HUMANITARIAN CASH COORDINATION IN THE CYCLONE IDAI RESPONSE

After-Action Review by the Southern African Technical Cash Working Group September 2019

Abstract

The paper, an initiative of the SARTCWG, the use of Cash in the Cyclone Idai Response, with a focus on the role of national CWGs, including lessons learnt and recommendations for future responses.
**Introduction**

The March 2019 Cyclone Idai resulted in a significant humanitarian emergency across three countries in the Southern Africa region with the declaration of an L3 emergency in Mozambique. Humanitarian Cash Working Groups (CWG) activated in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique, with a pre-existing regional CWG activated, based in South Africa, to provide support and information sharing in the broader response. With the emergency response period now over, the Southern African Technical Cash Working Group (SARTCWG) has conducted an after-action review of its role and the role of the national CWGs in the response, to ensure that the experiences from the emergency were captured and to share recommendations that may be of use to the broader humanitarian community.

The after-action review was created, with the support of the co-chairs of the national CWGs, from responses from eighteen agencies across the three countries, who completed an online survey, which asked about their use of Cash, how they had engaged with the CWGs, what challenges they had encountered and how they felt the response was undertaken. These answers were combined with records of interviews with the key agencies, and donor stakeholders collected by the Inter-agency CashCap Coordinator to the SARTCWG, during his field missions to the three countries. Out of that review this report has been created which is structured to cover each of the three countries and the regional CWG, looking at their preparedness activity, the use of cash in the response, how the CWG was able to respond and recommendations for future humanitarian responses.

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Mozambique
Preparedness
It has long been the policy of the Mozambique government that they did not approve of the use of cash transfers in emergency settings. The government had ideological concerns about the development of a hand out mentality, with a strong feeling that communities understood in-kind to be time-limited, but cash transfers would raise expectations for ongoing welfare support that the government would not be able to fulfil. They also had significant concerns on how the cash would be used, with comments around it being used for alcohol and tobacco noted. Traditionally cash has been managed and coordinated by the social protection ministry, not by the disaster management agency (INGC) responsible for coordinating humanitarian emergencies. The social protection ministry was not directly linked to the CWG instead working through the UN-led social protection working group (SPWG), where there was a focus on how humanitarian programs could connect to social protection, mainly through horizontal expansion, and how the registration systems for the humanitarian and national social protection system could be better connected.

Since the 2017 El Nino response, a CWG body has existed in Maputo which has been working on advocacy looking to open space for humanitarian cash as a response option. This advocacy had been funded by DFID and ECHO and undertaken by the cash working group and had involved multiple training events and exposure visits by government staff to other countries in which humanitarian actors were using cash at scale. Most actors agree that space for discussions on these topics were slowly opening, and an advocacy document had been drafted, which recommended use of cash in emergencies where feasible and appropriate. Unfortunately, the paper was scheduled to be considered two weeks after the landfall of Cyclone Idai, and as a result, when the storm hit advocacy and preparedness for cash in emergencies had not yet reached an operational point.

The Response and the CWG
After the landfall of Cyclone Idai on the 15th of March 2019, the city of Beria became an island functionally for the first two weeks with its port damaged, key stocks damaged, and critical roads north and south cut multiple times, outside of the city and area the size of Luxemburg was submerged and even assessing the expected need was a challenge. As a result, an L3 humanitarian emergency was declared. As the markets were not functioning and it was unclear at the time if there was approval by the government for the use of Cash, the initial response analysis by actors was to focus on in-kind and significant efforts were put in place to establish logistics pipelines to bring in food, hygiene and other essential goods.

In the week leading up to the landfall of the cyclone, the CWG in Maputo began to meet with three meetings taking place before and after landfall of Idai that were well attended, however very rapidly the attendance decreased as technical staff were deployed and the scope of the response became clear. As a result, the Maputo CWG was unable to make strategic recommendations about the use of cash or the role of the CWG in the response in the first week of the response. This situation was compounded as the co-chairs of the CWG in Maputo, who were double hatting, suddenly had a surge of work in the main jobs and were deployed to field locations with limited communication capabilities.

