

MINUTES OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA CASH WORKING GROUPS LEADS & CO-LEADS GROUPS (CWGs) MEETING

Place: Conference room of the regional office of Action against hunger in Dakar – SN
Date: February 1st -3rd, 2023 (9H-17H GMT)
Participants : 30 including 13 women (Day1)
34 including 18 women (Day 2)
33 including 12 women (Day 3)
Organizations: UNICEF, DRC, SCI, WFP, World Bank, Wizall, MFS Africa, OCHA, Ground Truth Solutions, ACF, NRC, ECHO, BHA, Direction of Social Protection and Solidarity-Based Economy (DNPSES) / Mali, Ministry of Humanitarian Action, and Disaster Management (MAH/GC) / Niger, Mercy Corps, CRS, Oxfam, ASOPV, CALP

Introduction

From February 1-3, 2023, the meeting of leads and co-leads of the Cash Working Groups (CWGs) of West and Central Africa was held in Dakar, Senegal. The meeting is part of the support provided by the Regional CWG and CALP Network to the national CWGs in the region. It was co-organized by CALP and the United Nations Regional Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with the financial support of the Bureau of humanitarian Assistance (BHA/USAID).

The specific objectives of the meeting were:

- Contribute to improve the coordination at the regional level and in the different countries.
- Support the national CWGs for a better transition process.
- Strengthen synergy and networking between the CWGs around key regional trends.
- Identify the priority topics and activities to organize in 2023.

The meeting was attended by 8 of 9 active CWGs in the region with 16 participants from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chad. There were as well several participants in attendance from international NGOs, Financial services providers, Donors and regional focal points of cash and vouchers assistance (CVA) as contributors to the different sessions/discussions.

Day 1

1. Opening session

The meeting was opened by CALP, who addressed the current political and security situation in the region, and the affected populations who are increasingly in need of humanitarian assistance. This steady deterioration of the context overwhelmed by increasing needs calls for multiple humanitarians, a pooling of resources and networking. The new cash coordination model is an opportunity to make CVA more efficient and effective.

2. Humanitarian coordination and planning

The first session of this meeting was animated with two presentations:

1. Humanitarian coordination and planning by the OCHA regional office: around the history of Humanitarian coordination, its architecture at the global level, the humanitarian and country

programming cycle also the link between coordination and localization on the one hand, and on the other hand between the CWGs and the localization as well as the mobilization of funds such as Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and other funding from traditional donors.

2. CVA in the 2023 Humanitarian program cycle by Niger CWG: participation of the CWG in various humanitarian program cycles, collaboration with REACH under the lead of the inter-cluster in the multi-sectoral needs assessment. The highlights of this presentation are as follows:

From the discussions, we can retain:

- The continuing challenge of regular updating of the 5W matrices by the CWGs and the need to clarify the role of the clusters in this process.
- The regional CWG must take back the issue of the regional dashboard to support the CWGs' efforts to monitor and strengthen the visibility of CVA at the regional level.
- The challenges of respecting the 25% quota of mobilized fundings allocated to local organizations; This quota is respected for funding directly managed by OCHA, but not yet for other funding mobilized by other humanitarian actors.
- Continue to support national CWGs in the transition process to the new cash transfer coordination model; the OCHA regional office is currently working on this; CWGs will be contacted once the plan is finalized.

3. CVA and locally led responses

Two presentations as a basis of discussions in this session:

1. The presentation of DRC's FLASH project served as the basis for discussion in this session. It is a project implemented with local organizations as a rapid response mechanism in three countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, a difficult context characterized by significant population displacement and limited access.
2. A short presentation by CALP on the preliminary results of the consultation with local actors on the new capacity building strategy: even if they have training plans, local organizations have difficulties in terms of financing, appropriate access to technologies and they are not sufficiently informed about the training opportunities of CALP. The complete results of this consultation will be presented throughout a series of workshops planned on the 15 and 16 of February 2023.

The session brought together “pros” and “counter/reticent” opinions to work with local actors to help advance the localization agenda. Discussions revolved around the role of CWGs in this effort of localization but as well as the expectations, limits and risks of rapid emergency response led by local actors. As takeaways from this session:

- Create a more open space to organizations, beyond the framework of CWGs.
- Commit to meeting international commitments to local organizations, including access to funding, strengthening partnerships while further strengthening local organizations.
- The choice of partners in the implementation of programs must be based on their areas of anchorage; programs must now be aligned with the geographical anchorage of the local organizations and contexts that they know very well to facilitate deployment.
- The risks associated with working with local organizations locales should not be a justification to delay the implementation of the localization agenda; we should start one day, similarly to DRC did with the FLASH project.

4. (PSEA) in the CVA framework

The presentation of the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) network in West and Central Africa first recalled the links between PSEA and the increase in the use of CVA. This session aims to contribute to a better awareness of participants. The risks of exploitation and sexual abuse

can come staff from our organizations, distribution partners as well as the local community itself (especially if they are part of the distribution committee). Therefore, it is important to assess the risks according to contexts and programs. It is also necessary to raise the awareness of humanitarian actors on PSEA and analyze the risks before the implementation of projects using the CVA modalities. It was recommended to continue raising awareness and to extend it beyond the framework of this meeting either at the level of Regional CWG or at the level of national CWGs.

