

FINAL: Summary Note on Cash Working Group (CWG) Meeting

Date/ Time & Venue	20 May 2021, 10.00 – 12.00 (via Webex)	
Chair / Co-chair	Mercy Corps (John Nelson), WFP (Thin Thin Aye) and MRCS (Moe Thida Win)	
Participants	Action Aid, American Red Cross, ACF, AVSI, CARE, Canadian Embassy, CRS, CSI, DRC, FCA, Helvetas, IFRC, INGO Forum, MA-UK, Malteser, Mercy Corps, MRCS, OCHA, SI, UNHCR, PATH, Tearfund, TGH, UNICEF, UNICEF – WASH, UNOPS, UNWOMEN, WFP, WFP – FSS, WFP – Sittwe, WHH, WVM	
Agenda items and summary of discussion	Action Points	
<p>1. CVA situation update and feedback from partners</p> <p>The CWG co-chair provided an update on the current CVA situation. The MMK is weakening against the USD, and the spread between formal and informal rates is expected to widen. For international remittances to Myanmar, banks are required to report transactions from INGOs and NGOs for more than 10,000 USD. Withdrawing MMKs is becoming increasingly difficult, both at ATMs and banks. Withdrawal limits vary from bank to bank but are usually 300k per withdrawal for individuals and 10 million for organizations per week. Mobile money fees are increasing, and accessing cash remains a constraint for aggregators. To identify good agents and negotiate fees, information sharing between partners is encouraged. Voucher programs are still facing constraints as most vendors are unwilling to accept bank transfers. Similar issues exist for in-kind distribution with suppliers requesting physical cash. For cash in Envelope, access to cash and withdrawal limits are challenging. Implementation costs are generally expected to increase, and donor guidance would be helpful.</p> <p>Despite the challenges, WFP manages to implement cash programs for about 230,000 beneficiaries in Rakhine, Kachin and Northern Shan, shifting from mobile money to cash in envelopes in all areas except Sittwe.</p> <p>CSI noted that its cash program in Northern Rakhine is being implemented with M-pitesan despite significant challenges. A 3% fee on the transaction has been introduced, and higher increases have been observed in other regions.</p> <p>CARE noted a delay in implementing a cash grant program for livelihood assistance in Maungdaw, northern Rakhine State due difficulties accessing cash. CARE continues negotiations with possible agents and financial service providers, and no-cost extensions have been requested.</p> <p>MRCS is planning cash programs in Rakhine, Kachin, and peri-urban areas of Yangon, and noted ongoing discussions with financial service providers on possible options for cash transfers.</p> <p>Caritas Myanmar noted that a cash assistance program in peri-urban Yangon had to be suspended due to difficulties accessing cash, and options with financial service providers are being explored.</p> <p>A mobile cash program planned by IRC in March had to be postponed, but solutions have been identified and a start is expected soon.</p>		
<p>2. Markets Update</p> <p>WFP market price report update (March 2021): WFP updated on price developments in May 2021. The average retail price of rice and cooking oil continues an upward trend in all monitored markets, but particularly in Rakhine. The price of chickpeas and salt remained stable. There was an increase in the price of tomatoes. Fuel prices increased by 8-10 percent, depending on the type and location.</p> <p>In Yangon and Mandalay, the retail price of rice recorded negligible to slight fluctuations when compared to mid-March, but the price of cooking oil increased. The average fuel price continues an upward trend.</p>		

<p>Nationwide, the average retail price has increased for rice by 6%, cooking oil by 25 % and fuel by 30%. The prices are particularly high in some border, conflict-affected states including Rakhine, Kachin and Chin.</p> <p>The increase in transportation costs, among others, causes the increase in prices. Traders also note concerns with cash transfers and higher transaction fees from Hundi services. Further increases in the price of cooking oil and rice are expected.</p> <p>The market monitoring dashboard is available here: https://analytics.wfp.org/t/Public/views/MarketMonitoringDashboard/MainSummary?:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&embed=y</p> <p>Mercy Corps market reports: Mercy Corps Market Analysis Unit (MAU) also collected the market price data from Rakhine at the end of March, and the findings were similar to WFP's. The cooking oil prices increased and should be closely monitored. The prices of NFI remain stable.</p> <p>The MAU report will be published end of the month. The MAU dashboard is available on the MIMU website: http://themimu.info/rakhine-market-analysis-unit</p>	
<p>3. Peri-urban updates and discussion</p> <p>WFP is providing assistance in Yangon with the aim to reach two million beneficiaries over six months, depending on donor support. With the funding resources currently available, WFP plans to reach 900,000 people in three townships in Yangon within two months. While starting with in-kind food distribution, a shift to cash-based options is planned at a later stage. Households are being identified through available data, but targeting remains challenging due to the lack of information. WFP has received approval from GAD for in-kind distribution, and is working with local authorities to facilitate the provision of life-saving assistance. No security incidents have been reported so far during distributions. WFP is also looking to expand the assistance to Mandalay.</p> <p>UNOPS noted that a cash assistance program with Wave money had been implemented in Hlaing Thar Yar for the previous two years and is now being planned to be resume.</p> <p>It was asked whether mobile money financial service providers are legally required to share the contacts of their clients. WFP noted to conduct an assessment of mobile money providers, including on data protection, and will share results.</p> <p>WFP is considering voucher support as a new modality and encouraged other organizations to share their experiences. MC noted an electronic voucher program being implemented in Rakhine, with challenges around vendors not accepting bank transfers.</p>	
<p>4. CWG Priorities Discussion and 2021 Work planning</p> <p>The CWG co-chair briefed on the 2021 CWG prioritization exercise. Key priorities for the CWG have changed with the military coup and are expected to evolve with the dynamic situation. Urgent priorities include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mapping current obstacles for CVA and identifying mitigation measures, • cash and market feasibility assessment, • engagement with donors on using informal money markets and service fees, • advocacy for coordinated and accessible solutions to all agencies. <p>Further areas to consider in 2021 include capacity building and promoting knowledge, establishing standards and common approaches, coordination and information sharing as well as developing evidence base.</p> <p>CRS noted the importance of including peri-urban areas and other areas in need that are not in the current HRP/HNO due to emerging needs, notably information sharing in this regard.</p>	

MRCS emphasized the need to collaborate with social protection actors, also considering discussions to reprogram development funds for humanitarian needs.

UNICEF noted that the Social Protection Working Group was revitalized, and possible collaboration with the CWG can be explored. Discussions around key challenges to identify joint approaches were mentioned as a priority.

OCHA noted discussions around the geographic scope of response across the board, and that an HRP addendum is being developed to cover areas outside the scope of the initial 2021 HRP. Challenges in expanding cluster/sector capacities beyond existing (primarily conflict-affected) areas in the HRP was noted. Multi-purpose cash was indicated as an assistance modality to further explore, including in urban areas, and it was suggested that interested members of the CWG could further discuss the building blocks needed for an expansion of MPC.

The INGO Forum noted that at Rakhine level, concerns about the banking system dysfunctionality were discussed with CWG co-chairs, and a mapping of the impact on operations will be conducted.

Useful links

- [Myanmar: Cash Working Group \(CWG\) on MIMU Page](#)
- [Myanmar CWG final Terms of Reference \(June 2020\)](#)
- [Myanmar CWG 4Ws \(as of 10 November 2020\)](#)

Next CWG meeting: Thursday, 10:00 – 12:00, 10 June 2021