In Beira, it was rapidly decided to set up an additional CWG as that was the focus of the response and where many technical cash and markets staff were to be based. This CWG had different agencies co-chairing than the Maputo as those agencies did not have staff available to support the new CWG. As a result, during the initial response, there was a loss of institutional knowledge, with the Beira CWG
starting from scratch with poor communication between Maputo CWG and the Beria CWG. This poor communication was compounded by the high cost of travel and limited internet communication between the two hubs, with a surge of technical teams from the global level, as a result of the L3 being declared, deploying directly to Beira without travelling via Maputo.

Consequently, there was miss-understanding in Beria concerning the approval on the use of Cash. The actors in CWG worked under the assumption, that if evidence could be collected on households, markets, and financial service provider (FSP) suitability, which supported the use of cash, then the Government would grant approval to the use of Cash as a response option. Consequently, significant efforts were put into creating households and market surveys and in their data collection. While this was later useful for supporting field level voucher design and programming it was not used for advocacy purposes, towards the use of cash programming.

It was recognised by actors that there was a capacity gap in the coordination of the Beira CWG and a request was made to CashCap to deploy an expert to lead the CWG, and to the Southern African Technical Cash Working group (SARTCWG) to deploy surge support. In total three experts were deployed as surge support to Mozambique, the SARTCWG deployed two experts; Maputo was supported by one of the SARTCWG co-chairs, and Beria was supported by the Coordinator of the SARTCWG, who had been deployed to the regional response by CashCap. After the initial surge support Beria was support from mid-April three months by a dedicated Portuguese speaking CashCap expert.

As a result of the additional support, the communication issues were resolved and the CWGs were able to confirm that cash would not be used in the emergency response and that coordination of vouchers would be done via the traditional cluster system. These decisions, however, did not take place until the 24th of April or 38 days after the start of the response. Due to the delay in making this decision, only five NGOs were implementing vouchers programs by the middle of June.

Once the dedicated Portuguese speaking CashCap CWG coordinator was deployed to Beria, the CWG was able to focus on the needs of its members. Feedback from the after-action survey reported that the CWG was able to provide robust coordination, advising members of program design and technical standardisation, facilitating experience sharing and avoiding repetitive assessments. It was also able to provide Portuguese training for national staff and actors on basic Voucher programming in emergencies. The Beria CWG was also able to coordinate well with the Maputo CWG to coordinate on voucher amounts so not to conflict with existing and predetermined Social Protection assistance.

The CWG coordinator in Beira was also able to be present in most meetings with the local government, INGC, INAS (SP) which helped build a relationship with the decentralised municipal authorities. As a result, there was a growing acceptance of vouchers by local authorities after they had seen it being implemented and identifying the added value for the beneficiaries and the local markets. This acceptance was further strengthened after the CWG held a training on Vouchers for the local government actors, facilitated by the deployed CashCap expert. Additionally, there was a growing interest by retailers to participate in vouchers programs once they were confident that there were no delays in reimbursement for existing vendors.

**Key lessons from the response.**
Below are several key lessons learnt and recommendations from actors working on the response.

- It was good that CWGs were activated both in Maputo and Beira, but there were communication challenges between the two, with both CWGs unclear of the role of the other leading to unnecessary delays as both CWGs did not want to make decisions in conflict with
each other. This was compounded by the extremely high turnover of staff in the members of the CWG leading to loss of intuitional memory.

- CWGs should develop contingency plans, for how they will respond in sudden-onset emergencies and what responsibilities sub-workings groups will take on.
- It should be clear which forum is empowered to make strategic decisions, in this case, that cash was not a practical response option due to the lack of acceptance of cash as a modality for emergency response, and lack of expectation that that mandate would change in short to medium term.

- The focus on Cash programming led to voucher advocacy being neglected. Clarification was not pursued on what type of voucher programs were approved, and which body would have to sign off. An assumption was made that all types were accepted, leading to uncertainty and delays after the decision to move away from cash was made.
  - During preparedness activities, efforts should be made in parallel to clarify and support the use of vouchers as well as cash programming.
  - In an unclear policy environment, a dual-track approach preparing for both cash and vouchers would have better positioned the humanitarian actors.

