

# Community reflections:

## The cumulative impact of keeping people informed

July 2022

## Introduction

As part of the [Cash Barometer initiative](#), Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) has asked thousands of people affected by crisis in Somalia, Nigeria and the Central African Republic in recent years for their views on cash and voucher assistance (CVA). We have relied mostly on standardised surveys conducted together with our research partners and local teams. Before engaging in another round of surveys later this year, we decided to pause and reflect with representatives of communities in Nigeria and Somalia, including youth leaders, women's leaders, traditional community leaders, and community members. In our reflections with communities, we set out to gain an in-depth understanding of how they understand the concepts we regularly cover in our surveys, and what else they think about some of the main themes coming through in our findings, such as the importance of participation, information provision, fairness and respect.

## Main findings

Our research confirms the importance of the themes covered in regular Cash Barometer surveys and the interconnectedness of those themes. Information was confirmed as a particularly crucial component of aid quality and accountability. If it is lacking, it will undermine perceptions of fairness and participation. Interviewees shared their personal experiences of these concepts and provided tangible examples of what it means for humanitarian services to be provided in a fair, participatory, and high-quality manner. Our conversations with CVA recipients summarised in this briefing note also validated the formulation of our survey questions to understand what people think about when answering them, and how easily understandable the questions are. Most of the survey questions tested as part of this exercise were seen to be easily understood and appropriate for future surveys. Further probing brought to the forefront examples of aid provision done well as well as areas for improvement that aid providers should consider.

This briefing note presents an overview of the findings from Ground Truth Solutions' in-depth, qualitative interviews with community representatives of displaced people and aid recipients in Nigeria and Somalia in May and June 2022. In Nigeria, we conducted 10 interviews with community leaders, women and youth leaders, camp chairmen and CVA beneficiaries in Gubio and El-Miskin camps in Maiduguri, Borno State. In Somalia, we interviewed 10 men and women who received CVA in Hodan, Hantiwadaag, Waaberi and Shabelle IDP camp in Garowe, Puntland.

Interviews also contained a cognitive interviewing component with the aim of testing how well participants understand questions from our standardised [quantitative surveys](#). This will inform the next round of quantitative data collection in September 2022.

Research partners conducting the interviews were practiced qualitative researchers with strong ties to the local communities. In Nigeria, this was Fact Foundation, and in Somalia, New Access International (NAI) Somalia.

Supported by:



# Information is the keystone for an accountable response

We know from past surveys that many people affected by crisis feel poorly informed about available aid. Communities in Nigeria and Somalia confirmed that information provision is not only beneficial in itself but also a key component in creating aid provision that respects individuals, treats them fairly, and allows them agency to participate. As such, many interviewees saw the concepts of fairness, respect and information provision as closely intertwined. Being transparent with information was seen as necessary for people to feel like they are being treated fairly. In Nigeria, people appreciated understanding aid providers' plans, processes, and basic parameters of projects such as the length of assistance, which allow people to know what to expect. When they saw aid providers sticking to their promises, they felt they are being treated fairly.

Similarly in Somalia, transparency was often cited as important for fairness and accountability. Making information about eligibility criteria public in targeted communities, for example, would ensure no one is unduly left out and would serve to deter corruption or diversion.

“

**Somalis say 'things kept in the dark usually have a bad odour'. If you want to make things fairer then it has to be done transparently.**

**- Female CVA recipient, Hodan, Somalia**

”

“

**If someone is fair, he always obeys and follows the right way, rules and regulations. He is always transparent and accountable.**

**- Community leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria**

”

In Somalia, a lack of information on key aspects of CVA programmes, such as selection criteria or aid duration, led to feelings of uncertainty and a sense that people had to be grateful for whatever they end up receiving. This meant that many did not feel they could ask questions to aid providers. Where information is lacking and people feel they cannot ask questions, people rely on knowledge drawn from other recipients – for example, to confirm they are receiving the right amount.

While many stated that “knowledge is power”, and a crucial component of trust, others reiterated the sense of “disentitlement” to humanitarian aid, and therefore, that they felt they had no right to know how aid providers spend humanitarian money or decide who receives aid and who does not. Larger information gaps exist for those who do not receive aid – many do not expect them to know much about CVA programmes in their communities.

“They always have a good plan before and they work according to their plan with honesty.”

- Male CVA recipient, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“Fairness means providing full information on aid including duration, ratio, mechanisms and procedures. It is always good to share everything about the programme with the community. This will give the community the sense that they understand the aid provided properly.”

