PROGRAM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY FOR EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

"USAIDizi VI"

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSI	Coping Strategies Index
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EOCD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ER	Emergency Response
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FFP	Food for Peace
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HH	Household
HHS	Household Hunger Scale
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
LLIN	Long Lasting Insecticide-treated Net
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PDU	Program Development Unit
RFQ	Request for Quotations
RMA	Rapid Market Assessment
RRMP	Rapid Response to Population Movements
SP	Samaritan's Purse
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
ToR	Terms of Reference
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

This reports presents the major findings of the final evaluation of the emergency response and economic recovery program "USAIDIZI VI," in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). To assist disadvantaged households (HHs) cope with displacement and loss, the program provided food and non-food items (NFIs), as well as agricultural inputs (improved seeds and tools) and agricultural training to the beneficiaries. Unless otherwise stated, the findings do not differentiate between individuals who received food through direct distribution, vouchers, or a mixture of both, and instead relate to changes in all modalities. There was also no control group for comparison in the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team, would specifically like to thank the following people for their generous contributions to the evaluation process: Deputy Country Director, Grant Analyst, Program Development Officer, Chief of Party, Food Security & Agriculture Program Manager, Database Coordinator and M&E Coordinator.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAIDizi program focused on addressing the emergency needs of conflict-affected HHs in the provinces of Ituri, Tshopo, Haut-Uélé, Bas-Uélé and North Kivu within DRC. The program intended to accomplish this goal by providing food and NFIs, as well as agricultural inputs (improved seeds and tools) and agricultural training to help disadvantaged HHs cope with displacement and loss. This report details the evaluation that took place from November 20, 2020 to March 18, 2021 concerning the sixth iteration of the USAIDizi program.

The program had both Emergency Response (ER) and agriculture components paired together, with the ER aimed at improving short term food access. Toward this end, the program applied a variety of modalities, mainly voucher fairs and direct in-kind distributions. For the voucher fairs, SP organized market fairs at which pre-selected and approved vendors sold their food and NFIs directly to the beneficiaries in exchange for vouchers of equivalent value, after which the program redeemed the vouchers from the vendors. Overall, the program aimed to provide food and NFI assistance to 52,500 HHs, as well as seeds, tools and agricultural training to 6,000 HHs in intervention sites across five targeted provinces.

During the post-distribution monitoring (PDM) component of the evaluation, the team interviewed 3,835 respondents; the sample consisted of 78% women and 22% men, with Rimba having the greatest proportion of women at 40%, compared to Wanierukula's 9%. Agricultural production was the respondents' main source of income with 44.7%, followed by cash for work and food for work, which contributed 33.3% and 14.6%, respectively, to HH income.

Purpose of evaluation
Samaritan's Purse was interested in understanding the effectiveness of meeting the immediate needs of HHs displaced by rapid onset emergencies through direct distributions or voucher fairs that provide both food and NFIs at the same time. Samaritan's Purse is also interested in understanding the effectiveness of responding to immediate NFI and food needs, while simultaneously reinforcing the host-community coping mechanism through parallel agriculture livelihoods and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions.

Evaluation methodology
Specifically, the evaluation applied the following strategies for data collection and analysis:

i. Desk review of relevant project documents, partners' assessments and databases.
ii. Interviews with SP senior management and cluster representatives.
iii. Interviews with key informants.
iv. Field visits to distribution, fair, and livelihood intervention sites.
v. Guided and structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiary communities including women, men, vendors and other key stakeholders.

Effectiveness of the program
The program also aided in the application of a number of modifications to agricultural practices which included a 43% improvement in access to seeds, a 77% improvement in access to farming equipment and a 32% rise in awareness about farming techniques. The majority of respondents indicated high levels of satisfaction across all PDMs, with an average of 80% of beneficiaries satisfied with the quality, 80%

satisfied with the contents of essential HH items, and 82% satisfied with the contents of WASH articles received. The Food Consumption Score (FCS) of the majority of HHs served at the various intervention sites improved from an average of 22.59 across all sites at baseline to an average of 45.39 across all sites at PDM. The evaluation noted a similar trend in the Coping Strategies Index (CSI), with most respondents registering a reduction in the use of negative coping strategies from an average of 50.70 across all sites at baseline, to an average of 12.22 across all sites at PDM.

