



Learning Brief:

Empowering Communities, Piloting Multi-purpose Cash Distribution in Khartoum

Context

On April 15th, 2023, conflict erupted in Sudan resulting in wide-scale displacement and more than 25 million people in critical need of assistance. In Khartoum, rife with conflict and where international assistance is minimal for myriad reasons, many people remain sheltering in place, or moving from neighborhood to neighborhood seeking safety and resources. Given the lack of external support, grassroots local volunteers formed Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) which have become the main avenue for assistance provision in Khartoum alongside a few remaining local organizations working to support the population. Electricity and communications such as cellular and data are intermittent, and minimal market mechanisms remain functional, though not always reliable. Of those who remain in Khartoum, many are the most marginalized and vulnerable, including women and older individuals who often do not have their own standard phone or smartphone and cannot access an operational market themselves due to safety concerns.

Despite and because of these operational hindrances, CORE teamed up with Sudanese Development Call Organization (NIDAA) and engaged RedRose (RR) and their partner Cashi, an omni-payments platform that has a 10k+ merchant network across Sudan, to ascertain whether multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) was feasible in Khartoum as a means of complementing ERR activities. The consortium determined to pilot the delivery of MPCA to 600 households in two of the most conflict-impacted neighborhoods in Khartoum: Burri and Aljiriaf. These neighborhoods were chosen for the pilot because one is a largely static population while the other is displaced, thereby affording greater learning.

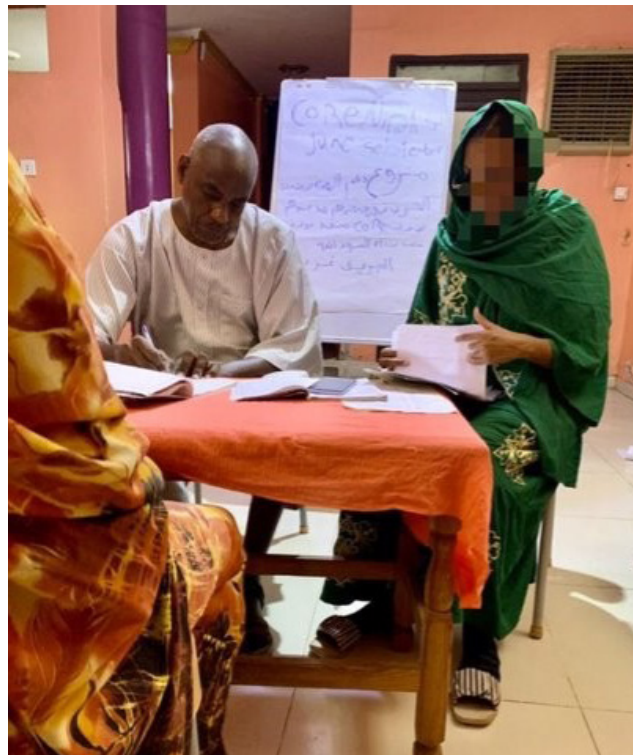
Preparation, Partnership, and Risk Management

NIDAA formed two project committees responsible for conducting a needs assessment, identifying and verifying vulnerable households, monitoring implementation, and facilitating a feedback and complaints mechanism. The Aljiriaf Committee was formed with the neighborhood's existing community leaders and ensured an equal gender split. The Burri Committee, on the other hand, given it is a displaced population, was formed by using existing Whatsapp groups previously created by neighborhood residents who voted for committee members, ensuring gender-balanced representation (ex: 4 females, 6 males). Identification and verification took place through phone calls in Burri and house to house visits in specific blocks in Aljiriaf.

CORE coordinated across partners, working closely with NIDAA on targeting approaches and monitoring and evaluation to ensure CVA best practices. Through close collaboration CORE helped to problem solve, pivot and adapt approaches and document lessons learned.

RR started by providing capacity building to ensure sustainable good governance practices for delivering cash assistance. In line with its localization strategy, RR supports capacity building of local partners to ensure that its digital solutions are maximized in a balanced manner considering contextual constraints and local partners' needs.

A year prior to the conflict, RR had partnered with Cashi, a Sudan fintech with a network of merchants, to provide the last mile delivery of cash. Cashi remains operational in Khartoum. Cashi's voucher code mechanism is integrated into the RR Program Management solution for full end-to-end distribution management. After creating the distribution order within ONEsolution, each recipient receives a unique code. This code, along with an additional piece of verification information, for example photo identification and phone number/pin number, is used to redeem with a merchant who then exchanges the voucher code for cash. Each recipient household was to receive 50 USD delivered in SDG as a one-off transfer.



