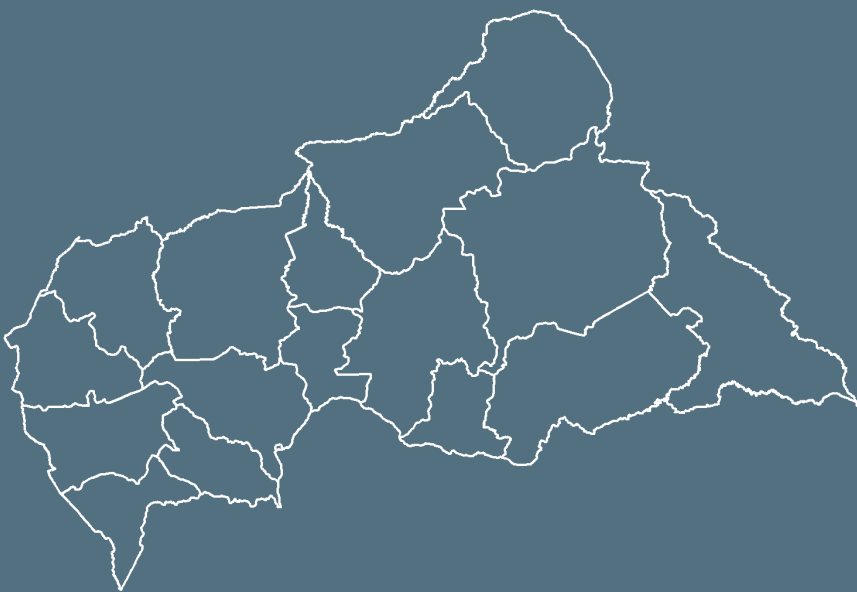


With the stakes so high, is Cash and Voucher Assistance the lifeline it's meant to be?

Cash Barometer • Central African Republic • December 2022



GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS



“For (humanitarians), our needs can be summed up by their needs assessment surveys conducted on what we eat and how we live. But asking us what our basic needs are, they do not do that.”

— Woman, 52 years old, host community, Bangui



“Go to the camps. A lot of people are suffering. Some are struggling to find food but those close to a camp delegate will have two, sometimes three, vouchers at their disposal.”

— Woman, 55 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro



“Nobody ever showed us the criteria on which they base their targeting.”

— Man, 32 years old, community leader, Bangui



“The vendors disrespect us. Often they say rude things like ‘If you are unhappy, just go home. You cannot redeem your voucher anywhere but here.’ This kind of mistreatment leads us to sell our voucher at a very low price, sometimes half the actual voucher value. It is better to accept less and move on than to go back to the shops and be disrespected.”

— Man, 32 years old, IDP, Paoua



“We want organisations that come and work in our neighbourhood and interact with all our community structures. Because we know best about our neighbourhood, our problems and the vulnerable people. But all the work is given to the head of the village, even though he cannot do everything alone.”

— Woman, 56 years old, host community, Bangui



“They just abandoned us after two months without informing us. The programme was initially announced to last for six months.”

— Woman, 48 years old, host community, Paoua



“Let the humanitarian actors themselves go down to the field to be really informed about the problems in our localities rather than always sending community agents.”

— Woman, 34 years old, returnee, Bangui

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For a French version of this report, visit [our website](#).

For more information about the Cash Barometer in CAR or globally, please contact carolyn@groundtruthsolutions.org or visit groundtruthsolutions.org/cash.

The Cash Barometer is an independent accountability mechanism that combines face-to-face surveys with qualitative discussions to enable cash and voucher recipients to share their views and participate in decision-making.

With generous funding from the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:



Introduction

Humanitarian aid has been a part of life in the Central African Republic for a long time. A decade ago, the crisis that led to the overthrow of the incumbent government forced almost a million people to flee their homes. A newer wave of displacement peaked in 2017, and again in 2020 when, during the presidential election, an upsurge in violence led to the formation of a coalition of armed groups, the CPC (Coalition des patriotes pour le changement).

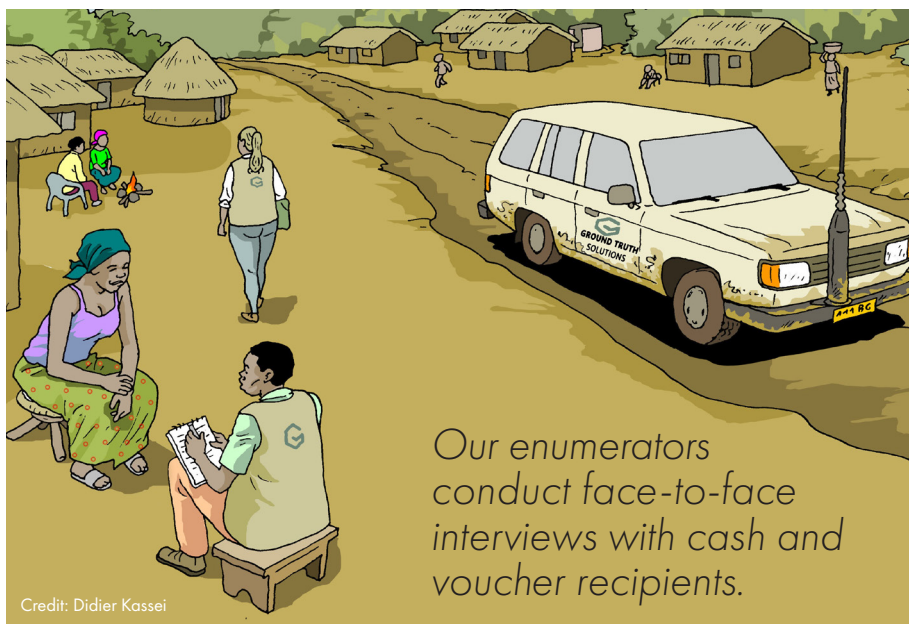
In 2023, 3.4 million people, some 56% of the population, will need humanitarian aid. This number has grown steadily, up from 3.1 million in 2022 and 2.6 million in 2020.¹ Displaced from their homes, people are vulnerable to human rights violations and gender-based violence. Most people need protection, water and sanitation, and food security support. The crisis has been compounded by the disruption of global markets; resulting price rises have cut the already low purchasing power of the country's people.

To keep up with increasing needs, the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) has risen over the years, although there was a decrease in 2022 from 2021 as many Covid-specific programmes came to an end. In the first half of 2022, most CVA recipients — 159,000 people, or 38% of recipients — received cash in hand. There was an even split between those receiving paper vouchers or electronic vouchers via electronic transfer — 130,000 people or 31% for each².

Between June and August 2022, Ground Truth Solutions talked to nearly 1,500 CVA recipients in the three subprefectures where most people received cash and voucher assistance the previous year: Bangui (including Bimbo), Kaga Bandoro, and Paoua. We spoke to people in host communities, internally displaced people living in and outside of camps, as well as returnees. Read our detailed methodology [at the end of the report](#).

After our survey, we returned to all three subprefectures in September and facilitated focus group discussions to share our findings with community members, to gain a deeper understanding of our findings and to hear peoples' recommendations on how to improve some of the issues they face.

This report combines our quantitative data with the qualitative feedback received during focus group discussions.



We talked to 1,487 CVA recipients

Subprefecture

- 515 Paoua (35%)
- 511 Bangui (34%)
- 461 Kaga Bandoro (31%)

Gender

- 748 women (50%)
- 739 men (50%)

Delivery mechanism

- 779 paper voucher (52%)
- 290 cash in hand (20%)
- 288 electronic voucher (19%)
- 126 mobile money (9%)

Status

- 878 host community members (59%)
- 326 IDPs living in camps (22%)
- 177 Returnees (12%)
- 101 IDPs living outside camps (7%)

Age

- 321 18-30 years old (22%)
- 729 31-50 years old (49%)
- 437 over 51 years old (29%)

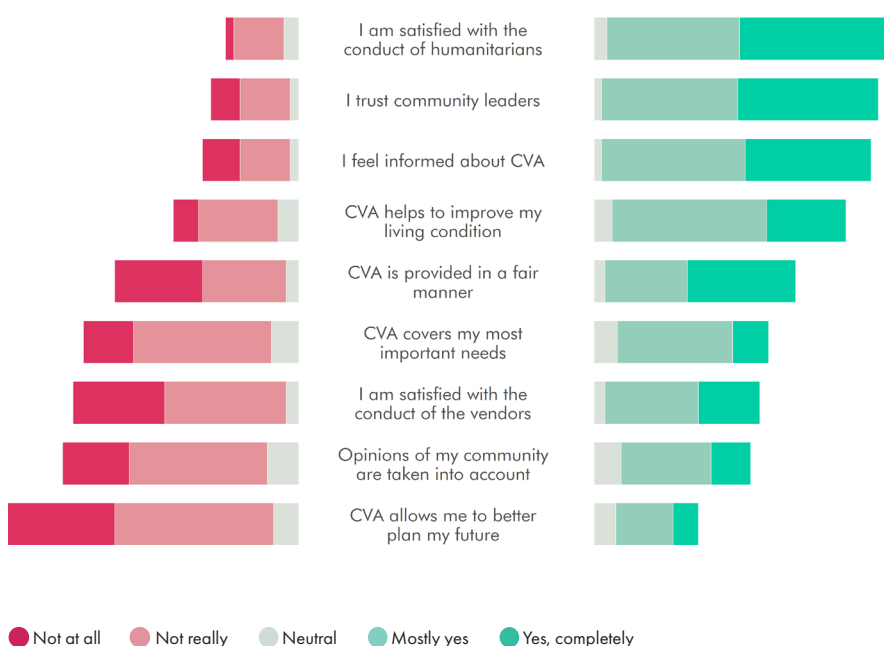
¹ 2023 HNO

² Cash Dashboard January to June 2022

Our sample distribution varies slightly from these numbers (see right bar). The methodology chapter at the end of the report provides more information.

