

Perceptions of cash and voucher recipients and market traders on received aid and COVID-19

Cash Barometer - CAR

Qualitative report

Introduction

As part of the Cash Barometer initiative in the Central African Republic (CAR), Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) interviewed crisis-affected people to gauge their perspectives on cash and voucher assistance (CVA) in order to support stronger humanitarian programming. These perspectives complement previous surveys by GTS in CAR and support a stronger understanding of social and contextual dynamics through in-depth qualitative analysis. In the context of the current health crisis, this qualitative survey provides a better understanding of the experiences, behaviours, and feelings of CVA recipients and market traders in CAR.

The GTS team interviewed 15 CVA recipients in three towns (Bambari, Kaga Bandoro, and Bangassou) in July and August 2020. The objective of these interviews was to understand CVA recipients' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and to ask for suggestions on how to improve the assistance they have received. This qualitative survey also addressed CVA recipients' expectations about the future. Due to COVID-19 measures and restrictions on movement, GTS conducted the interviews by phone.

To complement the interviews with CVA recipients, our team interviewed 12 market traders in the same areas (and also in Bouar) to gauge their views of the situation in the markets and to find out how traders have adapted to the difficulties associated with COVID-19.

We conducted a validation workshop with humanitarian actors in CAR in September 2020 to discuss and contextualise the findings. During this workshop, participants extracted key profiles after sorting and summarising the information collected during the individual interviews. We based the resulting personas on geographical areas (towns), demographic characteristics, different experiences of aid depending on the assistance received (these categories are described below), and finally feelings (more negative or more positive trends). Subsequently, we created empathy maps to visualise the key personas' experiences of the different aspects of the qualitative survey (see appendix 2).

Authors

Guillaume Pocard

Senior Programme Analyst

Louisa Seferis

Senior Programme Manager

Marie-Françoise Sitnam

Programme Manager

Engaging with vulnerable populations

This qualitative survey aims to gauge the perspectives of vulnerable groups (female heads of households, people aged over 42, and households with a chronically ill member) and to share their experiences as widely as possible. Although their perspectives are not statistically representative of the entire population, they highlight some of the principal challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations. Despite examining the experiences of the most vulnerable populations in CAR, humanitarian programming designed to address the gaps highlighted in this report would also provide better coverage to less vulnerable people.

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Key findings

- **Increased prices and reduced purchasing power at the market seem to be priority issues for the respondents. Interviewees also report restricted access to essential services.** Meanwhile, market traders report dealing with supply problems and reduced sales. Given the crisis, people's ability to meet their needs has greatly diminished.
- **Female respondents are more positive about the assistance they received than male respondents.** Women also report satisfaction with the information shared by humanitarian actors on containing the spread of the virus, with many saying they shared such information with family members. However, mothers frequently reported being concerned about the extended lack of schooling. Some fear it will push their children into delinquency. Respondents also report that closed public places and reduced social interactions have disrupted the social fabric of some communities. Although some respondents report that new habits – such as handwashing – are having a positive impact, a growing number of affected people are worried about the social effects of the COVID-19 measures.
- **Perspectives on the long-term economic impact of the pandemic are split, especially among male respondents.** Although some respondents are optimistic about their businesses reopening, the majority are worried about the adverse economic effects of COVID-19.
- **Respondents made recommendations to improve the distribution of assistance and their lives.** Principally, they note the need for additional government assistance for agriculture, stabilisation of the prices of basic foodstuffs, and increased CVA for affected individuals. Respondents also recommended that schools be reopened to help cope with the crisis. In some areas, respondents want increased measures to target armed groups and greater efforts around disarmament activities.
- **To optimise CVA, respondents suggest adapting the transfer amounts to the size of the household and distributing CVA in a private place to reduce the risk of reprisals and theft.** CVA recipients also want to receive information from humanitarian actors about CVA distributions in advance. This recommendation echoes a request for increased collective decision making about assistance between communities and humanitarian actors.
- **Humanitarian actors also made recommendations during the validation workshop based on the results of this qualitative survey.** They highlighted the need to integrate these perceptions into strategic humanitarian documents, such as the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP 2020), to ensure that the aid system takes affected people's perspectives into account at each stage of the humanitarian programme cycle. At the inter-agency level, several cluster coordinators want to further explore door-to-door sales in Kaga Bandoro.

