An Assessment of ChildFund’s Emergency Cash Transfer Project in The Gambia

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Acronyms

CO   country office
EFF  Eastern Foni Federation
HH   head of household
IDP  internally displaced people
LP   local provider
MM   mobile money
MMCT mobile money cash transfer
SIM  subscriber identification module
SMS  short message service

Terms

agent – a person or business contracted by Qodoo Financial Services in The Gambia to facilitate transactions for mobile money users/clients on scheduled times and days; can be community-based or mobile

beneficiary – received mobile money through the project

cash – bank notes and coins that an agent can immediately access to meet customer demands to sell (cash out) electronic money

cash in – the issuance of electronic money on the Qodoo Mobile Money System following the exchange of an equivalent amount of cash given to an authorized agent by the customer

cash out – the redemption of cash on the Qodoo Mobile Money System following the exchange of an equivalent amount of electronic money given to an authorized agent by the customer

community mobilizer – Eastern Foni Foundation staff member based in project communities who works directly with beneficiary families

electronic money or e-money – the monetary value in the Qodoo Mobile Money account representing an equal amount of cash that may be redeemed through an agent

float – balance of physical cash that a cash out agent can immediately access to meet customer demands to sell (cash out) electronic money

mobile money cash transfer – a movement of value that is made from a mobile wallet, accrues to a mobile wallet, and / or is initiated using a mobile phone
non-beneficiary – did not receive mobile money through the project (but received other benefits from ongoing ChildFund programs in their community)

Qodoo Mobile Money Service – the cash in, cash out and other services which result in the acquisition or redemption of money on the Qodoo Mobile Money System and includes analogous services such as SIM card replacement, customer registration, customer care management, etc.

Qodoo Mobile Money System – the proprietary technology platform operated by Qodoo Financial Services in The Gambia to provide mobile money services

QPower – a service on the Qodoo Mobile Money platform that allow users to buy prepaid electricity tokens directly from funds in their mobile cash accounts

technical ambassador – a volunteer from project community who is identified and trained by Qodoo to provide technical support on a volunteer basis
1. INTRODUCTION

Background

In The Gambia, political turmoil following the presidential elections in December 2016 led to an estimated 150,000 internally displaced people (IDP). A number of families in communities where ChildFund operates hosted IDPs, taking in an average of six IDPs for almost one month. The additional people strained household resources, prompting ChildFund to plan an emergency response to protect the welfare of children in affected families.

ChildFund and its local implementation partner, the Eastern Foni Federation (EFF) initially planned to deliver food commodities. As the context of the emergency and the needs became clearer, we decided instead to design a livelihood stabilization to deliver unconditional cash via mobile money cash transfer (MMCT) to provide the fastest relief and the greatest flexibility to beneficiaries.

The Emergency Cash Transfer Project in The Gambia had three objectives: (1) to support the basic household needs and provide economic stability for 100 families from six communities for three months (during implementation, this period was extended by two additional months to help head of households (HHs) graduate into some form of investment activities beyond livelihood stabilization; (2) to learn how to use mobile technology to deliver cash to affected families, including in hard to reach areas; and (3) to create opportunities for children to continue their education and stay healthy. ChildFund has previously used mobile money technology to successfully deliver services in Kenya and Zambia.

Study Objectives

This study presents an assessment of the project’s design, effectiveness, sustainability, relevance, with a special focus on the program design, including strategies and mechanisms used. Specific learning questions include:

**Effectiveness**: To what extent have the project objectives been met? How effective was the use of mobile technology? What unintended benefits have been achieved due to the use of mobile technology?

**Relevance**: Is the innovation of cash transfer project delivery model using mobile technology liked by the beneficiaries? Was the cash able to stabilize the economic status of the families?

