Emergency Food Assistance in the 2014 Liberian Ebola Epidemic
A Review of Beneficiary Perceptions
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Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 4
II. BACKGROUND............................................................................................................................. 4
IV. FOOD ASSISTANCE MODALITIES............................................................................................. 8
V. ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 9
VI. BENEFICIARY PERCEPTIONS..................................................................................................... 10
VII. GENDER DYNAMICS.............................................................................................................. 17
VIII. PROTECTION CONCERNS ....................................................................................................... 17
IV. MODALITY COMPARISON ........................................................................................................ 18
X. LIMITATIONS ............................................................................................................................ 19
XI. FUTURE RESEARCH ................................................................................................................ 20
XII. CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................... 21
XII. APPENDIX A: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONS, CASH ...................................................... 24
XIII. APPENDIX B: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONS, AGRICULTURAL INPUT VOUCHER ............ 28
I. INTRODUCTION

In response to the 2014 – 2015 Ebola epidemic in Liberia, the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) partnered with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement an emergency food assistance program. These programs sought to address beneficiaries immediate and pressing food needs through the distribution of agricultural input vouchers, unconditional cash transfers, and mobile money. The United Nations’ World Food Program (WFP) ran parallel programs, distributing locally and regionally procured (LRP) and imported food stuffs to the most vulnerable communities.

As these programs prepare to close, USAID-FFP partnered with graduate students from The George Washington University (GWU) to conduct a review of beneficiary perceptions of these programs. These qualitative, semi-structured interviews were meant to provide FFP with an understanding of how beneficiaries’ perception of the assistance varied according to the modality they received. These insights will inform future emergency food assistance programming in emergency situations, thus enabling USAID and its implementing partners to better meet the needs of their beneficiaries.

II. BACKGROUND

The 2014 – 2015 Ebola epidemic incited a severe health crisis in three West African countries. Liberia’s weak healthcare infrastructure was unable to contend with the crisis. The country experienced 10,666 reported cases of Ebola virus disease (EVD), and 4,806 deaths.\(^1\) Compared to Sierra Leone’s 3,589 deaths, and Guinea’s 2,536, Liberia was among the hardest hit.\(^2\)

During the crisis, day-to-day life all but ground to a halt. The Liberian government put entire communities under quarantine, and advised citizens to avoid crowded areas. A confirmed death due to EVD often made the entire village go into quarantine for a minimum of 42 days. For most people living outside of the capital city of Monrovia, meeting basic needs became infinitely more complicated. Border closures meant to prevent the spread of EVD placed a severe constraint on economic activity, especially for a country in which imports account for 80%\(^3\) of food consumption. Food

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2 Ibid.

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USAID-FFP Implementing Partners

Save the Children’s Food Security and Livelihoods Program provided $4.6 million in cash transfers to 25,000 EVD affected individuals in Bong and Margibi Counties. Their agricultural input voucher program reached 4,000 farming households.

PCI Global’s Protect and Empower for Ebola Resilience (PEER) program provided cash transfers and agricultural input vouchers in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties, in an effort to mitigate the increased food insecurity and livelihood disruption brought about by EVD.

The Economic Recovery from Ebola for Liberia (EREL) program, implemented by Mercy Corps provided cash transfers and agricultural input vouchers to 30,000 households in Montserrado County.

ACDI/VOCA’s Liberia Ebola Recovery and Resilience Project (ERRP) provided cash transfers and agricultural input vouchers to EVD-affected communities in Bong County.
prices skyrocketed, and many markets shut down altogether. People’s limited mobility and the social stigma associated with EVD meant farming one’s own food became nearly impossible.

Food security was already a challenge in Liberia pre-EVD. The epidemic exacerbated an already precarious situation, leaving many households with decreased income and purchasing power. USAID-FFP and WFP’s emergency food assistance programs sought to close the basic needs gap many Liberians faced. USAID tripled its food security assistance in Liberia, from $20.2 million in 2014, to $65.8 million in 2015 and partnered with ACDI/VOCA, Project Concern International (PCI Global), Save the Children, and Mercy Corps to launch its mixed-methods emergency food assistance program. These programs helped ensure that beneficiaries were able to meet their most urgent food needs in a time of crisis.

III. Literature Review

United States food assistance dates back to 1812 when President James Madison sent emergency food aid to earthquake victims in Venezuela. Feeding programs became part of American philanthropic efforts during the 1920s Russian famine and an integral component in our foreign policy in the form of the Marshall Plan following WW II. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one of the largest food aid providers worldwide and USAID’s Food For Peace (FFP) food assistance programs consistently comprises a main component of USAID’s budget. FFP combats global hunger and malnutrition by providing emergency food assistance to those affected by conflict and natural disaster. FFP has provided food assistance to approximately 3 billion people in 150 countries worldwide since its inception over 60 years ago. FFP programming includes development programs, emergency programs, and nutritional support programs.