How to read the report

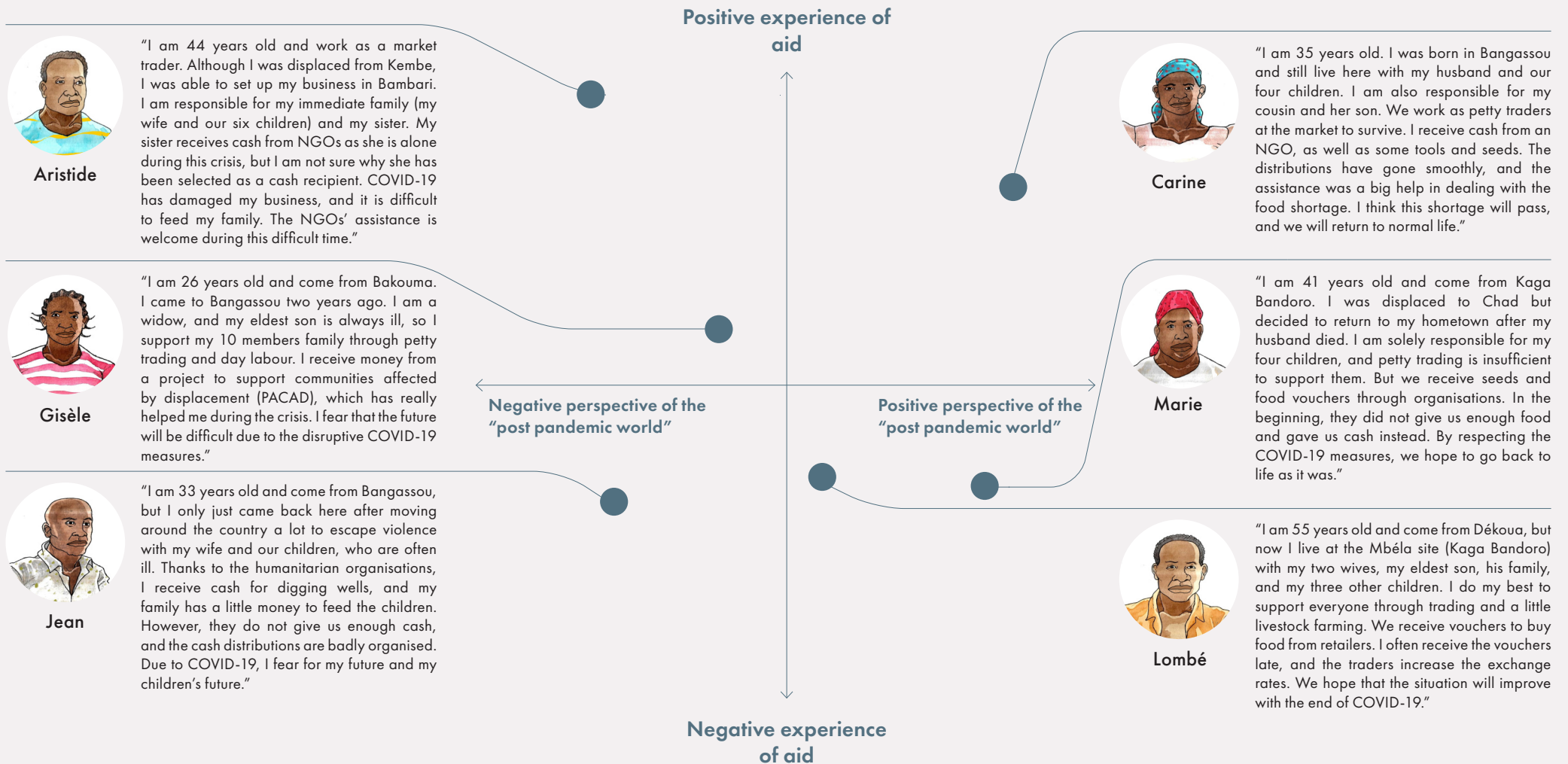
Based on the respondents' answers, the report will be divided according to four main thematic:

- Economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Experiences and challenges of CVA during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Impact of COVID-19 measures on CVA recipients and traders
- Perspective on the "The post-pandemic world" (the period which will follow the government's announcement that the pandemic has ended, and measures are being lifted)

Key personas

The empathy map personas are fictional people representing the needs, experiences, behaviour, and preferences of CVA recipients with similar characteristics. Through quotes and illustrations, the personas enable us to better visualise the impact of COVID-19 on the experiences of CVA recipients, particularly around the assistance they receive. All the experiences and quotes featured in the report and the empathy maps come directly from the respondents. For privacy reasons, the names used in the empathy maps are fictionalised.

The six personas developed by analysing the qualitative interviews are displayed on the graph above. Their position on the horizontal axis illustrates the extent to which they have a positive or negative outlook on the world as they think it will be after the COVID-19 pandemic ends ("the post-pandemic world"). Their position on the vertical axis illustrates how satisfied they are with the assistance they have received since the start of the pandemic. Through quotes and illustrations, the empathy maps describe the personas' experiences of the impact of COVID-19 and the assistance they receive.



Economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Increased prices and reduced purchasing power

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in CAR, respondents report that it has negatively affected the local economy and the daily lives of residents in their towns. Interviewees report price increases and reduced sources of income at the time of the qualitative survey (July–August 2020) in all three target sub-prefectures. These findings parallel the results of the REACH market study from July–August 2020, which found an increase in the median cost of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) since the beginning of July.¹

Several factors may explain the increased prices of basic foodstuffs: higher transport costs, low market supply, and increased action by armed groups around the upcoming elections. The increasingly fragile economy has also led to speculation on the part of certain retailers and producers, contributing to higher prices.²

Although agricultural products and food are generally available, the respondents indicate that they are unaffordable for many affected people. Respondents also report reduced sources of income, especially for day labourers. Several of these issues were also highlighted in the quantitative survey Ground Truth Solutions conducted in June 2020, including higher prices and reduced sources of income as the main concerns in assessed communities.³

Supply problems and reduced sales

Respondents report that the amount of trading has stagnated following border closures and restrictions on movement imposed by the government. Women are more likely to mention these restrictions than men and report being worried about the availability of products.



Access is subject to preventative measures, which creates a new pace of life. This is becoming increasingly difficult and slows business. Buyers like us are struggling to get certain products.

Woman - Bangassou

Market traders describe restrictions on movement as an additional obstacle creating logistical problems for their businesses.



The coronavirus has slowed down goods transport due to the restrictions to control it.

Trader- Kaga Bandoro

Market traders also say that several of the main highways in the three regions have closed. They report other difficulties as well, including increased transport costs and customs duties in Kaga Bandoro, and the border closure between CAR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Bangassou. According to the REACH market study, nearly one-third (31%) of retailers mention that the price of transporting goods between suppliers and warehouses has increased. The poor condition of roads due to the rainy season is an additional important factor in supply problems encountered by traders.⁵

Due to their inability to purchase supplies from abroad, some traders have decided to procure their goods from Bangui, despite higher costs.



We now get our supplies from Bangui because we do not want to cross the border with the [Democratic Republic of the] Congo illegally.

Retailer - Kaga Bandoro



Illustration based on interviews conducted by GTS (Florent Kassai, 2020)



Increased prices are a problem, and almost all business has ground to a halt, especially temporary work. Our usual employers are no longer looking for labour. Day labourers are not hired as much as they were before COVID-19



Jean - Bangassou⁴

33-year-old man returnee
Cash for Work recipient

¹ REACH (2020), [Link](#)

² FEWS NET (August 2020), *Central African Republic – Remote monitoring update* (in French), [Link](#)

³ For more information on our surveys on the perceptions of community actors, please consult our bulletins available [on our website](#).

