

Lessons Learnt Workshop Report



Pilot Cash & Voucher Assistance Project in Response to Cov-19

Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society

June 2021

Table of Contents

- List of Acronyms & Abbreviation..... 3
- Introduction..... 4
- Pilot Project Overview in Azerbaijan 4
- Workshop Objective 5
- Workshop methodology..... 5
- Process Analysis..... 6
 - Preparedness..... 6
 - Market Assessment 6
 - Response Analysis 7
 - Implementation..... 7
 - Monitoring..... 8
 - Coordination..... 8
 - Project Timeline..... 9
- Survey Findings..... 9
 - Management 9
 - Staff (including the CVA Focal Point)..... 10
 - Heads of Branches..... 10
 - Volunteers 12
- Challenges 12
- Key Achievements & Good Practices 13
- Recommendations 15
- Annexes 16
 - LLW Concept Note..... 16
 - Survey Questionnaire 17
 - List of People who involved Pilot Project..... 18

List of Acronyms & Abbreviation

AzRCS	: Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society
CALP	: The Cash Learning Partnership
CBI	: Cash based Interventions
CEA	: Community Engagement & Accountability
COVID-19	: Covid-19 Pandemic
CTP	: Cash Transfer Programming
CVA	: Cash & Voucher Assistances
FSP	: Financial Service Provider
HQ	: Headquarters
ICRC	: International Committee of Red Cross
IFRC	: International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies
IM	: Information Management
MEB	: Minimum Expenditure Basket
NS	: National Society
OTC	: Over the counter
PDM	: Post Distribution Monitoring
UNHCR	: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	: Water Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had detrimental effects not only on community health but also on communities' access to basic services to meet their basic needs such as education, health, livelihood, and WASH. It damages the economic resilience of people and has a detrimental effect on their well-being.

COVID-19 affected Azerbaijan like all other countries around the globe. As of June 2021, a total of 335.961 positive¹ cases have been recorded in the country, of which 4.973 resulted in death. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict escalation in September 2020 exacerbated the impact of COVID-19. To support Governments' efforts in response to the people affected by COVID-19 and the conflict escalation; the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, together with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, local and international organizations, and UN agencies, has been actively assisting the affected population. Disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic may increase the needs of the population, which Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) can address in an appropriate manner as long as the context allows. CVA enables people to prioritize their needs and affords people to cover their other costs such as transport, rent, utilities, and fees in addition to their basic needs.

As a modality, cash-based interventions (CBI) allow governments and humanitarian actors to implement fast, safe, efficient, and multi-sectorial response programmes in a dignified manner to address diverse needs. Considering the advantages of CVA such as dignity, choice, flexibility, empowerment, cost efficiency, and effectiveness, there is an increasing trend in the humanitarian sector in terms of cash transfer programming. According to "the State of World's Cash 2020" report by CALP; *US \$5.6 billion in CVA was programmed which constitutes 17.9% of all international humanitarian assistance in 2019.*² In two years, it doubled; compared to USD \$2.8 billion in 2016. This development is not only showing the increased portion of CVA but is emphasizing the its quality as well.

The Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society is the largest national humanitarian actor and local responder in the country and has fulfilled its role as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field for over 100 years. Its mandate is to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people affected by emergencies and disasters through its network, comprising the headquarters, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic Committee, eight regional centres, 92 local and field branches, and primary organizations. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, AzRCS implemented a pilot CVA project with technical support of IFRC and in cooperation with the local authorities.

Pilot Project Overview in Azerbaijan

Within the framework of the IFRC Global COVID-19 Emergency Appeal, the AzRCS implemented a pilot CVA project with technical support of the IFRC. The aim of the project was to assist vulnerable households residing in Baku (381), Ganja (187), Sumgait (197) & Absheron (194) regions of Azerbaijan that were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 959 households were reached out of the targeted 1000. The average size of household was 4.1 persons, which means up to 4.000 people were assisted through this project. Identification of the intervention areas and obtaining the lists of the targeted individuals were the subject to approval of the public authorities; thus, the AzRCS preferred to implement this project with consent and cooperation of the government.

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/azerbaijan/>

² https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SOWC2020_Full-report.pdf

Azer Post³ which has a nation-wide coverage and a track record of efficient delivery of postal services both in urban and rural areas, was selected as a financial service provider to distribute the cash through OTC delivery mechanism.

After 11 days of active encashment period, the project cycle continued with the reconciliation and post-distribution monitoring, followed by a lessons learned workshop. Based on the CTP preparedness action, AzRCS assigned a CVA focal point and developed a Technical Cash Working Group in the organization which comprised of 6 people from different functions.(Finance, Information & Public Relations, Volunteer & Youth etc.) The large number of trained volunteers, representing one of the strengths of the AzRCS, was mobilized with the involvement of respective branches, ensuring the smooth and efficient implementation of a highly impactful project.