Summary: What people say about cash and vouchers

Our study shows that people’s experiences receiving cash and voucher assistance are more complex than they initially appear. Qualitative enquiry helped us more fully understand responses to the survey questions. Although survey respondents said they are satisfied with the conduct of aid actors, focus group discussions revealed that people face poor services and feel unable to influence change. They are satisfied with humanitarians, but not humanitarian aid – because they see “humanitarians” as separate from implementers, with whom they face a variety of issues. Unchecked vendors and limited ways to complain leave people vulnerable to misconduct. Despite this, there appears to be high trust in community leaders to make fair decisions, indicating a few tweaks could go a long way. Cash helps meet immediate needs but does little to improve their lives in the long run. People also say they feel informed about CVA, but further interviews reveal they are still missing some of the most basic information about the assistance they receive. They do not feel that their opinions are considered.



The bar graph illustrates people’s responses to key questions on a Likert scale (1 to 5). Each bar shows the distribution of responses in percentages, using a colour scale from red to green. Red indicates negative responses (1/2), while green indicates positive responses (4/5).

Here’s what people told us

Cash and voucher assistance is improving people’s lives in CAR, helping to meet urgent needs. But priority needs like education remain unmet.

“Cash helps but there are other ways, too. Our youth need training.”

Most people prefer cash in hand and would like to see a move away from paper vouchers, which remain a common delivery mechanism.

“If I were to make the decision, let’s leave vouchers behind and just give cash; vouchers create a lot of problems.”

TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this document, we use CaLP’s CVA terminology: **Modality** refers to the form of assistance provided to recipients: cash, vouchers, in-kind aid or a service. **Delivery mechanism** is the means of delivering a transfer:

E-cash/ mobile money



Uses mobile phones to access financial services such as payments, transfers, insurance, savings, and credit. It is a paperless version of a national currency that can be used to provide humanitarian e-cash payments.

Cash in hand



A payment made directly to recipients in physical currency (notes and coins).

Paper voucher



Can be exchanged for a set quantity or value of goods or services. Vouchers by default are restricted and are redeemable with preselected vendors or in “fairs” created by the implementing organisation.

E-voucher



A card or code that is electronically redeemed at a participating vendor. E-vouchers can represent monetary or commodity value and are stored and redeemed using a range of electronic devices.

See [Glossary of Terminology for cash and voucher assistance](#).

Recipients are not active participants. Most feel that their opinions do not matter. The majority do not know how to submit a complaint or suggestion, and of those who have used feedback mechanisms, half say they never received a response.

“They say that they consider the point of view of us, the aid recipients, but in reality, they do not.”

People do not know when they will receive money or how much. Two out of three CVA recipients do not know how long they will receive their assistance. Information is irregular, and recipients are not told in advance about changes to programming. People are fed up with empty promises:

“I think it’s been over three months now since they gave us phones to receive mobile money. Since then, nothing has happened. They never followed up with us.”

People are frustrated about the way they are treated by vendors contracted by humanitarian organisations. They want aid actors to hold vendors accountable for misconduct, disrespect, poor product quality, and arbitrary price increases, a major issue for voucher users.

“If you complain about the unfair prices, they say things like ‘nobody is going to accept your voucher but me’. These words push us to sell our vouchers to others for much less than their actual value. I sold mine worth US\$ 60 for \$30.”

People surveyed say they are largely satisfied with the work of humanitarian actors, but they want aid agencies to better oversee programme implementation and to penalise fraud and misconduct carried out by their own staff, volunteers, external partners, contractors, and service providers.

“The humanitarian actors are good, but it is those carrying out their tasks in the field who taint their image.”

What aid recipients want

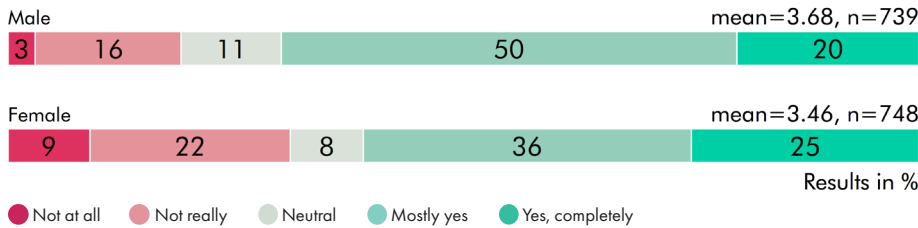
- **On aid relevance:**
Move from vouchers to cash wherever possible and make sure aid agencies coordinate to provide different types of assistance to meet more needs and be helpful over the longer term.
- **On participation:**
Inform aid recipients how to submit complaints and recommendations. Make sure implementers come to communities more often so people can talk to them.
- **On information:**
Directly communicate with communities as much as possible. Interact with every segment of the community, not just community leaders. Better inform people about distribution dates, length of the assistance, and the amount of cash or value of the voucher.
- **On vendor conduct:**
Evaluate vendor conduct regularly and involve the community in the assessment process. Facilitate training to vendors on humanitarian principles and agree on standards with vendors.
- **On implementation:**
Avoid delegating too many activities to subcontractors. Ensure better control over implementation and show more presence in the communities to better understand the situation on the ground and assess ongoing programmes.

For humanitarian actors’ suggestions on how to address some of these issues, see chapter [“What do aid providers suggest?”](#)

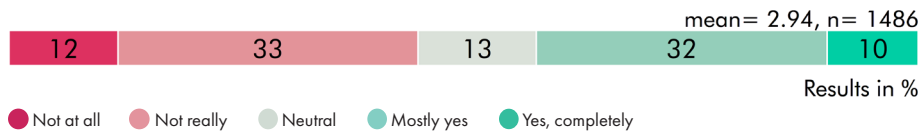
1. CVA helps now but does not improve the future

More than half of the people surveyed credit CVA with improving their lives (65%), with men feeling slightly more positively about this than women. But only 42% say aid helps meet their most important needs. They say it has helped them access more diverse foods and reconstruct destroyed homes. While some people credit CVA with helping them pay for their children's education, this remains a priority unmet need for many others.

Does the cash or voucher assistance you receive help you improve your living conditions?



Does the cash or voucher assistance you have received meet your most important needs?



“

I only recently benefited from voucher assistance, and it is thanks to this that I can prepare my children for the start of school, so there has been a change.

— Man, 29 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro

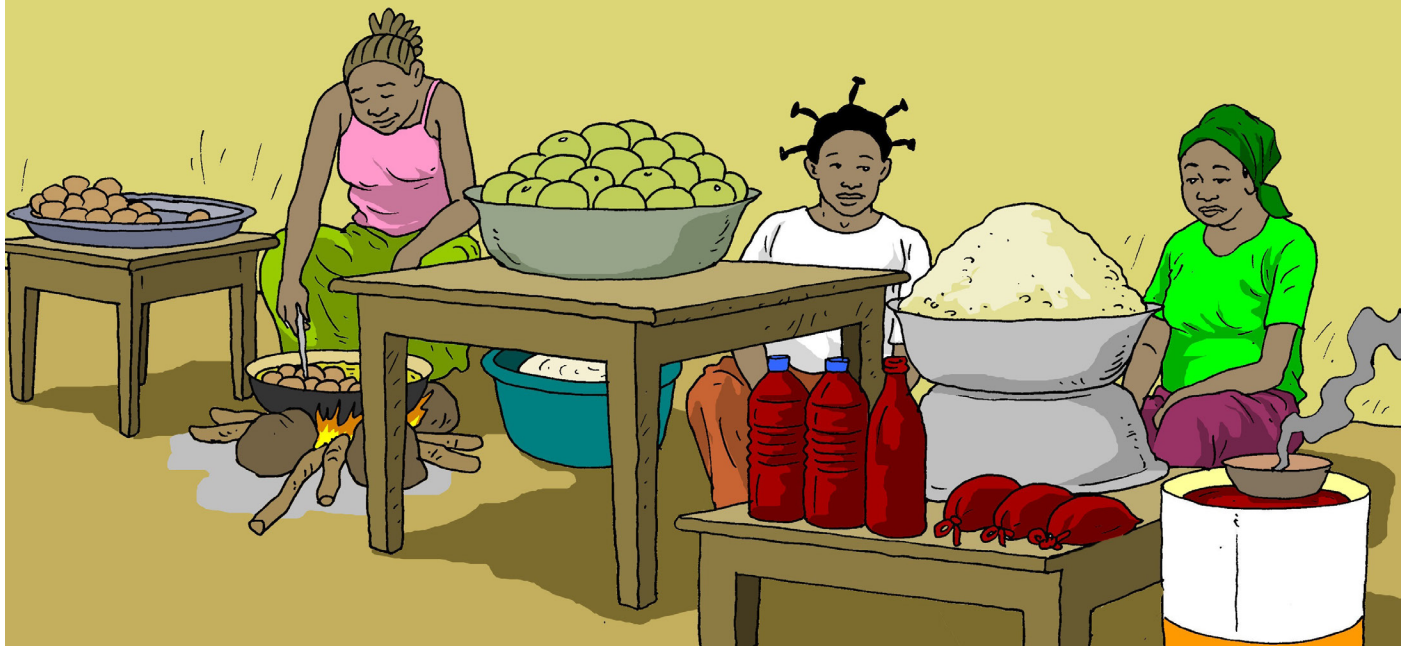
“

Cash offers many advantages. Some of my constituents bought cement and were able to rebuild the foundation of their destroyed houses while waiting for the dry season to allow them to build a hut.

