

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations for Cash-for-Shelter Programmes in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Executive Summary

Despite the increasingly widespread use of cash transfer programming (CTP) to meet humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it was only in 2016 that shelter partners began to consider CTP as an alternative to more traditional in-kind distributions. At the end of 2018, its use in shelter interventions remains limited but there is an increasing need – and appetite – to scale up CTP where appropriate and examine how it could be used more effectively in the sector.

This report details how CTP has been used to support shelter interventions in DRC to date and the lessons which have emerged from them. These were collected during meetings between the Shelter Working Group's Cash-for-Shelter Advisor and Shelter Working Group (SWG) partners. The report then goes on to discuss recommendations and opportunities for future cash transfer programming in the sector in DRC.

Cash Transfer Programming in the Shelter/Housing Sector in DRC

In line with the SWG strategy, most CTP in the shelter and housing sector is used to support the (re)construction of housing using local construction norms, rather than for emergency shelter projects. Typically, support is provided through conditional cash transfers, which aim to cover the costs of materials, skilled labour and other related expenses. Organisations usually – but not always – agree on a minimum shelter design with the community concerned and provide technical and other support to ensure quality standards are met. The transfers are usually also distributed in tranches, the receipt of each being conditional on the completion of agreed stages in the construction process. In cases where some the required materials are not available on the local market, organisations adopt a hybrid approach – combining an in-kind distribution with the cash transfer, and occasionally vouchers. In addition, there are examples of unconditional cash transfers, cash-for-work projects and vouchers being used in shelter/housing interventions across the country.

In light of the current interest from donors and implementing agencies in multipurpose grants, the report also discusses why such approaches in their current format do not adequately increase access to safe and secure shelter and housing in DRC, as elsewhere.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

Several key lessons and recommendations emerge from the cash-for-shelter programmes that have been implemented across DRC to date:

- There is enormous potential to expand the use of cash-based assistance in the sector, building on the lessons learnt and experiences gained to date. There is clear evidence that these can be effectively replicated and scaled up; moreover, they have encouraged community members who were not directly targeted by shelter interventions to improve their own housing, thereby extending the potential reach of such programmes.
- In addition, it is important to consider expanding CTP to include market-based approaches. These go beyond cash/voucher distributions, to programmes which support traders to

increase their capacity and to improve how market systems function. Such efforts should be done in close collaboration with other agencies and sectors. Such approaches are particularly important in areas where the presence of functioning markets can help to facilitate returns.

- The use of conditionality – in this case, the distribution of cash in tranches according to progress on construction - combined with technical support and supervision, can help to ensure that the construction progresses as planned and that it meets quality shelter standards. Such conditionality can also be used to meet other sectoral objectives, for example, the construction of latrines or a household's participation in hygiene behaviour change activities.
- There is evidence that cash-based approaches helped to increase social cohesion and reduced tensions between different communities. Asking beneficiaries to contribute unskilled labour and/or locally available materials also increased their engagement in the project.
- Agreeing a minimum shelter design is an effective way of ensuring that the money distributed is sufficient to complete a full shelter. However, it is essential to ensure that the community is meaningfully involved in the design of the shelter and that it takes into consideration local construction norms.
- Targeting for any cash-based assistance should systematically include socio-economic, as well as shelter vulnerability, criteria to identify those who require monetary rather than/as well as other forms of support. Careful consideration should also be given as to how households without manual labour capacity can most effectively benefit from cash programmes in the shelter sector.
- Cash-based shelter interventions can have a particularly severe impact on the local environment. Shelter actors therefore need to give due and immediate priority to analysing, addressing and monitoring this, as well as how it impacts the local seasonal availability of natural resources. Efforts to do so are currently limited to some tree-planting activities. Furthermore, shelter interventions can be a useful starting point for engaging in discussions, and encouraging community-led interventions, to improve local environmental awareness and natural resource management.
- Seasonal changes in the labour market are also insufficiently considered, and can have a serious impact on existing livelihoods, markets and the programme. More in-depth gender and risk analyses should be systematically included in programme planning and monitoring, with the flexibility to change approach if the context and risk profile of a response changes during the implementation period.
- While not yet used in DRC, cash-for-rent programmes offer a potential avenue for shelter actors to explore, in light of reports that displaced households can be evicted for the non-payment of rent. Further analysis would be required to better understand the problem and its scale.
- As the GTA now prioritises local construction norms in (re)construction and rehabilitation projects, further discussion is needed to find an agreed and acceptable balance between these and humanitarian standards, while also assisting as many families as possible with the resources available.
- While evidence to date has shown that multipurpose grants in their current format do not adequately meet shelter objectives and improve access to housing, further research and analysis should be undertaken to identify how they could be adapted to better do so.