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## **CASH VOUCHER PILOT PROJECT, MUNDRI WEST COUNTY**

### **FINAL REPORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

LCED implemented a cash voucher pilot project under the SSHF first round allocation 2017, for the S/NFI cluster. The project targeted 80 of the most vulnerable households in Mundri West county, which received cash vouchers of a value of 3,000 SSP (30 USD) each to purchase emergency shelter material and Non-Food Items (NFI) from local suppliers.

LCED conducted a market and needs assessment in Greater Mundri (Mundri West, Mundri East and Mvolo Counties) in February 2017. The assessment findings indicated a high need of shelter and NFI among the population, due to multiple displacement of households, driven by conflict and search for food. The findings also highlighted the presence of local suppliers in the area, which were interested in a cash voucher programme, but needed to be sensitized about it.

Despite the assessment being conducted in all three Greater Mundri Counties, LCED decided to focus only on Mundri West county as target area for this pilot project. This choice was made due to the need of limiting the project size; Mundri West was preferred to the other two Counties since the LCED field office is located in Mundri town, and also considering the increasing insecurity –and limited access- in Mundri East County.

#### **ACTIVITIES**

LCED field team shared the activity plan with the RRC representatives in Mundri West county, during a meeting at their offices. The team also had a meeting with Non-violent Peaceforce (NP) in order to discuss the modalities of identification of the most vulnerable households to be targeted by the project, since the protection partner was already working with some women groups in the area. However, LCED was not able to work with NP after the discussion, since they had already scheduled activities in different locations. Nevertheless, NP provided valuable information on how to reach and mobilize the community.

Identification and registration of the beneficiary households was conducted from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2017. In order to identify the most vulnerable households, LCED involved the community leaders (village chiefs) who mobilized the beneficiaries in advance. Once in the project locations (Centers: Lakya,



Bari, Medewu and Mundri), the LCED team (including the NFI officer and the Programme Assistant) registered 80 beneficiary households:

- 12/05/2017 –Five (5) households verified in Lakya.
- 15/05/2017-Ten (10) households were verified in Bari.
- 15/05/2017-Twentyfive (25) households verified in Medewu.
- 16-17/05/2017- Forty (40) households were verified in Mundri town.

The team opted for this strategy, considering the situation of insecurity which would have put the staff member at high risk. Only female beneficiaries were registered, due to their higher freedom of movement from IO-controlled areas to SPLA controlled areas Mundri town. The LCED team randomly selected beneficiaries on the spot, based on their physical conditions, or the physical conditions of someone in their household (e.g. elderly, severely ill, or disabled person), with the help of the village chiefs.

Due to difficulties in involving the local suppliers as initially planned (given the low exchange rate they were using), LCED decided to transfer 2,400 USD to Mundri through Eden Commercial Bank. The exchange rate used was the official bank rate at the time of the transfer (1 USD = 110 SSP), and 10% of that was used to pay for the transfer. Therefore, each beneficiary household received 3,000 SSP, to be collected at the bank's branch in Mundri, using specific identification codes provided by the bank itself, through the LCED office. The beneficiaries already registered collected their vouchers and secret code at the LCED office in Mundri town. The code was separated from the voucher to increase security, as the beneficiaries had to provide both to the bank while collecting the money.

The LCED team (including the NFI officer and the Emergency Response Officer) started the distribution of vouchers in Mundri town on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 (7 vouchers distributed). At the time, other field locations, including Lakya, Bari and Medewu, were not accessible due to insecurity on the road. In fact, after resumed fighting in Mundri town on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2017 –reportedly at the hand of a small armed group- the State Governor has declared that humanitarian access is temporarily suspended due to insecurity.

In the beginning of July 2017, the security situation improved, and the remaining beneficiaries managed to travel to Mundri town to collect their bank code and voucher from the LCED office and successively the cash from Eden Commercial Bank. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2017, all beneficiaries had collected the vouchers and respective bank code, and had collected the cash.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Given the fact that the beneficiaries are not bound to buy specific items with the 3,000 SSP they receive, the LCED field team asked each person what they intend to buy at the local market. The field officers stressed that their answers will not prevent the beneficiaries from obtaining the voucher and secret bank code.