— Man, 56 years old, district head, Bangui

Credit: Didier Kassei

People feel like income-generating activities would help them to become more resilient in the longer term.



What are your unmet needs?

Education n = 798



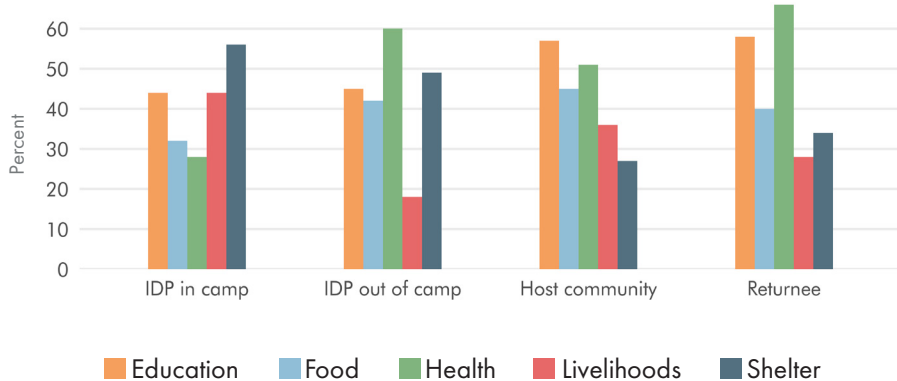
Health



Food



Results in %



Cash assistance decreased in CAR in 2022, with the number of recipients shrinking by almost half. The remaining recipients received on average 10% less. We did not survey people whose eligibility had expired, which should be noted when considering satisfaction levels and the number of people who think aid reaches those who need it most (56%). With fewer people on the list, those who still received CVA had a greater share of the overall CVA transfer values in 2022.

Does the cash and voucher assistance in your community go to those who need it most?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes, completely

People prefer cash in hand

“Convert vouchers into cash, it’s the best way to help us.”

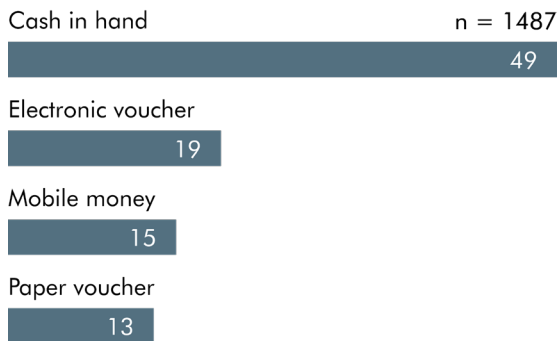
Two out of three people prefer to receive cash over vouchers and in-kind aid.³ It allows them to set their own priorities and reduces their dependency on vendors⁴ who sometimes raise prices for voucher users. Despite the fact that most would prefer to receive cash,⁵ in 2022 cash made up only 38% of cash and voucher assistance.

Both men and women prefer cash, but more women than men favour vouchers. Kaga Bandoro is the only place we looked at where most (55%) prefer voucher assistance over cash (32%) and in-kind goods (10%).⁶ This illustrates a tendency that we have seen: that people generally prefer the version of CVA they are already receiving. Of the people we talked to in Kaga Bandoro, 93% were already using vouchers.

Which of the following types of assistance would you prefer?



How would you prefer to receive your cash or voucher assistance?



Results in %



I fully support cash assistance. It is the best way to help vulnerable people.

– Man, 36 years old, community leader, Bangui

³ Since we only interviewed CVA recipients, this preference might not come as a surprise. It could point to the fact that people often prefer what they already know or indicate that their preferences for CVA were generally respected.

⁴ Vendors are suppliers of goods and services contracted by the humanitarian response to participate in the cash-based intervention. They are the merchants to whom CVA recipients go to redeem their voucher or use their cash to buy products to cover their needs. (See [CALP Glossary](#).)

⁵ REACH’s FSP Study produced similar findings: In Bambari, 69% prefer to receive cash over voucher or in-kind aid, in Bangui the figure is 39%, in Kaga Bandoro 31%.

⁶ Ibid.

Paper vouchers are the least popular way for women and men to receive CVA, but 31% of cash and voucher assistance in the CAR is still issued in the form of paper vouchers.⁷ Paper vouchers offer fewer choices than cash in hand. People also say they have had bad experiences redeeming paper vouchers for food and other products in designated shops.⁸ A 40-year-old village head in Paoua explained the difficulty: “The vouchers that we are given are bound to selected shops that we cannot choose. There the prices are very high, and we have no choice but to accept them. If we were given cash instead, we would be much better off.”

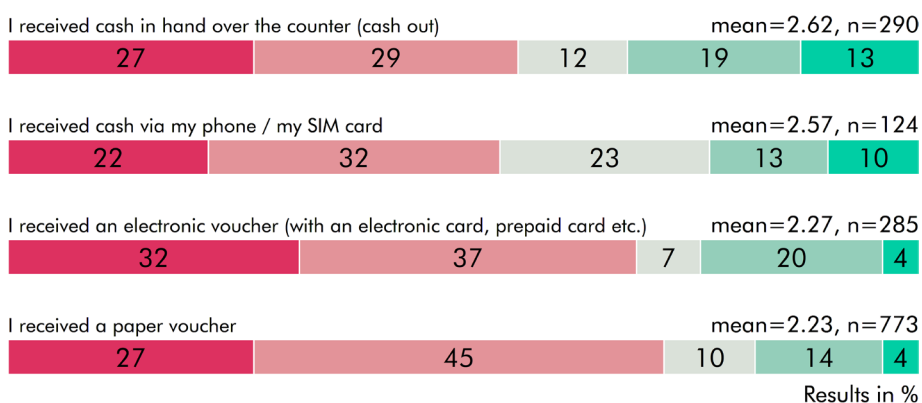
The threat of theft does not emerge in our research as a major drawback to cash in hand. Most recipients say they feel safe at all stages of the CVA process: when being notified about the selection, travelling to the distribution, during the distribution and when spending CVA. People who receive cash in hand are slightly more negative on these issues and are more likely than others to mention the risk of theft. But cash in hand remains the preferred delivery mechanism of those already receiving assistance this way.⁹

Cash and vouchers do not create a brighter future

“Cash will run out eventually. It is not what will make us self-sustaining.”

Cash and vouchers are designed as emergency assistance.¹⁰ The focus is on the now. So, unsurprisingly, people do not see it as particularly conducive to longer term recovery. This is especially true for voucher recipients. Younger people we surveyed, aged 18-30, said they need training to better plan for their future. In the face of the country’s high rate of unemployment, they would prefer to have a stable income. Better linkages between CVA and social protection programmes, which was a strategic priority for CAR in 2022, is a gap that seems to persist.

Do you think that the cash and voucher assistance you currently receive allows you to better consider or plan for your future?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes, completely

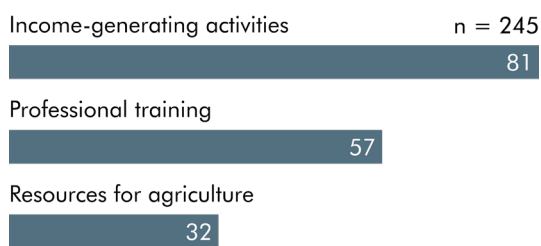
⁷ Based on information provided for CVA in CAR in the first half of 2022. See: [Cash Dashboard January to June 2022](#)

⁸ See chapter 4 for more details. The problems related to paper vouchers that were most frequently cited by respondents to a survey conducted by REACH are that vendors do not accept the vouchers and that the desired products are not available. REACH FSP Study, op. cit.

⁹ REACH FSP Study, op. cit.

¹⁰ In the [2022 HRP](#), CVA is listed as a means to achieve strategic objective (SO) 1, to address urgent and critical multisectoral needs, and is presented as an aid delivery modality for the SO 2, to ensure food security. 47-48.

What do you need to better plan for your future? (18 to 30-year-olds)



Results in %

What aid recipients want

- **Transition from vouchers to cash wherever possible**

"We are well aware that we live in an area where not everyone has access to Orange Money¹¹. I propose that those who have an Orange Money account can be credited directly and those who do not can be served directly in cash."

– *Man, 52 years old, host community, Paoua*

- **Ensure complementarity of cash and vouchers with other aid programmes¹²**

"There are a lot of idle young people in our district. Money is good but there is also another way to help. For example, organisations can help us to do training/income generating activities to enable us to become autonomous, which would be a better thing than always depending on assistance."