The cash-based intervention was quite new for the AzRCS team and ensured a relevant and practical exposure to the new modality in which their skills and capacity in CVA were developed and improved. To analyse the implementation of the pilot project, its best practices and challenges, the IFRC and AzRCS conducted a Lessons Learnt Workshop.

Workshop Objective

Main purpose of lessons learnt workshop activity

- to provide a brief presentation of the project life cycle
- to identify challenges and bottlenecks
- to showcase the best practices and achievements
- to collect the feedbacks of volunteers, staff, departments, management who were involved to the process
- to document the outputs of this workshop as a guidance for future CVA projects

Workshop methodology

A total of 28 staff and volunteers from different functions of the AzRCS participated in the project implementation. Initially, the Lessons Learnt Workshop was planned in June 2021, after finalizing the PDM process. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, organizing a large public gathering was not feasible. One Lessons Learnt Workshop opening session was held in HQ with the participation of 8 NS management and staff members involved in project. In this opening session, CTP terminology, pros & cons, minimum requirements, project life cycle and preparedness were presented as a refreshment. A comparison of pilot project implementation with the initial Plan of Action was discussed.

To collect the feedback from all parties, a survey was prepared and integrated into KOBO data collection tool and shared with the branches, volunteers, staff and management. The survey consisted of four different sections representing the four different groups (NS Management, Staff, Branches and Volunteers) and one final section was added to collect the overall feedback from all groups. Questions in each section varied in accordance with the level of involvement of groups to the implementation. Following the feedback collection, the findings were analysed and a closing session was held only with the AzRCS management to discuss and decide on the key strategic focus, organizational and operational adjustments in order to be well prepared for future projections.

For more details, workshop concept note and the survey questionnaire are attached as an annex to the present report.

³ <https://www.azerpost.az/az/index>

Process Analysis

Under this section, all stages of project life cycle are revisited from preparedness to monitoring. The aim is to describe the picture of the whole process.

Preparedness

A baseline report was developed in late 2020

- To determine the feasibility of cash transfers as an emergency response option for the National Society
- To provide baseline information for the development of scenarios that include CVA emergency response options
- To identify priority CVA preparedness activities based on the current situation in country

In January 2021, during the CVA preparedness self-assessment workshop, AzRCS discussed organizational readiness in accordance with the four tracks of the Movement Cash Preparedness Framework. Overall analysis showed that all tracks need to be strengthened. After the workshop, AzRCS assigned one CVA focal point and created the Cash Working Group with the involvement of different functions to deliver a pilot CVA project. The Present Strategy and Response Plan (Strategic Development Plan 2021-2025) of AzRCS does not include CVA as a response option. Successful pilot CVA project showed that the CVA can be integrated into the Strategic Plan.

For beneficiary selection & registration, AzRCS uses manual and paper-based methodology but it is planned to introduce a system for electronic registration of beneficiaries and data management. AzRCS has a beneficiary registration process and a general reporting system in place, but it did not include CVA before the pilot project. NS is using KOBO data collection tool. In terms of capacity, AzRCS' staff and volunteers had limited experience on Cash Transfer Programming but a few point persons, who had taken part in cash working group, possessed basic CTP knowledge. To meet this need, during the implementation of the pilot project, training sessions were held before each stage of project cycle for those involved in the process.

In terms of coordination, there was a cash-working group in the country chaired by UNOCHA but with limited cash actors. During this self-assessment, all shortages and adjustments were identified; some of them were fixed on the way and some other structural adjustments were left as part of capacity building as next step.

Market Assessment

The present section includes the market, FSPs, cash stakeholders, organization capacity and risks assessment results. After relevant assessments, cash stakeholder mapping revealed the presence of quite few cash actors on the ground. ICRC is the main practitioner and UNHCR has implemented a small-scale cash project. Out of the humanitarian scope, the Government of Azerbaijan is implementing a number of social safety net programs, which target specific vulnerable groups with cash grants. Market is accessible and feasible to implement cash project.

Experience in the region showed that the recipients of assistance might have a preference for both approaches; the cash based support as it provides them with flexibility and choice, and in-kind assistance as per their needs and abilities. Unconditional and unrestricted cash will allow recipients to cover their individual needs more effectively. During the COVID-19 crisis or any other emergencies/crisis, different modalities may be relevant. The country has good banking infrastructure; thus, reliable and accountable financial service providers are available. National Society's capacity is low but their openness and willingness to host a CVA project made the implementation of a successful pilot project possible.

