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# Evidence and practice review of the use of cash transfers in contexts of acute food insecurity

Final report

Prepared by Key Aid Consulting for the Global Food Security Cluster  
Cash and Market Working Group

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# Acknowledgments

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# Executive summary

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## I.1. Introduction

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Hunger affects 10% of the global population, with the rate of undernutrition having increased by 150 million people from 2019 to 2022 as a result of conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic (the “three Cs”). Projections of undernourishment indicate that by 2030, 670 million people will be undernourished. As the three Cs impact global hunger, there has been an attempt to shift the paradigm of food security interventions by prioritising a systems approach that addresses the root causes of food insecurity and builds resilience.

The volume of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) has increased in the past six years, reaching 6.7 billion USD in 2021.<sup>1</sup> However, the growth rate of funding has been stalling. Despite the increase in the acceptance of CVA, a large portion of which is dedicated to preventing the further deterioration of food security and helping to improve it, there is inconsistency in the choice of modalities, application and general practices across contexts facing acute food insecurity. The use of CVA to meet food security outcomes continues to fall short of its potential.

There is therefore room to explore the untapped and/or underused potential of cash transfers, and strengthen evidence of the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity. These contexts are those with Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) or Cadre Harmonisé (CH) levels 3-5 and Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI) levels moderate or severe.

In light of this, the Global Food Security Cluster Cash and Market Working Group (gFSC CM WG) commissioned operational research to gather evidence and lessons learned in support of the use of cash<sup>2</sup> for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity. For the sake of the research, these are defined as contexts in which IPC/Cadre Harmonisé (CH) Phase 3-5, or CARI moderate or severe (3 or 4), has been reported or projected in the last two years (between 2020 and 2022). This research uses Nigeria, Somalia and Syria as examples of acute food insecurity contexts.

## I.2. Findings

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### Government and donor support for cash

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an enabler for the use of cash through the expansion of social protection programmes and more exposure to cash for humanitarian actors and governments alike. However, actors’ openness and exposure to the use of cash does not necessarily imply change in the way they make decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Considering the value transferred and the associated programming costs (operation and implementation).

<sup>2</sup> This research only looks at the use of cash assistance and does not consider vouchers.

- Donors' earmarked funds, and/or requirements and preferences for certain modalities, are still influencing the choice of modality. Those requirements or preferences contribute to maintaining in-kind assistance, but donors have generally been supportive of the use of cash for food security outcomes in all three contexts. However, in Syria, donors remain cautious about the use of cash in areas under government control for a number of reasons, including international sanctions, aid-diversion concerns and weak currency. In northeast and northwest Syria (NES and NWS), which are outside of government control, some donors have been supporting scaling up the use of cash under robust monitoring, even since before 2020.
- Governments have made the decision to restrict the use and distribution of cash transfers in certain contexts, especially ones with a strong presence of non-state armed groups. The extent to which authorities support cash is different in each country:
  - In northeast Nigeria, the government is not openly against the use of cash, but there are restrictions on the movement of physical cash based on anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism regulations.
  - In Syria, the Syrian Arab Republic Government gave the greenlight for the use of cash in areas under its control in 2020 to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and the dramatic depreciation of the Syrian pound (SYP). In NES and NWS, where humanitarian cash is widespread, the authorities are supportive of cash in general, but restrict its use in camps for fear that it will be diverted to terrorist groups and create a pull factor.
  - In Somalia, both the government and donors are very supportive of cash, and it is now well established, with only a few exceptions.

### Response Analysis and **Decision-making**

The research looked into the decision-making process behind the choice to use cash, voucher or in-kind modalities for food assistance in the three contexts surveyed, identifying enablers that encourage the use of cash, and inhibitors that hinder its uptake.

#### **Enablers:**

- Markets are largely functional in all three contexts, with a secured supply of essential goods.
- There is a high level of awareness about the added value of cash over voucher and in-kind modalities, especially in terms of its effectiveness and the dignity it gives recipients by offering them freedom of choice.
- Support from the Cash Working Group (CWGs) and Food Security Clusters/Sectors (FSC/Ss), especially in terms of enhancing the quality of programming, harmonising approaches, and advocacy.

- An organisational culture that is conducive for the use of cash at scale for food security objectives and basic needs.
- Donors with policies that explicitly promote the use of cash among their partners and fund CWG coordinator positions, in line with the Grand Bargain<sup>3</sup> commitment to scale up cash and its coordination.
- Availability of market prices and functionality data.
- Available and functional financial service providers (FSPs) in targeted areas and established ways of working with them.

#### Inhibitors:

- Donors' requirements or preferences for other modalities (especially in-kind).
- Perceptions by stakeholders such as implementers and authorities around the potential misuse and diversion of cash.
- The use of cash is still perceived as riskier and more technical (step-by-step approach).
- Intended objective: voucher modality often preferred for food security outcomes.
- Restrictive national and international regulations and policies that constrain the scale-up of cash.
- An overall lack of common analysis among donors and between implementing actors.
- Fear of inflation impacting participants.
- Lack of coverage or functionality of FSPs in targeted areas.

#### Transfer value

In the three countries studied, the transfer value is closely monitored and there is a robust and recognised mechanism for adjusting it to inflation. The recommendations of the CWGs and FSC/Ss differ between countries but most of the implementing organisations follow them nonetheless. The research does identify some challenges in adjusting the transfer value in cases of high price volatility, but that is not an inhibitor for the use of cash. Some informants have a preference for vouchers over cash, based on the belief that they can better withstand inflation.

#### Effectiveness of cash transfers

Examples across Nigeria, Somalia and Syria shows that the use of cash for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity has contributed to improving food security. Findings from Post Distribution Monitoring reports (PDMs) show that people use cash transfers to meet their food needs as a priority, as well as their other basic needs (using between 30% and 96% of the cash assistance depending on location and transfer value, with the proportion being smaller for multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA)). Positive food security outcomes are also found in the results of the endlines explored, which showed

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2016). 'The grand bargain—a shared commitment to better serve people in need'. Available here: [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand\\_bargain\\_final\\_22\\_may\\_final-2\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf).

higher rates of recipients with acceptable Food Consumption Scores (FCS), decreased reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) scores, and improved Household Hunger Scale (HHS) scores, compared with baseline data across the three contexts. Nonetheless, several PDM reports showed inconsistent progress, mostly due to seasonal factors and the severity of the food insecurity situation, particularly in Somalia.

The extent to which cash can succeed as the best modality of assistance is hindered by different factors in the three countries. The effect of cash in Nigeria and Syria has been negatively affected by high inflation in recent years. In Syria in particular, economic instability, inflation and the depreciation of the national currency have made cash a second-best option compared to vouchers. In Somalia, cash has proved to be more effective thanks to a widely functional market and mobile money infrastructure.

Cash assistance is delivered on schedule in the three countries, mostly due to a secure and well-functioning cash infrastructure. Implementing organisations in the three countries have the capacity to deliver within short periods of time with no need for long procurement processes.

### I.3. Recommendations

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Based on the research findings, the consultants produced the following recommendations.

#### Recommendations for implementers and donors

##### Evidence and impact

- **Monitoring and evaluation reports** should be more widely disseminated to increase awareness of the food security outcomes of cash transfers in contexts of acute food insecurity, and to provide evidence of best practices. This will help to reduce incorrect perceptions or fears around the use of cash for food security, especially in these acute contexts. Current challenges revolve around a reluctance, including among donors, to share monitoring and evaluation data externally when the data is deemed to be sensitive. In-country FSC/Ss and CWGs should lead on or support the compilation and dissemination of this evidence and best practice.
- There should be systematic monitoring of the food security impact of Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) cash transfers and MPCA using the recommended indicators (FCS, rCSI, HHS and the HDDS), and this should be reinforced in 2023 given the severity of the food crisis in the three contexts. Improvements or deterioration of the food security situation as demonstrated by these indicators should be considered alongside any complimentary assistance received by targeted households, seasonal factors, and the severity of the crisis, and analysed accordingly to avoid misinterpretation.
- **CWGs and FSC/Cs** should continue playing an important role in supporting food security actors in the use of cash transfers and adjustment of cash transfer value, especially in contexts of significant inflation.

## Response analysis

- **The rationale for maintaining in-kind food aid in the countries and/or areas covered should be revisited**, particularly in Somalia (but also in Syria), where most actors and the literature demonstrated its lack of relevance due to the food markets' functionality and resilience. Recognising modality neutrality is important., donors should request a strong response analysis concluding that the relevance of cash when the problem is linked to **economic food access rather than food availability**, and **when markets are functional and FSPs available**. In line with this recognition, humanitarian actors should justify in their response analysis why restricted assistance (such as vouchers or food aid) would be chosen instead of cash, shifting the burden of proof to actors using the restricted modality in the food security sector. FSC/S leads should take a prominent role in continuously asking the question, "Why not (more) cash?"
- Similarly, **all humanitarian food security actors should now be in a position to scale up the use of cash in the countries and/or areas covered**, as this appears to be the most relevant and appropriate modality of assistance for food security outcomes in these contexts. The challenges described, if important, can be overcome.
- Past global commitments on the use of cash (such as the Grand Bargain) put the "Why not cash?" question at the forefront. These commitments have now come to an end, but the question is still not asked systematically. **Humanitarian actors that have made commitments on the percentage of assistance provided in cash should continue to pursue this goal, and donors should encourage cash uptake** while continuing to request a strong response analysis.

## Food availability and markets

- **Market monitoring and analysis should continue, and should cover all areas** reached by humanitarian actors, to enable **timely and relevant transfer-value adjustments and to enable market systems to be strengthened** whenever possible to sustain a conducive environment for cash.
- **Monitoring and analysis of markets** should be put **into perspective with the positive effects of cash transfers on demand and the possibility of in-kind food aid** to undermine market functionality and give a false picture of the traders' capacities.

## The role of FSC/Ss

- **FSC/S leads are both implementers and coordinators** (in Inter-Agency Standing Committee settings). As implementers, they should act as **role models and catalysts** when it comes to the use of cash for food security outcomes in contexts where it is deemed relevant and appropriate.

### Advocacy

- There should be as much advocacy as possible for governments to ease the restrictions and approval processes for cash transfers in specific areas.

### Anticipatory action

- The research highlighted the **apparent lack of the use of cash as an anticipatory action** linked to food security objectives. This should be explored further to document the potential positive impact (and cost-efficiency) of anticipatory action in the wake of an acute food security crisis.

### Other dimensions

- Modalities are important, but should not obscure other important aspects of a humanitarian response, such as **targeting and accountability to recipients** (communication with recipients, complaint and feedback mechanism, consultation processes, etc.).
- UN agencies and donors should provide support to their partners when faced with issues of **compliance with recipient data-protection principles**.
- To encourage further uptake of cash for improved food security outcomes, food security actors should **strengthen their risk management approach** to reassure both donors and governments. Protracted acute food insecurity often overlaps with conflict situations, in which the transfer of resources has become increasingly complex as a result of national and transnational anti-money laundering and counterterrorism regulations. Humanitarian organisations therefore need to develop **their understanding of these regulations** in recognition of the risks they pose for principled humanitarian action overall, and for the use of cash more specifically.
- In Nigeria, the humanitarian community should support **expansion of the FSP market in the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states**.
- In Somalia, the use of mobile money at scale should be taken as an opportunity to scale up **digital financial inclusion and women's economic empowerment programmes**.

### Specific recommendations for donors

- **Donors** should always request a strong response analysis documenting the rationale for the choice of modality, including its relevance and appropriateness. As far as possible, donors should apply a neutral position on modality decision-making and provide full flexibility of funding, while encouraging the use of cash when it is deemed most relevant and appropriate (in line with the Grand Bargain commitments to ask the “Why not cash?” question).
- Donors' own governments should themselves provide this flexibility to their humanitarian agency and not provide earmarked funds.



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## Acronyms

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|            |  |
|------------|--|
| BAY        | Borno, Adamawa and Yobe  |
| BRCiS      | Building Resilient Communities in Somalia Consortium                           |
| CARI       | Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security                |
| CH         | Cadre Harmonisé  |
| CRS        | Catholic Relief Services   |
| CVA        | Cash and Voucher Assistance  |
| CWG        | Cash Working Group   |
| EFCC       | Economic and Financial Crime Commission  |
| FAO        | Food and Agriculture Organisation  |
| FCS        | Food Consumption Score   |
| FSP        | Financial Service Provider   |
| FSC        | Food Security Cluster  |
| FSC/S      | Food Security Cluster/Sector   |
| gFSC CM WG | Global Food Security Cluster Cash and Markets Working Group                    |
| GoS        | Government of Syria  |
| GPPI       | Global Public Policy Institute   |
| HCT        | Humanitarian Country Team  |
| HHS        | Household Hunger Scale   |
| HRP        | Humanitarian Response Plan   |
| IDPs       | Internally Displaced People  |
| IPC        | Integrated Food Security Phase Classification                                  |
| INGO       | International Non-governmental Organisation                                    |
| KII        | Key Informant Interview  |
| MEB        | Minimum Expenditure Basket   |
| MPCA       | Multipurpose Cash Assistance   |
| NES        | Northeast Syria  |
| NGO        | Non-Governmental Organisation  |
| NWS        | Northwest Syria  |
| OCHA       | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs                            |
| PDM        | Post-Distribution Monitoring   |
| PTT        | Turkey's national post and telegraph directorate (Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı ) |
| rCSI       | reduced Coping Strategy Index  |
| UN         | United Nations   |
| USAID      | United States Agency for International Development                             |
| WFP        | World Food Programme   |

## II. Introduction

### II.1. Background

Hunger affects 10% of the global population, with the rate of undernutrition having increased by 150 million people from 2019 to 2022 as a result of conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic (the “three Cs”).<sup>4</sup> Projections of undernourishment indicate that, by 2030, 670 million people will be undernourished.<sup>5</sup> As of May 2022, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have designated “Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen at ‘highest alert’ as hotspots with catastrophic conditions, and Afghanistan and Somalia” have been added to the list. The same report designates the “Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, the Sahel region, the Sudan, and Syria” as areas of “very high concern.”<sup>6</sup> As the three Cs impact global hunger, there has been an attempt to shift the paradigm of food security interventions by prioritising a systems approach that addresses the root causes of food insecurity and builds resilience.<sup>7</sup>

The volume of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) for humanitarian assistance has increased in the past six years, reaching 6.7 billion USD in 2021 (including associated programming costs).<sup>8</sup> However, the growth rate of funding has been stalling. The volume of CVA grew 4% between 2020 and 2021, compared to a 19% increase in the previous period. Nonetheless, CVA tracking shows that the use of cash transfers relative to vouchers is increasing continuously, with cash transfers constituting three-quarters of total CVA in 2021 globally.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the increase in the acceptance of CVA, a large portion of which is dedicated to preventing the further deterioration of food security and helping to improve it, there is inconsistency in the choice of modalities, application and general practices across contexts facing acute food insecurity.<sup>10</sup> The use of CVA to meet food security outcomes continues to fall short of its potential. According to a 2016 study from the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), if cash transfers were the default modality for humanitarian assistance, around 40% of global humanitarian funding would go to interventions using cash, and cash programmes would be delivered in 70% to 80% of all humanitarian contexts.<sup>11</sup> The same GPPi report estimates that if cash were the default delivery modality, it would account for 90% of food assistance. This is even more important considering that, according to the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service,

<sup>4</sup> Action Against Hunger (2022) “World Hunger Facts”, available [here](#) (accessed 28/11/2022).

<sup>5</sup> FAO, “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022,” 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en>.

<sup>6</sup> WFP (2022) “Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity June to September 2022 Outlook,” [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000139904/download/?\\_ga=2.229325980.1299607333.1669633654-2017572414.1669633654.w](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000139904/download/?_ga=2.229325980.1299607333.1669633654-2017572414.1669633654.w)

<sup>7</sup> Hall C. (2021) “A Food Systems Approach to Combat the Three Cs: Coronavirus, Climate Change, and Conflict,” <https://www.usglc.org/blog/a-food-systems-approach-to-combat-the-three-cs-coronavirus-climate-change-and-conflict/#:~:text=How%20is%20the%20global%20development,a%20role%20in%20global%20hunger>.

<sup>8</sup> Development Initiatives (2022) “Tracking Cash and Voucher Assistance”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Development Initiatives.

<sup>10</sup> CaLP (2020) “The State of the World’s Cash 2020” <https://www.calpnetwork.org/state-of-the-worlds-cash-2020/>.

<sup>11</sup> Global Public Policy Institute (2016) “Drivers and Inhibitors of Change in the Humanitarian System”

food security is, globally, the humanitarian sector with the largest requirement (19 746 006 795 USD) and largest share of funding (9 064 235 870 USD).<sup>12</sup> Any good practices for allocating resources more effectively and efficiently in the food sector will therefore have important ramifications for humanitarian programming overall.

There is therefore room to explore the untapped and/or underused potential of cash transfers, and strengthen evidence of the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity.<sup>13</sup>

In light of this, the Global Food Security Cluster Cash and Market Working Group (gFSC CM WG) commissioned operational research to gather evidence and lessons learned on the use of cash for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity. For the sake of the research, these are defined as contexts in which IPC/Cadre Harmonisé (CH) Phase 3-5, or CARI moderate or severe (3 or 4), has been reported or projected in the last two years (between 2020 and 2022). This research uses Nigeria, Somalia and Syria as examples of acute food insecurity contexts.

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<sup>12</sup> OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (2022), "Appeals and Response Plans 2022." Available [here](#) (accessed 28 November 2022).

<sup>13</sup> CaLP "Food Security and Cash and Voucher Assistance." Available [here](#) (accessed 28 November 2022).

