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Overview

For people suffering from the devastating impact of drought and ongoing conflict in large areas of Central South Somalia, food vouchers, cash transfers and direct food aid have become key means of survival.

UNICEF and its network of local partners in these areas are providing food vouchers and cash transfers to enhance families' food-purchasing power – and to encourage local traders to bring in more food at affordable prices. To fill gaps in food security, UNICEF and partners have also stepped in with blanket supplementary feeding for the most vulnerable population, particularly children and women.

These interventions are being targeted to the worst-affected famine areas; the main areas where people are on the move; and other areas currently in a 'very critical' nutritional situation in southern Somalia.

Delivering food assistance

UNICEF's enhanced supplementary feeding basket includes 25 kg of corn soya blend, which is rich in micronutrients and carbohydrates, 3 litres of cooking oil and 15 kg of beans. The basket represents half of one family's daily caloric needs for a month.

UNICEF cannot feed everyone in urgent need in southern Somalia, however. Targets for the coming months are to reach 32 per cent of the families in need, amounting to more than 200,000 households. UNICEF will continue to monitor the humanitarian situation and the impact of the programme, and the targets may be adjusted accordingly.

By supporting supplementary feeding, particularly in the worst-affected areas, UNICEF helps to ease the impact of rising food prices and depleted crops and livestock.

Benefits of food vouchers and cash transfers

Food vouchers and cash grants provide a greater choice for beneficiaries than other forms of aid. They are flexible, can be easily started and stopped if needed, support local markets and may be more cost-effective than food aid due to reduced transport and distribution costs.

Over the coming months, UNICEF aims to reach about 50,000 vulnerable households in Central South Somalia with cash grants. UNICEF's education partners are also distributing food vouchers to over 15,000 Somali children in attendance at 'safe spaces'. In the absence of school feeding programmes, the vouchers provide critical support to affected children. They also serve as an incentive to increase school attendance.

Distribution mechanisms

Delivering cash transfers is not a novel intervention in Somalia, where several tested and effective models already exist. For example, distribution mechanisms known as *Hawalas* comprise a well-established local financial system delivering remittances regularly from relatives living abroad.

Hawalas have proven to be a reliable and transparent mechanism for cash transfers, with beneficiaries registered through NGO partners. The process is monitored through third parties to ensure that funds reach those most in need. Concerns over security and inappropriate spending can be properly mitigated using due diligence measures and other safeguards that are currently in place.

Where cash/voucher programmes have been initiated

The programme is being implemented in close collaboration with NGO partners and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The cash grants and food vouchers are sufficient for each family to buy a basic food basket for one month. The grant amount depends on local prices, ranging from \$85 in Middle Juba to \$90 in Lower Shabelle.

Cash grants and food vouchers are currently distributed in the following regions of Somalia, with wider distribution planned if funding becomes available:

- Lower Juba (district of Afmadow and Badhaadhe), with a distribution of cash grants to 5,000 households for six months
- Middle Juba, where UNICEF is funding a cash programme for 3,000 households
- Bakool, where UNICEF will fund 3,000 households
- Lower Shabelle, Afgoye district, where UNICEF will fund 7,000 households
- Lower Shabelle, where UNICEF is also funding an emergency food-vouchers programme to cover 4,000 vulnerable households for six months, with a possible scale-up to cover another 4,000 households.

The cash grant/food vouchers programme is closely linked to parallel blanket-feeding efforts in these regions. By integrating and linking cash and food interventions, it will help to save lives and provide a much-needed basic safety net for the most vulnerable families.

Viability of cash assistance

UNICEF's immediate priority is to save lives. Since the children of poor families are at the greatest risk of death, the organization must consider all options to help these families. Food is available in many markets in Somalia, but it is unaffordable for poor households. If delivered properly and jointly with food aid and livelihood-supporting measures, cash transfers can effectively help those families for whom high prices represent the main barrier to food access.