

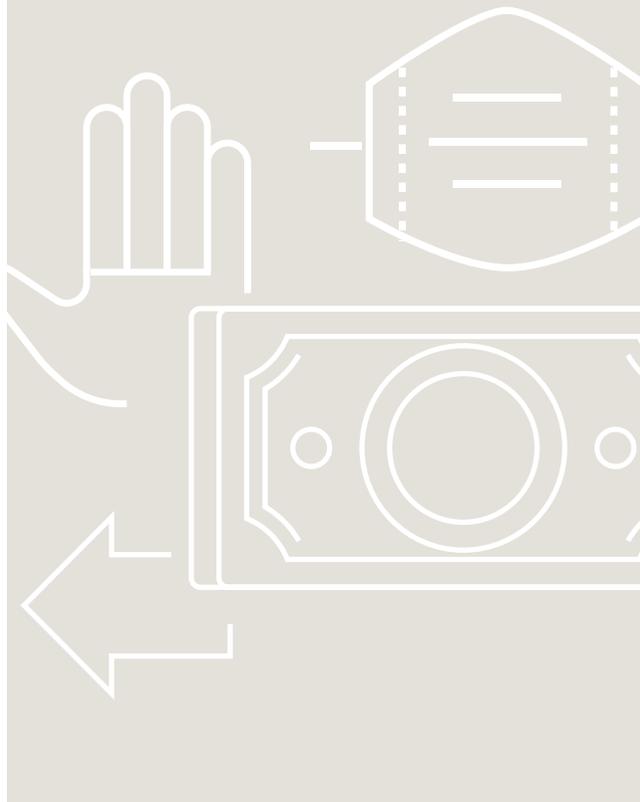
COVID-19: CVA preparedness

Ensuring minimum requirements to deliver timely, accountable, and effective CVA are in place



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Introduction

The Movement CVA (Cash and Voucher Assistance) preparedness approach states that ‘CVA preparedness is an ongoing National Society development initiative that aims to mainstream CVA into existing National Society tools, systems, procedures and staff capacity, as well as strengthening active leadership support for CVA, coordination and communication’.

Over the past decade, an increasing number of National Societies (around 40 to date) have invested into different levels of cash preparedness with the objective to deliver, when appropriate, cash and voucher assistance, in a timely, accountable and effective manner at any time and at any scale. The National Society Cash Preparedness Guidance was developed in 2015 and was used by different Movement partners to support NS cash preparedness investment. In 2019-2020, the guidance was revised and updated based on the evidence and recommendations from different National Societies engaged in CVA preparedness initiatives. One of the key recommendations is that consistent investment in NS cash preparedness is needed over a period of time (minimum 3 years) to ensure CVA is effectively mainstreamed and institutionalized by the National Society and the NS is ready to implement cash at a relevant scale independently (without external support).

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an impact not only on the health of people around the world, but also significantly constraining people’s ability to meet their basic needs and impairing their economic resilience. CVA can enable access to key basic services such as health, education, water, etc. and support vulnerable households to address other costs such as rent, utilities, transport and fees, and contributing to protect and restore people’s livelihoods.

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Purpose

This fast-track CVA preparedness approach is an adapted version of the RCRCM standard CVA Preparedness aiming at supporting National Societies considering a CVA under COVID-19 response in having the minimum requirements in place to deliver CVA in a timely, accountable and effective manner. The initial focus should be on ensuring a **“good enough” NS CVA capacity** to conduct the CVA feasibility assessment, design, implement and monitor the program as well as to ensure that the required systems are in place.

National Societies can be supported by existing IFRC resources like Regional Cash Coordinators or Focal Points and by the remote support provided via the **Movement CashHub COVID-19 HelpDesk** that are available in the four official IFRC languages.

On the other hand, the long-term NS CVA preparedness is a more robust and comprehensive approach that makes a stronger investment to ensure NS CVA sustainability and institutionalization; aiming at having CVA mainstreamed and institutionalized across all systems, processes and departments of the National Societies and positioning them as strong partners of choice to deliver CVA.

The fast-track approach presented here focuses only on ensuring that NS comply with the minimum requirements to support timeliness and accountability of the COVID-19 cash responses. The sum of these initial preparations combined with the remote technical support that a NS will receive along the program design and implementation will result in a timely, accountable and effective CVA response within the current IFRC COVID-19 Emergency Appeal, or any other project including bilateral.

Audience

This document provides a brief guidance to National Societies with no or limited CVA experience, guiding them to make the critical and necessary preparations required to deliver timely and accountable CVA.

This guidance can also be used by NS with more CVA experience and capabilities to check that they are adapting to the COVID-19 response specificities (e.g. more emphasis on aligning with and complementing social protection programmes) and completing the preparatory works.

Like any preparedness initiative, the host National Society shall lead the fast track cash preparedness. National Societies can access technical support via the IFRC Regional Cash Coordinators/Focal Points and via the **Movement CashHub COVID-19 Helpdesk**, hosted by British Red Cross and supported by the Cash Peer Working Group.