1 Source: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency
2 ChildFund piloted the use of MMCT to deliver direct financial assistance to beneficiaries in Kenya in 2015. As of December 2017, ChildFund is using MMCT to deliver 92% and 70% of all direct financial assistance in Kenya and Zambia, respectively. ChildFund has also piloted the use of MMCT in Sierra Leone but a project review revealed several challenges that need to be addressed before it implements a wider application in the country.
Should the mode of giving cash to the beneficiaries be changed to better utilize other available options within the area?

**Sustainability:** To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support the continued implementation of the project? Can the project be scaled up using the same model?

Research conducted for this study consisted of focus group interviews with individuals directly involved with implementation, including 11 managers and staff from ChildFund, 7 managers and staff from EFF, 4 managers and staff from Qodoo, 6 community mobilizers, 6 technical ambassadors, 2 community-based agents (both shop owners), and 1 mobile agent; and analysis of household questionnaires with beneficiaries collected by community mobilisers from outside the project area; and analysis of EFF’s monitoring and summary reports and data collected from Qodoo’s online account management platform and available reports.

2. **PROJECT DESIGN**

ChildFund’s project team conducted a pre-analysis using guidelines developed by ChildFund following the successful implementation of a MMCT pilot project in Kenya. This analysis examined the availability of technical infrastructure, cultural perceptions that families may have toward mobile money banking, and the potential for financial efficiency, among other factors, to determine if MMCT would be an appropriate means of service delivery. Based on their analysis, the team determined that a livelihood stabilization project using unconditional cash transfers to HHs was the most suitable form of support to impacted households.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**ChildFund** led the project. Key responsibilities included developing the project design (in collaboration with EFF), providing funding, determining criteria for beneficiaries, and supervising budgeting, contracting, monitoring, and quality control.

**EFF**, the local provider (LP), furnished the project’s senior management team and community mobilizers. Key responsibilities included developing the project design (in collaboration with ChildFund), assessing beneficiary needs, maintaining beneficiary records, managing the cash transfers to beneficiaries, managing the community mobilizers, generating reports, and project monitoring. EFF’s community mobilizers provided information to communities on beneficiary selection criteria, the type of benefits they were going to receive, and the rationale behind the cash transfer project. They also facilitated interaction between Qodoo’s field agents, community-based cash out agents, and community members, and responded to requests for assistance, such as guidance on how mobile money could be used.

**Qodoo Financial Services in The Gambia** hosted an autonomous web-based, mobile money platform and set up and provided EFF with access to this platform. They also set up, trained, and coordinated agents, EFF staff, and technical ambassadors, sensitized beneficiaries, provided and facilitated the
distribution of QCell-compatible SIM cards, activated mobile money accounts, and assisted network optimization with QCell.

**QCell** provided the mobile network. As a third-party independent service provider, they were responsible for infrastructure investments for network coverage but were not part of any direct service in the project.

**Beneficiary Selection and Benefits**

EFF compiled an initial list of 660 families that 1) had ChildFund-sponsored children and 2) were impacted by IDPs. Community Association Committee members, supported by the project’s community mobilizers (who provided technical support) reviewed the initial list against a set of criteria to prioritize MMCT benefits to 100 households in six communities with a strong and urgent need for support, prioritizing households

- that hosted a greater number of displaced people
- without a reliable source of income
- that had not received direct financial assistance from ChildFund on a frequent basis
- with a female HH
- with more than five children
- without livestock.

To participate and receive the MMCT benefit, beneficiaries needed to have access to a mobile phone. Beneficiaries who did not have their own phones were able to borrow them from family members, friends, or neighbors. (As noted above, Qodoo provided QCell-compatible SIM cards to beneficiaries as needed.)

From February through June 2017, beneficiary households received D2,000 (US$42.00) via MMCT on a monthly basis. This amount is equivalent to the cost of an average food basket in The Gambia. Beneficiaries were notified that money was available through a short message service (SMS) text message and could then withdraw money from a cash out agent or make a mobile money transaction.

