



Evidence to Action Brief

**BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT,
FLOOD RESPONSE 2020
CAMBODIA**

KEY FINDINGS



Cash transfer 3,667 HHs

- 88% of households satisfied
- 12% of households had errors

WASH kits 1,420 HHs

- 100% of households received the kits and were satisfied

Borehole rehabilitation 108

- 108 boreholes cleaned with repairs as needed
- 2,700 target households satisfied with clean water

Safe Learning Environment 15 schools

- 15 schools completed damage assessment

INTRODUCTION

In response to the devastating floods and heavy rainfall experienced in Cambodia in late September 2020, caused by tropical storms Nangka and Saudel, Save the Children, funded by ECHO, Save the Children Korea (SCK) and the organisation's Children's Emergency Seed Fund (CSF) implemented a multi-sectoral project in Thmar Kaul and Moung Reusse districts of the worst-hit province of Battambang in partnership with World Vision (WV), Hagar International and Komar Rikreay Association.

The project aimed at supporting the immediate life-saving basic needs of 3,667 households through the provision of unconditional cash transfers, improved access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene practices, as well as re-establishing a decent, clean, and safe learning environment for boys and girls from late November 2020 to March 2021. Throughout the Action, Save the Children and project partners integrated Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), and child protection messaging through awareness-raising and community outreach to mitigate the risks of COVID-19, child protection issues and mental distress.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this assessment is to identify and document best practices and lessons learnt for the emergency response to flood-affected households in Battambang province, Cambodia. Importantly, this documentation study aims to identify the effectiveness of the emergency response strategies and lessons learnt to improve future emergency responses. Detailed objectives of the assignment are as follows:

- Examine project interventions based on OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria (Relevance and Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability).
- Identify best practices and lessons learnt in the emergency response, with a particular focus on the innovations used (in particular Interactive Voice Response (IVR), under the cash assistance component).
- Make recommendations to improve future emergency response work.

METHOD AND SAMPLING

With time constraints and limitations on gathering in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the consultant team was deployed to the field from 18-24 February 2021 and conducted KIIs and FGDs in 10 villages of the six target communes in Thmar Kaul and Moug Reussei districts, Battambang Province, Cambodia. Although not a full project evaluation, the consultant team still applied OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria to guide assessment planning, qualitative data collection and reporting. The assignment was focused on identifying the best practices and lessons learnt in the flood response project. The methodologies were as follows:



The assessment team engaged 142 respondents (56% female), of which 28 people were interviewed and 114 participated in the FGDs across the two districts. Respondents consisted of district, commune, and village authorities, district office of education personnel, school teachers, representatives of Village Health Support Groups and Water Sanitation User Groups, target and non-target beneficiaries and Save the Children and partner staff.



56%
Female

44%
Male

142 respondents

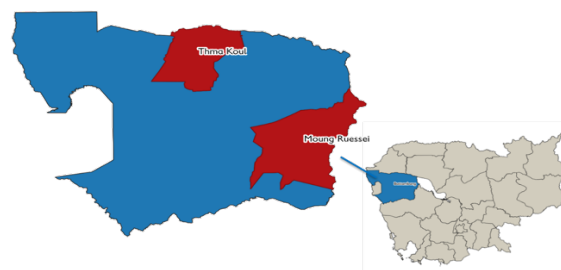


Figure 1: Target areas of Thmar Kaul and Moug Reussei district, Battambang



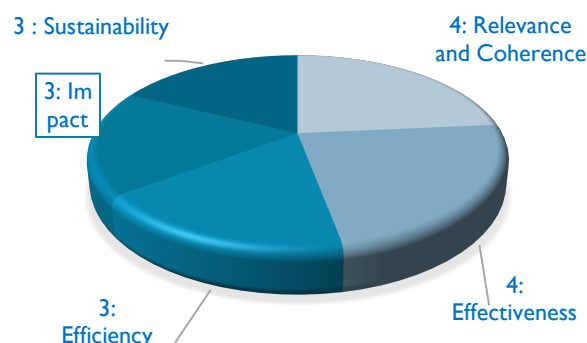
OVERALL FINDINGS



PROJECT OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS BASED ON OECD-DAC CRITERIA

The assessment revealed that the project interventions on unconditional cash transfer and WASH components were considered highly relevant, coherent and effective, while the project efficiency, impact and sustainability were not highly rated due to the tight project timeframe and delay in implementing activities under the safe learning environment and other hindering factors (Figure 1).

