Cash-Based Responses/Technical Working Group (Northern Syria)

Meeting Minutes: Thursday 5th November

Venue: IRC, Antakya

Coordinator: Jennifer McAteer cbr.twg@gmail.com

Attendees: IRC, CRS, NGO forum, PIN, Big Heart, GOAL, ACTED, Mercy Corps, NRC, REACH

Attachments: October market monitoring report, Mercy Corps presentation, Price monitoring harmonised form

Dropbox link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/t44bfyivqctdqtq/AABf4QaVRt2EzXKPv2q8LTXea

Agenda points:

Welcome, introductions

1. Information sharing between partners
   - Mercy Corps e voucher presentation
   - Round table discussion

2. Assessments
   - IVTS study update
   - Price monitoring items review
   - Market Monitoring update

3. AOB
   - RAM training update
   - FSL WoS HRP meeting update

Agenda points | Summary of discussion | Main take away/action points
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Mercy Corps e-voucher presentation | Mercy Corps piloted an e-voucher card system in Azzaz and Daret Azza sub districts of Aleppo Governorate for 1,000 beneficiaries. Overall the project was considered a success with some observed challenges and requirements for ongoing programmes.

Objectives
- Alleviate risks on border closure
- Improve quality to reach most vulnerable households
- Triangulate MM data and analysis

Setting up process: Contracting and preparation of service providers and printing vouchers -> topping up vouchers -> training vendors -> beneficiary orientation

The cards are handed out to beneficiaries and can then be remotely topped up, reducing the requirement for repeat voucher distributions and transfer of vouchers over the border for validation.

Any comments or questions, please speak to Jen or Roula

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Remaining balance left on vouchers – may be possible to add to next round of distribution</td>
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<td>- Sensitising the authorities on use of e vouchers/ lack of familiarity within community</td>
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<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Needs acceptance from market actors and beneficiaries</td>
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<td>- Technological support required onsite</td>
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<td>- Commodity voucher – restricted based on system provided by provider – need to open this up for more commodities/ value</td>
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<td>- Service fees quite high and to be negotiated with service provider</td>
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<td>- Internet required for syncing intermittently</td>
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<td>- Documentation and payment methods should be clearly agreed with vendors, e.g. exchange rate and validation method prior to the programme</td>
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<th>Questions</th>
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<td>- How many vendors? Is it scalable?</td>
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<td>o Piloted with 11 vendors, (7+5)</td>
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<td>o More vendors would be better for competitive prices among markets</td>
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<td>- How was the relationship with the service provider?</td>
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<td>o Pilot produced a lot of improvements related to the Syrian context and reporting requirements</td>
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<td>- Has this changed the vendor requirements?</td>
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<td>o Already working with these vendors,</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Amended some rules for this programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Internet connection</td>
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<td>o Only required at the end of the day</td>
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<td>- How does the top work if the beneficiaries are not connected to the internet?</td>
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<td>o Information updated on the smart device so when beneficiaries visit the vendor it updates</td>
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<td>- Does the team need to be present all them in future or can the vendors be more autonomous?</td>
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<td>o MC team needed to be present for trouble shooting and monitoring the prices due to limited number of items</td>
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<td>- Is it possible to have commodity groups instead of items?</td>
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<td>o</td>
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<td>- Did the beneficiaries need more support on using the cards (over paper vouchers)?</td>
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<td>o There were some questions but orientation covered how to use the cards</td>
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<td>- Why not set prices beforehand?</td>
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<td>- Any changes geographically?</td>
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### Current programmes:
- Paper voucher for food over 3 cycles
- Aleppo situation has caused changes to current programmes so now incorporating NFI commodity vouchers
- Thinking about opening up to value voucher for food items
- Planning to pilot e-vouchers for hard to reach areas but reluctant if the system still requires heavy onsite presence of staff. E-voucher could be more easily adjusted to households and changing market prices because with price monitoring system the paper voucher programme has a two month delay

### Cash
- Potentially using voucher to distribute cash from shops – exploring possibilities with donors
- Seeing if a mix of modalities would be feasible

### Challenges
- Vouchers are labour intensive and would like to limit exposure of staff in hard to reach areas/ distribution to beneficiaries

### 2.
- 3 programmes
- CFW and vouchers for work
- Vouchers for agricultural inputs
  - Commodity vouchers - seeds and inputs
- Cash distribution through local businesses
  - 4,000 HH
  - SYP denominations large and small vouchers

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**No** – just some time issues on internet varied on location

- Vendor feedback
  - Preferred e-vouchers over paper
  - (Bens also said the same 89% - avoiding going every month to distribution)
- How long to reimburse the vendors?
  - 15 days via hawala
- Expensive investment costs for setting up and large fees to provider

**NB.**
- OCHA may be developing e-voucher programming – speak to STIMA – Jen to follow up with OCHA

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**Round table discussion of activities plus challenges**

(organisation names are anonymised – if you’re happy to share names let Jen know)