To mitigate potential friction between households selected to receive MMCT (beneficiaries) and households that were not selected (non-beneficiaries), EFF offered other services to households not included in the cash intervention. These included basic training on small business entrepreneurship and life skills; tuition payment for children’s education; garden tools and inputs; building materials; furniture; start-up capital for income generation projects; and, in one community, safe drinking water. Several of these interventions were carried out in collaboration with SOS Children’s Villages.

**Mobile Money Cash Transfer Process**

EFF collected and uploaded beneficiary data into Qodoo’s mobile money management platform. This data included the name of the village, community association, and HH, household code, identity type
(national ID, Gambian or foreign passport, voter registration card, alien card, or refugee card) and number, mobile phone number, and internal ChildFund case number.

Next, on a monthly basis:

- EFF transferred D254,000.000 to Qodoo electronically. This amount is the sum of the amount disbursed to beneficiaries plus a service charge of D54 per D2000 transferred. There was a three-day period before Qodoo could access these funds, due to the project using a bank which is not affiliated with Qodoo’s network. EFF paid a bank charge for each transfer.
- Qodoo converted the cash float into a mobile money float and notified EFF of the updated status.
- EFF notified the community mobilizers to initiate a payout to the HH’s phone account.
- The community mobilizer uploaded the float distribution to the HH’s Qodoo account.
- The HH received a mobile notification that funds were available.

Training and Technical Support

Qodoo conducted training sessions to support project implementation. One-time sessions, planned in consultation with ChildFund and EFF, were held for:

- EFF management and staff on Qodoo’s MMCT platforms and process
- Community mobilizers on MMCT process and guidance on how to provide outreach and support beneficiaries
- Technical ambassadors on topics such as how to resolve issues related to SIM card registration, using a mobile phone, MMCT transaction management, cash-out activities, account management, account balance checks, reducing risk of cash theft or loss, and QPOWER purchases; Qodoo also provided a leaflet to the technical ambassadors with step-by-step instructions on each of these issues.

HHs received training and ongoing technical support from community mobilizers and technical ambassadors. HHs also relied on technical ambassadors and used their mobile phones to provide feedback on emerging issues.

Project Monitoring and Quality Control

Community mobilizers planned to conduct monthly home visits and prepare monthly reports to ensure that: beneficiaries hosted IDPs; the system was actually effective delivering benefits to the targeted beneficiaries; funds transferred to Qodoo were converted to e-money for disbursement; and beneficiaries received money through the cash-out agents. However, these actions did not take place as planned due to other project activities. Instead, EFF conducted a midline review and held two reflection meetings in March 2017 with 30 people (including project beneficiaries and staff from EFF and ChildFund) to share implementation successes, challenges, and lessons learned. EFF staff also conducted HH interviews during implementation to track emerging impacts.
3. RESULTS

Between February 1 and June 30, 2017, the project delivered D2,000 (US$42.00) per month to 100 HHs impacted by IDPs. Asked to identify how they used the cash, HHs cited three categories most often—“Food” (80%), “Education” (47%), and “Health” (17%). See Figure 1 below for all responses.

**Figure 1: How Beneficiary HH’s Chose to Use Cash (N= 100)**

Beneficiary HHs shared positive feedback about their experience with the project:

As Kemo Jallow noted, “I used to find it difficult to solve multiple issues at the same time but thanks to Eastern Foni for providing me this great opportunity to be able to take care of the following. The financial support provided to me in February, March and April was cumulatively used on purchasing
clothes and shoes for children and food for the family. I also used part of it to pay for wife’s medical bill. My children’s educational needs were also taken care of.”

Ousman Baldeh emptied his store in order to host IDPs. “I am indeed much grateful to the Federation for bailing me out of this difficult period I was faced with. For me, nothing is pleasant on earth when my store is out of stock. EFF has made me bold enough to face my children at all times because they will not cry for hunger for now.”

Yafye Kujabi, who had been sick for two years, said “I got to a point when I could not proceed with my treatment due to financial constraint. God so good, I received the cash assistance and used part to pay for my medical bills while the balance was spent on food for the family. I have now recovered and wish to convey my sincere thanks to EFF.”

