

Independent Review

Cash Based Programming in Iran

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Prepared for the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Danish Refugee Council, and Relief International

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BAFIA	Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs
CASWA	Central Asia South West Asia
CBI	Cash-Based Intervention
CHD	Community Help Desk
CRM	Complaints Response Mechanism
CWG	Cash Working Group
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
ERM	Emergency Response Mechanism
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FSP	Financial Service Provider
ICLA	Information Counselling and Legal Assistance
IPA	Individual Protection Assistance
IPACG	Individual Protection Assistance Cash Grant
JAM	Joint Assessment Mission
JNA	Joint Needs Assessment
KAP	Knowledge Attitude and Practices
PDA	Participatory Development Associates
PDM	Programme Development Manager
ICRI	International Consortium for Refugees in Iran
IRR	Iranian Rial
MPC	Multi-Purpose Cash
MPCG	Multi-Purpose Cash Grant
NFE	Non-Formal Education
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
SPD	Strategic Programme Document
TMN	Toman
ToC	Theory of Change

Exchange rate:

1 Toman (TMN) = 10 Iranian Rials (IRR)

Average exchange rates for 2017: 1 EUR = 37'534 IRR, 1 USD = 0.887 EUR

1 Introduction

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 triggered the first wave of refugees from Afghanistan to neighbouring Iran. Since then, migration to the country has continued without end. Ongoing conflict, insecurity, and poor economic conditions drive many civilians across the border. Today it is estimated that more than 3 million Afghans reside in Iran, making it host to one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations in the world.

The Afghan population in Iran consists of registered refugees, passport holders, and undocumented. In 2015, the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) reported 951'142 registered Afghan refugees.¹ That is, only about one third of the estimated 3 million Afghans residing in Iran are officially registered refugees. The number of Afghans holding an Afghan passport with a valid Iranian visa is estimated at 620'000 people and the number of undocumented Afghans at 1.5 to 2 million people.

For several years, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Relief International (RI) have been supporting vulnerable Afghans in Iran: RI has been in Iran since 1991 and DRC and NRC established their presence in 2012. The International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) aim at helping vulnerable Afghans improve their living conditions and prevent secondary displacement.

From mid 2016 to the end of 2017, the INGOs implemented the Humanitarian Implementation Plan 2016 (HIP16) funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department's (ECHO). They have been providing cash to support Afghans in accessing basic needs as well as to assist them addressing individual protection needs. While the INGOs have been working with different delivery mechanisms, they all made use of unrestricted and unconditional cash allowing beneficiaries to spend the assistance according to their individual needs. Collectively the three INGOs transferred roughly 2.5 million Euros to several thousand households and collected a substantial body of evidence on the outcomes of the CBIs through monitoring activities and beneficiary feedback. In addition, the INGOs run a number of other programs that use CBIs as well – some of which are ECHO funded too.

All three INGOs will continue using cash modalities in their Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018, which they will start implementing from June 2018. In order to inform their respective projects and the related Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) efforts, they commissioned an independent 'light-touch' remote review of the outcomes of the CBIs implemented during HIP16.

This document presents the results of the commissioned review. It discusses the extent to which the interventions have achieved set objectives, identifies exiting information gaps, and proposes ways to strengthen the cash-based programming and the related M&E to further improve the INGOs future efforts to support vulnerable Afghans in Iran. The document unfolds as follows: Section 2 summarizes the purpose, objectives, and scope of the review. Section 3 presents the methodology used. Section 4 presents some key features that characterize of the context in which the INGOs implement their CBIs as well as a description of their respective programs. Section 5 details the review findings. Section 6 provides the key conclusions and Section 7 presents a series of recommendations.

¹ UNHCR (2017). In addition, there were 28'268 registered Iraqi refugees.

2 Review purpose and objectives

In early 2018, the three INGOs commissioned the consultant to undertake an independent, 'light-touch' review of the outcomes of the HIP16 CBIs.² He was to generate independent findings and conclusions regarding the outcomes and results of the HIP16-funded CBIs that can inform programming decisions for the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018 as well as to provide recommendations for the program's baseline assessment methodology and identify information gaps that can be addressed during respective assessments. While the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018 had been largely finalised prior to the start of this review, the review results are seen as a good opportunity to influence decision making before the implementation.

2.1 Key questions

1. What are the outcomes and results of the HIP16-funded CBIs, and how do these outcomes and results compare against the intended outcomes?
2. Among the different modalities and delivery mechanisms used in HIP16 CBIs, which show signs of being more effective for meeting program objectives?
3. How could the CBIs of the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018 achieve greater and more sustainable outcomes, given the context of a protracted crisis in Iran?
4. What key information gaps need to be filled during the baseline of the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018, and what are some appropriate outcome indicators that could be measured across the INGOs in 2018?

While addressing these questions, the review also seeks to address the following more detailed questions listed in the revised version of the Terms of Reference for this consultancy:

- (a) What are the outcomes and results of the HIP16-funded CBIs, and how do these outcomes and results compare against the intended outcomes?
 - Is there a need to change program implementation and/or direction?
 - *What would be involved in a shift towards an integrated approach with sectoral outcomes?*
- (b) *Which of the CBI variables (transfer value, frequency and timing) used by the INGOs show signs of generating the most significant and longest-term outcomes, and in what ways?*
- (c) *Have complementary activities, such as trainings or partial in-kind distribution, influenced impact or sustainability of impact?*
- (d) *To what extent did the programs reach their target group(s) based on the INGOs reporting?*
 - *What recommendations could be made to narrow the targeting to the MOST vulnerable?*
- (e) *What attempts have been made to promote harmonization between the INGOs and other Cash WG Members?*
 - *To what extent is it feasible and recommended to harmonise CBI approaches across agencies delivering similar CBIs (in terms of intended objectives, outcomes and target groups) – and what recommendations could be made in this regard?*
- (f) *Were there any unintended positive or negative consequences from using CBIs?*

2.2 Review scope

² The following is based on the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this review which can be found in Annex 1.

This review covers the period from the HIP16 funded CBIs implemented prior to the start of this review in January 2018. The review's focus is on the cash provided to support basic needs³ and for Individual Protection Assistance (IPA).

3 Methodology

The methodology used was primarily qualitative and included a desk review and semi-structured interviews with staff members of the three commissioning INGOs as well as with the cash program officers of WFP and UNHCR in Iran. The work was conducted between 7 January and 17 April 2018.

3.1 Data collection

Desk review: The consultant reviewed the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA), program documents and guidelines, Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports and he analysed the available program baseline and post distribution monitoring data.⁴

Interviews with INGO staff: The consultant devised interview guides for the interviews with the staff members of the three commissioning agencies involved in cash-based programming and conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 people.⁵ In addition, he interviewed the cash program managers of WFP and UNHCR on their experiences with CBI in Iran. All interviews were conducted via Skype.

Quantitative data: DRC and NRC provided the consultant with baseline and PDM data. The consultant used the sources to crosscheck quantitative and qualitative arguments made in the different documents and during the interviews and to put them into perspective. RI was unable to share its baseline and PDM data as they were still being worked on.

3.2 Data analysis

The data collected through the interviews mirrors the commissioning agencies' experiences with the CBIs implemented in Iran. The respective data is of qualitative nature. The review as such was not designed to allow statistical analysis.

The gathered information and documents were analysed for themes and patterns. The materials were analysed in the following order: (i) program proposals and documents, (ii) notes from the interviews with staff members, and (iii) review of the available baseline and PDM data – which did not go beyond simple descriptive statistics.

3.3 Limitations

There were several limitations to the methodology and the data collection that must be taken into account with respect to the potential impact they may have on the type, representativeness, and quality of the gathered information.

- The three INGOs have limited information about the Afghan population in Iran (i.e. population estimates for the different provinces or urban neighbourhoods they work in) as respective data is either not available or not accessible. It is thus difficult to estimate the programs' relative importance when it comes to coverage.

³ 'Basic needs' are understood to be 'The resources that people need to survive, including essential goods and services such as food, water, shelter, clothing, health care (including nutrition services), sanitation and education.' See Household Economic Security (HES) Technical Guidelines for Assessment, Analysis and Programme Design', British Red Cross, 2014.

⁴ The consulted documents can be found in the bibliography at the end of this review.

⁵ For a list of the interviewed people see Annex 2.

- While the PDM questionnaires of NRC and DRC are similar with regard to at least part of the questions, they are not the same and therefore hard to compare or merge.⁶ Questions are phrased in different ways and in different order, which is likely to affect comparability.
- Most data regarding expenditures is retrospective and self-reported. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the data. Unless beneficiaries are asked to track their expenditures – as they are by RI – they have to remember them. This raises the question of the accuracy of recall data and the question of whether beneficiaries have an interest to report their true income. While these are typical issues when it comes to collecting and analyzing income data the limited availability of secondary data to compare the findings with makes the issue the issues a little more problematic than usual. Crosschecking information during the interviews by confronting the interviewees with secondary data) as well as during the data analysis is particularly difficult.

4 Context

As most of the registered Afghan refugees were born and raised in Iran, the refugee situation can definitely be described as a stable, protracted crisis that fits ECHO's criterion for the use of multipurpose cash transfers.⁷ Despite the protracted nature of the context, the accessible social-economic information on Afghans living in Iran is very limited.

4.1 Limited access to Afghans

All matters regarding Afghans are managed by BAFIA. If the INGOs want to conduct any form of assessment or household visits they require its authorization and a pre-approval of the interview forms they want to use. A recent attempt to obtain detailed information of the household economy of Afghans living in Iran showed that required authorizations are hard to get. This is one of the main reasons for the INGO's constrained ability to access more in-depth, robust, and up-to-date information on the specific needs of Afghans and specific risks they face.

Another reason is the large number of Afghans living in Iran and the fact that the vast majority of them are spread across the country's major urban centres. Even if the INGOs had free access to them it would take a major effort to conduct an exhaustive needs and livelihoods assessment.

BAFIA has a database containing all registered Afghan refugees. While it provides the INGOs with lists of vulnerable Afghans they deem to be in need of support, they do not provide the INGOs with any additional information that would allow them to estimate the potential number of beneficiaries. BAFIA only stated that they consider 25%–30% of the registered Afghan refugees to be vulnerable people with specific needs. This makes it very difficult for the INGOs to estimate their potential caseload.

4.2 Attempts made to identify Afghans' needs

There have been only two recent comprehensive efforts to assess the needs of Afghan households in Iran: The Joint Assessment Mission (JAM)⁸ conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2016

⁶ See DRC (2017a & 2017b) and NRC (2017c).

⁷ See ECHO (2017, p. 1). The protracted nature of the situation was confirmed by the recent JNA, which shows that more than half of the assessed Afghan households have been living in Iran for over 20 years (see also Annex 9).

⁸ WFP & UNHCR (2016). The assessment is a periodic program review and the 2016 exercise was conducted in four of the 20 settlements.

and the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA)⁹ conducted by the three INGOs in 2017 in partnership with the International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI) and several local NGOs.