## II.2. CVA and food security in Nigeria, Somalia and Syria

The research explores the use of cash transfers to meet food security outcomes in Nigeria, Somalia and Syria, but aims to generate findings that are relevant globally. In these three countries, cash transfers have been used over the last two years (2020-2022) either extensively (Somalia) or occasionally (Nigeria and Syria), as part of a food security response. Food security interventions were triggered either by conflict (Nigeria and Syria) and/or natural disasters (Somalia). Some areas of Nigeria and Somalia have had IPC/CH Phase 3-5 reported or projected over the 2020-2022 period, and Syria has had CARI level 4 (severe food insecurity) reported in all governorates over the last two years.


The food security maps for the three countries for 2022 as given in the IPC/CH maps or Humanitarian Needs Overview are available in Annex IX.1.

|   | Context   | CVA   | Latest developments   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Nigeria</b></p>  | <p>As of February 2022, 8.4 million people in Nigeria are in need of humanitarian assistance due to insurgencies in the Northeast of the country. According to OCHA, <b>3.5 million people were expected to face food insecurity ranging between CH phases 3 to 5 in severity</b>. As such, among the needs of the crisis-affected population, food is a priority for the majority (93%), followed by livelihoods (68%) and healthcare (41%).<sup>14</sup></p> <p>The November 2022 CH result reported that, in the BAY states alone, 3 million people were food insecure. That number is expected to increase to 4.4 million people in need of food assistance in the 2023 lean season, of whom 578,178 will be in IPC</p> | <p>According to the same OCHA report, in-kind is the preferred modality of assistance (89% of the affected population), followed by cash (55%). This is mostly explained by inflation, a devaluation of the local currency (the naira) and fluctuations in market functionality.</p> <p>Despite recent developments, such as the establishment of a CWG and a Collaborative Cash Delivery Network entity made up of 13 humanitarian agencies, and the government's uptake of CVA, policies such as those relating to counterterrorism hinder the scaling up of cash transfers.<sup>16</sup></p> | <p>As of August 2022, there are 29 actors implementing CVA activities for food assistance, and agriculture and livelihood support in the three most food-insecure states in the country: Borno (IPC 4), Yobe (IPC 3) and Adamawa (IPC 3).</p> <p>Overall, 59% of food assistance and 10% of agriculture and livelihood support is received through CVA. However, only 7% of CVA for food security outcomes is received through cash transfers, compared with 93% received through electronic vouchers.<sup>17</sup></p> |

<sup>14</sup> OCHA, "Nigeria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022 (February 2022)," 2022.

<sup>16</sup> CaLP, "The State of the World's Cash 2020."

<sup>17</sup> Food Security Cluster Nigeria, "Food Security Sector Cash Dashboard - Northeast Nigeria - August 2022," 2022, [https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/nga\\_fss\\_cash\\_dashboard\\_august\\_2022.pdf](https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/nga_fss_cash_dashboard_august_2022.pdf).

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   | Phase 4 (Emergency) and 3,967 in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe). <sup>15</sup>   |  |  |
| <p><b>Somalia</b></p>  | <p>In 2022, around 5.2 million people across Somalia were experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), with <b>2.2 million of them expected to be in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and 200,000 likely to face famine in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe).</b><sup>18</sup></p> <p><b>All regions of the country were expected to experience an IPC 4 (Emergency) level of food insecurity between June and September 2022.</b></p> <p>An increase in population displacement from rural to urban areas and IDP settlements is expected to continue beyond June 2022, as a result of worsening drought conditions and persistent insecurity<sup>19</sup>.</p> <p>As a result, moderate to large food-consumption gaps are expected for most IDPs. <b>Most of the main IDP settlements across Somalia were projected to be experiencing an IPC 4 (Emergency) level of food insecurity between June and September 2022.</b><sup>20</sup></p> | <p>CVA has been implemented in Somalia since 2003, in small-scale responses. The first large scale-up of cash transfers using mobile money took place in September 2011, in response to the famine and humanitarian crisis in the country's central region.</p> <p>The scale-up of CVA and cash in particular was triggered as a result of the Al-Shabaab group banning WFP and, with it, the food distributions that it facilitated. As such, the scale-up of CVA supported around 137,000 households to meet their basic needs.<sup>22</sup></p> | <p>As of September 2022, CVA has been scaled up to reach <b>3 million people. Out of the 5.6 million people who have received food assistance, 54% of them received it through cash transfers, 36% through vouchers, and 10% in-kind.</b><sup>23</sup> Food security takes the top share of CVA (44%) (largely facilitated by WFP), followed by multipurpose cash assistance (MPCA) (38%) and cash for safety nets (24%).<sup>24</sup></p> |

<sup>15</sup> Cadre harmonisé Fiche (2022) Final Fiche Report for November 2022: Cadre Harmonisé Result for Identification of Risk Areas and Vulnerable Populations in Twenty (26) Nigerian States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria

<sup>18</sup> Food Security Cluster (2022) "Somalia Updated IPC and Famine Risk Analysis Technical Release Final 2022," <https://fscluster.org/somalia/document/somalia-updated-ipc-and-famine-risk>.


<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Humanitarian Policy Group (2012) "Cash and Voucher Monitoring Group Final Monitoring Report of the Somalia Cash and Voucher Transfer Programme"

<sup>23</sup> Food Security Cluster Nigeria (2022) "Food Security Sector Cash Dashboard - Northeast Nigeria - August 2022."

<sup>24</sup> The Humanitarian Data Exchange, "Cash Based Programming in Somalia", available [here](#) (vi: 28/11/2022).

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
|   | <p>The major sectoral needs in Somalia are: health; water, sanitation and hygiene; protection and shelter; followed by food, with 61% of IDPs reporting food or cash to buy food as a priority need.<sup>21</sup></p>   |   |  |
| <p><b>Syria</b></p>  | <p>In 2022, over 13.9 million people in Syria were identified as in need of humanitarian assistance <b>due to the combined effects of the economic crisis, the ongoing conflict and displacement</b>.<sup>25</sup> In addition, another 5.5 million Syrian refugees are in need of humanitarian assistance, most of them in Turkey (64.8%), Lebanon (14.9%) and Jordan (12.2%). The Syrian response is therefore coordinated between multiple hubs in different countries.</p> <p>In 2021, 12 million Syrians (56% of the population) were facing acute food insecurity, and 2.5 million of them were severely food insecure (CARI level 4 or severe).<sup>26</sup></p> | <p>Since 2011, the use of CVA as a modality of assistance to cover different needs has kept growing.<sup>27</sup> A CWG is in place to coordinate CVA related actions <b>with hubs across the three areas</b>.<sup>28</sup></p> <p>Unconditional cash transfers have been employed for food security outcomes in NWS, making a positive contribution towards meeting the basic needs of affected populations, improving FCS, reducing negative coping strategies and allowing flexibility to address multiple needs.<sup>29</sup> There is a preference for cash transfers over in-kind assistance among crisis-affected populations in Syria.</p> <p>Political instability and the existence of three coordination hubs in Syria are challenges to cash coordination in the country.<sup>30</sup> Other challenges relate to economic constraints (inflation, exchange</p> | <p>As of 2021, a total of 116 million USD has been disbursed in Syria, with 67% of that being cash transfers. The largest share of these transfers has gone to MPCA (64.7 million USD), nutrition (24.3 million USD), and food and agriculture (11.7 million USD). During the same period, there were 41 actors in Syria implementing CVA, 11 of which were engaged in MPCAs.<sup>32</sup> <b>As of November 2022, only 7% of food assistance was made through cash transfers, while 14% was delivered through vouchers.</b><sup>33</sup></p> <p>According to the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2022-2023, cash programming was set to reach 662 million USD in 2022, representing only 15% of the 4.4 billion USD that the HRP requires.</p> |

<sup>21</sup> OCHA (2021) "2022 Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview"

<sup>25</sup> OCHA (2022) "2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic (February 2022)"

<sup>26</sup> Global Network Against Food Crises (2022) "2022 Global Report on Food Crises,"

<sup>27</sup> <https://jhumanitarianaction.springeropen.com/counter/pdf/10.1186/s41018-016-0015-7.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> OCHA, "Cash Working Group - Northwest Syria (NWS)", available [here](#) (vi: 28/11/2022).

<sup>29</sup> GOAL (2022) "Provisional Impact of Repeat Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance on Meeting Basic Needs and Supporting Food Security (North-West Syria)"

<sup>30</sup> CaLP (2020) "The State of the World's Cash 2020."

<sup>32</sup> OCHA (2022) "Syrian Arab Republic: Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) / Jan - Dec 2021,"

<sup>33</sup> Food Security Cluster, "Whole of Syria Food Security Sector Syria: Sector Objective 1: Food Assistance Dashboard," November 2022.



rate, etc.) and access constraints (e.g. use of electronic banking), which differ from one region to another.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Trust Consultancy, "Cash & Voucher Assistance in Northwest Syria: Practices, Challenges and Lessons Learned" available [here](#) (ví: 28/11/2022)

### III. Objectives and scope

The purpose of the research is to **gather evidence around the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity** (IPC/CH Phase 3-5 or CARI moderate or severe (3 or 4). The research aims to analyse decision-making in terms of the use of cash transfers; the effectiveness of cash transfers for food security in contexts of acute food insecurity; its timeliness and cost-efficiency; how it has been used; and its performance alone or in combination with other modalities or activities. The research is intended to be used by humanitarian organisations and donors, as well as FSC/Ss and their members in-country to inform the design of future food security programmes, and the role they can play in the uptake of cash transfers in contexts of acute food insecurity.

While CVA refers to the use of both cash and vouchers in humanitarian responses, this research focuses exclusively on the use of cash transfers to meet food security outcomes (either sectoral cash for food security or MPCA). This research does not cover the use of value or commodity vouchers for food security objectives.

The countries were selected based on the criteria mentioned in section II.2, as well as the availability and interest of in-country Food Security Clusters (FSCs). A detailed summary of the scope is available in IX.3. The review looked at the following aspects:<sup>34</sup>

**Table 1. Primary research focus areas**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Response analysis and cash feasibility                             | • Supportiveness of the context (government, donors) of the use of cash transfers.   |
|  | • Decision-making on the choice of assistance modality(ies) in contexts of acute food insecurity: enablers and inhibitors for choosing cash transfers and determining appropriateness and feasibility. |
|  | • Effect of contextual changes on the choice of modality.  |
|  | • Mechanisms used to adapt cash transfer value to meet household minimum food requirements throughout a project lifespan.  |
| Programme design   | • Illustration of cash transfer programme design in contexts of acute food insecurity, including with complementary activities.  |
| Outcomes and impact: effectiveness, timeliness and economic impact | • Evidence of the effectiveness of cash transfers for preventing deterioration and contributing to improving household food security in contexts of acute food insecurity.                             |
|  | • Timeliness of cash transfers compared to other modalities in contexts of acute food insecurity.  |
|  | • Evidence of the positive or negative impact of cash transfers on local markets.  |

Secondary research areas focused on:

- Good practices and/or missed opportunities in the use of cash transfers as anticipatory action to mitigate food insecurity and prevent negative coping mechanisms.
- Cost-efficiency of cash transfers compared to other modalities.

<sup>34</sup> Questions have been rephrased or further broken down from the ToR to take on the form of investigation points and to deal with the lack of data available to address the questions initially envisioned in the ToR.

See the Study Matrix in Annex I.1, which details the criteria and sub-questions of the review.

## IV. Methodology

The following table summarises the main methodological steps followed as part of this research. A detailed methodology is available in Annex IX.4

Table 2. Summary of methodology

|                             |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Inception phase             | Inception report   | Desk review  |
|                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Briefing with the research manager.</li> <li>▪ Validation of the inception report.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Iterative review of documentation from all three countries studied.</li> </ul>  |
| Primary data collection     | 45 key informants were interviewed across the 3 countries (9 interviews in Nigeria, 9 in Somalia and 18 in Syria, covering the 3 hubs (Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), Humanitarian Liaison Group and the NES NGO Forum.) <sup>35</sup>   | Preliminary findings presentation  |
| Analysis and report writing | Data coding and analysis   | Reporting and dissemination  |
|                             | All primary and secondary data gathered in a coding matrix and organised by evaluation question. Iterative analysis of the data disaggregated by country and triangulated to ensure validity.  | <p>Validation of the first draft of the report during a presentation with all country offices.</p> <p>Final version produced, integrating comments and a standalone executive summary.</p> |
| Limitations                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In consultation with the GFSC, the consultancy team, to an extent, favoured the breadth of data collection over depth. The study therefore benefited from diverse insights on barriers and opportunities in the use of cash transfers to meet food security need in acute food crisis. This, however, also means that only 9-18 interviews were conducted per country, which limited the extent to which data was saturated. Findings that emerged in one country only or with a limited number of key informants are highlighted as such in the main text of the report. Although the research aimed to produce results that are informative for humanitarian practitioners globally, the sample of countries is in no way representative, and the results cannot be generalised nor considered quantitative data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Moreover, due to data sensitivity considerations, no direct reference to an organisation could be made, because this would put the informant's data at risk.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ In documents such as Post Distribution Monitoring reports (PDMs), and interviews, the distinction between cash and vouchers was not clearly</li> </ul> |  |

<sup>35</sup> Some interviews were conducted as paired interviews.

established and it was not always possible to differentiate one from the other.<sup>36</sup>

- The effectiveness of cash in achieving food security outcomes has been assessed in light of a given context and based on the intended intervention objectives. In other words, this was not a systematic review of the effectiveness of cash in meeting food security needs compared with other modalities. That would have required a completely different methodology, with treatment groups given different modalities of assistance within the same timeframe and conditions, and monitoring and evaluation conducted accordingly. The review provides illustrations of the extent to which cash has been successful in meeting food security needs. No overarching conclusions are drawn on the effectiveness of cash in achieving food security outcomes compared with other modalities.
- It was outside the scope of the research to disaggregate findings by gender. Moreover, the methodology of the research was such that the research team had to rely on data already available from PDMs, which often do not disaggregate food security indicators data by gender.

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<sup>36</sup> Making the distinction between cash and vouchers in the collection and analysis of data is an agreement of the Grand Bargain. See [here](#) for a more detailed discussion.

## V. Response analysis and cash feasibility

This first section examines the extent to which situation and response analysis, as well as cash feasibility, is influenced by external and internal factors.

To do that, it first discusses how supportive the context is (particularly the government and donors in each country assessed), before examining the decision-making factors favouring or deterring the use of cash. It then looks at the way contextual changes influence the use of cash and, in particular, the mechanisms used to adapt transfer values.

### V.1. Supportiveness of the context

#### V.1.1. Government support for the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes

Table 3 summarises the main findings on support for the use of cash by national authorities in the three countries assessed. The findings are explained in more detail after the table.

Table 3. Summary of the context's support for the use of cash

| General trend   |   |
|---|---|
| The governments in the three countries are supportive of cash, although with varying degrees of acceptance, especially when it comes to areas controlled by non-state groups. The COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity to explore the use of cash in the three countries, especially as an expansion of social protection programmes. |   |
| Country-specific considerations   |   |
| Nigeria   | In Nigeria, the government is particularly wary about the movement of physical cash in the northeast due to the presence of armed groups. The regulations of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) impose a bureaucratic process that puts recipients' data at risk. A decision from the Central Bank in 2021 allowing two mobile network operators to offer banking services might change the current state of play.  |
| Somalia   | The government of Somalia appears to prefer cash (through mobile money) over other modalities, as its use across the country is now widely established. There is some reluctance around unconditional cash transfers in Somaliland for fear of creating dependence, but this is not a major barrier.  |
| Syria   | The Syrian government accepted the use of the cash in 2020, which applies for the HCT areas (referred to as GoS areas). However, assistance must be delivered through an umbrella organisation with ties to the government, which creates concerns about data protection, independence and transparency.<br><br>Authorities in NES and NWS support the use of cash in general. The use of cash in IDP camps in NES is discouraged by authorities, donors and the CWG alike, because of the potential pull factor, and the issue of terrorist groups infiltrating the camps (e.g. Al Hol). |

## General trends

The use of cash is officially approved by the governments of Nigeria, Somalia and Syria, albeit with several restrictions and barriers that deter some actors from using cash at scale. In the three countries, governments have officially allowed the use of cash as a modality of humanitarian assistance, but with restrictions in areas where there is a strong presence of non-state armed groups, for fear of cash being diverted to finance terrorism. The restrictions constrain the use of cash transfers to meet food security needs in areas of limited state control. Humanitarian actors have also described challenges in protecting cash recipients' data in those areas, as official or non-official regulations are in place requiring humanitarian actors to share the lists of cash recipients with authorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic-related cash assistance (often as a vertical or horizontal expansion of government social protection programmes, and as UN/NGO-led humanitarian assistance) provided an opportunity for the governments of the three countries surveyed to be further exposed to cash assistance and increase their familiarity with, and acceptance of, the modality. It also provided an opportunity for the use of cash to be scaled up, including in the most remote areas, as "almost 17% of the world's population has been covered with at least one COVID-related cash transfer payment between 2020 and 2021."<sup>37</sup>

### Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states):

The government's attitude towards cash is shaped by fear of humanitarian cash assistance being diverted to armed groups. In 2019, this went as far as shutting down NGO offices on the allegations of aiding terrorist groups.<sup>38</sup> Distribution of cash was one of the reasons for the government's discontentment, according to several key informants. They were allowed to come back in November of the same year, but this has made humanitarian actors more hesitant to use cash in the BAY states as there is a real and significant risk of losing access due to the perceived diversion of cash or support for terrorism. Furthermore, the EFCC's anti-money laundering law (the Anti-money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Act) restricts the movement of cash and is a barrier to actors having large caseloads and not using financial service providers (FSPs), as it applies only to the movement of physical cash over a certain amount (see Box 1 below). Key informants perceive this as a lengthy bureaucratic process. They also see it as a risk for the protection of cash recipients' data, as it was reported that, in 2021, the EFCC requested a humanitarian actor to provide them with its list of recipients. This request is reportedly common practice, although NGOs always try to push back.

