



CRS' study on NFI needs for women highlighted that *pagnes* (cloth) were in high demand due to their varied uses: from transporting items during displacement, as clothing for adults and children, and covers for water and food. Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl/CRS

Democratic Republic of Congo

DISPLACED AND RECENT RETURNEE HOUSEHOLDS
INVITE RECOVERY IN EASTERN DRC (DRIVE)
INTERNAL CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

Location:	North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Katanga provinces
Disaster/conflict date:	Multiple conflicts since 1996
Project timescale:	May 2014 - July 2015 (14 months)
Affected population:	2,506,639 individuals in targeted area
Target population:	13,000 households
Modality:	Flexible, per market context
Cost:	US\$75
Project budget:	US\$1.8 million for food and nonfood item needs



RESPONSE ANALYSIS

The Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC, has endured multiple conflicts since 1996, including armed conflict in Eastern DRC during 2012 and 2013. In December 2014, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the DRC reported that the armed conflict had internally displaced 2.72 million people. For the next few years, over 58 percent of internally displaced people (IDPs) were in North Kivu province and 14 percent in Katanga province; the majority lived with host families. Displacement was frequent, unpredictable and difficult to track, and it also affected host communities whose limited resources became further stretched.

Catholic Relief Services conducted three needs assessments between September 2013 and January 2014, identifying food and nonfood items (NFIs) as the greatest needs. More than 80 percent of the population had poor food consumption scores on the World Food Program's (WFP) food security index, and displaced and recent-returnee households lacked sufficient access to essential household items such as cookware, blankets and water storage. Most households preferred cash and in-kind assistance to meet those needs.

Based on identified needs and the local market context—as well as feasibility, protection and security, and beneficiary preferences—CRS chose a cash-based response.

Nonfood needs

The NFI score card, a tool developed by the United Nations Children's Fund in 2007, assesses household material vulnerability by measuring the quantity and quality of NFIs owned by a household—such as jerry cans, casseroles, basins, work tools, mattresses, covers and clothing. Levels of need are ranked on a scale from 0 to 5 (5 = extreme vulnerability, 0 = no needs). The program's baseline studies indicate that the average scorecard was 3.54 for areas targeted by CRS prior to interventions, highlighting high

2.72 million

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

NFI vulnerabilities. Overall, 81 percent of interviewed households were vulnerable; 26 percent were acutely vulnerable and 55 percent were moderately vulnerable. Most frequently, households lacked key NFIs such as clothing, blankets and water storage containers such as jerry cans and basins; households frequently share these items or use them for multiple purposes. CRS' study on NFI needs for women highlighted that *pagnes* (cloth) were in high demand due to their varied uses: to transport items during displacement, as clothing for adults and children, covers for water and food to avoid contamination, blankets to keep warm and for various uses during childbirth.

Market context

A rapid market assessment showed that many markets were well-integrated and able to satisfy demands in NFI and food; however, in parts of North Kivu and Katanga, markets were small, remote and unable to supply all of the needed commodities, thus hindering beneficiaries from accessing them. Since vendors in most nearby markets were able to supply the variety of NFIs and food needed by returnee and internally displaced households, CRS determined that in most places a market-based approach was feasible through voucher fairs. Beneficiaries use vouchers from CRS to buy items (such as kitchen utensils and cloth) and food from selected vendors, with vendors then exchanging vouchers for payment from CRS. However, due to the ever-changing security context and the remote nature of some of the implementation zones, CRS developed a flexible approach for the program, tailoring the type of assistance provided to each particular context.

PROGRAM STRATEGY

CRS proposed the Displaced and Recent Returnee Households Invite Recovery in Eastern DRC (DRIVE) program to address basic needs of the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees and host communities. To meet households' daily food and NFI needs, households received a comprehensive food and nonfood items assistance package through voucher fairs or direct distributions. A secondary goal was to support the local economy's recovery. Finally, the DRIVE response integrated cash-for-work interventions to reinforce intra-community linkages, strengthen community assets and avoid further depletion of host community and host family assets.

Flexible approach

CRS' flexible approach required a continual cycle of market assessment and market monitoring to select a strategy that was most appropriate for each geographic area. DRIVE worked in phases:

1. Staff would first conduct a market assessment in the market of intervention, and other nearby markets, to determine the most appropriate response modality for food and NFI assistance in the particular market and security context (in-kind assistance, cash, shop-based vouchers or voucher fairs).