Response Analysis

Under the response analysis, three response options were evaluated:

- Cash feasibility, modality & mechanism
- Transfer Value
- Targeting

Assessment results showed that cash assistance modality is feasible in the local market since ICRC was on the ground and was implementing the first phase of their cash project. Among the financial service providers, Kapital Bank and Azer Post were found to be prominent. Considering the Azer Post's nation-wide coverage and reasonable cost of its services, it was selected as a FSP with an OTC mechanism, unconditional and unrestricted cash distribution.

The transfer value was determined based on an assessment of the External Cash-Working Group chaired by UN OCHA, as well as the standard value determined by ICRC, harmonized with the government MEB, and considering the needs of the most vulnerable population in Azerbaijan affected by COVID-19. The calculation below presents the methodology for determining the amount of cash assistance within the pilot project:

- One-off assistance in the amount of CHF 80 per family for food items (covers the needs for 1 month)
 - One-off assistance in the amount of CHF 45 per family for hygiene items (covers the needs for 1 month)
 - One-off assistance in the amount of CHF 20,15 per family for medical expenses or other essential basic needs Response
- In total, 145,15 CHF (270 AZN) per HH.

As mentioned earlier, the target areas were identified by the government; the primary criteria for selection was the extent to which the targeted region was affected by COVID-19. The locations with the highest number of COVID-19 cases and the highest number of people made vulnerable as a result of the pandemic were selected after the process of thorough verification.

Particular focus was placed on targeting the older people who were affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, large families, people with disabilities, pregnant or lactating women were deemed eligible for assistance within the project.

Implementation

To ensure smooth implementation, operation plan, budget, and workplan were prepared. A short-term service contract was signed with the Azer Post for the distribution of assistance. Strong coordination with ICRC on the ground shortened the FSP procurement process since ICRC was already working with Azer Post with the similar procurement procedures.

Green light from the government was granted on **5th of March** and the lists of the targeted people were collected from the local authorities from the areas that government pointed until **15th of March, 2021**. AzRCS local branches retrieved the soft and hard copies of the lists from the local authorities, with necessary steps taken to ensure confidentiality of personal data (Encrypted excel files & sealed envelopes).

IFRC IM delegate processed the collected data and integrated the lists into KOBO using unique QR code for each potential recipient. A training on **verification** and **CEA** topics was held for the volunteers who were 12 (8 female & 4 male) and handled the verification of data and communication activities. Volunteers used smart phones for data collection and outbound calls simultaneously.

After completion of verification, volunteers called all verified recipients to deliver the key project related messages. To ensure the key messages were delivered well to the target people, text SMS content was prepared and shared with Azer Post along with the payment list. A bulk SMS sending was used to inform the recipients additionally.

A special hotline phone number was launched for the pilot project and one trained volunteer was assigned to answer and record all incoming calls between the working hours 9 AM to 6 PM during the active **encashment** period. A Frequently Asked Questions sheet was prepared composed of 19 possible questions and answers. It was delivered to the every party involved the project implementation. (Volunteers, branches, hotline operator, FSP, cash actors, AzRCS HQ staff etc.) In addition to the this hotline number, AzRCS central hotline responded to the calls pertaining to the CVA project as well.

Collected assistance amount was checked on a daily basis with the Azer Post; to ensure that the assistance was distributed in planned period, AzRCS branches carried out the **outreach** activity to the targeted individuals who had not collected assistance. To reach the targeted people, one-day extension was granted for encashment and by the end of March, 30 encashments were undertaken. Of the day after each encashment, payment receipt and daily transaction report were requested from Azer Post and AzRCS Finance team accomplished **the reconciliation**