<sup>37</sup> Gentilini, [2021b](#) and Smith, [2021](#) in Lawson-McDowall, J., McCormack, R., & Tholstrup, S. (2021). The use of cash assistance in the Covid-19 humanitarian response: accelerating trends and missed opportunities. *Disasters*, 45, S216-S239.

<sup>38</sup> Quartz (2019) *Nigeria's military is in a battle with international NGOs in the country's troubled northeast*. Accessed 25/11/2022 at <https://qz.com/africa/1716064/nigerian-army-shuts-mercy-corps-ngos-amid-boko-haram-crisis>

### Box 1. Nigeria's cash movement restrictions

The Anti-money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Act restricts cash movements in the BAY states.

The EFCC was established in 2003, partially in response to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering, which named Nigeria as one of 23 countries not being cooperative in the international community's efforts to fight money laundering, and which also aims to "fight against terrorism." (The Establishment Act 2007, EFCC).

Organisations willing to distribute cash beyond 1 million NGN (equivalent to 2,200 USD) have to seek approval from the EFCC for the movement of cash to areas where there are no banking agents. The request is sent via the INGO Forum through a cash notification form. There is a list of "acceptable reasons", which include "All cash movement with the end recipient being a beneficiary from an affected community (project recipient)." This covers both unconditional and conditional cash.

This only applies to physical cash transfers, so actors using FSPs that can deliver cash through electronic transfers can avoid the restriction.

One of the donors interviewed highlighted that these restrictions, which only apply to physical cash movement, could be avoided if actors were using FSPs to deliver electronic transfers. This donor called it a "catch-22 situation", where the FSP market is not well developed in these areas simply because there is not enough demand for them to work there. As FSPs are functional and well developed in the rest of the country, this donor believes it would suffice for actors to ask those FSPs to come to these areas with clear communication on challenges and shortfalls and support provided by the organisation to the FSP for cash disbursement in order to change the status quo. It is worth noting that a few large food security actors distribute cash over the counter, and mentioned that the movement restriction is "very manageable."

On the other hand, one decision that the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) made at the end of 2021 could change the state of play in northeast Nigeria: it awarded MTN Nigeria and Airtel Nigeria Payment Service Bank licences. This means that both mobile network operators will be able to offer banking services, including mobile money, anywhere in the country. One key informant (a donor) referred to that decision as an opportunity (and additional reason) for humanitarian actors to scale up their use of cash and create the potential to overcome the policy restricting the movement of cash. This informant thought that actors could be "capitalising much more on that."

However, while using FSPs to deliver cash is a way to avoid restrictions on the movement of physical cash, security clearance still needs to be obtained from the local authorities in areas with a presence of armed groups.

### Somalia

The government is supportive of cash transfers via mobile money, which are now well established across the whole country. Key informants have described isolated exceptions,

such as in Somaliland, where the local government is less supportive due to fears of unconditional cash creating dependence.

“Both government and donor policies are more in favour of cash than in-kind transfers.”

One key informant in Somalia

## Syria

In Syria, key informants shared that the use of cash for food security outcomes is now well accepted by the local authorities overall, with limitations in the Government of Syria (GoS) controlled areas and in several context-specific/problematic camps in NES.

- **GoS areas:** Since March 2020, the GoS has allowed the use of cash as a modality for delivering humanitarian responses (Cash Working Group (CWG), 2022). However, humanitarian actors cannot distribute aid, including cash, directly and must do so through an umbrella organisation such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), the Syria Trust for Development or the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. This creates concerns about recipient data protection, targeting and transparency, given the strong links that these organisations have with the government.
- **NWS and NES hubs:** Local authorities are supportive of the use of cash, with exceptions in certain IDP camps in the NES, where it is also discouraged by donors and the CWG due to fears of pull factors and the cash being diverted by non-state actors infiltrating the camps. This is particularly the case in the Al Hol camp, where donors and local authorities have imposed restrictions on using cash. In the two hubs, there are also other areas where delivering cash remains a sensitive issue, particularly with regard to the local authorities’ requests to see the lists of recipients.

### V.1.2. Donor support for the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes

#### The general position of donors in the three countries assessed

In the wake of the Grand Bargain, donor policy commitments now focus on the routine consideration of CVA. This is now generally considered to have been achieved.<sup>39</sup>

Most key informants said that donors’ perceived or stated restrictions or preferences are still influencing their choice of modality. However, it is worth emphasising that a significant number of actors mentioned that their donors are neutral and only ask for a justification of the choice of modality.

DG ECHO’s global position on cash transfers is that unconditional cash should be the default modality for food assistance wherever recipients have safe access to food commodities.<sup>40</sup> DG ECHO emphasises that cash is a more discreet way of providing support and gives people choice, although there are caveats around its effectiveness for nutrition

<sup>39</sup> CaLP (to be published)

<sup>40</sup> DG ECHO (2022) Thematic Policy Document 3, Cash Transfers, European Commission.



outcomes. This is in line with the commitments made by other donors and partners for the Grand Bargain<sup>41</sup> and the UN Secretary General’s statement on cash.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – the world’s largest humanitarian donor, providing 46.3% of global humanitarian funding in 2022<sup>42</sup> – adopts a neutral position on modality choice (cash, vouchers or in-kind). It asks partners to justify their choice using the USAID Modality Decision Tool for Humanitarian Assistance,<sup>43</sup> which looks at four factors: appropriateness, feasibility, objective and cost-effectiveness. However, a significant part of USAID funding is tied to specific modalities. For example, the Title II Food for Peace Act requires that a certain amount of funding be used to purchase US in-kind commodities. In 2021, 2.3 billion USD were allocated to Title II.<sup>44</sup>

Donor attitudes towards the use of cash for food security outcomes is very much aligned with their attitudes to using cash overall. Their acceptance or reluctance in the three countries assessed is primarily driven by context-specific considerations related to risk.

### Country-specific situations:

- **Nigeria:** Three of the biggest donors are jointly advocating for the use of cash, and more donors have signed up to the Cash Common Donor Approach Nigeria Action Plan,<sup>45</sup> as the humanitarian response in Nigeria has been selected as a pilot for the approach. While all donors are supportive of the use of cash in Nigeria, others are open to their funds being used for vouchers instead of cash for food security outcomes in the BAY states, in the name of “do no harm.” Indeed, the context of the presence of non-state armed groups brings legitimate fears of cash diversion and security issues (see section IV.2.2 on decision-making factors for not using cash).
- **Somalia:** Donors are all very supportive of the use of cash for food security outcomes. DG ECHO only funds cash in the form of MPCA in the country, in line with its global policy of preferring cash over vouchers<sup>46</sup>.
- **In Syria:** Donors recognise the complexity of the situation and appear to be open to the three modalities, not pushing their partners to scale up or transition to cash transfers. There are some exceptions in NWS, where donors (and the CWG) have encouraged several INGOs to transition from vouchers to cash via MPCA<sup>47</sup>. However,

<sup>41</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2016). ‘The grand bargain—a shared commitment to better serve people in need’. Available here: [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand\\_bargain\\_final\\_22\\_may\\_final-2\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> U.S. House of Representatives (2022) “Testimony of Sarah Charles Assistant to the Administrator for the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance U.S. Agency for International Development Before the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture Committee on Agriculture U.S. House of Representatives,” <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AG/AG29/20220406/114585/HHRG-117-AG29-Wstate-CharlesS-20220406.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> USAID (2018) Accessed on 5/12/2022 at <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/ModalityDecisionTool.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 40

<sup>45</sup> The draft consultation and feedback document shared with the authors for the purpose of this research was circulated for comments in 2021, the authors did not obtain further update

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 39

<sup>47</sup> Due to shifting contexts, plus the remote management context of NWS where paper vouchers had to be printed in Turkey and transported inside Syria, vouchers were deemed to be inefficient and ineffective. This is due to the ground realities at that time that technology such as holograms and other security features to

most donors, including those that usually support cash, push back against the use of cash transfers in camp settings, particularly in problematic camps in NES, due to pull factors and the risk of cash ending up in the hands of ISIS fighters (e.g. Al Hol camp). In GoS areas, the position of donors on the use of cash is neutral, given the concerns and challenges that actors face there. In Syria, donors' decisions around whether to scale up the use of cash may have more to do with the geopolitical and socioeconomic complexities of the context, and less to do with the feasibility of cash as a response option.

Some donors expressed regret that there is weak coordination among donors in Syria and a lack of a common position on the use of cash in specific areas, which makes it difficult to push for scale-up and generates a lack of coherence in the modality used for food assistance across the country. This lack of coherence was also observed during the research, making it difficult to draw conclusions on donor positioning.

Unlike in Somalia and other countries, DG ECHO funds all three modalities in Syria, as there is not enough evidence that cash could be the most effective modality in all areas and contexts.

## V.2 Main decision-making factors in the choice of modality for food security outcomes

### V.1.3. Decision-making factors in favour of cash

#### General trends:

#### External driving factors

- There is **general consensus that markets are mostly functional** in all three countries assessed, with no concerns about shortage of supplies and a recognition that markets are dynamic and reactive to demand. There are a few exceptions to agreement on market functionality in rural areas of the three countries, with recognition that populations classified as IPC or CH phases 3 to 5 are most often IDPs and/or rural populations that potentially have greater difficulty accessing markets (particularly in Nigeria). However, there is also a recognition that cash transfers can stimulate or even create new markets.
- The increased availability of robust and regular market data sourced from different actors (Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit, REACH, Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping, etc.) is also a strong incentive for using cash, even in contexts of price inflation and currency fluctuation. As market prices are monitored and transfer values adjusted

"Vendors smell the money and will set up shops wherever people receive cash"

A key informant in Nigeria

mitigate the misuse of vouchers did not exist in NWS and vouchers could easily be tampered with frauds reported. The other reason is the shift in the context in NWS when MPC which was once a one-off first-line response after an emergency became a bridge that enabled assisting newly displaced people from 1-3 months, just enough time for FSL and protection actors to set up their response to take over with longer interventions and/or critical services.

as regularly as is operationally possible, there are fewer concerns about the purchasing power of cash recipients being eroded. All actors interviewed recognised that cash has no direct and substantial effect on price inflation, and that the seasonal factor has the biggest impact, particularly in drought contexts.

- The **availability and functionality of FSPs** is an important enabler for the use of cash, as fewer and fewer actors opt for the cash-in-hand option. This has proved to be an incentive for the uptake of cash transfers in all three countries, albeit to different extents.
- **Donor policies** that explicitly favour cash are also a strong incentive for actors to use cash, as stated in section IV.1.2.

### Internal driving factors

- The **organisational culture** (e.g. pro-cash with management support, or more conservative) is a very important factor in whether actors adopt cash for food or MPCA as the default modality, transition slowly, or keep voucher or in-kind modalities for food assistance, especially in contexts with a lot of challenges around the use of cash (such as Nigeria and Syria). The research found that most INGOs in the three countries now fall into the pro-cash category.
- The research found a high level of general awareness of the added value of cash compared to other modalities of food assistance in terms of effectiveness, dignity, choice and alignment with recipients' preferences. In addition, **the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the voucher and in-kind modalities has also been questioned**. As the sale of food items received by either of these is observed and documented, there is increased evidence of these practices, and actors tend to choose cash to make sure the full value of assistance is being used by recipients. These factors combined drive increased adoption of the cash modality for food assistance in the three countries.
- **Attitude to risk and to challenge the status quo**  
The attitude and response of actors in an acute crisis, such as that in Somalia, can generate different perspectives and reactions. Some that are more risk-averse will keep the status quo, and stay in the modality comfort zone, when the severity of the food security situation becomes acute and the crisis more complex. Others will challenge this status quo and push their comfort zone, realising that "business as usual" is not necessarily the best way to provide assistance. Those factors appear to be influencing modality decision-making to some extent.

Decision-making factors are also very context-specific, as illustrated below.

### Country-specific situation:

- **As of August 2022, 59% of food assistance in Nigeria's BAY states was delivered through CVA, of which 6% was in cash (and 94% as vouchers).**<sup>48</sup> That means only 3.5% of food security assistance was given in cash in the BAY states.

A number of actors are using FSPs that can transfer cash electronically (such as Nagis Informatics), avoiding the cash movement restrictions (see section IV.1.1 and box 1). As more FSPs have become licensed and available in the BAY state over the last two years, humanitarian actors have more options to choose from. This includes the

<sup>48</sup> Nigeria Food Security Sector (2022) Food Security Sector Dashboard-Northeast Nigeria-September 2022

possibility of using mobile money, which is further enabled by increased phone ownership (key informants, 2022).

**In Somalia, one of the most challenging places to deliver aid,<sup>49</sup> 54% of food assistance was delivered through cash transfers as of September 2022.<sup>50</sup>** The severity of the crisis and the volatile context in Somalia have little influence on modality choice, as there are a strong infrastructure and rationale for using cash.

Mobile money is the delivery mechanism most widely used by humanitarian actors (key informants, 2022), irrespective of geographical areas and programme size. This is due to the widespread coverage and use, and functionality, of mobile money throughout the country. One key informant explained that Somalia leans towards a “cashless economy” in which all transactions are made via mobile money payments. This is one of the main enabling factors in most food security actors choosing to use cash transfers since the 2011/12 crisis (key informants and Jaspars et al. 2019). One actor said that the Somalia Mobile Money Regulation passed in 2019 further facilitated mobile money.<sup>51</sup>

Cash is seen as the best modality for mitigating security risks and overcoming access challenges, as **cash transfers through mobile money have proved effective in reaching recipients of assistance in hard-to-reach areas**, and especially Al-Shabaab-controlled areas. Most key informants agreed that those areas would not be accessible otherwise (neither with vouchers nor in-kind). Mobile money enables the process to be entirely remote, from targeting (using trusted community members or local NGOs) to registration (as most people already have access to a SIM card), and remote monitoring through phone calls. The recipients living in those areas can either access the mobile money agents and markets inside the rebel-controlled areas, or leave those areas to register and come back on the same day. This allows assistance to be provided without putting anyone at risk. Mobile money is also advantageous in that it does not involve crowded distribution centres or voucher redemption at shops. It is also a discreet modality of assistance as it is easily concealed, which reduces risks to women, people with disabilities, and other diverse groups. This is a noticeable improvement on the 2011/12 crisis, when the hardest hit and Al-Shabaab-held areas could not be reached by international organisations and so did not receive adequate assistance.<sup>52</sup>

There is one large food-security actor that, unlike many others, prefers to start by delivering in-kind aid in those areas as part of the first line response. Then, if further market assessment indicates that cash is feasible, and if recipient registration and

<sup>49</sup> In 2021, 194 incidents took place that affected ability to deliver humanitarian aid in the country (UN OCHA (2021) Humanitarian Response Plan Somalia – Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2022.)

<sup>50</sup> Somalia Food Security Cluster (2022)

<sup>51</sup> One food security actor mentioned having waited for this official regulatory framework to be in place to use this mechanism for delivering cash (Key Informant Interview, 2022 and GSMA 2021)

<sup>52</sup> Jaspars, S., Adan, G. M. and Majid, N. (2019) ‘Food and power in Somalia: business as usual? A scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance’. Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.

verification can be done without significant challenges, it considers introducing cash or vouchers.

The fact that markets in Somalia are still functional despite all the shocks experienced there also makes a strong case for the use of cash. As one actor said: “The situation could not be worse than it is today, and markets and FSPs are still functional. Therefore, if cash is feasible today, I can’t see any reason why it would not be in the future.”

As of November 2022, in the middle of the fifth failed rainy season and one of the worst droughts the country has experienced in decades, regional commodities can be found all over the countries’ markets to make up for the lack of Ukrainian wheat and locally produced commodities. The markets are also still functioning in “besieged” or Al Shabaab-controlled areas, demonstrating the resilience of Somali markets and traders.

In that particular context, most key informants agree that cash transfers are the modality that makes the most sense in Somalia.

“The case for cash in Somalia is strong.”

“No reason why markets would collapse one day in Somalia, if they were to collapse, they would have already collapsed by now.”

“Cash is simply seen as the easiest and most efficient modality in Somalia.”

In the **Ground Truth Solutions Cash Barometer 2020**<sup>53</sup> for Somalia, **61% of respondents preferred cash**, compared with 51% preferring vouchers and 40% in-kind (multiple-choice answer). In the 2021 cash barometer, **Ground Truth Solutions added a question about preference in their survey, conducted all over Somalia, and 86% of respondents said they would prefer to receive cash**, while 10% preferred vouchers and around 2% preferred in-kind (Ground Truth Solutions Key Informant, 2022). This confirms that the cash modality not only makes sense for humanitarian actors, but also increasingly for aid recipients. Due to global food-price hikes and price inflation, a specified cash transfer value means that recipients’ purchasing power is eroded, because if the value is not adjusted to market prices frequently enough,<sup>54</sup> cash recipients will be able to buy fewer commodities each month. As a result, recipients who used to receive in-kind food baskets stated<sup>55</sup> that they would

<sup>53</sup> Ground Truth Solutions (2020) Perception survey of aid recipients in Somalia

<sup>54</sup> As explained further below, the Somalia transfer values were updated in April 2022, based on a revised composition of the full Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) costed against March 2022 market prices and a gap analysis conducted to determine the percentage of the full MEB that household on average by region could not cover. These new values will remain in effect until March 2023 but a review in December 2022 will be done to check if revision is needed earlier (Somalia Cash Working Group and Somalia Food Security Cluster, 2022)

<sup>55</sup> Source : key informant who received anecdotal report from recipients

prefer to continue receiving them, as they believed they could get less with their cash assistance.