In 2010, FFP enacted the Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP) in response to the highest priority emergency food security needs. EFSP which is funded using International Disaster Assistance funds under the Foreign Assistance Act provides grants for the procurement of local food commodities, cash, or food vouchers. Up to $300 million is available through this account and it allows for a quicker dissemination of food. Title II food aid is still the primary source of food assistance, but EFSP is utilized when Title II food aid cannot arrive in time or cash or vouchers are a more appropriate market response. Altogether in FY 2014, USAID provided 77 EFSP grants, totaling $865.6 million in 39 different countries.

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8 Title II In-Kind Food Aid: Title II of the Food for Peace Act provides in-kind commodities and associated costs. This program comprises the majority of USAID food assistance programming.
10 Food for Peace awarded 64 EFSP grants in 32 countries through its IDA base funding of $314.2 million. It provided an additional 13 grants in 7 countries with the additional $551.4 million IDA/Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) funds.
including emergencies in Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Niger, and Kenya. To date, the EFSP has assisted 57 million people in over 41 countries.

Food assistance can be provided by means of various modalities including:

a) conditional or unconditional cash transfers,

b) vouchers for food,

c) in-kind donations (food shipped from the US or elsewhere),

d) local and regional procurement of food.

The particular food modality that is utilized in a response effort is dependent on a number of factors including the needs of the situation as well as the interests of the US. Type of disaster or conflict, time and monetary constraints, and the functionality of markets can all dictate the appropriate modality. FFP recently produced a document titled “Food For Peace: Voices from the Field” to highlight 60 years of work and stories of success from their various interventions. In Turkey, USAID teamed up with the World Food Program (WFP) to provide electronic food vouchers to Syrian refugees which allowed them to purchase food at local supermarkets. USAID explains in their report how this modality benefits the local economy as well as allows individuals to regain a sense of normalcy—all while significantly reducing costs of feeding refugees.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, USAID utilized a multi-faceted response by combining cash transfers with US in-kind food. USAID’s cash grant allowed WFP to purchase 2,400 tons of rice directly from the Government of the Philippines and purchase high-energy biscuits from Dubai. In addition, in communities where agricultural markets remained functioning, unconditional cash transfers were granted directly to individuals. Two days after the typhoon made landfall, USAID authorized an airlift of 55 tons of meal-replacement food bars as well as over 1,000 tons of rice positioned in a warehouse in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Once the humanitarian need shifted from emergency relief to early recovery, USAID implemented work-for-vouchers programs for non-vulnerable groups.

However, the decision to utilize particular modalities over others is one that is still hotly contested, particularly in the wake of 2014 FFP restructuring under the Obama administration. The Obama administration proposed decreasing the amount of US purchased commodities to increase targeted cash transfers which would strengthen the depth of USA food assistance response without increasing the budget. Humanitarian organizations such as Oxfam, WFP, and Save the Children, are largely in favor of

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14 Voices from the Field, 9.
15 Voices from the Field, 9.
16 Voices from the Field, 9.
17 Targeted unconditional distributions were provided to vulnerable groups like the disabled or elderly.
such a suggestion, citing millions more would be fed with no additional costs to the taxpayer. Catherine Bertini, former executive director of the World Food Program, believes not only would the new system decrease costs “dramatically” by minimizing shipping costs, but would also have a positive impact on farmers in recipient countries. Food aid reformers believe that cash transfer programs offer more benefit by citing more cost effectiveness and efficiency, less disruption to local markets, support of local and regional economies, and allowing individuals to retain a sense of normalcy and autonomy. Some studies have found that cash-based programs as well as local and regional procurement of food can result in a 25 – 50% savings all while delivering the food 11 to 15 weeks faster.

However, anti-food aid reformers believe a more traditional approach is actually more cost-effective and serves mutually beneficial interests. In a statement released April 2013, James Henry, chairman of USA comments on the proposed changes to the Food for Peace Program. He says, “This successful program is now threatened by overwrought political efforts to provide cash donations rather than American grown and delivered food, changing longstanding assistance into a payment scheme that places the world’s most vulnerable populations at risk.” According to Henry, USAID conducted studies display that traditional FFP aid (meaning food shipped from the US and provided in-kind) is 78% cheaper per ton of food delivered than the cash transfer approach. Lawmakers from farm states and industry lobbies reject the changes arguing that the current system allows for a trade surplus which benefits the US economy by providing extra revenue and more jobs. Accordingly, they argue changing the system could also result in market disruption. ACDI/VOCA, a lead USAID implementer, notes “that the current system works and local procurement is not necessarily the most effective way to deliver food to impoverished nations.”

In the context of Liberia, US development assistance has been provided since 1952. During Liberia’s two civil wars, the second of which ended in 2003, US money was generally provided under the United Nations umbrella as humanitarian relief to displaced populations and vulnerable groups. Post-conflict Liberia however, has seen an increase in funding. In 2004, Congress provided $200 million in international disaster and famine assistance funding which has allowed the US to have a more active role in the reconstruction of the country.