The JAM was exclusively focussed on households living in the refugee settlements who make up only about 3% of the registered refugee population. Its main objectives were to document the food security situation in the settlements, review the quality and appropriateness of the UN agencies' interventions, and assess the feasibility of introducing a cash-based transfer modality.¹⁰ Since the INGOs do not assist the settlement populations with CBIs, the respective information can serve them at best as a base for comparison.

The JNA was to provide information on the needs of Afghans in different sectors¹¹ across 6 provinces¹² allowing INGOs to design more impactful programs. When the INGOs developed the assessment questionnaires, they included a series of detailed questions addressing the household economy and livelihoods of Afghan households. Yet, most of these questions were not approved by BAFIA and had to be dropped. Consequently, the assessment provides only limited socio-economic information that can be used for programming.¹³

The JNA shows that 81% of the assessed households have been residing in Iran for more than 10 years and only few have received assistance in the 3 months prior to the assessment.¹⁴ As there do not appear to have been any recent sizeable support programs, these households have most likely not received assistance in a long time. One can thus assume that they have adapted to their situation and found mechanisms to get by – including the normalisation using of coping strategies.

The JNA suggests that the main concern of Afghan households is poverty. It mentions an average monthly household income of 5'700'000 IRR (152 EUR) and an average household size of 6. This corresponds to an average income of 31'667 IRR (0.84 EUR) per person per day which is well below the national poverty line.¹⁵ Missing income opportunities is said to force 94% of the assessed households to apply negative coping mechanisms to make ends meet – the most common mechanisms being to take children out of school and to borrow money. The assessment also points out that a significant number of households reduce their food consumption to cope with a lack of income.¹⁶

The JNA identifies needs in all assessed sectors. Households face difficulties accessing food, paying rent, improving shelter, accessing water, covering health expenditures, paying for education related costs, and renewing official documents. Yet, it neither quantifies the needs (gap analysis) nor does it mention which Afghan households are most affected.¹⁷

In 2017, the CWG members identified that a small number of vulnerable Afghan households are living in extremely destitute circumstances¹⁸ – these households include female headed households, child headed households, households with disabled members, households with many children, and households without income generating opportunities. The vulnerable

⁹ JNA (2017). The joint needs assessment included the main project areas of the three INGO's. The only locations not included were Qom, Semnan, Shiraz, and Bandar-e-Abbas.

¹⁰ See also WFP & UNHCR (2016a).

¹¹ The assessment focused on livelihoods, food security, household economy, shelter, water, health, education, and legal documentation.

¹² The assessed provinces included Tehran, Alborz, Esfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Khorasan Janubi, and Kerman.

¹³ The available household economy and livelihoods information is limited to monthly income, debt and savings, the reasons for debt, the access to a bank account, asset ownership, livelihood coping strategies, employment sectors, the reasons for not working, and the food consumption score.

¹⁴ JNA (2017, p. 29).

¹⁵ RI (2017f, p. 6) reports the Iranian national poverty line to be 72 USD per person per month – that is, 2.40 USD per person per day.

¹⁶ The assessment only mentions that the typical coping mechanisms are reducing food intake and taking children out of school JNA (2017, p. 39)). The assessments raw data was not available.

¹⁷ As was pointed out by NRC during the review of this report, now that the MEB has been established it would be fairly easy to perform a gap analysis using the JNA data.

¹⁸ CWG (2017d, p. 8).

groups appear to have been identified during several rounds of consultations between the three INGOs and UNHCR in order to harmonise the vulnerability criteria.¹⁹ A proxy means test does not seem to have been conducted.

Household income is most likely the prime vulnerability indicator for the Afghan households living in chronic poverty. And yet, the INGOs do not seem to have assessed to what extent their vulnerability criteria select the households with the lowest per household member income.²⁰

In summary one can say that the INGOs had to design their CBIs without much information about the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the households they intend to assist. They had no reference points allowing them to make absolute statements about vulnerability.²¹

4.3 Beneficiary selection

There are three basic ways the INGOs get in contact with potential beneficiaries: Through lists of vulnerable Afghans provided by BAFIA, referrals from other INGOs or local NGOs, or direct contact (e.g. hot-lines, office visit, community outreach facilitators).²² In every case the three INGOs assess beneficiaries based on their vulnerability criteria before they admit them to their CBIs. That is, referred beneficiaries are subject to two-stage targeting.²³

The INGOs apply their vulnerability criteria to both the referred and the directly identified beneficiaries. In an attempt to harmonise their approach, the INGOs decided to base their criteria on UNHCR's vulnerability criteria.²⁴ While each INGO uses an adapted version of the criteria, they all focus on the similar criteria: age and dependency of the head of household; number of dependent household members; number of adult household members; number of household members with disabilities or serious medical conditions; housing situation; inability to afford documentation renewal; the use of coping mechanisms; children, older persons, and women facing particular risks; and households that have recently experienced an emergency situation (e.g. loss of employment, loss of breadwinner, risk of eviction, sudden serious illness etc.). The unconditional Multi-Purpose Cash Grants implemented by NRC are an exception in this respect. They focused heavily on the food security scores of the identified household.

Based on the provided information the consultant could not judge whether the applied vulnerability criteria are appropriate to identify the most vulnerable Afghan refugee households.²⁵ However, as vulnerability of Afghan refugee households appears to be mostly caused by a lack of access to income it would appear reasonable to pay more attention to household income when it comes to determining household vulnerability. This might also provide a better idea about the quality of the different currently used vulnerability criteria.

4.4 Two types of cash-based interventions

When it comes to their CBIs the three INGOs basically distinguish between general vulnerability resulting from a chronic lack of income and vulnerability caused by a recent shock affecting income. Consequently, they offer two types of CBIs: unconditional Multi-Purpose Cash Grants (MPCG) to support basic needs and unconditional, unrestricted cash grants for Individual Protection Assistance (IPA) to address shock-related costs.

Both CBIs consist of a one-off cash transfer to the beneficiary household. The stated objective of the unconditional MPCGs is to make sure selected households have enhanced ability to

¹⁹ RI (2017f, p. 3).

²⁰ As was pointed by NRC out during the review of this report, the NRC would allow to verify to what extent the criteria select households with the lowest household per person household income.

²¹ See for example NRC (2017, p. 7).

²² DRC and RI use all three channels to access beneficiaries. NRC only uses the BAFIA lists and referrals.

²³ See for example NRC (2017d, p. 1).

²⁴ See UNHCR's Scoring System for more detail.

²⁵ See also CashCap (2017, p. 10).

meet basic needs.²⁶ The objective of the IPA is to help selected households to deal with short-term shock-induced costs reducing the chances of them having to apply negative coping mechanisms.

The available information suggests the vulnerability of Afghan households is the result of a chronic lack of income.²⁷ One-off MPCG can thus not be expected to have a significant and lasting impact on these households and indeed none of the INGOs is expecting their grant to solve these households' chronic problem. They are thus only aiming at providing some temporary relief.

A one-off IPA on the other hand can be expected to have a significant and longer-lasting impact on a vulnerable household if they are provided to address the costs of a sudden extraordinary shock that would force a vulnerable Afghan person to refer to negative coping mechanisms if they were not assisted. The intervention is about preventing the household from applying negative coping that might have a longer-lasting negative impact on the household. The crucial question is whether the shock qualifying a beneficiary for an IPA is a truly extraordinary event or whether the beneficiary's situation is the consequence of a chronic lack of income. Another question is whether the INGO is nimble enough to deliver the assistance in a time frame that is suitable to achieve the intended objective.

5 Review results

5.1 Intentions and outcomes

The following presents the outcomes and results of the HIP16 funded CBIs extracted from the documents and monitoring data provided by the three INGOs and reviews how they compare to the intended outcomes mentioned in the program proposals.

5.1.1 Interventions and intentions

Table 1 provides a basic overview of the two types of HIP16-financed unconditional unrestricted CBIs implemented by the INGOs to support vulnerable Afghan households: MPCGs to support households' basic needs and IPAs to address individual protection related issues. The upper section of the table shows the ranges of transfer values, the number of instalments, and the number of targeted households or beneficiaries.

Table 1: Program parameters and indicators for the HIP16 financed CBIs²⁸

	Cash to			Cash for		
	support basic food & non-food needs			Individual Protection Assistance		
	DRC	NRC	RI	DRC	NRC	RI
Transfer value (EUR)	200 – 300	150 – 350	200 – 400	133 – 266	350	300
# of instalments	1	1	2	1	1	1
Target # of beneficiary HH	1600	1500	2700	–	–	–
Target # of beneficiaries	–	–	–	770	900	500
Indicators to measure intervention result						
# of HH that received transfer(s)	1600	1500	2700	770	900	500
# of HH that spent 80% on basic needs	80%	–	–	–	–	–
# of HH with acceptable FCS	–	80%	–	–	–	–
# of HH satisfied with assistance	–	–	2600	75%	80%	–

Sources: DRC (2017), NRC (2017), and RI (2017).

²⁶ See NRC (2017, p. 11), DRC (2017, p. 12), and RI (2017, p. 15).

²⁷ See also CWG (2017e, p. 2).

²⁸ The transfer value for IPA cash for NRC is an average value that was calculated based on the total cash transfer budget and the target number of beneficiaries.

The mentioned transfer ranges for MPCGs are a consequence of the fact that the INGOs intended to adapt their grant value to the size of the beneficiary household. During implementation, DRC decided to use a fixed grant of 10'000'000 IRR (266 EUR) per household, while NRC and RI went ahead as planned and adapted their grant value to the household size using household size brackets.

The variation of the IPAs is mostly caused by the different protection issues the INGOs address. While DRC mentioned a bracket for its grant value, NRC and RI mentioned average values.

Table 1 also presents the indicators to determine the outcomes of the generic objectives mentioned in Section 4.4. The INGOs' first indicator for both MPCGs and IPAs basically determines beneficiaries have obtained the assistance. The second indicator to determine outcome of MPCGs varies between INGOs: DRC uses the percentage of the grant households spent on basic needs, NRC uses the percentage of households with an acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS), and RI uses the assisted households' satisfaction with the assistance. The second indicator DRC and NRC use for the IPAs is the assisted households' satisfaction with the assistance. RI does not appear to have a second indicator for IPAs. Measuring the outcome using the Food Consumption Score (FCS), NRC clearly defined the most concise and telling outcome indicator.²⁹

5.1.2 Intentions and outcomes

The indicator all INGOs follow is whether beneficiaries have actually received their grant(s). As the consultant did not have access to any process monitoring data he was not able to verify to what extent this 'objective' has been reached. However, based on the discussions with INGOs' staff and the available PDM results³⁰ this seems to have been the case and it can hence be assumed that the purchasing power of the supported Afghan households was enhanced in proportion of the grant value.

Unfortunately, the PDM reports do not allow to differentiate the two intervention types and conduct any intervention-specific analysis.³¹ This is at least in part a consequence of the fact that in some cases³² assisted households received both a MPGC and IPA in one transfer and on one pre-paid bank card. This made it hard for beneficiaries to differentiate their respective expenditures.

