



Cash and Voucher Assistance Preparedness Program

Lessons Learned Workshop Report



November 2023



Acronyms and Abbreviations

DM	Disaster Management
CVAP	Cash and Vouchers Assistance Preparedness
HHs	Households
HQs	Headquarters
YRCS	Yemen Red Crescent Society
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
BRC	British Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
DRC	Danish Red Cross
GRC	German Red Cross
NRC	Norwegian Red Cross
KRC	Kuwaiti Red Crescent
LLW	Lessons Learned Workshop
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
FSP	Financial Service Provider



Purpose of the Lessons Learned Report

This report aims to collect all relevant information to facilitate better planning and execution of future cash and voucher assistance projects or similar events, minimize risks associated with such operations, and use key lessons learned to improve cash and voucher assistance programs implementation.

During the lesson learned workshop (LLW) for the Cash and Vouchers Assistance Program, YRCS staff, volunteers, movement partners, and financial service providers (FSPs) gathered at the YRCS HQ Sana'a to discuss and provide feedback. The main takeaways and suggestions from the discussions were compiled, focusing on the pilots that were implemented in the CVA program. The information was collected in person during the workshop.

Lessons are learned and opportunities for improvement are identified throughout the life cycle of each project as part of a continuous learning and improvement process. Documenting these lessons helps project teams to understand why problems and challenges arise and find ways to avoid them in the future. It also helps to identify good practices that can be used in other ongoing and future programs.

The purpose of this report is to document the lessons learned from the design and implementation of the cash and voucher pilots that took place in the branches of Amran, Abyan, Hajjah, Hadramout, and Al Hudaidah. It is important to identify and list any required adaptations or improvements for future operations, as well as to document any challenges and obstacles faced during the implementation process and the actions taken to overcome them. Furthermore, recommendations for the design and implementation of future similar operations should be documented and disseminated. Lastly, it is necessary to document the readiness and quality of CVA implementation.



Introduction

In 2021, YRCS participated in implementing CVA interventions in collaboration with ICRC, OCHA, and UNHCR. Their role involved conducting assessments, verifying beneficiary lists, and monitoring distributions. Later in November 2021, YRCS launched a CVA preparedness program with the support of the British Red Cross (BRC) and ICRC. The program aimed to enhance YRCS's capacity to design and independently implement cash-based programming on a large scale. The program is designed to support YRCS CVAP for three to five years as per the standard recommendation of the Red Cross Movement.

After the implementation of some key preparedness activities in 2022, the YRCS completed cash pilot projects in four branches namely Amran, Abyan, Hajjah, and Hadramout. The pilots aimed to test the established CVA systems and processes so that the results would inform the revision of the system and process moving forward. The YRCS has successfully targeted 500 HHs in each branch and delivered three rounds of multi-purpose cash assistance. Additionally, vouchers for food were also implemented by YRCS in Al Hudaidah targeting 600 households with support from Kuwaiti Red Crescent in 2023.

The Lessons Learned Workshop was conducted with the participation of YRCS HQ staff, volunteers from branches, movement partners, and financial service providers. The workshop aimed to evaluate the key achievements and challenges of the operation and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to share their lessons learned. This workshop was also an opportunity to provide recommendations for future cash and voucher assistance programs and contribute information to future work plans.



Methodology

Desk review of key documents including project proposals, Baseline, Self-assessments, SWOT Analysis, implementation reports, feedback mechanism reports, verification, and PDM reports: it was conducted to gain a better understanding of the CVA program process and procedures. It also aimed to identify the roles of YRCS HQ, YRCS branches, the FSP, and movement partners during the implementation of the pilots in the four targeted branches, in addition to the distribution of vouchers in Al Hudaidah.

Key informant interviews with HQ staff, branch staff, and volunteers who were involved in the design and implementation of the cash pilots including vouchers for food: The purpose of the interviews was to gather comprehensive information about the project's ability to meet basic needs, the factors that influenced its effectiveness, the extent to which it achieved its planned outputs and results within the given timeframe, community engagement and accountability, as well as reporting and coordination.

Data collection was done where The participants were divided into seven groups: They identified good practices, challenges, and difficulties faced during the implementation and recommendations for future CVA programs, discussed how they overcame these challenges, and provided recommendations for improvement in future CVA programs.

Final findings presentation: all stakeholders participated in clarifying their points during the presentation of the data collection exercise. The presentation covered best practices, challenges, and recommendations for future CVA program implementation.



What went well and what needs to be improved on relevant components of CVA design and implementation

YRCS is seeking to enhance its ability to independently design and implement cash-based programming at scale through its investment in a cash and voucher assistance preparedness (CVAP) program. To achieve this, YRCS conducted a self-assessment process to determine its level of preparedness for CVA and identify any gaps that need to be addressed to implement CVA independently and promptly. The self-assessment is based on five key CVA preparedness areas, each of which is equally essential and contributes to the overall operational cash readiness of the National Society. These areas are:

- Area 1: Leadership commitment
- Area 2: Processes, systems, and tools
- Area 3: Financial and human resources and capacities
- Area 4: Community engagement and accountability (CEA), coordination and partnerships
- Area 5: Test, learn and improve

During the CVAP period, YRCS conducted two self-assessments. These assessments helped identify gaps and priority preparedness activities, as well as the level of YRCS on CVA and the improvements made.

