



A member of the community receives cash from Viet Nam Red Cross Society after Typhoon Wutip 2013 © Ly Nguyen /IFRC

Community engagement in Cash Transfer Programming

Introduction

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has continuously strived to respond to the needs of communities and build their resilience to disasters at a local level. ‘Community engagement’ is an approach that puts people at the centre. It promotes two-way communication to provide timely and relevant information to communities, while allowing them to participate in decision-making processes. Ultimately, it helps strengthen community participation in resilience-building initiatives by enhancing their skills, knowledge and connectedness.

Recognizing the importance of community engagement in disaster response and recovery, the Viet Nam Red Cross Society and the IFRC have systematically integrated community engagement across emergency operations in recent years. During and since the Typhoon Wutip/ Nari Operation in 2013-2014, in which cash transfer programming was implemented, community engagement mechanisms and tools have been improved, taking into account lessons learnt from previous operations.

What is cash transfer programming?

Cash transfer programming utilizes cash transfers as an alternative to complement in-kind assistance in order to better meet the diverse needs of disaster-affected populations. Compared to in-kind assistance, cash transfers can be quicker and more efficient. The IFRC has been implementing cash transfer programming in disaster response since 2006.

Background

Within the first two weeks of October 2013, central provinces of Viet Nam were hit by two consecutive typhoons, Typhoons Wutip and Nari, locally known as Storms number 10 and 11. These extreme weather events resulted in 31 people dead and 330 injured, with a total economic loss estimated at USD 734 million.

In response to the disaster, the IFRC launched an emergency appeal of CHF 2,623,263 to assist 34,000 beneficiaries (6,800 households) for a period of 12 months, covering activities from relief, shelter, health, water and sanitation, livelihoods to disaster preparedness. Cash transfer was an integral part of the operation, with IFRC supporting the Viet Nam Red Cross Society to provide grants for 7,500 households.

Community engagement in the Typhoon Wutip/Nari cash transfer experience

The engagement of affected communities in decision-making processes related to cash grants was an integral part of the Typhoon Wutip and Nari operation.

After developing selection criteria and guidelines for allocating grants, the Viet Nam Red Cross Society shared the criteria via local media and public notices. Community members were then invited to participate in village meetings to nominate beneficiaries. The Viet Nam Red Cross Society set a target of at least 70 percent of the affected community members to attend, to ensure adequate involvement. Following the meetings, the lists of beneficiaries were publicized on local loud speakers for three days and in public places for five days to allow for feedback from the community.



Feedback box at the distribution point in Quang Binh, Viet Nam November 2013 © Ly Nguyen/ IFRC

With support from the IFRC, the Viet Nam Red Cross Society developed posters displaying the objectives of the cash transfer programme, the cash grant values, beneficiary selection criteria and selection process, and the hotline phone numbers in case of any questions or concerns. On the day of the cash grants distribution, the posters were displayed at the distribution point, along with the list of beneficiaries and the amount for each family. The phone hotline was complemented by a feedback box and form.

Realizing the limited effectiveness of the feedback box, due to a preference for verbal communication by community members and that beneficiaries tended to keep the cash envelope – in which the cash was given to the beneficiaries – for memory, the Viet Nam Red Cross Society decided to print the hotline numbers on the envelope. Staff reminded beneficiaries to keep it in case they needed to contact the Red Cross later on related matters.

Making improvements in community engagement

In May 2015, as part of the effort to improve preparedness in cash transfer programming, the Viet Nam Red Cross Society worked with a consultant to conduct a review and to capture best practices in beneficiary targeting and impact stories. This initiative provided an opportunity for community members and local authorities to raise their voice and concerns about the process.

The results fed into the development of information, education and communication materials ready to be disseminated to local areas in preparation for the upcoming disaster season. In addition, the work drew out community feedback on the appropriate mechanisms to engage the community in the beneficiary selection process.



Huong Giang, Huong Khe, Ha Tinh. IFRC and Viet Nam Red Cross Society staff interview a beneficiary of the cash transfer programme during the Wutip/Nari operation, regarding their experience. May 2015 © Hoang Nga/ Viet Nam Red Cross Society

Lessons learnt from the assessment

The assessment resulted in a number of findings regarding the beneficiary selection process, including:

- The feedback box was not effective as a feedback mechanism: the Red Cross only received a few response letters from across the nine project sites. This was attributed to the limited availability of the feedback box and also the fact that villagers are more comfortable with verbal communication, which they believe to be more secure and quicker.
- Informal feedback, such as to a village head, is common in many rural communities in Viet Nam. As such, the National Society should also have in place a mechanism and reporting templates for village heads and commune authorities to record the informal feedback they receive. Alternatively, community groups representing various groups such as men, women, children, the elderly, the disabled can be established to respond to community concerns.