2. CRS and partner organization Caritas would implement the program for 3 to 4 months in one geographic zone, and then move to another vulnerable and affected zone. Staff would then repeat Step 1.
3. Staff would continue to monitor NFI and food prices in key markets during the course of implementation and prepare to make changes to the program if markets or security contexts shifted.

Voucher fairs

CRS and Caritas determined that a voucher fair was the most appropriate strategy in four of the five targeted geographic zones. Markets were functioning in project areas, but not all markets supplied all necessary goods. However, vendors in nearby markets often supplied those goods not available in local markets. In this context, CRS determined that organized fairs would:

- Provide a diversity of supplies by organizing vendors from a variety of nearby markets.
- Work through local markets, thus contributing to economic recovery.
- Lessen the risk of inflation or stock ruptures in local markets by drawing vendors from nearby markets and increasing competition.
- Enable beneficiaries the flexibility to choose the NFIs and foods they needed most.

Program adaptations

CRS retained the possibility for direct distribution when voucher-based assistance was not possible. Over the course of the programs, CRS made a few program adaptations based on local context; these included adding new vendors to ensure competition, and to increase the diversity of products based on beneficiaries' preferences.

Program goal and objectives

Vulnerable households in conflict-affected communities in Eastern DRC have improved quality of life:

- IDP and returnee households in Eastern DRC have restored essential nonfood household assets.
- Returnee and host family households in Eastern DRC have increased economic capacity.
- IDPs and returnee households in Eastern DRC have increased food security.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Partnership

CRS implemented the program in partnership with Caritas Kilwa-Kasenga, Caritas Goma and Caritas Manono, with funding to CRS from the U.S. Agency for International Development's Food for Peace program and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance.

Beneficiary selection

The DRIVE program identified the most vulnerable communities through a multisectoral needs assessment, and then carried out household targeting to identify families most in need of NFIs and food to receive vouchers or in-kind assistance. Staff used an innovative NFI scorecard to assess material vulnerability: the resources available to households to cope with a threat and meet their basic needs. Using the scorecard, project staff quantified possessions of key NFIs (weighted on a scale of 0 to 5, with a score of 5 signifying extreme vulnerability) and food security levels (using the WFP's Food Consumption Score and Coping Strategies Index). They linked the score with food vulnerability criteria using an intangible value assessment methodology, which determined household food security, NFI needs, social vulnerability and household status. The program

prioritized women and children because they were most likely to be vulnerable.

The DRIVE program committed to serving a general geographic region rather than specific communities due to the volatile security context and changing needs; areas that were stable and safe could quickly become violent as military and rebel group operations continued in Eastern DRC, resulting in frequent and large displacement and returnee movements. The program identified villages based on the following criteria:

- Affected by a recent crisis or armed conflict.
- Comprised of at least 500 to 1,000 displaced and/or returnee households in the past 12 months.
- An average NFI scorecard of 3.5 or higher.
- Limited accessibility due to surrounding conflict and/or poor road infrastructure.
- Poor food security (food consumption score of 28 or lower).
- The geographic area receives assistance from another humanitarian actor, and a support gap remains for at least 1,000 households.

Value of cash grant

CRS and Caritas consulted beneficiaries in focus group discussions to assess the types of NFIs needed. Each household received a US\$75 voucher to buy NFIs and a US\$45 voucher to buy food commodities at organized fairs. In the event of direct distribution of goods, they would have a cash value equal to the vouchers.

Cash distribution

CRS and Caritas used a flexible approach to NFI and food delivery, depending on market conditions, beneficiary preferences and the feasibility of holding voucher fairs. Where feasible, CRS prioritized a market-based approach to support the local economy through local vendors and goods. Suitable vendors set up stalls at the venue and received payment for the vouchers at the completion of the fair through checks, mobile money or money transfer agencies depending on the local context and security level. Items available for purchase with NFI vouchers included wool blankets, tarpaulins, warm clothing, emergency shelter materials, hygiene items and kitchen supplies. Fairs also promoted access to specific shelter equipment to allow for construction of additional temporary shelters and/or the expansion of existing shelters to allow for larger, partitioned sleeping quarters. During food fairs, beneficiaries could buy key staples such as maize, cassava, rice, beans, oil and salt.

