



Lessons Learned Cash for Rent

NRC Cameroon

AUGUST 2022 | LESSONS LEARNED

1 What is Cash for Rent?

Cash for Rent (CfR) assistance is an emergency methodology to address acute shelter needs, particularly in urban centres, where the lack of shelter poses significant threats to protection, safety and the health of displaced families. CfR is one of the cash modalities where the most vulnerable individuals, families and households are targeted.

Importantly, CfR interventions enable crisis affected people to cover rental costs for a short period. CfR is considered a temporary shelter solution yet it can contribute significantly towards a more transitional shelter solution if accompanied by rental agreements, or in some instances, livelihood support. CfR is a conditional and restricted cash modality as beneficiaries are expected to cover rental costs of accommodation that meets minimum sphere living standards. While NRC is committed to increasing the use of cash across its programmes, CfR is not a flawless stand-alone solution. It must be used wisely and in combination with sector specific interventions to generate the best results for the assisted population.



2 NRC Cash for Rent in NW/SW regions of Cameroon

In order for NRC to reach the most vulnerable families with CfR shelter assistance, NRC use a Shelter specific, Vulnerability Assessment Scorecard

(VAS) for targeting the most vulnerable. The VAS prioritises female headed households, people with physical disability, families with school aged children and other highly vulnerable persons and groups most likely to resort to negative coping strategies and experience insecure tenancy.

After a rental market assessment is completed, beneficiaries are assisted with assistance up to a maximum amount relative to the rental market in their location. For the NRC pilot project in Sisia, Bamenda III, and Ntancha in Kumba of Meme Division, beneficiaries received **25000XAF per month, (\$38 USD)** for a period of 3 months, received in one instalment of 75,000 XAF. Due to the risk of eviction, exploitation or abuse, NRC ICLA department and Shelter departments facilitated a training of beneficiaries on HLP rights and adequate housing standards, and have planned a training of landlords in the near future. NRC staff will monitor on a monthly basis to ensure that the shelter conditions meets that of adequate housing and beneficiaries still express their rights to security of tenure. However, in some cases beneficiaries were advised by the NRC Shelter team to move to new locations since their current shelter conditions did not meet the standards of adequate shelter, and since some of the beneficiaries were renting areas with high risks of natural disasters like landslides.



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3 Lessons Learned

NRC is a strong advocate for more effective and nuanced use of cash where it is the most appropriate modality (based on needs, markets, rights and protection considerations). In the case of CfR there are several key steps to maximise success.

- Market assessment is a critical step and tools should be developed to ensure the assessment gives; the market assessment provided information on the shelter typologies, the average cost of the rent, how the tenants paid their rents, the frequency of rent payment, the availability and type of security of tenure, their reasons for settling in that location, the availability of basic services, the state of the shelter facilities and type of shelter market(formal or informal)
 - a) An accurate account of the current rental costs of the target location.
 - b) The different shelter typologies in the community.

Of note, market conditions can quickly change, and people's situations often change rapidly.

- Displaced Persons usually settle or rent houses in illegal settlements, prohibited areas, or high risk areas due to the low cost of the shelter facilities. It is very important that at the beginning of any CFR intervention, a detailed assessment should be done to identify authorized zones for settlement, this will help you design the intervention better, it is advisable to tell displaced persons who have settled in unauthorised zones to move to safer locations after receiving the rents assistance. For the case in Sisia community, 30% of the caseload were living in unauthorised zones and had to be moved to safer locations
- Most of the displaced persons live in shelters that does not meet the adequate housing standards. The objective of CFR assistance is to help displaced persons attain a level of adequate shelter. Therefore, from the assessment, identify the households that will require some repairs by landlords, households that will need some basic facilities like latrines, water and equally those who will have to look for different houses. The CFR assistance should be able to help the households move in to a better shelter. Notwithstanding, it is usually advisable not to move people from their present shelter because a number of factors account for why displaced persons settle in a particular location. Also, some of the beneficiaries have already established some social links with their landlords and community members

- It is very necessary to always consult with the Shelter cluster during assessment design and on the required sample. NRC used a smaller sample size than required. This would have been avoided if prior consultations with the shelter cluster was done.
- Vulnerability Assessment Scorecard (VAS) is a positive way to ensure the most vulnerable populations are reached. This should be promoted further.
- A good number of the displaced persons have debts of rent that have accumulated over several months. It will be important to clearly define if the CFR intervention will be considering this debt or only a certain time frame.
- Rental agreements are critical to ensure security of tenure for the beneficiaries. It equally ensures that landlords and tenants are fully aware of their rights and obligations. Written agreements can prevent problems occurring and allow security for tenants to plan long term. Rental agreements can be verbal or written. Most displaced persons have verbal agreements with their landlords. Ensure arrangements vary according to cultural and legal norms. Even when land or property may have formal links to the market, the displaced population's ability to stay in the accommodation may not necessarily be formally recognized leaving the displaced in an informal or semi-formal market situation. Hosts or landlords may try to avoid registering the stay of beneficiaries despite the existence of a rental contract to avoid taxation fees related with the status of the accommodation. NRC through the ICLA department sensitised the beneficiaries and landlords on the importance of security of tenure documentations and were available to help those willing to have these security of tenure documents. About 70% of the case load had no security of tenure documentations.
- Close monitoring is required to ensure rights of vulnerable tenants are respected. Close monitoring is also required to ensure that beneficiaries use the cash grants to pay for their rents and not divert the money to meet other needs. Some of the shelter structures needed rehabilitation, so a close follow-up was done to ensure that the shelter structures that needed rehabilitation was done.
- It is advisable that Payments be done directly to the beneficiaries through a third party financial service provider and not to the landlords. Paying directly to the beneficiaries gives the beneficiaries bargaining powers with the landlords and checks the possibility of landlords increasing rents
- Shelter staff should clearly explain to beneficiaries the amount they will receive before each distribution and complimented in writing to allow for all literacy levels.
- M&E staff should ensure each beneficiary receives an NRC complaint and feedback card at the beginning of the project. This must include the phone number of 1 male and 1 female M&E staff, for beneficiaries to call if they have any CfR issues.
- It is advantageous for shelter projects, such as CfR, to be complimented by legal assistance and livelihood programs to ensure sustainability and also ensure tenant rights and obligations are upheld.

4 Recommendations and next steps

NRC Cameroon is exploring numerous additional shelter interventions, including CfR and light to medium rehabilitation of housing for no cost periods of rent. In addition, one off grants to landlords for long term rental property use are a common cultural practice in Cameroon and are also being explored. NRC is pursuing further research in these and other areas of CfR to expand the evidence base and ensure the most effective and efficient Modality while ensuring the right to shelter for beneficiaries,

NRC realises that CfR is not a longer term sustainable approach but CfR is a short term solution that can bridge the gap between emergency supports and longer term durable solutions when complimented with appropriate strategies or livelihood interventions. In this regard, NRC continues to investigate multisector approaches to CfR and to learn from lessons during the project implementation.



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