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
26 This funding is not specific to the Office of Food for Peace.
27 Food Assistance Fact Sheet-Liberia.” Country Fact Sheets. USAID. 8 Sept. 2015.
While the country is agriculturally leaning, having a favorable climate, rich biodiversity, and vast natural resources, Liberia remains a highly food insecure country.\textsuperscript{28} Years of civil war, and low economic and social investment coupled with recent disease outbreaks has left most of the country in poverty. The Ebola epidemic wreaked havoc on the country’s health system, economy, and food security situation. Quarantines and restrictions on movement disrupted the flow of trade, increased food prices, and reduced household income and purchasing power.\textsuperscript{29} Food security actors in Liberia conducted an analysis in 2015 that estimated, “Between June and August 2015, an estimated 1.46 million people will likely face stressed levels of acute food insecurity, while an estimated 720,000 people will face crisis levels, requiring humanitarian assistance to prevent malnutrition, protect livelihoods and safeguard household assets...”\textsuperscript{30} As the number of Ebola cases move closer to zero, economic activity is slowly increasing. However, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has said that it will take the economy at least two years to recover.\textsuperscript{31} FFP continues to provide food assistance to vulnerable populations directly affected by the Ebola outbreak through a mix of in-kind assistance, LRP, cash transfers, and agricultural input vouchers in an effort to bolster food access, household purchasing power, and market recovery. In FY 2015 alone, the Office of Food for Peace contributed $61.2 million (an increase of approximately $40 million from the year before) to Liberia with over 70% of the funding stemming from the Emergency Food Security Program in response to the Ebola epidemic.\textsuperscript{32} As the Emergency Food Security Program enters its next wave of existence, the need for review and assessment of its programming is essential to its future success.

IV. FOOD ASSISTANCE MODALITIES

The multiple methods USAID-FFP and its implementing partners employed provided the research team with a diversity of beneficiary experiences on which to draw. In-kind food provisions were managed by the WFP, and were distributed in communities facing the most restricted access to food assistance. This assistance took two forms: locally and regionally procured food, and food imported from the United States.

**Agricultural input vouchers** were provided to farming households in order to facilitate their access to vital agricultural inputs. Implementing partners who deployed this modality worked with Liberian vendors of agricultural inputs to organize fairs in various communities. Beneficiary households registered with these programs received vouchers which they could use at these fairs to purchase the goods they needed. The initial vouchers ranged in value from $40 USD to $75 USD. Some programs provided a second voucher many months later, but with a smaller monetary value. Vendors provided vital inputs such as seeds for crops, and tools such as wheelbarrows, cutlasses, and hoes. Vouchers had the dual benefit of utilizing the market resources already in Liberia, and offering beneficiaries a range of options from which they could choose.

\textsuperscript{28} “Liberia.” Food Security Portal. IFPRI. 2012.
\textsuperscript{29} “Food Assistance Fact Sheet-Liberia.” Country Fact Sheets. USAID. 8 Sept. 2015.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen. “Liberia will take two years to recover.” CNN. MSNBC. 30 Sept. 2015.
\textsuperscript{32} “Food Assistance Fact Sheet-Liberia.” Country Fact Sheets. USAID. 8 Sept. 2015.
Unconditional cash transfers took the form of either direct cash, or mobile money transfers. Cash was given in disbursement ranging from three to six depending on the program. Disbursements amount were between approximately $40 USD and $60 USD. This modality offered beneficiaries even greater choice in determining their most basic consumption needs, and empowered them to meet those needs as they saw fit. In communities that still had access to functioning markets, beneficiaries used the cash to mitigate the severe income constraints they experienced during the EVD crisis. Mobile money, although not a different modality, was a distinct distribution system of cash transfer.

V. ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY
The GWU research team used semi-structured qualitative household interviews to discern how women and men perceive the various food assistance modalities they received. Specifically, their goal was to understand how different modalities impacted:

1. household consumption preferences;
2. gender dynamics in the home;
3. mitigated or exacerbated protection concerns.

The research team began their assessment with desktop research on food security and emergency food assistance programs. The knowledge gleaned from this research informed the questions included in the interviews. The researchers initially planned on one-on-one surveys and focus group discussions with individual beneficiaries. However, it became evident that household interviews were better suited to the knowledge they were seeking to obtain. By speaking with an entire household, the interviewers were able to obtain a more nuanced picture of household consumption changes across modalities. Closed-ended one-on-one interviews would have limited the information beneficiaries could provide. The qualitative, open-ended nature of questions meant beneficiaries could provide deeper insight into how their day-to-day lives were impacted by the modality they received. As well, household interviews allowed the research team to observe interactions between different members of the household.

The methodology design began as a combination of cluster and stratified sampling. The research team opted to visit one county for each implementing partner; for feasibility purposes, the county closest to Monrovia was often selected. Over the course of the fieldwork, the team visited four villages within each county. Interviewees were selected by the implementing partner based on the type of modality they received. However, convenience sampling was also a methodology adopted by the team during the fieldwork. On multiple occasions, the pre-selected beneficiary(s) was not present during the research team’s visit, so the team was compelled to interview another available beneficiary.