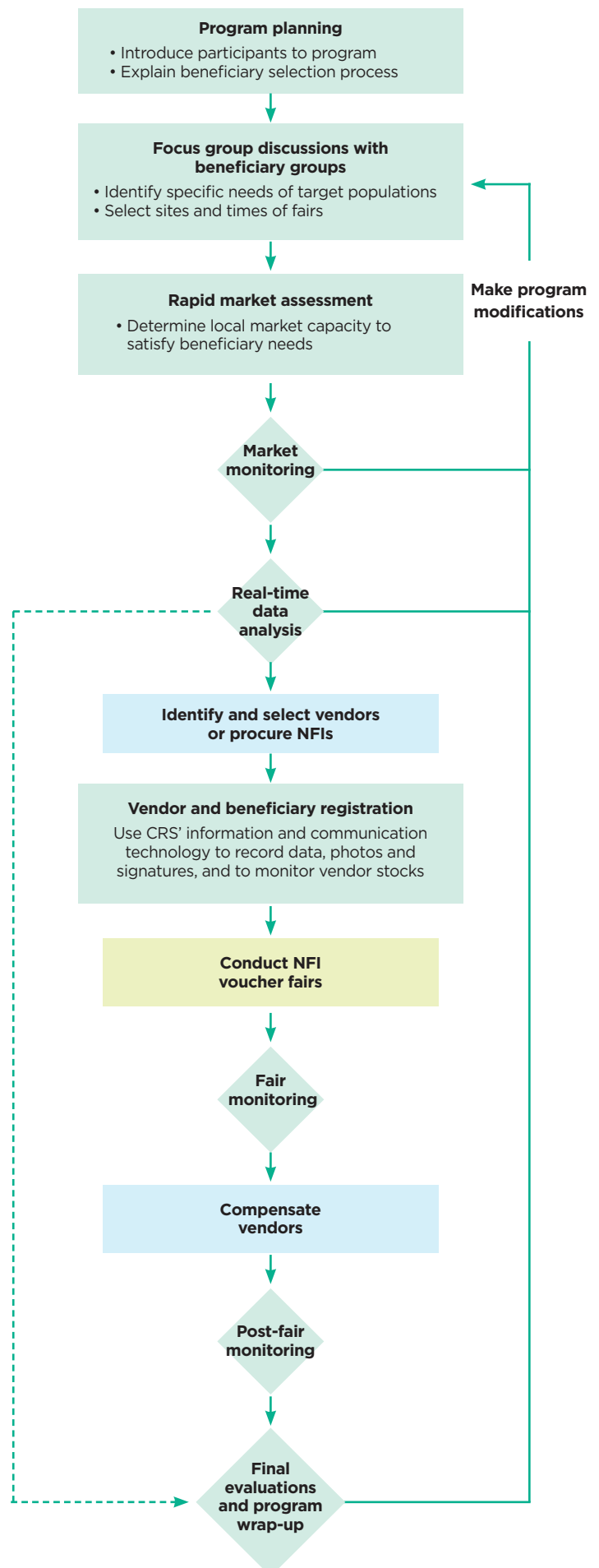
Protection and security

CRS and Caritas shared with communities the general findings of the intangible value assessment and the process of ranking vulnerability. DRIVE teams addressed community feedback and concerns before finalizing the beneficiary list. Focus group discussions with beneficiaries also indicated their preferences for the dates and locations of the voucher fairs. Finally, to meet women's and children's needs, CRS ensured availability of products for women and children at voucher fairs.

On the day of the fair, staff gave special attention to people with heightened vulnerability (disabled, infirm or elderly) by setting up priority queues for beneficiaries with special needs, hiring daily workers to assist families during the activities and setting up complaints and feedback mechanisms including a suggestion box and feedback desk. Start and end times for fairs were decided by village leaders and beneficiaries, taking into account any special protection considerations for women and children, such as closing fairs early to allow beneficiaries from the furthest communities adequate time to commute home in daylight hours.

Process

The chart illustrates the implementation process.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The DRIVE team worked in each village for 1 to 3 months to assess needs, monitor markets and provide an appropriate response package. The teams used principles from the Cash Learning Partnership's [MARKit: Price Monitoring, Analysis and Response Kit](#) to ensure that CRS was doing no harm to local markets. CRS and Caritas used MARKit to collect market price data and monitor significant changes before, during and after the intervention, enabling staff to:

- Ensure NFIs and food prices during the fairs were reasonable and in line with local markets.
- Assess project impact on local markets in terms of price, availability and other indicators.
- Understand if any program modifications were necessary to ensure healthy market function.