– *Man, 30 years old, community leader, Bangui*

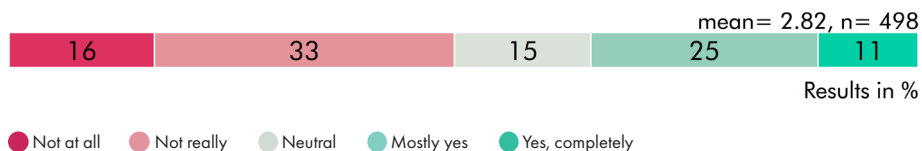
¹¹ Orange Money is a mobile money provider that allows people to buy Orange phone credit or other services, pay bills, and transfer money via a mobile wallet on their phones.

¹² This is in line with 1 of 4 Priorities (Partnership Priority) of the Cash Working Group for the [2022 HRP](#) (p. 35)

2. People do not think their opinions matter

If people cannot participate in decisions that affect them, a programme cannot claim to be accountable. In CAR, half of respondents do not think they have a say in aid programming. The people we spoke with find participation to be very important, but they do not see it happening in their communities. This corresponds with the REACH global AAP-analysis which ranks the response in CAR the worst when it comes to the consultation of households on their needs and preferences.¹³

Do you think people in your community can influence how cash and voucher assistance is provided?



“

They do not keep their promises. Usually, they say that they consider the point of view of us, the aid recipients, but in reality, they do not. According to my observations, they do not give the people what they need. People are given food even when that is not what they want.

— Man, 32 years old, community leader, Kaga Bandoro

People do not know how to provide feedback

“We have so much to say regarding the interaction between vendors and aid recipients. But how to address complaints or recommendations to humanitarian actors?”

Two out of three people surveyed do not know how to give feedback or file a complaint. In 2019, when the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) decided to introduce perception indicators to track accountability of the collective response, the target for *complaint mechanism awareness* was set at 50%. This target, already low in ambition, is in reach only for people living in IDP camps, where camp management apparently can set up complaint mechanisms more easily, and humanitarian presence in the camps provides a natural feedback loop. In non-camp communities, 80% of displaced people say they cannot voice frustration or anger to those who could make changes.

People distrust complaint mechanisms, saying they that often do not receive a response to the feedback or complaint they submitted.



Credit: Didier Kassei

¹³ REACH. 2022. “Accountability to Affected Populations – Global Key Findings,” p. 4

Do you know how to make suggestions or complaints about cash and voucher assistance you receive?



By population groups



● No ● Yes

Only half of those who had submitted a complaint say they received a response. Those who did, though, said they were satisfied with it. At the same time, our Feedback Mechanism Mapping conducted in 2021 showed that nearly all (96%) organisations consulted had put in place some type of system to respond to feedback, questions and complaints. This begs the question – where are these systems breaking down? Why do they leave so many complaints unanswered? The majority cite funding issues as a major challenge.

Did you receive a response to your suggestion or complaint?



● No ● Yes

How satisfied were you with the response you received to your complaint/suggestion?



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes, completely

Our previous research showed that, as elsewhere, aid recipients prefer to provide feedback in person.¹⁴ REACH MSNA data echoes these findings, with the top three preferred ways to provide feedback being community meetings (60%), face-to-face interactions at home (27%) and face-to-face interactions in an office (17%). Still, in a study we conducted in 2021, we found that most organisations in CAR use suggestion boxes (63% of the 48 organisations we surveyed).



Complaint boxes do exist here, but nobody raises awareness about them, so many people do not know about them.

– Man, 32 years old, community leader, Kaga Bandoro

Heads of households received responses to their complaint in 57% of the cases. The number plummets to 23% for people not heading households.



There are complaint boxes on the sites, yes. But unfortunately, we never get any feedback.

– Woman, 29 years old, community leader, Kaga Bandoro

¹⁴ Ground Truth Solutions. August 2021. [How do aid recipients feel about the humanitarian response in the Central African Republic?](#) Page 6.

How did you submit your complaint?

Face to face to a humanitarian actor n = 191

54

Community meeting

28

Complaint box

26

Results in %

What aid recipients want

- **Better explain how aid recipients can submit complaints and recommendations**

"Ideally, humanitarian actors organise awareness-raising sessions for the population to increase their knowledge on complaints and suggestion boxes."

– *Man, 30 years old, community leader, Paoua*

- **Come to communities to talk to recipients**

"To (humanitarians), our needs can be summed up by their needs assessment surveys conducted on what we eat during the day and how we live. But asking us what our basic needs are, they do not do that. So next time, when organisations want to help us, they should approach us and ask us what our real needs are."

– *Woman, 52 years old, host community, Bangui*

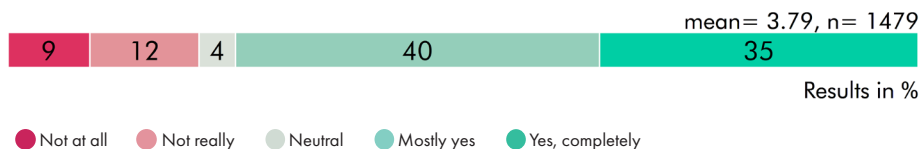
3. People lack basic information

Sitting, waiting, wishing

“They said we will receive CVA for six months but after two months they just stopped without informing us.”

In our survey, a great majority of respondents say they feel “informed” about CVA.

Do you feel informed about the cash and voucher assistance available to you?

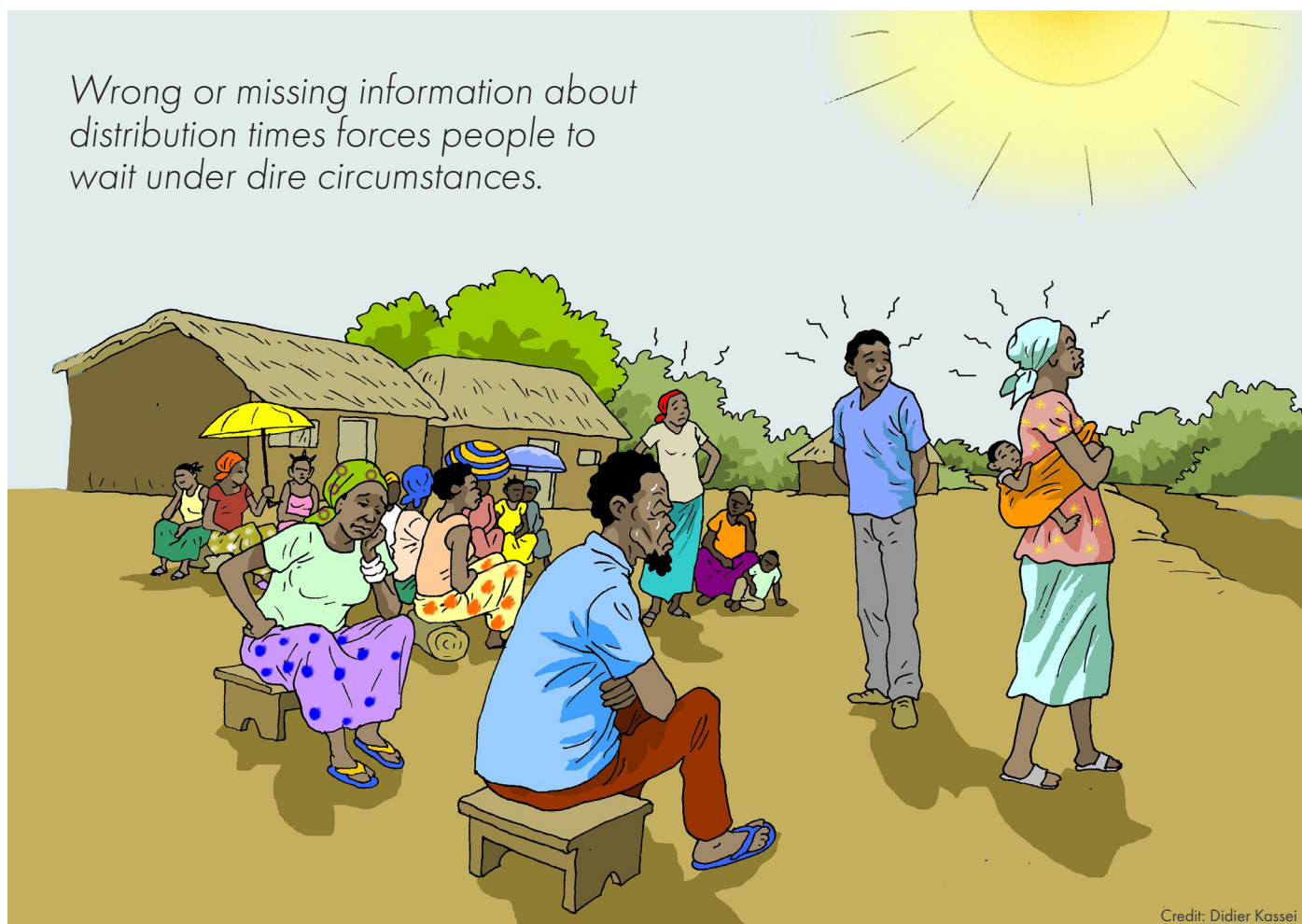


People with disabilities feel less informed (-8%), less empowered to participate (-18%), and trust leaders less to share crucial information with them (-14%) compared to people without disability.

However, further discussion calls this into question. By “being informed,” people might mean they are generally familiar with the modality, given their extensive exposure to cash and voucher assistance. This does not mean that humanitarian actors provide sufficient and timely information about the programmes themselves. Only 15% say they know how humanitarian money is spent in their communities. An overwhelming majority do not know the duration of the programme they are enrolled in (64%).