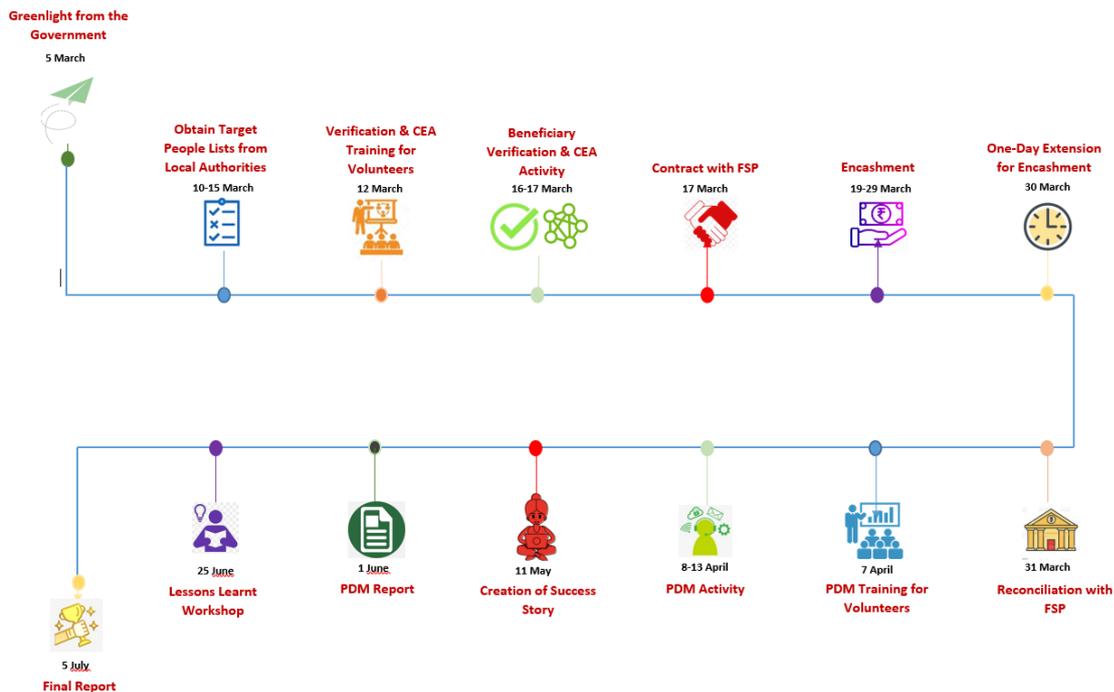
Monitoring

Due to the Covid-19 measures, volunteers conducted post distribution monitoring activity remotely by using outbound calls 10 days after the encashment. PDM training delivered to the same volunteer team and questionnaire was introduced them. A questionnaire comprised of six different sections and in total of 41 questions were prepared to measure the project impact. 257 HHs were surveyed for PDM activity.

Coordination

AzRCS maintained the coordination with local government, movement partners, members of cash working group throughout the project implementation.

Project Timeline



Survey Findings

Management

Overall perception of management with regard to the pilot project is positive, despite the fact the CVA was completely new and demanded much effort and full engagement of different departments. Management appreciated the tangible results of the intervention and appointed out the need to increase the understanding of the complex process of CVA compared to the in-kind interventions among the relevant staff.

In terms of modality, management confirmed that the CVA fits well within the Azerbaijan context as a response option considering its advantages. Through the survey, AzRCS management noted that the IFRC technical support was satisfactory.

The Management also highlighted the positive effect of the CVA pilot project on the organization's image. PDM results⁴ also showed the pilot project enhanced the visibility of national society among the target community in a positive way.

AzRCS local branches mainly work in same premises as the local authorities. Management perceives this as beneficial for beneficiary identification and project implementation. For future projections, AzRCS management underscored the importance of more trainings for the implementing team to build a well-structured CVA mechanism in the organization. An assistant to the CVA Focal point may be needed to ease the workload. Good coordination with humanitarian actors, in order to prevent any duplication of response activities, is another aspect to be considered.

⁴ %83 of Pilot CVA Project PDM participants stated this Project changed their mind to the AzRCS in a better way.

After testing the pilot CVA project, AzRCS saw CVA as a response option to include in the organization strategy; however, the management stated that CVA for AzRCS is still at a basic stage and the institutional competences in this direction need to be further developed to ensure institutionalization of CVA approach.

In terms of CVA project consistency in future, the Management provided positive feedback and stated that it will be ensured by the organization.

According to the IFRC, four tracks of CTP Preparedness Framework, AzRCS think they are good at Communication and Coordination. Yet to implement a CVA project in a minimum standard, other tracks need to be strengthened specifically resources & capacities and program tools. This could be seen as key must-haves for future projections.

Staff (including the CVA Focal Point)

AzRCS staff stated that due to the tight schedule of the CVA project, they were not fully prepared and ready for its implementation. In the end, notable achievements were cultivated on the ground; nevertheless, further knowledge and capacity development interventions are required for the relevant AzRCS staff to ensure proper institutionalization of a completely new assistance modality.

Survey showed that, despite that fact that CVA was a newly introduced modality among the staff, it contributed a lot to their operational capacity. Involved staff mentioned it was an interesting and informative journey that would support their future work. Staff found all operational/organizational processes successful, despite the occasional difficulties with implementation.

The staff were asked to elaborate on the operational/organizational shortcomings that need to be fixed for better CVA projections in the future. The following responses were provided:

- Lack of Local Staff dedicated to CVA
- Lack of Local Experience and Capacity
- Lack of Infrastructure
- Issues related to the government bureaucracy (approval, slow process etc.)

In addition, the staff underlined the importance of enhancing coordination among the workstreams.

Heads of Branches

Heads of branches were fully engaged and contributed to pilot project implementation. They managed the communication and coordination with local authorities. They explained project objectives and activities to local authorities and collected the lists of the targeted people. Branches took part in informing the recipients and carried out outreach activities. Thus, their feedback to the survey is crucial to see and understand the local dynamic.