Timeframe

The **expected timeframe** for fast-track cash preparedness initial preparations and feasibility assessment is 2 to 3 months. This timeframe is calculated based on the time required for conducting the cash feasibility assessment and signing a contract with a FSP (Financial Service Provider)/service provider. The actual timeframe can vary upon the existing capacities and systems in place within the NS.

Although most of the activities in the initial preparations are no-cost activities, funds might be required for instance, to cover the cost of CVA Focal Point, to purchase equipment/software for data collection and management, to conduct a training or bear the costs of the staff and volunteers engaged in the assessments. In this case, the funds available for COVID-19 in-country response could be used.

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MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO DELIVER TIMELY, ACCOUNTABLE AND EFFECTIVE CVA

Related to National Society leadership acceptance and organizational capacity:

- A CVA focal point is in place.
- A CVA TWG (technical working group) is established and actively engaged in ensuring that minimum requirements are in place
- The CVA focal point and the CVA TWG have acquired basic understanding of CVA specificities to lead the implementation of the COVID-19 CVA response and are connected with IFRC Regional Cash Coordinators and the COVID-19 Helpdesk for remote technical guidance, quality assurance and on-the-job/real-time learning support.
- A fast-track NS CVA capacity survey has been completed to identify key gaps that inform the support required from IFRC/CashHub.
- The NS CVA roles and responsibilities matrix is in place, identifying the specific decision making, roles and responsibilities of all the NS departments and functions engaged in CVA delivery including DM, programmes, support services (logistics, finance, audit, M&E/PMER, CEA, etc.).
- An analysis of internal financial flows has been conducted to identify potential blockages / limitations
- A data collection and management system is in place, including the required equipment, technology, and staff capacity.
- CVA is mainstreamed into monitoring, reporting and evaluation tools and systems already in place.
- CVA is mainstreamed into CEA tools and systems already in place.

Related to coordination and partnerships:

- National Society is actively engaged with county-level CVA working groups and forums. The CVA Focal Point regularly attends the national CWG meetings and ensures that the National Society contributes to harmonized and coordinated approaches of the different humanitarian responders in the country or intervention areas.
- Contracts with one or more FSPs are in place to facilitate the delivery of cash.
- A Project Agreement specific to CVA is signed between the host National Society and the funding partner. This will be compulsory for IFRC supported CVA intervention.
- When relevant, the National Society explores linkages with social protection or shock-responsive safety net interventions in the country (by sharing information, linking up, aligning with, or complementing these initiatives).

Related to defining the COVID-19 response modality and delivery mechanism (assessment and response options analysis):

- CVA feasibility assessment reports (including affected population's needs, preferences, access to markets, as well as existing FSPs, risks, capacity, etc.) with recommendations are available to inform response analysis.
- NS conducts a response option analysis and defines the most adequate response modality and related mechanisms.

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FAST-TRACK KEY ACTIVITIES

The initial focus should be on ensuring a “good enough” **NS CVA capacity** to conduct the CVA feasibility assessment, design, implement and monitor the program as well as on ensuring that required systems are in place.

NS CVA Focal Point/Person

The National Society needs to have a CVA Focal Point, responsible for leading the initiative and liaising with all relevant internal and external stakeholders involved in CVA delivery. This person needs to be actively engaged in ensuring the National Society minimum requirements for CVA delivery are in place. If this role falls under a manager that already has a busy schedule, a junior support person should be appointed to provide operational support full-time and engage in the day-to-day activities to ensure timely progress is made.

National Society CVA Technical Working Group

A NS CVA TWG should be established by nominating representatives from the different departments engaged in CVA planning, design and implementation - including Disaster Management, relevant sectoral teams (health, food security and livelihoods, WASH, protection, etc.), finance, logistics/procurement, PMER/M&E, CEA, IT, legal department, etc. When relevant, this TWG can also include representatives of other RCRCM members present in country.

The CVA Focal Point, with the support of CVA TWG, should ensure the minimum requirements are in place before CVA response is carried out. The role and responsibilities of the NS Cash Focal Point and members of CVA TWG working group are clearly stated in ToRs and approved by the senior management of the NS. In case of no CVA experience at all within the NS, it is advisable to contract someone external with technical CVA experience as a CVA Focal Point to bring in the needed expertise. Alternatively, capacity building support could be accessed via the IFRC Regional Cash Coordinators and Movement CashHub COVID-19 Helpdesk support.

The CVA TWG participates in filling in the NS CVA capacity survey to identify the capacity gaps and areas of support that will be required from the IFRC and/or the Movement CashHub COVID-19 Helpdesk.

It is important to consider, not only the capacity at HQ level but also at the branch level where CVA response is likely to be implemented.

Capacity building

The main approach to staff and volunteers’ capacity building will be on-the-job learning with remote assistance and guidance from the IFRC Regional Cash Coordinators and the Movement CashHub COVID-19 Helpdesk. On-line and remote trainings will be made available for key staff if necessary. The capacity building support could also be provided by the Movement Partners present in the country.