DRC's indicator to determine the performance of the MPCG program is the number of assisted households that spent at least 80% of the grant value on basic needs and it judges the program successful if at least 80% of the assisted households complied. Since the PDM results do not differentiate MPCG and IPA recipients, it was not possible to validate whether this outcome has been accomplished.³³

NRC's performance indicator for the MPCG program is the Food Consumption Score (FCS) of the assisted households and it judges the program successful if at least 80% of them have an 'acceptable' score (i.e. >42). Implementing its program, NRC conducted a baseline assessment in order to be able to determine to what extent the FCS has increased following the assistance. The PDM results show that percentage of households with an acceptable score increased from 84% before the assistance to 93% 4 to 6 weeks after the assistance.³⁴ However, the fact that the assisted households FCS exceeded the intervention's set objective before it

²⁹ According to the outcome indicator NRC's objective was to increase the Food Consumption Score (FCS) of at least 80% of the assisted households to 'acceptable' (i.e. FCS >42); DRC wanted households to spend 80% of their grant on basic needs; and RI wanted them to be satisfied with the grant.

³⁰ PDM results on beneficiary satisfaction suggest that beneficiaries did receive their assistance. See DRC (2017b), NRC (2017e), and IR (2017d, 2017h, 2018).

³¹ The INGOs could of course obtain the information by matching the beneficiary information of the PDM with their distribution lists. Yet, it would be much easier to include the information in the PDM itself.

³² NRC mentioned that most households that had received an IPA had also received a MPGC. For these households a respective differentiation would have been difficult.

³³ DRC (2017b, p. 2).

³⁴ NRC (2017e, p. 39).

had even started raises questions about its appropriateness. The result suggests that MPCG should probably not be used to address food security.

RI's indicator for the MPGCs program is whether beneficiaries were 'satisfied' with the assistance and it judges the program successful if at least 96% (2'600 out of 2'700) express their satisfaction. While RI did not directly ask its beneficiaries whether they were satisfied with the grant they did ask whether they were satisfied with the grant value and the behaviour of the RI staff. The percentage of beneficiaries that replied yes to the respective questions are 89% and 99% respectively.

The primary focus of the INGOs' PDMs is on monitoring implementation process, beneficiary safety and convenience, and accountability. These are relevant aspects of the program, but they are not the focus of the review. What can be said is that the respective findings are positive and that there appear to be no concerns that these aspects have a negative impact on program performance.

The PDMs also take a close look at beneficiaries' expenditure patterns following the assistance, which gives an indication of the beneficiaries' most pressing needs (i.e. revealed preferences). Surprisingly, only DRC defined an outcome indicator that considers beneficiary expenditures. The PDM results show that beneficiaries primarily spent their grants on healthcare, food, housing, and debt repayment. The money was thus mostly used to cover basic needs, which is what the INGOs had hoped for. The expenditure pattern is also taken as confirmation for having targeted vulnerable Afghan households – how this deduction is justified remains unclear. It would be interesting to compare the typical expenditure pattern of a vulnerable Afghan household (before intervention) with expenditure pattern shortly after the CBI to see if it changes. Unfortunately, the available data does not allow for a direct comparison.

NRC went a step further than the other NGOs and made an attempt to assess whether the IPAs had been used for the protection related issue they had been provided for (i.e. intended outcome). They found a moderate relationship between the reason households had been selected for and the way they spent the cash, which is encouraging. The fact that the relationship was only moderate does not mean that the intervention did not work. Vulnerable households are often facing a multitude of competing basic needs at the same time and have to make choices as to how to use their scarce resources. In this respect DRC found early on that IPAs worked better when combined with a MPCG. Another way of saying that, when working with vulnerable households, the value of an IPA should not be solely defined based on the shock related cost it is supposed to cover.³⁵

The INGOs' PDM reports show that households spend most of their grant on healthcare, food, housing, and debt repayment – all basic needs – and the INGOs' observations suggest that households receiving an IPA grant use it to address the issue they received it for. This suggests the usefulness of combining MPCGs and IPAs.

5.1.3 Comprehensibility of the programs

The goals and objectives of the CBIs were insufficiently defined, which goes along with a lack of measurable outcomes. Based on the current officially stated objectives, the main purpose of the CBIs seems little more than to provide one-off cash grants to vulnerable Afghan households for temporary relief. While the INGOs' PDM results suggest that this objective has been reached, it is felt that this tells little more than that CBIs are feasible, appreciated by the assisted, and working well in the sense that the assisted appear to use their grant for basic needs.

One-off MPCGs on their own cannot be expected to provide more than temporary relief in a situation of chronic poverty (see Section 4), and it is felt defining further reaching goals and objectives for them will not be possible. What would be the logic of the MPCG program? The INGOs identify vulnerable Afghan households which they deem to be unable to cover their

³⁵ DRC provided 72% of its IPA beneficiaries with a MPCG top up. It would be interesting to assess how this affected the satisfaction and the expenditures when compared to the other 28% of IPA beneficiaries.

basic needs because they are poor, assist them with a one-off cash grant for temporary relief, and then leave them on their own knowing they will fall back into the same situation as before the assistance. If providing the assistance was imperative, how can stopping the assistance be justified? The INGOs are of course aware that MPCGs can at best provide temporary relief. At present, the INGOs are considering to provide beneficiaries with multiple monthly transfers. NRC sees such transfers as a way of providing beneficiaries with breathing space allowing them to think about things such as livelihoods and training courses, which they simply do not have the time to do in their daily struggle trying to cover their basic needs. NRC also aims to use this stabilization period to offer courses and suchlike. The ultimate aim of interventions like this is of course to permanently improve the situation of the beneficiaries.

Another issue with regard to the MPCG program is the enormous number of potential beneficiaries. BAFIA is said to estimate around one quarter of the registered Afghan refugees to be very vulnerable when it comes to accessing basic needs – this means that the number of potential beneficiaries might be as high as 250'000 people (see Section 5.2.3 below). Is there a willingness to assist them all? Is it certain that the applied selection criteria select the most vulnerable? After all, there is little information on what makes Afghan households vulnerable.³⁶

One-off IPAs can and do seem to provide more than just temporary relief when they are addressing the consequences of a shock that would cause vulnerable households to refer to negative coping strategies worsening their situation and possibly increasing their vulnerability for a longer period of time. Imagine a household with a member that suddenly becomes ill and the related treatment expenses preventing the head of household from paying for the renewal of his Amayesh card and his working permit. In this situation an IPA could help the family cover the cost of the Amayesh card and work permit renewal thus preventing the head of household from losing his legal status and the possibility to continue to work legally. Contrary to the one-off MPCGs the one-off IPA actually addresses and solves an extraordinary problem. Yet, if the non-renewal of an Amayesh card is the consequence of chronic poverty assisting the household with an IPA would be comparable to assisting vulnerable households with a MPCG. Once the head of household needs to renew his card again, he will find himself in the same situation as before – the intervention did not address the underlying problem. While one could argue that enabling the renewal of an Amayesh card for one year is significant enough to justify the intervention the question is whether the grant could instead have been used to address an equally pressing need in a more sustainable way.

In order to develop a comprehensible IPA program, the INGOs must define clear objectives that make sense and devise measurable outcomes to be monitored in order to be able to determine whether the objectives are achieved. Without clear objectives the program's purpose cannot be explained and without clear and measurable outcomes its functional effectiveness cannot be verified. The INGOs also have to make sure that the cash grant provided is appropriate to reach the set objective.

The CashCap Advisor mentioned that there is an underlying sentiment within the INGOs that CBIs are an objective themselves.³⁷ This could be one reason for the fact that no specific objectives and outcomes have been attached. It must thus be clarified that CBIs are a modality to reach a specific objective and not themselves an objective. Another reason could be the limited information on vulnerabilities and needs that could be addressed and solved by CBIs. This is something that the INGOs are working on as they implement their programs and learn at the same time.

5.2 Modality, delivery mechanisms, and transfer values

³⁶ An example are different opinions about whether newly arrived Afghan refugees are more vulnerable than those that have been in Iran for many years. Some say the former are more vulnerable, some say it is the latter, and others say it depends.

³⁷ CashCap (2018, p. 3). See also CashCap (2017, p. 11).

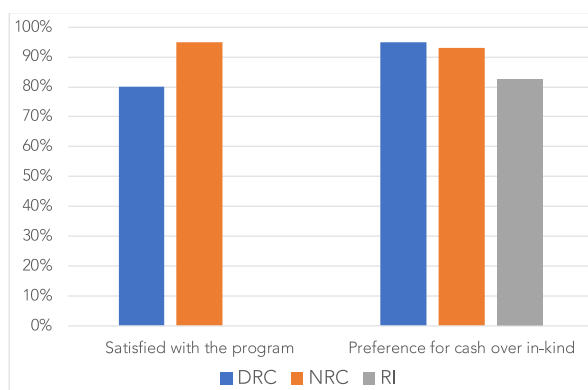
The following looks at the appropriateness of cash transfers as such, the delivery mechanisms used to transfer the money and the transfer values provided by the three INGOs.

5.2.1 Modality

From 2012 to 2015, prior to its HIP 16 program, NRC supported some 2'000 vulnerable Afghan households with electronic vouchers referred to as 'store cards' – magnetic cards charged with an amount of money allowing the beneficiary to buy products in a specific super market chain.³⁸ During the PDM of the program beneficiaries mentioned that they would prefer buying their food products from their local neighbourhood stores because this was cheaper and more convenient. They also pointed out that they had various other needs and expenses (e.g. health, rent, school fees, etc.).³⁹ RI made a similar experience when it started its CBLs in 2016 also using 'store cards'. There was thus an argument for providing beneficiaries with unrestricted cash instead of vouchers.

There have been two efforts to map the financial services and potential transfer mechanisms available in Iran: one conducted by DRC in September 2017 and one conducted by WFP over much of 2017. The results of the two mapping exercises and other information on the financial sector, are summarised in the CWG's draft guidance on financial services and transfer mechanisms.⁴⁰ The guidance provides a sound base for INGOs to plan their CBLs. It concludes that Iran has a well-developed national banking sector with an extensive coverage of both Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and Point Of Sale (POS) stations and mentions that a large share of people is holding and using debit cards. The available transfer mechanisms are: direct cash payments, direct cash payments through agents, pre-paid cards, smart cards, mobile money (to a limited extent)⁴¹, and transfers to bank accounts. The capacity of the country's financial sector to support cash-based programming is appropriate to engage in CBLs.

The INGOs' PDM results indicate that vulnerable Afghan households are satisfied with the modality and suggest that using cash transfers to assist them was the right decision. The vast majority of DRC and NRC beneficiaries reported to be satisfied or very satisfied with the cash grants (see figure). RI did not ask beneficiaries about their overall satisfaction with the cash grants. When asked whether they preferred cash assistance over in-kind assistance, the majority of the beneficiaries of all three INGOs said to prefer cash (see figure).



Source: NRC database, DRC PDM reports, RI PDM reports; own calculations.

In the given context, cash grants are an effective, feasible, and appreciated modality to support vulnerable Afghan refugee households. They increase households' access to basic goods and services and allow them to make choices about their own needs.