- Community leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“If the [targeting] criteria aren't clear then many people who are poor and vulnerable will feel that they have been cheated. This [criteria] should be something that everyone knows.”

- Male CVA recipient, Hantiwadaag, Somalia

“Do things in the open and make it open for the whole public. Give people the whole information. The more people know, the more things will be trusted.”

- Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

“I don't want to know. I don't want to spend my time on that. Listen, it's their money and they can choose whoever they want.”

- Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

“Lack of information and lack of accountability in the projects always creates doubts and suspicion around the overall aid and those who provide it.”

- Male CVA recipient, Waaberi, Somalia

# Participation is crucial, but not everybody needs to participate

In both Nigeria and Somalia, people clearly expressed the importance of participation in aid provision in their communities. For interviewees in Nigeria, participation took many forms: people being given the opportunity to take issues to aid providers in person in their camp, seeing changes made based on their suggestions or complaints, and the community being consulted on aid providers' plans in advance and throughout programme implementation. Many were pleased that they receive responses to their suggestions or complaints and that their issues are handled confidentially.

For community members, participation makes aid provision more effective and efficient, as the community knows best what they need and can advise aid providers on how best to interact with the community. Another benefit of participation mentioned was that communities feel a sense of ownership when they have been involved, and so will take on shared responsibility for the success of the project.

“

Compliance becomes a lot easier when the decisions come from us. We know that it is our responsibility to ensure that what we wanted works for our benefit and therefore, it becomes a community effort to us to make sure that our decision is upheld by all of us.

”

- Women leader, Gubio camp, Nigeria

In Somalia, people felt that participation was important to ensure all voices were heard, not just community leaders. Some felt that it was also important to talk to people who were not selected to receive aid, as they are nonetheless part of the community where this activity is taking place. People recognised the importance of being involved at all stages of the project, highlighting a need for systematic rather than tokenistic participation.

While some suggested relying on committees of trusted and knowledgeable persons, others suggested making participation even more open, for example by allowing more people in the community to vote on key decisions that affect them. These wider fora for consultation could have an added benefit, as some people considered aid agencies to be more responsive to concerns raised by groups of people rather than concerns raised by individuals. In both Somalia and Nigeria, participation was a crucial component in feeling like a response is fair.

“

The community should be part of discussions before the project starts - as a beneficiary, we should be able to ask them questions. Also, when the project is done, we should be able to sit with them and tell them what was good and what wasn't.

”

- Male CVA recipient, Hodan, Somalia

“Even if it is concerning issues between a wife and her husband, this office collects their complaints and does their best to sort it out in confidence.”

- Women leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“For instance when vendors bring food items that are not of a good quality or if there are issues with our vouchers, we report it and we see changes immediately.”

- Youth Leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“Including us in the decisions that determine the type of aid that they provide is very important. We talk about how we wish the aid providers would ask for our opinion more.”

- Female CVA recipient, Gubio camp, Nigeria

“You can get suggestions from people that even you as a leader may never be able to come up with. It feels good to know that what you have to say may be useful.”

- Camp chairman, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“I don't know of ways that I can have a say in aid, we take what they give us. The process is not done with us. It is done with the leaders and committee of the neighbourhood. And sometimes the agency comes and asks questions to those who have benefitted. But rarely to the people who didn't receive it.”

- Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

Despite finding participation important, in both Somalia and Nigeria people were hesitant to demand a seat at the table. We heard many times that community members do not feel comfortable complaining or telling aid organisations how to do their work, given that they are providing a free service to the community. Even where information is concerned, some in Somalia felt like they should not seek information about aid as it belongs to aid providers and not to the community.

“  
I do not think it is right for us to tell the person trying to help us that this is the type of help we want, someone that is not your relative and has come to give assistance and you want to tell them how to assist you? I honestly do not think it is appropriate.

”  
-Camp chairman, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“  
It's their [aid agencies] money so I don't know how much they would like for the community to participate. But we should be able to vote on things and make decisions, not just be told what is going to happen. But I doubt that will happen. Would you let someone control your money and make decisions on what you should spend money on?.

”  
-Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

## A fair response leaves no one behind

In Nigeria, community members were clear that fairness means treating everyone equally. This can be in tension with the humanitarian ideal to prioritise the most vulnerable. Particularly in camp contexts in which everyone is in need, people felt that aid providers should ensure blanket coverage, even if that meant that each individual would receive less. People found that giving aid to everyone registered, and not just a selected few, showed respect for the community.