The relevance of the program

According to OCHA, about 5.5 million people were living in internal displacement because of conflict and violence at the time of the USAIDizi VI implementation, with about 15.6 million projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2020.[1] As a result, the USAIDizi VI program was, and still is, both needed and extremely relevant, in terms of improving food security and dietary diversification, as well as improving HH asset ownership. In the program, HHs received coupons to use at voucher fairs which sold a variety of food and non-food items. According to interviews with both the program and procurement staff, the choice of voucher fairs and direct distribution approaches as the main modalities for the delivery of assistance in USAIDizi VI resulted from the prevailing environment of insecurity and limited financial setup, which did not favor cash transfer in the regions selected for intervention. The results from the FGDs suggest that embedding unconditional cash transfers within other modalities may have been an effective way to improve HHs' purchasing power and food security in emergency settings, while also giving them the freedom of choice, which increases with cash transfers.

Efficiency of the program

The evaluation gauged the program's efficiency according to the length of time it took to deliver the program, as well as whether the supply and distribution of goods and services took place in a complete manner. When the evaluation looked at each of these aspects separately, according to various interviews with staff and beneficiaries, the program was able to deliver most of the outputs including food, NFIs, agricultural seeds and tools distributed through fairs, as well as trainings, on time. In Kalunguta, Kamango, and Wanierukula, for example, the program delivered assistance within 60 days, 75 days, and 74 days, respectively, against an 81-day target for fairs and a 91-day target for direct distribution; however, instability slowed the response time in Bengamisa, resulting in beneficiaries receiving assistance after 93 days. Thus, there were delays in some areas, especially with the delivery of food, hygiene kits, and LLINs procured from neighboring countries. In a number of the discussions, the beneficiaries noted that SP did not provide them with mosquito nets and hygiene kits as had been announced during the targeting stage of the program. Interviews with staff from the operations and procurement departments revealed that the delays resulted from the complications posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which occasioned the closure of most international borders for an extended period, making it impossible for vendors to get their products cleared at the border on time. The closure of the international borders also made it difficult for SP to continue with supplier vetting, causing the cancellation of the vetting process altogether after quotations expired before the completion of the process, thereby occasioning a repetition of the entire procurement process once the borders reopened.

[1] https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/dr-congo-complex-web-humanitarian-needs-1-May-2020.

2. INTRODUCTION

Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It has excellent natural resources, such as cobalt and copper, as well as hydropower capacity, substantial arable land, vast biodiversity, and the world's second largest rainforest. Poverty is severe and prevalent in DRC; in 2018, the World Bank reported that 73% of the Congolese population, or 60 million people, lived on less than $1.90 per day (the international poverty rate), making DRC home to one out of every six people living in extreme poverty in SSA (World Bank, 2021).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been dealing with one of the world's biggest and most complex humanitarian crises for over two decades (WHO, 2018). People in eastern DRC, in particular, have experienced recurrent and prolonged humanitarian crises as a result of the long-term existence of local and international armed groups, as well as attempts by the national army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo - FARDC) to eradicate the groups (Bailey, 2014). Conflicts, epidemic outbreaks, natural disasters, and chronic underdevelopment have all contributed to these humanitarian crises. After a long and costly civil war ended in 2003, hopes soared, but the country has since seen intermittent waves of fighting, especially in the east (UNHCR, 2020). Between October 2017 and September 2019, the crisis' continued severity, a shortage of basic social services across the region and the country's ongoing armed conflict internally displaced 5.01 million people (UNHCR, 2020). According to OCHA's contributions to the DRC's 2021 humanitarian response plan, 15.6 million people in DRC needed humanitarian assistance at the start of 2020. The humanitarian situation in eastern DRC worsened in 2020 because of ongoing intercommunal conflicts, which were exacerbated by an outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu. Insecurity reduced income-generating opportunities, disrupted agriculture, displaced families, and limited humanitarian access in conflict-affected areas of eastern and central DRC, damaging food supply chains, hampering food production and creating food insecurity (USAID, 2020).

In this context, the Emergency Response and Economic Recovery Program (USAIDizi) aimed to meet the emergency needs of conflict-affected HHs in eastern DRC’s Ituri, Tshopo, Haut-Uélé, Bas-Uélé and North Kivu provinces.

2.1 Program Strategy

This sixth iteration of the project also helped to promote efficient and rapid response to the needs of conflict-affected populations in eastern DRC by improving food access, enhancing HH resiliency, and promoting economic recovery, the program also helped to promote rapid economic recovery of affected livelihoods and markets.

To achieve this goal, the program aimed to provide food and NFIs, as well as agricultural inputs (improved seeds and tools) and agricultural training to help disadvantaged HHs cope with displacement and loss. The program targeted areas that have high levels of insecurity and inadequate infrastructure, all of which obstruct market access.