While for the moment we may not be sure of the reason for the gap among the three regions, it looks like Paoua may be able to teach us something.

Wrong or missing information about distribution times forces people to wait under dire circumstances.

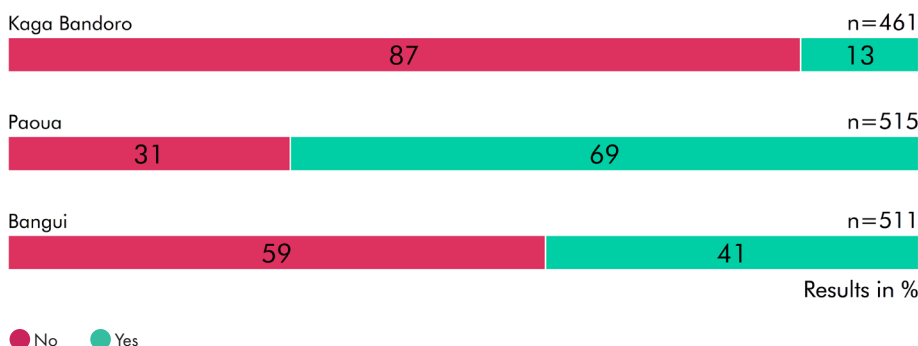


Credit: Didier Kassei

Do you know how long you will receive cash or voucher assistance for?

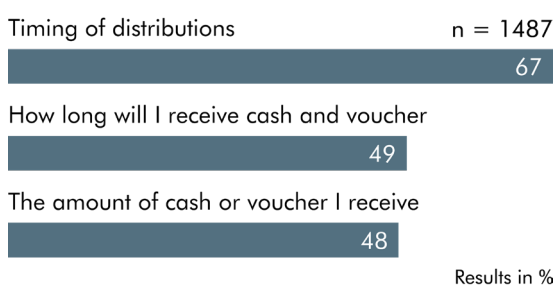


By region



Some aid actors we spoke to cited security concerns as justification for intentionally withholding information: they say they want to protect aid recipients and humanitarian workers from physical risks. Delivery of cash and vouchers can attract criminals, and limiting the information communicated to cash recipients in advance could be presented as an appropriate mitigation measure. However, this does not resonate with community members. People tell us they are tired of delays and cancellations of distributions without warning. Some have to walk up to 10 kilometers to distribution sites without knowing for sure whether the announced schedule will be respected. Changes in distribution schedules aren't communicated systematically, programmes that have been announced do not always come to fruition, and many programmes stop abruptly without people being informed in advance. When asked what humanitarians are doing wrong, many people mentioned poor communication.

What additional information about the cash or vouchers assistance do you need?



People do not understand how recipients are selected

"Nobody ever showed us the criteria on which they base their targeting."

The most frequent criticism levelled at humanitarians relates to targeting. Some people believe the selection criteria to be unfair, leaving out people in need. They demand an area-based approach that is more inclusive, more holistic, and would cause fewer tensions between community members.¹⁵ Among recipients surveyed, 22% say their relationships with other community members have worsened since receiving CVA; those living in Kaga Bandoro report a greater deterioration than CVA recipients in Bangui and Paoua. When tensions increase between displaced people and host communities, many say jealousy by those left out of CVA programs is to blame.

¹⁵ Centre for Global Development. October 2020. [Inclusive Coordination: Building an Area-Based Humanitarian Coordination Model](#).

“

I host 13 IDPs but only four were taken into account during the registration. So, what will be the reaction of those who got nothing? They will be angry of course. Humanitarian aid should not do harm, not divide.

— Man, 42 years old, host community, Paoua

“

In some localities close-by, they successfully ended their activities but in others, our community included, they just abandoned us aid recipients after two months without informing us. The programme was initially announced to last for six months.

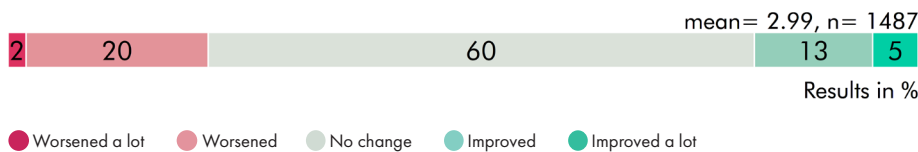
— Woman, 48 years old, host community, Paoua

“

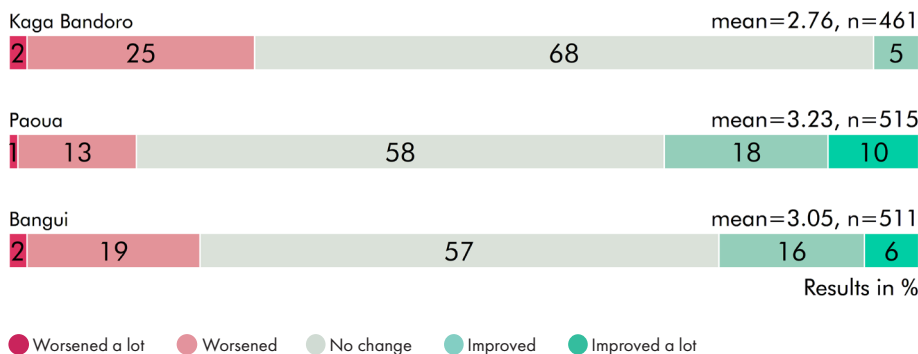
I think it's been over three months now since they gave us phones to receive mobile money. Since then, nothing has happened, they never followed-up with us.

— Man, 84 years old, host community, Bangui

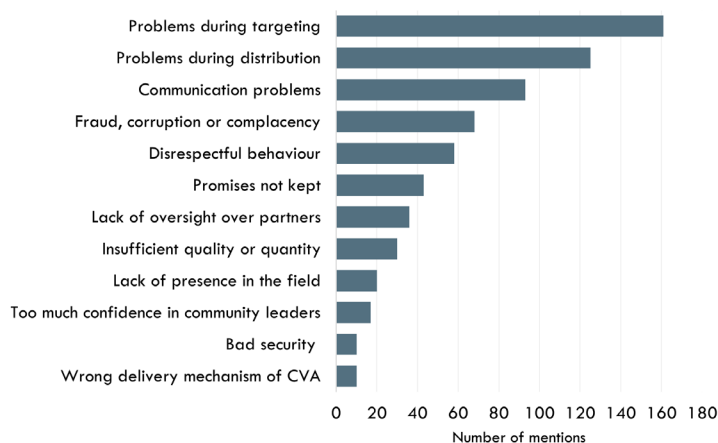
Has your relationship with other community members outside your household changed since you were selected to receive cash or vouchers?



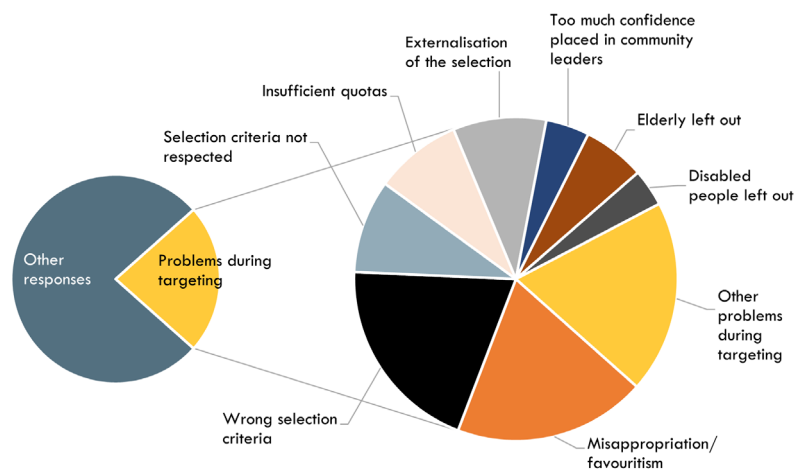
By region



What do humanitarians not do well?



These are answers to an open-ended question that we coded. The numbers indicate the number of mentions.



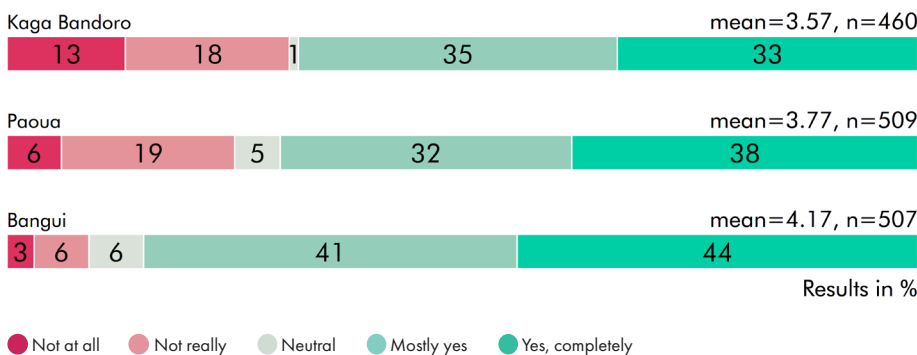
People with disability are more likely to see their relationship with other community members worsening after having received CVA than people without disability (31% vs. 20%). Similar results were reported within households (16% vs. 6%).

