

WEBINAR MINUTES

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SAHEL AND CENTRAL AFRICA: DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CVA PROGRAMMES IN CHALLENGING CONTEXT (FOCUS ON THE SAHEL REGION)

Location: virtual
Date: 22 sept 2022 (12H-13H GMT)
Attendees: 96 men et 41 women
Speakers: IRC Mali, ICRC et WFP / Burkina Faso

Justification

In response to the multiple crises that have plagued the Sahel region for several years, it is pertinent to address the design and implementation of Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) to aid vulnerable households living in areas whose sources of income and livelihoods have been impacted by conflict and the presence of non-state armed groups. In addition to these difficult contexts, there are geographical and technological constraints and the ramifications of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

Through this webinar, held in virtual mode on September 22nd, 2022, the CALP Regional Office for West and Central Africa took the opportunity to analyze, with the help of its partners' experience sharing, some strategies for adapting the modalities and mechanisms of cash transfers to difficult contexts.

The webinar is composed of a contribution from DG Echo, and three presentations followed by a question-and-answer segment (direct and written), all with simultaneous interpretation in English and French.

Contribution of the ECHO General Delegation

Available on recording (from 10mn-14mn20s)

Christophe BREYNE of DG/Echo welcomed the CALP initiative and the relevance of the theme of this webinar in the Sahel sub-region. Indeed, this zone is experiencing more and more crises which in turn have caused a deterioration on all modalities as well as on the operational actors. The recommendations shared are the following :

- Rethink the choice of modalities or systematically the best modality by including several criteria given the complexity of local and operational contexts
- Effectively respond as quickly as possible to the needs of households in relation to the defined objectives, in a context of tension while considering the increase in needs in relation to resources.
- Monitor and evaluate the economy of scale through the choice of modality by considering the protection aspects of the beneficiaries, price inflation for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.
- Properly prepare response options B and C.
- Improve monitoring, evaluation, and analysis of modalities in local markets (proximity markets) because on-site arrangements are not optimal

1. IRC Mali's experience with food vouchers

(Available on recording from 15min – 24min)

Hamadoun KOMOU/Deputy Food Security Livelihoods Coordinator shared with us IRC Mali's experience with food stamps in areas of armed conflict between militant groups and the Malian army (Ménaka, Ansongo, Douentza, Tenenkou, Youwarou and Nara).

It should be noted that in Mali between 2015 and early 2018, assistance was provided through direct cash, but the voucher approach was adopted to assist the population in a safe and timely manner.

The choice of vouchers is a response to the following constraints:

- Insufficient providers to carry out the cash distribution
- The high cost of distribution
- The opposition of radical Islamists to the use of cash because of the high rate of transfers
- Insecurity of financial providers with the high number of robberies blocking all activities.

Despite the challenges (available in the presentation), the choice of food vouchers has several success factors such as:

- Diversification of the diet of the most vulnerable households
- Responding to emergencies and the immediate needs of vulnerable households
- Strengthening the resilience of the population
- Revitalization of the local economy

The recommendations to be drawn from the experience of the IRC in Mali are a better involvement of the communities as much on the modalities as on the choice of the products but also a balance between the different categories of traders.

2. Emergency response in a hard-to-reach area - Matiacoal, Eastern Region of Burkina Faso

(Available on recording from 25min - 37min)

Paul BAKAIVE/ICRC Burkina Faso shared the ICRC's experience in the eastern region of Burkina Faso, which has seen a sharp deterioration in the security situation due to the presence of non-state armed groups over the past two years. The number of internally displaced persons (IDP) and the number of people in a situation of acute insecurity (3.5 million or 16% of the population) have increased considerably. The modality chosen in this intervention zone is cash for emergency food assistance to 1,719 households (IDPs and vulnerable host households) in 3+1 rounds to enable them to meet their basic food needs urgently. This modality was chosen because of the following reasons :

