Nutrition-sensitive cash+ in Somalia

Combining cash payments, nutrition education and provision of agricultural and livestock inputs to increase food security and improve diets of drought-affected pastoralists and farmers.

Context

Somalia is one of the world’s most fragile states and over the past 20 years has suffered from violence and political instability as well as environmental and economic shocks. This has driven widespread poverty and persistently high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition.

In 2016 and 2017, a drought led to large-scale food insecurity, affecting more than six million people, including over 900,000 children under the age of five likely to be acutely malnourished. Following the two-year drought, in 2018, heavy rains led to flooding in the southern part of the country. This severely affected farmers’ ability to cultivate during the following season.

In response to this emergency, in 2018 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) adopted a programmatic nutrition-sensitive cash+ approach funded mainly by the World Bank through the “Somalia emergency drought response and recovery project”. This approach was further streamlined by the cash+ livestock projects funded by the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and the cash+ agriculture project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

FAO’s cash+ is a cash transfer modality that pairs unconditional cash transfers with productive inputs, assets and/or technical training aimed at supporting beneficiaries to address their immediate needs while also engaging them in productive activities. Depending on the beneficiary groups, FAO provides cash+ crop, livestock, or fish packages. In short, cash+ interventions seek to enhance the food security, nutrition and income generation potential of vulnerable households. Against this background, this promising practice explores how the cash+ model in Somalia can contribute to improving diets and food security of pastoralist and farming communities.
What is cash+ and how can this cash transfer modality contribute to enhancing community nutrition and resilience in Somalia?

The “plus” in FAO’s cash+ programming ensures families not only have cash in their pockets, but also the inputs, assets, training and support they need to farm, herd, fish and diversify their livelihoods. Nutrition-sensitive cash+ interventions in Somalia targeted households affected by the 2016-2017 drought to ensure immediate access to nutritious foods. This allowed families to access food during the “lean” months, before the harvest or while animals were taken further away from the household for better grazing. Agro-pastoralists, pastoralists and farmers received cash and, simultaneously, received agriculture or livestock inputs to make sure that food production could be restored in the different livelihood zones affected. The provision of cash and inputs was provided in conjunction with training on food production, handling and use in order to protect and improve diets and nutrition.

Cash+ packages are specifically designed to fit to each context, and generally include three main components: unconditional cash transfers, productive inputs or assets, and technical training and extension services. Cash+ programmes in Somalia included the following nutrition-sensitive actions:

- **Inputs** for food production were aimed at ensuring access to foods with a high nutrition content.

- **Equipment** was provided for improved processing, storage and preservation of food. This helps retain nutritional value, shelf-life, and safety of food items, reduces seasonality of food insecurity and post-harvest losses, and makes healthy foods convenient to prepare while ensuring access to nutritious and safe food throughout the lean season.

- **Nutrition education** was offered, and included training on hygienic food handling practices as well as training on infant and young child feeding practices for those with children who are the most at risk of malnutrition.

Cash+ can be a useful nutrition-sensitive tool to support:

- diversifying beneficiaries’ diets by increasing access to micronutrient rich foods including - if possible - animal products or iron rich plant foods and other foods;

- improving food preparation and cooking methods for improved diets; and

- improving knowledge about health practices and disease control measures.
Methodological Approach

Targeting beneficiaries
Nutrition-sensitive cash+ interventions in Somalia targeted the most food insecure locations based on the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC), therefore districts classified as being “serious” or “critical” (IPC Phases 3 and 4). Within these areas, villages with high rates of malnutrition, especially with high numbers of malnourished children, were prioritized through consultations with government authorities and community members. Selected beneficiaries included those who suffered loss of livelihoods such as: female-headed households, child-headed households, households with pregnant women and with children below five years of age. FAO implementing partners (IPs), normally local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), played a key role in this targeting process as they were the ones in direct contact with the beneficiaries.

Addressing the components of the food systems to improve diets

- **Food supply chains: production, handling and storage**

  Cash payments in Somalia were used as a form of nutrition-sensitive humanitarian food assistance, coinciding with the lean season when acute malnutrition rates usually spike. The payments were provided on a monthly basis for three months and complemented the programme’s phased input support at the beginning and at the end of the planting season to restore and improve home food production.