Although they were involved in a cash project for the first time, they were able to provide detailed information about the project and confirmed that all relevant information (target, objectives, criteria, transfer value and modality) was clearly communicated with them.

Interestingly, despite the fact that CVA modality is a faster, easier and more efficient to deliver compared to the in-kind modalities, 57% of the survey respondents of participants stated CVA is more preferable, while 43% preferred in kind assistances.

The following reasons were pointed out by those who identified CVA as a preferred modality:

- CVA is more accountable
- CVA provides power of choice & dignity
- CVA is more feasible modality for addressing the needs

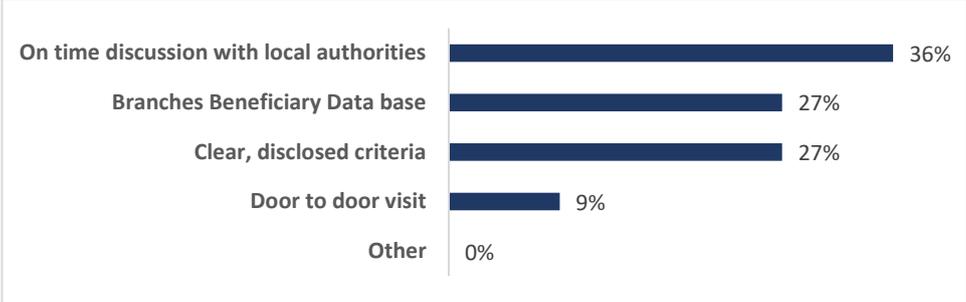
The following reasons were pointed out by those who identified in-kind assistance as a preferred modality:

- CVA was just one-off assistance
- Daily food product is a basic need for vulnerable groups
- In-kind food parcels are more favored by the target groups

The branch staff confirmed that the pilot project did not have any adverse effects on the relations with the local authorities.

As a local level body, branches noted that CVA reached the most vulnerable group and met their needs.

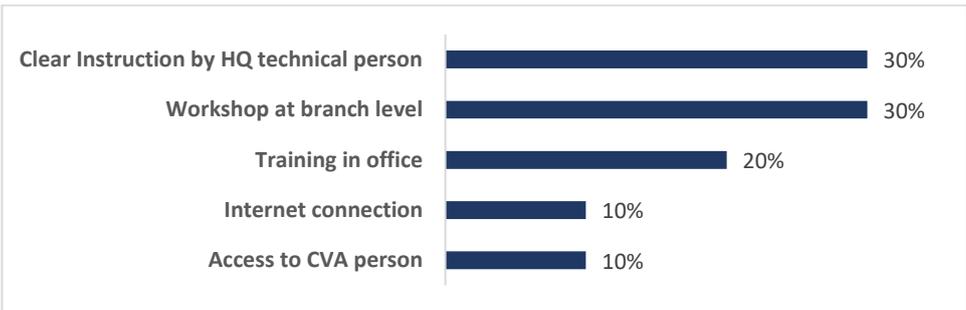
As for the alternative beneficiary registration/selection process for the projects in future rather, the surveyed staff mentioned the following aspects:



The survey results clearly demonstrated the branches’ willingness to work with the local authorities during the process of beneficiary selection, since the AzRCS is not in a level to create an application centre or point.. They noted the importance of a combination of branch recipient pool and coordination with local authority.

The survey respondents identified the tight schedule, as well as the holiday periods coinciding with project implementation as challenges related to project implementation.

The surveyed branch staff highlighted the importance of receiving the clear instructions from the HQ technical point , workshops or trainings on the branch level, for the efficient implementation of CVA projects. The following options were prioritized:



Volunteers

Volunteers were engaged in the pilot project implementation in the processes of beneficiary verification, communication, and post distribution monitoring, outreach and hotline service. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures, all of the above mentioned process were conducted remotely with outbound calls. All outbound calls, answering the incoming calls for hotline service and physical outreach services were carried out by volunteers.

The survey aimed to measure satisfaction level of volunteers and tried to understand what could be done for them to increase their capacity. Survey was presented to the 12 volunteers (8 female & 4 male)

Majority of the volunteers stated their satisfaction with the communication and the level of engagement with target group.

Based on the feedback that volunteers collected from the target group throughout continuous communication, it was revealed that the targeted people appreciated the assistance provided and found it relevant to their needs.

All volunteers noted that they found the trainings (verification, CEA, PDM) very useful for their operational capacity. They requested more trainings and specified they have built capacity in a certain level in CVA project and use of open data collect kit.

Challenges

Final section of the survey contained three different questions focusing on the challenges, achievements and recommendations. All surveyed individuals were requested to answer these questions.

