COVID-19 Food Security Response
Operational Update

Introduction

Following the launch of the UN Emergency Flash Appeal for the COVID-19 Response by Her Honour Inonge Wina, Vice President of Zambia, and the subsequent launch of the COVID-19 Emergency Cash Transfer (C-19 ECT) programme on 28th July 2020 by Hon. Kampamba Chewe, Minister of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), working with the Government and in coordination with UN Agencies (UNICEF, UNDP and ILO), started providing cash assistance to vulnerable households in Lusaka and Kafue districts impacted by COVID-19.

Under the social protection and food security sectors of the Inter-Agency Flash Appeal for COVID-19 Response, there are two complementary but distinct and fully coordinated Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) programmes. The ECT for Food Security, implemented by WFP, aims at providing a life-saving intervention to address the immediate food and nutrition security needs of the most vulnerable. On the other hand, the ECT for Social Protection, implemented by UNICEF, is part of a shock responsive response aimed at stabilizing income of vulnerable households to enhance household consumption and facilitate access to basic needs such as education, health and nutrition.

Prior to commencement of the WFP-supported ECT, WFP, MCDSS, ILO, UNICEF, and the Zambia Red Cross agreed on the harmonized targeting criteria and transfer value, on their respective geographical coverage, as well as on coordinated communication mechanisms for the programme. This was aimed at ensuring enhanced synergy and complementarity between the two forms of ECT for COVID-19.

Designed to address the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable households, the ECT programme targets both people under the SCT programme who are residing in the targeted districts (vertical expansion), as well as vulnerable people not currently covered by the SCT (horizontal expansion). Other vulnerable households targeted by the programme include those working in the informal sector who have been heavily impacted by COVID-19 due to a slowdown in economic activities and loss of jobs/income. The food security ECT also targets households whose food security situation has been compromised due to high food prices, scarcity of nutritious foods and increased food expenditure share.

Each eligible household would receive 400 kwacha per month – the value agreed upon among relevant UN agencies involved in the response – for a period of six months to allow them to meet their essential food and non-food needs.

COVID-19 ECT interventions are coordinated through the MCDSS and utilize existing structures, including where possible payment modalities such as the Zambia Integrated Social Protection Information Systems (ZISPIS), grievance mechanisms and dedicated call centres. A harmonized communication strategy was developed to communicate the overall ECT approach incorporating both the food security and social protection components, with a focus on the transfer value and the temporary nature of the cash-based interventions vis-à-vis the regular SCT programme among others.
WFP’s Response at a glance

655,790
Targeted people (131,158 households)

K 400
Per month / family of five

4
Targeted districts

USD 10.4M
Available resources (out of USD 22M required)

WFP’s plan is to provide cash transfers for about 656,000 people (131,200 households) living in disadvantaged, high-density, low-income urban compounds of Lusaka, Kafue, Livingstone and Kitwe districts, for a period of six months to avert food insecurity exacerbated by COVID-19, with targeted households receiving ZMK400 per month. To limit human-to-human contact, the transfers are disbursed using mobile money services through a local mobile network provider, MTN. Integration of nutrition messages in awareness raising activities among assisted people accompany the response to promote the choice and consumption of nutritious foods. This is critical to keep the immune system strong, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implementation update

The implementation of the WFP-supported food security component of the COVID-19 ECT programme started on 28 July 2020. Based on available resources, WFP initially targeted 180,000 people in Lusaka and Kafue, with a plan to scale up to reach 656,000 people in the four districts as additional resources are secured. As of 3rd September 2020, WFP has made two rounds of payments to 36,311 eligible households (181,555 people) in Lusaka and Kafue districts, distributing a total of USD 3.2 million (ZMK 58 million). As COVID-19 confirmed cases continued to rise, WFP, in consultation with MCDSS, distributed four months’ worth of rations (ZMK 1,600 per family) to allow targeted families to purchase food in bulk and avoid overcrowding when visiting pay points and markets, thereby reducing the risk of contracting or further spreading the virus.

