beneficiary preferences for humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip

an interim output for Oxfam GB and the Cash Working Group of the Food Sector

Funded by ECHO

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Summary of findings

Beneficiary preferences for programme type and transfer mechanism vary significantly.
The strongest factor affecting this variation is the nature of the situation, and the effect is most strong for a post-conflict response.
Other factors such as the livelihood of the recipients can have a significant impact on results, and for development programmes in particular this should be considered through more detailed localised study.
It is possible to make some generalisations, for example around ‘urban people’, but care should be taken with these. A deeper pool of data would help increase confidence.
In planning for emergency response, there is need for a single appropriate system to be adopted for assistance. From the perspective of the beneficiaries, the preference would be for Unconditional Cash Grants, delivered in the form of physical cash rather than via a bank or voucher system.
From the perspective of the agencies managing the response, there will need to be consideration of other factors in addition.
Introduction

This report one of several planned outputs from a consultancy process managed by Oxfam GB and funded by ECHO, and run in coordination with the Food Security Sector. The review process includes the following elements:

- A mapping of current cash programming in Gaza
- A focus on preparedness for using cash in future emergencies in Gaza
- Several workshops with cash practitioners
- Technical support to agencies interested in strengthening their work in this area

This report is intended to support more effective preparedness by humanitarian actors, when planning to respond at scale and speed to a future disaster.

The report is the independent work of the consultant: it does not represent the views of Oxfam GB or the workshop participants.

Background

Despite confident pronouncements about beneficiary preferences, it is an area that is surprisingly difficult to investigate objectively. Both beneficiaries and programme managers tend to express (or report) preferences for the modality they are most familiar with, and the manner in which questions are asked can strongly influence outcomes.

The approach used to generate this report seeks to minimise the influence of the asking agency, and disaggregate the findings in a useful fashion. It does this by recruiting interviewees across a range of agencies and programmes, by using a participatory approach within a focus group environment, and by subtly changing the nature of the question from one of “either/or” to one that looks at a balance of preferences.

Amongst cash programming practitioners there is a growing awareness that the current terminology is inadequate (a ‘voucher’ can be both a ‘mechanism’ and a ‘modality’; ‘conditionality’ may refer to a restriction placed on expenditure or a contribution from the beneficiary, or indeed both). This report seeks to be clear in terms of terminology but is not bound by previous convention.

This exercise was designed in and directed towards the specificities of the Gaza context, but could easily be adapted to other locales through minor changes to terminology and options. Although described here in English, the exercises took place entirely in Arabic.

Context

The economic situation of Gaza cannot be normalised until the blockade comes to an end, people can move freely, and products can be exported. Until this time, humanitarian and development actors can only work to provide an interim solution. The situation is considerably complicated by the no-contact rules, which have forced the creation of parallel systems.

The components of the current situation include the private sector, the public sector, a formal safety net, parallel employment creation schemes, a range of short term and ad-hoc assistance, and informal social safety nets. This nature of each component has evolved over time, in response to changing circumstances and in some cases, detailed evaluation findings. However, it remains piecemeal, incomplete and reactive, as opposed to a joined-up holistic approach guided by best practice.

In common with humanitarian assistance projects worldwide, there has been a noticeable shift towards cash-based assistance and some interesting work around market-based responses. Cash for work projects, which have long been part of the Gaza reality, have gradually been complemented by other forms of cash transfer.
Methodology
The full methodology is described in the second annex to this report, to assist replication.

The approach adopted used a series of proportional piling exercises to explore the preferences of beneficiaries around a range of programme options, and for transfer mechanisms for unconditional cash transfers.

Designed disaggregation
The data was collected from ten focus groups including 99 carefully selected participants, to allow maximum disaggregation of the results, by the following dimensions:

- Men / Women
- Livelihood groups, where applicable
- Urban / rural
- Qualifying / not for safety net assistance (either UNRWA or MoSA)
- Specific vulnerabilities, where applicable

This list could be further developed in the future. Additional groups could easily be drawn up to round out the last category: for example households with high recurrent medical expenditure; households with a limited family support network. In addition, repetition of some of the groups would add confidence to the findings outlined below.

Three simple scenarios
In each case, participants worked together to determine their preferences for assistance in three scenarios:

- **normal**: in regular times under the blockade, for example as part of a safety net programme
- **post-conflict**: around a month after the end of hostilities
- **post-disaster**: around a month after a major winter storm or other natural disaster

Four programme descriptions
The choices offered were restricted, based on a review of programme options in Gaza, prior experience, and the outcomes of the mapping exercise previously circulated.