The main challenges identified are as follows:

Lack of Cash Experience and Cash Knowledge

This was a pilot Project and AzRCS implemented it for the first time. It was a new modality for the team. Even though relevant trainings were provided to team at different level and IFRC supported the team technically, lack of cash experience was a demonstrated challenge and the process was complex.

Project Time Frame

The present pilot Project was initiated by the IFRC Emergency Appeal in response to COVID-19. To implement this Project self-assessment as part of preparedness, and other studies like baseline report were done in late 2020 remotely due to the COVID-19 travel restriction. These COVID-19 restrictions and the Escalation of Nagorno Karabakh Conflict put a significant pressure on the NS' institutional capacity; consequently, it had to pause its CVA preparation work and focus on responding to two crises simultaneously. The CVA works were resumed in early 2021. Proper planning and coordination led to successful implementation of the pilot initiative but with limited time-frame for implementation due to fund earmarking requirements. This could also force the team to go through multi-tasking.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Except for the encashment and outreach, all interaction with the target community was carried out remotely due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Verification, communication, monitoring activities were conducted with outbound calls. Calling target people a couple of times in a short period within the same project was also a novel approach, which put a significant stress on the volunteers capacities.

In terms of data quality, in humanitarian sector face-to-face interactions, household visits, key informant interviews, focus group discussions are always more valuable and collected data is of higher quality in comparison to the remote one. On the other hand adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the official bureaucracy, resulting in delays in granting the approval for implementation by the public authorities, retrieval of the lists of beneficiaries and other communication.

Local Authorities Database

Subject to government approval, lists of the target people were collected from the local authorities by the AzRCS branches. During the verification process, which is the key element to define the final beneficiary list, some inaccuracies were detected. Volunteers had to rectify the errors. This was another challenge for the volunteers who had to make longer phone calls and for the IM delegate since analysis of verified data was complicated.

Lack of Local Resources and Procurement Obstacles

It was clear in preparedness session that interaction with the target people would be performed remotely to avoid the COVID-19 infection and to protect the both staff and recipients. To make the outbound calls, to collect the data, to conduct CVA implementation; main IM equipment like smart phones, tablets, simcards, computer were absent. To fill this gap, procurement of these items were budgeted at the beginning. According the NS legislation regardless of the trade volume, each payment has to be done through the banking transaction and in order to make a remittance; an official contract is mandatory between the NS & service provider / supplier. Thus, procurement process was not flexible, and quite time-consuming. This can be interpreted as a challenge and needs to be considered for future projects.

Lack of Local Staff dedicated to CVA

Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society is a strong organization. What makes it very strong is its volunteer pool and the number of main and sub-branches. This pilot project was managed at the central level and the staff in the HQ were engaged in implementation as a part of the Cash Working Group. Staff number was limited in each department in HQ, hence, lack of available human resources dedicated to this project posed another challenge in implementation.

Key Achievements & Good Practices

NS Interest & Openness

Implementing a CVA project in Azerbaijan was a joint decision with the national society. Even though there are a few cash actors on the ground, organization has limited sources and community is unfamiliar with such an innovative intervention modality, AzRCS leadership prioritised cash transfer programming in the country as response to COVID-19. AzRC society took an initiative and facilitated governmental legal procedures in order to assist COVID-19 affected vulnerable groups with cash. To realize this decision, AzRCS embraced the IFRC's technical support and ensured a responsible team allocation. Thanks to the IFRC Emergency Appeal fund and AzRCS ownership, this pilot project was implemented successfully.

Team Spirit, Ownership of Branches & Volunteers

Despite the challenges mentioned above, the team demonstrated a high level of commitment and dedication to accomplish the objectives of the pilot project. The key staff were in charge of multiple complex tasks and had to prioritize them according to urgency and importance, which was a good lesson learnt for responding to future crises and emergencies. Branches and especially volunteers took part in every stage of the implementation, including the data collection, community engagement, communication, verification, post-distribution-monitoring, outreach, and hotline

operation. Their engagement contributed to cultivating a shared vision and understand for the cash project implementation.

Coordination with ICRC and Relation with FSP

In parallel with the commencement of the CVA pilot project, ICRC was implementing its cash project on the ground as a movement partner. ICRC was working with Azer Post as a FSP. Hence, Azer Post was quite familiar with the process requirements. This experience paved the way in negotiation with Azer Post. On the other hand Azer Post quoted a reasonable price in for its services. Coordination with ICRC and FSP experience was a demonstrated good practice within this project.

AzRCS Image After a Successful CVA Project

The project started with consent of government and local authorities provided lists of the target people. Inherently Cash projects have higher levels of accountability, transparency and context-sensitivity. The local government appreciated having carried out a successful project in a very short time and their appreciation of the capacities of AzRCS has increased.

