps.

⁵⁰ Oxfam leads the CWG through its WASH focal point.

⁵¹ Funding enabled the recruitment of a CWG coordinator in Niamey for six months in 2017.

⁵² Oxfam leads the CWG through a dedicated position.

⁵³ A coordinator was recruited by OCHA in August 2016 but was only able to stay a few months. A new coordinator took up the position in early 2017 and Mercy Corps recruited a technical coordinator for the group in July 2017.

MEB VALIDATION AND PROSPECTS

Only Cameroon finalized its process up to the final validation of the MEB, which culminated in its inclusion in the HRP. The question of how to include the basket in the humanitarian response plan is a discussion for the different countries that have had to conduct this work. In [Lebanon's](#) HRP, the MEB is mentioned by different sectors (Basic Assistance, Livelihoods, food security...), and is integrated as a verification tool. [Iraq](#) has developed an "MPG" section in the cluster response part of the plan. But these two countries have for some time exceeded the work on the MEB and already have some experience in the implementation of MPGs. [Cameroon](#) has chosen to include its MEB in the "country strategy" section of the response plan, with a section dedicated to "Why not cash?" and a box dedicated to the MEB process. Sectors are also developing their intervention strategies on cash transfers, but it is noted that further evaluations are still needed to advance the design of multi-purpose cash transfers.

The validation process in Cameroon went through all stages of the coordination structure; once the MEB was validated by the task team, the Maroua CWG in turn approved it and forwarded it to the Yaoundé CWG for validation. The sectors in northern Cameroon had pre-approved the MEB since they had themselves defined the components of their respective "baskets". The Yaoundé CWG then submitted the MEB to the HCT, which approved it for inclusion in the HRP at the end of 2017.

Nigeria is planning the same validation process, with some additional steps at the regional level where the Operational InterSector Working Group and the Operational Humanitarian Country Team are located. These two validation steps will be necessary before the MEB is validated by Abuja.

These different steps are intended to be essentially validations and not technical reviews of the tool, even if there is always room for comments and questions. Indeed, since the task team has been mandated by the CWG and is, in principle, recognized as having the necessary expertise (in CTP and sector-specific) to ensure the technical quality of the MEB, it is best placed to carry out the technical work. The MEB calculation itself was done in conjunction with the heads of agencies in Cameroon based in Yaoundé and the CWG was regularly updated on the progress made. The solid anchoring of the task team in the coordination structure (through the CWG) and the work on consensus made it possible, in the case of Cameroon, to provide a solid justification to the MEB and to avoid too much back-and-forth in the validation stages. Similarly, the very strong involvement of the actors in charge of coordination (up to the Humanitarian Coordinator) made it possible to speed up the process and to ensure a validation in time for the HRP, ensuring a certain balance between the search for the most accomplished technical sophistication possible and the pragmatism necessary for the finalization of the work.



*A few members of the BIEP cohort with CaLP regional team members, September 2017.
N. Cissokho*

In Mali, since the CWG is co-led by the government and since the government participated in the MEB process, the government's validation will be necessary and will allow this work to be articulated around social nets. The same applies to Chad, where the government is very involved in the process. It will be very interesting to see what influence the MEB can have on government programs, not only in terms of amount but also in terms of:

- What types of services and goods should cover state assistance? What can be covered through social nets, and what needs other public policies?
- Design – Coordinated amounts between emergency CTP and National Safety Nets based on a common MEB?⁵⁴
- Financing – What is the financial weight of the needs to be covered on the national economy?
- What contribution does aid make to meet needs?

Work on the MEB in the different countries has been guided by strategic decisions to move towards the implementation of multi-purpose cash transfers. The processes, sometimes laborious, must not overshadow the remaining next steps⁵⁵ in being ready for the design and implementation of such interventions. In turn, these MPG, sometimes defined as "emergency social safety nets", can help link humanitarian aid with government programmes; to scale them up, and to ensure institutional linkages between emergency response and social protection. The MEB, while an essential step in designing MPG, is not enough, but also goes beyond MPG. After validation, it has the potential to measure, in a more comprehensive and integrated way than is currently possible, the contribution of humanitarian assistance in meeting the needs of the most affected populations.

⁵⁴ Recommendation from the workshop co-hosted by CaLP and the [Regional Platform on Social Protection](#), on 19–20 April 2018 in Dakar.

⁵⁵ Recommendations for these next steps were developed at the CaLP/IRC [workshop](#) in December 2017.

CONCLUSION

Several countries – and an increasing number of them – are embarking on the definition of the MEB throughout the world. In this respect, the individual experience of West African countries does not necessarily shed a new light on an already extensive concept. However, parallel initiatives in several countries in the same region facing similar crises, with different coordination challenges, capacities and experiences, can identify success factors and obstacles for a smooth and rapid process. This regional experience highlights in particular:

- The importance of quality coordination as the basis for discussions, and the collaborative approach to ensure ownership and validation of the MEB via a dedicated forum (existing – as a CWG, or temporary, like the task teams set up in the countries). The task team approach is, in this experience, good practice and has made it possible to unlock the procedures, but it is not certain that the approach is necessary with a stronger CWG and coordination structure.
- The involvement of coordination actors at different levels (on the horizontal level: across sectors, on the vertical level: through the coordination bodies in charge of the validation of the MEB, with clear lines of accountability, but also on the technical level: with the involvement of the various necessary expertise and a clear delegation of tasks, and on the strategic level: the orientation necessary to ensure the progress of the work according to the roadmap, and decision-making).
- As with any evaluation and consensus-building work, the MEB is never perfect or definitive; it is therefore a matter of achieving a work that satisfies everyone, which will be updated as necessary, providing a clear improvement for the programming and monitoring of aid performance indicators.
- The limit of dedicated resources: if the initial obstacle to achieving the MEB is related to the process or coordination, adding technical capacities will not allow progress to be made, and may in fact slow down the process by developing parallel initiatives or by “paralyzing” the actors in the country, who will then have to take the process back a few steps.
- Institutional anchoring: The amount of the MEB, which takes into account the real needs of households, is likely to exceed the minimum income in many countries, which can create tensions if the tool and the approach are not understood by all. The full participation of the government from the beginning of the process therefore encourages its validation and ownership, but also its scaling up and periodic review.

The process of defining the MEB in these different countries has generally been long and laborious – at least six months to reach the validation stage – and has never progressed in a straight line. Various ad hoc initiatives carried out in parallel and leading to the resumption of the roadmaps, weak appropriation of the technical support provided, etc., are some of the pitfalls encountered which should inform the next countries to embark on this work. On the other hand, the processes have been collective, leading to consensual results allowing for better coordination in the future and preparing the ground for the next steps towards a multi-agency MPG. Finally, this experience seems to show that while collective action takes time to launch, it ultimately helps to gain time later in the process, provided that there is a strategic vision of the coordination actors in the background, which supports the dynamics and facilitates the process.

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The Cash Learning Partnership

Throughout 2017, five countries in West Africa have worked collectively to define minimum expenditure baskets, in order to better capture the contribution that humanitarian assistance is making to address the basic needs of affected populations, and improve the impact of assistance. This heavy process raises technical and coordination challenges. CaLP, with support from USAID / OFDA, documented the different approaches used by countries to identify facilitating factors to achieve the process and develop recommendations to overcome obstacles. This work does not aim at providing a guidance for MEB definition, but should be of interest to other countries working to define MEB.

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