- The CWG needed strategic and technical direction and a dedicated focal point. The rapid turnover of cwg co-chairs in the initial stage of the response, who did not have a good understanding of the context, led to confusion and wasted energies.
  - In future sudden onset emergencies priority should be given to identifying a dedicated coordinator of the CWG who can work in the role full time to gain keen situational awareness and be able to guide the technical and strategic decision making of the CWG, and other stakeholders in the response.
  - Strategic response analysis to be undertaken as rapidly as possible as a priority to ensure that data collection and technical program design can be directed correctly.
  - The quick request for CashCap for a "neutral" CWG coordinator with strong buy-in from members and OCHA enabled the forum to resolve its initial communication and coordination confusions rapidly. Relying on external resources is not ideal as they may not be available in the future. Efforts, therefore, should be made to identify how these roles could be achieved using existing in-country resources.

- The Maputo CWG had developed a significant number of documents and guidance on cash in Mozambique, but during the initial stage of the response, they were not available. This lack of core documents on the background of cash and vouchers in emergencies in Mozambique limited the initial development of a shared understanding and what was possible/feasible in the Mozambique context.
  - This was resolved by the creation of a google group mailing list and a humanitarianresponse.info page to centralise information sharing and ensure that new actors to the response were able to access previous discussions.
  - It is recommended that CWGs ensure that all documents developed are published in a central repository, (humanitarianresponse.info and CaLP being options,) for use by actors in future responses.

- There was an initial disconnect between the working of the social protection working group (SPWG) and the CWG, while this did not have significant impacts in this response, it did lead to some duplication when planning the early recovery stage of the response.
  - It is recommended that the CWG co-chairs to engage with the SPWG to share CWG planning and feedback to CWG the plans of the SPWG.
Zimbabwe

Preparedness

Zimbabwe had a significant pre-existing food security situation, with an El Niño induced drought and economic crisis in 2018/2019. As a result of this the CWG was already active, with a considerable cash caseload across the country covering the ongoing lean season/drought response from late 2018. The CWG had developed a minimum expenditure basket, that was being used to calculate transfers for lean season support and was engaging closely with the government. Development actors who were involved with the CWG had undertaken significant work with the government on its social protection programs which were well mapped. However due to the budget issues of the Zimbabwean government, these programs are currently not funded, and it was not seen as feasible for them to be used as part of a horizontal or vertical expansion by humanitarian actors. The government was in favour of Cash programming if the markets were functioning, and activities were coordinated with the relevant authorities.

The Response & the CWG

The CWG met rapidly after the start of the response and created a technical team to coordinate a rapid multi-agency and multi-sector market analysis in the affected regions. This rapid assessment was completed by the 5th of April 2019, twenty days after the start of the response. The results confirmed initial assessments that the markets in affected areas were not functional and that there was significant damage to infrastructure linking the affected region to the rest of the country that needed to be repaired. As a result, it was agreed to continue with the use of in-kind to cover the needs in the response and to undertake a second market assessment to be completed by the end of May 2019. This latter market assessment informed the CWG that the markets had recovered suitably for cash (local bond notes &USD) to be used as a response option. However, by this point, the emergency response stage had started to scale down, so the CWG moved to focus on technical standardisation for economic recovery and conditional CFW programs.

The CWG in Harare was disrupted during the initial stages of the emergency but rapidly recovered with all organisations being able to maintain representation at the national level CWG. Additionally, due to the more limited size of the response, it was decided not to set up a new Sub-CWG body closer to the affected area. To provide technical support to the CWG, a request was made to CashCap to deploy an expert to provide short term surge support, and a Zimbabwean national CashCap expert was deployed by the end of the first month of the response.

One factor that impacted the CWG was the lack of capacity in the existing Inter-cluster system, which was not operational before the emergency. This was resolved as the response moved forward but added expectations by external stakeholders for the CWG to play a coordination/response analysis role it had not been planned to have.

It was additionally quickly realised by agencies, that the Minimum Expenditure Basket had been developed to meet the needs of the lean season response and did not match the needs of populations affected by the flooding. As a result, the CWG had to review and create an emergency Minimum Expenditure Basket to compliment the work already undertaken.

