

gFSC Good Practice Case Study

ACF in the Philippines



Emergency Cash-based Interventions in Urban Areas: Tropical Storm Washi in the Philippines

Background to the project/programme

Tropical Storm Washi (locally name: “Sendong”) hit Mindanao, the largest island in southern Philippines, in December 2011. The volume of rains brought by the tropical storm created massive flashfloods that caused widespread destruction to lives and properties, especially to Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City, two major cities located in the north of Mindanao. Cagayan de Oro is a major commercial hub in northern Mindanao, while Iligan is considered an industrial center in the region. The combined death toll in the two cities reached almost 1,500 casualties, and displaced people numbered 450,000, many of whom sought refuge in schools turned evacuation centers. Rapid assessments conducted by the government and various humanitarian agencies, including ACF International, indicated the priority needs were: (i) food; (ii) clean water and sanitation facilities both in evacuation centers and affected communities; and (iii) psycho-social support for those suffering mental distress due to their harrowing experience. Because of the enormity of the destruction and the needs to be addressed, the Philippine government called out to international community for assistance a few days after the calamity.

Although the destruction in lives and properties were massive, the affected areas were largely confined in the densely populated poor communities along the major rivers that cut through the two cities. The commercial areas of the cities were not severely affected, and business started to normalize just a few weeks after the calamity. Market assessments conducted by humanitarian agencies in the immediate aftermath of the disaster showed public markets, shops, supermarkets and groceries, among others, were operating and functioning at normal levels. This allowed the humanitarian agencies to employ cash-based interventions, specifically *cash-for-work (CFW)*.

ACF International was part of a consortium of international NGOs funded by the European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO). A primary emergency response project was implemented by the consortium from December 2012 to March 2013; involving interventions such as (i) cash-based interventions (e.g. cash vouchers and cash-for-work) to improve access to food and other basic needs, (ii) construction/rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities, (iii) hygiene promotion and (iv) psycho-social support to children. The consortium partners of ACF were Plan International, Save the Children and Care-Netherlands. ACF International’s Nutrition team implemented a separate emergency intervention funded by the United

Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), that involves the conduct of nutrition screening and treatment of children aged 6-59 months and counselling for pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) and children.

ECHO funded a nine-month (April-December 2012) second phase emergency response project, implemented by the same consortium of international NGOs that included ACF. A separate funding was received by ACF from the UN-World Food Programme (WFP) for its cash-based intervention. This case study focuses on the experience of ACF in the **cash voucher interventions** in this second phase project.

Target beneficiaries

The targeting of vulnerable groups, specifically the *pregnant and lactating women (PLWs)*, was designed during the first phase (December 2011-March 2012). ACF observed during Food Security cluster meetings that no interventions were being directed towards PLWs and children suffering from acute malnutrition. The prevailing food security-related interventions were blanket distribution of food items and cash-for-work. The nutrition needs of PLWs and malnourished children were not given attention. ACF therefore decided to distribute cash vouchers that allowed the households of PLWs and SAMs to purchase fresh and nutritious food items from public market and supermarket. This allowed ACF to leverage its limited budget for food assistance by using the cash vouchers to complement the food assistance and CFW activities they receive from other organizations. This design also complemented the work of the ACF Nutrition team who screened and identified the malnourished children and provided nutrition, breastfeeding and care practice counselling to PLWs. As Nutrition team raised awareness on the value of nutritious food, the FSL team provided the means for the beneficiaries to actually access nutritious food.

The design was successful during the first phase that it was continued by ACF in the second phase. The other consortium partners followed suit and even expanded the target vulnerable groups to include persons with disabilities (PWDs), the elderly persons (60 years old above), single-female headed households, and others. Particular attention was given to these vulnerable groups because they have less capacity to seek out income and livelihood opportunities for their families.

[NOTE: The SAM children were not prioritized anymore during the second phase because the acute malnutrition rates had already gone down and the screening and treatment interventions were handed over to the local government’s rural health units (RHUs). ACF capacitated the staff of the RHUs during first phase. In addition, ACF focused its implementation of the ECHO project in Iligan City only because the other consortium partners were covering Cagayan de Oro City.]

The total number of beneficiaries reached by ACF during the second phase was as follows:

- **ECHO-funded cash voucher intervention.** ACF provided cash vouchers to 1,950 vulnerable individuals, which benefited as well their respective families.