³⁸ NRC used the Refah supermarket chain, which runs some 160 branches across the country.

³⁹ RI ran its 2016 winterization program using Refah cards and also came to the conclusion that the beneficiaries had multiple needs and would be better assisted with cash.

⁴⁰ CWG (2017c).

⁴¹ The currently available mobile money options are judged non-viable for CBLs (see CWG (2017c, pp. 14).

5.2.2 Delivery mechanism

When it comes to the delivery mechanism, the INGOs opted for the solution that best fits their programs' requirements⁴² while at the same time minimizing the administrative burden and maximizing the efficiency and security of funds. In doing so, they ended up with three suitable delivery mechanisms: bank accounts, e-cards (pre-paid & smart cards), and e-vouchers.⁴³

At present, DRC is using bank transfers through Tejarat Bank, NRC is using pre-paid debit cards (Saman Bank gift cards), and RI is using pre-paid debit cards (Saman Bank gift cards) and bank transfers if the beneficiary has a bank account. Respecting beneficiary preferences for cash and valuing their diverse needs the INGOs dropped e-vouchers early on⁴⁴ – a good decision in the given context.

The INGOs appear to have selected their financial service provider (FSP) for the CBIs based on familiarity.⁴⁵ That is, they opted for the services of their house bank. Since most major banks seem to provide the two delivery mechanisms of interest to the INGOs (bank transfers and e-cards) the house bank bias did not affect the choice of delivery mechanism.

While the CWG guidance⁴⁶ on financial services and delivery mechanisms does not mention the fees FSPs charge for the different delivery mechanisms, it does mention that they are negligible, a statement that was confirmed during some of the interviews with INGO staff members. The cost implications of bank fees can therefore be considered to be of minor importance when it comes to choosing a FSP or delivery mechanism. The internal administrative cost of using a particular delivery mechanism on the other hand is likely to be more significant and should thus be taken into account when selecting the mechanism.⁴⁷

Based on the available information on FSPs and their services, it is not possible to make statements regarding potentially more effective or efficient options for delivering cash. Moreover, most arguments for the choice of the delivery mechanism mentioned by the INGOs appear to be based on unverified assumptions.⁴⁸

An aspect that does seem to influence the choice of the delivery mechanism was the extent to which the mechanism requires beneficiaries to have proper documentation. Opening a bank account requires beneficiaries to have proper documentation⁴⁹ – that is, a valid Amayesh card or a passport with a valid visa. Consequently, households without documentation are usually supported with pre-paid 'gift cards'. In exceptional cases, RI reported to have provided beneficiaries with direct cash ('cash in hand'). And still, DRC manages to implement its program exclusively using bank transfers.

An aspect that might influence the choice of the delivery mechanism if the INGOs decide to switch to multiple monthly payments, as ongoing discussions seem to suggest (see Section

⁴² NRC for example decided to go with pre-paid cards and not with bank accounts as they wanted to be able to support undocumented Afghans and also felt that this option offered them the possibility to give the card to a specific household member while bank accounts were typically held by the male head of household. NRC's decision was validated by the JNA data on access to bank accounts. NRC also felt that bank accounts demand a higher level of literacy than the pre-paid cards. UNHCR, on the other side decided to use bank transfers because they are safe and to increase beneficiaries' financial inclusion.

⁴³ CWG (2017c, p. 13).

⁴⁴ The CashCap Advisor mentioned that RI might still be using store cards to provide beneficiaries with access to hygiene kits. If this is the case, RI might want to consider using cash instead.

⁴⁵ There is tendency for INGOs to refer to their house bank when setting up CBIs. INGOs are often able to obtain better conditions from their house bank as the house bank already benefits from the its day to day business.

⁴⁶ CWG (2017c, p. 4).

⁴⁷ Distributing pre-paid debit cards for example can be a quite human resource consuming and thus costly activity.

⁴⁸ The only exception is the JNA data on access to bank accounts that seems to validate the argument to use of pre-paid cards over bank accounts for the most vulnerable.

⁴⁹ CWG (2017, pp. 16).

5.1.3), is whether the delivery mechanisms allows multiple transfers. The currently available information suggests only bank accounts and some of the e-cards allow repetitive transfers.⁵⁰

Presently, most of the INGOs CBIs consist of one-off payments. The only exception are RI's MPCGs, which are disbursed in two instalments. Yet, as the available information does not point out any advantages of disbursing the assistance in two instalments, it would seem more efficient and preferable for RI to switch to a single one-off payment thus reducing the internal administrative cost of the MPCGs.

As pointed out by the CWG⁵¹, there are rumours that the Central Bank of Iran could restrict the usage of pre-paid cards: Instead of being usable at any ATM or POS they would only be usable at ATMs and POSs of the issuing bank thus reducing the application possibilities for cardholders. While the respective developments should definitely be monitored as they may have implications for CBI beneficiaries, it should also be noted that there would likely be no possibilities to avoid the restriction. In this regard it might be worth exploring the services of the Post Bank as it uses postal branches and offices present in many cities, towns, and villages to provide its services and is thus likely to have a bigger outreach than any of the banks.

Summarizing one can say that the INGOs chose their FSPs and delivery mechanisms pragmatically in order to get the implementation of their CBIs of the ground. They are using different FSPs and delivery mechanisms to target the same type of beneficiaries – vulnerable Afghan households. While all of the INGOs managed to effectively transfer the cash and the beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction in the PDMs this does not guarantee that they are using the best available services. It seems appropriate to further deepen the analysis of the available financial services in order to make sure that the INGOs are using the FSPs and delivery mechanisms that best fit the needs of their beneficiaries and the program objectives but also to be prepared to adapt programming in case of the mentioned possible future regulatory changes affecting the available financial services. The analysis of the financial services should include a more detailed assessment of respective beneficiary preferences. Asking beneficiaries whether they appreciate the service they got or whether they prefer cash over in-kind assistance is not sufficient. It might be useful to discuss the appropriateness of different FSPs and delivery mechanisms with them.

5.2.3 Transfer value, frequency, and timing

At the design stage of the CBIs the transfer values for the MPCG and the IPA appear to have been determined rather arbitrarily. This was due to the fact that there was only little information on basic needs and minimum expenditure requirements of vulnerable Afghan households or the type and costs of their potential individual protection needs.

The CWG's Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) was a major step to fill this knowledge gap and was supposed to be used to establish the transfer value for MPCGs. The CWG estimates the amount a vulnerable Afghan refugee household requires to cover its basic needs at 11'827'332 IRR (316 EUR),⁵² and its average monthly income at 6'287'550 IRR (168 EUR). Hence the CWG assumes a monthly income gap of 5'539'782 IRR (148 EUR). This income gap is proposed as the reference value for a monthly MPCG for a vulnerable Afghan refugee household of five. According to an INGO staff member, BAFIA judges that about one quarter of registered Afghan refugees face a respective income gap – they are considered to be the most vulnerable 250'000 Afghan refugees.

According to the latest figures published by Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in October 2015, the cost for a 2,100 Kcal food basket with minimum necessary nutrients for a family of

⁵⁰ Normal bank cards can be re-loaded while pre-paid gift cards cannot. Yet, as pointed out by DRC there may be some potential upcoming regulatory changes that prevent all repetitive transfers.

⁵¹ CWG (2017c).

⁵² CWG (2017d, pp. 3). The value of the MEB almost exactly corresponds to what RI (217f, p. 6) mentions to be the national poverty line of 72 USD (63 EUR) per person per month.

four would be 9'570'000 IRR (255 EUR) per month.⁵³ This suggests that the value of the MEB is certainly not exaggerated.⁵⁴ It does however raise a serious question about the validity of the average monthly income that was established for vulnerable Afghan refugee households. How do they cope with an income gap that corresponds to 47% of the amount of money to cover basic food needs?⁵⁵ The big discrepancy suggests that the income situation of vulnerable Afghan households is not fully understood. Is their monthly income underestimated?⁵⁶ Are they covering their food needs based on a significantly cheaper food basket? Are they not covering all of the basic needs listed in the MEB? There is a need to improve the understanding of the household economy of vulnerable Afghan households and the coping strategies they apply to make ends meet. A better respective understanding might reveal new ways of supporting these households.

After creating the MEB, the INGOs decided to adapt their transfer values. Yet, despite the determined income gap they decided to establish their own transfer values for their MPCG: DRC provided a one-off grant of 10'000'000 IRR (266 EUR); NRC provided a one-off grant of between 8'800'000 and 12'300'000 IRR (234-327 EUR), depending on high food expenditure scores, usage of negative coping mechanisms, and household size; and RI provided a grant of between roughly 6'660'000 and 13'320'000 IRR (177-355 EUR), depending on household size and disbursed in two equal instalments. The differences in transfer value are minor and suggest that the three INGOs could easily harmonize their MPCGs. While increasing the transfer value of a stand-alone MPCG may improve a household's access to basic goods and services for a longer period this effect will eventually fade out and its situation will return back to what it was before the intervention.⁵⁷ How long the effect will last is difficult to say.⁵⁸ As there appear to be no safety nets, social protection programs, or development programs the beneficiaries could be referred to the INGOs should look for interventions that are more likely to generate a sustainable impact.

The INGOs are currently considering increasing the transfer frequency. The argument for doing so is that "a recurring grant payment allows households to plan how best to save and invest when this is possible"⁵⁹ or as mentioned above (see Section 5.1.3) to provide beneficiaries with breathing space allowing them to think about things such as livelihoods and training courses. While it is possible that multiple monthly instalments generate the described effect and produce an added value, it is in no way guaranteed. If the beneficiaries face credit or savings constraints a sizeable one-off payment may allow them to make an investment while multiple smaller payments may not. Whether it makes sense to increase the number of instalments or not essentially depends on the situation and preferences of the beneficiaries and the needs the INGOs intend to cover. At present the INGOs seem to lack the necessary information to

⁵³ NRC (2017a, p. 2). NRC mentioned 290 USD. The consultant converted this number to EUR using the exchange average USD-EUR and EUR-IRR exchange rates for 2017.

⁵⁴ Adapting the food basket to a household of 5 leads to estimated monthly food expenditures of 11'963'963 IRR (319 EUR), which is basically the equivalent the MEB foresees for the total food **and** non-food expenditures. Taking into account that, based on provisional estimates, the consumer price index increased by about 16% from 2015 to mid-2017, current estimated monthly food expenditures are more likely to be around 13'878'197 IRR.

⁵⁵ Income required for a household of 5: $9'570'000 \text{ IRR} / 4 * 5 = 11'962'500 \text{ IRR}$. $6'287'550 \text{ IRR} / 11'962'500 \text{ IRR} = 0.53$.

⁵⁶ According to WFP & UNHCR (2016, p. 15) the average reported daily wage for Afghan refugees was 12 USD (10.5 EUR), which corresponds to about 395'000 IRR. The average monthly income estimated by the CWG thus corresponds to roughly 16 working days. WFP & UNHCR also mention that the average reported daily wage for Afghan refugees children was between 7 and 10 USD.

⁵⁷ A possible exception might be if a beneficiary uses the grant to invest in a productive activity providing him with a regular income. However, such investments are likely to require significantly higher grant values.