The team used monitoring results to adjust the program design and improve future interventions. The program used the following monitoring and accountability mechanisms:

- Prioritized monitoring and evaluation aiming to collect indicators quickly and efficiently, per emergency standards.
- Registered vendors and beneficiaries using CRS' information and communications technology for development (ICT4D)—and automatically centralized, aggregated and analyzed vendor and beneficiary data. The project also used paper backup systems in case there were complications.
- Took photos of beneficiaries and recorded

signatures to corroborate identity if questions arose on the day of the voucher fair. Project staff also collected key information for a second household representative in case the beneficiary could not participate on the day of the fair.

- Monitored the quality and quantity of NFIs and food commodities on-site to guarantee beneficiaries' satisfaction and ensure they met cluster specifications.
- Interviewed a random sample of beneficiaries exiting the fairs to record purchases and appreciation on fair organization, prices and quality of products. The project used the data to report on fairs and generate statistically viable trend analysis and conclusions.
- One month after a fair, project staff visited a random sample of beneficiaries in their homes to assess assets and determine the NFI score and the food consumption levels of the household. Project staff compared this to the baseline NFI scores collected during beneficiary registration to assess changes.
- Emphasized participation rates of women, female-headed households, older beneficiaries and people with disabilities.
- Analyzed data monthly to identify emerging trends and challenges in project implementation. This type of analysis also enabled staff to make real-time project decisions, in case the program needed to shift due to a changing context.
- Conducted an intangible value assessment at the end of the project for each assisted community and compared the results to the initial baseline.

RESULTS

CRS and Caritas supported over 13,000 households, assisting 4,057 IDP and 9,740 returnee households with NFIs, through vouchers or direct distribution to restore their lost assets.

Voucher fairs provided necessary household assets. Voucher fairs took place in Walikale, Kato, Mutendele and Mukanga with a total of 423 vendors, of whom 121 were women and 302 were men. Of these, 65 sold food commodities only (15 percent), 264 sold NFI only (62 percent) and 94 (22 percent) sold both NFIs and food. There was one large-scale distribution that supported 4,225 families in Kamango.

Voucher fairs injected cash into the local economy. NFI purchases totaled US\$717,900 and food purchases an additional US\$830,745, all of which represented gains to the local economy. In

addition, CRS distributed 4,225 standard NFI kits and 12,675 half food rations.

Beneficiaries were satisfied with the support.

DRIVE's first-year final evaluation showed that 80 percent of beneficiaries were very satisfied with overall voucher fair activities, and 20 percent were satisfied. In the case of direct distributions 79 percent of interviewed households were very satisfied and 21 percent satisfied. The majority (95 percent) reported having the NFI purchased or received through DRIVE activities three months after the distribution or the voucher fair; 4 percent reported having received the necessary information on upcoming DRIVE activities.

Voucher fairs provided adequate choices and were accessible. The availability of NFIs and food was adequate according to the majority of respondents,

and the average NFI score for assisted households improved from 3.98 before the project to 3.03 after. Overall, 78 percent of beneficiaries considered fair prices to be normal compared to local markets, whereas 22 percent found them higher. Most (66 percent) beneficiaries walked less than 5km to reach the site, 33 percent walked 5km to 10km, 13 percent walked 10km to 15km, and 18 percent walked more than 15km.

Direct distribution supported households in vulnerable areas. Direct distributions took place in Kamango in December 2014. Only four villages received 4,225 standard NFI and hygiene kits due to armed conflict in the area, links of local vendors to military groups and the inability of local markets to meet an increase in demand.