The program began in 2014 and has now completed six iterations of intervention with staggered financing from the OFDA and FFP, with the latest phase having ended in March 2021. As the program adopted new goals and locations during implementation, it modified some components. The phase under consideration

focused on displaced people, needy host families, and returnees in North Kivu, Ituri, Bas-Uélé, Haut-Uélé and Tshopo Provinces.

The program's ER and agriculture components intended to improve food access in the short term rather than resolve long-term food security. It achieved this through a variety of modalities, mainly voucher fairs and direct in-kind distributions, with SP organizing pop-up market fairs at which pre-selected and approved vendors sold their wares directly to the beneficiaries in exchange for vouchers of equivalent value. Samaritan's Purse worked with participating vendors to ensure that beneficiaries were able to purchase locally preferred food, NFIs, seeds, and agricultural implements with the vouchers. The program would then redeem the vouchers from the vendors by paying them sums equal to the value of the commodities they sold to recipients, after the program had counted and verified the coupons.

The program has been designed with built-in flexibility regarding the intervention approach in each region, which is selected based on assessments. This flexibility is justified by the fact that needs, economies, protection, and preferences differ across areas where the program provides assistance, often even within the same provinces.

Overall, the program aimed to provide food and NFI assistance to 52,500 HHs, as well as seeds, tools and agricultural knowledge to 6,000 HHs in all five provinces. The program has four cross-cutting sub-sectors that help to balance the provision of emergency needs with the contribution of commodity and business facilitation to economic recovery.

i. Sector I: Shelter & Settlements (S&S)

The objective of this sector was to efficiently and rapidly respond to the needs of conflict-affected populations by facilitating access to S&S NFIs and Shelter items through direct kit distributions, fairs or cash transfer modalities. The program planned to provide a package that included kitchen items (pots, dishes, and utensils) and standard items like soap, clothes and mats, in addition to a shelter materials kit. Long-lasting insecticide-treated nets were also to be procured and included in the NFI package as a supplementary delivery alongside the voucher fairs or cash transfers. In its endeavor, the program chose NFI kit contents and a voucher approach in all of its emergency distributions, in accordance with the "Do No Harm" concept and as per the guidelines from the cluster chaired by OCHA.

ii. Sector II: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

To alleviate the suffering and promote the dignity of conflict-affected people, the program aimed to distribute WASH NFI kits alongside S&S NFIs and shelter products (tarps and ropes). Appointed field assistants aided by community relay persons listed among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) were to carry out hygiene promotion during the fairs, in-kind distribution of WASH kits, or cash transfer activities. The program also intended to provide community relays, also known as community health promoters, with basic hygiene training materials and instructions on how to use them. A hygiene kit (soap, menstrual hygiene materials, a plastic bucket and women's underwear) as well as water storage and transport items were included in the WASH NFI kit.

iii. Sector III: Agriculture and Food Security

To strengthen the agriculture-based livelihoods and food security of the disaster-affected population through increased and diversified production, the program intended to provide agricultural inputs to help returnees and host HHs supplement their short-term emergency food production and diet diversification. Specifically, the sector aimed to provide vegetable and cereal seeds, farming equipment, and important

agricultural knowledge, such as seed use sensitization messages, to ensure that beneficiaries were well prepared to get the most out of the inputs given. It intended to improve the coping ability and resilience of the most vulnerable HHs in host communities while also allowing them to grow their own food in the short term.

iv. Sector IV: Food for Peace: In-Kind and Voucher

In order to provide emergency food assistance to save lives and improve food security for conflict-affected HHs, the program adopted a multisector approach through which it planned to combine food and NFI interventions. Accordingly, the program aimed to provide 36 kg of maize flour, 11 kg of ordinary beans, 3 liters of vegetable oil and 0.5 kg of iodized table salt per month for three successive months to each of the 52,500 HHs. This amounted to providing three half-month rations to each HH of six people. The Food Security Cluster in eastern DRC, where the vast majority of IDPs reside with host families as a coping mechanism for displacement, accepts the provision of a half-month food ration. The program planned to provide the humanitarian food aid in one of these three ways: in-kind deliveries, unconditional cash transfers or voucher fairs.