  In agricultural areas, the selected households were provided with cash on a monthly basis, which was paired with tools and seeds for home gardening. Seeds included sorghum or maize and depending on the area, also cowpea, watermelon, amaranth, Ethiopian mustard, tomatoes, carrots, green peppers and onions.

  In pastoral areas, the monthly cash transfer was paired with livestock support for sheep and goats to improve animal health and milk production. Inputs included animal fodder, water and nutrient blocks as well as treatment and vaccinations for diseases. This cash+ package directly targeted those who stayed behind during seasonal animal migration periods, mostly women, children and the elderly.

  All cash+ interventions addressed issues of food loss and waste thanks to the equipment provided to households and communities. Agricultural communities received hermetic bags, which preserve the quality of the food and increase the length of time at which it can be stored while preventing infestations from insects. Pastoralist communities received milk storage containers, which are much easier to clean than the traditionally used jerry cans and keep the milk fresh for a longer period of time.
• **Consumer behaviour and diets**

Under all the cash+ interventions in Somalia, village-level “nutrition champions” were recruited and trained to support the community in promoting nutrition. Nutrition champions led nutrition training to beneficiary families, and addressed topics including: storage modalities, ways to maximize the nutritional value of food items as well as safe and hygienic preparation of food. Cooking demonstrations on how to prepare healthy meals sought to improve the skills of caregivers and to ensure a balanced diet for those most nutritionally at risk. The educational training sessions were tailored to the different types of beneficiary groups with separate training packages for pastoralists and farmers.

FAO facilitated the development of *Nutrition and Food Safety Education Guidelines* in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries, Health and Education. The Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement was also involved in the development of the guidelines.

**Impacts**

• **Increased access to food in times of emergency**

Nutrition-sensitive cash+ interventions allowed both herding and farming families to purchase food in the lean season, and the accompanying productive inputs supported the restoration of their agricultural production. Cash+ recipients testified that the support of this project had been critical in helping them survive the emergency and preventing malnutrition in children and pregnant/lactating women.

• **Improved diets**

The impact of cash programming on access to food is well documented and there is some emerging evidence globally that this can also contribute to improved dietary diversity. The crop package provided by FAO included a diverse range of nutrition-rich vegetables. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews noted that observed food security and nutrition improvements in the villages are a result of increased availability of food from the *Deyr* harvest (*Deyr* is the second rainy season of Somalia), as well as increased milk production. Evidence is still needed to fully understand the additional impacts on nutrition.

• **Enhanced nutrition knowledge**

Nutrition knowledge has *increased demand for nutritious foods in the population*. Nutrition champions received consecutive trainings, helping with the retention of knowledge. Training on sanitation has also created a shift around eliminating food-borne diseases and increasing milk quality. Yet these preliminary findings should be supported by additional evidence gathered through systematic research incorporated into the impact of the intervention on food systems, diets and nutrition knowledge of beneficiaries.
• Gender equality and women’s empowerment
FAO provided equitable and gender-sensitive opportunities to women and men to access cash and learn. The training and nutrition education component of the intervention ensured the whole household’s nutrition needs were addressed. The topics covered ranged from safe pregnancy and young child feeding practices to adolescent nutrition, particularly of girls.

The implications of COVID-19 on nutrition-sensitive cash+ programming in Somalia

With the COVID-19 pandemic, nutrition education sessions for the community have been compromised due to restrictions on gatherings. Nevertheless in 2020, FAO was able to reach 7,364 Cash+ beneficiaries and train 648 nutrition champions on nutrition and food safety education while observing social distancing measures. Different communication channels were used to ensure that nutrition messages reached the target audience through other sources such as radio and short messaging system (SMS). FAO also technically supported the development of a YouTube video on nutrition and dietary diversity during COVID-19 (for beneficiaries who have access to Internet). These messages enabled households to make nutrition, hygiene and health choices that are informed and relevant to the COVID-19-affected situation.

FAO Somalia has made a significant shift towards a digital payments system. In the medium-term, these payment systems offered by mobile money operators have the potential to usher the bank-less FAO cash beneficiaries into the financial system. This can be particularly relevant also in the context of COVID-19 as it overcomes restrictions of movement and does not require gathering of people. Since the pandemic hit, FAO has been using mobile money to disburse cash assistance to the beneficiaries. FAO also provided e-vouchers to beneficiaries for them to access the agriculture and livestock inputs.