Figure 2: DCA Criteria



Score: 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = medium, 4 = high & 5 = very high

Relevance and Coherence

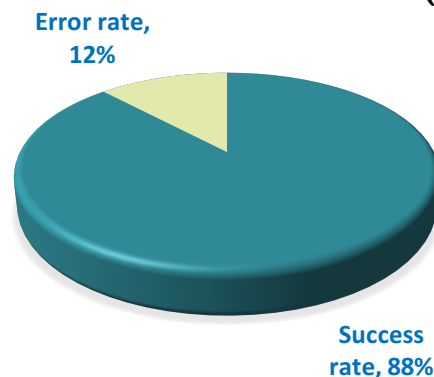
The project was relevant, and responsive to the immediate needs of flood affected households. In particular, the unconditional cash and WASH components provided life-saving support to poor flood-affected households and boys and girls who faced negative effects from flooding, loss of income sources, and damage to water and sanitation facilities. The project was well aligned with strategies of the government, UN-OCHA, HRF, along with Save the Children and World Vision and was also partially relevant to Komar Rikreay Association and Hagar International' strategies.

Effectiveness

Project interventions on unconditional cash transfer and WASH components were found to be highly relevant and effective in meeting the urgent life-saving needs of flood affected households. Unconditional cash assistance allowed households to meet their own prioritised needs at a time when livelihoods had not yet been re-established, and were further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The modality of cash assistance through mobile technologies could reach large target group, although challenges were noted in this. WASH support that combined rehabilitation (minor repair and cleaning) of affected water sources was effective in restoring access to safe drinking water, alongside emergency provision of WASH kits to meet household water, sanitation and hygiene requirements in the short-term. The assessment findings indicated that project interventions were effective in filling the water, sanitation and hygiene needs of households following the emergency until safe drinking water was restored.

Cash Transfer: The 88% of the target households who received cash successfully expressed that they were happy with the cash process as it was easy for them and they think it is a safer method than distribution of money in the communities. Save the Children's Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) report found that 99.34% out of 88% who received the cash considered the distribution method was the most effective, safe, accessible accountable and participatory.

Figure 3: Innovative Digitalised Cash Transfer success and error rate (%)



The challenges: The issues faced by the 12% of households who experienced some errors via both Wing to Wing and Wing to Phone number transfers, were being investigated by Save the Children, partners and local authorities. At the time of assessment, Save the Children and its partners were addressing the issues for the target households through alternative transfer modalities to ensure all households receive their cash transfer.

WASH kits distribution: The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) kits reached 100% of the target households. The majority of beneficiaries expressed that contents of the hygiene kits, such as soap, was very helpful and met their needs and they can use it for COVID-19 prevention measures also. However, in regard to the provision of five drinking water bottles, while the majority of households mentioned that it responded to their needs, general consensus was that it would have been more helpful if it could be distributed during the flood season because they had difficulty accessing clean water during that time.

Borehole rehabilitation (cleaning and repair) was completed by the last week of February 2021. The villagers confirmed that they have observed an increased amount of water from the borehole and the hand pump mechanism after cleaning. Water was also smoother and lighter than before. However, the assessment observed that the boreholes can be flooded again in the next rainy season as the borehole cleaning and repair measures did not elevate or upgrade the existing levels above the floodwater levels.



Photo 1: WASH kits distribution

Safe Learning Environment: It is too early to determine the effectiveness of the Safe Learning Environment as at the time of the assessment, schools completed the damage assessment. School renovation plans have been submitted to Hagar International' staff as the education partner under the project. Delays in this component was due to limited knowledge and skills on the school safety framework among school support committees, who required training in school damage assessment, renovation and budget planning.

Efficiency

As the assessment was conducted prior to the project's final financial report due date¹, it was not possible to analyse the cost efficiency for the whole project. However, it is likely that the \$50 unconditional cash allocation and WASH intervention costs alone demonstrated efficiency as the amount allocated per household was sufficient to support the target households with their basic needs for between one month (cash transfers) to three months (WASH kits). Notably, the institutional capacity of Hagar International and Komar Rikreay Association in emergency response had some effects on efficiency and effectiveness as digitalised cash transfers and safe learning environment were new to them.