However, preference is not an easy factor to capture, for various reasons. Based on Ground Truth Solutions' 2020 to 2022 reports on Somalia, modality is not necessarily the most important factor for people: information and targeting of vulnerable populations is equally, if not more, important to aid recipients.<sup>56</sup> The fact that coverage is limited means that recipients share all assistance – regardless of modality. This has an impact on the effectiveness of cash for food security outcomes, as it also would for vouchers and in-kind assistance. Falling short on information can also mean that recipients are not able to make informed choices in meeting their priority needs (for example, whether to take credit or not). For example, in Somalia, 80% of respondents said that it was important for CVA recipients to know the duration of their assistance, whereas only 35% said they actually knew this duration.<sup>57</sup>

- In the Whole of Syria response, as of November 2022, only 7% of food assistance on average was delivered through cash transfers in the three hubs, with an average of 14% provided in vouchers. In the NES hub (NES NGO Forum), 56% of food assistance was delivered in cash.<sup>58</sup>

Cash is well accepted in Syria, particularly for emergency one-off MPCA, as there is recognition that IDPs have a range of basic needs to be met, beyond food needs. Winterisation grants are also very common, and are used to cover food needs even if food is not included in the design of the grant. When households only have a gap in meeting their food needs, some actors tend to prefer vouchers because of their restricted nature.

In NWS, actors have been using the Turkish national postal and telegraph agency (Posta ve Telgraf Teşkilatı or PTT<sup>59</sup>) as the main FSP, as it allows funds to be transferred from Turkey into Syria in USD and Turkish lira (TRY) through its branches in northern Aleppo. In 2022, PTT confirmed that its policy on signing protocol agreements for fund transfers with humanitarian organisations was mandatory for those registered in Turkey. This means that, without this signed agreement, funding flows and other financial transactions would be disrupted for both programming and operations. PTT's rollout process for the protocol was not well communicated and executed, which resulted in delays in cash distributions. The CWG led the response-wide advocacy for PTT to resolve some bottlenecks, with support from the Whole of Syria cash and markets advisor.

The fact that actors are able to deliver cash in USD (which the CWGs recommended for non-government-controlled areas in 2021) is a major enabler for cash in NWS and NES, as it safeguards against the depreciation of SYP against USD.

<sup>56</sup> Ground Truth Solutions (2022) 'The participation gap persists in Somalia-The Cash barometer-February 2022'

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Whole of Syria Food Security Sector (2022) Food Assistance dashboard November 2022.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.ptt.gov.tr/Sayfalar/EN/Homepage.aspx>

The end of open conflict since the last ISIS stronghold (the city of Baghouz) fell in March 2019 has enabled the uptake of cash in the country to increase. The improvement of the general security situation and physical market access, along with the reduction in concerns about protecting assistance recipients, has encouraged humanitarian actors to use cash and made them more confident about the modality.

Since the government gave its approval in 2020, partners in GoS areas have been able to use two FSPs to make electronic transfers: Al Haram and Al Fouad. They only operate out of Damascus, but have offices in other governorates and are used by the main cash consortium (of church-based organisations) operating in GoS areas.

In the NW Syria response, trans-shipment of in-kind assistance from Turkey continues officially, following the renewal of UN Security Council Resolution 2642 in January 2023 for another six months. While this means that pre-kitted food aid can continue flowing into this response hub through the Bab-al-Hawa crossing point, humanitarian organisations responding to alleviate food insecurity have already begun piloting local procurement and enhancing their capacity for more flexible and hybrid modalities (cash, vouchers and in-kind), as part of their contingency planning in case of a non-renewal scenario.

**Participant preferences:** In the Aleppo governorate, an Oxfam feasibility study<sup>60</sup> found that the majority (96%) of surveyed households indicated their preference for cash, as their communities were in Aleppo city and within walking distance of the main markets. In the Deir Ez Zor governorate, the same report found that 85% of surveyed households preferred cash, followed by 10% who preferred mixed modalities, and 6% who indicated that they preferred in-kind assistance. The main reasons for households to report a preference for cash were related to flexibility and freedom of choice.

#### V.1.4. Inhibitors of the use of cash

##### General trends:

All actors interviewed recognised that while the economy of the three countries and/or areas covered is monetised and the markets are generally functional, there are still many challenges and barriers that inhibit the use of cash.

##### External inhibitors:

- The fact that several donors still have earmarked funds, requirements and/or preferences for in-kind and vouchers is still a barrier to scaling up the use of cash (see box 2 for an illustration).

##### Internal inhibitors:

- **Perceptions around the possible misuse or diversion of cash transfers**, especially in non-state controlled areas, still inhibit the use of cash for several actors, as it is still perceived as riskier and more prone to diversion.

<sup>60</sup> Oxfam (2020) 'Market and Cash Feasibility Report Deir- ez Zor and Aleppo Governorates'

- Large actors face operational and bureaucratic constraints that prevent them from delivering cash at scale and in a timely way, while other modalities are more established (for example, FSP contracts need to be renewed yearly). Similarly, the “cash brain-drain” resulting from the need for cash specialists during the Ukraine crisis was mentioned as a reason for organisations not being able to make the transition to cash when it was not a familiar modality for them.
- Where markets are functional and accessible, there is still **an organisational preference among some actors for vouchers** over cash assistance. There are several reasons for this.
  - First, some actors think that vouchers are a **better modality for coping with inflation, as it** is easier to show donors that recipients will not be affected by inflation because fixed prices can be negotiated with contracted retailers for a round of assistance.<sup>61</sup>
  - Second, in environments where security and safety are a concern, vouchers are seen to be less risky for recipients and therefore more reassuring with regard to protection concerns.
  - Third, the concept of giving cash for food security objectives only is not unanimously understood or accepted by food security actors, as cash is recognised as being fungible and unrestricted by nature. Vouchers are often the preference for meeting this sole **food security objective**. Some actors expressed doubts about the capacity of cash transfers to reliably meet households’ food needs, recognising that people in crisis have a varied range of basic needs, with competing priorities and choices they have to make. These actors prefer vouchers because of their restricted nature. Meeting nutrition needs (“access to healthy food”) is also an aspect that pushes actors to deliver food assistance through vouchers rather than cash only (which contradicts evidence around cash plus interventions for nutrition outcomes).

“We are interested in this control that voucher provides.”

A key informant in Nigeria

- A final reason for choosing vouchers over cash, even when all conditions are met for the use of cash, is **organisational comfort** with vouchers. More “risk-averse” actors who have not yet used cash for food in a certain context do not seem open to engaging with a new and unknown modality. In contexts with a high turnover of staff, as is often the case in humanitarian contexts, it also means that there is a lack of the capacities needed to use cash or a lack of opportunity to build those capacities in the long term.

### Country-specific situation:

- In Nigeria’s BAY states

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<sup>61</sup> Note this doesn’t apply for Syria where most retailers requested amendments to their agreement since 2020 due to the Covid-pandemic and the depreciation of the SYP as prices of basic goods skyrocketed. To avoid further losses, participating retailers asked to amend the contracts to protect themselves during inflationary trends, the voucher value will be pegged to the exchange rate the day before or the day of distribution.



The northeast of Nigeria, particularly Borno state, has been most affected by conflict between the government and non-state armed groups, and this has consequences for government policies and, consequently, the choice of modality. The cash movement restrictions (see section IV.1.1 and Box 1), the approvals required for the use of cash, the government's ad hoc requests to see the lists of recipients, as well as the spectre of the 2019 incident (see section IV.1.1), are some of the main reasons that key informants in the country give for preferring vouchers over cash. One key informant shared a fear of "financing terrorism" if using cash. Actors shared concerns with their donors that using cash could create a risk of them losing access to these areas. Some consider the overall context in northeast Nigeria not to be conducive for the use of cash, and one informant said that they favour vouchers because of the **deteriorating security situation**, particularly in remote areas. For one actor, the fact that the Nigerian Armed Forces and government actors are tightly controlling the flow of food, fuel and cash, due to concerns about funding the insurgency, makes in-kind distribution or cash transfers less feasible or appropriate than vouchers.

- **In Somalia:**

A few actors fear using cash in areas controlled by Al-Shabaab because of the risk of the harmful uses of cash in those areas. Security risks in these areas were mentioned by one actor as an inhibitor of cash and a factor in preferences for in-kind. However, it was noted that some actors do provide cash assistance in those areas, although they fear reporting that they do so, as mentioned by one key informant.

"Reputational risk and misunderstanding of sanctions means it is a taboo subject to talk about "Al-Shabaab" controlled areas. It should be understood as self-censoring."

One key informant in Somalia

As mentioned by this key informant, international sanctions can be misunderstood and seen as a barrier to delivering cash in rebel-controlled areas. One informant confirmed that this should not be the case, as the sanctions are only affecting the leaders of terrorist groups rather than the general population, and would affect the vetting of vendors if vouchers were being used. Several actors see vouchers as being less prone to diversion to terrorist groups, but this could be seen as simply perception and interpretation.

One food security actor mentioned an issue with a mobile network operator's licence for mobile money, which prevented them from using the network as an FSP until 2020 and slowed down the desired transition to cash.

The same actor mentioned issues around participant SIM card registration, market functionality and access in hard-to-reach areas as other inhibitors of cash.

However, due to the context in Somalia, the majority of actors see no reason other than donor requirements or preference that would prevent humanitarian actors from using cash across whole country.

"Using in-kind or vouchers in a country with robust markets like Somalia is a donor-tied thing: a political agenda."

It seems that, in Somalia, only one large food security actor is conducting in-kind food assistance (see Box 2). One of their donors believes that maintaining a marginal in-kind pipeline allows the supply chain to be kept functional as a contingency plan, in case in-kind assistance needs to be scaled up because of market failure or access being cut off in a country that has experienced near-famine conditions in recent months. This donor added that maintaining a certain level of in-kind assistance in the country cannot do any harm in the current environment of low supply and production, and could instead create a welcome downward pressure on market prices.

#### Box 2 In-kind food aid in Somalia

##### In-kind food aid in Somalia

Most actors believe that markets are extremely resilient across the whole of Somalia, despite all the shocks experienced over recent years. One food security actor interviewed is maintaining a proportion (10%-20%) of its food assistance in-kind for various reasons: donor directives; weak market functionality in specific areas; government restrictions; former absence of a mobile money licence; and issues with recipient registration and verification. However, the ambition is to transition to increasing amounts of cash and voucher assistance.

Funding provided by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance requires a certain amount of funding to be used to purchase US in-kind agricultural commodities. In 2021, this actor received 28,560 MT of food commodities under USAID's Title II Humanitarian Response for Somalia, to a total cost of more than 51 million USD (USAID, International Food Assistance Report, Fiscal Year 2021, Report to Congress) or 44% of the food assistance funded by the US government that year.

- **In Syria:**

Several issues are preventing actors from using cash at scale in Syria, particularly in GoS areas.

- Significant barriers for the use of cash in GoS areas, where actors are unable to deliver cash in USD and have to deliver it in SYP, are: the **huge and rapid depreciation of the SYP**,<sup>62</sup> the **fluctuating exchange rate**, and the **coexistence of two rates** (the official one and the black-market one). Both exchange rates differ significantly and can reduce efficiency for the organisation or the recipient of cash assistance, compounding an already difficult situation. As an example, in November 2022, the official exchange rate was 3,800 SYP to 1 USD, while the black-market rate was around 5,000 SYP to 1 USD. Humanitarian actors are advocating for the Central Bank of Syria to raise the preferred rate for NGOs closer to the black market one to avoid large losses. The UN agencies

<sup>62</sup> As of November 2022 the official rate was 2,512 SYP to 1 USD, a depreciation of 387% in 5 years and 3497% in 10 years. In 2012, it was at 70 SYP to 1 USD.

have no choice but to use the official exchange rate. **Price inflation** resulting from economic volatility in all parts of the country is also a barrier. However, one donor gave the example of Lebanon, where it has been possible to use cash at scale in a context of currency depreciation and price inflation.

- Another challenge is the lack of **small-denomination USD banknotes**, which is a challenge in NWS and NES where actors deliver cash in USD. As banknotes smaller than 100 are difficult to find, it was recommended that local currency should be used for denominations smaller than that.
- Despite the fact that actors are able to deliver USD in the NWS and NES, there are challenges around the coexistence of **different currencies in the same areas**. For example, in the NWS, recipients receive USD and exchange it for TRY, which is used in most markets and is the official currency in Turkish-controlled areas. The **depreciation of TRY** in recent years and the volatility (and weakness) of the Turkish economy has consequently had a detrimental effect on the local economy in NWS.
- Some actors also mentioned **liquidity problems** as a barrier,<sup>63</sup> as Hawala dealers are not always in a position to access and deliver large amount of physical cash within a short period of time. Staggered cash distributions are therefore required.<sup>64</sup> It is worth mentioning, however, that actors delivering cash said that the liquidity issue never involved cancelling a cash distribution, only delaying it to a maximum of three days. It should be noted that delays can be due to funds being frozen as a result of sanctions by intermediary banks from international headquarters to Turkey, or from Turkey to NWS by PTT, or by Hawala security policies.
- The issue of the **monopoly and power** held by the Hawala dealers was also mentioned. As there are no banking system or mobile money operators in those areas, Hawalas are the only FSPs available in NWS and NES with sufficient capacities.

“The Hawalas control everything, they lead the show, they charge INGOs additional fees at their discretion. Especially during the COVID pandemic, they played with the fees and increased them. And INGOS have no option other than the Hawalas. There are only two or three big ones that control everything in the country. There is no other choice, especially in non-government-controlled areas, as there are no banks. Hawalas also decide when the distribution takes place for liquidity reasons.”

A key informant working in Syria

- Another important challenge slowing down the use of cash in the country is the issue of **targeting**. As camp management and local authorities do not accept targeting in camp settings, actors have to use a blanket approach, which is often impossible due to budget limitations.

<sup>63</sup> Other actors mentioned there was no liquidity issue

<sup>64</sup> Note that staggered cash distributions are also a mitigation measure against theft and the security risk to Hawala members of staff to be transporting large amounts of money.

- One important challenge in the GoS areas, despite the government giving the green light for cash, is that INGOs and UN agencies are largely not allowed to work there independently (see section IV.1.1). In addition, in a 2020 report, Oxfam reported that FSPs have an obligation to share information on cash transfer recipients with the Central Bank of Syria.<sup>65</sup> One actor shared its experience of implementing a pilot cash assistance project using bank transfers and ATM cards in the GoS areas, for which it received a request from the Central Bank of Syria to provide details of the recipients, including with their ID numbers. Forced non-compliance with recipient data protection is a disincentive for many actors to use cash.
- Much like in Somalia, the use of cash in Syria is hindered by fears of international sanctions and the consequences for its use in the country. This leads to a lot of sensitivity around this modality, particularly in areas previously held by ISIS or in camps known to host previous fighters and their families (the Al Hol camp in particular). It is worth mentioning that sanctions do have negative consequences in the country: the lack of availability of FSPs (as most are sanctioned and actors need waivers to be working with them, especially in GoS areas); the lack of a formal banking system in the non-government controlled areas; and the weakness of online infrastructures in general (mainly due to the international sanctions).

## V.2. How have contextual changes (security, economic, environmental and political) affected modality decisions in the context?

### General trends

The COVID-19 pandemic is a significant event that has led to the review and adaptation of certain processes (targeting, delivery and verification) to ensure people's safety while continuing to reach targeted recipients. Good practices drawn from this experience can assist post-pandemic programme design and effectiveness too, especially in hard-to-reach areas. However, the research did not find that it had any influence on the choice of modality, besides the scale-up of cash during this period (in particular for safety nets) and the increased exposure already mentioned. The most important contextual change that has taken place in the three countries over the last two years that has influenced modality decision-making is economic: price inflation linked to currency depreciation and a surge in global food staple prices (although the price of vegetable oil, dairy, meat and sugar actually went down in October 2022, cereal prices are higher than in the same periods in recent years and continue to increase).<sup>66</sup> Despite these economic shocks, we have observed increasing trends in the use of cash in Somalia over the last two years, but an increased use

<sup>65</sup> Oxfam (2020) *Dignifying Aid - Oxfam's Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Programming in Syria, Oxfam Case Study, July 2020*

<sup>66</sup> The **FAO Food Price Index\*** (FFPI) averaged 135.9 points in October 2022, virtually unchanged from September, with the price indices of all the covered commodity groups, except cereals, down month-on-month. An upturn in the Cereal Price Index countered drops in the indices for vegetable oils, dairy, meat and sugar. With the latest updates, the FFPI has dropped 23.8 points (14.9 percent) from its peak in March this year, but remained 2.7 points (2.0 percent) above its value in the corresponding month last year (FAO World Food Situation 2022 Accessed on 24/11/2022 at <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>)

of vouchers rather than cash in Nigeria and Syria (for the reasons set out above). Actors have demonstrated agile and robust mechanisms for adapting programming to inflation, particularly the cash transfer value, as stated in the below section IV.4.

Another change that has driven this increased uptake is governments' approval for the use of cash for food security assistance, as in Syria, and the passing of regulatory frameworks for FSPs, as in Nigeria and Somalia.

### Country-specific trends

In Nigeria's BAY states, 59% of food assistance in 2022 was delivered through CVA, of which 6% was in cash (and 94% in vouchers),<sup>67</sup> meaning that only 3.5% of food security assistance was given in cash in the BAY states. In 2021,<sup>68</sup> 45% of food assistance was delivered through CVA and 21% in cash. It confirms that, even if the use of CVA has increased, the proportion of cash decreased in 2022. Interestingly, in November 2020, the trend was reversed, as 55% of food assistance was delivered through CVA (decreasing from 2020 to 2021 and increasing from 2021 to 2022), and the use of cash as opposed to vouchers was slightly lower than in 2021, at 20%.<sup>69</sup>

In Somalia, despite price inflation, one donor observed that none of its partners ever asked to switch to another modality. The depreciation and fluctuation of the Somali shilling is not an issue for cash actors and recipients, as USD is the *de facto* currency used in Somalia and is widely accepted, even by small food retailers. Assistance is also in USD.