Preliminary data on the female beneficiaries interviewed by the LCED staff in Mundri town revealed that the cash vouchers were used to purchase NFI such as charcoal stoves and cooking utensils to support their small businesses (e.g. selling tea, bread, etc.). This shows the innovation of such programme, given by the fact that the NFI purchased by those households will help vulnerable IDPs to become self-sufficient, improve their livelihood, and empower the women. This enhances the sustainability of such project in the long-term and helps reviving the economy in the area.

From the 15th to the 20th of August, LCED visited the residence of 13 women which had already started their petty business in Mundri town and in Mundri displacement site. The business included making and selling tamia, mandazi, sambuusa and tea, and selling other items such as charcoal stove, cooking oil and some agricultural products (groundnuts and cassava). With the money received, they had bought charcoal stoves and other cooking utensils, which enabled them to start their businesses. They now sell their food items in the market in Mundri town and within the displacement site in Mundri.

Some of the women reported that they were able to send their children back to school, as they now have the money to pay school fees. Additionally, all women reported that with the money received from their small business, they are now able to buy soap, salt and other small items for daily use. They declared that this project had brought a major change in their lives and livelihoods, giving them economic empowerment and independence. Before this intervention, the women were relying on the support of relatives and friends, while now they can satisfy their basic needs using the income of their businesses.

## **CHALLENGES AND CHANGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

1. Mobilization was problematic, due to lack of mobile network and other means of communication, which hindered the sharing of information to the most remote/hard to reach areas. In some locations, the possible beneficiaries did not show up on the first day that LCED visited, therefore the activity had to be rescheduled. Furthermore, the physical distance of some locations where the beneficiaries were residing, became problematic, as many of them were not able to reach in time the registration centre.
2. Identification of the most vulnerable households was also problematic, since most of the people are in dire humanitarian conditions, and in need of ES/NFI.
3. There was misconception of the overall project among the beneficiaries. Most of them thought it was a loan programme, which involved an annual interest, and they were not trusting the LCED team at first.
4. Once consulted by the LCED team and Executive Director, local suppliers would have been using a lower exchange rate (USD to SSP) compared to the official one in South Sudan. To avoid that the beneficiaries would receive goods of less value than the one estimated by the



project, the LCED management decided to not involve local suppliers through contracts, and to make beneficiaries go directly to the bank with their vouchers to collect the money.

5. The prices of the goods in the market sky-rocketed between July and August 2017, which affected the suppliers and their capacity to transport goods to Mundri West county, as well as the beneficiaries residing in the area south of Mundri town, who were able to travel only in the month of July.
6. Insecurity interfered with the market operations between April and July 2017, and hindered the possibility for beneficiaries to travel from areas south of Mundri to Mundri town, in order to collect the cash, until the beginning of July, when the situation improved slightly.

#### **LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Community mobilization should be done in advance, in order for the information to reach even remote/hard to reach locations, and give time to the possible beneficiaries to travel.
2. Both the village chiefs and the beneficiaries should be suitably sensitized about the overall aim of the project, in order to avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions.
3. Where possible, it would be best to verify the vulnerability of targeted households by visiting their place of residence.
4. Local suppliers cannot be involved directly in the distribution of items, given the risk of getting less value for money. Maybe this could be further discussed at cluster level, in order to find a different solution to this problem, or to endorse what LCED approach through the bank.
5. LCED received positive feedback about this intervention both from community leaders and female beneficiaries, who reported a drastic change in their lives and livelihoods, hence it is recommended to continue with the implementation of such projects in Mundri and areas with similar conditions.
6. Although no incidents were reported, future interventions should consider the security situation in a different way, in order to avoid putting the beneficiaries in condition of travelling unsafely just to collect the cash.
7. PDM should be conducted in the remaining locations: Lakya, Bari, Medewu.



## ACTIVITY PICTURES



Women making sambusa and tamia in Mundri displacement site.



Woman at the market counting the money from her petty business.



Woman selling items from home, including charcoal, cooking oil, spices and onions.



Woman making sambusa and tamia at Mundri displacement site.

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