The deployed CashCap expert, with the support the SARTCWG coordinator and World Vision was able to provide a five day CaLP certified training for program staff to ensure that the CWG was up to date with current developments in cash programming, and out of the training were able to develop an operational work plan for the CWG moving forward. This training which was funded by World
Vision through ECHO funding was attended by staff from twenty-one organisations, (one red cross, seven UN, twelve INGO, and one government department.)

**Key lessons from the response.**

A sudden onset emergency in Zimbabwe was unexpected; the CWG had been structured to respond to a slow onset drought response in which they would have had more time to assess the situation and develop plans. However, the CWG was able to respond rapidly with a key factor facilitating a rapid assessment was the harmonized market monitoring tools that the CWG has been using since 2016. This involved the CWG members undertaking biweekly markets and commodity prices data collection and WFP providing data analysis and report creation. This pre-existing system and capacity allowed the agencies to rapidly undertake a market assessment in the aftermath of the Cyclone.

- With increased climate volatility, the CWG could look to develop contingency plans in place on how it could respond during a future sudden-onset emergency.
- The CWG can store the market assessment tools and other resources developed during this emergency for use in future responses.
- The CWG can work to develop clear SOPs for assessment, coordination and analysis for future responses.

- The CWG discovered it had limited visibility and actors who were active during the emergency response, but not during the lean season response were not aware of it
  - Creation of a humanitarianresponse.info page to provide contact details for the CWG and a google group mailing list so that new members can see past discussions.

**Malawi**

**Preparedness**

In Malawi a significant amount of work had taken place to prepare for a slow onset emergency, with multiple projects focusing on targeting using the same criteria as the government social protection program, however the sudden onset of the Cyclone resulted in a majority of the preparedness work not being used, as the focus was on life-saving emergency assistance. Lean season targeting focused on vulnerability to economic changes while targeting for flooding was based on displacement. As a result, agencies primarily used their in house targeting system to identify households. Additionally, while the social protection systems were not significantly affected the case management system had, and it was realised that social protection system would take several months to return to normal, with multiple government staff members reported as displaced, and that it would be used during the recovery stage when it had re-established its systems.

**The Response and the CWG**

Markets and in particular pay points for the primary financial service providers were disrupted by the flooding, however ongoing market monitoring by the WFP Vam unit showed that they were able to regenerate rapidly, in part due to the limited geographical impact of the flood. Within two weeks of the start of the emergency, most markets in the affected areas had seen pricing and the availability of goods within them to normal levels. However, household’s ability to access the cash payment system was impacted with a significant number of displaced households reporting the loss of their government id documents that were required at the payment sites. Additionally, the area affected was not one customarily targeted by humanitarian actors meaning that several agencies reported that they used in-kind transfers for the first month while they negotiated contracts with financial actors who had coverage in the area.
The Government of Malawi played a key role in the response, with the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA) having responsibility for coordination. There were issues of duplication during the initial weeks of the response, as a significant number of Malawian private actors and companies provided assistance directly to displaced camps without going via the official coordination system put in place by the government at the district level. However, this was mostly resolved by the first month of the response.

The Government of Malawi is currently extremely pro-cash, and provided a clear plan to the humanitarian community, that the emergency period would last three months, and that In-kind could be used for the first month but by the second and third month only cash-based assistance would be approved. This strong government endorsement of cash supported the working of the CWG as it provided clear strategic direction leading to the CWG being able to access resources from its members to undertake the rapid assessment.

The CWG had similar issues to both Zimbabwe and Mozambique in that it had been set up to respond to slow-onset emergencies, and suffered from capacity gaps during the initial weeks of the response. After a slow start, CWG was able to identify and develop market assessment tools and mapped which cash implementers were working in the flood-affected areas to support coordination, by the end of the first month the CWG was able to confirm that cash was a suitable response option.

With the support of the SARTCWG coordinator, the CWG was able to rapidly develop a Multipurpose Cash Values covering multisector needs as the food security-focused lean season MEB was recognised not to be useful for the response. The CWG was able to rapidly develop the transfer amounts via the strong links it had with the food security cluster, and the active engagement the members of the social protection working group gave to the CWG to ensure that it was harmonised with their previous work.