Trends in the use of cash and vouchers in Somalia in the last two years (2020-2022)<sup>70</sup>

Table 4: Trends in the use of CVA in Somalia from 2020-2022

| Trends in Somalia (millions of people assisted) |         |          |         |          |         |          |
|---|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
|   | Aug-20  |          | Aug-21  |          | Jul-22  |          |
|   | No. (m) | % of CVA | No. (m) | % of CVA | No. (m) | % of CVA |
| <b>Delivery mechanism</b>                       |         |          |         |          |         |          |
| Cash via mobile money                           | 2.12    | 48.1     | 1.03    | 57.9     | 5.1     | 55.3     |
| Cash in hand                                    | 0.69    | 15.6     | 0.05    | 2.8      | 1.03    | 11.2     |
| Vouchers  | 1,6     | 36.3     | 0,7     | 39.3     | 3.1     | 33.6     |
| <b>Objective of the assistance</b>              |         |          |         |          |         |          |
| Cash-for-food Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)  | 3.2     | 69.6     | 1.1     | 61.1     | 4.1     | 44.1     |
| MPCA  | 0.9     | 19.6     | 0.2     | 11.1     | 2.8     | 30.1     |
| Safety nets                                     | 0.26    | 5,7      | 0.28    | 15.6     | 2.2     | 23.7     |

<sup>67</sup> Nigeria Food Security Sector (2022) Food Security Sector Cash Dashboard-Northeast Nigeria-September 2022

<sup>68</sup> Nigeria Food Security Sector (2021) Food Security Sector Cash Dashboard-Northeast Nigeria-June 2021

<sup>69</sup> Nigeria Food Security Sector (2020) Food Security Sector Cash Dashboard-Northeast Nigeria-November 2020

<sup>70</sup> HDX platform Somalia, Accessed on 06/12/2022 at <https://data.humdata.org/visualization/somalia-cash-programing-v4/>

We can see that the use of mobile money as a delivery mechanism increased from 48.1% of total CVA in 2020 to 55.3% in 2022 (more than 5 million people), and the use of cash in hand decreasing from 15.6% of total CVA to 11.2%. In relation to the sectoral use of cash, we can see that cash-for-food MEB decreased from 69.6% of all CVA in 2020 to 44% of all CVA in 2022. The proportion of MPCA has increased, as have safety nets as a proportion of total CVA in the country from 2020 to 2022. This can be explained by greater uptake of MPCA, donor preferences for MPCA, and the scaling up of safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**In Syria**, findings show that the support of a strong CWG providing clear guidance on how to handle exchange-rate fluctuation, depreciation and price inflation is key to creating an enabling environment for cash. Section IV.4 below describes how inflation is managed. Furthermore, recent advocacy by the CWG to standardise the dollarisation of cash assistance (to safeguard against the depreciation of SYP against USD) was a major step in adjusting to contextual changes.

### Trends in the use of cash and vouchers in Syria in the last two years (2021-2022)<sup>71</sup>

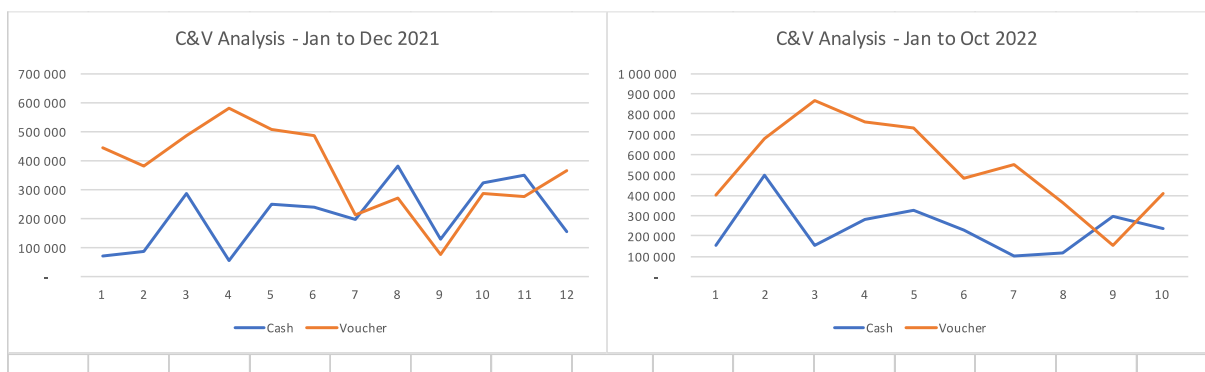


Figure 1. Trends in the use of cash and vouchers in 2021-2022 (the x-axis shows the months of the year and the y-axis the number of people assisted).

The figure above shows that the trends are not linear and that, while the number of voucher recipients outnumbered cash recipients at the beginning of 2022, by September cash recipients were more numerous.

Finally, actors try to remain agile due to the volatile security situation in the country. For example, one actor budgeted for an in-kind intervention as a contingency plan in case of large-scale displacement or a lack of market functionality.

## V.3. Mechanisms used to adapt cash transfer value to meet household food needs

### General trends

There is recognition that prices are volatile in the three contexts and that changes to the transfer value can help adapt to that. In the three countries assessed, the systematic review of the food MEB and MPCA transfer value by the Food Security Clusters/Sectors (FSC/Ss)

<sup>71</sup> Whole of Syria Food Security Cluster (2022)

and CWGs, respectively, with recommendations for how frequently it should be changed, made actors confident that they were still meeting a set percentage of an MEB and particularly households' food needs as much as operational constraints would allow. Changing the transfer value is an accepted method of adjustment to inflation for cash and food security actors in the three contexts, even if operational and budget constraints might prevent them from doing that more than once a year.<sup>72</sup> Actors have the total support of donors in this and, most of the time, the flexibility to increase or readjust their budget accordingly. Most actors interviewed were using crisis modifiers or budget buffers in their budget proposals to allow for swift and easy value adjustments. The role of the FSC/S and of CWG in-country is important to give all actors a common reference and to harmonise cash assistance for food objectives. Most actors interviewed said that the ability to adjust the cash transfer value is a mechanism that confirms the relevance of cash and the absence of a need to switch modality in case of significant inflation. This also reassures donors of the relevance of cash for food objectives in contexts of acute food insecurity and inflation. Nevertheless, most donors facilitate agile mechanisms for switching from cash to vouchers or vice versa, although some said that switching from in-kind to cash or vice versa is not that easy.

Finding consensus among food security and cash actors (including donors) on the transfer value or percentage of MEB to be covered seems very important for cash to be effective for food security outcomes in these contexts. An inconsistent or insufficient transfer value can mean continuous use of negative coping strategies and a reduced impact on food security (as was the case before consensus was reached in Somalia). However, it is worth noting that not all actors have the budget flexibility to be able to change the transfer value as prescribed by their FSC/S or CWG.

### Country-specific trends

- In **Nigeria**, the food security sector recommended that cash transfers for food should be based on 70% of the food MEB in rural areas where HEA analysis was not available. However, in urban and peri-urban areas, where HEA analysis is available, cash actors only cover the actual gap as indicated in the HEA. The CWG's MEB taskforce recommended that a monthly multipurpose cash (MPC) payment should be provided, and the amount was set in February 2021. To keep up with price inflation, a taskforce committee exists within the food security sector to monitor pricing monitoring and adjust transfer values if necessary. Guidance from the food security sector recommended that partners review the transfer value if it has changed by (-/+ ) 15% compared to the prevailing market calculation indicated by food price monitoring in the local markets. An advocacy note written by the food security sector in June 2022<sup>73</sup> recommended updated food MEB-based transfer values in specific

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<sup>72</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Nigeria Food Security Cluster (2022) Advocacy Note: Change of Transfer Value for Food Assistance Fourth Edition; Updated 02 June 2022

locations because of price inflation. This has been followed by most, but not all, actors. Various internal processes have delayed some food security actors' ability to adjust the transfer value to the recommended rate in a timely way.

- **In Somalia**, a Joint Somalia CWG and FSC Technical Note in September 2022 recommended harmonised MPCA and food transfer values by region for all CVA as part of the drought response. It recommended that these transfer values cover 80% of a household's basic needs (full MEB) and 80% of the food MEB respectively, based on regional commodity prices. The transfer value recommendations aimed at CVA for all vulnerable populations facing IPC Phase 3 and above will remain in effect until March 2023. However, the CWG and FSC will conduct a review based on the unfolding food security and humanitarian situation, and prevailing market prices, in December 2022. Until 2020, there was a threshold variation of 10% of the MEB cost, which is not in use anymore due to constant price variation that would mean adjusting the value too frequently. As a way forward, the CWG plans to use a 25% threshold from March 2023. The CWG and FSC have agreed to a set rate and value for each region, which will be updated in 2023 (see section IV.4 below). Market monitoring is done by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit with input from WFP Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping to inform these transfer value adjustments. The country FSC and CWG collaborate to provide evidence on the impact of commodity price inflation on the MEB transfer value.
- **In Syria**, the cash and markets advisor for the Whole of Syria response coordinates the three hub-level CWGs. However, they each have their own value based on market price differences.<sup>74</sup>

With support from the hub-level CWGs, three ways were found to address the high **food price inflation**.

- **Dollarisation of cash assistance** in NWS and NES.

- In NES, the CWGs' recommendation in 2021 was to budget a higher value for MPC (120 USD for an agreed MPC of 100 USD) in order for there to be a buffer, and to avoid actors having to ask for a budget modification. This was applied in the second part of 2022, when prices justified raising the MPC to 120 USD. The fact that it was budgeted before enabled actors to change easily, without going back to donors. It was revised again in November 2022. The costs are higher in NWS (which is dependent on imports from Turkey), while costs are slightly cheaper in NES (which relies on imports from Iraq). This explains why the MPC value was set at 120 USD in NES while NWS has two types of MPC: an emergency one-off for new displacements (first-line response) at 130 USD; and a repeated/regular MPC at 100 USD. This represents 70% of the survival MEB (SMEB).

- In the GoS area, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) CWG developed an MEB calculation tool and set a threshold at an increased 13% of the total MEB cost to change

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<sup>74</sup> In Syria, the CWG doesn't recommend changing transfer values for MPCA on a regular basis for the operational constraints mentioned above and for avoiding confusing participants. Budget cuts also meant that, if transfer values increase, an even smaller number of people can be served, which is very difficult to justify vis-à-vis a worsening food security crisis since 2020.



the transfer value. It was changed twice in 2022, based on inflation and currency depreciation, and was planned to be changed again in December 2022 or January 2023. Some cash actors top up 30% of the transfer value in their budget in order to foresee any inflation rate and have the necessary buffer should they have to adjust the value over the course of a project.

One key informant made an interesting point with regard to price inflation and food security. This actor delivered cash assistance in the NWS and prices increased over the course of the project, but they could not afford to change the transfer value. However, they did not see any differences in food consumption behaviour in the PDM data. Instead, recipients reduced their use of cash for other expenses (health, for example), demonstrating that if the value of a cash transfer decreases relative to food prices, priority will still be given to food needs. This is aligned with the evidence that shows that the poorer the household is the larger the share of household expenditure on food.<sup>75</sup>

## VI. Programme design

### VI.1. Use of complementary programming

The uptake of MPCA to cover a range of basic needs, including food needs, was observed in the three countries assessed. Most actors interviewed had a preference for MPCA over cash for food, as it can be used to cover the varied needs (including food-related) that the most vulnerable households have, especially displaced people. Nigeria is an exception, where cash for food only is more widespread than MPCA.

Cash Plus, also called Complementary Programming, is defined by the CaLP Glossary as: “programming where different modalities and/or activities are combined to achieve objectives. Complementary interventions may be implemented by one agency or by more than one agency working collaboratively. This approach can enable identification of effective combinations of activities to address needs and achieve programme objectives. Ideally this will be facilitated by a coordinated, multisectoral approach to needs assessment and programming.”

<sup>75</sup> *The Engel's law demonstrates that as incomes rise, expenditure on food increases while expenditure on other things increases even more, so that the share of total income spent on food declines. If a change in food prices results in a higher share of total household expenditure being spent on food, then this can result in the household being more resource constrained (i.e. poorer) as a result of the increase in food prices.*

*Consequently, depending on the specific foods, households that are very poor and already consuming the lowest-cost foods will be unable to substitute cheaper foods and will be forced to spend more on basic staples, reduce the quality of their diets, or even reduce the quantity consumed of the least expensive foods, while also reducing non-food expenditures that may be equally needed (e.g. on health and education).'*

Lele, U., Masters, W.A., Kinabo, J., Meenakshi, J., Ramaswami, B., Tagwireyi, J., Bell, W. & Goswami, S. (2016) Measuring Food and Nutrition Security: An Independent Technical Assessment and User's Guide for Existing Indicators. Measuring Food and Nutrition Security Technical Working Group. Rome: Food Security Information Network. Available at <http://www.fsincop.net/topics/fns-measurement>.

Uptake of the Cash Plus approach, or the use of complementary programming, is recognition that cash alone falls short of meeting all needs. The research found overall enthusiasm around the approach, especially for nutrition outcomes. However, the main issue hindering greater uptake in the countries assessed is a lack of funding preventing actors from providing the recommended full MPCA or food MEB value. Although the approach is recognised as an effective way to improve food security outcomes, limited funding prevents most actors from implementing it.

One actor has been using this approach in Somalia, where cash transfers are integrated with nutrition education; water, sanitation and hygiene services; child protection; and support to access health services. The key informant representing this actor stated that it was successful in terms of integrating and streamlining service provision, and had a positive outcome on food security indicators in the short term. Another actor in Syria mentioned having used cash for food combined with livelihoods interventions with successful outcomes.

Several actors interviewed suggested that cash + vouchers would be an ideal approach for meeting food security objectives, as vouchers would enable households to access a set range of food items and cash would enable them to complement those with food commodities of their choice (including fresh food). However, these actors were not yet using this hybrid approach.

## VI.2. Use of cash as anticipatory action

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Anticipatory action, also called early action or forecast-based action, means taking steps to protect people before a disaster strikes based on early warnings or forecasts<sup>76</sup>.

Based on respondent interviews and the literature shared, the research found no evidence of the use of cash as an anticipatory action in the three countries assessed. For most actors, either those contexts are protracted (Nigeria and Syria), or when the early warning signs of a crisis were triggered (Somalia) the funding was not there. However, some respondents shared examples of resilience programming that could be seen as a way to help recipients mitigate the impacts of future shocks. For example, one actor in the NES has used a mix of cash and in-kind for livelihoods objectives. He mentioned that as the ultimate outcome was for households not to fall into food insecurity, and this assistance was a way to protect their food security, it could be seen as anticipatory action.

The apparent lack of use of cash as an anticipatory action linked to food security objectives should be highlighted, and could be explored further.

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<sup>76</sup> IFRC (2022) Accessed on 06/12/2022 at <https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/disasters-climate-and-crises/climate-smart-disaster-risk-reduction/early-warning-early#:~:text=Early%20action%2C%20also%20known%20as,engagement%20with%20at%2Drisk%20communities>.

## VII. Outcomes and impact of cash transfers in a context of acute food insecurity

### VII.1. Evidence of the effectiveness of cash transfers for preventing deterioration and contributing to improve food security in contexts of acute food insecurity

The focus of the research was on cash transfers for food security outcomes. However, MPCA formed part of the research as it was agreed that it is a form of cash assistance that covers food needs, among other things, and is used in all three countries covered. For example, as of July 2022, MPCA made up 30% of the total CVA in Somalia.<sup>77</sup> There is a large body of evidence on the positive contribution of multipurpose cash and sectoral cash transfers on food security outcomes.<sup>78</sup> The research added a focus on contexts of acute food insecurity to assess whether these overall positive outcomes hold true in those contexts.

In the PDMs shared for the three countries, we observed that between 50% and 80% of the MPCA value is spent on food needs, depending on the season, the recipients' vulnerabilities and the context. This is reflected in the way that the MPCA value is calculated in the countries assessed, as food needs make up the largest proportion in their MEB or survival MEB.

In most of the monitoring and evaluation literature reviewed from 2020 to 2022 in the three countries assessed, the research found overall improvements in food security. This was evidenced by higher rates of recipients with acceptable Food Consumption Scores (FCS), decreased reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) scores, and improved Household Hunger Scale (HHS) scores, compared with baseline data across cash for food and MPCA. However, where overall progress is seen, it is sometimes outpaced by the deterioration of the situation. Several PDMs showed inconsistent progress due to seasonal factors and the severity of the food insecurity situation, particularly in Somalia.

**Impact on food security evidenced by food security indicators:**

<sup>77</sup> HDX platform Somalia, Accessed on 06/12/2022 at <https://data.humdata.org/visualization/somalia-cash-programing-v4/>

<sup>78</sup> Harvey, P. and Pavanello, S. (2018). Multi-purpose cash and sectoral outcomes: A review of evidence and learning. *Study commissioned by UNHCR in collaboration with members of the Advisory Board. May. UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency), Geneva.*

Three indicators – the FCS<sup>79</sup>, the rCSI<sup>80</sup> and the HHS<sup>81</sup> – which are considered a good proxy for households’ food security, and are commonly used across the PDMs accessed during the research, were used to analyse the effectiveness of cash transfers on food security in the countries covered. Almost all monitoring and evaluation reports analysed used these three indicators, enabling reliable trends to be given for each country and for all three countries together.