3. EVALUATION PURPOSE

3.1 Objectives of Performance Evaluation

The overall objective of this performance evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the program's design and implementation plan, as well as the degree to which the program met its ultimate objective. More specifically, the evaluation aimed:

a) To understand the effectiveness of pairing food and NFI distributions in order to meet the immediate needs of conflict-affected HHs.
b) To understand the effectiveness of pairing agriculture and food security with WASH interventions in order to meet the immediate needs of conflict-affected HHs.
c) To understand the effectiveness of carrying out multi-sectoral and multi-modal interventions (agricultural livelihood interventions in parallel with WASH interventions, food and NFI through fairs, direct distributions, and restricted unconditional cash interventions) given the overall objective of reinforcing the host-community coping mechanism though short-term support to both IDPs and the host community.
d) To understand the scalability and replicability of this model for future emergency responses in eastern DRC.
e) To evaluate the effectiveness of direct cash transfer interventions (restricted unconditional cash transfer modality) and potentials for scalability and replicability.

3.1.1 Evaluation questions:

Specific evaluation questions included:

a) Was this project an effective way to holistically meet the needs of conflict-affected communities in eastern DRC?
b) Did the programming activities meet the objectives laid out in the proposal?
c) Were the modalities used (direct distribution, restricted unconditional cash transfers and voucher fairs) used in an effective way to promote the recovery of local market economies in eastern DRC?
d) Was SP's project M&E methodology for project outcome indicators appropriate and did it provide an accurate representation of project success?

3.1.2 Anticipated use(s) of the evaluation

The primary target audience for this evaluation report is the grantor, USAID, with the idea that the findings of this evaluation will inform its future strategy and programming for cash and voucher assistance in emergency settings. Samaritan's Purse is the secondary audience, and Samaritan's Purse may be able to apply the lessons learned in future implementation efforts of this program. Finally, a tertiary audience includes the DRC government and the development community, who are both involved in implementing comparable projects around the country.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Overall Study Design

The overall goal of this evaluation was to determine the program's performance as measured by the effectiveness of its design and implementation plan, as well as the degree to which it met its ultimate goal, measured by the delivery of its outputs as envisaged in the proposal, and the level of satisfaction of project beneficiaries and other stakeholders. It also looked at the expediency of the methodologies used and their viability. Through this, it intended to recognize scaling-up challenges and best practices.

The evaluation team visited five sites (Bengamisa, Kalunguta, Kamango 1, Rimba and Wanierukula) during the evaluation due to the time allotted for fieldwork and the security situation. The type of assistance offered, the security situation, the time since the last intervention (which affects recall), and the presence of IDPs supported, as well as the permitted time for PDM and accessibility to the intervention site, were all factors included in the selection of sites (which is a major challenge given DRC's poor infrastructure and unpredictable security dynamics).

4.2 Approach to the evaluation

The evaluation took place in three phases – review of the literature, data collection and reporting. The evaluation began with a review of available information on ER programs, particularly those administered through cash, voucher and in-kind assistance globally and in DRC. The evaluation focused on literature on the backdrop of the conflict in DRC, as well as other information judged essential for successful completion of this assignment following consultation with key stakeholders, in order to comprehend the context of DRC. For further information, the study team looked through a variety of program documents, program plans, and past evaluations. This process largely informed the development of the study tools.

In the second phase, data collection took the form of questionnaires and key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials, program, procurement and operations staff. In addition, Samaritan's Purse compared the ER data gathered at baseline to the PDM data, while the agriculture sector's baseline data was compared to the endline data to analyze trends across multiple indicators. The interviews gathered information on the project's significance, the extent to which the program met its goals (through different metrics), and the extent to which it realized its results (using satisfaction assessments among project beneficiaries and stakeholders who interacted with the program). The KIIs aimed to gather rich qualitative information on whether the project had achieved sustainable outcomes and, if so, what those outcomes were, as well as the importance and effectiveness of the design, implementation and monitoring, along with the challenges and lessons learned.

Focus group discussion (FGD) guidelines were used to stimulate discussions and acquire more information on various aspects of the program, as well as to seek clarification on issues that were not clearly brought out by the other evaluation tools. There were sets of FGDs devoted to agricultural interventions and others to ER programming. There were three types of focus groups, each aimed towards a different group of stakeholders, such as beneficiaries, vendors, and other key stakeholders including local community leaders. The conversation centered on opinions about the program's service quality and encouraged suggestions for improvement.

A team comprised of the evaluator and M&E coordinators led the FGDs and KIIs. Interviewers worked in pairs during focus group sessions, with one person leading the discussion and the other taking notes. The evaluator was able to ask follow-up questions since a third person translated the proceedings into French for him. The evaluator and the staff met each day after data collection to discuss the day's findings. To improve the rigor of the evaluation, the following techniques were used: triangulation of findings using various data collection approaches and sources (e.g. focus groups, KIIs, monitoring data) and data collection sites; transparency about the approach and the methodology's limitations, sharing findings with in-country stakeholders through a debriefing session to identify potential inaccuracies; and a feedback / commenting process on the evaluation.