NIDAA conducts registration and baseline data collection with households © NIDAA, 2023

Note: This transfer was recommended by NIDAA based on market analysis for what it considered a “survival” package to meet survival needs and stretch resources (the delivery of MPCA discussed in this case study is complemented by additional support, including a 10 USD nutrition voucher delivered directly by NIDAA to households using a paper voucher.) RR undertakes constant analysis of liquidity to ensure currency availability of Cashi merchants in the target area.

Several actions were taken to mitigate risks for Partner staff and recipients. These included: a comprehensive risk analysis and mitigation plan; NIDAA’s staffing plan –the team was kept small and dedicated staff were trained in protection mainstreaming and living locally, thus able to limit their movements; reduced project visibility to minimize attention; and minimizing the use of proxy recipients unless for important accommodations, e.g., for people with disabilities.

Pilot Implementation

RR, NIDAA, CORE and Cashi began with a pilot of 31 households in Aljiriaf to capture lessons learned. The team understood that the conditions in Khartoum were changing rapidly; therefore, a local coordination mechanism involving Cashi and NIDAA staff was used to share up-to-date information on operating merchant locations and liquidity conditions. Communication to recipients was planned in two ways. The first was to deliver the voucher code information to each recipient individually by WhatsApp or SMS. If that was not feasible, a paper backup mechanism was used.



Beneficiaries purchase food items after receiving cash assistance
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The process started with a meeting of local and remote managing team members to assess the merchant locations in relation to the recipients, along with a discussion of the neighborhood context and kinetics.

The decision was a go for recipients to visit a merchant independently after determining that the merchants were close enough. The organization’s outreach team informed recipients of the merchant locations where they could collect the cash. Due to communication challenges, however, voucher code information was to be provided individually to each recipient using paper.

Pilot Adaptation

One of the key challenges partners had to overcome was that the merchants often proved not close enough to the recipients, because movement in the area became increasingly difficult. While access fluctuated, at times only one out of seven of the merchants was accessible to the target population.

The team immediately evaluated alternate options to mitigate access issues. Some of these included:

Bulk collection – group recipients would go to a pre-identified merchant together. This was not preferred because it decreased the safety of everyone involved and could have made it obvious there was a person in the area with large amounts of cash, increasing the merchant’s risk. In addition, it required recipients to put themselves at further risk of theft or attacks by moving together through a dangerous area.

Remotely collect – by working remotely with a merchant, a merchant could send the funds to a digital channel (a mobile wallet, or pay bills, for example). This requires that the SOPs be followed remotely and is not an ideal solution as not all recipients have digital wallets.

Send to banking mobile wallets. This mechanism requires more up-front data collection and verification work, including human intervention, creating an additional burden on the team. Any mistake in details will cause failure. Allowing recipients to collect into their wallet via the merchant is less burdensome.

Set up a localized, relationship-based delivery mechanism. Working through local relationships, finding a way to move the cash into the area and by hand get it to the recipients. This mechanism requires that additional accountability touch points be put into place to guarantee end delivery.

Partners worked closely together to engage in a variety of program solutions that best fit the needs and contextual environment; they discussed different models of cash transfers, including how Cashier merchants can reach mobile wallets and the bank account mobile apps where available. Once this was agreed upon by partners, NIDAA undertook additional data collection to identify the preferences for Aljiraf beneficiaries. This change was quickly implemented through RR’s offline capable digital data collection.

Lessons Learned

Targeting and selecting recipients who are largely mobile requires local leadership and follow-up:

NIDAA's leadership of coordination with the ERRs on targeting was essential. In Burri, where the target population is very mobile to stay ahead of active conflict, recipients often change their contact details which presented challenges for completing registration and communicating assistance was ready for collection. In-person contact was required to ensure follow-up and delivery.

Navigating the proximity between Cashi merchants and recipient households requires real-time monitoring, a case-by-case approach and risk mitigation:

In an area that is under such high conflict and security conditions, geographic proximity between merchants and recipients must be managed at a street-by-street level and conditions may shift day-to-day. Because of the combination of the security situation and the recipient vulnerability profile, recipients within the highest conflict and most insecure areas were not always able to reach the merchant locations initially intended to redeem the vouchers. Therefore, a flexible 'case by case' approach is essential to mitigate access issues.