From the onset of the emergency, there was a clear focus by donors and the government to ensure that after the three-month emergency stage, future programming would be harmonised with the government social protection systems. As such donors funded the leading un agencies to provide a basic needs cash transfer as a parallel system for two months, with a key focus on building on the government system as much as possible. The Government had recently completed a unified national registry, (a social registry covering almost 100% of the country population) which was used to target the most vulnerable ten per cent of the population in the affected areas to develop beneficiary lists. Registration of households was done via Scope, with distribution completed via WFPs FSP system with third-party monitoring via an INGO. Other humanitarian actors are continuing to use cash programming but focusing on economic recovery and conditional cash transfer programs during the recovery stage.

Key lessons from the response.

- The CWG, while playing a key role in the response, did not have a formal structure, being a voluntary association not formally linked to the humanitarian structure or the government.
  - Formalise the CWGs role and its connection to the Department of Disaster Management Affairs so that it be incorporated into strategic planning.
- The CWG co-chairs had not planned to commit the extra time required to provide the increased support to the CWG that’s its role during the emergency required; this delayed the progress of the CWG.
  - It is recommended to identify a dedicated resource to support the CWG in emergencies as the workload can be expected to increase dramatically.
The Southern Africa Response Technical Cash Working Group (SARTCWG)

Preparedness

The Southern Africa Region Technical Cash Working Group (SARTCWG) was created in 2017, in recognition of the need for better-coordinated cash transfer responses to humanitarian crises in southern Africa. In the aftermath of the 2016-17 El Niño, agency and development partners identified worrying patterns in cash programmes in emergencies, where partners would collect duplicative and often contradictory needs and vulnerability information and implement cash responses in a manner which led to overlaps in some locations, where other areas of high need were left out of support entirely. The features of cash transfer programmes, even those implemented in the same geographical area and reaching the same communities, frequently differed, on occasion leading to substantial differences in cash transfer values received by households and risking the potential for contributing to conflict. The SARTCWG is led by WFP and World Vision International, and participants include UN agencies (including UNICEF), INGOs, and key donor partners active in Southern Africa. In non-emergency periods, SARTCWG meetings take place quarterly in advance of a high-level RIASCO/R-UNSDG Social Protection Platform chaired by the UNICEF Regional Director, which is empowered to take forward the recommendations of the SARTCWG.

Before the recent emergency, the SARTCWG had developed three tools for use by CWG and Cash actors in the response;

- Considerations in Determining Cash Transfer Values: Towards Harmonising Cash Transfers Programming in Southern Africa
- Mapping of Financial Service Providers in Cash Transfer Programming in Southern Africa

The Response and the SARTCWG

The SARTCWG was activated as the response started, with an aim on providing a platform for sharing updates from different countries, to promote situational awareness of the use of cash across the response. The SARTCWG also aimed to identify tools and best practices that could be shared between countries and provide support to national CWGs as required.

As the scale of the response began to become apparent, the SARTCWG co-chairs requested from CashCap the rapid deployment of an expert to provide dedicated support to the body. CashCap was able to respond with a dedicated coordinated deployed for three months.

The SARTCWG held three regional calls during the response and created a google group mailing list to facilitate the sharing of resources across the three countries. These resources included cross sharing the draft market survey tools developed in Zimbabwe and Mozambique that supported their development and a Cash 4W tracking template developed by Malawi. The SARTCWG also shared the work it had developed on MEBs for the region, and the co-chairs and coordinator supported Malawi and Mozambique to develop draft MEB and multi-purpose transfer value amounts.

One key challenge in responding to the emergency was from a regional level there was limited visibility of the existing CWGs in the affected countries with the CWGs having not published online contact details or documents. Additionally, the overstretched nature of the national CWGs meant that they were unable initially to respond to a request for information to the SARTCWG. Identifying this issue, the SARTCWG team focused on providing technical support to the national CWGs teams.
to enable them to respond operationally to the response. This included creating online data repositories and mailing groups, providing technical inputs on tools and analysis of collected data and supporting strategic discussions around the role of the CWG in the response.

The SARTCWG itself was also not well known in the response countries before the start of the current emergency, of the 16 agencies who responded to the survey only six were aware of the SARTCWG before the response. Notably, during the first call, almost all the actors joining the call in the affected countries were from WFP or WV the two co-chairs of the group. As the response progressed, the SARTCWG profile was raised with a wide range of actors joining future discussions.