⁴ The quotes in the right-hand column highlight experiences linked to the key personas defined during the validation workshop.

⁵ REACH (2020), *Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) – 23 July to 5 August 2020* (in French), [Link](#)

Some retailers, however, report that getting supplies from Bangui may negatively impact sales. Market traders stress that customers do not want to buy goods from Bangui because they believe that the products are contaminated by the Coronavirus. Some retailers in Bambari say the affected population is suspicious of goods imported from other cities, which is detrimental to their sales.

Many market traders report a reduction in their clientele and decreased sales. According to the REACH survey, more than half (55%) of the traders surveyed report a decrease in customer numbers in the last two weeks of July. The main reasons they cite are that customers cannot afford to buy the products, that they are working in the fields more, and that restrictions on movement linked to COVID-19 prevent some people from accessing the market (44%).

Some retailers also fear their shops will close as COVID-19 restrictions prevent them from getting supplies. According to REACH (July–August 2020), 28% of retailers report that their colleagues' shops have closed, and 51% cite lack of supplies as one of the leading causes.



I live off income from trading; if the supply system slows down, the business I rely on to live will suffer. So, my ability to manage my business is at risk.

Retailer - Bangassou

Reduced needs coverage

Respondents report a reduction in their sources of income due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, either due to decreased trading profits or the loss of day labour jobs. The key informants surveyed in June and August 2020 also note reduced ability to meet basic needs throughout their communities. They attribute this reduction primarily to increased prices and loss of income.

To meet their essential needs, respondents have developed new practices, such as reducing meals to one per day and increasing agricultural work to produce foodstuffs. However, respondents in Kaga Bandoro report that an increasing number of people are in debt to traders, often finding it difficult to pay off on time. Many traders are also selling their goods door-to-door to cope with decreased market traffic.



Data triangulation

The latest evaluations by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimate that during the lean season (May–August 2020), more than half of the Central African population (2.36 million people) was facing acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3). Although armed conflict and low agricultural production are determining factors, market disruptions due to COVID-19 have also contributed to the worsening food crisis in CAR.⁶



Illustration based on interviews conducted by GTS (Florent Kassai, 2020)



Poverty limits the number of customers who come and buy from us. Agricultural products are available in the Bambari markets, but households cannot afford to buy them. Young people have lost the odd jobs they used to do.



Aristide - Bambari

44-year-old displaced man
Trader

⁶ IPC (2020), Central African Republic (CAR): IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis (in French), [Link](#)

Aid: experiences and challenges

The CVA recipients interviewed receive different kinds of aid: cash or voucher distribution, or Cash for Work. It is therefore difficult to compare their experiences. As such, the key persona profiles aim to highlight the experiences of recipients of the different modalities. The “empathy maps” provide a detailed outline of the CVA recipients’ experiences of aid. However, there are shared experiences across aid modalities, and recipients across sub-prefectures have specific challenges.

Women have a more positive experience of aid

The women interviewed are more positive about the aid they receive than the men, especially in terms of the relevance of the assistance and their relationships with humanitarian actors. Women have greatly appreciated CVA since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic:



We are facing enormous difficulties during this crisis, which is why the government is helping us via PACAD. The cash has really helped us.

Woman - Bangassou

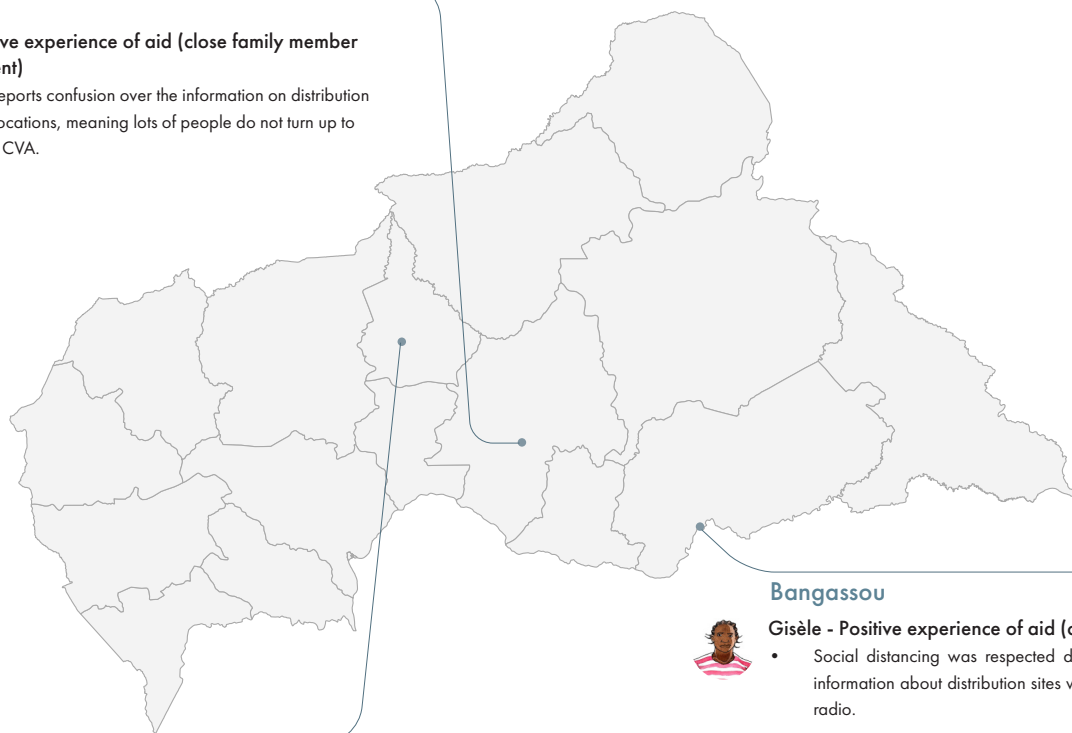
Overview of the humanitarian experience for each key persona

Bambari



Aristide – Positive experience of aid (close family member is a cash recipient)

- The family reports confusion over the information on distribution dates and locations, meaning lots of people do not turn up to collect their CVA.