Impact

As an emergency response with a short implementation period, it was not possible to measure any long-term impacts of project interventions on target beneficiaries. Therefore, the assessment only addressed whether the project met the objectives and immediate outcome "Flood-affected children and families are provided with immediate life-saving assistance".

The assessment team concluded that the project not only responded well to cover the basic, life-saving needs of the flood affected beneficiaries but also observed unexpected positive outcomes for those households who used the cash assistance to develop their livelihood activities, notably chicken raising, growing vegetables, and rice production as well as partially or fully repaying their debts.

¹ Project final narrative and financial reports are due to the Save the Children Norway at the end of April 2021 while the assessment was conducted Feb18-24, 2021.

However, in a small number of cases some concerns were highlighted whereby support to households contributed to, or exacerbated, pre-existing tensions and jealousies among beneficiaries and non-beneficiary households in the target villages.

Sustainability



Photo 2: Samnang is feeding his chickens

Although it was difficult to measure sustainability of the emergency response project, the consultant team found that active government involvement from the district to the commune and village leaders strengthened commitment and ownership of project implementation. These stakeholders expressed they had a good opportunity to learn from the project and to adapt it for future emergencies.

Partner organizations Komar Rikrey Association and Hagar International confirmed that they will be able to adopt the innovative process of cash transfers with some contextual modifications in future emergency response work. World Vision can be a strategic partner to deliver WASH in future emergencies.



BEST PRACTICES

- ❖ **Beneficiary Selection:** Jointly developed beneficiary selection criteria and complaint mechanism engaging relevant local authorities in all processes created a strong sense of ownership among local authorities and ensured inclusion of the most vulnerable households for relief assistance.
- ❖ **Accountability:** The project established an inclusive selection criterion and complaints mechanism, and undertook beneficiary screening and verification, random spot checks of between 5-10% of target households and Post Distribution Monitoring for cash assistance.
- ❖ **Partnership and collaboration:** The project team collaborated closely with partners, as well as district and commune authorities, and this generated a strong sense of ownership and commitment from all stakeholders and a good project result.
- ❖ **Unconditional Cash Transfer:** The unconditional \$50 was extremely helpful for those families who were struggling to survive, and in general was used for food, keeping children in school, and for medical and health treatment for at least one-month.
- ❖ **Innovative digitalized cash transfer:** Save the Children's partnership with a micro-finance organization to deliver an innovative digitalized cash transfer via Wing to Wing Account and Wing to Phone number had a success rate of 88% and error rate of around 12%. These methods are considered effective and scalable for a larger response.
- ❖ **Wing to Wing account:** It appeared to work quite well, especially for elders, those without phones and low-tech users and is suitable in a small-scale response or development work. Acknowledging some issues are important, particularly related to the ID card, requirement for deposit and travel, slow processing in Wing account set-up, requirement of having a phone number associated with Wing account, and requirement for face-to-face sensitization.
- ❖ **Electronic Cash Transfer Standard Operating Procedures:** Save the Children has developed Standard Operation Procedures which was very helpful to guide implementation of the Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC) to support vulnerable, flood affected households, and cover their basic needs.
- ❖ **Linking Relief to Recovery and Development:** The cash program contributed to Linking Relief to Recovery and Development. This assistance came at the critical period of livelihood recovery transition, with a number of households from the FGDs describing how they used part of the cash to recover their livelihoods, reactivating the local market after the flood.