Data from the interviews were analyzed through content analysis and pattern matching. All transcripts or notes from the household interviews were put in a qualitative coding software such as Dedoose in order to identify trends. By identifying frequently used themes we aimed to capture an understanding of various perceptions of the different type of food modalities. Through content analysis and pattern matching we can ensure the validity of our findings.
The primary interviewees were the male and female heads of household, although many households were single, female-headed households. When interviewing spouses about gender dynamics in the home, the team interviewed men and women respondents individually, due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions. Over the course of eight days, the team interviewed sixteen beneficiary households affiliated with each of the implementing partners. In total, the team conducted sixty-four interviews across Bong, Margibi, Montserrado, and Bomi counties.

The average household is comprised of six people, with many living with extended family members, such as adult children, grandparents, and grandchildren. The vast majority of beneficiaries were farmers, although some also operated micro-enterprises. The average interviewee was 44 years old, with some as young as 19, and as old as 80.33

VI. BENEFICIARY PERCEPTIONS

In-Kind Food Assistance
The WFP provided beneficiaries with in-kind food assistance during the EVD crisis. In-kind food assistance was provided during EVD, but while the epidemic was in a declining state. All beneficiaries who received USAID-FFP funded food also received in-kind food assistance through WFP. Although there were slight regional variations, most people received rice, oil, beans, cornmeal, or some combination of these foods. These foods are similar to what they usually purchase, which usually include rice, cassava, cornmeal, oil, beans and fish. However, food provided by WFP was more nutritious. For example, WFP distributed corn and vegetable oil to beneficiaries but they usually eat palm oil because it is cheaper. As for the measurement of nutrition, we asked beneficiaries in our interviews "what did you used to eat" before the assistance and "what did you eat after the assistance", if they included any explanation related to protein or greens, such as cassava greens, we noted that their consumption of nutritious food increased. If they stated that they purchased the same exact types of food (even when pushed to list

33 The average household size is 6 with min 1 and max 15. The average age of interviewees is 44 with min 19 and max 80.
When the vouchers came, farming was easier than ever before." - Beneficiary

In general, beneficiaries responded positively when asked about the in-kind food assistance. Many reported that it was the only way they were able to feed their families during a time of market closure, quarantines, and general anxiety about mobility. Surveys indicate that the in-kind assistance helped with individual beneficiary, as well as community resilience. Many reported that they shared their cooked food they received with others outside of their household, because entire communities were suffering, not just individual households and not everyone had received the assistance.

**Agricultural Input Vouchers**

As noted above, agricultural input vouchers gave beneficiaries access to a wide array of vendors selling seeds and tools needed for their farms. This modality was intended to help offset the potential greater losses to farmers at the next harvest.

Beneficiaries who received agricultural input vouchers reported great gains when they pooled their resources and knowledge to maximize the benefits from vouchers. ACDI/VOCA took a unique approach in its voucher program, the communal farm, seeking to maximize the benefits of shared knowledge by establishing a communal farm, and providing beneficiaries with training on using the tools and seeds that were new to them. Notably, the communal farms are an exception. ACDI/VOCA had previously established a development program on the ground and that is why this was so successful. An emergency feeding program would not be able to have these results without that established history.

**Seeds**

Reactions to the seeds vendors provided at agricultural fairs were mixed. Some communities experienced success with their seeds, while others reported that their seeds failed. The variance in the success of these seeds may be due to the diversity of input vendors whom implementing partners recruited to participate in these fairs. The beneficiaries held many beliefs as to why their crops did not successfully grow. Among them being the seed vendors mixed low quality seeds with high quality seeds, the seeds were expired, the sun had been particularly strong this past year, or that the seeds provided by the vendors were not local to the soil.

For the most part, beneficiaries bought seeds for crops with which they were already familiar such as rice or peppers. Some used the agricultural fairs as an opportunity to branch out into new crops, reporting that they sought to purchase crops that would be more profitable when sold at the market, switching from corn production to bitter ball farming, for example. For these farmers, the vouchers facilitated their access to inputs they had previously been unable to afford.

However, the failures of some of these seeds was enough that 60% of beneficiaries reported that, given the opportunity in the future, they would not buy the same crops. Chief among their complaints were that the opaque seed packaging prevented them from inspecting the quality of the goods they were
purchasing, which many believed contributed to their crop failure. While they did appreciate the increased variety of seeds and tools the agricultural fairs offered, they reported that they would prefer to patronize their local market, where they could be assured of the quality of the inputs they were purchasing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops for Consumption</th>
<th>Cash Crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rice</td>
<td>• Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Corn</td>
<td>• Bitter ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pepper</td>
<td>• Watermelon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pepper</td>
<td>• Greens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bitter ball</td>
<td>• Eggplant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Watermelon</td>
<td>• Cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eggplant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cucumber</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Tools**

Agricultural tools people generally purchased are cutlasses, diggers and shovels. Attitudes towards the tools provided at the agricultural fairs were more positive, with more beneficiaries reporting that they would purchase the same tools from those vendors in the future. While they reported that the quality of the tools available to them at the fairs was of similar quality to what they were used to, some indicated that the increased variety of tools provided by the vendors was more attractive than at the market. Others reported having a voucher modified their consumption preferences when it came to tools. By removing a financial barrier, the voucher enabled farmers to invest in tools which, previously, had been too costly for them.

