

INSIGHTS

OF A NATIONAL SOCIETY CVA FOCAL POINT

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Since 2014, Elisia has built her humanitarian career with NGOs and the Lebanese Red Cross, moving from fieldwork to leadership as Economic Security Coordinator (2024) and Program Manager (2025), while leading the CVA Preparedness journey. Her work emphasizes integration, accountability, and resilience, with CVA seen not just as aid, but as a pathway to empowerment.

In this Q&A session, Elisia shares her journey and insights, highlighting a people-centered approach to CVA. She reflects on program design, integration across sectors, and the importance of dignity, accountability, and resilience in humanitarian action.



WE ASKED ELISIA SEVERAL QUESTIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS THE CVA FOCAL POINT AT THE LEBANESE RED CROSS.



1. What professional pathway have you followed to reach your current position? How do you feel your background has prepared you for this role?

My path into humanitarian work has always been about people. I started at the community level in 2014, working with families, children, and volunteers through different NGOs and later with the Lebanese Red Cross. Those early years shaped me, because I was not only “delivering a service” but also learning how to listen, sit with people, and understand what dignity means in crisis.

Over the years, I took on different roles from field distributions to monitoring and evaluation, to coordinating teams. Each step taught me something about resilience, trust, and the responsibility we carry when people let us into their lives.

What has prepared me is not just my education or positions, but the reminder that people are never just “beneficiaries.”

They are individuals with voices and choices.

2- In your experience, what are the key considerations when deciding between cash and in-kind assistance? How do you determine which approach is more appropriate for a given context?

For me, the starting point is simple: what do people need most, and how can we give them the dignity of choice? Cash assistance is powerful because it lets families decide whether that means food, rent, medicine, or education. It provides flexibility, independence, and a sense of control at a time when people often feel they have lost it. That said, there are moments when in kind aid is more appropriate, such as sudden emergencies when markets are disrupted, or when essential goods aren't accessible. In those cases, providing food, water, or shelter can save lives.

The key is not to see cash and in kind as competing, but as complementary tools.

In the end, it's about respect respecting people's voices, contexts, and their right to decide what matters most for their families.

3. How do you ensure that cash and voucher assistance programs are tailored to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability, and cost-effectiveness?

The only way to make assistance meaningful is to design it with the people who will use it. For me, tailoring CVA begins with listening through assessments but also real conversations where communities share their priorities and hopes. That is how ownership is built.

Accountability comes from that same trust: being transparent about what we can and cannot do, and creating safe spaces for feedback even criticism because those voices make programs stronger. Cost-effectiveness, meanwhile, is not just about budgets, but about impact: ensuring every dollar brings real value to families.

In the end, CVA is not just technical it's an ongoing dialogue with communities, making sure assistance reflects their reality and strengthens their resilience, not just meeting short-term needs.

4. Can you share an example of a successful integrated program? What factors contributed to its success, and what lessons did you learn from it?

One strong example of integration was the Cash for WASH initiative in informal tented settlements and nearby communities. The program combined cash support for households with a WASH outcome: families received cash to meet basic needs, but participation in hygiene promotion sessions was required. This way, financial assistance went hand in hand with raising awareness on healthy practices.

Its success came from linking financial flexibility with sectoral goals. By merging cash with WASH objectives, we not only filled economic gaps but also encouraged better hygiene behaviors. It showed that conditionality, when applied thoughtfully, can reinforce program outcomes and create real synergies across sectors.

The key lesson was that cash can be an entry point for wider objectives. Integrating it with outcomes like hygiene requires strong coordination, clear communication, and community engagement so people understand the link between the transfer and behavior change. This experience proved that cash does not work in isolation when integrated strategically, it amplifies impact and strengthens overall program effectiveness.



5. When making the case for more and better CVA, how do you address concerns about risks – for example to recipients, staff, and financial service provider partners – which are often raised?

When advocating for CVA, I stress that risks are real but manageable with the right systems in place. For recipients, concerns often involve exclusion, misuse, or protection issues, which we address through strong registration and verification, clear eligibility criteria, and robust feedback mechanisms.

For staff, the focus is safeguarding and operational security, supported by clear roles, training, and protocols to handle sensitive data responsibly. With financial service providers, risks lie in compliance, liquidity, and data protection, managed through strong contracts, data-sharing agreements, and contingency planning, alongside regular communication and trust-building.

Overall, CVA risks are not greater than other modalities—just different. By embedding accountability, transparency, and preparedness, we show donors and partners that these risks can be mitigated, shifting the conversation from whether CVA is risky to how it can be responsibly scaled.

6. What are the main advocacy messages you use to support National Societies in engaging with their partners on using cash and voucher assistance as the default modality in contexts of conflict, crisis, and emergencies?

My message to National Societies is clear: in times of conflict and crisis, cash should be the default. Needs are diverse and shifting, and cash allows families to decide for themselves whether for food, shelter, medicine, or transport while in kind aid often cannot keep pace.

Cash also ensures speed, scalability, and accountability. With preparedness, it can be delivered within days, is traceable and efficient, and supports local economies.

Most importantly, cash is not just assistance but a strategic tool. Making it the default shows that National Societies put flexibility, efficiency, and dignity at the heart of emergency response.

7. What strategies do you employ to support measuring the impact and efficiency of cash and voucher assistance programs?

Measuring the impact and efficiency of CVA requires balancing data with people's voices. On one hand, we use monitoring systems post-distribution surveys, market assessments, and outcome tracking to measure how cash is spent, whether it meets needs, and its effect on household decisions.

But numbers alone don't tell the whole story. We complement them with feedback channels, focus groups, and direct engagement with communities. This helps us understand how assistance is perceived whether it reduces stress, restores normalcy, or supports meaningful choices ensuring programs are both accountable and people-centered.

8. What do you enjoy most about your job? Moreover, what do you find most challenging in the role?

What I enjoy most about my job is the sense of purpose it gives me knowing that my work supports families during their hardest moments and helps shape systems that respond quickly and effectively. I especially value the chance to innovate, whether by integrating CVA into new sectors or strengthening preparedness, and seeing ideas turn into real change on the ground is deeply rewarding.

The biggest challenge is balancing urgent humanitarian response with long-term planning. Emergencies demand speed, but we also need systems that are accountable, efficient, and sustainable something especially complex in contexts like Lebanon.

For me, the joy and the challenges are part of the same journey: the challenges keep me grounded and learning, while the rewarding moments remind me why this work matters.

9. If you could give one piece of advice to a fellow colleague working on CVA in the MENA region and beyond, what would that be?

My advice is to never lose sight of the bigger picture: CVA is not just about money it's about restoring choice, independence, and dignity in times of crisis.

I also encourage colleagues to embrace flexibility and innovation. Every context is different, and the strength of CVA lies in its adaptability. Don't be afraid to test new approaches, learn from setbacks, and keep improving.

Finally, build partnerships and trust. No one can deliver CVA effectively alone. Strong collaboration with communities, colleagues, and partners makes CVA more than assistance it becomes a pathway to resilience.