Kaga Bandoro



Marie – Negative experience of aid (cash distribution)

- The information shared by humanitarian actors around COVID-19 preventative measures was positive.
- There is nervousness around distribution times. Humanitarian actors shared the names of the CVA recipients publicly, raising fears they would be targeted.



Lombé – Negative experience of aid (vouchers)

- The amount received is not enough to cover the increased prices since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and is not proportional to household size.
- Traders engage in abuse when exchanging vouchers. Some traders add transfer costs or charge a commission on the value of the voucher, reducing the final amount for voucher recipients.

Bangassou



Gisèle - Positive experience of aid (cash distribution)

- Social distancing was respected during distribution and information about distribution sites was communicated via radio.



Jean – Negative experience of aid (cash distribution + Cash for Work)

- The amount received is not enough to cover the increased prices since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and is not proportional to household size.
- There were significant delays in aid distribution.



Carine – Positive experience of aid (cash distribution)

- Fewer humanitarian actors are working on the front line of the response due to the pandemic. Some people in her neighbourhood report that CVA has ended or been reduced due to the constraints imposed by COVID-19.
- The assistance received made it possible for her to complete her food basket.

Impact of COVID-19 measures

Sharing information on COVID-19 measures

Following the spread of COVID-19 in CAR, the government has introduced measures to limit the population's risk of infection. These efforts were accompanied by major campaigns to spread information about preventative measures, identifying the symptoms of COVID-19, and who to contact if a person experiences symptoms.⁷

Most respondents to the community leader quantitative survey in August 2020 report that their community members are sufficiently informed about how to protect themselves from the virus. However, they report that more information on preventative measures and the symptoms of COVID-19 is needed.

Among the CVA recipients interviewed as part of this qualitative assessment, women particularly appreciate the information humanitarian actors provide on stopping the spread of the virus at information-sharing sessions. Many of the women report that they have shared the information that they received with their family members.



I really appreciate the advice we have been given as part of this process to protect ourselves and our family from the coronavirus.

Woman - Kaga Bandoro

Women therefore report playing an active role in sharing information on COVID-19 within their families, and as such, they seem to be a useful group to focus on when conducting information-sharing activities for affected populations. The contribution of women to sharing information on COVID-19 has also been observed in other countries⁸ and was previously highlighted in our community actor surveys in CAR:



Training and awareness activities should be focused on women, as they actively interact with household items and children [...]. If a woman knows how to comply with the preventative measures, she can halt the spread of COVID-19 in her surroundings.

Schoolteacher, Bouar (July 2020)

Interviewees report that sharing information with affected populations may have influenced the development of positive new habits. The older persons interviewed report that new practices have been introduced to communities, such as not shaking hands and greeting each other from a distance.

Limited access to essential services

The respondents say that restricted access to essential services has had a substantial impact on them. However, they report significant differences concerning such access. Although CVA recipients appreciate having access to free healthcare, they complain about school closures. They fear their children will lose their knowledge and juvenile delinquency will increase.

Reduced access to the market

Respondents say that restricted access to essential services has impacted them substantially. However, they report that access to different services has changed in significantly different ways. Although CVA recipients appreciate having access to free healthcare, they complain about school closures. They worry that without schools their children will lose their knowledge and juvenile delinquency will increase.



Illustration based on interviews conducted by GTS (Florent Kassai, 2020)



The preventative measures introduced since the start of COVID-19 such as school closures and restrictions on movement will have consequences for our life after the pandemic. The financial crisis has escalated; we therefore require substantial support.



Gisèle - Bangassou

26-year-old displaced woman
Cash recipient

⁷ OCHA (June 2020), Humanitarian Bulletin – Central African Republic, Issue 56 (in French), [Link](#).

⁸ UN WOMEN (2020), Women peace mediators become key actors on the front lines of COVID-19 prevention in refugee settlements in Uganda, [Link](#).

Traders report that restrictions on movement also impact the supply of goods. They say they face delays and cancellations in receiving new stock. As a result, they report being unable to offer the products that customers request. Correspondingly, many CVA recipients complain they cannot find what they need at the market.

Despite the measures that authorities put in place, affected people consider the market to be a high-risk location. CVA recipients fear being infected and therefore avoid getting supplies from the market. Many families do not let women and children go to the market in Bangassou, for example.



Some parents do not let their children or spouses come and trade at the market, which means we cannot find everything we need there.

Woman - Bangassou

Some traders report that they have developed new strategies to continue to sell their products outside of markets. For example, some say they sell goods door-to-door and diversify their product ranges to attract more customers. Between 23 July and 5 August 2020, one-quarter (24%) of the traders surveyed thought that their colleagues had closed their shops to sell their products door-to-door.⁹ Access restrictions on markets have therefore pushed traders to adopt new practices to reach clientele outside of traditional trading locations.

Closed gathering places and reduced social interactions

Gathering places such as bars and places of worship have closed in all three locations since the arrival of the pandemic to CAR. Following these measures, people over 42 years old complain of a reduction in social interaction and, as a result, a weakening of the social fabric of their communities. Respondents report that social distancing measures have greatly reduced social exchanges within traditional social structures (among neighbours and families). They fear that these COVID-19 measures will harm social structures in the long-term.



You know, when this evil goes away, it will leave an impact. We Africans love community life, which has been made difficult by social distancing.

Man - Kaga Bandoro

Growing worries about the application of COVID-19 measures

Many CVA recipients report being worried about the future, with some respondents noting concern that the pandemic could get worse in their areas.

Fear of the virus, COVID-19 measures, and the virus's economic impact add additional emotional burden to the heads of households, who are also concerned with providing for their families. Many families fear they will not be able to meet their children's educational and nutritional needs.

Such an emotional burden may correspond with feeling a lack of adequate support. The majority of respondents describe feeling that they have to deal with the pandemic on their own. This feeling is particularly strong in men in Kaga Bandoro and women in Bangassou. Respondents stress that they are not receiving enough support, either from humanitarian and government actors or from their communities.

