



Delivering Emergency Cash Assistance to Crisis-Affected Families in Yemen

Final Report Prepared for Thankyou Charitable Trust
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Na'aem, 11 (left), and Aisha, 10, are best friends whose families fled violence that erupted near their homes. Photo: Saleh Ba Hayan/IRC

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to our partnership with Thankyou Charitable Trust, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) successfully implemented a 12-month multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) program to address the urgent needs of food-insecure families in Yemen. With your support we reached 370 of the most vulnerable households with six rounds of cash assistance in the Al Bureiqah district, Aden. Women, men, and children were empowered with access to their food, water, and other necessities like cooking gas, hygiene kits and transportation. These resources prevented them from resorting to negative coping mechanisms like selling assets, skipping meals, child labor, and early marriage for girls. We are pleased to present this report on the evolving situation in Yemen and the tremendous impact Thankyou Charitable Trust is making in the lives of families there.

CONTEXT UPDATE

Yemen remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The country tops the IRC's annual emergency watchlist for the third year in a row: a consequence of over seven years of war and severe underfunding that has pushed the country to new lows in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has only put the country at risk of further deterioration. People are increasingly struggling to get enough food, and the World Food Program has warned that Yemen could face famine this

year, especially as warring parties manipulate the country's economy as a tool of warfare. Over the last four years, essential household staples have more than doubled in price. As a result, over half the population in Yemen is going hungry. Of the over 20.7 million people in need in Yemen, over 3 million people are identified to be in "catastrophic need," indicating a total collapse of living standards, exhaustion of last resort coping strategies, and an alarmingly high number of deaths. Children have been particularly impacted: half of all children under 5 are acutely malnourished, and 400,000 children are at risk of dying if they are not treated.



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Despite control measures imposed by the Central Bank of Yemen in Aden in recent months—including the temporary closure of a number of exchange shops—the Yemeni rial (YER) has continued its trajectory of rapid depreciation, reaching 1,600 YER/USD (selling rate) in Aden as of November 2021—24% higher than in October 2021 and 89% higher than in January 2021.¹ The ongoing pandemic led to a sharp drop in remittances, as incomes of Yemenis located outside the country reduced due to the global effects of reduced economic productivity from lockdowns and unemployment. The government is unable to subsidize food and other commodities for which Yemen is 90% import-reliant. Remittances are the largest source of foreign currency and lifeline for many families, where 80% of people live below the poverty line. As a result, millions of people cannot afford to meet their basic needs.²

PREVENTING HUNGER AND RESTORING AGENCY

Providing our clients with cash instead of goods like blankets or food allows the IRC to reach families quickly and at a lower cost. Cash relief is also good for the Yemeni economy. It means people can buy what they need from local shops giving them the power and choice to decide for themselves what they need most. This is why the IRC is committed to delivering 25 percent of our aid through giving cash by 2020.

Sustainable cash programming starts with transparency and clear communication with the community. In Yemen we initiated implementation by meeting with the Aden district council and leaders of the Food Security and Livelihood Cluster (FSLC), Cash and Market Working Group (CMWG), Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) and the Executive Unit of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Together with these representatives we identified remote locations where families are not served by other humanitarian actors. Following the analysis, the IRC and Aden governate authorities agreed to prioritize the areas of Alduabia, Ras Abas, Kud Qaraw, Aldwagan, Alkhisa, and Kubagan villages in the Al Bureiqah district.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND UPDATES

In December 2020 and January 2021, the IRC held two meetings with the Local Council Director of Al Bureiqah before the start of the project to explain the project objectives, including planned activities, beneficiary selection criteria, targeted locations and the implementation mechanisms. The meetings aimed to ensure project acceptance by the authority, guarantee to obtain the required facilitation and permits before and during project implementation, and also create a sense of ownership of the project among the district level authorities.

In January of 2021, we collaborated with community representatives to create Relief Committees (RCs)—consisting of five to seven elected representatives from each village—to support project implementation. The RC representatives conducted door-to-door home visits with client registrations and verification processes, participated in cash distributions,

¹ <https://fews.net/east-africa/yemen>

² Humanitarian Needs Overview, Yemen 2021 – UNOCHA

and ensured active community engagement by monitoring activity throughout the project. We required selection of at least two women per village to participate, share their opinions and ensure effective participation of female clients.

In January and early February 2021, we conducted extensive community mobilization and awareness-raising sessions on the MPCA client-selection criteria and the project implementation modalities before cash assistance distribution to the selected households. The sessions aimed to promote the project, community acceptance, and avoid future tensions between selected and non-selected households. During awareness-raising and community engagement sessions, the IRC familiarized the communities with project objectives, vulnerability client-selection criteria, project implementation methodology and progress, availability of IRC feedback channels, protection and inclusion/exclusion risks and COVID-19 prevention measures.