“  
If they have 100 things to distribute but there are 600 people that may need it, what I would need to suggest for them is to ensure that they can reduce the quantity or even the type of goods in a manner that will go round for everyone in need.

”  
-Camp chairman, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

In Somalia, people had different interpretations of fairness with regard to targeting, ranging from aid going to “the right people” or to those who need it most, to covering all people in a certain geographical location without excluding anyone, or aid going to only those it is intended for without diversion. On the one hand, increasing coverage can be fairer with more money spread around in the community, especially when many people are suffering. On the other hand, targeting a few people with higher transfers was considered by some as being more impactful, serving to build resilience and reduce aid dependency for recipients in the long run.

“Fairness is not about selecting others and leaving some it is about honesty and making sure that everyone is treated equally.”

- Female CVA recipient, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“The issue is, if you give more money and the process is not fair, then you have just wasted money because some people who really need it won't get it and those who don't need it will get richer. But if you give to a lot of people, more people who actually need it will get it.”

- Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

“Giving more money to fewer people is a better idea – if I got more money, I would have done something with it like save it or invest in a shop. Something more than just pay my bills.”

- Female CVA recipient, Camp Shabelle, Somalia

# Respect is about how aid providers act, not what assistance they bring

For communities, the first sign of respect comes in advance of any activities, when aid providers meet with community leaders and ask their opinion. This could be with the traditional community leader or with other members of the community who are knowledgeable about a particular subject, such as women's leaders. Asking the community leader's advice on how to engage best with the community was also seen as a sign of respect.

“

Looking for permission from us, the Bulama and other community members is a sign of respect. The way they do not separate themselves from us when they are going from household to household is also a sign of respect for us.

”

-Camp chairman, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“

They ask us for our advice on how to engage with our community since it is us that know our people more than them. For someone to come to your place and seek your opinion before doing anything and to actually listen and follow your suggestions this is a very good show of respect.

”

-Women leader, Gubio camp, Nigeria

As one of the main contact points with humanitarian organisations, conditions at distribution points were very important to people's feelings of respect and fairness in Nigeria. Ensuring that the elderly or other vulnerable groups are prioritised, limiting waiting times for all, planning for shade, and distributing at agreed times were mentioned as both a sign of respect and fairness.

In general, in Nigeria, face-to-face contact was important for respect. Being able to meet representatives in person if there is an issue, getting a timely response to complaints, and going household to household to ensure everyone is registered were given as examples.

“

They don't allow us to sit on the ground, or under the sun, they show us respect, they insist on us taking care of our children and they help whenever they are here. so you see anyone that shows you that they care about your children and are seeking the well-being of your children in my opinion that is someone that respects and cares for you.

”

-Women leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“Once you just approach them with any sort of complaint they are very quick to act. One young woman came into the camp after escaping the insurgents. During the registration exercise, she was not included, so we came to the office with her and met the camp official. He went to the organisation and spoke on her behalf, and she was included and started collecting aid that she used to take care of her mother and herself.”

- Women leader, El-Miskin camp, Nigeria

“Sometimes, the humanitarians don't plan in such a way that the beneficiaries will find it easy during food distribution in the camp - most times the humanitarians converge all people at the distribution site and there is no shade for people, so I feel this as part disrespect for the community.”

- Community leader, Gubio camp, Nigeria

“They tell us to be in line and 5 people will be calling names at the same time so they don't waste our time.”

- Female CVA recipient, Gubio camp, Nigeria

# Conclusion

While survey findings often highlight shortcomings in cash and voucher assistance (CVA) and the humanitarian response as a whole, the feedback offered by participants in these broader conversations demonstrates many positive examples that may inspire learning and confirm what is working well for communities. They also confirm the importance of sometimes intangible quality concepts, which we continue to monitor in quantitative surveys in September and October 2022 in Nigeria and Somalia. The findings from this next round of surveys will then be discussed with affected communities again to develop recommendations for how aid providers can optimise CVA programming.



## GROUND TRUTH SOLUTIONS

For more information about our work in Nigeria, please contact Hannah Miles.  
[hannah@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:hannah@groundtruthsolutions.org)

For more information about our work in Somalia, please contact Andrew Nzimbi and Heba Ibrahim.  
[andrew.nzimbi@groundtruthsolution.org](mailto:andrew.nzimbi@groundtruthsolution.org)  
[heba@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:heba@groundtruthsolutions.org)