Satisfaction of the Recipients & the Team

During the encashment of project, hotline operator recorded 10 compliments out of 120 received calls. During the PDM, volunteers recorded 41 cases of positive feedback. During and after the project implementation, the AzRCS branches and the Local Authorities received a significant number of verbal messages of positive feedback from the recipients. These boosted the team (staff, volunteers and branches) motivation and increased the sense of their ownership on the project.

AzRCS Staff Capacity and Capacity Building

AzRCS staff, volunteers and branches were face with a new modality of intervention. Their active engagement ensured a clear understanding of the benefits of a cash project and the importance of the mainstreamed communication, coordination and monitoring elements. The volunteers were well trained on how to use technologies and collect data in safe and systematic way.

Cost Efficiency

In comparison with the in-kind assistance, the cash transfer programming is characterized by higher cost-efficiency. It makes possible to reach the project outputs, with lesser CTP costs. This efficiency is two-sided. CTP reduces the transport/logistic expenditures of the organization, as well as the recipients.

Dignity & Choice

Another advantage of the CTP is dignity. It preserves people's dignity by transferring more choice to them on how and when cash is spent.⁵ The [success story](#) of this pilot project published on IFRC & AzRCS online platform is an example of a succesful practice.

⁵ RCRCM CTP FAQs

Recommendations

- Cash does not replace the traditional in-kind modalities, as cash is not always the most appropriate response option to every situation. Yet cash support meets its goal and reaches the vulnerable people. It is fast, efficient and accountable modality. It provides chance of choice to the recipients and cost efficient implementation for the organization. Thus AzRCS need to build competency to identify the where cash can be used appropriately to complement AzRCS response plan and AzRCS needs to include CTP to organization strategic and response plans.
- For the pilot CVA project, AzRCS identified the CVA focal point. IFRC will ensure that CVA focal point participates in all relevant training courses and understands the cash preparedness to build competency in cash programming.
- In pilot project, other departments like Finance, Communication were involved in implementation as part of Cash Working Group but number of the staff in HQ is not sufficient. AzRCS need to increase the staff number align with the national society development plan and identify the key person from each and every department who will manage, liaison, coordinate with CVA focal point, various stakeholders and the management in case of CVA operation.
- By identifying the key person from different departments, CVA focal point should reshape the Technical Cash Working Group and roll out the preparedness components.
- AzRCS need to ensure that a framework agreements with potential financial service providers are in place as a contingency plan in case of any emergency or crises. IFRC will provide technical support in collaboration with ICRC to ensure AzRCS has mentioned FA is in place.
- To create a smooth CVA system, cash related standard operation procedures, terms of references and other relevant documents need to be developed or included to the existing ones.
- CVA focal point needs to lead a household/community level assessment to measure the community cash preferences in certain locations. This assessment will be preparatory and guide future cash projects, additionally it will strength the capacity of the focal point with practical experience.
- Cash programming stakeholders and financial service providers mapping will be needed to establish a financial and technical baseline. CVA focal point can undertake these exercises with Movement Cash Toolkit.
- AzRCS should utilize the power of volunteers in an effective way and identify some volunteers who will be ready and available in case of emergency, who will be trained for cash preparedness.
- To retain the existing capacity already and to increase the levels of professionalism, AzRCS need to undertake more trainings for volunteers and staff.
- CVA used in response to COVID-19 was a completely new modality for AzRCS. Collaboration with local government enabled the retrieval of the lists of target people. AzRCS needs to explore different alternatives for beneficiary registration.

Annexes

LLW Concept Note

<p>Concept Note Lessons Learnt Workshop of Pilot CVA Project hosted by Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society June 2021</p>
<p>Summary</p> <p>Within the framework of the IFRC Global COVID-19 Emergency Appeal, the AzRCS implemented a pilot Cash & Voucher Assistance (CVA) project with technical support of the IFRC. The pilot project targeted people highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that are living in Baku, Absheron, Sumgayit and Ganja locations between the March-May 2021. Following the obtaining the list of targeted people, the project cycle continued with the verification, community engagement and accountability (CEA), encashment, reconciliation, followed by a post-distribution monitoring. In order to conclude the project cycle, the IFRC will organize a Lessons Learnt Workshop together with the AzRCS with the aim of capturing and documenting the key learnings and insights gained that can be usefully applied during future projects.</p>
<p>Objective of the Lessons Learnt Workshop</p> <p>Main purpose of lessons learnt workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to provide a brief presentation of the Project life cycle• to identify challenges and bottlenecks• to showcase the best practices and achievements• to collect the feedbacks of volunteers, staff, departments, management who were involved during the process• to document the outputs of this workshop as a guidance for future possible CVA projects
<p>Planned Lessons Learnt Workshop</p> <p>Initial idea was to hold one full day workshop including three different sessions in a separated premise with participation of all relevant internal and external parties in early June. (Attachment: Initially Planned Workshop Agenda)</p> <p>The pandemic situation, international events held in the country, unplanned organizational and operational developments hindered this planned idea.</p> <p>As a second step, especially considering the COVID--19 measures, an online workshop possibility was preferable, yet this time; lack of volunteers' internet access and lack of technical equipment in branches failed this possibility.</p>
<p>To implement this activity timely and efficiently, the most appropriate methodology is elaborated in this concept note. General plan is to hold a short opening and closing sessions with AzRCS management and staff in AzRCS HQ and in between to collect the feedback of all relevant people with means of a Kobo Feedback Survey Link easily accessible via smartphone browser. This survey will be a short one and request very critical and key feedback.</p>
<p>Parties involved the Project Implementation & Their Roles</p>