We collaborated with village leaders who proposed a list of households for consideration. We then devised a 2-part selection criteria. The primary criterion was a household income status of less than 65,000 YER—the equivalent of \$260—per month. We then prioritized families who met at least one of our secondary criteria:

- Female-headed households
- Elderly-headed households
- Households hosting persons with disabilities and/or displaced people
- Households with poor food consumption score
- Households that have resorted to negative coping strategies

Our original target was to serve 440 households with six rounds of cash assistance. However, due to local currency fluctuations in Yemen resulting in the increased price of basic commodities in the market, including food, the CMWG revised the MPCA transfer value. In February 2021, the transfer value was revised from 117,000 YER to 141,000 YER based on the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB), which is applicable to all members of the CMWG until further notice. This obliged the IRC to reduce the targeted households from 440 to 370 to align with the revised transfer value and ensure six rounds of cash distribution to the selected households.

In February and March 2021 we conducted a client selection process in close collaboration with the local stakeholders, community members in the villages and selected 370 households that met both levels of criteria. The IRC Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team then conducted the client verification process to ensure transparency—in the selection and confirmation process—through the use of a random sample selection method. Cash distribution points were selected in close coordination with RCs, local authorities and the IRC’s Security department. The selected locations were assessed to be easily accessible by clients, IRC staff, and free from security risks such as exposure to military frontlines and bases. During cash distribution, the IRC ensured adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures in each location, including hand washing, hand sanitizing and the distribution of face masks to all who were meeting in person. As an additional mitigation against the spread of COVID-19, we limited the number of clients to receive cash assistance per day to 150.

From May to August 2021 in coordination with RCs and local authorities, we conducted the first four rounds of MPCA to the selected 370 households in Al Bureiqah district with a transfer value of 141,000 YER (approximately \$155) per month as approved by Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) and CMWG in Al Bureiqah district. These households had an average of seven members and the cash assistance was intended to enable them to meet 80% of their most urgent needs.

In late August 2021 the FSCA and CMWG revised the monthly cash transfer value from 141,000 to 147,000 YER due to depreciation of YER against the USD—leading to inflation in the market and a decrease in our clients’ purchasing power. The revised transfer value was based on the SMEB and adapted for the subsequent remaining two cash distributions, and this revision did not impact the project implementation significantly.

At the end of August and September 2021 the IRC finalized the fifth and sixth cash assistance distribution to the 370 selected households with a transfer value of 147,000 YER (approximately \$162) per distribution.

We communicated with clients frequently throughout the six-month duration of the MPCA through IRC information sessions during cash distributions. This provided them with the added benefit of learning more about project objectives,

distribution procedures and feedback sharing channels. We also provided advice on household cash management to successfully meet food and household needs each month.

Assistance Recipient Breakdown

Recipient Category	Female	Male	Total
Households receiving cash assistance	82 female-headed	288 male-headed	370
Individuals reached with cash assistance (including all household members)	1,177	1,285	2,462

Recipient Vulnerability Breakdown

Recipient Criteria	Vulnerability	Female-headed HHs	Male-headed HHs	Total Number of Households
Displaced families		15	56	71
Host community members (with identified vulnerabilities)*		67	230	297
Returnee families		0	2	2
Headed Households		Female-headed HHs	Male-headed HHs	Total Number of Households*
Female-headed households		43	Not Applicable	43
Elderly headed households		13	31	44
Households with disability		19	66	85

* Other vulnerabilities include households with low income, poor food consumption and those that have resorted to negative coping strategies, as mentioned above.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The MEAL team gleaned crucial evidence for measuring our success through the following activities:

- A **Baseline Survey** was conducted in May 2021 after the first round of cash distributions. The survey objectives were to establish the project benchmarks and develop relevant recommendations based on the findings. The baseline survey findings showed that most households were food insecure (only 3% of the households surveyed had their food consumption score falling in the acceptable category) and were using extreme negative coping strategies to meet the household food demands, for example, only 11% of the households used low coping strategies³ to meet their household food demands. Lastly, 92% of the respondents mentioned that the most significant barrier they were facing to meet their family's needs was the shortage of income, implying that they were unable to meet their household food demands with insufficient income.
- A total of three **Post Distribution Monitoring (PDMs)** activities were conducted during the project implementation period. The main objectives of the PDMs were to assess the clients' satisfaction levels with the distribution process and whether their concerns were addressed during the distribution days. The MEAL team used a random data selection method during verification. Findings from the PDM reports showed that most of the clients were satisfied with the distribution process, and there was the availability of feedback platforms for them to voice their complaints.

³ Low coping strategies mean that households can meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in harmful strategies

Additionally, the MEAL team participated during community engagement sessions and conducted routine monitoring visits to the targeted households to monitor the implementation progress and provide recommendations.