Looking ahead

- There is a need to use various feedback channels to accommodate for different groups. The Red Cross should utilize verbal as well as written channels including, among others, hotline phone numbers, encouraging feedback to a village head or community group, and feedback boxes.
- Information should be provided in multiple ways to ensure it is accessible to as many community members as possible. The hotline phone number, for example, should be printed on posters at the distribution points, on envelopes and leaflets which beneficiaries can keep at home, as well as announced on community loud speakers on the days leading to, and after, the cash distributions.
- Red Cross staff and volunteers should receive clear guidelines on the importance of community engagement and how to make feedback mechanisms more accessible to communities. A checklist of reminders at community meetings and distribution sessions would be useful.

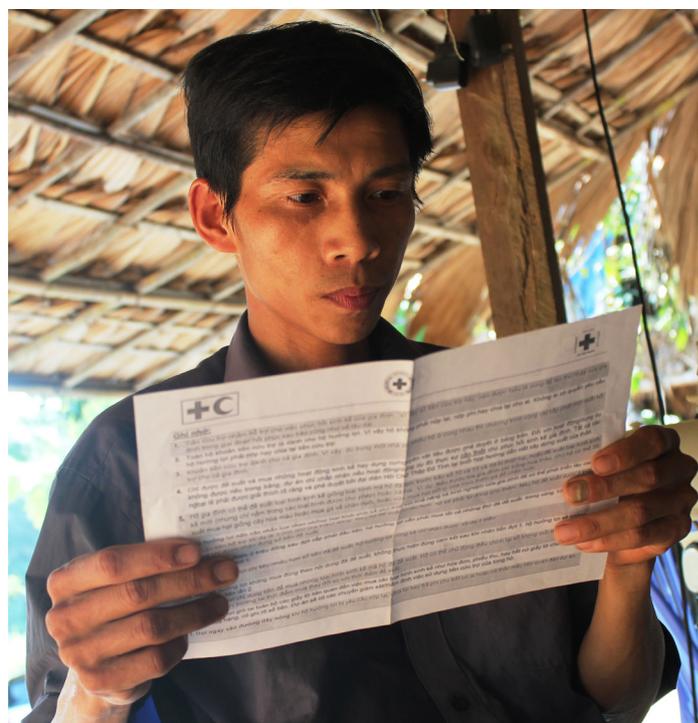
The experience of Tran Van Hieu

Thanks to the phone hotline, the cash was returned

In October 2013, when Typhoon Nari hit Huong Giang commune, Huong Khe district, Ha Tinh province, flash floods inundated the house of Tran Van Hieu of ward 12, leaving his home completely unroofed and his family's foodstock lost.

Hieu's family was one of the households which received a cash grant from the Viet Nam Red Cross Society following Typhoon Nari in 2013, and which used the hotline phone number.

Four months later, his family was among those receiving VND 3 million from the Viet Nam Red Cross Society as part of the conditional cash for livelihood recovery programme. His family of five was selected as eligible beneficiaries by the commune authorities, as they were among the worst affected in the village and in the near-poor list at the time.



Tran Van Hieu, a beneficiary of the CCGLR programme, showed the Red cross the beneficiary criteria he still keeps. May 2015 © Ly Nguyen/ IFRC

Thanks to the hotline, Hieu was able to contact the Ha Tinh Red Cross Chapter and IFRC to inform them that the village head had requested all beneficiaries to return their money a few months after the project ended (in order to redistribute to other poor households). Because of the availability of the hotline, the problem was resolved in a timely manner.

“I’m very thankful and happy with the way the Red Cross handled the matter,” Hieu said. “They were very helpful and followed up with us. The cash gets to beneficiaries, supporting livelihood development.” With the cash grant, his family discussed and decided to invest in a cage and two pigs. This was the first time his family had enough cash in-hand for them to buy pigs. Previously, they lived mostly on crops planting. Along with cash distribution, the Red Cross also supported his family and others to complete a livestock development plan, raised their awareness about livestock related diseases and provided them with prevention as well as curative methods. After a year, his pigs already gave birth once, helping his family to recover the investment and continue to invest. He said now he has had more experience so he would be more productive.

How to integrate community engagement in cash transfer programming?

Step 1: Identify the most trusted communication channels in the community, as well as how the community would like to receive information and provide feedback.

Step 2: Plan and set up the community feedback and response mechanism.

Step 3: Respond to feedback from community members.

Step 4: Inform community members about how the feedback was responded to.



For more detail on the information contained in this case study, please contact:

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