LESSONS LEARNT

- ❖ **Introducing different methods of innovative digitalized cash transfer:** Introducing different methods of innovative digitalized cash transfer for this emergency response during the COVID-19 outbreak was a good initiative of Save the Children. However, the introduction of this approach in such a short time-period, without a strong understanding of community feasibility created some confusion among stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
- ❖ **Wing to Phone number:** This method was not well suited for some specific groups such as elders, households without mobile phones, and low-tech users because many of them could not read the message and understand the process sufficiently in order to receive the required code while other persons needed to use their relative's phone. Wing to Phone number approach is more suited to the urban context with a population more adept at mobile phone usage.
- ❖ **Sensitization messages:** Using the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) as a method for community sensitization was suitable for the younger generation, and high-tech users as they tended to listen to the IVR from start to finish. However, it was not appropriate to elder users as they believed the IVR message was a scam and/or telemarketing and cut the IVR message.
- ❖ **Real-time reporting:** Service provider Wing could not provide real-time tracking reports to the support team to resolve errors (changes in phone numbers, expired passcodes, and digital glitches) for beneficiaries promptly.
- ❖ **Accountability and Complaint Mechanism:** In the implementation of the innovative digitalized cash transfer at the larger scale under the project, Save the Children country office and its partners faced multiple errors and complaints, and the existing staff and structures of the Accountability and Complaint Mechanism could not handle and resolve the multiple cases simultaneously.
- ❖ **Community perception and nepotism:** With community meetings were not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions², the lack of communication around beneficiary selection, including the selection criteria and complaints mechanism at the village level, resulted in a less transparent process. As such, perceptions among community members of nepotism in beneficiary selection could not be avoided, particularly in the communities with pre-existing tensions.
- ❖ **Communication and messaging:** When there are two projects³ with similar interventions in the same target areas and communities at the same time, there is high potential for confusion through inconsistent messaging and unclear communication among stakeholders and the community. For example, in Thmar Kaul district it was communicated that there was more than one cash transfer, although this was not the case.
- ❖ **Visibility of Save the Children at local level:** Although Save the Children's role in the emergency response project was well communicated with stakeholders, the evaluation team found that if the name is too long or used both English and Khmer and or too difficult to pronounce, it is hard for people to remember.
- ❖ **Staffing:** To implement the emergency response project with the high budget within a short timeframe required responsible staff (Save the Children and partners). In this case, dedicated staff were not allocated and staff were allocated project responsibilities on top of their regular workload, working very hard without time off. It affected work life balance for individual staff members who were responsible for this project.

² The Covid-19 community outbreak of 28 November 2020 limited community gatherings. As such, the beneficiary selection processes and complaints mechanism were not systematically applied at the village level and no open meeting was conducted with the community

which is good practice.

³The Family Care First (FCF) project for the COVID-19 response was providing more than one cash transfer in the same areas.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria, best practices, and lessons learnt from the project interventions, below are the key recommendations:

Accountability and Complaint Mechanisms

1. **Open community meeting for beneficiary selection at the village level:** To ensure a transparent process in beneficiary selection, the selection process and criteria should be understood by village leaders and villagers and informed to the community. It is good practice to conduct an open community meeting for beneficiary selection at the village level with participation of target and non-target households.
2. **Strengthen the Accountability and Complaints Mechanisms at different levels:** It was understood that Save the Children has an existing accountability and complaint mechanism, including a complaint hotline. In an emergency context with potential overwhelming complaints and feedback, this mechanism should be better structured with clear roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders at different levels to ensure sufficient resources to handle multiple complaints simultaneously.

Emergency Preparedness

3. **Identify the suitable innovative digital cash transfer method before the next emergency:** Save the Children should continue to test the innovative digital cash transfer methods or other methods before the next emergency. If possible, continued testing should be done in the form of a project outside of an emergency to allow a broader learning perspective in different contexts.
4. **Explore the best option of innovative digital cash transfer to align with the existing government system:** Save the Children should explore the possibility of aligning future cash responses with the government's equity card system as this would save time and resources, and build on existing user knowledge.
5. **Replicate the suitable innovative digital cash transfer method at the country level:** Save the Children should work alongside the Food Security Sector Co-lead in HRF to share learnings and identify appropriate innovative digital cash transfer methods which can be replicated at a country level before the next emergency.
6. **Integration of disaster risk reduction (DRR) in WASH infrastructure:** Save the Children to systematically integrate DRR in each component of the emergency response. In the case of WASH, this would include risk-proofing the intervention to reduce the risk of future disasters.

Save the Children Visibility

7. **Increase visibility of Save the Children at a local level:** Save the Children should agree to use one name either in Khmer or English. Both Save the Children and partners should equally promote visibility of Save the Children and partners.

Staff Management in Emergency Response

8. **Disaggregated of duties between emergency response and development projects:** 1) Save the Children should increase the number of members in the Country Emergency Roster Team (can be out sourced to experts) so that the team can immediately deploy in any large-scale emergency response, 2) Project budgets should have some allocation for dedicated/responsible staff in partner organizations. This project would have benefited from dedicated/responsible staff to support the project throughout the entire period of implementation.

Partnership and Collaboration

9. **Strengthen partner capacity on Emergency Preparedness and Response:** Save the Children should identify potential partners and build their capacity on Emergency Preparedness and Response so that these organizations can have a timely response to any future emergencies.

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