Day 2

5. Links between CVA and Social protection

The session was structured with a presentation made by WFP, UNICEF and the World Bank. The purpose of the presentation was to reflect with the CWG coordinators on the link between humanitarian CVA and social protection, in a context of chronic crises with recurrent and overlapping food crises especially in the Sahel, the increase in the number of people suffering from hunger from year to year, the complexification of the causes, the vulnerability of people throughout the year, and this has now been done for years, funding that is becoming increasingly difficult for humanitarian crises and the role of social protection in supporting the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Following the presentation, the exchanges opened with the experiences shared by the CWG of Mauritania, and other countries. Mauritania is a very positive case where humanitarian organizations are starting to use the unified social register, although there are still some difficulties. Among the different aspects touched during the debates were the difficulties encountered with the unified social registers, which according to the interventions are often not up to date or do not cover the whole population or the whole country, the difficulty of alignment because humanitarian programs have a vocation to cover a limited period and different needs, and the rather political aspects. The importance of linking humanitarian and social protection programs was, however, highlighted as a priority for all countries.

In conclusion, the group considers that even where there is no unified social register and where the state has not yet made much progress in establishing a social safety net system, humanitarian actors should approach state departments that are supposed to be interested in social protection and also other entities that support social protection programs. This can be done through dialogue and information-sharing, which should help to ensure operational synergies and complementarities.

6. AAP/ Accountability towards affected populations in CVA context

This session was facilitated by two presentations from the regional AAP (accountability to affected populations) network:

- UNICEF presentation on the AAP dimension of humanitarian response to demonstrate the importance of designing interventions to truly serve communities by involving affected populations in decision-making in an equitable, safe and effective manner. AAP is applicable to both emergency and long-term interventions. However, it is important to adapt the AAP dimension to the context (conflicts, epidemics, disasters, development) and to properly identify the information and communication system, without forgetting to consider the gender dimension, social context, etc.
- Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) presentation of the Cash Transfer Barometer in the Central African Republic. This is a dynamic of GTS in West and Central Africa that aims to understand the views of people who have received CVA. The study noted the importance of collaboration with different partners, the humanitarian working groups. The study noted the misconduct of certain traders (financial service providers) and failures in monitoring. The study recommends: a) limiting the outsourcing of services that run the risk of fraud; b) being

more present in the communities and ensuring systematic follow-up of complaints after distributions.

7. Session with financial service provider WIZALL

This session was the first of two presentations with two FSPs. The aim was to exchange between the humanitarian coordination of CVA and the FSPs, in order to improve mutual understanding.

After a short presentation, WIZALL introduced its structure and services. Currently the company is working in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso and is in the process of launching its operations in Niger as well. Wizall is a structure attached to the Atlantic Bank, which also guarantees liquidity for large humanitarian operations. The services offered are several, and in addition to the classic money transfer by mobile, Wizall has also presented the possibility of assisting populations living in areas not, or little, served by the telephone networks with electronic cards that work without network (offline).

In conclusion, CWGs and Wizall coordinators agreed on the importance of creating spaces for discussion between humanitarians and FSPs to work together on solutions adapted to the different specific constraints and in complete safety for the beneficiaries.

8. CWGs update

The latest updates from the different CWGs since the meeting in the month of July 2022:

- **Successes:** good functioning of national CWGs with in some cases rotating meetings and transition of CWGs to the new coordination model ongoing.
- **Challenges:** a) CWGs are still deployed only at the national level; there is a need to consider the activation of subgroups at the subnational level; b) How to make the involvement of national NGOs and government actors more active; c) Mobilization of resources for financing the activities of national CWGs; Widespread updating/revision of MEBs.
- **Recommendations :** a) Capacity building of CWG members including government actors and National NGOs; b) Training of trainers; c) Advocacy for political acceptance of CVAs in light of the banning decisions of CVA taken by governments at regional level; d) Advocacy with donors for the mobilization of resources for the financing of CWG activities; e) Strengthen the engagement of national NGOs and government actors in CWGs; f) Continue the support to the transition process to the new model: dedicated staff, support on 5Ws and Dashboards; g) Initiate/strengthen networking of the different CWGs.

9. Working with local governments

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Northeast Nigeria shared their experiences in terms of acceptance of CVA by existing state structures. It is important to note that Cameroon and Nigeria have experienced a ban on CVA by their governments in the past. However, through advocacy, better involvement of local authorities, and regular information sharing on CVA operations, the use of CVA has been restored. Government actors are not necessarily informed, so there is a need to improve information sharing and agree on standard operating procedures. Since the beginning of the year, Burkina Faso has experienced a ban on CVA, specifically in the Sahel region. The causes and implications of this situation have been discussed at length: the problem seems to be beyond CVAs, but rather all humanitarian assistance modalities. The Burkinabe government is continuing discussions with various stakeholders to find a better approach to humanitarian assistance. The CWG is also continuing consultations and advocacy to prevent a possible ban on CVAs in other regions.