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NS CVA roles and responsibilities matrix:

The roles and responsibilities of the key personnel engaged in the COVID-19 CVA response should be outlined and clarified. This document should be used as the foundation for CVA SOPs in the future, that is once the NS has implemented COVID-19 response and is interested to continue investing in CVA preparedness through the standard approach to institutionalize CVA.

CVA embedded into data collection and management systems and tools

Data collection, data management and information technology systems should be in place and include the relevant CVA considerations to allow for a quick, accountable and secure registration, payment, reconciliation and reporting of CVA implementation. NS should invest in ensuring that necessary equipment, technologies and capabilities are in place to enable timely and accountable delivery especially when they do not have pre-existing electronic systems in place.

Coordination

NS should engage actively in national coordination when cash working groups are in place. In the COVID-19 fast evolving crisis, with many unknowns and limited access to first-hand information, robust collaboration with the local authorities and humanitarian community through CVA national coordination forums is crucial. Sharing information and plans, harmonizing when possible CVA approaches including cash grant values, geographical areas prioritization, targeting, etc. to avoid duplication, enhance synergies and harmonisation of approaches is mandatory.

This is even more applicable to NS that are new to CVA and can capitalize on existing efforts linked to CVA feasibility, risks analysis, FSPs mapping and assessments that are relevant across the different implementation areas (considering that urban and

rural settings might have access to different delivery mechanisms), and other key information through engaging with the local CVA coordination forums.

Social protection

Government social protection systems have rapidly scaled up in many countries in response to the COVID-19 crises. There is a general agreement that humanitarian actors should work with governments and, when relevant, link humanitarian CVA to national social protection and/or shock response initiatives. If relevant, NS should map and assess the capacity of social protection systems in place and explore linkages and opportunities to coordinate, align with, complement, build on existing systems. NS can be well placed to cover the gap of social protection/safety nets to ensure no one is left behind.

CVA feasibility assessment

A cash feasibility and response options analysis to understand the context and inform the response needs to take place. In the COVID-19 context, collection of information may need to rely more on secondary data and use remote data collection approaches. Engaging actively in existing cash working groups and other coordination mechanisms and working closely with other humanitarian actors and relevant national authorities at both national and local level would be key to have access to relevant and up-to-date information. All CVA feasibility assessments must have COVID-19 safety measures and considerations in place to ensure a 'do no harm' approach and include the following aspects:

- **Needs assessments:** including affected population preference and access to markets and existing FSPs.
- **Market assessment** (covering relevant key commodities, services and labour markets):

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Having a rapid understanding of access to, availability and capacity of markets is critical to inform the most adequate response modality. The impact of COVID-19 on markets might change depending on containment measures that are in place (curfews, movement restrictions, business closures, rules of social/physical distancing, etc.) affecting the access to markets and national as well as international supply chains and prices. This should include consideration of alternative markets that might have emerged. Market monitoring systems should be put in place to capture prices, access to, availability and quality of commodities and services available. When possible, NS should participate in joint market monitoring systems.

- **Financial Service Provider assessment:** NS should select the most adequate Financial Service Provider for the different implementation areas, building on existing FSPs mapping and assessments that might be available internally and externally (other humanitarian actors, government, Mobile Network Operator(MNOs), etc.). NS should reach out to other stakeholders and capitalize on as well as contribute to FSPs mapping and analysis efforts to evaluate existing and potential cash delivery mechanisms and FSPs/SPs (traders, banks, mobile service providers, remittances agencies, etc.). FSPs assessment should take into consideration different geographical areas in terms of presence and liquidity of agents, vulnerable population groups literacy and financial inclusion, Know Your Customer (KYC) regulations, etc. as well as consider that access and availability of financial services might be compromised by COVID-19 containment measures (i.e. reduced access, less physical contact, use of cash or electronic payment services, preventing large crowds, etc.) as well as by business continuity capabilities in contexts of lockdown.

- **NS capacity assessment in the implementation areas** – at province-/district-level: National Society should identify capacity gaps at both HQ and branch levels and ensure actions addressing these gaps are in place with the overall aim of enabling timely, accountable and effective CVA responses at these levels. NS staff and volunteer network can have access to remote online trainings and capacity building.

Response option analysis, modality and delivery mechanisms selection, as well as M&E and CEA

- The CVA feasibility assessment's results will be used to inform the most adequate COVID-19 response and delivery mechanism to achieve the specific objectives of the National Society (i.e. basic needs, food security, livelihoods, shelter, WASH, protection, etc.). Often, CVA responses with specific sectoral outcomes need to be complemented by other actions (i.e. cash for livelihoods inputs can be complemented by awareness sessions, trainings/capacity building sessions to improve productivity, etc.)

Project Agreement

- A CVA Response Project Agreement specific to CVA is signed between the host National Society and the potential funding partner. The project agreement is mandatory solely for CVA under IFRC COVID-19 Emergency Appeal while the other funding partners can decide on either to have a separate project agreement for CVA or include CVA into their existing project agreements with the HNS.