Respondents report that the measures introduced to fight COVID-19 as well as fear of the virus have created a climate of distrust, which extends to stigmatising people who wear masks in public.



Effects of the security context

In the CAR context, insecurity has accentuated the negative dynamics that market traders and CVA recipients have encountered since the start of COVID-19.

For example, many market traders in Kaga Bandoro say that the imposition of illegal taxes and limitations on movement in the regions controlled by armed groups accentuate the supply problems they have experienced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, displaced populations report more difficulty meeting their needs because they lack access to agricultural land. They want to return to their places of origin to develop their businesses and to farm.

⁹ REACH (2020), *Initiative conjointe de suivi des marchés (ICSM) – 23 Juillet au 05 Aout 2020*. [Lien](#)

Respondents report that the measures introduced to fight COVID-19 as well as fear of the virus have created a climate of distrust, which extends to stigmatising people who wear masks in public.



People laugh at and stigmatise those who wear mask

Woman - Kaga Bandoro

The post-pandemic world

During the interviews, respondents shared their perceptions of “the post-pandemic world”. In the context of this qualitative survey, the phrase “post-pandemic world” refers to the period following the government’s announcement that the pandemic has ended. In general, female interviewees are more optimistic about the future than male interviewees. While male interviewees focus more on future economic difficulties, female interviewees often talk about the emergence of new hygiene habits in their areas.

Introduction of new habits

Among the changes linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, many women stress that new health practices have become habits as a result of the information campaigns by humanitarian and government actors. Respondents mention “a new way of life” that includes preventative measures.



Habits will change, as now people are starting to get used to washing their hands with soap all the time.

Woman - Bambari

Female interviewees list the following practices as new habits in their areas during the COVID-19 pandemic:



Hygiene education in Bambari



Changes in social customs (a decrease in public social interactions and the number of visits to family members) in Bangassou.



Handwashing with soap in Bambari



Not shaking hands in Kaga Bandoro

Respondents in the GTS quantitative community actor survey (August 2020) report that members of their communities have introduced practices to fight COVID-19, including not shaking hands, social distancing, and increased hygiene measures (handwashing, not touching their face, and coughing/sneezing into their elbow or a tissue).

Long-term economic impact

The interviewees – especially the male interviewees – have mixed perceptions about the longer-term economic impact of COVID-19. Some respondents are more positive about their businesses, but the majority are worried about the long-term negative repercussions of COVID-19 on the local economy.



Data triangulation

Although the majority (84%) of respondents report that wearing a face mask is recommended in their communities, less than half (48%) say the population respects this recommendation.

¹⁰ Although respondents say some practices have become habits, such as social distancing and handwashing, others are failing to achieve widespread success, such as wearing a face mask.

Community actors report that it is difficult for members of their communities to get supplies of masks and hand sanitiser.¹¹ Almost half (43%) of respondents who do not wear a mask say they cannot afford to buy one.¹²

¹⁰ U-REPORT (August 2020), Face mask distribution and use (in French), [Link](#)

¹¹ Ground Truth Solutions (2020), COVID-19 insights from key informants: Central African Republic – Bulletin 2 (in French), [Link](#)

¹² U-REPORT (August 2020), [Link](#)

Despite concerns about the situation as a result of COVID-19, many CVA recipients say they are optimistic about the future, especially in Kaga Bandoro and Bangassou, due to the resilience of their communities in the face of many crises as well as support from NGOs and the government.



I have taken care to educate my family on the preventative measures to follow. I am convinced that everything will go back to normal after the pandemic.

Female – Kaga Bandoro

People who think business will go back to normal expect:

- Supply deliveries and trade will resume when restrictions on movement are lifted.
- Prices will decrease when supply deliveries resume.
- Job opportunities will recover, especially for day labourers.
- Assistance will help them to revive trading and livestock farming.

People who think economic recovery will be difficult say:

- It will be difficult to continue trading after the drop in sales caused by COVID-19.
- They are spending their investment funds, which will make recovery difficult and will aggravate the fear of bankruptcy.
- The fear of being infected and the climate of distrust will decrease the number of customers in shops.
- They fear no longer receiving aid from humanitarian actors once the programmes launched before or during the COVID-19 pandemic come to an end (most people who express this fear are women).

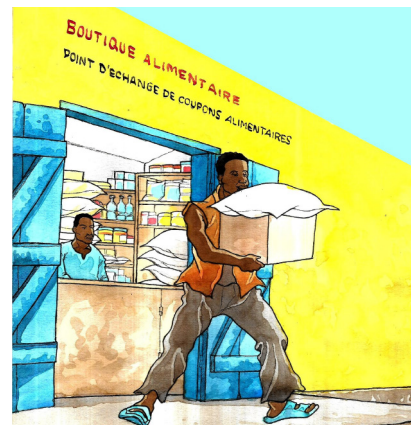


Illustration based on interviews conducted by GTS (Florent Kassai, 2020)



Customers can no longer come in large numbers and buy things; they will remain afraid of getting infected by the disease. Our concern is having financial support if we cannot continue our small business.



Lombé - Kaga Bandoro

55-year-old displaced man

Voucher recipient

Affected people's recommendations

The economic situation of the majority of Central Africans in the regions affected by COVID-19 is so fragile that the population finds it difficult to cope with a slight or temporary increase in prices. This is particularly true for displaced persons. The COVID-19 crisis aggravates this fragility: restrictions on movement harm livelihoods, exacerbating negative perceptions of increased prices.

Although the government is currently lifting restrictions on movement, it remains important to understand the extent of the economic impact of COVID-19 on market traders and CVA recipients, including market practices. The adoption of new hygiene practices has also affected interactions between CVA recipients and market traders.