⁵⁸ Based on the MEB, an NRC grant would allow an average vulnerable Afghan household of 5 to cover its income gap for almost 2 months. The NRC staff implementing the program mentioned that they believe the household to experience improved access to food and non-food products for 3 to 4 months, suggesting that the supported households will not access all the basic needs included in the MEB.

⁵⁹ NRC Remote Cash Guidance cited in CWG (2017d, p. 8).

decide whether multiple instalments would be more advantageous for beneficiaries or not. Based on the available information it seems unlikely that multiple monthly instalments will produce an added value for the beneficiaries. The INGOs' PDM results at least indicate that households have a preference for withdrawing their grants within a short time span.

Appropriate transfer timing of a MPCG may well increase its usefulness. Afghan households face strong seasonal income fluctuation with winter being the low season for most households.⁶⁰ Providing MPCGs during low season would help beneficiaries to smooth their consumption. While the INGOs are aware of this, they did not seem to have put a strong emphasis on it during program implementation.

As mentioned earlier, IPAs can be expected to have significant and longer-lasting outcomes. However, what combinations of transfer value, frequency, and timing generate the most significant and longest-term outcomes cannot be determined without a clear definition of the intended objectives, outcomes, indicators to measure these outcomes, and monitoring data on programs applying the transfer value, frequency, and timing combinations of interest. As this information is currently not available, it is not possible to provide conclusive answers.

The protection support provided is determined based the cost related to the addressed shocks. The CashCap Advisor recently prompted the three INGOs to harmonize their IPA related interventions and transfer values. Recent initial efforts to develop a common understanding of the costs and seasonality linked to specific protection risks⁶¹ are a first step towards harmonised interventions with more clearly defined objectives and outcomes. To further improve their CBIs the INGOs should review and specify their objectives where necessary and make sure they have defined measurable outcomes and indicators that allow them to determine the success of the intervention. The indicators should be meaningful and small in number – not a long list. They should follow from the specific purpose of the program. The ToR for this consultancy asked the consultant to provide specific indicators that could be measured across INGOs in 2018. The objectives of the current interventions are not sufficiently defined and harmonised to allow establishing additional such indicators.

A way to optimize a specific CBI would to implement and test different variations of it (e.g. change the transfer value, frequency, or timing) and compare the respective outcomes. In a situation of limited information such a trial and error approach would seem the appropriate way to proceed. Applying such an approach would allow the INGOs to learn as they implement their programs. If they could all agree on a common approach and joint experiments they would significantly increase the learning potential. The question is whether the mentioned access restrictions allow the INGOs to gather the necessary data accurately enough to allow comparison. Another question is whether the INGOs have the capacity to take on more monitoring and analysing. The answers could be found by implementing a pilot study.

5.3 Towards more sustainable outcomes

The following looks at how CBIs funded through the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018 could be shaped in order to achieve greater and more sustainable outcomes in the given context of a protracted refugee crisis.

5.3.1 Complementary activities

All three INGOs are advocating mixed modalities to complement the CBIs based on the recognition that the latter cannot address all needs. Complementary activities do have the potential of generating an additional positive impact for CBI beneficiaries. Activities aiming at making people familiar with the legal aspects and advantages of documentation and best the ways of obtaining it may have a lasting impact on CBI beneficiaries. The challenge is turning the theory into practice and to measure whether the intervention was successful. Complementary activities should be treated as the CBIs themselves: the INGOs should define

⁶⁰ See CWG (2017d, p. 11).

⁶¹ See CWG (2017d).

their objective and measurable outcomes and verify whether they perform as intended. Control groups that do not benefit from the activities are one way of doing so. Based on the available data it is not possible to make any statements as to how such activities have influenced the situation of beneficiaries or the sustainability of the CBI impact.

The INGOs see the expenditure patterns collected through their PDMs as the beneficiaries' revealed preferences that can provide them with information about their true needs and be used to adapt programming. As NRC puts it: "if people spend significant parts of the provided cash on education, NRC could supplement the cash transfers with an education program to seek to address needs in a more sustainable fashion".⁶² In light of the scarce information available this is judged to be an approach worth continuing.

If complementary activities are the primary objective and depend on a CBI for them to be feasible, this can be a sound reason for one-off grants providing only temporary relief. NRC stated that the CBIs have improved access to beneficiaries in need of Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA).⁶³ A lasting impact of such legal support could be an argument for CBIs even if the direct impact of the CBIs itself would fade out. Yet, one would have to formulate the CBIs' objective accordingly and check whether the ICLA objective is achieved. The latter would of course require formulating respective objectives, outcomes, and indicators. At the time of this review, efforts to strengthen these aspects were already ongoing.

5.3.2 Harmonizing CBIs across agencies

The INGOs appear to be in favour of a harmonisation of CBIs and launched several respective initiatives within the CWG. The most notable initiatives are the establishment of the MEB, the related discussions on appropriate transfer values for various intervention types, the efforts to develop common assumptions of the market situation, the efforts to develop a better understanding about the availability and suitability of FSPs and delivery mechanisms and the discussions on appropriate vulnerability criteria. All initiatives benefitted from strong CashCap Advisor support and the respective results are summarized in several CWG documents.⁶⁴

Despite the general agreement on beneficiary selection criteria, minimum expenditures, and transfer values, the INGOs still largely seem to follow their individual approaches.⁶⁵ Considering the similarity of the different interventions, this is surprising. Based on the discussion and the available documentation it would appear that a harmonization of selection criteria, transfer values, and transfer frequency would only require minor adaptations by each INGO and thus have no substantial consequences on their programs. Based on the INGOs' apparent general agreement on the context and the situation of vulnerable Afghan households, they should address the same issues in the same way. A harmonization is desirable because it would increase beneficiary and stakeholder comprehension of the interventions and because it would generate the environment for a joint monitoring-based learning process. Yet, this does not mean that the INGOs all have to address the same issues. As they work on different issues it is absolutely possible that different approaches are required and justified. For example, it is no problem that NRC is supporting vulnerable Afghans who are not able to renew their passports and DRC. In fact, it is the base for the developing un-official referral system where INGOs that do not deal with certain issues refer respective cases to INGOs that do.

⁶² NRC (2017b, p. 2).

⁶³ Prior to the CBIs the ICLA teams were not able to access beneficiaries in the field as the Government of Iran (GoI) refused the necessary authorization. This seems to be the case because the GoI seems to understand the needs of Afghan households to be primarily of economic nature and thus favours needs-based interventions (i.e. cash grants) over interventions that address legal and protection issues. CBIs provide NRC's ICLA teams with access to beneficiaries and allowing them to address both economic and counselling needs.

⁶⁴ See CWG (2017), CWG (2017a), CWG (2017b), CWG (2017c), CWG (2017d).

⁶⁵ For example: as pointed out by the previous CashCap Advisor, the joint multisector needs and targeting tool developed by the three INGOs has been dissected and added to by each agency so that it is no longer as a common tool.

With regard to the MEB and diverging transfer values some INGO staff suggested that the different urban centers differ significantly with respect to the cost of living and therefore considered a standard MEB of limited use. This claim should be verified and regional versions of the MEB should be established if it proves true.

If the three INGOs decide to continue their harmonization efforts, harmonising common objectives and their intended outcome is the first step. It should be taken before the INGOs engage in efforts like harmonising transfer values, delivery systems, databases and the like.⁶⁶ At present these more technical aspects are of secondary importance. It is worth noting that the CashCap Advisor has already made a significant effort for the INGOs' M&E teams to meet, share approaches, and agree on a joint roadmap for harmonization and that this effort has helped in harmonising a number of outcome and output indicators in the latest project proposals (HIP18). Yet, the INGOs should only engage in harmonisation if they are willing to commit to it. If this is not the case harmonisation efforts are a waste of time.

5.3.3 Is there a need to change program implementation or direction?

The limited knowledge about the vulnerabilities and needs of Afghan refugees caused the INGOs to design flexible general CBIs covering a wide range of needs and apply a broad set of criteria when it comes to beneficiary selection. It also had them adapt their approach as new information became available during implementation through the increased contact with beneficiaries. This was a good way to start CBIs in the given context. It now seems time to start focusing on specific interventions that appear 'solvable' and may create a more lasting impact on the lives of beneficiaries. The one-off MPCGs and IPAs allowing beneficiaries to temporarily improve their access to basic needs or their protection status do not fall in this category and should be re-thought. Based on the current experience, focusing IPAs addressing shock-related individual protection needs appears to be the most promising strategy of to make sure the CBIs generate a longer lasting impact for beneficiaries. In the given context of chronic poverty, the strategy of topping up IPAs with MPCGs seems a promising approach as it may increase the chances of reaching the intended IPA outcomes.

The fact that cash is distributed and used for a multitude of reasons – food security, non-food needs, health issues, documentation, house repairs, education and more – triggered the question whether there is a need for the INGOs to shift towards sectoral outcomes.⁶⁷ Investigating sectoral issues that could be addressed with CBIs seems worthwhile if they allow the INGOs identify and quantify specific needs allowing them to identify particularly vulnerable groups, formulate clear objectives, appropriate interventions, and measurable outcomes. The main interest of following this 'sectoral' approach is seen in the fact that it might reveal new relevant solvable issues that may lead to a longer-term impact for CBIs not the fact that is 'sectoral' as such. The focus should be on solvable issues affecting genuinely vulnerable Afghan households – whether they are sector-specific or general needs based should not matter. In any case, the INGOs should not explore too many options at the same time and start by reviewing and refining their most promising existing IPA interventions before addressing new sectoral issues.

A crucial and positive aspect of the current CBIs that should be maintained is they are unrestricted. Sectoral approaches⁶⁸ always bear the risk that beneficiaries do not spend the cash as intended (i.e. for identified the sectoral issue). This should not be seen a problem as long as the assistance was targeted at genuinely vulnerable households. That is, as long as the selection for inclusion in a cash-based program was based on solid socio-economic and protection-oriented needs. If INGOs work with genuinely vulnerable households, it does not

⁶⁶ See for example CashCap (2017, p. 9).

⁶⁷ The INGOs are already running a number of sectoral interventions (e.g. educations programs). Yet, since these interventions were not part of this review they were not investigated.

⁶⁸ It should be noted at this point that IPAs are sectoral intervention too.

matter what they chose to spend the cash on. The ultimate purpose of unrestricted CBIs is after all to leave the decision on what needs require immediate attention to the beneficiaries.

The importance of targeting genuinely vulnerable households of course brings us back to the importance of strengthening the current understanding of the socio-economic and protection-oriented needs and the importance of further strengthening respective assessment efforts. Refining the current interventions and developing new ones requires a better understanding of the vulnerabilities and needs of shock-affected refugee households. The three INGOs have recognized this and are planning to refine their monitoring efforts so that they can be used to collect much needed information.

In light of the limited knowledge about vulnerability and needs developing the interventions should happen according to a trial and error approach where monitoring results provide information about what works and what does not. As rightly pointed out by the NRC M&E Manager this requires an agile monitoring system able to provide timely and regular monitoring results to the project teams. A trial and error based approach requires a lot of programming flexibility, which may need to be communicated to donors.