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

Advantages	Challenges and risks	Actions and recommendations
Voucher fairs help support the local economy.	Vendors were unable to procure items of acceptable quality or had an insufficient supply of high-demand items; some items were not always readily available in local markets or were of a lesser quality.	CRS bought items directly and worked with local transport vendors to guarantee timely shipment to the voucher fair sites.
	High demand for items led to an increase in prices during voucher fairs in some cases. Closed fairs and open market voucher fairs caused price inflation in local markets.	Voucher fairs relied on market forces to determine fair prices. Staff set ceiling prices only in exceptional cases. CRS conducted a detailed analysis to ensure that local markets were not overstrained. Where necessary, CRS bought items in larger, provincial capital markets or in neighboring countries, or invited vendors from surrounding areas to participate in fairs. These mediating actions acted to maintain fair market prices at fairs.
	Potential for fraud through the injection of fake vouchers during fairs.	Each booklet of vouchers had a barcode and each voucher had a unique serial number associated with the voucher booklet and linked back to the beneficiary. Other mitigating actions included rigorous verification and sensitization of beneficiaries, and close monitoring of fair activities.
	Due to security and logistical constraints, it was not always feasible and safe to transport cash to pay vendors directly.	When possible, CRS made payments to vendors from the CRS offices via checks; alternatively, DRIVE paid vendors using local money transfer agencies.
Voucher fairs enable beneficiaries to choose specific NFIs.	Ensuring that beneficiaries did not use Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance funds committed to NFI support to buy food or pay for non-NFI needs or services. Similarly, ensuring that beneficiaries did not use Food For Peace funds committed to the purchase of food to cover other nonfood needs.	Vouchers restricted purchases to essential household and shelter items (NFI vouchers) and food (food vouchers). The project conducted rapid market assessments and consulted local communities using DRIVE's feasibility study checklist before choosing the appropriate response strategy.
	Ensuring beneficiary and vendor security on the day of the fair.	CRS coordinated with local United Nations security forces and the Congolese military (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo or FARDC) to ensure secure routes to fair locations and a security presence at the fairs. Local authorities and village leaders were responsible for creating a secure environment on the day of the fairs. CRS did not employ armed security; if they could not ensure security at fair locations, CRS postponed activities or moved the fair to another nearby, safe location.
	Overcrowded fairs are difficult to monitor and can lead to theft of merchandise and vendor collusion in the market to increase prices.	Project staff limited fairs to 500 beneficiaries per day and permitted a maximum of one family member to accompany the voucher-holder into the fair.

Advantages	Challenges and risks	Actions and recommendations
A flexible approach allowed the project to select a strategy that was most appropriate for each geographic area.	Target areas could become inaccessible due to renewed conflict and violence.	DRIVE had two fully staffed and operational teams to offer assistance, and was able to shift activities to another geographic location until the target area became safe.
	Access to marketplaces was limited in remote areas.	CRS did not rule out direct distributions in remote areas isolated from markets. In these cases, CRS bought materials from the most viable local suppliers of quality NFIs and food. Through cash-for-work activities to rehabilitate key communal infrastructure such as roads and bridges, DRIVE assisted vulnerable host communities and improved accessibility.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The voucher approach offered flexibility.

Each population's needs are different; returnee households often prefer income-generating activities to address their NFI needs, whereas IDPs might require more relief NFIs. The voucher approach offers flexibility for families to fulfill their specific needs. In general, the most vulnerable IDPs and host families need both NFIs and food assistance; thus, integration between the two sectors is most appropriate.

The household targeting process was effective but lengthy. DRIVE interviewed all recently displaced and returnee households within a village and administered a targeting tool to identify the most food-insecure and NFI vulnerable households. Although this method of household targeting enabled DRIVE to identify and assist the most vulnerable families through a transparent process, it was extremely time- and resource-consuming and limited communities' participation.

Maintaining a flexible approach helped address different needs. The possibility that target beneficiaries could be displaced during the course of the project made it difficult to complete activities like cash-for-work and vouchers. Maintaining the ability to shift timeframes and transfer options can help address needs in a volatile context.

Restricted access limited the project's ability to respond to needs. Restricted access of project teams to target areas due to volatile security

situations and poor infrastructure (especially during the rainy season) significantly increased operational costs. Where possible, projects should favor market-based approaches that can help reduce operational costs, and should design budgets to take into consideration expenditures linked to the transportation and distribution of goods in cases where voucher fairs are not deemed appropriate.

Monitoring and sensitization could help to reduce the risk of inflation. During a number of voucher fairs, beneficiary households found prices to be higher than local market prices. To avoid risk of inflation in the future, DRIVE teams will increase on-site price monitoring and will sensitize vendors and beneficiaries by informing them about price ceilings (i.e., the maximum they should buy or sell key NFI and commodities for), the need to bargain for goods, and sanctions for vendors who charge beneficiaries above price ceilings.

Procuring NFIs and food well in advance could reduce delays. There could be a delay in the response time for direct distribution of NFIs because of the need to apply for tax exemption. For future programming, consider procuring essential NFIs and food well ahead of time to ensure rapid distribution and to maintain program flexibility. The program will also have a contingency plan that includes strategies to increase vendor numbers or other supply solutions in order to ensure that fairs effectively support local markets without price increases or other negative impacts.