### Use of cash for food needs:

Table 4. Use of cash for food needs

| General trends   |  |
|--|--|
| Findings from PDMs show that cash transfers are used to meet food needs as a priority and also enable people to meet their basic needs (between 30% and 96% of cash assistance is used for food, depending on location and the transfer value, with the proportion generally being smaller for MPCAs). |  |
| <b>Nigeria<br/>(BAY states)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two cash-for-food MEB PDMs showed that, respectively, 72% to 94% of the cash received was spent on food on average.</li> <li>▪ Six other PDMs conducted between 2020 and 2022 showed less strong results. On average, cash recipients spent 57% of their cash on food. The result was higher in Borno (73%), the most affected state, pointing to higher food needs there. The PDMs also showed that between 13% and 27% of the cash received was spent on repaying debts (often food-related).</li> <li>▪ Recipients who received 9,000 Nigerian naira (NGN) as a voucher and also received the same amount in cash spent an average of 3,635 NGN of their cash on buying additional food items that they did not acquire with their voucher.</li> <li>▪ An example of a cash for work scheme showed that when participants received 7,500 NGN per month, they spent 59% of it on food needs.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Somalia</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Four recent MPCA PDM examples showed that, on average, cash recipients spent 55.3% of their cash on food expenditure, ranging from 42% to 62% in the Luuq and Dollow districts of the Gedo region (IPC 3). In the Baidoa region (IPC 5), recipients on average spent 62% of the MPCA on food.</li> <li>▪ The same PDMs showed that between 13% and 27% of the cash received was spent on repaying debts (often food-related).</li> <li>▪ The BRCiS<sup>82</sup> consortium in Somalia provided a large cash grant (270 USD), of which 30% was spent on food, 20% on water and 20% on debts.</li> </ul>  |

<sup>79</sup> A technical note on the FCS can be found here: [FCS Technical Guidance 5 February 2008 \(wfp.org\)](https://www.wfp.org/publications/technical-guidance-5-february-2008)

<sup>80</sup> rCSI: the proportion of households that limits portion size at meal times, restrict consumption by adults for small children to eat and reduce number of meals eaten in a day. A technical note can be found here: [Microsoft Word - Coping Strategies Index Manual Rewrite Version 2.1 letter ... \(enonline.net\)](https://www.enonline.net/microsoft-word-coping-strategies-index-manual-rewrite-version-2.1-letter-...)

<sup>81</sup> The HHS is an indicator to measure household hunger in food insecure areas specifically developed and validated for cross-cultural use, it asks questions on food security over a period of 30 days. The HHS scales are "little to no hunger in the household" (0-1), "moderate hunger in the household" (2-3), or "severe hunger in the household" (4-6). A technical note on this indicator can be found here: <https://www.fantaproject.org/monitoring-and-evaluation/household-hunger-scale-hhs>

<sup>82</sup> The BRCiS consortium (Building Resilient Communities in Somalia) is a humanitarian consortium created in 2013 implementing resilience programming across Somalia which explains the higher amount given not aligned with recommended transfer values. However, due to the timing of the interventions studied here (2021 and 2022), the results can be compared with other emergency programming.

|       |   |
|-------|---|
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>94% to 96% of a cash-for-food MEB was spent on food needs, which fits with the objective of this assistance.</li> </ul>  |
| Syria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REACH (2022) found that in Al Hasakeh (NES) recipients from different cash projects spent 43% to 53% of their monthly expenditure on food. The majority of respondents (89%) mentioned not having enough money to buy food.</li> <li>Two PDMs from two MPCA projects conducted in camps in NES in 2021 found an average of 60% was spent on food needs. An additional 16.5% of the assistance is used for debt repayment, of which 68% is to cover food debt, meaning that the real expenditure for food is actually higher, at around 70%.</li> <li>Another PDM of a six-month MPCA intervention in NES found an average of 86.3% of the MPCA was spent on food needs</li> <li>A PDM conducted in 2022 on households that received two rounds of MPCA in GoS areas found that 45% was spent on food. In addition, 86% of respondents shared that they always bought food in the market and 76% said that they had access to quality food. Another PDM conducted in the GoS areas in 2021 found that 64% of the MPCA was spent on food.</li> </ul> |

### FCS: country-specific trends

#### Nigeria (BAY States)

In Nigeria, the PDMs assessed all showed significant improvements in participants' FCS.

- In Yobe state, after recipients received six rounds of a cash-for-food MEB to the value of 5,000 NGN, 97.4% of households reported an acceptable FCS (compared with 87.5% in PDM 5 and 54% baseline).
- Other PDMs showed a poor baseline FCS (21%), increasing to 30.3% and 60.7% in subsequent PDMs; a borderline baseline FCS (24.7%) increasing to 33% and 61.8% in subsequent PDMs; and an acceptable baseline FCS (54%) increasing to 96.7% and 97.4% in subsequent PDMs.
- An endline made in November 2021 showed an improvement in the rate of acceptable FCS from a baseline of 40.9% of participants to 60.4% in April 2021, 64.7% in July 2021, and 86.9% in November 2021.

#### Somalia

Results for FCS improvements are more limited in Somalia, especially in IPC 4 areas. Project monitoring done between 2021 and 2022 across the most food-insecure areas of the country showed that between 39% and 84.9% of participants had an acceptable score after receiving MPCA for three to six months. In the case of those who received a cash-for-food MEB transfer, between 12% and 60% of them had an acceptable FCS after receiving the transfers.

- In one intervention where recipients received 73 USD of MPCA, 25% of them had a poor FCS, 36% had a borderline score and only 39% had an acceptable score at the first PDM. Almost all participants (91.1%) in the Baidao district were in the poor FCS category.
- Another PDM for MPCA in the Gedo region (IPC 3 in May 2022) showed that 23% of participants had a poor FCS, 20% had a borderline score and 59% had an acceptable score.
- MPCA provided by the Somali Cash Consortium in March 2021 for six months showed that the percentage of participants with an acceptable FCS improved from a baseline of 29% to 46% at midline and 39.7% at endline. This shows an improvement at midline, which can probably be explained by the increased severity of the crisis and seasonal factors.
- Another endline report by the consortium showing results for recipients of six rounds of monthly MPCA in 2021 (in the Banadir, Bari, Bay, Awdal, Hiraan, Lower Juba, Mudug, Middle Shabelle, Sanaag and

Sool regions) reported that 38.8% of households had an acceptable baseline FCS, followed by 56.4% at midline and 52.3% at endline. The report noted particularly high proportions of households with a poor FCS in the Banadir, Bay and Lower Shabelle regions.

- A third consortium endline showed results for recipients of a three-month MPCA programme in 2022 in the BAY, Lower Juba, Mudug, Middle Shabelle, and Gedo regions. Here, 46% of households had an acceptable baseline FCS, followed by 36.8% at midline and 57.5% at endline. The proportion of households with an acceptable FCS increased between the baseline and endline for all these regions, but particularly Middle Shabelle (67.8% at baseline and 84.9% at endline) and Gedo (37.5% at baseline and 63.0% at endline).
- A BRCiS Consortium PDM in July 2022 showed that approximately 83% of recipients had an acceptable FCS, suggesting that a higher transfer value has a greater impact on food security.
- A July 2021 PDM of a cash-for-food MEB of 30 USD per month showed that 60% of households had an acceptable FCS.
- Another PDM of a cash-for-food MEB transfer in Nugaal, Puntland, in July 2022 showed that only 12% had an acceptable FCS at PDM, 22% were borderline and 66% had a poor FCS.
- A second PDM in June 2022 of a cash-for-food MEB transfer in the Gedo, BAY, Baqool and Burko regions showed that the percentage of households with an acceptable FCS decreased from a baseline of 30.9% to just 10.6% and 21.7% in subsequent PDMs. Those with a poor FCS made up 56.6%, up 9% from the 51.9% baseline, and down 2% from the 57.7% recorded in the last PDM. Similarly, the borderline FCS worsened from 17.2% at baseline to 21.7% and 31.8% in the following PDMs. It was also noted that the poor consumption score was more pronounced in female respondents.

### rCSI: country specific trends

Only a few PDMs provided results for rCSI (and none of the PDMs for Syria had data on rCSI), with limited results in terms of improvement, particularly in Somalia, where improvements are not consistent across time and location.

Table 5. rCSI<sup>83</sup>

| Nigeria  | Somalia   |
|--|---|
| <p>In Nigeria, a PDM for an intervention distributing MPCA for six months showed a drop in the rCSI from 8.1 at baseline to 2.9 in the latest PDM.</p> <p>A PDM in Nigeria showed that, after receiving six months of MPCA, 82.9% of selected households had a low coping strategy index and only 0.2% had a high coping strategy index (DRC Nigeria 2021, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) cash PDM-BHA-Unconditional Food Assistance PDM report, April to Nov 2021).</p> | <p>In Somalia, there are two examples of MPCA reporting an improved rCSI between baseline and endline: one from 15.3 to 12.5 and the other from 13.5 to 10.3.</p> <p>PDMs from the BRCiS interventions showed that rCSI decreased by 18 points in the Dinsoor district between January and March 2022. Other districts that registered a decrease were Wajid, Afgoye and Afmadow (Dhobley). The other districts registered an increase in rCSI in the same period. In Kismaayo and Luuq, the rCSI increased by 17 and 13 points, respectively.</p> <p>In the Baidoa and Berdale districts, the rCSI decreased by 26 and 12 points respectively between the baseline and PDM (April and July 2022). This means that households were resorting less to negative coping strategies to cope with the drought.</p> <p>In the Belet-hawa district, rCSI increased from 15 to 29 between the baseline and PDM (April and July 2022),</p> |

<sup>83</sup> No information was available on rCSI in Syria

meaning that the households were resorting more to negative coping strategies to cope with the drought.

Lastly, A PDM from a cash-for-food MEB intervention showed that the Gedo, BAY, Baqool and Burko regions showed positive results, with rCSI decreasing by 7% between baseline and PDM 2 (14.73 to 13.73). However, the rCSI increased from 10.03 in PDM 1 to 13.72 in PDM 2, showing non-linear improvements.

### HHS<sup>84</sup>: country specific trends<sup>85</sup>

Data shared on the HHS showed positive results overall, with one negative result in Somalia in 2021.

Table 6. HHS

| Nigeria  | Somalia  |
|--|--|
| <p>A PDM after six months of food MEB (5,000 NGN) revealed that 98% of surveyed households experienced little to no hunger – a huge improvement from 65% at baseline and 84% at PDM 1. The same PDM shows that severe hunger decreased from 19% to 1% at PDM 6 compared to the baseline.</p> <p>Another PDM report from an unconditional cash programme showed improvements in the share of households with moderate and severe HHS scores: from 57.9% at baseline to 32.1% at PDM 1, and 0% at PDM 2 and endline.</p> | <p>An endline from a Cash Consortium intervention in 2021 showed an evolution of the HHS from 4.3 at baseline to 5.2 at midline and endline, which is not a positive result.</p> <p>A multisector emergency response showed that the proportion of households experiencing little to no hunger increased from 22% at baseline to 90% at midline. Conversely, the percentage of households with an HHS showing a moderate or severe level of hunger decreased substantially from 78% at baseline to just 35% at midline. Gender-disaggregated data showed that slightly more men (92.6%) than women (87.8%) reported having experienced no hunger or slight hunger. In contrast, 11.4% of the women experienced moderate hunger compared to only 7.4% of men. This could be associated with the fact that men generally have more social networks than women to keep hunger at bay.</p> <p>Lastly, a PDM in 2021 showed HHS at 1.36, indicating a level somewhere between little to no hunger and moderate hunger. This was an improvement of 40% on the baseline score of 2.2, indicating moderate hunger.</p> |

<sup>84</sup> The HHS is an indicator to measure household hunger in food insecure areas specifically developed and validated for cross-cultural use, it asks questions on food security over a period of 30 days. The HHS scales are "little to no hunger in the household" (0-1), "moderate hunger in the household" (2-3), or "severe hunger in the household" (4-6).

<sup>85</sup> No information was available on HHS in Syria

### Further points to consider in the effectiveness of cash and other modalities

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Access to markets</b>                             | Overall the data reviewed shows that recipients did not face any difficulties accessing markets. There are some concerns about the time required to reach and come back from the markets, as some recipients live further away from them, especially vulnerable ones such as IDPs. Similarly, recipients tend to feel safe when withdrawing the cash.   |
| <b>Ability to withstand a crisis, and well-being</b> | An endline evaluation report on an MPCA intervention by the Somali Cash Consortium in 2022 demonstrated that households' perception of their ability to withstand a crisis or shock had improved considerably. The proportion of households who believed that they would be completely unable to meet basic needs and survive a crisis such as a drought, flooding, locust invasions or hailstorms decreased from 39.0% at baseline to 23.2% at endline. Reflecting the general trend in the other subjective well-being indicators, the proportion of households who reported positive perceptions of their well-being appears to have increased between baseline and endline, while the proportion of households who reported negative perceptions decreased. |
| <b>Obstacles for effectiveness</b>                   | As mentioned above, mainly because of inflation and the fact that cash assistance is not meant to cover 100% of food or basic needs in the contexts covered, a substantial percentage of participants said that the amount received is not sufficient to meet all of their basic needs, particularly for large families.  |
| <b>Negative impacts of other modalities</b>          | The report found evidence that in-kind food aid is not sufficient to cover vulnerable households' basic needs. This is illustrated in the Ground Truth Solutions Cash Barometer 2022, in which respondents who received only in-kind assistance were slightly less positive than those who received only CVA. In 2020, only 22% of recipients who received in-kind assistance and CVA felt they were able to meet their most important needs, whereas when they received only CVA in 2021, that percentage was 40%.   |

## VII.2. Timeliness of cash

### Country-specific examples<sup>86</sup>

#### Somalia

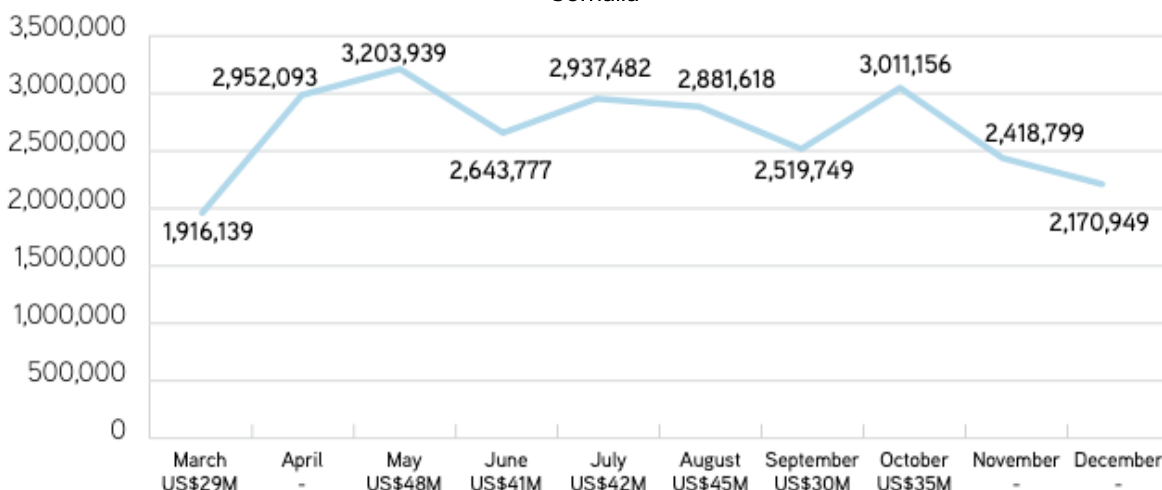
In Somalia, the CWG conducted an evaluation of the cash-based response to the 2017 famine alert, which involved a significant scale-up of cash-based interventions implemented in the country since 2003.<sup>87</sup> The alert was raised in January 2017 and by March the scaling up had started, making use of the existing operational structure for cash. As shown in Figure 2, by March 2017, 29 million USD were being distributed to 1.9 million recipients and, by May, the programmes were reaching over 3 million recipients with 48 million USD. According to the informants in that report, the fast response was thanks to both donors and organisations reacting quickly to the famine alert. Likewise, the informants considered cash to be faster than in-kind, especially when items are not readily available.

<sup>86</sup> The consultants only found relevant information about the timeliness of the response for Somalia and Syria, and not for Nigeria.

<sup>87</sup> Cash Working Group Somalia, "Evaluation of the 2017 Somalia Humanitarian Cash-Based Response Commissioned by the Somalia Inter-Agency Cash Working Group," 2018.



Figure 2. Number of recipients reached and estimated value of cash by month for the 2017 famine alert in Somalia



There were some reported delays in delivery of the cash due to operational challenges, meaning that some recipients were given two instalments at once. However, the lessons learned from the 2011 famine by both the drought-affected communities and the humanitarian organisations enabled a more rapid response.

Similarly, the informants from Somalia who discussed the timeliness of their programmes agreed that cash is much faster than in-kind, as recipients can access their cash as soon as a week after the donor approves emergency cash assistance, whereas non-emergency cash can only be distributed after about 20 days.

The PDM data from different interventions points to similar results:

- The PDM of the USAID/BHA-funded Ultra-poor Graduation (UPG) model implemented through a consortium in Baidoa, Somalia, shows that 94% of respondents think that the MPCA was received in time to cover their needs.<sup>88</sup>
- Similarly, the PDM of the Danish Refugee Council programme delivering MPCA to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in Mogadishu, Somalia, show that 68% of respondents were very satisfied with the timeliness of the assistance, while 32% were satisfied with it.