The increments in which the vouchers were provided seemed to impact how farmers chose which tools to purchase. For example, beneficiaries of PCI Global’s program reported that the manner in which the monetary value of the voucher was divided affected their purchasing choices. Beneficiaries reported foregoing purchasing a tool if the combination of the vouchers monetary value allowed a portion of the voucher to remain unused. Some farmers reported that, while they were happy to be able to purchase these inputs for their farms, they also felt that many of the tools they ultimately selected were something they could have borrowed from friends or family. Conversely, some tools that they did desire to purchase, such as rain boots, rain coat and wheel barrow, were not as readily available for all partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools Most Frequently Bought</th>
<th>Tools Most Frequently Wanted But Unavailable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cutlass</td>
<td>• Rain boots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Digger</td>
<td>• Fertilizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hook</td>
<td>• Pesticides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Axe</td>
<td>• Watering can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rain boots</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Slashing iron</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Household Consumption Preferences**

When querying households about how the cash transfer impacted their consumption, the researchers focused on three primary areas: quantity of food purchased, type of food purchased, and daily...
consumptions. Beneficiaries answered questions about their habits in all three areas before the EVD epidemic, during the crisis, and immediately after. Only 32% of beneficiaries reported purchasing more nutritious food when they began receiving cash. When asked why, they responded that they preferred buying foods with which they were already familiar.

**Unconditional Cash**
Beneficiaries received varied instructions from the implementing partners regarding what the cash was meant for. Those who felt they had more flexibility in determining their spending, based on these instructions, used the cash for more varied purposes, such as business investments. They also tended to feel more secure about their food and financial prospects after the program’s end, as they had sought to make investments that would pay off in the long-term. Those who believed the implementing partner’s instructions gave them less flexibility, on the other hand, tended to limit their consumption to food, and some had greater concerns about how they would meet their needs upon the program’s end.

Beneficiaries reported changes in their spending patterns over time. By far, the most common spending categories were food, school-related expenses, micro-enterprises, health-related expenses, clothing, and shelter. During their first disbursement of cash, beneficiaries tended to prioritize expenses related to food and education. The second disbursement tended to go to food, medical expenses, and investments, while the third was spent primarily on food and business investment. As noted in the section on consumption modifications, while the categories of spending did not change for most beneficiaries, the amount of money they were able to dedicate to these did shift.

**Evolution of Purchases by Disbursement**
Though varied with demographic and financial situation of the households, the purchases people made changed as they received more cash disbursements. Households tended to prioritize food purchases during the early disbursements but, as time passed, began diversifying their spending. Besides food, households prioritized spending on business and farming investments; school-related purchases and fees for children; clothing; healthcare costs, and shelter. For those who began businesses, the assistance either enabled them to grow their enterprises, or provided the seed capital needed to create the business.

Figure 2.
Figure 3.

**Beneficiary Spending - Individual Case I**

Figure 4.
Quantity of Household Consumption
An overwhelming majority (79%) of beneficiaries reported that after receiving cash, they increased the quantity of food they purchased. Whereas households used to purchase rice by the cup, receiving cash enabled them to purchase large, 25 kilogram bags of rice. Others would buy larger quantities of dried fish, rather than small quantities of fresh fish.

Interestingly, 52% of respondents either decreased their daily food consumption, or maintained it at the pre-cash transfer levels. Most reported eating once a day at the height of the EVD crisis, and others reported an average of two meals a day. When asked why they bought more food, but did not begin consuming more food, respondents reported that they purchased larger quantities of food because doing so was cheaper, and enabled them to better plan their family’s consumption for longer periods of time. Purchasing larger quantities of food while maintaining or decreasing daily consumption was thus a way for households to ensure their own food security in the medium term. This theory is borne out by the fact that beneficiaries who did not purchase larger quantities of food reported that they did not want to use the money in one fell swoop. It thus appears that the cash transfer did not initiate notable changes in consumption patterns, but rather enabled beneficiaries to continue consuming as they had prior to the Ebola epidemic, and to do so more securely.

Figure 5.
Ensuring the sustainability of the cash they received was of primary concern for most beneficiaries. Those who did not save the money, or spend it all on food to manage their consumption reported using the assistance to facilitate business investments. Some beneficiaries would upgrade their position within a value chain in which they were already participating. Many people who used to cut palm began processing activities to manufacture and sell palm oil. Others purchased goods at markets that they would sell at mini-markets in their villages. Beneficiaries were frank in acknowledging that they understood that, since the epidemic was over, the assistance would soon stop. Their main concern was using the money in a way that would enable them to continue to reap benefits from it, rather than using it solely for immediate consumption.

Mobile Money
Although mobile money has gained vaunted reputation in development, it does not seem to be well-suited to the Liberian context. Most beneficiaries did not have cell phones, and reported that they could not reliably access one if they needed to. For those who did have phones, limited network coverage posed serious obstacles to those seeking to access their cash transfer via a mobile phone.