Proxy recipients may be identified, when necessary, but should be used with caution:

Where appropriate, proxy recipients who can move more easily to and from merchants in the area can be used. In these cases, a proxy known to the recipient is identified to collect the cash on behalf of the recipient and deliver it to them. The use of proxies is minimized to mitigate risks and avoid introducing additional complexity.

Flexibility, coordination, and cooperation among implementing partners is key:

Information sharing from local teams to remote management is challenging due to constant network outages. Therefore, communications and pivoting to different operational mechanisms took time to evaluate and arrange. The case-by-case approach, mentioned above, is built on local collaboration and effective communication amongst the different actors (Cashi, RR, CORE, NIDAA). Excellent communication among local stakeholders was critical for adapting implementation and the success of this pilot. A coordinated delivery mechanism is required for success, which requires sufficient staffing to be able to continuously pivot and adapt.

Digital communications and mechanisms present opportunities and challenges:

Digital communication mechanisms can be unstable due to outages, recipients changing phones or phone numbers, and theft of phones. Power outages are frequent and the availability of items such as solar chargers to keep devices charged are few. Where digital mechanisms are available, they may be successful in providing MPCA and used in parallel to non-digital mechanisms to best meet the varied preferences and safety needs of recipients.

Scaling depends on local leadership and a neighborhood approach:

Within the zones with the highest conflict, Partners used a case-by-case approach to ensure receipt of funds. To reach more and the most vulnerable beneficiaries efficiently, Partners believe that the model must change from a resource intensive case-by-case basis to a neighborhood-based approach. In addition, blanket targeting is recommended to decrease social tension; while community members understood the need for targeting by vulnerability, it was next to impossible for them given how vast the needs are.

Partners plan to coordinate with the ERRs to explore their help identifying vendors who are not yet registered but qualify to enroll as Cashi merchants. This approach would onboard more accessible merchants, decreasing the human intervention and distance required for recipients to receive transfers. These shops joining the Cashi network of merchants also has the positive impact of providing vendors with additional revenue. Other mechanisms, such as bank transfers, seem to work for one-off cases, however, were not scalable within the context.

The leadership of the ERRs is essential to implementation at scale and to navigate the geographic demarcations of Khartoum. ERRs will need to be familiar with the delivery model to enable them to collect all required data up front. Together with Partners, in the future, ERRs need to lead decisions regarding scale, bandwidth, and the delivery approach.

Conclusion

The project is the first of its kind in Khartoum State since the conflict began and has raised discussions with the humanitarian partners in Sudan.

This initial pilot served 143 recipient households, the majority of which are female headed with the heads of household predominantly between the ages of 40-59 years old; average household size is 4-5 members. The project is now in the process of scaling up to 600 households. Partners expect to obtain additional insights by using some of the alternate delivery mechanisms described above, and as post-distribution monitoring and the endline are completed.

Further findings and recommendations will be shared with key stakeholders later in 2023. Partners anticipate the need to increase the transfer value and duration of assistance and will do so in line with recommendations from the Cash Working Group (as of September, WFP's recommendation is 26,228 SDG, approximately 44 USD per person per month).

Partners



NIDAA is dedicated to serve, mobilize and motivate Sudanese society, longing for desirable change through training, advocacy and sustainable community development. To learn more contact Sara Elgieli, Executive Manager (sarahegma@hotmail.com).

CORE's mission is to empower communities in and beyond crisis. CORE envisions a more equitable world in which underserved communities are prepared and can respond effectively to crisis from within. CORE's Cash and Voucher assistance vision specifically, is to empower communities and meet their needs through timely, effective and efficient assistance. To learn more visit www.CoreResponse.Org and contact Tenzin Manell, Sr. Advisor, Cash and Markets (tenzin.manell@coreresponse.org).

RedRose's mission is to help our partners increase the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of humanitarian projects. We have grown to partner with the foremost iNGOs, UN organizations, and donors to empower their programs with a digital approach. To learn more visit: <http://www.redrose.io/> and contact Brian Healy, Director (brian@redrosecps.com).

Cashi is the largest merchant-led digital payments network in Sudan. Cashi's mission is to provide accessible, reliable and secure digital payment infrastructure to communities across Sudan. To learn more visit: <https://getcashi.com/en/>