In each case, the programme would deliver the same amount of money (or value of commodities) to the household, over the same period. The four options were:

- Cash for work
- Conditional cash / voucher
- Unconditional cash transfer
- Commodities in-kind

Three options for transfer mechanism - for unconditional cash transfers
Again, each mechanism will provide exactly the same value of transfer to the household. The three options were:

- Transfer to bank account
- Collect cash from bank on presentation of ID
- Cash in hand

In the pilot focus group, a plastic card was also considered. However, this kind of transfer mechanism is strongly associated with the WFP/OGB VBV project, which places restrictions on expenditure, and this was found to be confusing the discussion. Since it is not yet widely used in Gaza as an unconditional transfer tool, it was removed from the options for the other focus groups.

Beneficiaries of the MoSA safety net are required to have a bank account, which is seen as worthwhile for repeat transfers. The majority of other participants did not have a bank account.

The full results are provided in the first annex.
Beneficiary preferences for programme type

The proportional piling exercise for this part of the process had four options, which are described in detail below:

**Figure 1: four options for programme type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cash for work</th>
<th>Conditional cash / voucher</th>
<th>Unconditional cash</th>
<th>Commodities in-kind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A cash programme in which participants are offered paid labour opportunities for a fixed period of time</td>
<td>A distribution through cash (or voucher) of cash with restrictions placed by the agency on the shops and commodities on which it may be spent.</td>
<td>A distribution of cash on which no restrictions are placed – beneficiaries are free to spend it where and how they like</td>
<td>This describes a physical distribution of typical, appropriate relief items – food, clothing, blankets, hygiene items, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the charts that follow, the vertical axis is effectively a percentage that describes the participants’ enthusiasm for a particular approach. A score of 100 would indicate that all 25 tokens had been placed in a single pile: that only a single type of programme would be acceptable in this situation.

Overall preferences for programme type

**Figure 2: overall preferences for programme type, disaggregated by gender**

These preliminary charts show the overall responses for the three scenarios, with a breakdown between men and women’s responses displayed. Some interesting observations:

- Support for CFW is higher amongst women than men, following a natural disaster; support for cash transfers is higher amongst men.
- The distribution for responses following natural disasters is very different from that following a conflict, where there is a strong preference for UCT expressed.
Are urban people’s preferences different from rural people?
This analysis considers FGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 to be urban, while 6, 7, 8 and 9 are rural.
The combined peak of each option is the same as the previous chart, but now disaggregated differently.

Figure 3: preferences for programme type, disaggregated by location

The important distinction here is the enthusiasm for conditional cash amongst the rural population: it is the most supported form of programme for normal times and in response to natural disasters.

Discussions within these focus groups implied an assumption that the conditional cash would be related to the restoration or protection of rural livelihoods – for fencing or agricultural inputs. This would take precedence over unconditional cash, which might be consumed by basic needs.

This argument is not entirely convincing, since the whole point of unconditional cash is to support choice – and farmers could choose to spend it on inputs or restoration.

It is possible that a more complete explanation would consider household debt and social or familial obligations. If a household receives unrestricted cash, there may be pressure to meet these obligations: pressure which can be resisted if the contribution is tied to specific commodities.
How does livelihood influence programme preferences?

This analysis considers only FGs 3, 6, 7 and 8.
The fishermen’s group is urban based (the men live in the Beach Camp area) while the Bedouin group and the two farmers groups (M & F) are rural.

Figure 4: preferences for programme type, disaggregated by livelihoods group

These charts highlight some very singular differences between the group of ‘farmers’ and the Bedouin – who are also farmers, although of a different tradition. The Bedouin expressed much stronger preference for unconditional cash in all situations, but especially after disasters of any kind.
The reasons for this are unclear and the qualitative discussions with the groups will be explored to see if they shed light on the situation.
The fishermen’s perspectives are different again – showing a preference for CFW in normal times (perhaps because the abolition of the restrictions on fishing was not one of the options for assistance); also comfortable with conditional cash for emergency assistance, but showing almost no support for commodity distributions in any circumstance.
How does the safety net influence programme preferences?
This analysis includes FGs 3 and 7, but not FG 6, which is considered to be a mixed group, and it does not include FG 8 where this information was not collected.

