Digital CVA solutions
Using technology in Cash and Voucher Assistance
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This document was prepared by Plan International by the Digital and Innovation Team in collaboration with the Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Program Community of Practice. The document aims to provide a basic concept on different types of electronic payment systems, and the biometrics that are in practice in the CVA Programming.

Introduction

In recent years, cash and voucher transfers have become a popular tool for humanitarian response. Two enablers have been branchless banking and electronic payments technologies. The need for efficient, effective and accountable mass money transfer to large numbers of recipients have led organisations to adopt technological innovations.

Plan International acknowledges that there is an immense potential to harness technology to improve the efficiency and timeliness of CVA delivery, with additional oversight and clarity in the management of projects. This guidance document provides a quick overview of digital CVA solutions and outlines some key issues that need to be taken into account when considering adopting these.
Electronic payment systems

Electronic payment (e-payment) systems have the potential to provide more efficient, safe and reliable delivery of cash and vouchers transfers than manual systems. Currently, the most popular e-payment systems are the following:

- **Mobile money transfers**: the most common form of electronic transfers (end to end interface). Common example are Mpesa in Kenya, Airtel in Zambia or MTN in Sudan.
- **Electronic vouchers**. They are mainly ‘localized systems’ through which beneficiaries can redeem their entitlements at the designated PoS (Point of Sale) terminal. The systems are interconnected through voucher cards, PoS and the server. Plan International has developed an electronic voucher system, which was piloted in Eastern Equatoria Region of South Sudan. Other examples are Last Mile Mobile Solution (developed by World Vision) or SCOPE developed by WFP.
- **Pre-paid debit card**. The card is given to beneficiaries to collect the cash from ATM outlets.
- **E-wallet**. An e-wallet is an electronic system which is used for transactions made online through a computer or a smartphone. Users can store money for future online transaction. Some example of e-wallets are KBZ Pay in Myanmar or e-Sewa in Nepal. Since many of its clients might not have an access to the computer or smartphone or internet connectivity, e-wallet companies also set up cash points (agents) for a physical cash collection or distributions.

**Benefits of electronic payment systems:**

Improved security for staff and recipients; reduced leakage; improved reconciliation and control of expenditure; greater speed and efficiency of transfers; reduced costs for the agency and recipient; the potential for realising wider impacts for the recipient.

**Challenges:**

Lack of prior experience with technology; poor network and infrastructure; low literacy and lack of agency capacity; these can contribute to access not being inclusive and benefits/impacts therefore not being distributed equally.

The digital gender divide must also be taken into account in rolling out any solutions. Girls and women face multiple barriers to take advantage of digital technology – due to existing gender norms and stereotypes women and girls are facing disadvantages in developing technical skills or are prevented access to technological devices such as mobile phones. These barriers must be acknowledged in any deployment of CVA technology, and mitigative measures must be taken to ensure any introduction of technology is inclusive and does not deepen the digital divide.
Essential considerations

Please consider the following factors carefully before choosing a particular technology for your CVA response:

- **Coordination**: Coordinate with the Cash Working Group and other actors in country to learn about technological solutions that are in place/ functioning and build on best practices.
- **Regulatory framework**: Check whether the local government and regulations allow that system or technology to be used (e.g. some governments have not yet authorised mobile money transfers.)
- **Reach of the service**: Assess whether the chosen technology can reach all the intended beneficiaries given e.g. the digital gender divide. Consider sex and age appropriateness of the chosen technology.
- **Access to the service**: Establish whether beneficiaries are already using that particular technology/service, whether your office can further support beneficiaries to gain access (e.g. through provision of a mobile phone and sim card), what the associated costs are, and if the procurement timeline feasible.
- **Digital literacy**: Establish whether beneficiaries are proficient and familiar in using the technology, and what their preference is.
- **Timeframe**: Establish how quickly you need to start the distributions. Note that in rapid onset situations (e.g. earthquake or cyclone), mobile network infrastructures could be down for several days because of the damage of its infrastructure.
- **Documentation requirements**: Establish what these are (e.g. know-your-customer (KYC)), and the extent beneficiaries meet the requirements.
- **Security and fraud risks**: Note debit cards are subject to data hacking remotely using apps. Set up preventive measures. What are the risks associated to the technology (e.g. cash out of an ATM and theft).
- **Technical sustainability**: Establish who will provide technical support/maintenance of the system during the project and once the project is phased out? Who will own it subsequently?
- **Financial viability**: Assess whether the digital tool represents value for money: is the technology cost efficient and effective in your context and your use case. Generally, technologies are financially more viable in the long run or when you need to do distributions for a larger population over a long period.
- **Data protection and privacy**: Ensure you follow global data protection standards and Plan International’s Data Privacy Policy, and have a clear understanding of the data lifecycle including the privacy and security of the data collected throughout. Ensure the protection of the beneficiaries following the principles of ‘do no [digital] harm’;
- **Scale, Reuse & Improve**: Check if someone at Plan International is already using this technology. What can you learn from that experience? Are there opportunities to scale the use of this technology within the organisation?

biometric data

With recent technological advances, it has become increasingly feasible to collect biometric data from beneficiaries. While it is perfectly feasible to make use of digital technology in CVA without collecting biometric data, proponents of collecting biometric data from CVA
recipients highlight benefits related to minimising fraud risks and ensure that aid reaches those most in need. However, critics stress the risks associated with collecting and storing highly sensitive personal data of vulnerable groups, as well as ethical questions surrounding consent and ownership of biometric data. Peer organisations have taken different stances on biometric data collection.

Plan International does not yet have a policy on the collection and use of biometric data. Plan International’s CVA commitment paper however recommends that we by default refrain from engaging in biometric data collection. The paper also recommends that in situations where collection of biometric data is a condition for a high-value partnership and clear benefits can be identified, engagement in biometric data collection shall be decided upon, on a case-by-case basis, by the Ethics Committee.

Learn more

- [New Technologies in cash transfer programming and humanitarian assistance](#) by Concern Worldwide, OPM, and PRIAD, 2011.
- [Protecting beneficiaries’ privacy](#), CaLP, 2013.