



Linking Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance to Long-Term Solutions: Key Findings and Recommendations from the Iraq CWG Workshop November 2021

Context

Large-scale Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) has been provided in Iraq since 2015 to assist people who are affected by conflict to meet their basic needs. Humanitarian actors view MPCA as the most appropriate response modality in Iraq and a major component of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

The Iraq Cash Working Group (CWG) has played a key role, driving coordination efforts focusing primarily on the harmonization of the strategy and approach, targeting systems, frequency and transfer values, and other technical tools.

In 2015, since the territories controlled by ISIS were retaken by the government, Iraq set out on a process of recovery. MPCA programmes have played a key role in supporting internally displaced populations, as well as those returning to their areas of origin.

While the objectives of MPCA programmes aim to address the basic needs of the affected population, CWG members recognize that linkages to emerging development and social protection programmes need to be further developed and strengthened.

This paper provides a summary of findings and recommendations from a workshop that took place in November 2021 in Erbil, Iraq, which brought together 40 senior staff from 30 humanitarian organizations (the UN, national and international NGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement) to review the MPCA strategies and harmonized approaches with other coordination structures (clusters and/or development coordination mechanisms) for 2022, in response to the transitional context.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Re-establish a platform for social protection and humanitarian CVA actors to strengthen alignment throughout the transition phase

Social protection is a key priority for all aid stakeholders – government, donors, humanitarian and development. However, greater attention should be given to coordination and strategic harmonization between humanitarian CVA and social protection planning.

Where social protection systems are being developed or revised, initiatives should be gradually phased-in and take account of government capacity. These efforts should work to ensure government ownership and provide a foundation for complete handover and transition. After seven years of implementing MPCA in Iraq, CWG actors offer a wealth of knowledge on delivering essential cash support to the most vulnerable. Stakeholders such as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), humanitarian and development actors, and relevant coordination structures should seek avenues to help inform a more shock-responsive and effective social protection system.

Recommendation:

- To enable this, social protection and humanitarian CVA actors need to re-establish a platform (i.e., the Social Protection Forum that was established in 2018) that will enable dialogue and cooperation, with a starting point of looking at potential alignments until functioning referral mechanisms are established.

Review the adjusted technical approach to MPCA to enable transition

MPCA is no longer seen as a stand-alone activity but as an entry point to more comprehensive assistance to address multiple needs. The technical approach of MPCA has been revised by the CWG actors to better enable linkages with longer-term support.

Recommendation:

- As this is the first time that the transfer value and the frequency of the assistance is being modified, the CWG actors should conduct an impact assessment to measure the effects of the changes.

Ensure linkages between new and existing structures

As emergency response interventions are scaled down, new structures are being developed to support long-term and sustainable solutions that aim to restore livelihoods and enable access to services, including health and education. These programmes should be informed by existing MPCA and CVA programmes and should capitalize on lessons learned.

Recommendations:

- Increase coordination and dialogue between the CWG and the Durable Solutions Task Force (DSTF). Activities under DSTF may well include MPCA and other CVA activities. It is recommended to establish a coordination mechanism for cash and livelihoods within the structure and with the CWG.
- The CWG should increase its technical and operational advisory support to the Durable Solutions mechanism and in particular to the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group (DSTWG).
- Clarify which activities fall under humanitarian response and which under the DSTF to avoid duplication.

Improve linkages between CVA and sector-specific outcomes

Alongside MPCA programmes, sector specific CVA is being provided by different organizations (Cash for Work, Cash for Protection, Cash for Health, Cash for Non-Food Items (NFI), Cash Plus Initiatives etc). Coordination between MPCA programmes and other types of CVA needs to be continued and strengthened to improve access and programming from a user perspective and support faster, more efficient transitioning to long-term solutions. At the same time, MPCA recipients with specific identified sectorial needs should be referred to the relevant clusters to consider them for this additional support, regardless of modality of assistance.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen engagement between the CWG and the Emergency Livelihood Cluster to ensure that MPCA and livelihood programmes are people-centred, interconnected, holistic and avoid fragmentation. Programmatic changes will be needed within institutions to achieve this, along with investments in relevant technical know-how to support the graduation models and approach.
- Ensure well-structured and resourced referral pathways so that recipients of MPCA can receive the support they need in an effective and timely manner. Give priority to strengthening referral pathways within specific sectors such as Protection, Health, Food Security (agricultural), Livelihoods and Shelter outcomes.

- Increase investment in CVA technical capacities and know-how within all clusters to improve quality of programming, speed up coordination, enable faster progress on developing referral pathways, and strengthen institutional experience.