Figure 5: preferences for programme type, disaggregated by access to the safety net

Compared to the overall norm, there is an increased preference for support for CFW, although this probably just reflects familiarity. However, in the emergency response and especially the conflict scenario, we see the same shift in preferences towards unconditional cash.

The distinction between these groups and the livelihoods groups is stark for the natural disaster and normal scenarios, but less so for the conflict scenario.

Note that the group who do not receive support is represented by only two FGs, 1 and 4 – and FG 1 was the pilot and the methodology changed slightly. There would be value in increasing the depth of the data here.
Beneficiary preferences for transfer mechanisms

The proportional piling exercise for this part of the process had three options, which are described in detail below:

**Figure 6: three options for programme type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer to bank account</th>
<th>Collect from bank with ID</th>
<th>Cash in hand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This option requires beneficiaries to have a bank account. It should be explained that people without an account will receive assistance to open one.</td>
<td>Beneficiaries present themselves at the bank and collect the payment on presentation of their ID</td>
<td>Cash is provided as physical banknotes in an envelope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the participants were directed to consider just an unconditional cash transfer for this exercise, it seems reasonable to think that the preferences expressed are relatively independent from programme type (as far as that is possible – clearly some types of programme imply a specific transfer mechanism). UCT was chosen as it is in some ways the simplest, least encumbered by other programme baggage.

**Overall preferences for transfer mechanism**

**Figure 7: overall preferences for transfer mechanism, disaggregated by gender**

Gender distinctions are not hugely apparent at this level, except for the preference for a bank account (F) over a bank transfer against an ID (M) – the reasons for this are unclear.

The preference for cash in hand, especially in response to conflict, is fairly strong.
Are urban people’s transfer preferences difference from rural people?

Figure 8: preferences for transfer mechanism, disaggregated by location

This is an interesting contrast to expectations from other situations, where we might expect urban dwellers to have better access to banking services than rural. However, the rural people in these FGs are largely farmers, and many are recipients of MoSA assistance. This means that they already have a bank account, and this may have influenced their responses compared to other groups – and especially for the conflict scenario.
How does livelihood influence transfer preferences?

Figure 9: preferences for transfer mechanism, disaggregated by livelihoods group

Here again the distinction between the Bedouin farmers and the other farmers is very apparent – but the factor here is perhaps that many of them had access to MoSA assistance (which requires the bank account), and perhaps the nature of their farming (with high seasonal input costs sales) also promotes having a bank account.

The Bedouin group was adamant that the only viable mechanism is all cases was collection from the bank on production of an ID. When facilitators suggested that they might consider the other options as well, to illustrate the pros and cons of each, they maintained that the issue of dignity made the decision simple – that being handed cash in envelopes was not appropriate.
How does access to the safety net influence transfer preferences?

Figure 10: preferences for transfer mechanism, disaggregated by access to the safety net

Those receiving MoSA support will mostly have access to a bank account, and this appears to be reflected in their preferences during normal times. However, in times of disaster the preferences are in line with the overall norms.
Annex 1: quantitative results from the 10 focus groups.

Abbreviations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CFW</th>
<th>CCT</th>
<th>UCT</th>
<th>Com</th>
<th>Card</th>
<th>B-T</th>
<th>B-ID</th>
<th>CiH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFW</td>
<td>cash for work</td>
<td>conditional cash transfer</td>
<td>unconditional cash transfer</td>
<td>Commodity distribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card</td>
<td>prepaid card for ATM/POS</td>
<td>Bank transfer to account</td>
<td>Bank payment on presentation of ID</td>
<td>cash in hand (envelopes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The card option was dropped from the exercise after the pilot.

The numerical score in each case is the number of counters the group allocated to each option.

Results

**FG1: Pilot, 7 men, Beach Camp, urban, no safety net assistance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme type</th>
<th>Unconditional Cash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>post-natural</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FG2: 10 women, Beach Camp, urban, with safety net support**

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<th>Programme type</th>
<th>Unconditional Cash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-conflict</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-natural</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**FG 3: 10 fishermen, urban, from Beach Camp (9 have access to safety net)**

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<th>Programme type</th>
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</thead>
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<td>normal</td>
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<tr>
<td>post-conflict</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</table>