4.2.1 Sampling methodology and sample size

The sampling methodology involved 3 components namely; PDM component which typically relied on both random sampling and KIIs.

During the PDMs and end line for agriculture, the M&E team collected baseline data on all qualifying HHs during the targeting stage and the evaluation sampling at least 10% of beneficiary HH members served in each of the five sites using the list of beneficiaries served by the program. The PDMs which focused on the ER component collected data from 3,835 beneficiaries after the cleaning process was completed; this data came from various sites, with Rimba producing 1,529 respondents, Bengamisa 848, Kalunguta 368, Kamango 697, and Wanierukula 393. The evaluation drew all 369 samples for the agricultural endline from Rimba, and this sample was independent of the ER samples collected from the same location

The evaluation team conducted 10 KIIs with ER team members, one with an agriculture team member, two with government officials, and four with procurement and operations team members. There were 26 discussions conducted across various respondent categories that included beneficiaries, local representatives and vendors, and government officials, who each had their own conversations in these focus groups.

Table 1: Number and Category of KII Respondents

Respondents for KII	**Number of respondents**
ER team	10
Agriculture team	1
Government officials	2
Procurement and logistics	4

4.2.2 Data management and ethical considerations

Prior to beginning the data collection exercise, the evaluation team took the enumerators through the SP beneficiary data non-disclosure agreement and its implications, the requirement to seek respondents' informed consent before beginning the process, and the scope of work. As a result of the requirement, enumerators ensured the beneficiaries gave consent for the interviews before proceeding. The enumerators also informed the respondents of the planned use of the results and recommendations, and assured them of the confidentiality of their answers, as recommended by the evaluation team.

4.2.3 Recruitment of enumerators, data collection and analysis

For data quality assurance, the evaluation team recruited and trained enumerators on responsible administration of the tools, interviewing methods, and how to use iPads for online digital data collection. The team used iFormbuilder software installed on iPads to collect data electronically and then submitted the findings for analysis. The evaluation team checked the quantitative data for consistency and outliers during the cleaning process. The evaluation utilized Microsoft Excel to analyze the final quantitative data, and for qualitative data, the study utilized the thematic content analysis method, which involved a detailed review of the answers to the various questions, comparatively fitting them into selected themes applicable to the project logic model, from which further explanation and conclusions were drawn. By way of a triangulation, the evaluation utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to arrive at solid conclusions.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

The lack of a control group meant that much of the evidence of program success came from program tracking data and statements from beneficiaries, triangulated and supplemented by qualitative data collection, thereby posing rigor challenges since there was no non-beneficiary control group to compare the changes and trends against. These constraints apply to the vast majority of humanitarian evaluations with similar scopes. The number and diversity of programming locations visited for data collection was equally limited by the security situation and the time allocated for fieldwork; it would have been of particular interest to visit one of the locations that benefited from both direct distribution and fairs. Unless otherwise noted, the findings mentioned below do not distinguish between those who received food through direct distribution, vouchers, or a combination of both, and, instead, apply to the changes encountered by all beneficiaries.

5. FINDINGS

The organization of this section follows the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) evaluation criteria. The first subsection outlines the general characteristics of respondents. The next sections discuss the relevance of the design and approach, the efficiency of the delivery mechanism, the effectiveness of the approach and implementation modalities and, finally, the outcomes and impacts of the project on project participants and beneficiaries, respectively.