Invest in locally led responses

Moving forward from emergency response to a more developmental phase, investment in locally led responses and national NGOs' engagement in CVA responses is key. Thus far, national NGOs have been included in senior decision-making processes and in the emerging initiatives and coordination platforms, but only at limited levels.

Recommendations:

- Invest in local actors to enable effective inclusion and participation. This should include a review of synergies and investment in strategic, technical, and organizational development capacities.
- Ensure local actor's active presence in decision-making structures.
- Donors should commit funding to local actors involved in integrating MPCA with longer-term solutions. Predictable and longer-term funding is needed to enhance local capacities and promote the engagement of local actors, not only at the operational level, but also at strategy and policy levels.

Further improve accountability to affected populations

In Iraq, many MPCA actors work with various forms of Community Committees or Community Working Groups for assessment processes however there are opportunities to strengthen communication with communities and investing time and effort to create common messages from MPCA actors to communities and amongst communities as well.

While many good feedback mechanisms are established by different humanitarian actors, MPCA actors are keen to improve the integration of these systems in CVA programmes.

Recommendations:

- Build on existing community collaborations to increase participation and impact. Where designed and supported carefully, these bodies could be effective partners throughout the programme – enabling diverse and representative perspectives to inform programmes. Such mechanisms should also provide clear opportunities for further development of communities to take ownership of their own responses.
- Develop common and coordinated communication approaches. Going forward, this should include collaboration with communities to design and test messaging and ensure it is shared through accessible and trusted channels.
- Make better use of feedback. A safe and trusted common feedback mechanism for MPCA and, potentially, other programmes will create opportunities to improve referral pathways, as well as providing a clearer system for users. It will also provide opportunities for data analysis, which can subsequently be used to inform decision-making.

Mainstream and Resource Gender Analysis

Understanding gender dynamics requires time and relationship building with communities to achieve a level of understanding that can form the basis of planning and programme design. This is especially important given that MPCA is delivered at the household level in Iraq, and additional efforts must be invested in designing gender-responsive programmes.

CVA actors identified gender analysis as either weak or missing altogether during programme design, targeting and household expenditure analysis. Moreover, CVA actors, especially local CVA actors, voiced their expectations that minimum humanitarian standards in general, but specifically gender standards, are achieved, yet finances are not allocated to gender considerations during programme planning, resulting in resource gaps and frustrated expectations.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian actors should collaborate with gender experts in-country to strengthen the gender-sensitivity of the CVA Strategy. The identification of gender-related blind spots will inform CVA actors on potential capacity building efforts and shifts in funding approaches.
- Invest in gender mainstreaming, ensuring adequate human, financial and communication resources at all stages of CVA programming, including the review of Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment (SEVAT). The shift towards structured and gender-sensitive approaches can be achieved by employing appropriately trained staff to conduct gender analysis in communities where MPCA is implemented, so the activity can be designed and implemented accordingly. The CWG, in close collaboration with gender and protection specialists, can support the design of appropriate guidelines with an analysis tool.
- Advocate and work through current power structures in the communities for gender inclusion. Support from religious figures, 'mukhtars' and all men in communities is pivotal for the change that everyone envisions.
- Donors should commit financial resources to enable gender mainstreaming and inclusion in the envisioned CVA programming.

Plan for financial inclusion

Some population groups have limited financial literacy and therefore have limited access to financial services due to social, cultural, and religious dynamics. This makes it difficult to provide equitable access to assistance and financial resources more widely. Prohibition of interest due to religious beliefs and should be taken into consideration.

Meaningful change in financial inclusion will therefore prove particularly challenging, but initial efforts should ensure that communities, and especially women, have the necessary skills, information, and opportunities to access financial services.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian CVA actors should provide financial education training to MPCA participants to enhance their budgeting, saving, and borrowing behaviour.
- Find ways to bridge the gap between vulnerable communities and formal financial institutions through context-specific interventions.
- Undertake an analysis of the impact of the MPCA transfer value and frequency of payments on financial inclusion.
- Strengthen referral pathways from MPCA programmes to livelihood projects, legal support and linkages with the government social protection programmes. These linkages, which serve as supplementary solutions, build on increasing financial inclusion by improving the socio-economic stability of communities.

The CALP Network and the CWG would like to thank all partners and other actors that participated in the workshop and made possible the strategic discussion to ensure a more sustainable and quality MPCA to continue supporting the vulnerable populations.

This report has been commissioned by the CALP Network.
It was generously funded by the German Federal Foreign
Office (GFFO).