5.3.4 Good practice aspects to consider

The CashCap Advisor mentioned that it would be “worthwhile to review the steps in the decision-making process and ensure adequate measures are adopted in order to prevent exposing anyone person to criticism” and mentioned a need to review and, where necessary, strengthen the checks and balances in the respective programs.⁶⁹ While the consultant was not able to assess the decision making process on the ground he does agree that it is of central importance – particularly in a context where access to beneficiaries is restricted. The most important aspect in this respect is the segregation of duties. To prevent fraud and theft it is essential that different tasks within the program implementation are performed by different actors and that there is a sufficient level of oversight. Necessary arrangements include: Staff selecting beneficiaries must not play a role in the disbursement process. Beneficiary information and the result of the selection process is entered in a beneficiary database (rejected cases too). The database is managed by a staff member that is not involved in the program implementation. The beneficiary database must be regularly reviewed by the program manager. The beneficiary information and selection criteria from the selection process must be verified and confirmed by the staff conducting the grant disbursement and the respective conclusion must be added to the beneficiary database. Program evaluation must be conducted by staff members that were not involved in the program.⁷⁰

The capacity building road map of the CWG⁷¹ mentions that BAFIA pushes towards partner implementation and mentions the importance of building the capacity of such partners. Before engaging in such an approach, the three INGOs should make sure they have the necessary checks and balances in place to keep full control over the program.⁷² Possible measures are negotiated random spot check (household visits) by INGO staff, or telephone survey of randomly selected beneficiaries by the hot-line staff. In this respect it useful to note that experience of other organizations showed that the number of people calling hot-lines is

⁶⁹ See also CashCap (2017, p. 8).

⁷⁰ Of course, segregation of duties is just as important when it comes to identifying and selecting the financial service providers. Typically, this is taken into account in the procurement rules of an organization. Because cash programs usually involve large amounts of money, the FSP selection process deserves particular attention and should be as transparent as possible.

⁷¹ CWG (2018, p. 2).

⁷² The consultant did not have sufficient information regarding the extent to which working with and through implementing partners is desirable, appropriate, promising, or feasible to allow discussing the subject in detail.

generally lower than expected and that active call centres (i.e. centres that contact the beneficiaries) show better results.⁷³

The CashCap Advisor also mentioned some concerns regarding the qualification of enumerators engaged in the M&E activities.⁷⁴ Unfortunately he did not specify his concerns and the consultant had no possibility to look into the issue on the ground. However, the consultant does agree that the enumerators qualification is of utmost importance when it comes to collecting sound and reliable monitoring data – as it is when it comes to the identification and verification of beneficiaries. Since the three INGOs intend to step up their monitoring activities in order to learn more about the vulnerabilities and needs of Afghan households as well as about whether their programs reach their objectives, they should make sure that all their enumerators understand the monitoring questions and their purpose and know how to phrase them in order to ascertain the accuracy and consistency of the collected information across beneficiaries. Training sessions and assessment test runs seem to be the way to go.

6 Conclusions

In a context marked by scarce information, the three INGOs started out implementing two types of unconditional unrestricted one-off CBIs: MPCGs to make sure vulnerable Afghan households are able to cover their basic needs and IPAs to support vulnerable Afghan households to deal with shock-induced individual protection related costs preventing them from having to use negative coping mechanisms to do so. The objectives, outcomes, and indicators formulated for these interventions were generic and do not provide a very strong base to judge their appropriateness.

MPCGs and IPAs both have largely performed as expected and reached the generic objectives: The MPCG beneficiaries used most of their grant to cover food, medical, and housing expenses and the IPA beneficiaries seem to have used most to address the shock-related costs for which they had been targeted. The interventions showed that cash-based interventions are feasible and appreciated by the assisted and the selected delivery mechanisms to disburse the cash seem appropriate and efficient.

At this stage the INGOs should focus their attention on refining the objectives of their interventions (CBIs and complementary activities), defining concise and measurable outcomes for each of them, and establish a result monitoring framework allowing them to determine whether they reach their intended objectives.

It is difficult to make a compelling argument for one-off MPCGs that can only provide temporary relief to beneficiaries faced with chronic poverty. Even if one were to extend the number of payments while keeping the grant value relevant, a stand-alone MPCG approach would most likely still only provide temporary relief. Once the assistance ceases, the beneficiaries' situations are likely to return to what they were before. What would be the convincing argument to stop the assistance? The INGOs should look for issues confronting vulnerable Afghan households face that CBIs may be able to address in a longer-lasting manner. Issues for which a cash grant may provide a permanent solution. As long as there are opportunities to support vulnerable Afghan households with interventions that may generate a longer-lasting impact one-off stand-alone MPCGs to help beneficiaries cover basic needs should be stopped. Not doing so would seem a waste of resources.

In the light of scarce information and constrained funding a focused IPA approach is currently seen as the most promising way to provide relevant support to vulnerable Afghan households. Targeted at the right beneficiaries, IPAs can help vulnerable households overcome

⁷³ See for example Sagmeister E., Steets J., Ruppert L. (2016): Community Feedback Mechanisms in Somalia and Afghanistan, Listening to Communities in Insecure Contexts; Interim Report; Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research project; January 2016.

⁷⁴ CashCap (2017, p. 11).

extraordinary shocks without having to use vulnerable coping strategies and thus prevent them from aggravating their situation. They stand a good chance of making a significant and longer-lasting difference. A further advantage of the shock-based approach is that it links the assistance to an identifiable and verifiable event and makes it comprehensible for both INGO staff and external stakeholders. MPCGs topping up the IPAs can be a valuable addition and increase the chances of the IPAs reaching their objective and, in fact, the INGOs are already using MPCGs for exactly this purpose.

The INGO's current effort to improve and harmonize monitoring efforts in order to establish a learning process that allows gathering much needed information is a promising further step towards improving and strengthening their CBIs in Iran.

In summary: The Iranian context provides a stable environment for cash-based interventions, there are vulnerable Afghan refugee households for which CBIs can make a significant and lasting difference, and the IPA approach to support shock-affected refugee households is currently the most promising intervention to generate longer-lasting impacts.

7 Recommendations

Based on the findings the following presents a series of recommendation that are believed to allow the three INGOs to strengthen their CBIs in Iran.

Focus on shock-based CBIs and other interventions with potential longer-lasting outcomes

Stand-alone one-off MPCGs should be stopped as they are unlikely to provide longer-term relief and as there are other CBIs that have the potential of providing vulnerable Afghan households with longer-lasting relief. At present the shock-based IPAs are the most promising interventions when it comes to generating longer-lasting outcomes for the assisted. These interventions address problems they can actually solve. It is recommended that the INGOs focus their CBIs on these shock related issues while at the same time looking out for other solvable issues vulnerable Afghan households might face.

During the preparations for their HIP18 proposals, the INGOs have undertaken first significant efforts to build consensus regarding the best way forward when it comes to CBIs in Iran. Led and facilitated by the CashCap Advisor via the Cash Working Group, these efforts included discussion about the improved aspects of IPAs when it comes to outcomes that came to similar conclusions as this review.

The only way in which one-off CBIs can be expected to have sustainable results in a context that is characterized by chronic poverty is if they address problems they can actually solve. In the given context the most promising respective issues seem to those related to a shock. It is thus recommended that for the moment the INGOs focus their attention on their current shock related interventions.

However, it is also recommended that the INGOs continue to look for other interventions that may provide longer-lasting relevant positive outcomes for vulnerable Afghan households. An example are the mentioned inquiries into possible sectoral interventions or seasonal shocks. Independent of the type of the intervention the focus should remain the solvability of the issue it intends to address.

Ideally, the INGOs would of course identify non-shock related issues typical to the protracted refugee situation Afghan households find themselves in. This would allow the INGOs to properly plan their interventions instead of solely relying on a purely reactive response design in which they have to wait for households to be affected by a shock in order to respond. Respective issues would of course still have to be solvable. Unfortunately, the consultant was not able to identify respective issues based on the information available to him.

Continue using MPCGs as top up for IPAs

INGOs should continue to use MPCGs to top up IPAs wherever this seems to increase the chances of a successful outcome.

Review selection criteria

While the INGOs made an effort to harmonise their vulnerability criteria they do not seem to have assessed how well these criteria are suited to identify the most vulnerable. Per household member income appears to be the prime vulnerability indicator for Afghan households living in chronic poverty – the other criteria are proxy indicators. It is recommended that INGOs review their selection criteria and verify to what extent they are identifying the households with the lowest per household member income. They may do so by plotting each of the proxy indicators against the per household member income. Another possibility would be to determine the correlation between the proxy indicators and the per household member income. The income data collected during the JNA and the NRC and DRC baseline assessments could serve as a starting point. Future assessment efforts on the livelihoods of Afghan households could provide additional data for analysis and the INGOs should consider orienting their efforts in this direction. These assessments could also be used to validate the appropriateness of the proxy indicators.

To the extent that BAFIA allows it, the planned 2018 baseline assessment should be used to learn more about the livelihoods of Afghan households.⁷⁵ Another occasion to learn more is the increased interaction with community members and representatives. Respective efforts are already being made and should be continued. Semi-structured interviews for key informants and focus groups could be designed to devise a structured and target oriented learning process.

Identify the issues to address and the respective intervention objectives and outcomes

If the INGOs decide to follow a shock-based approach they should define the shocks they want to address as well as the objective of their intervention for each of them. The needs the intervention is expected to be covered must be clearly specified and demonstrate the appropriateness of the intervention. The difficulty is to differentiate between issues that are the result of chronic poverty and issues that are genuinely extraordinary events.⁷⁶ The focus should be on the latter because in those cases the INGOs have a chance to have a significant and longer lasting impact.

The INGOs should define their intended objectives and measurable outcomes and design a result monitoring framework to measure the intervention's impact. In doing so they should deliberate whether they need baseline information to determine whether and to what extent their intervention has been successful in reaching the intended objective. This information should be included in the 2018 baseline assessment (see below).

The issues to be addressed can be in any sector, the focus should clearly be on its solvability and the significant longer-term impact of the intervention. The CBIs can also be the facilitator of a complementary activity that is deemed to have a significant longer-term impact. In this case the CBI itself does not necessarily need to have a longer-term impact.

A single database to monitor program progress and performance

Each INGO should develop a single database allowing it to assess the progress of their CBIs as well as the performance of their CBIs. For each beneficiary, the database should contain relevant baseline information (e.g. household income, household size, selection criteria statuses), relevant information on the implementation process of the CBI (attributed grant value, IPA type, disbursement date), PDM results, and the performance indicators collected

⁷⁵ In order to maximise the representativeness of the collected information and to allow comparability, the baseline assessment should be either conducted in the form of a joint assessment or consist at least of harmonised individual assessments.