1. **Current programmes:**
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2. **Challenges**
   - Vouchers are labour intensive and would like to limit exposure of staff in hard to reach areas/distribution to beneficiaries
| Contracted business owners – commission 1.5%  
Stringent vetting procedures  
Business owner redeemed in USD - set exchange rate by working out the average per day (collect rate several times per day and then average – business owner signs agreement on daily average rate)  
Used farmers groups to verify business owners  
Verify vouchers inside rather than crossing the border – new SOPs written with global guidance  
Targeting – 100% verification of beneficiaries and adapting targeting throughout programme |
| Challenges  
Donor perception  
Need more evidence? |
| Other notes:  
- CFW – 15 day – 10$ per day paid in Syrian pounds  
- Present next month |
| 3.  
- Food, NFI and Ag vouchers  
- Food - 1600 hh with vouchers |
| Challenges  
Paper work |
| Possible solutions  
- SOP – counted inside  
- scanning and sent via email |
| IVTS Study Update  
Report will be shared in the coming weeks through OCHA and NGO forum to CDs/senior management  
A technical meeting will be held in the region to consider the appropriate use of hawala as recommended in the report |
| Send names of nominated relevant colleagues for the meeting to Jen |
| Joint Market Monitoring – October report debrief  
Expanded to northern Hama and Lattakia  
First government controlled area to be assessed with this methodology  
11 partners – new high  
Price changes – very few  
- Eggs down/ tea up  
- One of the most stable months on prices since last month  
Exchange rate up to 339SYP  
Lattakia – one of highest SMEB – some unusual price distortions  
- Chicken was 3 x price |

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- Deir ez Zor highest overall
- Restocking shortages
  - Very few shortages and low restocking times
  - Southern Idleb and Northern Hama – longest time
- Some areas of Aleppo not monitored due to security

Questions
- Is it possible to changing timeline to collect data earlier in the month?
- Organisations in Gaziantep held discussions on adding additional questions on the trade routes and influences
- Demand information – vendor perceptions on business plans for future would be useful
- Price checks in the main commodity origin market e.g. Southern Turkey to see if prices are integrated

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<th>Price monitoring review</th>
<th>Price monitoring harmonisation</th>
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Jen attended a meeting in Amman which aimed at bringing together different methodologies of price monitoring to present a Syria-wide analysis of prices through GIS mapping. GOAL were also representing their organisation price monitoring. Other attendees included CARE, FFP, REACH for their Area of Origin project, WFP, IRD, IMMAP, RFSAN and FAO.

Participants presented the methodology and results of their price monitoring projects. It was tentatively agreed that each project would harmonise the list of items included in their monthly monitoring, and share the data with RFSAN to produce a country wide analysis.

For CBR/ REACH, this would mean adding a potential 10 items:
1. Fresh produce (tomatoes, onions and cucumber)
2. Milk
3. Wages
4. Baby formula
5. Diapers
6. Floor mat
7. Jerry can
8. Blanket
9. Solar lamp
10. stove

Questions:
- The objective is not clear
- Methodology
  - How many more vendors/ time will this add?

Jen to follow up with FAO/ IMMAP
How will data be compared across varying methodologies?
- What is the value added for CBR members?
- Are the items relevant for people purchasing inside – have these been cross checked with focus groups?

Winter items

A list of NFIs for winter, including clothes, bedding and heating equipment has been discussed with the NFI cluster and partners. The list will be provided to REACH to develop forms and price data can be collected in November. The objective of this project would be to see a snapshot of the cost of items inside which could inform further winter voucher programmes in 2016. Although the project has been delayed this year, data can still form a baseline for next year.

Discussion:
- It was suggested that one item be included in the monthly price monitoring as a proxy for winter NFIs to see the trend in price fluctuations throughout the year.
- To enable the data collection to be manageable,
  - the list of items should be reduced
  - forms should be optional for members to choose if they are willing to participate
  - specifications should be flexible.

AOB

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<th>1. Geographic coordination/ 4ws</th>
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<td>Sharing data with the clusters is important to reduce overlap. Let the clusters know when data can be shared with the working group.</td>
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To prepare the 4ws for cash and vouchers, the FS cluster IMO thinks it may be necessary to hold a training on properly filling in the form.

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<th>2. RAM training</th>
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<td>Training was held on rapid market assessment. Partners have since discussed a joint assessment.</td>
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<th>3. FSL WoS</th>
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<td>Jen and some partners were present at the FSL Whole of Syria HRP meeting in Beirut. Cash is growing topic among other hubs and within the FSL cluster. HRP objectives are aimed at ensuring 'appropriate modalities' are used through strong analysis and evidence building. Building a coordination mechanism for cash at the WoS level is being considered.</td>
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Partners to allow cluster to share information with working group
Jen to follow up with IMO on data currently available

Next meeting: Gaziantep w/c Monday Mon 30th Nov. Agenda to follow – will include roundtable sharing of project outlines and challenges. Suggestions for agenda items welcome.