Considering that there are districts in Somalia continuously within IPC 3 and 4, FAO has piloted a different type of intervention focusing on households recurrently on emergency assistance to transition them from emergency to development assistance. The intervention has adopted a safety net approach coupling longer term cash assistance with provision of livelihood inputs (e.g. milk production and crop production), nutrition education as well as village savings and loans associations (VSLAS). The village savings and loans are expected to diversify household incomes and ensure financial inclusion.

Sustainability

• Country-level ownership
FAO has used its expertise in cash-based programming to contribute to the establishment of a government-led national safety net programme and supported the development of national Nutrition and Food Safety Education Guidelines, which will be used to conduct the nutrition education in the communities. The Guidelines have been endorsed and are now owned by the federal government who will use them to train different ministries on nutrition.

• Capacity development
In nutrition-sensitive cash+ interventions, capacity development of local actors aimed to pass on skills and knowledge to be utilized long after the emergency cash projects had closed with lessons learned likely to stay in the community after the intervention has come to an end. Nutrition champions were trained at the village level and equipped to train and conduct nutrition counselling long after the project was complete.
Replicability and upscaling

- **Cash and social protection**
  Considering that there are districts in Somalia continuously within IPC 3 and 4, FAO has been exploring the design of a different type of intervention for those areas called “long-term cash”. It would act as a sort of safety net for a longer period entailing provision of cash and other livelihood interventions (e.g. bee-keeping and crop production). FAO is also piloting village savings groups and a milk value chain.

- **Tailoring cash+ to different livelihoods**
  There is significant possibility of extending this practice more widely as nutrition-sensitive cash+ interventions are designed to account for different types of livelihood zones. Nutrition-sensitive cash+ for riverine livelihoods areas is planned for 2021.

- **Further data and evidence**
  This practice is currently classified as a “promising practice” because while there are anecdotal evidence and testimonials indicating that this practice had a positive impact on diets, this has yet to be formally evaluated. Monitoring against nutrition indicators will be further needed. FAO should incorporate and track nutrition-related indicators such as minimum dietary diversity for women, and dietary diversity in children 6-23 months, in addition to standard indicators such as household dietary diversity and food consumption score.

**Testimony**

Hooda is a mother and a farmer who received a cash+ agriculture intervention package. The community selected her household as they were suffering after the drought. Before she was enrolled in the programme, buying diverse nutritious foods was not viable. Her children were only consuming rice and sorghum.

Once she received the cash, she was able to purchase and cook fish and vegetables to the children. Through this project, FAO gave her agricultural inputs including eight different types of vegetable seeds, which she was able to grow. This was her first time planting cow peas. Hooda cooks them with milk and feeds them to the children. She attended nutrition training and learned that the cowpea is very good for children and keeps them healthy.

The training was very useful as she also learned how to increase the shelf-life of food and how to ensure that food is prepared safely.
Key learning

- FAO has implemented cash+ programmes in development, humanitarian and recovery contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. While the current availability of impact evaluations of programmes that combine cash transfers with in-kind assistance and/or training is yet to be enhanced, existing evidence suggests that combined programmes can have positive impacts that go beyond the effect of an individual intervention. Current knowledge indicates that the integrated approach of cash+ supports households’ dietary diversity and food security, and reduces households’ need to resort to negative coping strategies.

- To maximise the impact on nutrition and diets, it is important to ensure timely disbursement of cash to coincide with the time of greatest need. Although programme design optimised nutrition-sensitivity by providing cash during the lean season, there were challenges with the timeliness of cash disbursement leading to delays. Even in conditions where some food needs are being met from other programmes, different transfer amounts could be used to ensure access to fresh food while training could be integrated to promote food security and nutrition.

- With the incorporation of a nutrition–lens in its programming, FAO increases its capacity to advise on the design of national nutrition-sensitive programmes. Yet evidence is still needed to fully understand the additional contribution of these programmes towards improving diets and how this impacts malnutrition in fragile contexts. FAO has begun to collect data on household dietary diversity and in the future will be able to provide further evidence. To fully understand the contribution of these interventions, operational research should also be built into programming and evaluations of nutrition components planned and budgeted.
Partners

Resource partners
- The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- The World Bank

Technical partners
- Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Livestock, Forestry and Range
- Scaling up Nutrition Initiative (SUN)

Several implementing partners, including local and international NGOs, led field-level activities and training in coordination with government staff.

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