Highly Vulnerable Groups	Number Reached	%
<i>Pregnant and Lactating Women</i>	1,092	56%
<i>Elderly Persons</i>	339	17%
<i>Persons with Disabilities</i>	519	27%
Total	1,950	100%

- **WFP-funded cash voucher intervention.** ACF provided cash vouchers to 6,500 vulnerable individuals. Their respective families benefited also from the cash vouchers.

Highly Vulnerable Groups	Number Reached	%
<i>Pregnant and Lactating Women</i>	3,322	51.10%
<i>Persons with Disabilities</i>	267	4.11%
<i>Elderly Persons</i>	1,918	29.50%
<i>Single headed households</i>	933	14.35%
<i>Households with 6 children & above</i>	41	0.63%
<i>Households caring for orphans</i>	19	0.29%
Total	6,500	100%

- **WFP-funded cash-for-work intervention.** The cash-for-work intervention did not target any particular sector or group. It was open to all disaster-affected households that can nominate an able-bodied member to participate in CFW activities. The total number of individuals that participated in CFW was **5,024**.

Funding amount and source

The breakdown per donor of the total amount of grants from the cash-based intervention of ACF during the second phase was as follows:

- **ECHO-funded cash-based intervention:**

Components	Amount
<i>Unconditional Cash Grant—Cash Vouchers</i>	€ 33,608 <i>(PhP 1,833,000)</i>
<i>Conditional Cash Grant—Cash Voucher</i>	€ 64,356 <i>(PhP 3,510,000)</i>
Total	€ 97,964 <i>(PhP 5,343,000)</i>

- **WFP-funded cash-based intervention:**

Components	Amount
<i>Unconditional Cash Grant—Cash Vouchers</i>	€ 197,891 <i>(PhP 10,793,000)</i>
<i>Cash for Work</i>	€ 154,994 <i>(PhP 8,453,382)</i>
Total	€ 352,885 <i>(PhP 19,246,382)</i>

Key activities and partnerships

A. Objectives and Activities of the Projects. In the respective logical frameworks of the project with WFP and ECHO, the information related to the cash voucher interventions are as follows:

1. WFP cash voucher intervention.
 - (a) Specific Objective: To provide short-term access to wider variety of food commodities among flood-affected population in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan cities.
 - (b) Result related to cash vouchers: Improved access of 4,000 flood-affected families to food in terms of more quantity and wider variety of food items.
 - (c) Activity related to cash vouchers: Distribution of cash vouchers or debit cards; Conduct of post-distribution monitoring (PDM).
2. ECHO cash voucher intervention.
 - (a) Specific Objective: To improve access to basic primary services and reduce negative coping mechanisms for WASHI affected communities.
 - (b) Result related to cash vouchers: Targeted individuals are provided with resources to meet their immediate basic food and non-food needs.
 - (c) Activity related to cash vouchers: Distribution of cash vouchers; Conduct of cash-for-training for vulnerable groups; Conduct of post-distribution monitoring (PDM).

The main activities of the two projects do not differ very much since the general implementation designs were the same. The only difference are the following:

- (i) In the WFP project, debit cards were used in combination with cash vouchers in Cagayan de Oro.
- (ii) In the ECHO project, ACF had to use a cash-for-training mechanism in its distribution of the second tranche of cash assistance to the beneficiaries. The “€ 100,000 limit” of ECHO for unconditional cash grants prevented ACF to distribute all tranches of cash grants unconditionally.

B. Partners in Implementation. ACF had to collaborate with different actors in order to successfully implement the cash voucher interventions, specifically (a) in the selection and sensitization of beneficiaries and (b) in implementing the cash voucher intervention.