4. **ASSESSMENT**

**Project Design**

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**What Worked Well**

EFF had direct linkage to both Qodoo and beneficiaries without day-to-day involvement of ChildFund. This arrangement sped up administrative aspects such as preparing payment sheets, monitoring the delivery of the cash, and strengthening local capacity.

Tasking Qodoo to manage all technical aspects, including technical training, worked well because they knew the technology best. They were able to identify solutions such as recruiting and training young, tech-savvy ambassadors and providing leaflets with guidance on how to troubleshoot technical issues.

**Areas to Strengthen**

The project faced acute challenges with the cash-out agents who were disincentivized by their low commission rates (D20 per cash out), a lengthy reimbursement process, and time and transportation costs incurred travelling to Qodoo’s office to receive their commission and principle cash. Because of these issues, the agents cashed out just eight beneficiaries over five months, totaling D32,000 or 3.2% of cash benefits distributed to beneficiaries.

The idea of community-based technical ambassadors is good but their role, relationship to service providers, and motivation to contribute their time on a volunteer basis without compensation needs more clarity. One ambassador who felt they should receive compensation from Qoodo decided not to participate.
The use of a mobile agent poses great risk to the project as there is neither insurance nor assurance that cash transferred by Qodoo to the mobile agent will reach the intended beneficiary.

**Beneficiary Selection and Benefits**

*What Worked Well*

The concept of cash transfers which empowers people to help themselves by making their own decisions towards financial empowerment and sustainability.

Community mobilizers reported that benefits offered to non-beneficiaries helped to defuse social tensions while facilitating links with groups such as microfinance credit unions.

*Areas to Strengthen*

There were discrepancies in criteria translation and definition among the community mobilizers. No specific tool or process was defined for the actual application of criteria at the community level to means test legitimate beneficiaries, rendering second level verification and validation difficult.

A defined set of beneficiary criteria and an established beneficiary verification process reduces potential tensions within the community and protects project staff by reducing the perception of favoritism. In this case, the project team consulted relief history and school enrollment records for verification purposes. However, in a large-scale emergency, such lapses could damage relations between the project staff and the community, undermine the objectivity of the LP, and threaten the success of the project. Also, using relief history as part of criteria should be applied with caution as it may lead to possible exclusion of qualified HH.

Due to time and manpower constraints, EFF was not able to include a beneficiary graduation criterion either during project design or implementation. This omission complicated further reprogramming choices and caused friction when the project decided to qualify the same 100 beneficiaries for a second round of assistance. This decision was questioned by some community leaders and members since the initial list of 660 households did not include all qualifying households.

**Mobile Money Cash Transfer Process**

*What Worked Well*

Based on this pilot, MMCT requires less time and effort and minimal supervision compared to providing cash for gifts for children. There are fewer risks to the local implementer and community mobilizers because they are no longer required to handle physical cash. EFF felt that
these benefits offset any fees and that they were able to deliver equal impact to children and HHs with same value of cash resources.

Data management and business-to-business operations—setting up accounts for beneficiaries and transferring money from EFF to Qodoo—went well. EFF successfully uploaded all beneficiary data on to Qodoo’s platform (an occasional delay in the monthly electronic transfers of funds from EFF to Qodoo was due to poor internet connectivity). Project staff valued the opportunity to use new platforms.

Community mobilizers reported increased trust between themselves and HHs because it utilizes a direct cash transfer without involving an intermediary to handle the cash.

All HHs surveyed (100%) reported that they liked using mobile money, citing reasons such as easy to access, confidential, and cost efficient (time convenience). Beneficiaries did not need to own a mobile handset to access cash. Around 85% of beneficiaries had a SIM card but borrowed a mobile phone to make transactions.