It was discovered that there was progress in all aspects of the evaluation when compared to the initial assessment, particularly in community engagement and accountability, coordination and partnership, followed by leadership commitment, test, learn, and improve in comparison to the initial assessment.



CVAP areas	Improvement that occurred	What needs to be improved
<p>Area 1</p> <p>Leadership commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CVA is included in the strategic plan of YRCS and CVA pilots were implemented in Amran, Hajjah, Abyan, and Hadramout where YRCS targeted 500 HHs in 3 rounds. The board and senior leadership supported the implementation of the CVA pilots. - YRCS has a CVA focal point at the HQ level, a CVA TWG was established and has meetings regularly to discuss all the activities that were implemented by YRCS with the participation of NS partners and members from all YRCS departments. - Staff from targeted branches trained in CVA program tools, carried out the required assessment for the pilots as a result developed their practical knowledge of CVA. - A CVAP capacity assessments were conducted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular attendance of the senior leadership and management staff in the CVA TWG meeting must be ensured for more monitoring of the implementation of planned activities. - More branches should be targeted by the CVA programs and trained in the CVA program tools. - CVA advocacy must be incorporated into the YRCS communication strategy in 2024. - Capacity assessment in CVA must be repeated at regular intervals for decision-making and resource allocation purposes.
<p>Area 2</p> <p>Processes, systems, and tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is clarity on the roles of different departments for the effective implementation of CVA. There are CVA-specific Standard Operating procedures in place defining the segregation of duties across YRCS departments, they are tested during the implementation of pilots. - The YRCS launched the tender for FSP framework agreements. - The YRCS has adapted available CVA tools and guidance across the program cycle and they used and tested during the pilots, translated, and adapted as required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitting SOPs to management after translating them for final approval and publication. - Signing contracts with financial service providers. - Improving infrastructure, equipment, and technology.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include CVA in the Financial and Logistic Systems, HR, Communication, Community Engagement and Accountability, Information management and Resource Mobilization - Reducing the number of questions in the market assessment tool and coordinating with the relevant authority beforehand. - Tools need to be validated by YRCS management. - Incorporate CVA in the IM system - Partners must respond quickly when approval is requested to implement activities - Development/revision of assessment tool or questions to integrate in other tools
<p>Area 3: Financial and Human Resources and Capacities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff from all YRCS HQ departments, and targeted branches attended training in CVA programming and they have the skills and capacity in all phases of CVA program implementation where they practically worked in all these areas in pilots. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CVA competency mapping and HR gap analysis must be undertaken. - HR needs to employ more staff to support the CVA program, which will reduce the reliance on external support. Need to include CVA roles in some relevant staff JDs. - Since the YRCS will be entering contracts with FSPs, two trainings must be held, one covering financial, logistical, and auditing



		<p>procedures, and the other covering the general and reporting systems of FSPs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linking the emergency fund with cash assistance. -
<p>Area 4: Community Engagement and Accountability, Coordination and Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - YRCS set up two-way communication with affected communities for cash pilots and involved the community in different phases of the project cycle. - YRCS placed and standardized a feedback and complaint mechanism during the implementation of the pilots. - ICRC, IFRC, BRC, and DRC are providing technical and financial support for the CVAP. - Attending the Yemen CMWG. - YRCS is a member of the MENA regional CVA TWG and attends all meetings and more engagement of YRCS in the MENA regional CVA community of practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish new and updated Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms in all relevant branches, for instance, to establish the hotline system in HQ and link this with targeted branches. - Training of staff and volunteers who are engaged on CVA interventions on how to make referrals - Proactively seeking partnerships with external entities to collaborate in YRCS CVA interventions in the future. - More coordination with community committees and authorities during registration and other project phases. - Extend internal coordination to obtain support for the hotline activation program. - Preparing the community engagement and accountability policy and its operational procedures and incorporating CVA within the strategy.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is important to have effective coordination with the authorities, particularly with SCAMCHA, right from the start of the program.
<p>Area 5: Test, Learn, and Improve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - YRCS had partners support in testing CVA capacity in 2023, where cash assistance for 2,000 was distributed in 3 rounds in Amran, Abyan, Hajjah, and Hadramout as part of testing the CVA SOPs. - YRCS CVA peer-to-peer learning schemes have been identified and sending staff to attend a peer-to-peer learning with SARC and the learning from SARC was shared with YRCS staff. - Case studies from the cash pilots implemented were produced and shared with movement through Cash Hub. - CVAP re-assessment was carried out after the implementation of the initial PoA and identified new areas for CVA capacity investment to be able to respond to any emergency. - Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) activity was conducted two weeks after the first round of distribution in all the targeted governorates and a quick analysis report was provided to avoid any previous problems recurrence in the next distribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanding the capacity for more branches. - More pilots are required from 2024 to test the approved YRCS SoPs and the FSPs. - The PDM to incorporate Focus Group Discussions tool to gather more information from different categories of the affected population. - Continuous lessons to be documented and disseminated within RC movement and beyond via Cash Hub platform, webinars, newsletters, and lessons learned workshop. - There is a need to have one CVAP self-assessment by the end of 2024 to guide progress. - Considering old branches' knowledge sharing on CVA with the new branches.



