



BRIEF



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ADDRESSING FOOD CRISIS IN YEMEN: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF EVALUATION¹

Background

In 2017, in response to the one of the world's worst manmade crises, a consortium of CARE and Action Contre la Faim (ACF) implemented a European Union (EU)-funded Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC) project in the Abyan and Amran governorates of Yemen. The project aimed to enhance food security and to support livelihood activities, savings groups, and the resilience of communities with the rehabilitation of critical, community-identified shared assets. The program design was aligned with the Humanitarian Development Nexus framework, which focuses on a shift from supplying humanitarian assistance to those who need it to reducing the demand for humanitarian assistance by addressing the root causes of these needs.

Program beneficiaries—2,100 of the most vulnerable and food insecure households in 36 villages— received MPC over ten cycles and completed projects that rehabilitated community assets, many through Cash for Work (CFW). Community projects included rehabilitation of water sources and facilities, market access roads improvements, formation of village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), and trainings on best practices in certain livelihoods.

Study Overview

This report is a summary of findings from the full evaluation. The evaluation looks at:

- Performance against Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Evaluation Criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability
- Insight on the internal and external factors influencing the achievement (or non-achievement) of project objectives

The evaluation employed a mixed methodology, including: a desk review and quantitative and qualitative fieldwork using structured and semi-structured data collection instruments. A total of 323 people participated in questionnaires (45% female headed) across the project area. Forty-seven project stakeholders participated in key informant interviews (KIIs) including implementing partners' teams, banks, market figures, and governmental figures. There were 16 focus group discussions (FGDs), made up of beneficiaries and local communities, with 50% female participants. Lastly, the evaluation used checklists, case studies, and desk reviews of relevant documentation.

The evaluation analysis is meant to inform decisions about replicating interventions, draw conclusions about the

1 For full findings is the full report "Addressing food crisis in Yemen (Food/2017/389-320), October 2017 – April 2019, Final evaluation report." August 2019.

“Before the project, some people had been starving and some others had used to take only one or two meals a day, mostly bread and water, when the project came, they became able to take up to three good meals a day.”

- A LOCAL AUTHORITY FIGURE IN AMRAN

effectiveness of the implementation strategies, highlight lessons learned, and lead to recommendations for future programming and policymaking.

Findings

RELEVANCE

The project’s objectives and components are in line with Yemen Human Response Plans (YHRP) 2018-2019 that identified acute needs in both targeted areas (up to level Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) 4).

The project provided “life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable people” through MPC and in promoting “access to resilient livelihood opportunities” by rehabilitating community assets. Data shows that over 32% of the MPC was spent on food items. Thus, the project addressed the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) objectives of improving “access to food for the most vulnerable.”

Ninety percent of the respondents believed that the project objectives and design were relevant to their own and their communities’ needs. According to KIIs, the project was in line with the governmental plan and also considered community traditions and culture.

In comparing the use of MPC with the community assets to other forms of humanitarian transfers in Yemen, MPC seems to be most relevant to the beneficiaries’ various needs as well as being more cost efficient, flexible, easy, and safe for beneficiaries.

EFFICIENCY

The project efforts to improve cost efficiency included using existing platforms for target areas’ market monitoring, delivering the MPCs through banks with outreach to targeted communities. It also made use of the Yemeni Rial (YER)

exchange rate decrease to expand the project’s reach and transfer cycles. As a piloted modality, overhead costs (such as those associated with human resources, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEAL), learning events, and consultations) were relatively high, but might be lower during future scale up.

Ninety one percent of beneficiaries expressed high satisfaction with MPC distribution timing, locations, and regularity, adding that the time needed to reach to distribution points ranged from less than 30 minutes up to 60 minutes with a similar amount of time spent waiting at distribution points.

EFFECTIVENESS

The consortium established a highly productive MEAL system, which produced several strong assessments and learning session reports. In addition, the Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFM) was put in place from the outset and the project adjusted improve its accessibility as learning was analyzed.

Over 80% of beneficiaries reported awareness of the CFM, though only 11% revealed that they had used the CFM. Over half of users (59%) reported satisfaction with the responsiveness of CARE and ACF. The remaining users, predominantly those using the locally placed suggestion boxes, reported slow reaction times for their reported concerns, indicating a need to move away from suggestion boxes and invest in other, more effective CFM pathways.