## Syria

There is agreement among informants in Syria that cash remains a faster option and that once the pre-distribution processes are completed, it can be made available to recipients in minutes. In-kind food assistance, on the other hand, is hindered by logistics procedures and more complex distribution that demands more time from recipients (transport to the distribution point, long queues, lack of certain items, etc.).<sup>89</sup> As a result, cash transfers and vouchers tend to be a more efficient modality than in-kind.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> BHA, "PDM Report: Building Pathways Out of Poverty for Ultra-Poor IDPs and Host Communities in Baidoa, Somalia," 2022.

<sup>89</sup> UNRWA, "UNRWA Emergency Cash Assistance and In-Kind Food Assistance in Syria," 2021.

<sup>90</sup> World Bank, "The Revival of the 'Cash versus Food' Debate: New Evidence for an Old Quandary?," 2016.

In Syria, the timeliness of cash has been challenged by the approval and access procedures required to start a cash distribution, making vouchers an even quicker option. Still, CVA remains a timelier alternative than in-kind assistance. According to two informants in Syria, distributing vouchers can actually be faster than distributing cash, because the selection of recipients and vendors can take place simultaneously, whereas, with cash, organisations must first select recipients and get them approved. The lack of banknotes is an additional reason for preferring vouchers over cash.

According to key informants, getting approval for a cash distribution can take between one and two months. This is in line with other studies that report an increase in the time required to distribute assistance, increasing from 3-4 days in the early years of the conflict to over three months.<sup>91</sup> Syria has been subjected to more international regulations than other countries, mostly due to the known presence of terrorists groups in rebel-controlled areas, the absence of legitimate authorities, and the lack of a formal banking system operating under international regulations. In emergency operations, such long procedures do not align with the need to respond quickly to the population in need. Moreover, the timeliness of the assistance is key in a context in which both needs and market conditions are constantly changing.

### VII.3. Cost-efficiency of cash

When looking at global trends, cash is usually a cheaper modality for distributing aid, due to some quick efficiency gains: cash is resold less; cash is more efficient the more the distribution recurses; and cash can be scaled up easily.<sup>92</sup> The findings of the research are in line with this global trend. Evidence from the research conducted in the three countries points to cash being more cost-efficient than in-kind assistance. However, there is a lack of cost-efficiency studies dedicated specifically to comparing CVA and in-kind assistance in these three countries, which makes it difficult to support their statements with robust findings.<sup>93</sup> And even if these studies were to exist, cost-efficiency studies tend to be project- and context-specific, and usually cannot be generalised. Nonetheless, during the key informant interviews, interviewees referred to three main clues that point to cash being more cost-efficient than in-kind assistance:

- **Accessibility:** ensuring access to in-kind assistance for remote communities is difficult and the situation can be even harder when natural disasters, such as floods, reduce accessibility for trucks even further.<sup>94</sup> In some cases, reaching more remote areas also requires an office to be established to coordinate logistics. Physical cash, on the other hand, is easier to transfer and, when done electronically, there are no physical

<sup>91</sup> ODI, "The Impact of Bank De-Risking on the Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Crisis," 2018.

<sup>92</sup> CaLP, "Cash Assistance: How Design Influences Value for Money," n.d., [https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/2/Cash-how-design-influence-VfM\\_FV.pdf](https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/2/Cash-how-design-influence-VfM_FV.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> For example, in 2015 the CaLP published a multicountry study that compared the cost to transfer ratio of different modalities. Nonetheless, the study was inconclusive because it was not possible to isolate the effect of the many variables that have to be considered. The study did find out that some key determinants of costs are the set-up costs of starting a new activity and the state of infrastructure (for example availability of electricity for local vendors) and that lower service fees can save some costs.

<sup>94</sup> Cash Working Group North West Syria (2020) "Cash Feasibility Assessment"

obstacles. Even when FSPs are not available, if markets are functional, organisations can reach recipients electronically or through vouchers.

- **Operational costs:** in-kind operation running costs vary and increase in proportion to the scale of the programme (costs such as items, warehousing and transportation increase with scale). The costs of in-kind operations are also more subject to international shocks. For example, the war in Ukraine and the resulting energy crisis has led to rising transport costs for in-kind assistance. Moreover, some informants report that the cost of the food bought for distribution can be higher than recipients will find in local markets. Similarly, recipients in Nigeria report that the quality of the in-kind food assistance is lower than they can find in markets.<sup>95</sup> CVA requires some initial, fixed operating costs in order to be functional, but scaling up the assistance does not demand additional operational resources (i.e. the difference in operational costs between reaching 100 or 1,000 recipients with a cash transfer is marginal).
- **Sale of food aid:** Evidence of the (re)sale of in-kind food aid is also a reason for stating that cash is more cost-efficient than in-kind. This is because recipients, when reselling their in-kind food ration, will always receive a smaller value than the real economic cost of their ration, which generates losses for recipients and the humanitarian actors that delivered the assistance. The 2020 Ground Truth Solutions' Somalia Cash Barometer reported the sale of in-kind aid as a practice recognised by 17% of participants surveyed, compared with only 8% in 2019.<sup>96</sup> **However, it is noted that the in-kind aid sold was not necessarily just food items, but other items too.** The report mentions that "The decline in aid recipients' ability to cover their most important needs is accompanied by an increase in the reported sale of aid items." This was also reflected in a PDM report on a project that took place in 2022 in the Galkayo district. The report states that "a large portion of the households sold the food assistance (cereals) they receive and the primary reason is to pay for their daily expenses such as other food, healthcare, and education." In Syria, a PDM reported that 12% of respondents reported selling part of their rations to buy alternative food items such as pasta, ghee and spices. Some respondents (2%) reported sharing their rations with friends and 1% reported that flour and lentils were spoiled or rotten, so they did not consume them. A few recipients living in Raqqa but receiving their rations in Aleppo reported transportation difficulties, leading them to sell all their rations and then purchase alternative food items back in Raqqa.

In Syria, evidence points to a reduction in the cost-efficiency of cash due to the pre-distribution procedures that need to be followed before delivering assistance (as explained in the previous section). Vouchers, and especially in-kind assistance, can be delivered more quickly because they require less clearance. One actor favours a mixed intervention of in-kind and cash for cost-effectiveness purposes, as when they are not able to distribute the full food basket because of inflation and funding shortages they can complement it with cash. Cash also allows them to have an alternative assistance modality in case of food

<sup>95</sup> Ground Truth Solutions (2021) "The Key to Fairness Is Inclusion Communities Call for Greater Involvement in Aid Northeast Nigeria - June 2021"

<sup>96</sup> Ground Truth Solutions (2020) Perception survey of aid recipients in Somalia

spoilage, which can happen with in-kind food that is transported from other countries or regions.

Nonetheless, the above does not necessarily imply that cash is less cost-efficient than in-kind assistance on the whole. There needs to be further cost-analysis research that specifically compares the different modalities in order to answer this question properly. Moreover, due to fluctuating economic conditions, inflation and currency depreciation, the CWG has to review the MEB constantly, and organisations have to conduct periodic market assessments to capture the state of the local economy, which differs from one area to another. These are additional operational costs involved in implementing a cash intervention.

## VII.4. Effect of cash on local markets

When asked about the effects of cash transfers on local markets (either positive or negative), most respondents did not have a clear answer, nor were they aware of any documents analysing the effect in detail. The review of secondary information in the three countries points to functioning markets with dissimilar degrees of accessibility, but no issue with the availability of products. In these contexts, cash was therefore generally deemed an appropriate modality for distributing assistance.

In Somalia, the market assessments conducted by several organisations all point to a modern market-based economy and a culture that combines the use of cash, mobile transfers and credit to buy and sell products.<sup>97</sup> It has been reported that in the context of the 2017 famine alert, the large and timely response – which was mostly in the form of cash assistance – sustained purchasing power and helped businesses to stay open and develop markets.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, PDM data from Somalia shows some negative distortions that might be due to this injection of cash into the economy. In different PDMs reviewed for this study, between 15% and 20% of respondents reported that they saw an increase in market prices or felt that they were charged more, because vendors knew that they were receiving cash assistance.<sup>99</sup>

In both Nigeria and Syria, the effect of cash and markets has been offset by inflation and the depreciation of the national currencies in recent years. It is therefore difficult to isolate the effect of cash on markets from the effect of economic trends (in this case inflation) on markets. In Nigeria, for example, yearly food inflation had increased by more than 20% by January 2021 as a consequence of COVID-19, reducing the effect of CVA by reducing the recipients' purchasing power.<sup>100</sup> Food distribution was not exempt from the effects of inflation, with recipients signalling a decrease in the amount of food being delivered.

Similarly, in the case of Syria, it is market conditions that render cash a second-best option compared with commodity vouchers. In Syria, market conditions are characterised by

<sup>97</sup> Cash Working Group Somalia, "Evaluation of the 2017 Somalia Humanitarian Cash-Based Response Commissioned by the Somalia Inter-Agency Cash Working Group."

<sup>98</sup> Cash Working Group Somalia.

<sup>99</sup> Reported in the comparative assessment reports conducted by the Somali Cash Consortium.

<sup>100</sup> Ground Truth Solutions, "The Key to Fairness Is Inclusion Communities Call for Greater Involvement in Aid Northeast Nigeria - June 2021."

economic instability, inflation and the depreciation of SYP. This means that there is a gap in the value of the money transferred (agreed at the proposal design stage) and the value when the cash is delivered. The CWG has made efforts to standardise USD as the default currency to distribute. When pre-distribution procedures (which can take months to be approved) are considered in addition to market conditions, the gap becomes even larger, increasing as the time passes between programme design and delivery. In contexts such as Nigeria and Syria, it is not possible to say whether the assistance is positively or negatively affecting local markets, as there are stronger macroeconomic forces guiding them.

## VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

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Despite the food security sector being one in which cash has been used the longest, and despite cash transfers often being faster, more efficient and evidenced as able to meet food security outcomes, there is **still resistance from humanitarian actors to the systematic use of cash whenever possible**. And there are still a lot of perceptions around the risks that prevent actors from using or scaling up the use of cash for food security outcomes in **contexts of acute food insecurity, particularly those affected by conflict**. Drivers of resistance revolve mainly around **fears of the diversion and misuse of cash, concerns about protection, and concerns about cash not being used for food security objectives**. Financial and reputational risks for the organisations, as well as risks for the protection of recipients' data in these contexts, are still deterrents to the use of cash.

Price inflation, which used to be a deterrent to the use of cash, is now well handled by humanitarian actors. This is partially due to the fact that CWGs and FSCs or sectors have now adopted a robust and regular mechanism for adjusting the transfer value. Finally, while monitoring and evaluation is regularly done and documented, reports are not always disseminated externally. This prevents actors that are using cash from sharing the positive outcomes of cash for food security objectives, especially in contexts of insurgency and acute food insecurity.

As the FSC/S leads are also the major food security actors in the three contexts assessed, they have a key role to play in encouraging the uptake of cash and ironing out some of the fears that food security actors have.

### Recommendations for implementers and donors

#### Evidence and impact

- **Monitoring and evaluation reports** should be more widely disseminated to increase awareness of the food security outcomes of cash transfers in contexts of acute food insecurity, and to provide evidence of best practices. This will help to reduce incorrect perceptions or fears around the use of cash for food security, especially in these acute contexts. Current challenges revolve around a reluctance, including among donors, to share monitoring and evaluation data externally when the data is deemed to be sensitive. In-country FSC/Ss and CWGs should lead on or support the compilation and dissemination of this evidence and best practice.
- There should be **systematic monitoring of the food security impact of Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) cash transfers and MPCA using the recommended indicators (FCS, rCSI, HHS and the HDDS)**, and this should be reinforced in 2023 given the severity of the food crisis in the three contexts. Improvements or

deterioration of the food security situation as demonstrated by these indicators should be considered alongside any complimentary assistance received by targeted households, seasonal factors, and the severity of the crisis, and analysed accordingly to avoid misinterpretation.

- **CWGs and FSC/Cs** should continue playing an important role in supporting food security actors in the use of cash transfers and adjustment of cash transfer value, especially in contexts of significant inflation.

### Response analysis

- **The rationale for maintaining in-kind food aid in the countries and/or areas covered should be revisited**, particularly in Somalia (but also in Syria), where most actors and the literature demonstrated its lack of relevance due to the food markets' functionality and resilience. Recognising modality neutrality is important., donors should request a strong response analysis concluding that the relevance of cash when the problem is linked to **economic food access rather than food availability**, and **when markets are functional and FSPs available**. In line with this recognition, humanitarian actors should justify in their response analysis why restricted assistance (such as vouchers or food aid) would be chosen instead of cash, shifting the burden of proof to actors using the restricted modality in the food security sector. FSC/S leads should take a prominent role in continuously asking the question, "Why not (more) cash?"
- Similarly, **all humanitarian food security actors should now be in a position to scale up the use of cash in the countries and/or areas covered**, as this appears to be the most relevant and appropriate modality of assistance for food security outcomes in these contexts. The challenges described, if important, can be overcome.
- Past global commitments on the use of cash (such as the Grand Bargain) put the "Why not cash?" question at the forefront. These commitments have now come to an end, but the question is still not asked systematically. **Humanitarian actors that have made commitments on the percentage of assistance provided in cash should continue to pursue this goal, and donors should encourage cash uptake while continuing to request a strong response analysis.**

### Food availability and markets

- **Market monitoring and analysis should continue, and should cover all areas** reached by humanitarian actors, to enable **timely and relevant transfer-value adjustments and to enable market systems to be strengthened** whenever possible to sustain a conducive environment for cash.

- **Monitoring and analysis of markets** should be put into perspective with the positive effects of cash transfers on demand and the possibility of in-kind food aid to undermine market functionality and give a false picture of the traders' capacities.

### The role of FSC/Ss

- **FSC/S leads are both implementers and coordinators** (in Inter-Agency Standing Committee settings). As implementers, they should act as **role models and catalysts** when it comes to the use of cash for food security outcomes in contexts where it is deemed relevant and appropriate.

### Advocacy

- There should be as much advocacy as possible for governments to ease the restrictions and approval processes for cash transfers in specific areas.

### Anticipatory action

- The research highlighted the **apparent lack of the use of cash as an anticipatory action** linked to food security objectives. This should be explored further to document the potential positive impact (and cost-efficiency) of anticipatory action in the wake of an acute food security crisis.

### Other dimensions

- Modalities are important, but should not obscure other important aspects of a humanitarian response, such as **targeting and accountability to recipients** (communication with recipients, complaint and feedback mechanism, consultation processes, etc.).
- UN agencies and donors should provide support to their partners when faced with issues of **compliance with recipient data-protection principles**.
- To encourage further uptake of cash for improved food security outcomes, food security actors should **strengthen their risk management approach** to reassure both donors and governments. Protracted acute food insecurity often overlaps with conflict situations, in which the transfer of resources has become increasingly complex as a result of national and transnational anti-money laundering and counterterrorism regulations. Humanitarian organisations therefore need to develop **their understanding of these regulations** in recognition of the risks they pose for principled humanitarian action overall, and for the use of cash more specifically.
- In Nigeria, the humanitarian community should support **expansion of the FSP market in the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states**.
- In Somalia, the use of mobile money at scale should be taken as an opportunity to scale up **digital financial inclusion and women's economic empowerment programmes**.



### Specific recommendations for donors

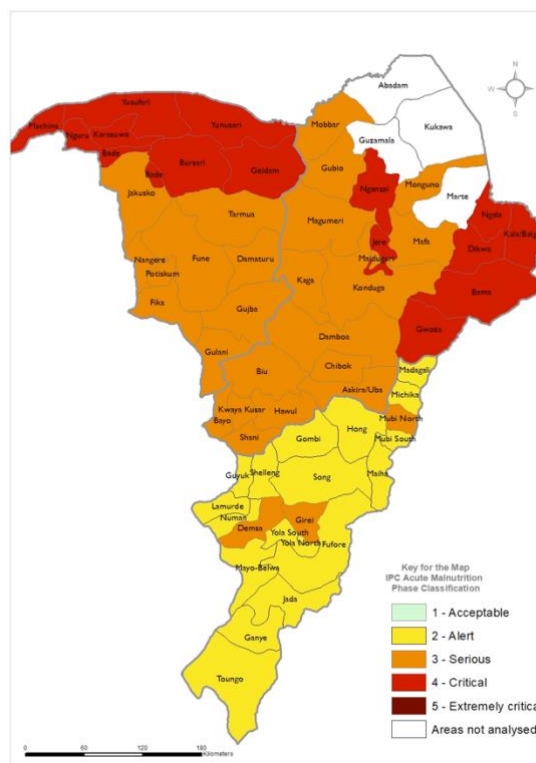
- **Donors** should always request a strong response analysis documenting the rationale for the choice of modality, including its relevance and appropriateness. As far as possible, donors should apply a neutral position on modality decision-making and provide full flexibility of funding, while encouraging the use of cash when it is deemed most relevant and appropriate (in line with the Grand Bargain commitments to ask the “Why not cash?” question).
- Donors’ own governments should themselves provide this flexibility to their humanitarian agency and not provide earmarked funds.