Throughout implementation, WFP, MCDSS and other participating UN agencies undertook joint communication around the ECT programme, duration and transfer value. Various channels were leveraged, including radio messages, the print media and mobile public announcements. WFP monitors and the Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs) also visited the targeted compounds to raise awareness in communities. SMS communication was also used to send messages to beneficiaries and to ensure that assisted people were aware of their entitlements and of the cash redemption process. Nutrition sensitization using selected radio channels and text messages was conducted to encourage beneficiaries to use the money on nutritious foods.
Beneficiary targeting, verification and registration

Clear targeting protocols and a thorough beneficiary registration process ensured that the most vulnerable are reached. Beneficiary identification, verification and registration were undertaken in close collaboration with the MCDSS through the CWACs structures and provincial and District welfare officials. The main role of the CWACs and local officials was to identify beneficiary households and ensure a coordinated approach was adhered to before and during cash disbursements. Beneficiary primary listings under the food security component of COVID-19 ECT were obtained from the MCDSS-managed ZISPIS, complemented by lists of vulnerable households provided by Faith Based Organisations. Furthermore, listings for households under the informal sector were provided by ILO and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) and supplemented by fresh registrations conducted by CWACs and WFP trained monitoring assistants and in collaboration with the Provincial and District social welfare officials. MCDSS through the CWACs facilitated WFP monitors to confirm the authenticity of the beneficiaries.

Beneficiary lists were verified by the Zambia Information and Technology Authority (ZICTA) to ensure completeness of Personal Identification Information (PII), which verified beneficiary names against registered numbers and their respective National Registration Cards (NRCs). This process was essential to ensure that people receiving the cash through mobile money were indeed eligible beneficiaries. Out of 26,781 beneficiary households, 11,000 households without accurate information were removed from the lists. Remedial action implemented by WFP was to support the CWACs to physically identify removed households, as well as those without phone numbers, who were issued sim-cards by MTN.

Outcome of the beneficiary households verification exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Submitted</th>
<th>Cleared and Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SCT listing (from MCDSS) – in Lusaka &amp; Kafue</td>
<td>26,781</td>
<td>20,287 (July and August)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Food Insecure HHs (CWACs/WFP) including Refugees, informal sector</td>
<td>17,221</td>
<td>16,024 (August)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>44,002</td>
<td>36,311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ECT distribution monitoring

Findings from the first monitoring exercise - conducted on 288 households during the disbursement of the first tranche of payments in Lusaka and Kafue - indicated that 60 percent of the beneficiaries were aware of and satisfied with their entitlements. The majority of the households (93 percent) reported reaching the cash points easily, usually by walking, and redeeming their cash in less than thirty minutes. The cash would be mostly used to buy food (61 percent), while a smaller percentage (19 percent) would use the money to start a small business or to buy essential household items (10 percent). The remaining sampled households would either use their entitlement to pay rent, buy agricultural inputs or pay school fees.

Fifty-one (51) percent of the surveyed households reported that the needs are greater in the targeted compounds and eight (8) percent reported that there were inclusion errors in targeting. However, it is important to note that at the time of the monitoring exercise, only 49 percent of the planned 36,000 households had been reached with the assistance, which could have affected this result.

The programme intended to utilize complaints and feedback mechanisms for the ECT programme, however only 10 percent of the surveyed beneficiaries reported being aware of them and only 5 percent having used them. On the preferred methods, 37 percent would prefer using a hotline to convey their complaints and another 37 percent would prefer using local committees, followed by SMS and suggestion boxes.

Lessons from the implementation of the first phase in Kafue and Lusaka were used to put in place mitigation and corrective measures during the second round of disbursements in August and will inform programmatic decisions and adjustments for the next expansion phase in Kitwe, Chilanga and Livingstone.

Market and price monitoring

WFP has been monitoring regional and international food availability and prices on a monthly basis in order to better assess COVID-19 impact on households food security. Monitoring analysis showed that in Zambia a rising national debt and disruption to export routes due to COVID-19 have contributed to the weakening of the kwacha against the USD, which in turn is expected to continue increasing commodity prices due to more expensive imports. This is in turn pushing up prices of local goods and eroding the purchasing power of both rural and urban households.