The project was adaptive and flexible, as evidenced in response to the learning and feedback from its MEAL system. Based on feedback received, implementers changed distribution points to suit beneficiaries’ preferences, raised the amount of cash during the last four cycles, and modified the community asset rehabilitation projects based on the community requirements. In addition, approximately 95% of consulted beneficiaries were highly satisfied with the ease of registering, access to support, and helpfulness of project team members.

“Thanks to CARE for ensuring to distribute the cash assistance at our villages. If it was distributed in Amran city, it would be very difficult and costly”

MALE FGD PARTICIPANT IN AMRAN

IMPACT

Beneficiaries believed the project had a great deal of impact. Nearly all (96%) reported 'high benefits and positive impact' during and immediately after the project period. Some of the highlights include:

- Cash distribution increased households' food security and decreased burdens on families, especially women, in locating water and firewood.
- Some households (14%) reported saving and/or investing money for future use, especially in Amran governorate where VSLA and livelihood training were delivered.
- Community asset rehabilitation was reported in both KIIs and FGDs as increasing access to water and food markets and expanding the reach of assistance through CFW.

ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY

The project ensured access and engagement with marginalized groups by targeting a wide range of vulnerabilities. The project's design included protection elements that resulted in almost no reports of abuse, teasing, or harm. Ninety one percent of surveyed beneficiaries thought that women, children, and people with disabilities had received appropriate accommodations during the activities. (See the section on the **Focus on Gender** for more on women's participation).

Preserving the principle of 'do no harm' supported the project's conflict sensitivity and reduced the potential for risk or harm due to the intervention. The local authorities and community figures agreed that project objectives aligned with governmental priorities designed to address food insecurity and were acceptable in terms of community tradition and culture.

While maintaining low levels of donor visibility in target areas and with stakeholders was important in ensuring continued access and security, if there is to be increased awareness of the project and its process more visible activities may be necessary in the future. This is an important balance that the project will need to strike.

Supporting Markets and Community Resilience

The MPC and CFW enhanced local market stability and increased local sales by as much as 50%. The MPC and CFW enabled households to clear their debts to businesses and

made cash available. Some market traders were also able to expand their businesses.

Other positive social and household dynamics included: reducing fear of starvation and associated stress; reducing family conflicts; and increasing community harmony and mutual support. Communities expressed a belief that the community assets might increase their ability to absorb shocks in the future though they did not see these assets as directly affecting their household resilience at project close.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is almost always a challenge in humanitarian response. However, the diversity of the project's activities could enhance sustainability to some extent. For some beneficiaries, the cash assistance provided an opportunity

"No rejection of women participation happened. Women were involved in a number of activities like CCs, organizing the cash distribution process and in the asset's rehabilitation. No one teased them."

FEMALE COMMUNITY FGD

to save and/or invest some cash for their future needs. The increased cashflow supported the local markets and allowed small businesses that had overextended their credit to recoup their working capital with debt repayment and continue serving their clients and market. This suggests that there may also be longer-term benefits from the community asset rehabilitation projects, as most of the community assets were sustainable in nature, such as water tanks, wells, and market feeder roads.

However, three or four months after the last MPC transfer, key indicators, such as the Coping Strategy Index (CSI), show many of these gains eroding, demonstrating that the extreme needs in these community and households have not changed sufficiently over the ten-month intervention period. The MPC—designed to cover 80% of basic household needs—was not sufficient for substantial investments in income earning or savings after addressing basic need. Therefore, post-MPCs declines in CSI are to be expected.

“My husband and I are jointly responsible about the family expenditures now.”

FEMALE FGD PARTICIPANT

Focus on Gender

GENDER EQUALITY

The project targeted women beneficiaries, with about 50% (N=12,871) female beneficiaries for MPCs within the targeted 2,010 households, in addition to engaging women in the community asset rehabilitation selection process.

The project also worked to target female headed households and ensure they were included in the MPC registration process. Due to the absence of data regarding how many households were female headed, no targets for female headed households were set. In addition, the community asset rehabilitation projects were designed to benefit the broadest group of residents in the targeted areas without an explicit focus on gender.

Despite the lack of intentional targeting, the project succeeded in reaching some female headed households, with 34% of beneficiary households in Amran and 12% of beneficiary households in Abyan headed by women. No cases of discrimination were reported through the CFMs. During an FGD in Abyan, a female participant said she felt that “men and women were treated alike.”