1. Partners in Selection and Sensitization of Beneficiaries.
 - (a) City Social Welfare Office (CSWO). In the Philippines, the function of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was devolved to the local government units such as provincial, municipal and city governments. The task therefore of validating who are the affected families in a certain town/municipality or city falls on the local city social welfare office. Immediately in the aftermath of the disaster, ACF coordinated with this office in Iligan and Cagayan de Oro to secure a masterlist of affected families. ACF then validated the list in the communities with the help of the local barangay (village) officials.
 - (b) Local Barangay (village) Officials. In the Philippines, the community level structure of governance is the barangay government unit. Barangay officials are local residents elected by the community to act as public officials vested with authority to implement laws and formulate local ordinances. ACF worked with local barangay officials in the validation of the target beneficiaries. Local officials also helped in organizing the smooth distribution of cash vouchers in the communities. In addition, they also provided resources such as transport for the PWD to help them attend the distribution and the cash-for-training sessions.
 - (c) City Health Office and Office Senior Citizens Affair. These are offices under the local city government. These offices provided support to ACF by taking the lead in conducting the sessions on rights of senior citizens and persons with disabilities (PWD). This sessions were in line with the cash-for-training component of the cash-based intervention.
 - (d) Handicap International. ACF collaborated with Handicap International in identifying and selecting among the affected individuals the persons with disabilities.

- (e) Collaboration of FSL and Nut teams of ACF. The selection of PLW beneficiaries was done through the collaboration between the two ACF teams. Although the collaboration was internal, we find it worthy to mention because it showcased a significant milestone in ACF's objective to implement its interventions in an integrated manner. This integrated work between the two teams is actually one of the best practice that ACF achieved in this experience.
2. Partners in Implementation of Cash Voucher Intervention.
- (a) Economic Enterprise Development Management Office (EEDMO) of Iligan City. This office under the city government endorsed the cash voucher intervention of ACF among the market vendors in Pala-o Public Market. It also helped monitor the implementation and the prices of the food items in the public market throughout the implementation of the project.
- (b) Pala-o Market Integrated Vendors Association (PAMIVA). This is the federation of market vendors associations in Pala-o Public Market. The acceptance of the federation and their individual market vendor members of the cash voucher scheme made the project design possible for the target beneficiaries in Iligan City. The federation and the market vendors did not ask for any incentive or fee for them to accept the vouchers. They easily saw the increase in their sales if they participated in the project.
- (c) Iligan Dealers Multi-Purpose Cooperative (IDEAL). This cooperative acted as the "pay-out partner" of ACF. Through IDEAL, ACF paid out the market vendors when they redeemed the value of the vouchers they accepted from the ECHO and WFP projects' beneficiaries. A minimal service fee was charged by IDEAL to cover their administrative cost in disbursing to the market vendors.
- (d) Ororama Supermarket in Cagayan de Oro. Among the supermarkets invited to participate in the WFP project in the city, only Ororama expressed interest to accept the cash vouchers of the beneficiaries. They also readily agreed to accept the debit cards that were issued to WFP beneficiaries. The supermarket did not charge any fees to ACF.
- (e) Citibank. ACF partnered with Citibank for the issuance of debit cards and the use of their system for the purchases of beneficiaries in Cagayan de Oro City. The project of WFP included in the design the use of debit cards. The objective was to see if beneficiaries can plan out their purchases better using debit cards instead of cash vouchers. The cash vouchers follow the concept of gift certificates; it forces the beneficiaries to consume all the value of the voucher in just one visit to the supermarket. The debit card will allow them to shop without totally consuming the cash value loaded on the card. [NOTE: PDM showed that all beneficiaries used the debit cards only once. They still consumed the entire cash value of their cards in just one shopping. This is one interesting outcome of the debit card experience that ACF plans to study further.]

Length of project/programme

The second phase of ECHO project with the consortium of international NGOs had a timeframe of nine (9) months. But specific to the cash-based intervention of ACF, it was only implemented from April to August 2013. The short period of implementation was largely dictated by the available funds for the cash grants. ACF was only able to disburse cash grants with an amount that was estimated to provide nutritious foods for one month.

For the WFP project, it was implemented between the months of March to end of July 2012. The short implementation period was dictated by WFP.

Assessment and Programme tools utilised

- A. Rapid Needs Assessment.** The second phase of the ECHO project was founded on the results of the rapid needs assessment conducted by the international NGOs in the consortium. The assessment was conducted in March 2012 just weeks before the first phase was completed.

Key Informant Interviews (KII) among local officials and leaders and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) within the communities were used to gather information about the situation of the affected families three months after the onslaught of flashfloods. The tools used were patterned from the Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment Survey questionnaire. The multi-cluster needs assessment tool was used by UN OCHA when it conducted with several international NGOs, including ACF, a follow up assessment in January 2012, a month after the disaster.