**FG 4: 10 women, urban, Al Daraj area, recruited from womens’ project, no safety net access**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme type</th>
<th>Unconditional Cash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Card</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>post-natural</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**FG 5: 9 men, urban Al Sheja’ya area, have access to safety net (CFW)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme type</th>
<th>Unconditional Cash</th>
</tr>
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<td>Card</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
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## Cash Based Programming in the Gaza Strip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG 6: 11 men, farmers, Beit Lahia, 7 of 11 have access to MoSA safety net</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFW</th>
<th>CCT</th>
<th>UCT</th>
<th>Com</th>
<th>Card</th>
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<th>B-D</th>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG 7: 11 women, farmers, Beit Lahia, 9 of 11 have access to MoSA safety net</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>post-natural</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG 8: 8 men, Bedouin farmers, Omm Al Nasser, access to safety net unknown</th>
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</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>UCT</th>
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<tr>
<td>post-conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>post-natural</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG 9: 10 men, CFW urban, with access to temporary work (all access safety net)</th>
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<table>
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<th>UCT</th>
<th>Com</th>
<th>Card</th>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG 10: 13 women, urban heads of households with limited labour resources, all have access to safety net</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>post-natural</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-conflict</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2: Investigating beneficiary preferences - methodology

Despite confident pronouncements about beneficiary preferences, it is an area that is surprisingly difficult to investigate objectively. Both beneficiaries and programme managers tend to express (or report) preferences for the modality they are most familiar with, and the manner in which questions are asked can strongly influence outcomes.¹

The approach described below seeks to minimise the influence of the asking agency, and disaggregate the findings in a useful fashion. It does this by recruiting interviewees across a range of agencies and programmes, by using a participatory approach within a focus group environment, and by subtly changing the nature of the question from one of “either/or” to one that looks at a balance of preferences.

Amongst cash programming practitioners there is a growing awareness that the current terminology is inadequate (a ‘voucher’ can be both a ‘mechanism’ and a ‘modality’; ‘conditionality’ may refer to a restriction placed on expenditure or a contribution from the beneficiary, or indeed both). This paper seeks to be clear in terms of terminology but is not bound by previous convention.

This exercise is directed to the Gaza context, but could easily be adapted to other locales through minor changes to language and options. This exercise was undertaken as part of a larger project seeking to build capacity for emergency response amongst humanitarian agencies with a presence in the Gaza Strip. Although described here in English, the exercise took place entirely in Arabic.

This description was finalised based on learning after the pilot was completed, prior to the main data collection exercise.

Materials required

- An appropriate room, with a table around which all participants can gather at once, and all reach the work area together.
- 25 counters for proportional piling (in Gaza, large fava beans)
- 4 plates or shallow bowls, or a flipchart sheet with 4 boxes
- Coloured, printed cards for the various options (situations, types of assistance, transfer mechanisms)
- Recording sheet and analysis spreadsheet
- Flip chart for recording discussion points
- Snacks, drinks for the participants. Transport costs if necessary.

Participant and data disaggregation

This section is highly specific to the Gaza context. Focus groups were designed to be able to disaggregate as follows:

- Men / Women
- Livelihood
- Urban / rural
- Qualifying / not for safety net assistance (either UNRWA or MoSA)
- Specific vulnerabilities

Therefore, the following focus groups were organised (in chronological order)

- Men from Beach Camp, no safety net (pilot, not included in quantitative analysis)
- Women from Beach Camp, safety net
- Fishermen from Beach Camp, no safety net
- Women from Al Daraj, urban Gaza, no safety net (recruited from women’s project)

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- Men from Al Sheja’ya, urban Gaza, safety net
- Men from Bait Lahia, farmers, 7/11 with safety net
- Women from Bait Lahia, farmers, 9/11 with safety net
- Men from Omm Al Nasser, Bedouin
- Men, with temporary work (CFW beneficiaries)
- Women headed households, with low labour potential.

Given the range of disaggregation being explored, there would be value in carrying out additional focus group exercises to confirm that the variation found is actually consistent between the groups.