Leadership	– Strategic Decision for a CVA Project
Management	– Correspondences with relevant institutional entities
Staff	– Implementation of the Project in work stream level
CVA Focal	– Coordination between the departments and IFRC Delegates
Branches	– Obtaining the targeted people list by the local government, CEA, outreach in local level
Volunteers	– Outbound calls (data verification, information dissemination, PDM data collection)
Volunteer	– Incoming Calls (Hotline Operator)
Process Flow for Lessons Learnt Activity	

Process flow:

- ↓ Preparation and approval of concept note
- ↓ Preparation of a kobo survey – feedback collection
- ↓ Creation of 4 different sections/ 4 relevant parties (*Leadership's strategic opinion is already in place and focal points are staff of NS*)
- ↓ Differentiation of section questions in accordance with the parties' role in Project implementation
- ↓ Basic questions related challenges and opportunities for all parties
- ↓ In class information session with the management and staff in AzRCS HQ conference hall
- ↓ To ensure that the process and objective of this activity is well understood
- ↓ Kobo link of the survey will be shared via whatsapp with relevant pre-selected people
- ↓ Feedback collection (within given deadline) and analysis of the findings
- ↓ To hold a closing session with Management and to evaluate the findings and recommendations
- ↓ To create Lessons Learnt Workshop report

Survey Questionnaire

<https://ee.humanitarianresponse.info/x/XGgfWjBn>

List of People who involved Pilot Project

Nr.	Unit	Name	Position
1	Management	Əziz Qocayev	AzRCS Vice President
2	Management	Ceyhun Mirzəyev	AzRCS Secretary General
3	Management	Shaban Shayev	AzRCS Deputy Secretary General
4	Management	Səbinə Məhbubi	AzRCS Deputy Secretary General
5	Staff	Xalidə İskəndərova	AzRCS Deputy Secretary General
6	Staff	Nailə Cəfərova	AzRCS Head of Finance Department
7	Staff	Seymur Hümbətov	Head of Information and Public Relations
8	Staff	Kamilla İslamova	AzRCS CVA Focal Point
9	Staff	Afag Hüseynzadə	AzRCS CVA Focal Point
10	Volunteer	Azayev Nicat	-
11	Volunteer	Salimov Hüseyn	-
12	Volunteer	Osmanlı Günay	-
13	Volunteer	Aliyeva Zeyneb	-
14	Volunteer	Naciyev Pervin	-
15	Volunteer	Seferzadə Aydan	-
16	Volunteer	Ahmedova Mehriban	-
17	Volunteer	Memmedlasamov Amil	-
18	Head of Branch	Ibragimova Rena	Nizami
19	Head of Branch	Sadikhova Esmira	Nerimanov
20	Head of Branch	Huseynova Turan	Suraxanı
21	Head of Branch	İsgandarova Tarana	Pirallahi
22	Head of Branch	Karimov İlham	Sabunchu
23	Head of Branch	Bandaliyeva Sevda	Sebail
24	Head of Branch	Eyvazov Niyaz	Qaradag
25	Head of Branch	Eyvazov Bahruz	Khazar
26	Head of Branch	Ragimov Talib	Khatai
27	Head of Branch	Quliyeva Hayala	Binegedi
28	Head of Branch	Quliyeva Afet	Nesimi
29	Head of Branch	Huseynov Shahin	Yasamal
30	Head of Branch	Asadov İsmayil	Ganja
31	Head of Branch	Mageramova Matanat	Sumgait
32	Head of Branch	Huseynova Fazila	Absheron
33	IFRC Int. Delegate	Marianna Pecnik	CVA-Shelter Coordinator
34	IFRC Int. Delegate	Hanifi Kınacı	CVA Delegate
35	IFRC Int. Delegate	Stefan Pankl	IM Delegate



Contact Us

<https://www.redcrescent.az/>



www.facebook.com/Azerbaijan-Red-Crescent-Society



<https://twitter.com/azredcrescent>