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

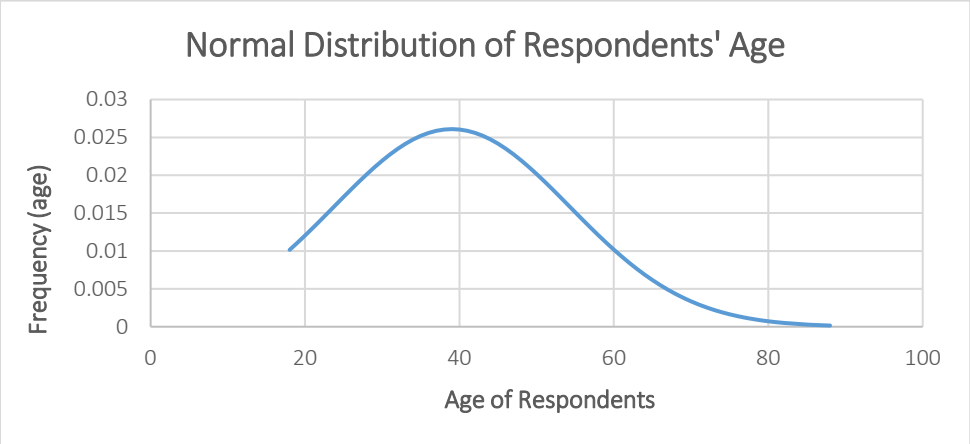
In the PDMs, the evaluation team interviewed 3,835 family representatives; of these, 40% were from Rimba, 22% from Bengamisa, and 18% from Kamango, with Kalunguta and Wanierukula each contributing 10**%.** In terms of gender, the sample included 78% women and 22% men, with Rimba accounting for 40% of the total number of women interviewed, while Wanierukula contributed the least, accounting for only 9% of the total number of women interviewed, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size for Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM)

Sample size for PDM						
Location	**Female**		**Male**		**Total**	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Bengamisa	614	21%	234	27%	848	22%
Kalunguta	302	10%	66	8%	368	10%
Kamango	592	20%	105	12%	697	18%
Rimba	1,201	40%	328	38%	1,529	40%
Wanierukula	270	9%	123	14%	393	10%
Total	2,979	100%	856	100%	3,835	100%
Gender	78%		22%		100%	

The average age of respondents in years was 40, with the oldest being 97 and the youngest 18. The standard deviation from the mean age was 15, showing that the variance from the mean age was modest.

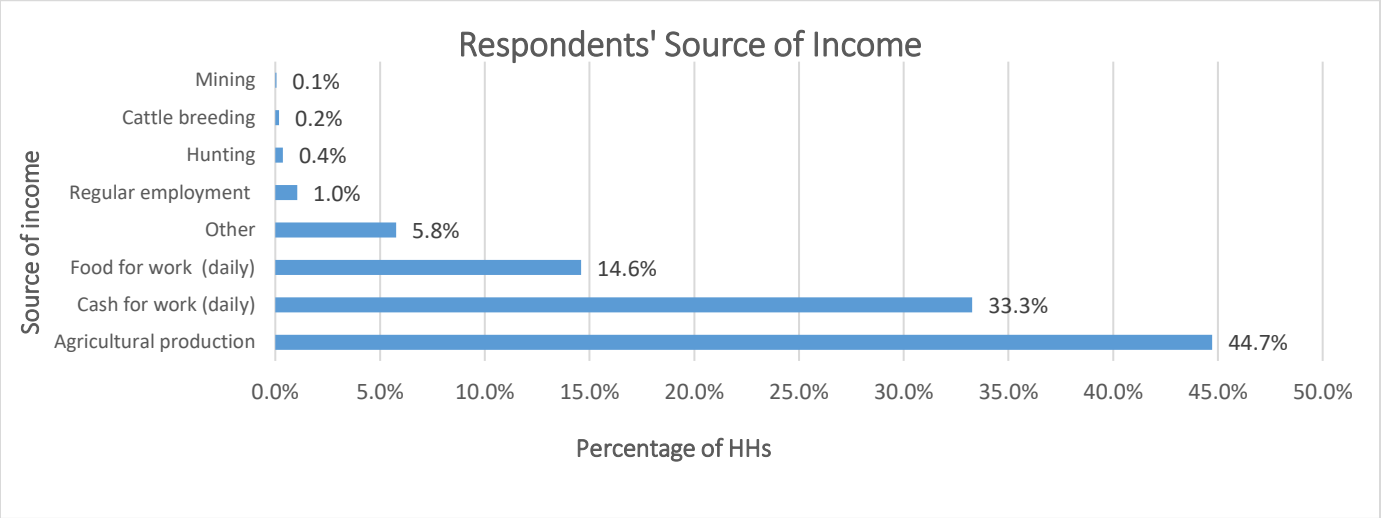
Figure 1: Normal Distribution of Respondents' Age



5.1.1 Source of income

Agricultural production emerged as the main source of income, with 44.7% of HHs depending on it, followed by cash for work and food for work, which accounted for 33.3% and 14.6% of HH incomes, respectively. Interestingly, only 1% of the HHs were employees paid regularly, with the remaining income sources sharing 6.5%.