With regard to maize, Zambia’s staple food, while prices have dropped in line with seasonal trends, two thirds of monitored markets were still indicating above-average prices in June – roughly 50 percent above 5YA and 16 percent above year prior level – which are likely to remain above average in coming months.
Constraints, risks and opportunities

The ECT programme is the first urban intervention that has been implemented in Zambia in a long time. While some progress was made around putting quick mechanisms in place to deliver emergency assistance to vulnerable households, there were some challenges faced during implementation that posed a risk to the effectiveness of the programme.

1. Most SCT beneficiary lists did not have contact numbers of beneficiaries. As disbursements were to be conducted via mobile money, it was difficult for WFP and MCDSS to identify all the beneficiaries on time and issue them sim-cards to receive their entitlements in July. As such, most households were verified in August and provided with their cash entitlements between August and September.

2. During beneficiary registration and verification, the CWACs and WFP teams tasked with the exercise encountered some challenges where some constituency/community officials attempted to impose a list of beneficiaries that was not consistent with food security targeting protocols. As a result, beneficiary registration in some constituencies was discontinued until the matter is resolved in consultation with ECT partners.

3. Some beneficiaries especially those with low levels of education experienced challenges in the redeeming process, such as remembering their cash vouchers and in some cases not knowing which part of their National Registration Cards corresponds to their PIN codes. Some who received SMS messages deleted them thinking the messages were a hoax. Misinformation related to the origin of the funds being distributed discouraged people from redeeming their vouchers before expiry. All these challenges delayed the disbursement process as WFP and MCDSS had to intervene with service providers to repeat the process in some cases.

4. Despite having utilized various communication channels such as print media, radio communication, TV, etc. to raise awareness about the ECT programme, there was some confusion around the monthly entitlements, lack of awareness of the targeting and voucher redemption processes and available complaint and feedback mechanisms. It was clear that the focus on the use of radio, print media and TV to relay and convey messages to beneficiaries was targeted to the wrong audience. Most vulnerable people have neither the means nor the time to listen to their media channels and as such it is essential to use community or grassroots mechanisms, like faith-based organisations, community leaders and influencers, as well as mobile public communication to reach the right audience.

5. Limited information on the ECT programme and targeting criteria resulted in some people in Lusaka being victims of fraud, whereby some people were requested to pay a fee with promises to be included on beneficiary lists. These illegal acts generated a lot of media scrutiny and negative social media reaction towards the programme, compelling the Minister of the MCDSS to launch a media campaign to reassure the public that the programme was launched to assist households affected by COVID-19. The Government strongly condemned these illegal acts that threatened the credibility of the programme and the UN, including WFP, also issued a joint statement to clarify the assistance being provided and vehemently condemned these criminal acts.
**ECT scale up**

With additional resources mobilized through the European Union, WFP plans to scale up the ECT food security component to the remaining two districts of Kitwe and Livingstone to support households rendered vulnerable by the COVID-19. WFP, working closely with the MCDSS and other relevant stakeholders, will also increase beneficiary sensitization through various channels, including through public announcements, phone and radio messages, as well by engaging communities and leveraging the role of community leaders. CWACs will continue to be used to convey door-to-door messages. To complement existing government grievance mechanisms, WFP is in the process of setting up helpdesks in strategic locations in the targeted urban compounds and has just activated a hotline number that beneficiaries can call to receive information or provide feedback on the programme.

**Funding**

To date, WFP has managed to secure USD 10.9 million in confirmed contribution out of the required USD 22 million. The early funding from the United Nations Central Emergency Relief Fund allowed WFP to initially target 180,000 people in the two districts of Lusaka and Kafue. Thanks to the subsequent USD 5.7 million contribution received from the European Union, WFP will be able to scale up its assistance to reach the additional two districts of Livingstone and Kitwe.
World Food Programme
Plot 10/4971, Tito Road, Rhodes Park, Lusaka, Zambia
Tel: +260 211 253802, 250407, 252955  wfp.org

Contact: Co.Zam.Communications@wfp.org

Photos: WFP Zambia