Nearly all HHs surveyed (95%) found the QCell system easy to access when they required it. HHs also appreciated the added value of a bonus credit from QCell on their SIM card which they could share or use to make calls. The range of items purchased with the mobile money (see Figure 1) indicates that MMCT gave HHs the flexibility to decide how to spend the money and that they used the funds on items that fell within the project’s intended scope of support.

MMCT eliminated costly travel to a bank and minimized bank and transfer fees.

**Areas to Strengthen**

Due to QCell’s limited mobile network coverage in two of the six communities served, about 15 beneficiaries (15%) were required to walk between four and five hours’ round trip (8 to 10 kilometers each way) to access MMCT services.

Beneficiaries who experienced difficulties using the system required technical support on a range of areas, including how to:

- Register a SIM card
- Activate a mobile cell account
- PIN code management
- Access the mobile cell network
- Access MMCT benefits, e.g., cash out dates, times, and locations
- Send money on a phone
- Purchase mobile phone credit
- Purchase QPower (electricity credit)
Training and Technical Support

What Worked Well

Project beneficiaries were able to call EFF staff and technical ambassadors to follow up on general issues. The mobile phones thus functioned both as the means of service delivery and as a monitoring and feedback tool.

MMCT service delivery created new learning opportunities for community mobilizers. One example was the call for community mobilizers to support gender inclusive HH decision-making for women and children. This learning opportunity offered a healthy challenge to the community mobilizers and the project’s management team.

Areas to Strengthen

Improved training and support on Qodoo’s cash transfer management platform so that the EFF can generate more robust reports.\(^3\)

Project Monitoring and Quality Control

Areas to Strengthen

Clear reporting expectations and robust reporting requirements were not established.

While EFF generated high-level transaction reports from Qodoo’s platform, these did not include detailed information that could have been used to identify and mitigate issues. Valuable data capturing access frequency, volume, and asset disposal were underutilized. This data could be used to mitigate issues and improve implementation.

Based on the initial agreement between ChildFund and EFF, ChildFund did not have access to EFF’s financial management system on Qodo platform and was unable to monitor the project in real time or independently verify that the MMCT actually reached the intended beneficiaries. As a result, ChildFund’s role was limited regarding process management, monitoring, and quality control. An option to consider is to provide training and access on the platform to ChildFund.

Beneficiary verification was not planned for and there was no process to verify the final beneficiary list. In this case, due to the small size of the pilot project, the team used school enrollment records, the midline review, and beneficiary testimonies to verify target HHs. However, in a large scale emergency, such lapses would potentially cause community social relations issues, bring into question the objectivity of the LP, and threaten the success of the project.

\(^3\) According to Qodoo, reports from the Mobile Money platform are restricted to who was paid, how much, how many times, whether payment was successful, etc. Due to legal limitations, Qodoo cannot provide information such as account balances, transaction history (cash out, creditor, QPower purchases, transfers), etc., unless there is written consent from the beneficiary.
Monthly home visits and reporting activities were planned for the project, however, due to demands from other project activities, EFF was unable to fully execute the monitoring plan. Information collected from a midline review, two reflection meetings, and HH interviews.

Effectiveness

*To what extent have the project objectives been met? How effective was the use of mobile technology? What unintended benefits have been achieved due to the use of mobile technology?*

Based on a survey of beneficiary HHs, the project succeeded at helping to support basic household needs because beneficiaries used the cash to primarily pay for food and education, the key intended outcomes. Of 68% of children that had health needs during the project, 66% received care from a community healthcare worker or nurse. In addition, beneficiaries gained increased access to mobile technology and—for some—decreased travel time to access funds. EFF learned how to use mobile technology to deliver cash to affected families, including in hard to reach areas, and identified aspects that worked well and areas to strengthen.

