

Final Evaluation Report

Mitigating Dangers of Localized Food Insecurity in (Sierra Leone and) Liberia

**Implemented by Welthungerhilfe Country Office Liberia and ACF
Liberia under the overall Project Responsibility of Welthungerhilfe
Country Office Sierra Leone**

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Executive Summary

Key Recommendations¹

1. In any relief, recovery and rehabilitation programming, always consider unconditional and unrestricted cash transfer as an option with the ability of addressing the common large variety of needs, respecting target groups' diversity and dignity and feeding sustainable local business development.
2. Add specific training and awareness modules to this central tool to enhance immediate results and sustainable impacts. Consider modules like basic business training, nutrition and WASH training or agricultural training, among others, as modules (where applicable, given possible time constraints). If necessary, muster additional funding to add such value to unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers.
3. Consider adding conditions or restrictions to cash transfers only, when the specific situation clearly points out added value to the cash transfer, compared to voluntary acceptance of training or guidance or recommendations.
4. In the emergency and recovery situation of targeted areas in Liberia, the distinction between unconditional and unrestricted cash transfer and the restricted and conditional cash transfer within the income generating activities was not convincing. Both approaches should have been merged in one 'cash and livelihood support' component.
5. Welthungerhilfe has to further develop her institutional capacity for programming cash transfers (conditional, unconditional, restricted and unrestricted) as a relief and recovery tool. Unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers are likely to become the dominant tool in a large variety of settings. In-kind relief will increasingly have to prove its advantages against cash in future programming ('burden-of-proof').
6. For improving the sustainability of economic activities through business trainings and through business-promotion with cash transfers, it is recommended to consider and introduce commercial, village-based business promoters through specialized trainings and to promote collective approaches to procurement and transport through initiating business groups.

Welthungerhilfe commissioned an independent evaluation of her ECHO-funded programme "Mitigating Dangers of Localized Food Insecurity in Sierra Leone and Liberia" that started in May 2015 and was completed in December 2015. Only the Liberian part of the programme was evaluated in December 2015. In both countries, Welthungerhilfe works in close partnership with ACF. The ToR state a clear focus on the experience with unconditional cash transfer and, to a lesser extent, with the conditional cash transfer under the income

¹ Recommendations in this report are, in general, aimed at future projects of a similar nature, i.e. an (early) recovery or slow onset emergency scenario with acceptable security situation and fairly well functioning markets

generating component. Result 4, relates to psycho-social support, added only in October 2015 and improved coordination.

The consultant spent ten days in Liberia, of which seven days were in the field with community meetings, small group and individual interviews. For the results relating to Psycho-Social Support (PS) and Income Generating Activities only one day each was spent in the field, limiting the validity of findings. Other interviews were conducted with management and field staff of Welthungerhilfe and ACF, members of the food security cluster and the cash transfer working group and one telephone interview with an official of the Government of Liberia.

Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT²): pending the more detailed results of the endline survey (also for IGA), there are good indications that the cash transfers (theoretically 6 x 50 USD, but partly given as two-monthly 100 USD instalments) through mobile phone worked reasonable well. There were no major technical problems with the target groups, the majority of selected beneficiaries possessed their own SIM card, 101 SIM cards were purchased for persons without means to purchase their own. Most of them even the mobile phone itself. Delays of the mobile cash company (LoneStar) in frontloading the already transferred funds caused substantial irritation and wasted management time. Some cases of illegal fees for paying out cash by mobile cash agents caused losses to beneficiaries in the range of single digit percentages. Inquiries in the field revealed a large variety of cash uses, led by school fees, food and business investment. Cash as a relief and recovery tool was considered highly relevant and mobile cash as a mode of transfer appropriate, despite the unhealthy monopolist position of LoneStar.

When engaging with (mobile) cash, the knowledge of peer organisations is an important source to build on and start from. Coordinated contracting with the mobile cash company occurred through the cash transfer technical working group and is recommended in general. Distributing physical cash should not be ruled out (in areas without network coverage it is a must) for short programmes as the start-up costs and management input are much lower. On the other hand, physical cash is generally considered less secure for staff and beneficiaries than electronic cash. A considerable number of UCT recipients claimed to have invested in business, largely petty trade. Therefore, in future projects, basic business training should accompany the cash intervention. The evaluation considers it a lost opportunity that not even a very basic business training was offered.

The most far-reaching recommendation out of this evaluation is that unconditional and unrestricted cash transfers should be considered in any emergency and recovery situation and that the livelihood support (IGA) should be designed with unconditional and unrestricted cash – perhaps in different phasing and dosage – combined with voluntary business or other training (trainings not as a condition for the cash transfer).

Income Generating Activities (IGA): ACF was the exclusive implementer of this component. The basic business training (2 x 2 days) was considered very helpful, even praised by all respondents. The selection of beneficiaries followed a differentiation between business- and non-business families through a questionnaire at the beginning of the project. The identification of business and, to a lesser extent, the procurement procedures for the business kits, led to some delays and in some few cases to financial losses for recipients. Some of the procurement protocols acted as exposure and as ‘procurement training’ aiming

² in the following text, UCT is always used as both unconditional and unrestricted cash transfer

at and achieving best prices and qualities. In some cases, they led to lower qualities and higher prices than beneficiaries usually worked with.

The evaluation recommends to drop restrictions to cash use in general, unless there are clear advantages due to economies of scale, logistics or other reasons. Because accountability to the donor is required to prove that the cash is spent in a certain way, contractually agreed record keeping and ex-post analysis should be negotiated to suffice. If the donor insist on conditions and restrictions how exactly cash should be spent (receipts to prove cash use in every case), the guided procurement, agency together with beneficiaries is unavoidable.

Petty trade was listed among the most Ebola-affected business sectors in the December 2014 needs assessment. Despite the strong focus on sellable items (petty trade promotion) there is no danger of a further fragmentation of the retail market as all IGA beneficiaries had engaged in petty trade before. Strengthening the productive sector (gardening, agriculture, animal husbandry, construction, other crafts) would require special offers of training or inputs that the market does not offer rather than conditions of cash use. While ACF and WHH engages in the productive sector in other projects, it was not the focus in this project.

Psycho-Social Support (PSS): ACF introduced this component in October 2015, after ECHO offered a budget increase. The three months component allowed ACF to reach additional persons as part of their continued efforts to render psycho-social support to persons affected by Ebola. The consultant found that PSS complements UCT and IGA in an ideal way, given the tremendous stress factors that most of the population in the target counties was exposed to.

All feedback from the communities the consultant interacted with were very positive, often moving. ACF is confident that not only the clients were in most cases able to continue a normal life, but also communities with which clients live have gained in understanding and compassion. PSS should be at least considered an accompanying element in every large emergency.