## IX. Annexes

### IX.1. Food Security Maps (Humanitarian Needs Overview)

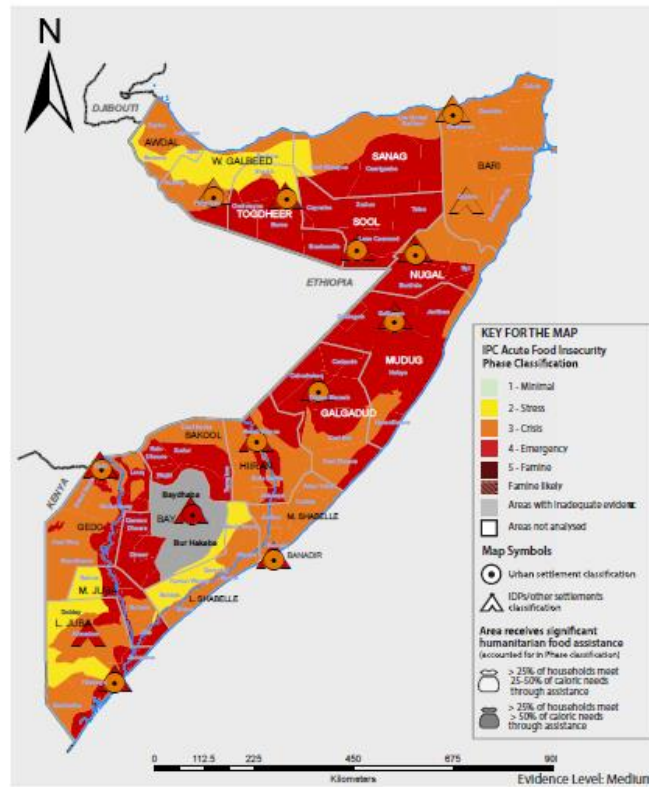
#### IX.1.1. Northeast Nigeria

Figure 3. Northeast Nigeria IPC Map May – August 2202



## IX.1.2. Somalia

Figure 4. Somalia IPC Map June – September 2022

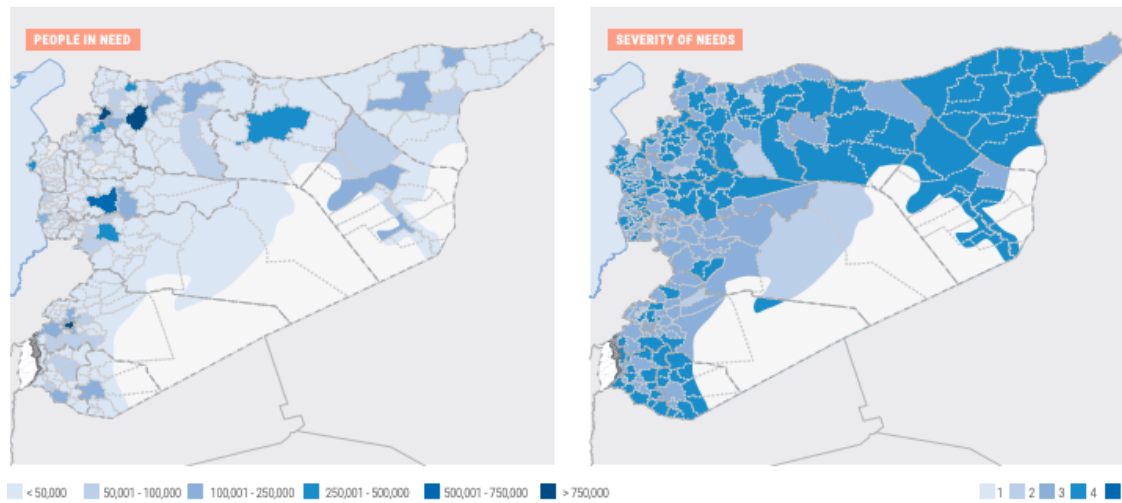


### IX.1.3. Syria<sup>101</sup>

Figure 5. Syria Food Security Map (Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022)

| PEOPLE IN NEED | FEMALE           | MALE               | CHILDREN (0-17)    | ADULTS (18-59)     | ELDERLY (>59)     | WITH DISABILITY     |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| <b>13.9M</b>   | <b>50%</b><br>7M | <b>50%</b><br>6.9M | <b>44%</b><br>6.1M | <b>51%</b><br>7.1M | <b>5%</b><br>0.7M | <b>28%*</b><br>3.9M |

SECTOR PIN DISTRIBUTION BY SEVERITY\*\*



<sup>101</sup> IPC map not available for Syria.

## IX.2. Study matrix

| Working questions   | Indicator/ how judgement will be formed  | Sources of information  |
|---|--|---|
| <b>I. Response analysis and cash feasibility</b>  |  |   |
| I.1 How supportive is the context (government, donors) regarding the use of cash transfers?   | I.1.1 Qualitative accounts of country context regarding the use of cash transfers for food security outcomes                                   | Key Informant Interviews  |
| I.2 What are the main decision-making factors regarding choice of modality for food security outcomes?  | I.2.1 Qualitative accounts and documenting of the main decision-making factors for the use of cash transfers (enablers)                        | Key Informant Interviews, Feasibility Studies, Response Analysis Reports  |
|   | I.2.2 Qualitative accounts and documenting of the main decision-making factors against the use of cash transfers (inhibitors)                  | Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Feasibility Studies, Response Analysis Reports                                     |
| I.3 How have contextual changes (security, economic, environmental, political) affected modality decisions in the context   | I.3.1 Documented adaptations to changes in context (security, economic, environmental)   | Programme reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations  |
|   | I.3.2 Qualitative accounts to changes in programme design as a response to changes in context (security, economic, environmental)              | Key Informant interviews  |
|   | I.3.3 Qualitative accounts to changes in programme implementation  |   |
| I.4. What evidence exists of mechanisms which food security actors used to adapt cash transfer value to meet household minimum food requirements throughout a project lifespan? | I.4.1. Documentation of mechanisms used to adapt cash transfer value to meet household minimum food requirements throughout a project lifespan | Programme Reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations, PDMs, market monitoring and analysis reports (REACH and others) |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | I.4.2. Qualitative accounts of mechanisms used to adapt cash transfer value to meet household minimum food requirements throughout a project lifespan and limitations                                | Key Informant interviews (KIIs)  |
| <b>2. Programme design</b>   |  |  |
| 2.1. What are the examples of other modalities or activities having being used to complement cash transfers for food security outcomes in contexts of acute food insecurity? | 2.1.1. Qualitative accounts and documentation of other modalities or activities having being used to complement cash transfers   | Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Feasibility Studies, Response Analysis Reports, Programme Reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations  |
| 2.2 What evidence is there for successful integration of cash transfers with other activities (including basic needs approach) in contexts of acute food insecurity?         | 2.2.1. Qualitative accounts and documentation of successful integration of cash transfers with other activities (including basic needs approach)   | Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Programme Reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations  |
| <b>3. Outcomes and Impact: Effectiveness, Timeliness, Cost-Efficiency and economic impact</b>  |  |  |
| 3.1. What is the evidence of the effectiveness of cash transfers for protecting household food security in contexts of acute food insecurity?                                | 3.1.1. Documentation of the effectiveness of cash transfers for protecting household's food security based on food security indicators (rCSI, FCS, HHS and others if relevant)                       | Baselines, Post-Distribution Monitoring reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations   |
|  | 3.1.2. Qualitative accounts and documentation of the effectiveness of cash transfers for protecting household's food security based on other quantitative or qualitative indicators of food security | KIIs, Baselines, Post-Distribution Monitoring reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations, Case Studies, Focus Group Discussion reports |
| 3.2 How timely were cash transfers as compared to other modalities?  | 3.2.1. Qualitative accounts and documentation of timeliness of cash transfers as compared to other modalities  | Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Programme Reports, Programme Evaluations, Sitreps, any other relevant literature                    |
| 3.3 What is the evidence of cash transfers' cost efficiency as compared to in-kind food aid in similar contexts?   | 3.3.1 Documentation of cost-efficiency of cash transfers as compared to in-kind food aid in similar contexts   | Reports demonstrating cost-efficiency comparisons  |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 3.4 What is the evidence of positive or negative impact of cash transfers on local markets?  | 3.4.1 Documentation of positive or negative impact of cash transfers on local markets  | Market assessment reports, Market Monitoring reports  |
| 4. Anticipatory action   |  |   |
| 4.1. How effectively were cash transfers used as anticipatory action to mitigate food insecurity and prevent negative coping mechanisms? | 4.1.1. Qualitative accounts and documentation of use of cash transfers as anticipatory action to mitigate food insecurity                              | KIs, Baselines, Programme reports, Programme Evaluations, Case Studies  |
|  | 4.1.2 Anecdotal evidence of the impact of cash transfers as an anticipatory action for preventing use of negative coping mechanisms (focus on Somalia) | KIs, Baselines, Post-Distribution Monitoring reports, Endlines, Programme Evaluations, Case Studies, Focus Group Discussion reports |

## IX.3. Operational scope of initiatives to be reviewed

### Type of interventions

This review focuses on experiences / lessons learned from interventions implemented as part of a food security response that started from January 2020 until the date of the research and that have used cash transfers as a modality in contexts of acute food insecurity. It includes:

- Interventions that explicitly look at **meeting or supporting food security outcomes** in a context of acute food insecurity and that used cash transfers as a modality;
- Interventions that explicitly look at meeting or supporting food security outcomes as an **anticipatory action** to acute food insecurity and that used cash transfers as a modality;
- Interventions that explicitly aim to improve food security outcomes and combine cash transfers with other modalities or activities in a context of acute food insecurity or as an anticipatory action;
- Interventions that explicitly look at meeting or supporting food security outcomes but opted not to use cash transfers as a modality and documented the decision-making process for the purpose of a review of these decision-making processes;
- Any other cash transfer interventions (such as Multipurpose Cash Grants) that aimed to improve coverage of basic needs explicitly including food needs in a context of acute food insecurity or as an anticipatory action.

The research excluded cash transfer interventions making part of a social protection, safety nets programme or integrated poverty reduction programmes, unless they included a short-term cash transfers (up to 6 months) for food security component in a context of acute food insecurity.

### Actors

The study looked at interventions designed and conducted by humanitarian actors (NGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and government actors) and delivered as part of a food crisis response with the objective of meeting food security needs.

### Implementation modalities and approaches

The study looked at interventions that use cash transfers (both unconditional and conditional) as their single delivery modality or as part of a mix of modalities. Multi-purpose cash assistance was included in the review as it covers food needs by nature, but the focus remained on the food security outcomes. Interventions having solely used vouchers were excluded from the review of cash transfer's effectiveness.

### Context / Geographical scope

The study looked at food security-related interventions implemented by humanitarian organizations using cash transfers in:

- **In Nigeria: Borno (local government areas of Abadam, Gubio and Mobbar in IPC 4), Yobe and Adamawa states in the northeast.**

- **In Somalia:** all regions of the country experiencing IPC 4; focus on **Baidoa and Burhakaba districts of Bay region** experiencing IPC 5 (likely to extend to other regions)
- **In Syria:** **Aleppo** (districts of Jebel Saman, Al Bab, Menbij, Ain Al Arab and As-Safira), **Homs** (districts of Homs and Al Makhrim), **Idleb** (districts of Idleb, Al Ma'ra and Harim), **Al-Hasakeh** (all districts), **Deir-ez-Zor** (districts of Deir-ez-Zor and Al Mayadin), **Tartous** (district of Tartous) and **Ar-Raqqa** (district of Ar-Raqqa)

The research aims to generate findings and trends that can be applied globally, pointing out country-level nuances where they exist and are relevant for the findings of the research.



## IX.4. Detailed methodology

The consultancy objectives will be met through a **qualitative approach**, engaging members of the gFSC's **Cash and Market Working Group** at different steps of the research process. Such an approach will increase buy-in and the likelihood of uptake of the research results by decision-makers and implementers. The consultancy will rely on a variety of secondary (both qualitative and quantitative if available) and primary sources (qualitative) of data. Findings will be triangulated to ensure their validity.

Figure 6. Research Steps



### IX.4.1. Inception phase

**Kick-off call:** The consultancy began with an inception call between Key Aid Consulting and the gFSC CM WG co-chairs and the gFSC focal point. The purpose of the inception call was to clarify the objectives and scope of the consultancy, identify secondary literature sources and potential preliminary key informants to be interviewed during the data collection phase.

**Desk review:** The desk review was done in an iterative manner throughout the inception and data collection phases. The desk review was extensive, sourcing documentation and literature from the global and the in-country FSC partners, donors, key informants during key informant interviews as well as government repositories. Specifically, the review looked at documents demonstrating decision-making processes and factors used for decision-making around modality of assistance (such as feasibility studies) and demonstrating the impact of cash transfers on food security outcomes (such as baselines/endlines, PDMs or programme evaluations).

The study team subsequently **produced an inception report** including a brief overview of CVA programming in each of the three proposed focus countries, refined methodology, a study matrix, a preliminary list of key informants to be interviewed, and a refined workplan along with data collection tools.

### IX.4.2. Primary data collection

**Key Informant Interviews:** The consultants interviewed 34 persons through key informant interviews, with purposively sampled stakeholders including but not limited to:

- Staff members of in-country FSC partners
- CWG co-chairs and members
- Other cash actors
- Government representatives
- Global advisors with country-specific inputs

- Donors

KIs took place **remotely for informants from Nigeria, Somalia and Syria.**

**Attendance of online national CWG and FSC meetings:** when relevant, consultants attended the CWG and FSC meetings in the three focus countries in order to present the research and gather information on the food security and CVA context in those focus countries.

**Workshop: validation of preliminary findings:** once data collection was completed, the consultants conducted an online half-day workshop easily accessible by stakeholders from the three countries as well as global-level stakeholders. This workshop was not only used to present and validate preliminary findings from the desk review and key informant interviews, but also served to fill data gaps as well as to discuss preliminary recommendations.

### IX.4.3. Data analysis and report writing

**Data analysis and triangulation:** Primary and secondary data was analysed and sources triangulated using Excel to identify emerging trends against the indicators set out in the study matrix. The analysis was done iteratively to be able to adjust the data collection tools and explore some of the trends in more depth.

**Reporting:** once data analysis was completed, the consulting team prepared the first draft of the report following the structure of the study matrix. The first draft will be submitted for review by the gFSC CM WG, and will be finalised following integration of comments and approval.

### IX.4.4. Data Protection

Key Aid Consulting complies with the E.U. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) directive that came into force on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This directive sets out individuals' rights regarding the processing, handling, treatment and storage of their personal data. The consultants will implement the following data protection measures to ensure the protection and security of primary data collected during this study.

For **data collected** the consultants will:

- Present the objective of the programme to potential interviewees.
- Obtain informed consent from anyone participating in interviews and FDGs with Key Aid Consulting.
- Store interviewee's data (audio recordings, transcripts, database) on a secured and password-protected online server, only accessible by Key Aid Consulting.
- Not share any raw data collected (audio recordings, transcripts, interview database) from interviewees with the client, unless the client especially asks for it. In this case, only anonymised data would be given.

## IX.5. Data collection tools

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### Key informant interviews with key stakeholders in country

#### Introduction

Hello and thank for taking the time to speak with me today.

You have been identified as a key stakeholder to contribute to this research, for which Key Aid has been commissioned by the gFSC CM WG.

The research aims to gather evidence on the use of cash transfers in contexts of **acute food insecurity** (*the definition of acute food insecurity we are using is areas which have been classified as IPC/CH 3-5 or CARI levels moderate or severe (3 or 4) in the past 2 years*). We are aiming at understanding modality decision-making, programme design components, **outcomes** and impact of cash transfers to highlight lessons learned and creating an evidence base for the effective use of cash transfers for food security outcomes in this context. The research will focus on three countries, and your country is one of them. As you are among the key cash and food security actors in the country, we would like to hear your opinion on the above.

The interview will last around one hour. All information provided will remain anonymous and your answers will not be shared. We adhere to strict data protection policies (GDPR).

In case you want to 1) correct outdated or incorrect information or 2) delete your data from the consultancy, you can contact Key Aid Consulting at [info@keyaidconsulting.com](mailto:info@keyaidconsulting.com). Please note that Key Aid will keep your data on a protected server for 30 days after the end of the project, after which it will be deleted.

Do you accept to take part in this interview?

Yes

No

#### Respondent Information

Name:

Organisation:

Title/Position:

Gender:

Email address:

#### Introductory question

1. Could you start by briefly introducing your cash transfer programme in the focused areas of food insecurity (delivery mechanism, participants, location, type of crisis, project timeframe, etc)

### Response analysis and cash feasibility

2. How supportive has the context been (government policies, donor policies, etc) regarding the use of cash transfers in your country over the last two years? (I.1)
3. What are the main decision-making factors that you have been using over the last two years to decide to use cash transfers for food security outcomes or the contrary (decide not to use it)? Explain also, if relevant, what were the decision-making factors in favour of “cash plus” interventions (I.2)
4. How have contextual changes (security, economic, environmental, political) affected modality decisions in your country over the last two years? (I.3)
5. If you had to adapt the cash transfer value to meet household minimum food requirements over the course of a project, can you explain the mechanism you used (programme design, data used, process) to change it? (I.4)

### Programme Design

6. If you complemented cash transfers with other activities/modalities in a “cash plus” approach or a “mixed modality” approach, can you describe these activities with the decision-making process and rationale behind? (2.1)
7. Could you say this integration of other activities or modalities has been successful in contexts of acute food insecurity and if so why? (2.2)

### Outcomes & impact

8. Would you say cash transfers for food security in contexts of acute food insecurity have been successful in reducing food insecurity / achieving food security outcomes? Do you have supporting documentation? (3.1)
9. Would you say cash transfers give an opportunity to reach the most remote and vulnerable population in situations of acute food insecurity or not? (3.1)
10. If you were engaged in other modalities for the same objective in the same timeframe, could you rate the timeliness of the cash transfers as compared to other modalities? Any documentation of this?(3.2)
11. Do you know of any document demonstrating cash transfers’ cost efficiency as compared to in-kind food aid in similar contexts of acute food insecurity (here or other countries)? (3.3)
12. Do you know of any document demonstrating positive or negative impact of cash transfers on local markets in these focused areas over the last two years? (3.4)

### Anticipatory Action

13. If you have used cash transfers as anticipatory action to mitigate food insecurity and prevent negative coping mechanisms over the last two years, how effective would you say it was? (4.1)

### Conclusion

14. What are the main lessons learnt that you draw from this programme?
15. Is there anything else that we have not discussed and that you feel is important for this review?

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