More communication channels needed

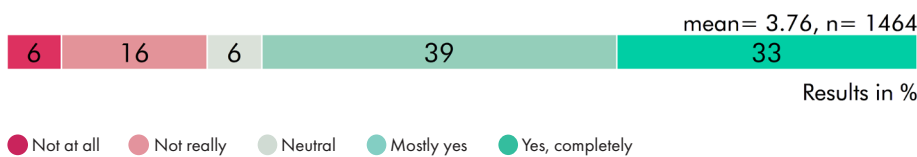
“They only pass the messages to community leaders, but the leaders do not always tell us everything.”

Community leaders seem to be perceived as a reliable source of information. A majority of respondents (77%) say they trust community leaders to make fair decisions and 72% believe their leaders share the necessary information about CVA programmes. Among MSNA respondents, 69% also cited community leaders as the most trusted source, followed by religious leaders (trusted by 29%) and international organisations (23%).¹⁶ The preferred channel for receiving information is radio (44%).

Do you trust your community leader to make decisions around cash and voucher assistance in a fair manner?



Do you feel that the community leaders share with you sufficient information about the cash and voucher assistance programmes?



But when asked for more detailed feedback, many aid recipients say they wish humanitarian actors spend more time in their communities to give information and to supervise activities. They challenge aid organisations’ tendency to channel information exclusively through a few powerful voices in the communities. They do not understand what they perceive as humanitarians’ blind trust in a few local work forces or authority figures in villages or communes. If there is a lack of trust, overreliance on community leaders can prove disastrous.

DIVERTED AID IN KAGA BANDORO

In Kaga Bandoro, one person in three of those surveyed do not trust community leaders to make fair decisions. In focus groups, people living in IDP sites said that aid meant for camp residents sometimes goes to people living outside the camps. They believe that people who have returned to their communities continue to receive aid thanks to their close personal ties to camp authorities. In other cases, we were told people working in camps urge residents to stay in the camp or to pretend to still live there to prevent a drop in aid.



I do not like their strategy of communication. I would like the humanitarians to communicate directly with the community instead of going through the site managers. The latter can lie to us to cover their own selfish interests.

— Woman, 30 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro

¹⁶ REACH. MSNA 2022, op. cit.

What aid recipients want

- **Interact with the community – not only the leaders**

"I propose that the staff of the organisation go to the field and in collaboration with the head of neighbourhood chiefs sensitise the population using a megaphone. If you just count on the heads of neighbourhoods to do it themselves, they won't pass on the messages they received from the aid organisation."

— *Man, 30 years old, community leader, Kaga Bandoro*

"Let the humanitarian actors themselves go down to the field to be really informed about the real problems in our localities rather than always sending community agents."

— *Woman, 24 years old, returnee, Bangui*

"At the moment we have a head of district, a women's association and a youth office that are all functioning. In the future, we want organisations that come and work in our neighbourhood to interact with all our community components. Because we know best about our neighbourhood, our problems and the vulnerable people. So, I think our involvement is crucial in the whole process of the activity. But truth is all the work is given to the head of the village, even though he alone cannot do everything."

— *Woman, 56 years old, host community, Bangui*

- **Better inform aid recipients about distribution dates, targeting, length of the assistance and amount**

"Inform the population of the selection criteria in order to avoid frustration."

— *Man, 56 years old, host community, Paoua*

"We want to be informed about the price increase of the products before we exchange our vouchers."

— *Woman, 28 years old, host community, Paoua*

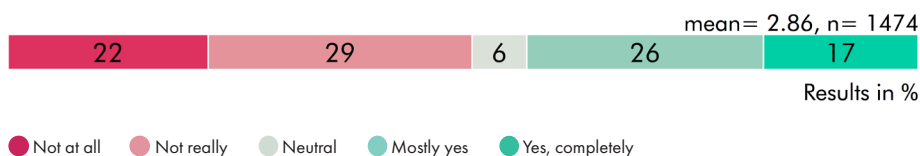
4. People demand scrutiny of vendors

"In the market, the day we redeem our vouchers at the vendor's shop, a bag of rice that usually cost US\$ 7 is sold to us for \$12."

Cash and voucher assistance often involves vendors contracted by humanitarian organisations to ensure the supply of goods and services that aid recipients can purchase.

Half of all recipients surveyed — and 60% of those who get paper vouchers — are dissatisfied with the vendors. They cite arbitrary and frequent price increases and the most common complaint is that vendors charge voucher users more than people who pay cash. This was also raised by interviewees last year.¹⁷

Are you satisfied with the conduct of vendors and payment agents?



“

[The vendors] disrespect us. And often they say rude things like 'If you are unhappy, just go home. You cannot redeem your voucher anywhere but here.' The kind of mistreatment leads us to sell our voucher at a very low price, sometimes half the actual voucher value. It is better to accept less and move on than to go back to the shops and be disrespected.

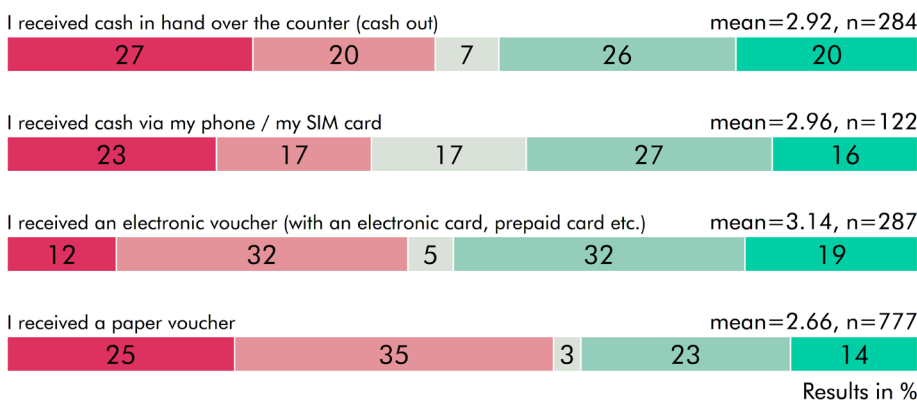
— Man, 32 years old, IDP, Paoua

Some people prefer to sell their vouchers to corrupt vendors instead of exchanging them for goods.



¹⁷ Ground Truth Solutions. March 2022. [Safety, dignity, and access must come first: Experiences of cash and voucher assistance in the Central African Republic \(Cash Barometer\)](#).

By delivery mechanism



● Not at all ● Not really ● Neutral ● Mostly yes ● Yes, completely

Why are you not satisfied with the conduct of vendors?

They charge more than the market price n = 821



They are corrupt



You cannot trust them



They do not respect us



Results in %

On top of price gouging, recipients complained about frequent and unbridled disrespect by vendors. Unethical vendor behaviour was the most popular topic of discussion in the free-flowing exchanges in all focus groups in the three provinces. People acknowledge aid organisations' attempt to support local economy systems instead of competing with them by importing the products or bringing in external shopkeepers, but do not accept the lack of vendor accountability. Once selected for a programme, vendors enjoy a monopoly on the market, recipients say. Vendors themselves are aware of the limited choices given to voucher recipients and are quick to mention this when people raise the issues of poor-quality products or unjustified price increases.

"Is that your money you pay with?"

- Vendor mocking CVA recipient for using money provided by humanitarian organisations

Some participants showed empathy for vendors, who face road tolls and inflation, as well as the cost and risk of transporting products to market, but they say price hikes exceed these costs, and are exacerbated by a lack of follow-up and accountability from humanitarian agencies.

In Bangui and Paoua, people allege corrupt practices that expose aid recipients to harm. In such cases, they say shop owners take advantage of voucher programmes and aid recipients' vulnerability by buying their vouchers for much less than face value. Vendors may end up making money even if their shelves are empty and their products of low-quality. Such practices strengthen the case for cash instead of vouchers. Cash allows the recipient to decide how and where to spend it with less restriction. In addition, e-transfers can reduce risks of fraud through more transparent tracking.¹⁸



The products we are given are of poor quality, be it sugar, fish, manioc, or coffee. When we notice it and want to denounce it, the suppliers insult us, they disrespect us and ask mockingly if it is our money that we use to pay for all this. Such answers hurt us."