Operational Challenges and Recommendations

During this session, the seven groups worked to identify the best practices (what went well, facilitating factors), challenges, and recommendations for future CVA program implementation. The below table lists and summarizes the findings of this exercise.

Challenge	Action Taken	Recommendation
Delayed response from donors regarding approval to implement some activities, which in turn delays the process of moving the project forward and obstructs the issuance of permits by the authorities.	Meeting with the concerned entities, clarifying the problem, and then diverting the implementation of some activities to another method to speed up the procedures and avoid contacting the authority more than once to issue permits.	Obtaining approval for all project activities simultaneously. Also, make sure to follow up after sending any request for approval
Obtaining permission from local authorities, particularly in the north, can cause significant delays and even prevent the activity from being implemented.	Not Solved	The management of YRCS should arrange a meeting with the local authority HQ in Sana'a to agree on implementing activities for an entire year. This would eliminate the need to obtain permits for each activity separately. Alternatively, the program should be explained in detail before starting its implementation, and permission should



		be obtained for all activities simultaneously before the implementation.
The number of beneficiaries was small compared to the need, and most of the complaints were about “Why am I not included in this program?”	Educating the community about the selection criteria, as well as the priority when choosing, since the assistance provided is very limited and the implemented projects were pilots.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Increase the number of beneficiaries. *It is necessary to conduct more awareness sessions for the community to understand the program's objectives and selection criteria.
When contracting with a third party to carry out verification processes, there was no communication with the targeted branches. Additionally, the third party was not familiar with the program and selection criteria. As a result, the YRCS branch was held accountable to the community due to the mechanism used by the third party. This mechanism failed to preserve the dignity of the beneficiaries.	No Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Communicate with the branch regarding the third party and ensure coordination between them. *It is important to consider that the third party has knowledge of the program, beneficiary selection criteria, and the goal of the verification process. *The branch must file any violation reported by a third party or beneficiary complaint. *Conduct verification through the YECS HQ or another branch of the YRCS.
Many beneficiaries were late for the distribution because they did not receive	*Communicated with the FSP to re-send the messages again to all beneficiaries.	*Establish a team to inform beneficiaries of distribution dates via verbal communication or a



<p>the distribution date through SMS from the financial service provider.</p>	<p>*Got in touch with the branch focal point to inform beneficiaries about available assistance they should receive.</p> <p>*The hotline team contacted all beneficiaries who did not receive their assistance and urged them to receive assistance</p>	<p>brochure outlining program details and distribution dates and sites.</p> <p>*Seeking the assistance of the authority and community representatives to inform the beneficiaries of the distribution date and sites.</p> <p>*Add only one contact number at the time of registration for the beneficiary's data because it is the number that will receive the FSP's SMS.</p> <p>* developing CEA guidelines in general for Cash responses detailing on the role of each of the parties</p>
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Organizational Challenges and Recommendations

Challenge	Action Taken	Recommendation
<p>The market Analysis tool is too large and the traders and market representatives often become bored or try to ignore volunteers during the assessment.</p>	<p>Volunteers briefly took the related information and then in the office completed the whole form.</p>	<p>The market study forms must be reduced and simplified to be easily asked and to facilitate market analysis without obstacles.</p>
<p>Errors were found in the beneficiary data or the absence of some data, such as the name and data of the beneficiary's next of kin, which necessitated the need to communicate with the FSP more than once to amend or add it so that the beneficiary can obtain assistance.</p>	<p>Communicate with the FSP to correct or add data</p>	<p>*Select qualified volunteers to carry out the beneficiaries' registration activity and ensure that they receive training on the registration form and data entry.</p> <p>*When registering beneficiaries, it's important to collect information about their next of kin. This will help with distribution in case the beneficiary is absent or unable to come to the distribution site.</p> <p>*Make sure to obtain a third-party report after verifying the beneficiaries' data to</p>



		amend any incorrect or missing data before starting the distribution process.
The distribution sites lack female staff to verify and assist female beneficiaries.	No Action	To inform the bank that female staff should be assigned to work with female beneficiaries
Financial operations are delayed due to many matters related to the financial management system, including the need for many people to sign disbursement orders, most of which do not exist, as well as due to the number of things required for the disbursement order to be completed.	No Action	* Conduct a workshop with financial management, compliance, and logistics staff to determine priorities and disbursement procedures, especially with financial service providers.

















Annex

LLW ToR document



Final ToR YRCS CVAP
LLW.docx

Complaints and Feedback- 4 branches



Complaints- Pilot
Projects- 4 Govs.xlsx

Attendees



Attendees.xlsx

LLW Branches Questionnaire



LLW Branches
Questionnaire-4 bran



YRCS Thanks Partners For Their Support



ICRC