⁷⁶ The shocks have to be extraordinary for the affected household and not for the community as a whole. Seasonal shocks that are largely predictable for example can absolutely be considered if they have extraordinary consequences for affected households that can be addressed by a CBI.

during the evaluation of the intervention (e.g. satisfaction with the intervention, expenditures according to grant objective, FCS). All collected data should be analyzed and presented – a dashboard could reveal the respective results as soon as they are entered. More specific statements regarding the data that needs to be collected would require information on a specific intervention with defined objectives, outcomes, and indicators.

In an ideal world, the INGOs databases would also allow comparing records in order to mitigate the duplications of assistance.

2018 baseline assessment

The baseline assessment(s) for the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018 should attempt to deepen the understanding of the socio-economic of Afghan households. This may allow identifying new opportunities for CBIs that are likely to lead to longer-lasting outcomes. A better understanding of the typical expenditure patterns of Afghan households in the absence of assistance could be used to see if and how income patterns change following CBIs. The data should also be used to review the MEB and revise it if and where necessary. This contribution should not be underestimated as the MEB will continue to be an important reference for cash-based programming – particularly if the INGOs decide to use MPCGs to top up their shock-based interventions.

The baseline assessment(s) should further record the assessed households' selection criteria status in order for the INGOs to be able to compare per household member income with the households' selection criteria status to allow assessing whether the selection criteria identify the financially most vulnerable.

Finally, the INGOs should use assessment to find baseline information that is of importance with regard to the specific IPA issues they intend to address. Information that and can help them to assess the effectiveness of their respective interventions. Without knowing the specific issues the INGOs intend to address and the specific objectives and outcomes they intend to achieve, it is not possible to list specific aspects that should be investigated.

The INGOs should focus on the few specific IPA issues they want to address and device the necessary questions to clarify them. The questionnaires should be short and concise and it should be clear how exactly all of the gathered information is going to be used.⁷⁷

Harmonize similar interventions

Considering the similarity of some of the INGOs' interventions with respect to selection criteria, transfer values, and transfer frequency harmonizing them would require only minor adaptations by each of them and thus not have substantial consequences on their individual programs. The INGOs should harmonize these approaches and address the same issues in the same way. Such harmonization is desirable because it would increase beneficiary and stakeholder comprehension of the interventions and because it would generate the environment for a joint monitoring and learning.

Different mandates and different objectives can justify that INGOs implement diverging CBIs. However, respective differences should be communicated and based on comprehensible arguments.

Harmonize the PDM tools and differentiate different intervention types

The INGOs should consider harmonising their PDM tools. This would allow them to combine their monitoring data and make more representative statements regarding their target population and to compare their PDM findings. The INGOs current PDMs suggest that this would not require major changes as the different monitoring tools appear to aim at collecting largely the same information. Not harmonizing the tools seems a lost opportunity.

⁷⁷ For a brief note on the importance of data minimization see: Data Management and Protection Starter Kit – Tip Sheet 2: Data Minimization, The Electronic Cash Transfer Learning Action Network, <http://elan.cashlearning.org>.

The INGOs should also make sure that the monitoring data of different intervention types (i.e. MPCGs and IPAs) can be separately analysed in order to be able to identify intervention specific outcomes and present intervention specific results.

Finally, RI should make sure that the wording of their questions corresponds exactly to what they intend to assess (see Section 5.1.2).

Consider introducing 'expenditure booklets'

Simple forms households can use to note the things they paid for using their grant could be a useful way to counter the typical recall-bias. RI has experimented with such an approach and could inform the other INGOs about their respective experiences and explain whether using such forms is considered useful to increase the quality of the monitoring data.

Review MEB for regional differences

Some INGO staff members interviewed believe that there are significant price differences between the different urban centres the INGOs are implementing their programs in. As the MEB will continue to be an important and useful reference when it comes to cash-based programming, the INGOs should consider assessing its regional validity. The INGOs should limit themselves on gathering the local prices of the commodities included in the basket. They should consider to do this during the baseline assessment(s) for the Humanitarian Implementation Plan for 2018.

The prices of the different MEB components have to be monitored anyway so that its value reflects possible price increases and the indicator remains up to date. In light of the present level of inflation⁷⁸ updating the MEB twice per year seems reasonable (once per year would seem to be the minimum).

The INGOs should not start a discussion on regional differences with regard to the commodities that should be included in the MEB as establishing regionally specific MEBs would almost certainly require an enormous assessment effort and result in only little added value. As the CashCap Advisor who facilitated the creation of the current MEB pointed out, it took the CWG members six months to establish the national MEB. Referring to the same issue he also mentioned that in the context of Iran where getting permission for data collection is challenging the INGOs have to choose carefully when and why to engage in such efforts.

Explain grant values

It should be good practice to document how the grant value for a CBI was determined. It forces the people designing the program to reflect on the issue, makes the ultimate decision comprehensible for people who have not been directly implicated in the program design, and provides a useful handover document. A respective description provides incoming staff with the possibility to verify whether the grant value of a program that has been running over several years is still appropriate. This is particularly important in a context with considerable inflation like Iran.

Within the forum of the CWG and facilitated by the CashCap Advisor the INOGs recently took a significant step in establishing and explaining grant values for different types of CBIs and documented them in a guidance document.⁷⁹ This is definitely more efficient than if each INGO goes about this process on its own. However, respective efforts should have been started during the proposal writing for HIP16.

Deepen the information on FSPs and their services

The INGOs face certain knowledge gaps when it comes to the extent of the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the available FSPs and delivery mechanisms and the looming regulatory changes that might affect them. It is recommended that the INGOs further deepen their mapping and analysis of the relevant financial system in Iran in order to make sure they

⁷⁸ Between August 2017 and February 2018, the General Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by almost 8%. However, the CPI for food and beverages increased by almost 13%.

⁷⁹ CWG (2017d).

are using the FSPs and delivery mechanisms that best fit with the beneficiary needs, program objectives, internal administrative procedures and other aspects that may be of importance to them. A particularly interesting FSP to include in the assessment is the post bank.

The mapping efforts should include beneficiary and community consultations that aim at establishing a more detailed picture of beneficiary preferences.

It is important to note that there is no immediate need for any of the INGOs to change their FSP or delivery mechanisms. The INGOs should conduct the suggested inquiries so that they can make sure they are providing the best possible service to their beneficiaries and can continue doing so in case of regulatory changes.

Define specific objectives, outcomes and indicators for complementary activities

All INGOs complement some of their CBIs with activities that are supposed improve the beneficiaries' situation. A prominent example is the legal advice provided to some IPA beneficiaries. In order to be able to assess whether these complementary activities attain the intended results the INGOs should formulate respective objectives, outcomes, and indicators. This is the only way in which INGOs can measure whether their intervention leads to the intended result.

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ANNEX 1 - Terms of reference



ANNEX 1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

NAME:	DE WILD CONSULTING GMBH
TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT:	INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CASH PROGRAMMING IN IRAN
CONTRACT PERIOD:	07 JANUARY 2018 TO 31 APRIL 2018
BUDGET:	IRFM 1604

1. BACKGROUND

Norwegian Refugee Council

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is a non-governmental humanitarian organization with 60 years of experience in helping create a safer and more dignified life for refugees and internally displaced people. NRC advocates for the rights of displaced populations and offers assistance within the shelter, education, food security, and water, sanitation and hygiene sectors. NRC aims to provide high quality and innovative technical solutions to daily challenges of life in displacement that also offer protection. In Iran, NRC aims to help Afghan refugees cope with the struggles of living in long-term displacement. NRC's programmes support Afghan refugees as they seek to improve their living conditions, prevent secondary displacement, help to guarantee their access to basic services, and reinforce their coping strategies. Additionally, NRC supports UNHCR's Regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) and advocate for better coordination in the humanitarian response. NRC has offices located in Tehran and Kerman, and undertakes further activities in the provinces of Semnan, Qom and Alborz.

Danish Refugee Council

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 1956 that works in more than 30 countries throughout the world. DRC fulfils its mandate by providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations – refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities in the conflict areas of the world. DRC established its Iran country programme in January 2012. Its programmatic response has a two-pronged goal under two strategic objectives: 1) to empower displacement affected people to become more self-reliant in pursuing transitional and durable solutions; 2) To ensure that access to rights and essential services of the most vulnerable among displacement-affected people is protected. DRC is currently working in the Iranian provinces of Alborz, Tehran, Fars and Isfahan assisting vulnerable Afghans in urban, peri-urban and rural settings. The assistance being provided falls under DRC's Protection and Livelihoods area of expertise. Protection encompasses access to services, including health and protection.

Relief International

Relief International (RI) is a humanitarian non-profit agency that provides emergency relief, rehabilitation, development assistance, and program services to vulnerable communities in more than 20 countries worldwide. RI's work across the globe is characterized by four pillars of excellence: health, WASH, education, and economic opportunity that are embedded into programmes through the "RI Way" that includes stakeholder participation, programme integration, civic skills and partnerships. Through its programmes implemented in the four provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Yazd and Sistan & Baluchistan, RI aims to address needs and challenges faced by Afghan refugee communities, alleviating poverty and strengthening their lives and livelihoods. Through outreach amongst the most vulnerable communities living in Iran, capacity building amongst national NGOs working with the most vulnerable and marginalized, emergency responses, and building community awareness and capacities, RI aims to address the key drivers of vulnerability, enhance health and well-being, improve access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and strengthen resilience amongst Afghan refugee communities living in Iran.



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2. CASH PROGRAMMING IN IRAN

The three INGOs implementing ECHO-funded Humanitarian Implementation Plan 2016 (HIP16) projects in Iran (NRC, DRC and RI) have been working with different cash-based intervention (CBI) modalities and transfer mechanisms to meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans.

For example, NRC used ECHO HIP funding in 2015 to distribute Refah supermarket vouchers, but as a result of findings from a Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) exercise in 2016, switched to unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) in the form of a Saman Bank bon card for its HIP16 programming. In contrast, DRC is using HIP funding to provide UCTs via bank transfers. RI is providing UCTs through the distribution of Saman Bank gift cards for Individual Protection Assistance (IPA) and for a pilot study being conducted for unrestricted UCTs, and through the distribution of restricted UCTs through Refah store cards. In addition, the targeting approaches, eligibility criteria and transfer amounts used by each INGO differ.

At the end of the HIP16 projects, the three INGOs will have collectively transferred around €2.5m using this array of modalities, and will have gathered a body of evidence on the outcomes of CBIs for Afghan households, along with recipients' views and feedback on the assistance they have received. All three INGOs plan to use cash modalities in their HIP 2018 projects, which will start implementing between March and April 2018.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The three INGOs intend to commission a Consultant at the start of 2018 to undertake an independent, 'light-touch' review of the outcomes of the HIP16 CBIs. Such a review would serve two main purposes:

1. It will generate independent findings and conclusions regarding the outcomes and results of the HIP16-funded CBIs in Iran, which will be used to influence HIP18 programming decisions. While much of the HIP18 detailed design will have concluded by early 2018, the report will still have a good opportunity to influence decision-making before programme implementation;
2. It will provide recommendations for the HIP18 baseline methodology and identify information gaps that can be addressed during the baseline process (March – April 2018).