Figure 2: Respondent's' Source of Income



5.2 Relevance of the Design and Approach

5.2.1 Justification of the modality choice in terms of needs and availability of markets

At the onset of every intervention, the program conducted rapid market assessments with the intention of understanding the market structure, population distribution, and existence of suppliers of goods and services; obtaining price data; and comprehending beneficiaries' choices and preferences of goods. This process informed the choice of the most appropriate modality for the program to adopt in delivering assistance. During focus group discussions in Bengamisa, many women mentioned that they were consulted regarding the food and NFIs that were distributed during the fairs. They elaborated that the possibility emerged during the preference study, in which they expressed their preference for vegetable

oil over palm oil and maize flour over cassava flour. Both cassava flour and palm oil were locally available in their villages, but they preferred the other products, which they could not afford.

Since these factors differed between locations, even within the same region and province, the flexibility of the modalities was imperative. The choice of voucher fairs and direct distribution approaches as the main modalities for the delivery of assistance in USAIDizi VI was informed by various factors including the supply of preferred commodities in the local market, beneficiary preference study, security situation, and limited financial systems setup, which did not favor cash transfers in the regions selected for intervention. According to interviews with both program and procurement staff, the program did not use cash transfers in USAIDizi VI. This was primarily due to limited financial infrastructure in most of the intervention locations, which were predominantly rural, and the low response from potential service providers in DRC.

An intervention approach delivering food and NFIs as a single package helped the USAIDizi program to leverage experience, expertise, scope, and resources, benefiting from their combined and varied strengths as the program worked toward the common objective of improving nutrition and health outcomes among people displaced by conflict in eastern DRC. In several FGDs, beneficiaries stressed that displacement often results in HHs losing their HH belongings as they flee conflicts, and that these become not only basic but also major costs as they struggle to settle in the camps. Beneficiaries stated emphatically that a response that only provides food or only provides NFIs ignores some of the vulnerabilities, since the beneficiaries would still be responsible for the costs of the unaddressed needs, causing increased stress on limited resources. Emergency displacement problems are complex, and in many situations, individual health or nutrition issues are affected by interconnected social, environmental and economic variables, which the program could best approach through a systemic, multi-sectoral approach. The program's integrated and systemic multi-sectoral intervention helped to overcome logistical implementation obstacles, promote scale-up, and synergistically maximize the effect of each sector, leveraging the strengths and diverse approaches of the response mechanisms.

Generally, HHs that received vouchers recorded an improvement in their FCS. However, some HHs had reservations regarding the effectiveness of the vouchers, arguing that the structure restricted them to spending the vouchers primarily on food, when they had other needs such as education and health. This, according to beneficiaries, made some exchange the goods for cash to meet more pressing needs. These results suggest that embedding unconditional cash transfers within other modalities may be an effective way to improve HHs' purchasing power and food security in emergency settings, while giving HHs the freedom of choice, which increases with cash transfers.

5.2.2 Did agriculture and WASH interventions meet the needs of the selected beneficiaries?

The program contributed to a number of changes and improved capacities because of both WASH and agricultural interventions. In the agricultural sector, the program contributed to a 43 percentage point change in access to seeds, a 77 percentage point change in access to farming equipment and a 32 percentage point increase in awareness about farming techniques. The program also led to a 98 percentage point increase in the number of people practicing appropriate crop protection procedures, with 706.80 hectares under improved agricultural methods after the program trained 34,649 people through the farmer field schools.

Other notable contributions to the agricultural sector included the introduction of farming practices that resulted in at least a 15 percentage point change in different categories, as well as the response to plant diseases, as shown in the table below. The increase in monoculture and decrease intercropping could be as a result of seasonality. In Rimba Health Zone, for example, farmers tend to plant mainly beans (and other legumes) in July-December season. There isn't much intercropping during this season. Cereals are planted in the subsequent season (Jan-March). This is because of the adaptability of different crops mainly due to the varying rainfall received in the different seasons. SP information sharing sessions include intercropping. On the other hand, the increase in the use of fertilizers could as a result of availability of the fertilizers in the market and possibly the ability of HHs to afford them. The government and other stakeholders could be promoting use of fertilizers and some of the farmers might have adopted them. This is therefore not linked to SP support and training. SP does not promote this but instead trains and conducts practical sessions on composting. In the next iteration of USAIDizi VII, the program will continue to ramp up training and follow up to support adoption of appropriate farming practices, especially those that may be entirely new to the farmers.