Project staff spoke of a gender mainstreaming policy to ensure the principles of gender equality and gender mainstreaming were adhered to throughout the project.² The policy sought to provide special spaces and opportunities for women to engage in the various activities including community committees, beneficiaries’ registration, and MPC distributions.

“I noticed an increase in women shoppers who used to not come to my shop, but send their kids.”

A SHOP KEEPER IN RAIDAH MARKET

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

There is some evidence of both intentional and unintentional women’s empowerment arising as a result of the project. Approximately 70% of surveyed female headed households felt that they now played a greater role in making or influencing financial decisions, including expenditures related to family needs; before the project, many of these women had not been involved in these types of decisions.

The MPC helped with purchasing firewood, saving women from the hard work of searching for, cutting, and carrying firewood, which sometimes brought women into areas with higher risk of mines. The selection of water tanks for community asset rehabilitation in some districts also saved women’s time and physical labor spent hauling water from long distances on their heads or backs with accompanying health impacts. A female FGD participant in Sarar, Abyan explained, “As a woman, I suffered a lot fetching water from far away areas on my head.” In the same FGD, another woman said, “During drought seasons we had to leave our village looking for water in other areas, now [after installing a water tank in the village] we can rest.”

Market figures in Amran reported that the number of female customers increased during the intervention period. The cash assistance opened opportunities for some school age girls to rejoin the schools after leaving school due to their families’ inability to pay school fees or the need for girls to work to earn food. A beneficiary from Khanfar said, “Because of this project, my daughter could go back to the girls’ secondary school in Je’ar.” Moreover, in some targeted households, women were able to improve their Minimum Dietary Diversity – Women (MDDW) score. Further anecdotal evidence is outlined in **The Gendered Dimension of Multi-Purpose Cash Supporting Disaster Resilience**. However, significant and lasting changes to gender or cultural norms were not observed, which is also outlined in the linked report.

Discussion

Quantitative data demonstrated that respondents preferred the MPC modality as it:

- Is flexible and meets the targeted beneficiaries’ various needs;
- Can reach the most vulnerable without conditions;
- Makes cash available, enhancing market resilience;

² This document was not made available to evaluation team.

- Supports family as well as wider community resilience, providing opportunities for saving and reducing fear of starvation as well as enabling targeted beneficiaries to help others and participate in community asset rehabilitation; and
- Increases the food security levels within beneficiary households during the intervention period.

While some savings and livelihoods investment were reported, this is an area that could be reinforced. Many factors might influence beneficiary savings and investment, including households' specific vulnerability profiles, contextual factors, the amount of the MPC, and levels of programing that work to promote savings and investment among beneficiaries.

For target beneficiaries and their households who did not have significant sources of income to secure their household food security, these gains erode significantly in the three to four months after the final MPC distribution. While there were households that maintained their CSI and Food Consumption Scores (FCS) scores, these tended to be households with additional household resources, household members who brought in income from labor, or those who had more than just the MPC to support the household's basic needs. As would be expected, when vulnerable households' food security improves, their CSI reduces, showing a reduction in the use of negative coping mechanisms. These findings were supported by findings from the quantitative study, where respondents indicated a return to their more difficult situations when support ended due to a lack of alternatives.

The World Food Programme's mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (WFP-mVAM),³ May 2019 assessment also highlighted the same issue that FCS and CSI scores declined three months after the last transfer for households, as they did not have

DISAGGREGATION OF THE FCS AND CSI DATA, THREE MONTHS AFTER THE FINAL MPC REVEALED:

- Female headed households maintained better FCS and CSI levels than male
- Single headed households showed better performance than other marital statuses
- Larger households preserved better scores than small ones
- Remoter areas have more of a decrease in indicators than less remote areas.

sufficient replacement income resources. In comparison with the WFP-mVAM4 findings, the project target areas still show slightly higher indicators than the general level nationwide, even three months after the final MPC, which may indicate increased overall resilience, but there is no way to show direct casualty or correlation with the current data.

There were also important observable differences between the two governorates (mountainous Amran and coastal Abyan) in terms of types of coping strategies and food consumption habits, due to the differences in the mountainous and coastal traditions and habits, and also due to the type of livelihoods each area has access to. Generally, it seems that in the more remote mountains region, scores decreased more quickly, and families felt the lack of the MPC more acutely. In more accessible coastal areas with more livelihood options and lower levels of consistent conflict, there was a less precipitous drop in key scores and indices.

³ WFP -mVAM report, Yemen, June, 2019, WFP

⁴ Ibid.

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