Relevance

*Is the innovation of cash transfer project delivery model using mobile technology liked by the beneficiaries? Was the cash able to stabilize the economic status of the families? Should the mode of giving cash to the beneficiaries be changed to better utilize other available options within the area?*

Beneficiaries appreciated the intervention and it helped to stabilize their economic status during a challenging period. While MMCT service delivery offers comparative advantages, based on this pilot, ChildFund may consider changing the implementation strategy to address issues such as:

- the transaction fee was high compared to credit unions, which do not charge a transaction fee
- the QCell mobile network was not accessible in some communities
- and the cash-out agents sometimes did not have sufficient cash on hand to execute payments.

These costs are offset by the absence of service or administrative fees to beneficiaries and reduced travel time for beneficiaries who might need to travel further to access a credit union.

Sustainability

*To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support the continued implementation of the project? Can the project be scaled up using the same model?*
The operational model with EFF and Qodoo and the back-end financial systems worked well and could be sustainable. However, this model of MMCT relies on the availability of cash-out agents with sufficient cash on hand to execute payments and access to a mobile cell network to succeed. Both areas need to be strengthened to scale-up.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- To facilitate the transition between relief-recovery and development using cash as an instrument, we need clear criteria for participating in the program based on either humanitarian needs or development objectives. If the same intervention spans a transition from relief to development, we need to see which HHs meet the different criteria and possibly change the selection over time. For example, depending on the type of emergency we are responding to, for the recovery phase, we might target HHs specifically who need to rebuild damaged homes, plant new crops, etc. Also for a longer-term intervention, we should explore ways to link participating HHs with larger-scale social protection programs run by the government. Or, if that is not possible (maybe because the government program only works in urban areas), apply similar criteria (e.g., amount of cash, frequency of distribution, etc.) consistent with the government’s practices.

- Provide local implementers with a clearly documented process for means testing and qualifying beneficiaries. These tools will also help in the beneficiary verification processes. Clear beneficiary criteria and a verification process protects staff, avoids favoritism, and reduces tension in the project environment.

- Integrate a secondary method of verification into the control process such as beneficiary list verification to limit risks and avoid transfers to an incorrect beneficiary account.

- Using past relief history as part of criteria should be applied with caution as it may exclude qualified HHs.

- Follow-on programming should be informed by a community-wide reassessment to go beyond HH already benefiting.

- Ensure that a sufficient number of cash-out agents are available in the target communities. Expectations for their services should be detailed in a contract. The project might explore using existing project savings groups or local small businesses to fill this gap.

- Providing ongoing community-based technical support to HHs to assist new mobile phone users and trouble-shoot MMCT technical issues is critical to achieving sustainability.

- The idea of having technical ambassadors is good but their role, relationship to service providers, and motivation to volunteer their time should be clarified. One possible way to incent volunteers could be to provide free mobile credit. The project should consider following up with the ambassadors to explore ways to increase their motivation and participation.
• LP staff should receive advanced training on the online platform to monitor the project, make evidence-based decisions, and provide project data to ChildFund. In future projects, ChildFund staff might also be trained so that they can monitor the project as well.

• Deeper discussion is recommended on the cadence and process to produce monitoring reports, how these reports will be used to support decision-making, and additional training to support these activities. For example, Qodoo’s platform can generate at least three different types of customized reports that could be used as powerful management tools.

• Community mobilizers expressed several concerns related to the service delivery approach. One concern was over the increased freedom given to HHs and whether children’s needs would be prioritized. Another fear was that as HHs made decisions on how to spend the cash, the relationship that community mobilizers have had with HHs would be affected. A third concern was that, with HHs taking on more responsibility for how to spend the money, community mobilizers are less able to measure the level of child participation.

• The Central Bank of The Gambia has imposed a maximum balance of D10,000 (US$210) on mobile accounts. Payments that exceed this amount must be split into separate payments, incurring multiple transaction fees. Beneficiaries should also be advised to cash out or spend the funds from one transfer, before receiving another to the same account. Future MMCT programs in The Gambia should consider this factor in the initial budgeting and cost assessment.

• At the end of project, consider holding a stakeholder reflection and post-project review to capture learning and close out processes initiated during the project.