The general recommendation is to involve government departments in the coordination of cash and vouchers assistance, from the planning to the response phase, in order to anticipate problems of political acceptance and improve accountability and transparency.

Day 3

10. Open discussions with Donors

The donor exchange session opened with a brief presentation from BHA and ECHO on their policies towards CVA. Even though BHA does not have a formal policy on CVA, partners must explain why they are doing so if they decide to make in-kind distributions, ECHO has a new CVA policy that focuses more concretely on Cash transfers, hence the default modality and partners must explain why they are not using this modality when appropriate.

Several CWG coordinators talked about the possibility of scaling up CVA programs in their respective countries by promoting the use of multi-purpose cash transfers and working more with different clusters to increase the use of sectoral CVAs. Advocacy was also mentioned as a tool to assist more people with CVAs, this activity should target the actors who could potentially use CVAs more and the different state departments that can play a facilitating role and link with the social safety nets.

In conclusion, coordination also emerged as a very important aspect to improve the efficiency and number of CVA programs, through updated MEBs, feasibility studies, capacity building, support to local organizations, linkage between humanitarian CVA and social protection programs, etc. For their part, donors have reiterated their willingness to support CVA coordination on a case-by-case basis, but they ask for a well-structured collective work, with validated and shared annual plans as well as advocacy tracks developed by/with the CWGs based on evidence. CWGs can approach donors, but with clear objectives and a well-structured roadmap.

11. Open session with Regional CVA focal points

The exchange session with the regional CVA focal points aimed to create a link between the CWG coordinators and the different regional offices. The session was attended by WFP, UNHCR, SCI, DRC and IRC (the latter remotely).

During the discussions, the CWG coordinators emphasized the need to work in a coordinated manner in building the capacities of all actors, local organizations, state actors and employees of international organizations. They also asked the regional focal points to sensitize their colleagues at the country level so that they can participate more actively in the meetings and working groups (MEB, advocacy, feasibility studies, etc.) of the CWGs in the different countries. Indeed, some coordinators underlined the low participation of some organizations in the work of some CWGs. This low participation was explained by some regional focal points by the fact that there are often gaps or no capacity.

In conclusion, the session had constructive exchanges and underlined the need for a greater participation of the different organizations in order to strengthen the technical capacity of the different CWGs. For capacity building, there is also a need to mobilize common resources to increase the number of people who are trained in the use of CVA.

12. Session with FSP MFS Africa

This second exchange session with a financial service provider was interesting because MFS Africa is a financial aggregator and several CWG coordinators were not familiar with the existence of this type of service. After a presentation of their services, the discussion allowed some CWGs to ask questions about the functioning of the service, the geographical coverage and also the added value of using such a service compared to a standard service (with a single operator). Several participants also addressed the contractual issues of having a contract with a single provider who in turn works with several others providing the various services available.

13. CALP training offerings and regional CWG meeting perception survey results

This is a short session to present the CALP training offers and the approach at the regional level. The training offers are now more diversified: standard training and specialized training in face-to-face, online (e-learning), distance or mixed formats. CALP will continue to organize trainings of trainers and certification with the CWGs and targeting countries as a priority according to the cost sharing principle. CALP will continue to strengthen and diversify the pool of certified trainers (language, modules, localization) as well as strengthen the capacities of local actors to deliver its trainings.

14. Key priorities identified for the Regional CWG Action Plan

The participants at the meeting wished to see the regional CWG engage in:

- Capacity building of country CWG members with a focus on state service teams and local actors
- The continuation of the certification and training of trainers to have more trainers per country.
- Support for the implementation/revision of the MEB and identification of transfer values
- Advocacy for the acceptance of CVA.
- Support to country CWGs in the transition to the new cash transfer coordination model.
- Supporting the strengthening of relationships with clusters.
- Revisiting the management of digitalization and data protection" as well as gender and cash CVA.

Main recommendations of the meeting

1. Support CWGs in the transition process to the new cash coordination model.
2. Accelerate the implementation of the localization agenda, in particular through capacity building for local organizations and state actors, their involvement from the planning of the humanitarian response as well as the diversification of forums for exchange with these actors.
3. Regional CVA advisors to raise awareness among their colleagues at the national level to participate more actively in CWG activities.
4. Donors remain open to supporting coordination efforts at the regional level, but CWGs must approach them with clear objectives and a well-structured roadmap.
5. Improve relationships with clusters, especially in the collection of data on sectoral CVAs.
6. Create spaces for discussion with financial service providers to facilitate the search for appropriate solutions.
7. Seek as much as possible to link humanitarian CVA with government social protection programs, even if the system is not ready yet.
8. Continue to raise awareness on cross-cutting issues (AAP, PSEA, gender) to ensure better understanding and consideration.