While there was active initial engagement with the SARTCWG by cash actors at the country level, this reduced, by month two, as the country CWGs became increasingly operational, and it became clear that in Mozambique and Zimbabwe the use of Cash would be a much smaller scale than that had initially been expected. With Mozambique only using vouchers at a limited scale, and Zimbabwe response largely using cash in the recovery stage, after the initial market assessment and resource mobilisation, actors operating in only one country saw limited value in maintaining situational awareness of the neighbouring responses. As a result of this, and with the national CWGs no longer requiring technical support, partly as a result of the deployment of two CashCap experts, by the end of the third month of the response it was decided to return the SARTCWG to quarterly meetings, and to focus on lessons learnt from the response.

Key lessons from the response.

- The lack of an updated mapping by the SARTCWG of CWG focal points in the affected countries delayed its ability to engage rapidly.
  - SARTCWG Co-chairs to engage with CWGs to maintain an active connection and ensure that the link to the SARTCWG is maintained, especially when there is turn over of national CWG coordinators/co-chairs.
- The setting up of an online presence of the CWGs in the response was useful for raising their profile and enable additional actors to coordinate. This did not have to wait until the emergency and could have been done pre-crisis.
  - SARTCWG to support national CWG to have webpages, either on humanitrianaresponse.info or CaLP.
- Multiple actors commented on the value of the CaLP organised meeting of CWG chairs in the East Africa region.
  - This could be replicated in Southern Africa by the SARTCWG, who could lead it themselves or facilitate CaLP to undertake a session, to support the development of a regional community of practice.
  - As well as the quarterly SARTCWG meeting open to all actors, more regular meetings and contact with the co-chairs of the national CWGs, would enable better links between the CWGs in the region and allow identification of how the regional body could support national CWG issues.
- Capacity Building was an area that all CWG co-chairs and members identified as a possible role for the CWG.
  - The SARTCWG could look to identify or facilitate training, key areas identified were;
    - For program teams on new developments in Cash,
    - Regional developments on linking social protection to humanitarian cash
    - Capacity building to CWG Coordinators.
Conclusions.

Key Recommendations from the response.

- The risk of sudden onset emergencies in Southern Africa was undervalued in strategic planning. While most responses in the region are related to lean season hunger, a repeat of a sudden-onset emergency should be considered.
  - The CWG’s could look to develop contingency planning SOPs for how they would respond in a sudden-onset emergency.
- CWGs being informal bodies were not linked sufficiently to the government and humanitarian system and did not have stand operating procedures for how the bodies could inform response analysis.
  - The CWG’s could engage with the existing systems to map what their role should be in future emergencies.
- The model of technical staff from two or more agencies, double hatting as CWG co-chairs works well as a mechanism is maintaining the CWG as a low-cost entity between major responses. However, once a response starts, the workload of the staff playing this role dramatically increases, leading to a loss of capacity at the moment the workload of the CWG dramatically increases.
- During the initial stages of an emergency, if the CWG is playing a key role in response analysis to determine if Cash is a viable response option and/or a standard transfer value, the role of a CWG coordinator becomes a full position requiring dedicated focus. Creating assessments, analysing data, and attending the other cluster and social protection coordination bodies during the first two months of a response requires at a minimum eight hour a day, five days a week of work, with a technical expert double hatting in a program role for their agency will not be able to provide the required support.
  - This issue was resolved, during the recent response, via the deployment of three dedicated full-time CashCap experts. However, ideally, this need should be resourced from the country, and the requirement for it included in contingency planning.
- During the response there was an influx of global experts and new agencies operating who were not able to gain an understanding of the work undertaken before by CWG, leading to duplication of past activities and a focus on the wrong priority areas.
  - CWGs should ensure that minutes of their meetings, and products that they develop are published online.
- The connections between the CWG in a country and the national Social protection working group, in all three countries in the response there were no formal links and it was discovered that work undertaken by the social protection working group to develop tools for post-disaster needs assessments, would have been of significant value to the CWGs during the initial response period.
  - Formalise a connection between the Social Protection Working Group and CWGs to ensure that both are kept aware of each other’s activities and can identify opportunities for collaboration.