Beneficiaries who did receive mobile money reported that it unnecessarily complicated what should have been a straightforward process. Some did not know how to use a mobile phone for the purpose of storing and retrieving money, with one beneficiary even reporting that her neighbor lost all of her money because she was so unfamiliar with the technology. Women specifically reported that, because their spouses controlled the family cell phone, receiving mobile money would hamper their access to the assistance, as it would force them to go through their spouse any time they wanted to make a purchase.
Furthermore, some beneficiaries seemed to feel more autonomy over their transfer if it was given in the form of cash rather than mobile money. Some reported fears that a vendor might steal their money when they sought to redeem their mobile money, while with cash they alone were in control of it.

VII. GENDER DYNAMICS

Dual-Headed Households
The primary area of inquiry relating to gender centered on household decision-making power over the modality. For dual-headed households, almost all beneficiaries reported making decisions about the use of the modality together. However, when interviewed individually, some women reported that their spouses tended to influence how they thought the family should use the vouchers or cash. Most stated that, in case of a disagreement, the spouses would discuss the matter and come to a decision together. When pressed, some women did indicate that they tended to defer to their husbands, but most reported that they were happy with the way their households used the assistance. For those who were not, their dissatisfaction stemmed from wanting to have more money to make additional purchases, rather than from any unhappiness with household decision-making dynamics.

One notable finding was that granting women physical access to the assistance did not translate into greater control over the use of the modality. Many of the partners sought to ensure women's access to assistance by only registering women as heads of households and beneficiaries. While this meant that women were responsible for physically retrieving the voucher or cash from the implementing partner, this did not mean that they had more say in its use than women in households where the husband was the registered beneficiary.

Single-Headed Households
Single mothers were a significant demographic in this study. The degree of perceived vulnerability varied greatly among the single-headed households interviewed. Women who received some degree of community support often tended to make long-term investment decisions such as cash crops or microenterprises. When asked about the extent of control they exercised over the use of the assistance, they reported control similar to those of husbands in dual-headed households.

Purchasing Influence
They were, however, more likely to report asking people outside of their immediate household for advice on how to use the assistance. Interestingly, some teenaged and adult sons in single female-headed households stepped into the male head of household role, advising their mothers on how they should use their cash or agricultural input voucher.

VIII. PROTECTION CONCERNS
Concerns about safety and security were a smaller consideration than initially expected. Most beneficiaries reported that their communities were close and tight-knit, so they had no concerns about anyone stealing their money. At most, they were more wary when walking to and from cash distribution...
points with large quantities of money. When going to the market, beneficiaries reported that they carried smaller quantities of cash and walked in groups, so they had less safety concerns.

The exception to this trend were single female-headed households. They were much more likely to express concerns about walking to and from cash distribution points, and keeping the money in their homes. One beneficiary reported that, because she did not have a man to protect her, she was concerned about people breaking into her home to steal her money. For one woman, her concerns were strong enough that she spent part of the assistance purchasing new, more secure locks for her house.

IV. MODALITY COMPARISON

When asking beneficiaries about their own preferences when it came to modality, responses varied by the context of the disbursement. Beneficiaries answered questions about which modality they would prefer before the EVD crisis, during the epidemic, and afterwards. The households we interviewed stated that prior to EVD, they would have preferred money because it would allow them to meet their various needs. They explained that they could pay for their children’s school fee or invest the money in their small business or farm. However, during the time of the EVD, the majority of respondents stated they would prefer food. They reported that with the quarantines, fears of large crowds, and market collapse, money would have been of little use to them. Food in-kind would meet their most urgent needs. The degree of their preference on food increased significantly. Some beneficiaries said we need food to survive first of all and then we will have the strength to work. Others explained that their children’s school fee was a priority, but school was not open during Ebola. However, a significant portion of respondents still maintained that they would prefer cash, even during EVD. Their reasoning was that food could be found, even if it meant lesser quality or lowering their consumption, but money had more uses. Those that preferred money even during EVD, tended to be very business oriented. As well, others who preferred money cited they would have used the money to buy medicine. Although, this varies with locations due to different health policy in various places. After EVD, money was stated as the most preferred modality as people are returning to their normal life. Throughout all three stages, vouchers were ranked as the least desired modality. Most respondents explained that cash was preferred because they could use the cash to purchase any agricultural inputs they needed. When prompted about the regularity of price fluctuations and the price of goods, and if vouchers provided a benefit, beneficiaries still maintained their preference for cash. When asked if there was ever a time when they would prefer a voucher, some respondents posited at the beginning of the planting season. The graph below depicts beneficiaries preferences for different modalities.

Figure 6.
When we break down the preference by demographic features, we noticed that more food insecure households\(^{34}\) are indifferent to modality preference (food vs cash) with a slight leaning towards food. Houses that perceive themselves to be more food secure, prefer cash because it allows them to meet other consumption priorities.