Despite the widespread adoption of new hygiene practices, respondents remain worried about the long-term economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The decrease in trade and the significant loss of revenue over the last few months has weakened the ability of affected people to meet their essential needs (incomes have decreased, savings have been used up, and assistance has been reduced). As such, a growing number of respondents report being more dependent on aid due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Recommendations on aid

These findings demonstrate that affected people will require additional multi-sector aid to help them return to normal life. They hope to benefit from integrated assistance that accounts for the diversification of economic activities, such as working in the fields and livestock farming.

Operational recommendations for the cash transfer programmes mainly focus on distributions and amounts, rather than on programme design.

Programmation recommendations by location

Bambari	Kaga Bandoro	Bangassou
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly share information on distribution times in advance. Distribute CVA in small groups to make it easier to organise distribution times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase community consultations with affected people to better understand their needs, especially when designing and planning activities. Distribute CVA in a private place, chosen by the people concerned, to reduce risks. Adapt the amount of aid to the household size; if the household size changes, change the amount of aid accordingly. Distribute CVA in small groups to make it easier to organise distribution times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase community consultations with affected people to better understand their needs, especially when designing and planning activities. Adapt the amount of aid to the household size; if the household size changes, change the amount of aid accordingly.

Recommendations for government actors

In addition to humanitarian programming changes, respondents want the government to act on the following issues:

- stabilising prices.
- increasing support for agriculture and CVA.
- increasing security to protect the population against armed groups and strengthening disarmament programmes.
- reopening schools in Bangassou.
- strengthening relocation and return programmes for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Humanitarian actors' conclusions

Based on consultations during the validation phase, the humanitarian actors have made the following recommendations for using these findings to strengthen the CVA programme:

1. Identify issues to research at the inter-agency level and/or quantify through future surveys.

At the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) level, cluster coordinators want more information on the door-to-door sales reported in Kaga Bandoro:

- Is it a service for those who cannot get to the markets (or those who are afraid to go), or is it a service with additional costs?
- What types of people ask for or use this service – more vulnerable people (persons with disabilities and certain ethnic groups), or those with more money (who are therefore able to pay for this service to reduce the risk of transmission)?

2. Integrate the key perceptions into planning documents to supplement the recommendations and improve the CVA programme as part of the COVID-19 response (HRP 2020).

The perceptions of CVA recipients must also be integrated into CAR planning documents, such as the HRP 2020, to guarantee that CVA recipients' perspectives are considered at every stage of the humanitarian programme cycle.

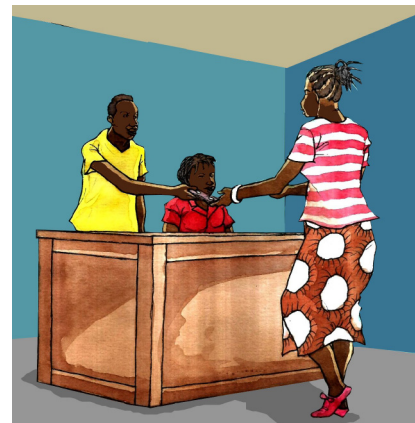


Illustration based on interviews conducted by GTS (Florent Kassai, 2020)



We know that the government does not have the resources needed to leap to the population's rescue. NGOs are our partners and have much greater financial resources than the government. So, we are asking NGOs to give us cash assistance and goods, but most importantly, they should come and monitor progress.



Gisèle - Bangassou

*26-year-old widowed, displaced woman
Cash recipient*

Methodology

We defined the objectives, interview guide, locations, and interviewee profiles in collaboration with the Cash Working Group (CWG) and representatives of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) committee. The interview guide was translated into Sango from French, and the GTS team in Bangui conducted the interviews over the phone. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent, and then transcribed and translated from Sango into French by a professional translator.

A GTS analyst coded and analysed the transcriptions to inform the validation workshop discussions. We coded the interviews to identify trends from which we derived the themes in this report. We presented the themes to the ICCG, and the members of the CWG who took part in the validation workshop reviewed them.

The virtual validation workshop was held on September 1 (on Skype) and brought together members of the CWG and other key coordination structures (the Food Security Cluster and the AAP committee). During the workshop, participants examined the selected interviews and discussed the findings. They also provided contextual information, contributing to the development of the main characteristics of the qualitative survey profiles/personas.

We used these characteristics to group respondents with similar experiences into key persona profiles. These archetypes represent the needs, objectives, values, and behaviour of groups of people.

Locations

Following consultations with the humanitarian actors in CAR and the various coordination structures, we selected the sub-prefectures of Bangassou, Kaga Bandoro, and Bambari. We also chose traders in the sub-prefecture of Bouar.

We selected sites with:

1. a high risk of COVID-19 spreading¹³
2. a large, affected population¹⁴
3. a working mobile network¹⁵
4. experience of CVA programmes delivered by different humanitarian actors.¹⁶

Participants

Our chosen sampling strategy aimed to target **27 people: 15 CVA recipients and 12 market traders.**

We compiled the list of CVA recipients and key informants in three stages:

1. CWG's member organisations shared the phone numbers of CVA recipients and key informants.
2. In the sub-prefectures targeted, community actors shared information on CVA recipients and key informants, as well as their contact details.
3. To finalise the list, we added the phone numbers of key informants from GTS's previous activities in CAR.

Data privacy

To maintain the respondents' anonymity and to guarantee the confidentiality of the information and contact details shared by the humanitarian partners and community actors, we store the database of informants securely on the GTS servers. Only the programme manager and programme analyst have access to this data, and they only share information on the people selected for the various phases of data collection with the rest of the team. GTS will only use the informants' contact details as part of its activities in CAR and will not share these details with any third party.

¹³ The Central African Ministry of Health defined the sites at high risk of COVID-19 spreading.

¹⁴ OCHA (2019), Humanitarian Needs Overview – Central African Republic (in French), [Link](#)

¹⁵ GSMA (2020), Network coverage map - [Link](#)

¹⁶ Cash Working Group – CAR (March 2020), Central African Republic: Cash-based initiatives (1 January – 31 March), [Link](#)

CVA recipients

To develop a list of CVA recipients, we organised consultation sessions with community actors and different members of the CWG. During these discussions, we established the following criteria for participants:

- Recipients who have received CVA in the six months prior to the interview.
- Preferred groups were CVA recipients corresponding to vulnerability criteria (female-headed households/people over 42 years old/households with at least one chronically ill member).