- An **Endline Survey** was conducted in November 2021 after the last cash distribution in September to assess the impact of the MPCA on the lives of the clients. Findings from the endline survey showed that the targeted households improved their food consumption score by 171% (Baseline Average FCS = 28 and Endline Average FCS =76) with the most significant change being noticed in meat, milk, and fruits food groups. Furthermore, there was a significant (78%) decrease in the household’s negative coping strategies (Baseline Average rCSI = 21 and Endline Average rCSI = 5), implying that they could meet their household food demands without engaging in stressful negative coping mechanisms. In terms of household gender dynamics, the survey showed that husbands had more control over the use of the distributed cash than their wives, implying that women have less control over household income. This could be attributed to the gender norms in the targeted locations.
- Regarding client **accountability**, 91% of the endline surveyed clients mentioned that cash assistance was delivered in a safe, participatory and accountable⁴ manner. The clients acknowledged that they were well informed about the location and timing of the distribution, and COVID 19 prevention measures were in place on the distribution days. Regarding clients’ complaints and feedback, IRC received 102 feedback cases, and most of the cases were received through the hotline number and help desks available during distributions. Most of the feedback received fell under the request for assistance category (37%), where community members requested to be included in the MPCA project. The IRC explained to the community members that they had to meet the selection criteria to be targeted. Other feedback received was categorized under the general feedback category (33%) where clients appreciated the excellent work of the IRC in their respective villages. All the feedback received was closed within 24 hours.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

From the project monitoring data, the overall indicator of achievement was 97%, implying key learning that the project met most of the set outcomes. Food security indicator analysis showed that 99% of the households were able to meet their basic needs after the cash assistance and thus improve their dietary diversity and reduce negative coping strategies. However, further analysis of the endline data showed that most of the Host Community households were able to meet their basic needs while most of the IDPs partially met their basic needs. The difference was noted in food, shelter, hygiene, and household item needs. This finding is a key lesson to the IRC as it is through this project that we have an evidence base that MPCA assistance impacts target groups differently. As such, there is need to have integrated programming by providing multi-sectoral assistance such as; engaging the Environmental Health sector (for water services) and partnering with other organizations that provide shelter assistance.



Najeeba and her family fled a conflict zone and have been displaced multiple times within Yemen.

The project managed to positively impact the clients’ lives by helping improve their dietary options, for example, there was increased uptake in meat, dairy, and fruits after the MPCA. The findings imply that MPCA gives clients the liberty to choose what they want regarding household food needs.

While the MPCA helped women to access unconditional cash assistance, the endline survey findings show that 52% of the households’ decisions on cash usage were made by the husbands alone, while only 30% of the households’ control of the use of the money were shared by both spouses. The results imply that there is still a gap in women’s ability to make decisions on cash usage at the household level—indicating a need to increase gender awareness sessions in the communities.

As reported above, initially the IRC targeted 440 households with six rounds of MPCA however, due to local currency

⁴ Accountability in this survey referred to client’s awareness and access to feedback and complaints mechanisms.

fluctuations resulting in increased prices of basic commodities, the CMWG led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), revised the MPCA transfer value from 65,000 to 141,000 YER. As a result, the IRC revised the project spending plan and reduced the number of the targeted households from 440 to 370. The changes were explained to the communities during community engagement sessions and there were no major concerns. The IRC also coordinated with FSAC to ensure other actors are aware of the project target reduction and current gaps in those specific locations.

During project activity implementation, some of the RCs and community leader members tried to convince the IRC for more flexibility in the selection criteria to target other households that were ineligible to the cash assistance. The non-selected households also put pressure on IRC staff, as many community members believed they were still eligible to receive the cash assistance. Following that, the IRC staff conducted community engagement meetings in collaboration with the IRC's Client Responsiveness and Accountability (CRA) team in the communities to sensitize them on the project objectives and implementation methodology to ensure clarity and acceptance between eligible and ineligible households to reduce tensions. Also, the CRA team reminded the community of the available feedback and complaint channels for clients to share their feedback to raise complaints and the IRC will ensure proper follow-up.

LOOKING AHEAD

During the start of the project, the IRC initiated two meetings with the local council and relevant stakeholders to explain the project objectives, nature of implementation and the duration. These meetings aimed to develop effective coordination strategies to ensure sustainable project outcomes and set an exit strategy in collaboration with other stakeholders. The IRC also explained to the stakeholders and clients that the project is not a permanent support, but a 12-month project to cover the basic needs of the vulnerable households and are therefore clients are expected to acquire sustainable livelihoods opportunities. The IRC also shared project achievements reports and is coordinating with Food Security and Agriculture Cluster to seek funding opportunities for long-term interventions to respond to the broader needs of vulnerable households. The IRC will continue to seek for short and long-term funding opportunities for durable solutions.

THANK YOU

The IRC is grateful for Thankyou Charitable Trust's generosity in improving the well-being of vulnerable Yemeni families with life-saving assistance to meet their emergency needs, minimize negative coping mechanisms, and respond to new crises such as COVID-19. The gift has had a profound impact on the families, and the IRC will continue to seek funding opportunities to support conflict-affected people.