The response scenarios

This section is highly specific to the Gaza context. The exercise has two parts, and each is considered within three response scenarios:

- **normal**: in regular times under the blockade, for example as part of a safety net programme
- **post-conflict**: around a month after the end of hostilities
- **post-disaster**: around a month after a major winter storm or other natural disaster

Introducing the exercise to the participants

The participants are given a thorough introduction to the exercise, including a description of the process and how the information will be collected, analysed and used – the purpose of the exercise. The following aspects should be included:

- The purpose of the exercise: that is, to ensure that agencies are listening to beneficiary preferences around types of assistance when planning for future emergencies.
- The participatory nature of the process: that the group should discuss the various options and reach agreement, and that all members of the group should be heard.
- That the focus of the exercise is not to choose a single preferred option, but to score the various options according to the advantages and disadvantages of each, within the context being discussed.
- The proportional piling exercise itself can be introduced using a different set of topics, unrelated to the exercise – favourite foods, for example. If this were done as a role-play between the facilitators that could encourage an interactive approach amongst the participants.
- The four types of programme need to be described very carefully and consistently in separate iterations of the process, as do the three selected transfer mechanisms. If the exercise is modified for other situations, it is important that the selected transfer mechanisms all relate to *unconditional* cash transfers. If a restriction, voucher, or conditionality is included that undermines the value of that part of the process.

The running order for the FGD

**Opening**

- Introductions and purpose
- Demonstration of the proportional piling tool
- Description of the scenarios

**Situation: normal scenario**

- Introduction to the 4 types of programme
- Exercise 1 – balance of programme preferences in normal times
- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions
- Introduction to the 3 types of unconditional transfer
- Exercise 2 – balance of preferences for UCT in normal times
Cash Based Programming in the Gaza Strip

- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions

**Situation: post conflict scenario**
- Exercise 3 – balance of programme preferences in post-conflict times
- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions
- Exercise 4 – balance of preferences for UCT in post-conflict times
- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions

**Situation: post natural disaster scenario**
- Exercise 5 – balance of programme preferences in post-disaster times
- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions
- Exercise 6 – balance of preferences for UCT in post-disaster times
- Discussion and validation, including exploring zero scores or even distributions

**Conclusion**
- General discussion and comparison of results
- Any issues raised by participants
- Appreciation and close
- Discussion amongst facilitators about qualitative reporting

**Option descriptions**

**Programme descriptions**
It is important to ensure that participants understand that each of the four options will all deliver the same amount of money (or value of commodities) to the household, over the same period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cash for work</th>
<th>Conditional cash / voucher</th>
<th>Unconditional cash</th>
<th>Commodities in-kind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A cash programme in which participants are offered paid labour opportunities for a fixed period of time</td>
<td>A distribution through cash (or voucher) of cash with restrictions placed by the agency on the shops and commodities on which it may be spent.</td>
<td>A distribution of cash on which no restrictions are placed – beneficiaries are free to spend it where and how they like</td>
<td>This describes a physical distribution of typical, appropriate relief items – food, clothing, blankets, hygiene items, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The transfer mechanism for unconditional cash transfers**
The options for an unconditional card transfer (as opposed to the VBV, which is conditional) or the PalPay mechanism were not included for this exercise as they are not readily available or widely understood. Again, each mechanism will provide exactly the same value of transfer to the household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer to bank account</th>
<th>Collect from bank with ID</th>
<th>Cash in hand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This option requires beneficiaries to have a bank account. It should be explained that people without an account will receive assistance to open one.</td>
<td>Beneficiaries present themselves at the bank and collect the payment on presentation of their ID</td>
<td>Cash is provided as physical banknotes in an envelope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantitative recording at the FGD.
Description of the specificities of the group
For example, gender, livelihood group, previous exposure to assistance programmes and safety nets, socio-economic status, age.

Single recording sheet for each focus group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance of programme types</th>
<th>Balance of UCT mechanism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer to bank account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash for Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional cash / voucher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconditional cash</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodity in-kind</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exercise number is shown in the corner of each cell – this does not need to be replicated in the recording sheet used on the day. The sum of the cells for each exercise should always add up to 25.

Qualitative recording at the FGD.
Key issues from discussion
Where there are substantial changes between the responses in different contexts, or where the results are very stark (zeros, 25s, or an even split between 2 or 3 groups) these should be explored and the reasoning understood and documented.

Suggested modifications to the methodology
Based on observation and learning from the process, the following changes are proposed should the exercise be extended to gather additional data, or adapted for use elsewhere:

- Increase the number of counters to around 50. This reduces the chance of them being ‘counted’ into the piles.
- Discourage ‘voting’, where every participant gets one or more counters and places them in piles, as this does not generate the ‘balance of preference’ being sought. Instead, as stated above, encourage a discussion, before the counters are distributed, about the pros and cons of each approach. This is a comparative method, not an either/or approach.