Table of CVA recipients by location

	Female	Male	Total
Kaga Bandoro	3	3	6
Bambari	1	1*	2
Bangassou	6	3*	9
Total	10	7	17

Key informants

The key informants targeted for these interviews are market traders of consumable/non-consumable goods in the sub-prefectures targeted. We selected 12 key informants (exclusively men, with an average age of 40):

- Kaga Bandoro : 5 interviews
- Bambari : 4 interviews
- Bangassou : 2 interviews
- Bouar : 1 interviews

We also chose respondents based on their availability, desire to participate in the interview, and practical constraints related to the phone network. Due to restrictions on movement to stop the spread of COVID-19, the GTS team decided to conduct the interviews over the phone in order to reach the largest number of interviewees while minimising transmission risks.

Limitations

Low key informant participation

Due to their regular duties and the qualitative approach we chose (phone interviews), it was initially difficult for the market traders and CVA recipients targeted to find the time to participate in our interviews. The GTS team developed an appointment system to schedule a timeslot for the qualitative interviews with the targeted people in advance. However, participation rates for qualitative phone interviews are lower than for face-to-face interviews.

Technical challenges

Disruptions in the Central African phone network caused technical difficulties, such as the line cutting out mid-call and an inability to reach some contacts.

Phone interview limitations

Conducting the interviews over the phone meant that the types of people we could reach were mainly traders. As such, it was difficult to contact older or more vulnerable persons (persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses). Ground Truth Solutions had to contact several people to identify those who best met the participant criteria. The answers were generally short, and the interview had to be split into two phone calls to cover all the topics while preserving the flow of a conversation. As stated above, low participation and technical challenges sometimes made it difficult to schedule a second call.

* We were unable to finish two of the interviews (with one man in Bambari and one man in Bangassou) because we could not reach the interviewees for the second part of the interview.

Annex: Map 1: Gisèle's experience (Bangassou / Cash distribution)

All my money has gone. Because I am a migrant, there is no agricultural land available to me.

It is very discouraging to spend time in the market but earn nothing.

My needs are great, as I am a widow with children, and we are displaced persons.

Economic impact of COVID-19

Cash distributions have gone smoothly. The day before we receive the assistance, they go on the radio to let us know. They receive 15 people in the morning and 15 in the afternoon to respect social distancing.

We are facing enormous difficulties during this crisis. That is why the government is giving us cash through PACAD. It has really helped us.

Aid during
COVID-19



Impact of
COVID-19
measures

Access is subject to preventative measures, which imposes a new pace of life. This is becoming increasingly difficult and slows business. We purchasers are struggling to get certain products.

The children no longer go to school because of the coronavirus.

The post-pandemic world

It is not easy for me to predict what will happen. We have lost a lot of our old routines due to the preventative measures, so it will be difficult to live as we used to.

Life was a bit better before the coronavirus pandemic. The preventative measures, such as school closures and restrictions on movement, will have consequences once the pandemic ends because the financial crisis has got worse.

Feelings

- We are afraid to be in the chaos of COVID-19.
- What worries me is the lack of humanitarian staff working on the front line of the response due to the pandemic.
- If COVID-19 ends, our situation may improve if God wills it.

Solutions

- The amount of cash we are given is small relative to the size of the households. We should also have support for agricultural development.
- We ask NGOs to give us cash assistance, but they must also often come and monitor the progress of the project.

Map 2: Carine's experience (Bangassou / Cash distribution)

It is not easy to get goods as a result of the closure of the borders. We have to go out in the fields to produce foodstuffs, which we then resell to survive. I am focusing on working in the fields.

What worries me are the restrictions on movement, which limit economic actors in their business ventures.

Before coming to the site, the humanitarian staff gave us information. They work with us and treat us with respect. The NGOs have helped us a lot by giving us seeds, spades, and 25,000 CFA francs.

This support came at the right time, and everything went smoothly. The corn seeds they gave us helped a lot because it was not easy to get them in the town.

Economic impact of COVID-19

Aid during COVID-19



Impact of COVID-19 measures

COVID-19 separated us from our parents. We can no longer see each other when we want; we must follow the measures and greet each other from a distance.

Children no longer go to school. We have to raise children's awareness, so they respect the preventative measures, which is no small feat.

The post-pandemic world

The country has been shaken by several crises, so if God wills it, good things will come after this pandemic.

The day the government decides to lift the restrictions, we will follow their lead.

The main change is that preventative measures are applied, and hygiene is respected. But I think things will go back to normal after this pandemic. The borders will open, and prices will be brought back down to where they were.

Feelings

- What worries me is that lots of people fear travelling. The presence of armed groups makes it difficult to live a normal life.
- Our greatest fear is that the disease that is killing people elsewhere and causing thousands of deaths will come back.

Solutions

- It would be good if the government could ensure our children can go back to school.
- Our recommendation for the actors is to support us in a way that can enable us to take care of our needs, because we have lost a lot during the crisis.

Map 3: Jean's experience (Bangassou/ Cash distribution and cash for work)

The increased prices are a problem, and almost all business has ground to a halt, especially temporary work. Our usual employers are no longer looking for labour. Day labourers are not hired as they were before.

It is difficult because the situation is beyond our capacity. The pandemic and the presence of armed groups mean we can no longer farm as we did before.

This assistance is tremendously beneficial. I am a displaced person who has lost everything, and I am regaining a sense of purpose. However, the amount provided is not enough to survive on during this time.

The aid comes in an untimely fashion. We do not get prior warning and have to go to the town hall. If you do not get the information because you are in the fields, for example, then you miss out. They have not organised us into groups, and they always improvise meetings.

Economic impact of COVID-19

Aid during COVID-19



Impact of COVID-19 measures

At the moment, the lack of lessons is problematic because our children's future is in jeopardy.