- The functionality of markets and the level of acceptable supply
- The availability of infrastructure and traders
- The presence of distribution points
- The experience of operations for electronic and direct payment and mainly the willingness of beneficiaries to opt for cash
- The experience of Financial Service Providers (FSPs) in similar operations in hard-to-reach areas
- The capacity of the FSP to work off-line and on-line
- Consultation with the beneficiaries

The lessons learned from this ICRC experience are Involvement of different stakeholders in the implementation of the project (Red Cross BF, local authorities, community leaders) for the readjustment of the planning; **Establishment of a flexible payment system (electronic/direct); Do-it-yourself by a team (with good acceptance and community anchoring) and remote monitoring to carry out the activities successfully.**

3. CVA in Challenging context by WFP Burkina Faso

(Available on recording from 37mn - 49mn)

The presentation by **Alpha KEITA, CBT Programme Officer/WFP Burkina Faso Office**, focused on WFP Burkina Faso's experience in supporting people vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity, including IDPs and local populations, to meet their basic food needs during the lean season. This hard-to-reach area is characterized by high insecurity and frequent population movement. The main

success factor of the project is to choose the modality and mechanisms of transfers that are best adapted to achieve the program objectives, considering the Context and the Operational Feasibility. During this campaign, different payment solutions were used:

- **Mobile money** (30-40% of targeted people),
- **Direct cash** (in areas where beneficiaries do not have access to telephone, network, or identification)
- **The e-voucher** (the Djibo area: hot zone in terms of insecurity and technologically limited). In the implementation, there is flexibility in the modalities whenever a certain modality limits the services.

In response to the challenges on the ground, the lessons learned and recommendations from this experience are:

- Emergency preparedness actions.
- Flexibility and Adaptation of payment solutions
- Secure beneficiary data management system
- Continuous monitoring and dialogue with the Private Sector

Questions and answers

(available on recording from 50 min - 1h01min)

- **Q to IRC** - What are the channels through which food vouchers positively influence local markets? **A:**
There is no added value for the vouchers but in the IRC system, using merchants of all sizes, we can ensure that the impact is present in local markets instead of importing suppliers from outside the area.
- **Q to CICR** – What strategies are in place to address the challenges identified in the presentation? **A:**
 - Subcontracting of the main provider with a local provider who already has a community base allowing for the mobilization of resources with the mechanisms developed
 - Internally, division of the team into scheduled subgroups depending on the availability of resources with the provider
 - Regarding adaptation measures: Addition of an additional round of assistance for an exit strategy; Training and monitoring of the Burkinabe Red Cross in remote locations to relay the work on the ground.
- **Q to PAM** – How do we choose the modality to meet vulnerable people and how do we manage to change it in a timely manner? **A:**
 - Implementation of contracts with national coverage with diversified suppliers
 - First, the choice of preferred modality for TMs = payment via cell phone
 - Secondly, direct cash is used through the services of local distributors working closely with beneficiaries
 - Finally, bank or microfinance used as a last resort.
- **Q to all panelists** – Which recommendations would you give to cash actors in challenging contexts? **A:**
 - **IRC:** Investing in baseline surveys
 - **ICRC:** On top of the baseline survey, flexibility in modalities et mechanisms – selection of a local team with a community base - having organizations already accepted - diversification of FSPs
 - **WFP:** Rapid emergency preparedness at scale - conflict sensibility
- **An additional document has been compiled to answer to all the questions in the Q&A**

Questionnaire results

At the end of the meeting, to gather the opinions of stakeholders and participants a survey launched at the end of the webinar yielded the following results:

- 1) 85% of respondents think CALP should be much more engaged around TMs in challenging contexts
- 2) 86% of respondents think CALP should hold more events like this to share lessons learned and experiences.
85% of respondents think CALP should organize more events like this to share lessons learned and experiences.
66% of respondents think CALP should instead support CWGs to operationalize learning in hard-to-reach areas.