Cash and vouchers are means of transferring resources to an individual or household during and after a humanitarian crisis, in times of economic shock, or through social assistance programmes across a range of different sectors. Cash and voucher transfers are usually a timely and cost-effective alternative to in-kind food and non-food items, and are the preferred means of assistance where local markets are functioning with sufficient supplies of basic goods and services but where people lack financial means to purchase them. In a humanitarian crisis, distributing cash in a targeted manner can often meet people’s immediate needs more quickly and appropriately than commodity-based assistance. These types of transfer are also recognized as promoting self-esteem by giving more flexibility to beneficiaries on expenditures.

Myanmar is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards, triggering different types of small scale to large-scale disasters across the country’s territory. Since its independence in 1948, Myanmar has also been home to some of the longest-running insurgencies in the world, resulting in internal displacement and an influx of refugees in neighboring countries. Myanmar’s vulnerability to hazards is compounded by socio-economic factors: widespread poverty and poor infrastructures are at the heart of the country’s relatively low capability to recover from significant shocks, and have put a strain on the development gains of a country that is naturally well endowed in natural resources.

The nature and type of response provided to both humanitarian and developmental challenges in Myanmar has evolved significantly in recent years, leading to an increased interest in Cash and Voucher Based Programming (CVBP). Rapid political and economic changes occurring in the country since the election of a nominally civilian Government in 2010 are increasing the scope and relevance of CVBP with their positive impacts on markets, telecommunication and financial infrastructures and the increased space for cooperation with the Government and the private sector.

Although there is increasing interest and opportunity for CVBP, coordination on cash issues remains limited. Initiatives such as CaLP (Cash Learning Partnership) trainings have taken place but information on existing CVBP experiences, good practices and lessons learned is not widely available. This coordination gap represents a risk (overlapping, unmet needs, non-harmonization, etc.) and undermines the effectiveness and impact of CVBP in Myanmar. The Government of Myanmar does not have a stated position on CVBP but has provided assistance to disaster-affected populations through cash transfers at a limited scale in recent years in addition to welcoming the use of cash by humanitarian partners. The Government is also in the process of developing a Social Protection Strategy, which is likely to include the use of cash transfers in a number of areas including safety nets. The Government however has limited experience and capacity to implement CVB programmes.
The CTWG aims to provide a platform for coordination and learning on cash transfer programming in Myanmar. The focus of the CTWG will be on cash in humanitarian as well as development programs and will cut across all traditional sectors of interventions. The activities of the CTWG will therefore be closely coordinated with other sector working groups and clusters operating in country.