The markets are not closed; people are just scared.

With COVID-19, we try not to have lots of people in the hospital at once. The hospital admits a certain quota of people each day.

The post-pandemic world

Due to COVID-19, families avoid each other. It has destroyed the old way of life. Our children no longer go to school; we fear juvenile delinquency will develop.

It is difficult to predict what will happen after COVID-19 because it is not over yet. My business suffered a lot during the crisis; I do not think this will change anytime soon.

Feelings

- The disease scares us. We do not know how it will end. I am afraid of the scale of COVID-19.
- We are worried about the coronavirus's sudden arrival, and especially the fact it has no cure. Distrust among the populations is a problem.

Solutions

- We ask the NGOs to help us through agriculture, and also not to lose heart and to continue to help us.
- We want a dignified return to our respective homes, with support that could help us get out of our vulnerable situation.

Map 4: Marie's experience (Kaga Bandoro/ Cash distribution)

Lots of things have changed due to poor sales. I have only made 600 CFA francs since this morning, for example. It is very discouraging to spend time in the market but earn nothing. Sales are very poor due to the increased prices.

I am worried that my income will only go down, which will bankrupt me. What matters to me is how to feed our children and meet their other needs during this difficult time.

Economic impact of COVID-19

We were given seeds after the sowing period. It was just a symbolic gesture and did not enable us to meet our needs. We need cash.

In the beginning, they also gave us rice, but we complained. After some discussion, they finally changed to voucher assistance.

Aid during
COVID-19



Impact of
COVID-19
measures

The hospital sees everyone, no exceptions, which is reassuring.

The children no longer receive quality teaching.

People avoid visiting the markets; the churches are closed. People laugh at those who wear face masks.

The post-pandemic world

I do not know when the pandemic will end, but if you told me it will go away tomorrow, I would say, "Thank you, God!" as my children could head back to school!

I have taken care to educate my family on the preventative measures to follow. I am convinced that after the pandemic everything will go back to normal. We will be able to live as we did before. If we respect the measures taken by the government, we can protect ourselves, and good things will come.

Feelings

- I really appreciate the advice we have been given to protect ourselves and our families from the coronavirus. But I do not know what is going to happen. Today I may say one thing, but God may say the opposite tomorrow.

Solutions

- We ask the government to support us so that we can go back home, live off agricultural income, and strengthen our business.
- We appreciate the seeds, but if they could give us tarpaulins or just cash, that would enable us to move forward.

Map 5: Lombé's experience (Kaga Bandoro/ Voucher)

We give our best customers loans to buy our goods, but they pay us back late and sometimes struggle to do so.

My expenses are higher than my profits. My business is taking a turn for the worse due to a drop in sales. So, I am focusing on livestock farming, and I am trying not to increase prices too much.

We eat every other day to reduce expenses.

Vouchers used to be distributed once a week; now, due to COVID-19, distributions are every two weeks, which makes it more difficult to cover our needs.

The organisations told us that they know this assistance is late in coming, but they should make an effort to monitor this.

When we want to exchange the vouchers with traders, they inflate the value of their goods against the vouchers and it penalises us.

Economic impact of COVID-19

Aid during COVID-19



Impact of COVID-19 measures

We live in an area controlled by armed groups. We calculate our movements for fear of being extorted by them.

The coronavirus has given us a new way of life with increased hygiene measures, so it has negative and positive aspects. One good aspect of COVID-19 is hygiene education, which has become a habit.

The post-pandemic world

We have to observe these measures, and when the authorities know that the disease has gone, they will lift them.

You know, when this evil goes away, it will leave an impact. We Africans love community life, which is made difficult by social distancing. People no longer shake hands.

White people say, "Every cloud has a silver lining." We hope that the government can appeal to NGOs, so they come and help us.

Feelings

- We are worried about the pandemic and are fighting to eradicate it. It has caused harm: desolation within families due to deaths, and of course the collapse of the economy. I am worried about the uncertainty regarding the end of this pandemic, and the fact that it stops movement and increases the price of goods.

Solutions

- The government should show up and make an effort, like the NGOs do, to give us cash and items we can resell, or tools to help us with farming.

Map 6: Aristide's experience (Bambari/ Trader)

Our savings have gone down. Delivery people have increased their prices, so the price of goods has also rocketed. Imported goods are now rare and more expensive, as traders struggle to get supplies due to the restrictions on movement.

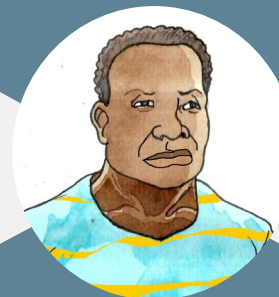
Agricultural products are available in the Bambari markets, but households cannot afford to buy them. Young people have lost the odd jobs they used to do.

We have reduced the number of meals we have to one per day, which we eat in the evening.

Economic impact of COVID-19

The cash gave us a little help. Without this support, vulnerable people would not be able to survive this crisis. Even though our needs are immense, we can only appreciate the aid received. The process went smoothly.

Aid during COVID-19



Impact of COVID-19 measures

We have to respect the measures taken by the government and avoid travelling too much. Even the churches are closed, and we are breaking social ties because we are avoiding visiting our parents.

People do not travel as they did before; it is no longer possible to get essential products.

The measures have not stopped us from going to the market; we wear a mask when we go. This new hygiene habit is fashionable here.

The post-pandemic world

Before COVID, I could spend at least 3,000 CFA francs [per day]. It is not easy now.

We have to support our family using our savings, which has reduced our ability to invest. For me, if there were work for those who are able to do it, life would function correctly.

Feelings

- All the schools and training centres are closed. Our children no longer go to school, which worries us.
- What matters to me is the lack of support, which is making us vulnerable. COVID-19 adds to the suffering, and we are starting to despair.

Solutions

- If the government could regulate the increasing prices, it would restore order to the markets.
- I think life will be good once business resumes and money flows again.