This independent review will likely pave the way for independent monitoring of HIP18 CBIs in Iran and a comprehensive independent evaluation of HIP18 CBIs in Iran at the end of 2018. However, these activities are outside of the scope of this independent review, and will be advertised at a later date.

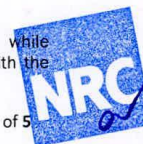
4. SCOPE OF WORK

The independent review seeks to answer four key questions:

1. What are the outcomes and results of the HIP16-funded CBIs, and how do these outcomes and results compare against the intended outcomes?
2. Among the different modalities and delivery mechanisms used in HIP16 CBIs, which show signs of being more effective for meeting program objectives?
3. How could HIP18 CBIs achieve greater and more sustainable outcomes, given the context of a protracted crisis in Iran?
4. What key information gaps need to be filled during the HIP18 baseline, and what are some appropriate outcome indicators that could be measured across the INGOs in 2018?

The independent review will also seek to answer a number of more detailed questions while answering the key questions. This list is not finalised, and will be discussed and refined with the Consultant early on in the review process:

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1. What are the sectorial outcomes of the CBIs? The review will consider: protection, legal assistance, livelihoods, education, health, hygiene, and food security.
2. Which of the CBI variables (transfer value, frequency and timing) used by the INGOs show signs of generating the most significant and longest-term outcomes, and in what ways?
3. Which of the conditions and restrictions imposed by INGOs (if any) have had the desired effect? Are there benefits from setting conditions and restrictions vs. not doing so?
4. Have complementary activities, such as trainings or partial in-kind distribution, influenced impact or sustainability of impact?
5. Which of the targeting approaches have been most effective at reaching the most vulnerable beneficiaries? To what extent is it feasible and recommended to harmonise targeting approaches across agencies delivering similar CBIs (in terms of intended objectives, outcomes and target groups) – and what recommendations could be made in this regard?
6. Were there any unintended positive or negative consequences from using CBIs?

The independent review will proceed according to the following methodology:

1. **Desk review of project documentation and monitoring data**
 - Activities: The INGO M&E teams will gather into one shared folder all the available evidence from HIP16, including a) proposals b) programme documentation including targeting approaches c) PDM tools and d) PDM quantitative and qualitative data. There will be an intensive inbrief over skype with the Consultant involving the review Focal Point, and key programme and M&E staff from the three INGOs. The Consultant will review data gathered for evidence that can support conclusions for the key research questions. This step may also involve a review of comparative literature on CBIs.
 - Outputs: None specific for this Phase.
 - Timing: The desk review is expected to take two weeks (or around 10 working days).
2. **Skype interviews with programme and M&E staff**
 - Activities: The Consultant will want to conduct in-depth interviews with programme and M&E staff from the three INGOs who were involved with HIP16 CBIs, to clarify missing points and gather perspectives. The review Focal Point can recommend interviewees and help to set meetings up.
 - Outputs: List of interviews and short summary of discussion points (no more than three pages).
 - Timing: The interview phase is expected to take two weeks (or around 5 working days).
3. **Analysis and reporting**
 - Activities: The Consultant will conduct a synthesis analysis of information gleaned from project documentation, monitoring data and the interviews. The Consultant will then draft a concise report that i) outlines overall findings and conclusions ii) makes recommendations for implementing HIP18-funded CBIs and iii) makes recommendations for cross-INGO baseline information needs and appropriate outcome monitoring indicators.
 - Outputs: Report (of no more than 20 pages, excluding Annexes), supplemented with a verbal presentation (over Skype) and a PowerPoint slide pack (of no more than 20 slides).
 - Timing: The analysis and reporting phase is expected to take three weeks (or around 10 working days). The draft report should be delivered to the review Focal Point no later than 28 February 2018.

The Consultant will be employed by NRC, but will be working on behalf of NRC, DRC, and RI, as the three organisations are participating equally in the independent review. The Consultant will report to a cross-INGO steering committee. The Consultant will work remotely.

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5. TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

The project will run between January and February 2018, with the draft report and presentation delivered no later than 28 February 2018. The INGOs commit to providing feedback on the draft within 5 working days and the final report must be delivered no later than 15 March 2018.

The Consultant is expected to deliver the following documents:

- List of interviews and a short summary of discussion points, in English (no more than three pages).
- Draft and Final Reports, in English (no more than 20 pages, excluding Annexes)
- A Presentation PowerPoint slide pack, in English (no more than 20 slides).

6. SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The Consultant will be responsible for:

- Developing a detailed timeline and resource plan for the independent review, and conducting the work according to the INGOs' cash and M&E programme teams to learn about the HIP16 cash programmes;
- Conducting a detailed review of all CBI-related programme literature and data;
- Finalising detailed research questions, in close collaboration with the INGOs' cash programme experts;
- Conducting in-depth interviews with INGO's cash and M&E programme teams;
- Drafting deliverables (see above);
- Delivering a verbal presentation over Skype (supported by PowerPoint slides) to present key findings and recommendations;
- Ensuring each of the three participating INGOs is equally involved and equally benefiting from the independent review.

7. QUALIFICATIONS

The Consultant must have these generic professional competencies:

- 5 years of experience managing reviews, research assignments, assessments or evaluations in humanitarian, recovery or development contexts;
- 5 years of experience working with INGOs, UN Agencies, or consulting firms;
- 5 years of experience in humanitarian cash programming, market analysis or similar.

The Consultant must have these specific skills, knowledge and experiences:

- Experience working with typical impact evaluation components (log frames, quantitative and qualitative methodologies, sampling, quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches, etc.);
- Experience using humanitarian and development M&E frameworks and standards within impact evaluations (OECD DAC, SPHERE, INEE, etc.);
- Experience managing projects using Gantt charts, resource plans, and budget trackers;
- Advanced level in all common MS Office applications (Word, Excel, PowerPoint);
- Fluent spoken and written English (Farsi is a plus);
- Experience working in refugee contexts is a plus;
- Experience working in Iran is a plus;
- Knowledge of data collection software e.g., KoBo or ODK Collect is a plus;
- Knowledge of analytical software e.g., SPSS is a plus.



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8. BUDGET AND PAYMENT TERMS

Bids shall include budgets in USD that are based on the scope of work above. The agreed sum shall include all fees and costs (including taxes, and insurance) incurred in conducting the consultancy tasks.

The lump sum will be paid in two instalments:

- 50% upon acceptance by the INGOs of the List of interviews and a short summary of discussion points
- 50% upon acceptance by the INGOs of the Final Report and PowerPoint presentations.



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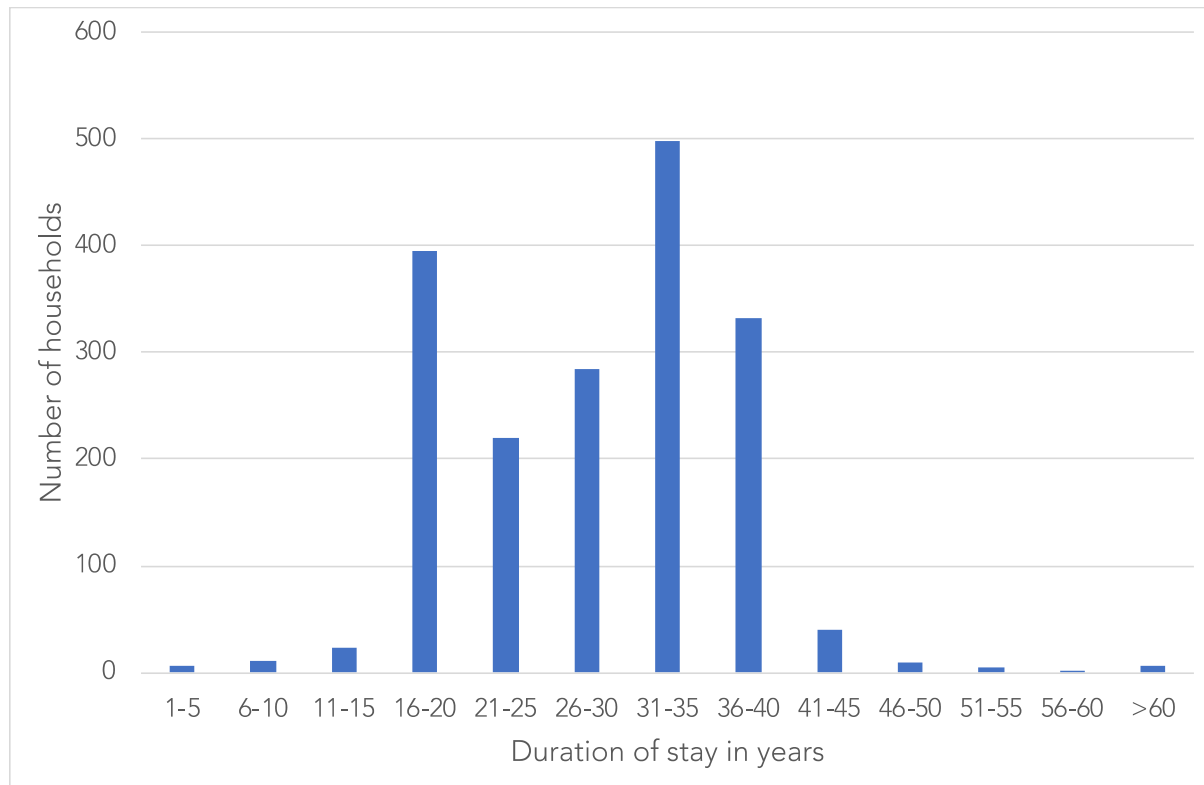
ANNEX 2 - List of people interviewed

	Name	Position/function	Date
1	Shahin Shadian	Livelihoods & Food Security Coordinator, NRC	12.02.18
2	Mina Kalantari	Livelihoods & Food Security Officer, NRC	
3	Anthony Dutable	Head of program, NRC	13.02.18
4	Mona Mirzadeh	Information Counseling and Legal Advice Coordinator, NRC	
5	Soroush Saadat	Monitoring & Evaluation Coordinator, RI	14.02.18
6	Joyce Dalgliesh	Program Coordinator, DRC	15.02.18
7	Abandokht Sarkarati	Cash Team Leader, DRC	27.02.18
8	Azim Noorani	Roving Technical Advisor for Cash and Livelihoods, DRC	
9	Vrinda Dar	Program Director, RI	26.02.18
10	Nazli Akbari	Cash Focal Person Monitoring & Evaluation, RI	
11	Tim McInerny	Cash Advisor, CashCap Iran	01.03.18
12	Leila Keivanani	Program Officer, WFP	08.03.18
13	Micheline Oussi	Cash-Based Interventions Officer, UNHCR	27.03.18
14	Stéphanie Rinvile	Senior Programme Officer, UNHCR	

ANNEX 3: Duration of the presence of Afghan households

The following graph presents the result of an analysis of the duration of Afghan refugee households registered by NRC. It is another illustration of the protracted nature of the refugee situation.

Duration of the presence of Afghan households in Iran, NRC 2017



Source: NRC baseline database.

Note: The NRC database contains 2'046 households of which 1'833 (89.5%) show a valid arrival date.