Beneficiaries who did not receive agricultural vouchers were likelier to prefer vouchers compared to those who actually received them. Many of the people that expressed a preference for vouchers are not farmers, but expressed in interest in doing farming because they believe it would be more profitable than their current trade. Figure 7 below explains how modality preference varies based on the type of modality that the beneficiary received.

**X. LIMITATIONS**

Major limitations of our study involve sampling size and sampling method. Although we had attempted to select a random sample of beneficiaries, due to constraints involving time, knowledge, and availability of beneficiaries we were ultimately unable to do so. Moreover, because we were only able to interview a small percentage of the beneficiary population, our data is not statistically significant. However, we recognize that the data collected can still play an important role in deepening the understanding of beneficiary experiences. A potential weakness of our methodology is that our findings may only be

\(^{34}\) We observed that the individuals who expressed more uncertainty about their level of food security were often more vulnerable, such as single mothers with young children or handicapped individuals.
internally valid. Since, our assessment will be on Liberian communities, and potentially only communities in a particular region of Liberia (this will be determined upon further discussion with our client), it remains possible that our analysis will not be generalizable to the wider region and remain valid only within the communities we assess or valid only within Liberia. As always, we are limited by an economy of resources that prevents us from interviewing as many people as needed. Moreover, our content analysis is limited by the availability of materials. The lifespan of the Emergency Food Security Program has been relatively short and therefore the number of written documents relating to it are very small.

However, the strengths of utilizing content analysis as a research method outweigh the negatives as it is a readily-understood, inexpensive research method that is only made stronger when coupled with interviews. In addition, pattern matching is the most appropriate research method for this project because it aligns with our research goal as well as our data collection strategy. By conducting interviews and surveys with numerous individuals, among different communities, the Capstone Team is attempting to find commonalities and trends among various groups. Therefore, pattern matching is the logical choice in order to link multiple interviews with a common thread in order to inform future programs.

XI. FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the limited time and scope given to this review there are several avenues for future research and more in-depth analysis that are recommended. For the WFP food transfer we propose a program to examine financing of large-quantity purchases of food and its impact on local markets. In regards to the agricultural vouchers, further review of the beneficiary’s perceptions of the agricultural training and quality of vendors would be useful for future food programs. The degree to which the community has on variety of tools and seeds offered would be a valuable follow-up. In regards to cash an examination of the success of the microenterprises and value chain upgrades over the next year to five years would be vital to assessing the sustainability of the program. Furthermore, an assessment of how participants use cash to seek medicine, whether it’s through traditional healers or to modern medical clinicians would be insightful. Finally, we recommend further comparing the benefits of multiple modalities. First, through assessing the path of family nutrition over time for those receiving the different modalities and then comparing modalities for the basis for an RCT study.

XII. CONCLUSION

The conversations the research team had with beneficiaries of USAID-FFP’s emergency food assistance program offered valuable insight that will be useful for future programming in similar contexts. Almost universally, beneficiaries reported that the assistance was vital for helping them meet their most basic needs in a time of community quarantines, mobility limitations, and market collapse. Indeed, cash was so successful in helping beneficiaries meet their basic food needs that they felt comfortable enough spending money on other priorities, such as school fees and business opportunities. Many beneficiaries reported high levels of awareness that the cash transfers would eventually end, and they sought to cope with this by making investments that would continue to pay dividends long after the programs ended. Investing in microenterprises or upgrading their existing enterprises position in a value chain was one of the chief ways in which they did this. Agricultural input vouchers empowered beneficiaries to meet their needs as food producers, not just consumers. Combining these modalities with cash transfers thus provided both consumption and production benefits. Future programs should draw on the lessons learned in this report to inform future programming when deciding which modalities are most suited to a specific context and beneficiary.
Biography


XII. APPENDIX A: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONS, CASH

Household Survey Questions: Review of Beneficiary Perceptions Of Emergency Food Security Programs in Liberia

Cash
Mobile Money
LRP
Implementing Partner: ___________________________
City, Village:___________________________
Household Number: ___________________________
Modality: ___________________________
Interview Date:___________________________
Time Start: ___________________________
   Time End: ___________________________
Interviewers: ___________________________
Survey Code: ___________________________

I. INTRODUCTION
● Introduce yourself and your group
● Introduce school and/or USAID project
   ○ Goal, objectives, reason, etc.
● Explain survey process and what the interaction will look like
● Ethics points and written consent form

II. OBJECTIVE
Determine how women and men perceive the various food assistance modalities’ ability to meet household food consumption preferences.