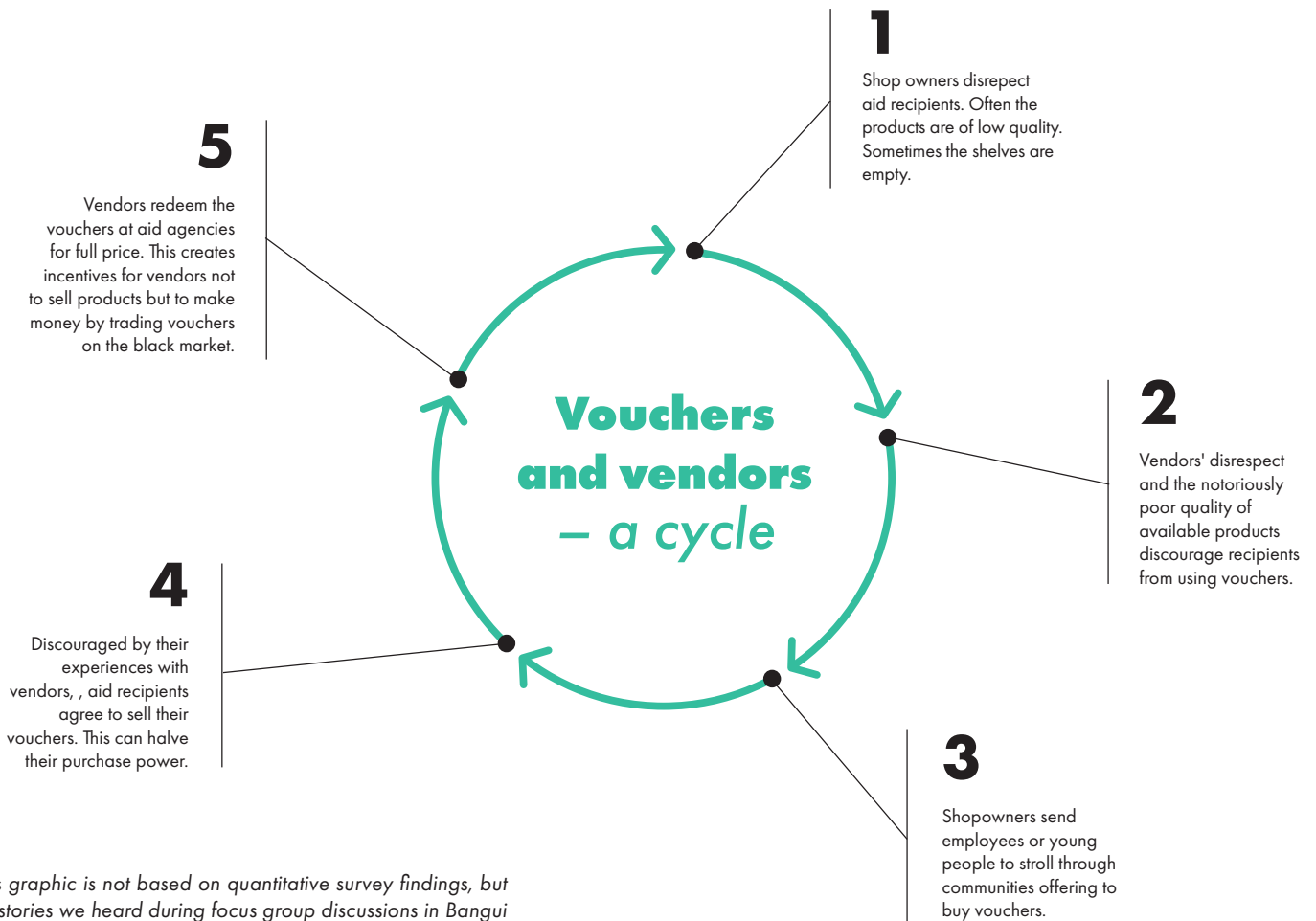
— Woman, 29 years old, host community, Bangui



Make vendors aware of the principle of 'do no harm'.

— Man, 58 years old, IDP, Paoua

¹⁸ CaLP, February 2018. [The State of the World's Cash Report](#).



This graphic is not based on quantitative survey findings, but on stories we heard during focus group discussions in Bangui and Paoua. They should be seen as indicative.

What aid recipients want

- Evaluate vendor conduct regularly and involve the community more**
 “Convene community meetings after distribution phases to take stock of what worked and what did not.”
 – *Man, 58 years old, IDP, Paoua*

“Often, in the run-up to each distribution, some humanitarian organisations hold a meeting with vendors. But we would like this same approach to apply to beneficiaries as well, for example, to convene a meeting with the beneficiaries to listen to them and find out about their difficulties. This is not done.”
 – *Man, 42 years old, host community, Paoua*
- Teach vendors humanitarian principles**
 “Train vendors on the principle of ‘do no harm’.”
 – *Man, 43 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro*
- Agree on standards**
 “Humanitarians should discuss with the vendors price stabilisation during voucher-product exchanges.”
 – *Man, 36 years old, returnee, Kaga Bandoro*

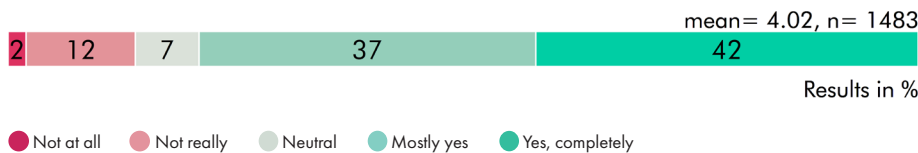
“Humanitarians should ask vendors to bring variety into their product range”.
 – *Man, 32 years old, host community, Paoua*

5. Lack of checks and balances leads to misconduct, communities say

“After vouchers have been distributed, humanitarian actors do not come back to us to understand the problems.”

Asked if they were satisfied with the conduct of humanitarian actors, an overwhelming majority said yes. Respondents say they are grateful for assistance, which is a true lifeline for many.¹⁹ Humanitarian workers are perceived as good people doing valuable work. When asked what aid providers are getting wrong, one in three had nothing to report. We acknowledge there is a possibility of bias if people fear losing future assistance for speaking out. However, we believe that our anonymous data collection methodology, independence from assessment exercises, and our status as a non-implementing organisation, help to keep this bias to a minimum. On the question of what aid providers are getting wrong, the other two thirds suggested things that require an immediate fix.

Are you satisfied with the conduct of humanitarian staff?



Many people we talked with alleged fraudulent behaviour and corruption. They told of officials charging money to put people on the list to receive aid (a practice known as name-selling), nepotism, bribery, and abuses of power by male aid providers who demanded sex in exchange for aid (see column on the right on the next page). Most people said they feel comfortable reporting unethical conduct, but this does not prevent cases from occurring.

“

Go to the camps. A lot of people are suffering. Some are struggling to find food but those close to a camp delegate will have two, sometimes three, vouchers to their disposal.

— Woman, 55 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro

“

I am an elderly person without support. I feel abandoned by the humanitarians. I do not feel the presence of the team in charge of the site to present my case.

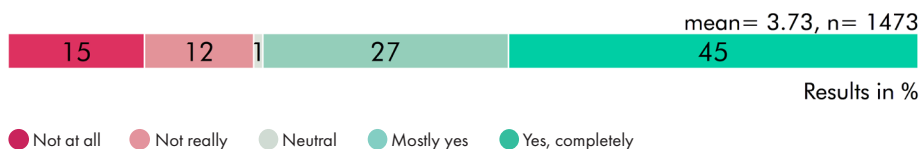
— Man, 62 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro

Some actors involved in distributions accept money to put affected people on the list of aid recipients.



Credit: Didier Kassei

Would you feel comfortable reporting abuse, harassment, or mistreatment by a humanitarian staff member?



Some accuse humanitarians of misconduct themselves, but most accuse external subcontractors and suppliers or local authorities who volunteer to oversee things like recipient selection. A few respondents said they do not understand humanitarians' blind trust in some local work forces or authority figures in villages or communes. They would welcome greater presence of humanitarian actors in their areas and the involvement of more diverse members of the community.

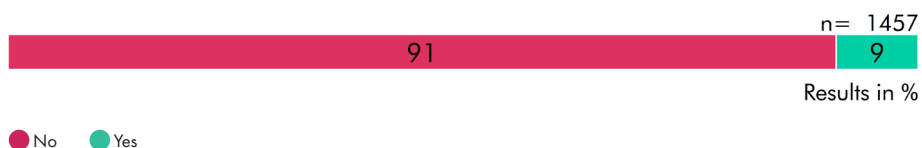
"The humanitarian actors are good, but it is those carrying out their tasks in the field who taint their image."

- Man, 62 years old, host community, Bangui

Some people say that humanitarians do not see the frequent cases of corruption and misbehaviour because they are seldom on the ground. Others paint a darker picture and say aid agencies know exactly what is going on, but decide not to put things right.

Being accountable means *using power responsibly*.²⁰ Outsourcing activities to already powerful men without putting in place well-functioning checks and balances puts people at risk of exploitation. One in ten people interviewed say that cash and voucher programmes have had a negative impact in their community. It is essential to make protection principles an integral part of CVA. Project design should take into account community power imbalances and should design interventions that uphold the humanitarian principle of impartiality.²¹

Do you feel that the activities of aid providers had any negative impact on you or the community?



● No ● Yes



On name selling: "The officer who registers all aid recipients will find someone in the community that is not eligible for humanitarian aid. He will choose a name at random from the list and sell the person that name. He will ask him to memorise the name well. On the day of the distribution, when the name is called up, two people will come forward. At that point the agent who sold the name will insist that only the person who gave him money is served."

- Man, 34 years old, host community, Kaga Bandoro



On nepotism: "Sometimes humanitarian staff tell their family members from Bangui to come over when the Orange Money accounts for us are set up. As soon as a targeted beneficiary is absent, they replace him/her by one of their relatives."

- Woman, 34 years old, host community, Bangui



On sexual abuse: "They slept with the girls. Only then would they put them on the list."

- Woman, 65 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro

Only 6% of the men say that household dynamics have deteriorated since they received CVA, but nearly twice as many women (11%) feel that way.

²⁰ Core Humanitarian Standard. 2018. "Guidance Notes and Indicators"

²¹ Somalia Protection Cluster. June 2019. "Essential Criteria for Cash and Vouchers Assistance".

What aid recipients want

- **Avoid outsourcing too many activities to subcontractors**

“We want humanitarian actors themselves to carry out the various distributions rather than leaving it to the head of villages. Their presence on the ground prevents a lot of bad things from happening. We think it’s their job, they came for that and not to stay away from us.”