- B. Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM).** ACF makes good use of the PDM in all its projects, including cash-based interventions, because it provides immediate feedback that either allows ACF to make adjustments or improve on the design of the next projects. The PDM is also helpful in the assessment before closing the project.

Programme/project objectives and impact

Because the projects (ECHO and WFP) were both short-term interventions aimed at filling in the immediate gaps in access to food and other basic needs, the results of the PDM were deemed sufficient enough to provide valuable insights on how it impacted on the target beneficiaries. At the center of the PDM were indicator on the access to food by households of affected population. The salient findings from the PDM reports were the following:

1. Comparing the responses of beneficiaries to the questions about the kinds of food they consumed before and after they received the cash vouchers/debit cards, it showed that the beneficiaries tend to maintain their preference to purchase and consume five kinds of food items: (i) cereals (staples e.g. maize, rice, etc.); (ii) vegetables; (iii) meat; (iv) condiments; and (v) oils and fats.
2. Comparing the responses to the same questions, it is worthy to note that almost all kinds of food items experienced an increase in number purchases after beneficiaries received the cash vouchers. Fruits had the most significant increase; from 122 respondents before the vouchers distribution, number of beneficiaries buying fruits increased to 249 after the voucher distribution. Only the vegetable and cereals experienced a slight decrease in number of respondents purchasing and consuming them.
3. On the question about what support the vouchers gave to their households, the respondents cited the following: (i) *“Reduced food expenses”* (93.7% of respondents); (ii) *“Provided access to food”* (88.9%); and (iii) *“Improved quality and quantity of food consumed”* (76.9%).
4. On the question “Would you buy the same items and in the same quantity even if no voucher support?,” 82.9% of the respondents replied NO.

The above responses of beneficiaries can be considered as indication that the cash vouchers/debit cards improved their access to nutritious food. In addition, beneficiaries expressed also their appreciation that the use of cash vouchers gave them the freedom to choose the kind of food that they want their family to eat.

Lessons learnt/best practice recommendations

- A. Best Practices.** For ACF, the experience in the emergency project for the population affected by Tropical Storm Washi in Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City surfaced a few best practices that were not totally expected. However, these practices are now being used by ACF in further improving its programming especially in emergency response projects.
1. Cash-based interventions are very appropriate during emergencies in urban context. Since most urban areas have strong commercial sector, the possibility that markets will be operational and accessible to affected population is high.
 2. Leveraging limited food assistance budget during emergencies by complementing food kit distribution. It is observed that the standard response of government and big multilateral organizations during emergencies is to distribute food assistance in-kind. These food kits normally do not provide the nutrition needed by the intended beneficiaries, especially vulnerable people like PLWs and malnourished children. And oftentimes, the beneficiaries reach the point of complaining that they are getting sick already from eating same noodles, canned sardines, rice, etc. from the food kits they are receiving. Using the limited resources to provide the beneficiaries with access to nutritious food can effectively complement the food kits they are receiving. Through this approach, the intervention can deliver a more meaningful impact on the beneficiaries.
 3. Leveraging limited food assistance budget during urban emergencies by complementing daily wages of affected population. One finding from the PDM was the fact that 25% of the respondents indicated that they buy food using incomes they had earned. These could be income from cash for work. Or these could be from petty trading or temporary daily labor that they do within the city. By using cash vouchers, we can provide their access to nutritious foods. Their income on the other hand can be used by the household for their other basic needs.
 4. Develop in the intervention design the strong links between the different sectoral teams to create an integrated impact on the beneficiaries. In this case study, the link between the nutrition team and the food security team delivered a coordinated and holistic assistance to the target pregnant and lactating women. As the nutrition team oriented them on care practices, proper nutrition for them and their children and exclusive breastfeeding, the food security provided the access to nutritious food. Although this was not elaborated in the case study, the water, sanitation and hygiene intervention of ACF's WASH team may have actually provided the PLWs in evacuation centers with access to clean water, sanitation facilities and clean livable environment.
- B. Lessons Learned.** The main lesson learned by ACF in this experience is the need to include in its contingency plan/preparedness plan the setting up of cash-based intervention mechanisms during emergencies. It was really a challenge to set up and formalized the important partnerships with different actors enumerated above during an emergency because it really takes time. ACF is now reviewing its contingency and preparedness plan to find ways how to set up at the quickest possible time the mechanisms for cash interventions during emergencies.