Identify perceptions of the modalities’ effects on:
● Consumption
● Food preferences
● Gender dynamics
● Protection

III. DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status (Husband, Wife #1, Wife #2, etc.)</th>
<th>Years of formal schooling</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Family Size and Number of dependents</th>
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IV. SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP QUESTIONS FOR CASH RECIPIENTS

1. What kinds of food assistance did you receive after Ebola? From who?
   *confirm cash for work or just cash or mobile money
   1.1 How many disbursements did you receive? When did you receive them? Were they before, after, or during WFP distributions?
1.2 Did what your purchase change with the different disbursements?
2. What were your most urgent food needs during the Ebola outbreak? How did the assistance help you meet those food needs?
   2.1 When did your local market shutdown? Did you feel secure walking with cash to a different market?
   2.2 Do you have any other sources of income? Adult children.
3. How did you spend the cash you were given? Tell us what goods or services you purchased with the assistance.
   3.1 What percentage of the cash went towards each product/service type?
   3.2 If purchased school tuition, uniforms, etc. Did the price of tuition go up once they started receiving cash?
   3.3 If you purchased medicine, how did you decide what to buy?
4. Was there anything else you wanted to purchase at the time? How did the assistance influence your ability to buy those things? (Direct beneficiary towards purchases related to food production, preparation, and/or consumption)
5. How, if at all, did the food you purchase change when you received the cash?
   5.1 Did you start purchasing larger quantities of food? Start planning long term?
6. Tell us about the process for going to physically pick up the assistance. Was any part of that process difficult for you? If yes, how so? (Probe for questions about convenience of receiving food, sense of safety in receiving and storing it).
7. Tell us about any security or safety precautions you had to take in your home as a result of the assistance. Why did you feel those were necessary?
8. Did you notice a change in prices for food after you received cash? How did it impact your ability to meet your food needs and preferences?
9. Are there any issues or concerns related to the assistance you want us to know about?

V. SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS - WOMEN
1. Tell us about how your household decided how to spend the cash. What was your role in that process? Why do you think that [i.e., their stated preference] did not occur?
   1.1 What was the process like for reaching a compromise on how you would spend the cash?
   1.2 Were you given any instructions on how to spend the cash?
   1.3 Do your older children help making decisions on how you spend the cash?
2. What, if anything, would you have changed about how your household used the cash?
3. Was there anyone outside of your household involved in deciding how you used the cash?

VI. SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS - MEN
1. Tell us about how your household decided how to spend the cash. What was your role in that process?
   1.1 What was the process like for reaching a compromise on how you would spend the cash?
   1.2 Were you given any instructions on how to spend the cash?
   1.3 Do your older children help making decisions on how you spend the cash?
2. What, if anything, would you have changed about how your household used the cash? Why do you think that [i.e., their stated preference] did not occur?
3. Was there anyone outside of your household involved in deciding how you used the cash?

VII. WFP-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS
1. Did you receive food during the Ebola crisis? Do you remember when?
2. What kind of food did you receive? Do you know who provided the food? (If usaid, then stop; If WFP/don't know, then continue) Do you think this food is local to Liberia?
   2.1 How many times a day did you eat before Ebola? During the WFP distribution? During the cash distribution?
3. What did you do with the food? (Was anyone outside of your family whom you share your food with?)
4. In what ways did the food you receive help you meet your most urgent needs during the Ebola outbreak? Was the food you received different from the food you would have wanted to buy?
5. We understand that you received direct food assistance, and the (cash/ag-input/mobile money). Tell us about which type of assistance you preferred, and why?
6. How much of the food you eat is what you grow vs. How much you buy from the market?
XIII. APPENDIX B: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONS, AGRICULTURAL INPUT VOUCHER


Agricultural Input Voucher
I. INTRODUCTION
● Introduce yourself and your group
● Introduce school and/or USAID project
  ○ Goal, objectives, reason, etc.
● Explain survey process and what the interaction will look like
● Ethics points and written consent form

II. OBJECTIVE
Determine how women and men perceive the agricultural input voucher’s ability to meet household food consumption preferences by providing high-quality seeds. Identify perceptions of the modalities’ effects on:
  ● Consumption
  ● Food preferences
  ● Gender dynamics
  ● Protection

III. DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
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<th>Years of formal schooling</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Households Size and Number of dependents</th>
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<td>Person 3</td>
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</table>

IV. SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP QUESTIONS
1. As a farmer, what were your most urgent agricultural needs during the Ebola outbreak? How did the assistance help you meet those needs?
2. Did you receive agricultural input voucher(s)? If so, what type and how frequently?
3. Who decided which crop to grow? Who decided how to use the voucher(s)?
4. How did you use the voucher? Tell us what goods or services you purchased with the assistance.
5. Was there anything else you wanted to purchase for your farm at the time? How did the assistance influence your ability to buy those things?
6. How, if at all, did the goods you purchase change when you received assistance?
7. Tell us about the process for going to physically pick up the assistance. Was any part of that process difficult for you? If yes, how so?
8. Tell us about how your household decided which inputs to purchase with your vouchers. What role did you play in that process? (Direct to the male and female head of household)
9. What kinds of crops did you plant using the agricultural inputs you received? Were these different from what you grew before you received assistance?
10. Who grows which kinds of food on your family’s farm? What do you do with the crops each of you grows?
11. Will you buy seeds from these vendors again?
12. Rank modality preference during and after Ebola.

V. WFP-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS
1. In what ways did the food you receive help you meet your most urgent needs during the Ebola outbreak? Was the food you received different from the food you would have wanted to buy?
2. We understand that you received direct food assistance, and the (cash/ag-input/mobile money). Tell us about which type of assistance you preferred, and why?