RURAL VOUCHER SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD ASSISTANCE

(ZCC - ICCO Joint Response to Drought in Mash East – Marondera and Seke Districts)

By: Maria Tendai Dendere (Director - ZCC Humanitarian and Development Services)
PRESENTATION LAYOUT

- Introduction
- Overview of the program
- Choice of modality
- The food voucher system
- Pros and Cons- ZCC perspective
- Pros and Cons-Beneficiaries perspective
- Challenges encountered
- Actions taken
- Lessons learnt
INTRODUCTION

- Food assistance has become more complex over the previous years with ever changing context.
- There has been increased shift from the traditional in-kind distributions to increased usage of other delivery modalities such as the mobile cash transfers, food vouchers, cash in transit.
- The various options for provision of food now requires more systematic analysis and planning for an appropriate response.
OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

▪ Aim - to mitigate food security and nutrition related risks for drought affected communities in Marondera & Seke districts with food aid and nutrition and livelihoods interventions.

▪ Duration of 6 months from March to August 2020

▪ Supporting 3,000 beneficiaries in 3 wards of Marondera district through the unconditional food voucher worth US$9 per person per month

▪ In addition, supporting 800 children under 5s & 200 pregnant and lactating undernourished mothers with nutrition supplements in the form of corn soya blend porridge as well as 2000 beneficiaries with small livestock and garden inputs in Marondera and Seke districts.
CHOICE OF MODALITY BY THE ZCC

- The traditional in-kind distribution does not give the beneficiaries power of choice. It is also associated with loss of dignity to the beneficiaries.
- The cash transfer modalities (mobile money, cash in transit) have not been considered suitable in the current volatile economic & social situation due to the following reasons:
  
  i. High inflationary risks and mobile transfer charges - reducing the purchasing power of the transfer value
  
  ii. Frequent Changes in financial policies
  
  iii. Security risks – to staff implementing the program and the beneficiaries.
  
  iv. Complex in beneficiary targeting – cash is attractive to everyone so high chances of inclusion and exclusion errors
  
  v. Cash could result in increased GBV due to access and control issues.
  
  vi. The food voucher system was therefore opted and adopted by the ZCC because it gives the beneficiaries power of choice, maintains beneficiaries dignity, and it is less associated with economic and social risks in the Zimbabwe current context.
THE FOOD VOUCHER SYSTEM

1. Beneficiary selection
   ▪ The community based targeting method was used to select project beneficiaries

2. Service provider/trader capacity assessments
   ▪ The assessment was conducted in wards of operation as well as the nearby urban areas after consultations with the beneficiaries to select the service providers of food for the voucher system
   ▪ Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the local markets were constrained to replenish the stocks of food commodities for the project hence 2 traders, (Gain and Carry from Marondera and Probrands from Ruwa) were selected to supply food for the voucher system
   ▪ Memorandum of Agreements were signed btwn the ZCC and service providers addressing the implementation modalities including the pricing system
3. Choice of food commodities for the food voucher

- The choice of food commodities provided by mobile traders was determined after consultation with beneficiaries to determine their preferences.
- The Post Distribution Monitoring also informed on the choice of preferred foods by the beneficiaries.
THE FOOD VOUCHER SYSTEM

4. Purchase of food by the beneficiaries

- Conducive dates for food purchase from mobile shops were set up in consultation with the beneficiaries.
- The mobile shops delivered food to selected food purchasing points.
- A maximum of 2 days are given to procure food from the mobile shop at each selected point.
- The ZCC issues out paper vouchers to the beneficiaries and remains with carbon copies for reconciliation.
- The beneficiaries then redeem the vouchers within the two days and 3 receipts are produced (for the beneficiary, ZCC and the trader)
- The supplier is paid an amount equivalent to the total value of food vouchers redeemed by beneficiaries after reconciliation
Purchase of food on mobile shops through voucher system
PROS AND CONS-ZCC PERSPECTIVE

Pros

▪ Supporting and building of partnerships with the private players in the food economy business
▪ Reduced logistical and labour costs

Cons

▪ National food shortages may be beyond ZCCs control
PROS AND CONS-BENEFICIARIES PERSPECTIVE

Pros

- Freedom of choice to select food of own choice from a wide range of products
- Maintained respect and dignity for the beneficiaries as they were not forced to take food that they do not prefer
- Value for money – no mobile charges and price increases

Cons

- The poor performance of the local market resulted in engagement of traders from the nearby urban areas and this caused beneficiaries to procure food commodities from mobile shops within a short period of time, sometimes affecting their choices
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

▪ Poor performance of the local market due to COVID-19 induced lockdown - Local traders in wards of operation who initially agreed to offer the services turned down at the 11th hour as they failed to replenish adequate stocks for the project
▪ Shortage of mealie meal on the market
ACTIONS TAKEN

• Engaged service providers/traders outside the wards of operation in Marondera urban and Ruwa as local traders failed to replenish adequate stocks due to the COVID-19 lockdown

• Entered into an agreement with 2 service providers (Gain &Carry and Probrands) to ensure full supply of commodities to minimise the risk of shortages of the preferred food commodities such as mealie-meal on the day of voucher distributions
LESSONS LEARNT

- Unconditional food vouchers are appropriate to meet the food insecurity gaps for the targeted households as they have choice to select food commodities that they do not have access to.

- When the local markets are not able to replenish adequate stocks, traders (shops) with capacity to supply food commodities from the nearby urban areas should be considered for the food voucher system.
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