— *Man, 70 years old, host community, Bangui*

- **Ensure checks and balances in project implementation**

“Site delegates are the reason why problems remain unresolved.... They tell you that if you want them to pass on your complaint to the right person, you have to promise them something in return if a solution is ever found to your problem. (...) What I would ask humanitarian organisations is to appoint internal staff members as controllers to come and supervise their activities”.

— *Man, 55 years old, IDP, Kaga Bandoro*

- **Increase presence in communities to better understand the situation**

“I would like the organisations working in CVA to also go to the field to better understand what the population is experiencing.”

— *Woman, 50 years old, host community, Bangui*

“For the proper execution of a project, aid agencies must go to the communities themselves to avoid that the head of villages have too much power that they can use for their own benefit.”

— *Man, 75 years old, host community, Bangui*

- **Respond to complaints**

“During distribution, setting up an emergency complaints committee is good. If you cannot get access your CVA, you are referred to this committee, which is responsible for checking whether someone has gone to get service on your behalf before. But once the check is done, this committee does not provide you with a solution. They just ask you to wait for the next one. They need to investigate and follow-up.”

— *Woman, 59 years old, host community, Bangui*

What do aid providers suggest?

Between July and October 2022, we spoke with humanitarian actors, as members of the cash and AAP working groups, to discuss their reactions to our findings and collect recommendations to tackle reoccurring issues. These recommendations will need to be translated into concrete actions by humanitarian actors.

To address poor levels of information:

- Prioritise feedback mechanisms and communication channels preferred by aid recipients.
- Multiply communication channels and avoid exclusive communication to heads of villages or neighbourhoods.

To address poor participation:

- Set-up regular awareness-raising sessions on available feedback mechanisms.
- Determine aid modality and delivery mechanism in conjunction with the community; conduct participatory risk analysis and needs assessments.
- Integrate systematic real-time follow-ups into programme design to better understand the impact of ongoing CVA.

To address the lack of trust in targeting:

- Ensure clear and inclusive composition of targeting committees (greater participation of women, minority groups, other marginalised populations).
- Harmonise targeting criteria across humanitarian organisations, adapted in collaboration with communities.
- Increase aid recipients' awareness of the programme objectives and the selection criteria through better communication.
- Prioritise two-level targeting: A first tentative selection of aid recipients conducted by staff members (or external partners, local volunteers etc.) is endorsed in a second step, a community meeting that takes place a few days later. This allows for mistakes to be identified, and to get the community's buy-in. Only then would a recipient list be signed off by community leaders.

To address vendor misconduct:

- Organise feedback sessions with aid recipients after distributions to allow them to raise concerns about vendor conduct. Present this feedback to vendors in a separate meeting and discuss the issues.
- Raise awareness of humanitarian principles among vendors. Offer incentives for proper conduct?
- Create a platform with the vendors' union.
- Set up an accountability system for vendors that makes sure there are consequences for those who do not follow the rules.

Methodology

Survey

Design

The survey was designed to cover a large proportion of people receiving cash and voucher assistance (CVA) in CAR in a representative manner, considering location, gender, and ages of recipients. We purposefully sampled three sub-prefectures that combined cover about 68% of the CVA recipients in CAR in 2021 (based on CVA Working Group data).

The sample was stratified by sub-prefectures and locations within them; in addition, a gender quota was used. The sample was allocated among the three sub-prefectures with approximately equal size to allow for estimates at that level. The final sample sizes were 511 for Bangui (including Bimbo), 461 in Kaga-Pandoro, and 515 in Paoua.

For Paoua, and Kaga-Pandoro the locations of CVA distributions were towns, and villages, as well as geographical axis between them, shared with us by relevant CVA actors. The sample was proportionally allocated to these locations, based on the number of CVA recipients. On site level, interviewers used a random-walk approach, whereby they went to each n-th dwelling, n being calculated based on the number of CVA recipients in the locations and the sample size. This random walk approach could not always be implemented in a precise manner since the exact location of CVA recipients within the villages is unknown.

For Bangui and Bimbo, the sample was allocated proportionally to CVA recipients in each arrondissement of the city. However, due to a lack of data, the selection of quartiers, the sub-units of arrondissements, followed a convenience sampling approach.

Weighting

Overall results are weighted based on the size of the sub-prefectures in terms of CVA recipients, based on Cash Working Group data. Note that quarterly averages of CVA recipients were used, rather than accumulated data. We used a post-stratification weighting technique to adjust for age group and gender, based on the demographics of the people-in-need population in CAR, as specified in the HNO.

Coverage and exclusion

The three areas included in our survey cover 68% of the CVA recipients in CAR based on averages of CVA recipients over the four quarters in 2021 (data based on figures from the Cash Working Group).

For Bangui, Paoua, and Kaga Bandoro, we were able to source data on CVA-distribution points for 83% to 91% of the CVA recipients as reported to the Cash Working Group. In Pauoa and Kaga-Bandoro not all locations were accessible because of logistical and security constraints. Taken together with the incompleteness of the data and inaccessibility of some areas, overall, for Pauoa, and Kaga Bandoro we have coverage rates ranging between 75% to 77% of the known CVA recipients respectively. In Bangui, we were able to reach all known locations. Taken together and considering their unequal size in terms of CVA recipients, we were able to include, overall, 85% of all CVA recipients in the three sub-prefectures in our sampling.

Precision of estimates

To calculate margins of error we used the package “survey” in R, specifying the survey design as outlined above. Note that the precision varies from question to question, sample size per questions (as some of the questions are just follow up questions asked to a sub-set of the total sample). For questions that were asked to all people surveyed, the margins of error range between 1.9 and 4% points. For estimates at sub-prefecture level, margins of error range between 1.9 and 6.7% points for Bangui, Kaga-Pandoro und Paoua. To calculate these margins of error, probability sampling has to be assumed. Note that for this survey, the main feature of probability sampling – that each individual has a known probability to be included – could not always be strictly adhered to at site level. Given that there is no comprehensive sampling frame available with all existing CVA recipients in CAR, we assume that the chosen sampling design is a reasonably close approximation to a probability sampling design in this context.

Challenges during data collection / Limitations

We originally intended to use the dataset compiled by the cash working group in CAR to inform the sampling strategy. Concerns over duplicated entries and the lack of comprehensive information within sub-prefectures prompted the project team to consult additional data sources to confirm and complement extracted information from the Cash Working Group dataset.

Due to a lack of data on the types of CVA delivered at the sub-prefecture level, the sample was not stratified by the delivery mechanism received. As such, the achieved sample includes a higher percentage paper voucher recipients than are present in the population. However, disaggregation by aid modality does not indicate that this causes a bias in overall estimates.

While the sampling approach in Kaga Bandoro and Paoua was stratified by specific locations of CVA distributions, such sampling strategy was not possible in Bangui due to a lack of data regarding the ratio of CVA recipients at the sub-arrondissement level. There the sampling process involved asking mayors of the respective arrondissement to identify *quartiers* home to CVA recipients. Received information was verified by consulting with the heads of designated *quartiers* to then deploy the survey in selected *quartiers* where CVA programs were implemented in 2021, with a minimum of two sampled *quartiers* per arrondissement.

In Bangui, enumerators faced difficulties in employing a random walk process within the *quartiers*. Not only are Bangui’s *quartiers* extremely vast compared to their counterparts in rural Paoua and Kaga Bandoro, but information was also missing about the precise number of CVA recipients in each quartier. This meant our team had to ask village heads and some people who had already completed the survey to indicate many of the areas in which cash or voucher assistance has been distributed within their *quartiers* to fulfil targeted quota.

The first two days of data collection in Bangui yielded an insufficient number of male respondents, putting the targeted equal division of men and women at risk. It is not uncommon for men designated as head of households to be out of their village during daytime earning a living. GTS’s enumerators were able to counter the initial disproportionate breakdown by gender by targeting more male respondents in the subsequent days of data collection.

Communication with Communities

Design

In September 2022, preliminary results from the quantitative study were presented to communities from all three sampled subprefectures – Bangui, Paoua, and Kaga Bandoro. Results were shared in focus group discussions. Participants were:

- Returnees, host community members, or internally displaced people
- People who had received CVA in the past year
- 18 years old or older

The groups separated male aid recipients from female aid recipients, and community leaders from community members. As such, three focus group discussions took place in each subprefecture: one all-male group, one all-women group, and one with community leaders only. A total of nine focus group discussions were conducted. Each group included up to ten participants.

Sampling

For each of the three subprefectures, one community was selected as the location for the focus groups. This allowed to compare male vs female aid recipients experience residing in the same community, as well as community members' perceptions with that of community leaders. In Bangui, focus groups took place in the 3rd arrondissement, *quartier Guida*. In Paoua as well as in Kaga Bandoro, participants gathered in the city centre. The selection of the venue followed consultation with the mayor's staff.

Community leaders were invited to accompany facilitators in the participant selection. Local knowledge was explicitly desired in order to avoid the inclusion of very close friends or neighbors as well as people in disharmony; the first could lead to an inorganic "room-domination" and the latter can hinder candid opinion-sharing in a fluid discussion.

Facilitators were joined by note-takers selected from the community. This can constitute an additional layer of trust in the room. Furthermore, the discussion took place in a chair circle, with both moderators included in this circle to avoid a teacher-student atmosphere.

Data collection team

The team was designed in house, with both national consultants of GTS facilitating the discussions on site.

Data collection and analysis

Transcriptions from the group discussion and notes taken by the notetaker were systematically categorised and analysed using MaxQDA.



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