Table 3: Changes in the Agricultural Sector

Changes in the Agricultural Sector				
Indicator		***Baseline***	***Endline***	**Percentage Point Change**
Farming Challenges	Difficulty in access to seeds	82%	39%	-43%
	Difficulty in access to farming tools	84%	7%	-77%
	Soil infertility	53%	58%	5%
	Inadequate knowledge of farming techniques	60%	28%	-32%
Farming Practices Implemented	Planting in line	51%	67%	16%
	Intercropping	87%	45%	-42%
	Mono-cropping	24%	53%	29%
	Crop rotation	50%	56%	6%
Grain Selection & Storage Practices	Selecting seeds from healthy plants	49%	94%	45%
	Selecting healthy seeds	66%	100%	34%
	Storage in a dry and well-ventilated place	67%	75%	8%
Response to Plant Diseases	Use of phyto sanitary products to treat plant sickness	2%	53%	51%
	Reporting to local agronomist to help with disease control	2%	57%	55%
	Destroying the sick plants	23%	31%	8%
Increasing soil fertility	Use of chemical fertilizers	3%	30%	27%
	Use of compost manure	3%	63%	57%
	Proper spreading of debris and manure in the farm	7%	69%	62%
	Use of kitchen wastes for nearby farms	4%	64%	60%
	Fallow farming (leaving farms to rest so as to build up fertility)	58%	88%	30%

The program also contributed to behavior changes; the percent of HHs targeted by the hygiene promotion program who stored their drinking water safely in clean containers increased to 76.7%. When the evaluation team asked the recipients of different WASH NFI products to rank their levels of satisfaction with the quality and contents of the NFIs provided the by the program, most expressed high satisfaction levels. This was particularly true for the Bengamisa, Rimba and Kalunguta sites, with at least 70% of

beneficiaries interviewed in Rimba and Kalunguta expressing satisfaction with the quality of the NFI kits, and 68% of those in Bengamisa voicing the same sentiment. The level of satisfaction in Kamango, on the other hand, was at least average in the majority of cases, as shown in the table below. Endline respondents rated the quality of the NFIs on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Excellent," 2 "Good," 3 "Average," 4 "Fairly Good," and 5 "Poor."

Table 4: Level of Satisfaction with NFIs

Location	Element of Satisfaction	Level of Satisfaction with NFIs				
		Excellent	**Good**	**Average**	**Fairly Good**	**Poor**
Bengamisa	Quality of NFI articles	21%	47%	18%	12%	2%
	Contents of essential household items	22%	49%	15%	12%	2%
	Contents of WASH articles (jerry can, soap)	26%	50%	12%	9%	3%
Rimba	Quality of NFI articles	44%	50%	5%	0%	0%
	Contents of essential household items	40%	55%	5%	0%	0%
	Contents of WASH articles (jerry can, soap)	34%	57%	8%	0%	0%
Kalunguta	Quality of NFI articles	83%	16%	1%	0%	0%
	Contents of essential household items	80%	19%	1%	0%	0%
	Contents of WASH articles (jerry can, soap)	68%	29%	2%	1%	0%
Kamango	Quality of NFI articles	28%	29%	21%	22%	1%
	Contents of essential household items	21%	35%	32%	11%	1%
	Contents of WASH articles (jerry can, soap)	18%	44%	13%	14%	11%

5.2.3 How beneficiary selection criteria complemented the targeting for humanitarian assistance

According to the interviewees, the program chose its sites mostly based on the most recent alerts issued by UN-OCHA, in areas facing extreme food insecurity and conflict related emergencies. All of the program staff interviewed mentioned that rapid multi-sectoral vulnerability surveys (MSVS) were conducted after "Go and See" missions in the targeted areas, as well as meetings with local officials and monitoring visits. The assessments' findings were used to inform the needs across many sectors. The respondents who worked in the program mentioned that various criteria were used to select potential beneficiaries for food assistance, shelter and settlement, and WASH, with priority given to households with "poor" FCSs, NFI vulnerability scores above 3.5, high CSI scores, large families, people with special needs, and women-headed HHs. The NFI vulnerability score is a metric used by the NFI and Shelter Clusters in eastern DRC to evaluate HHs' possession of essential HH items such as water storage containers, cooking pots, mats/mattresses, and blankets/sheets. Each of these areas is weighted on a scale of 0 to 5. Households considered NFI vulnerable are those with a total score of more than 3.5.

According to several community members who participated in the beneficiary selection process, the program considered beneficiary needs while balancing geographical areas within the available budget. The FGDs also confirmed that the program's community-led targeting approach, which was informed by the needs identified through MSVS in the targeted areas, as well as meetings with local officials, ensured that only the most vulnerable HHs were chosen, minimizing both inclusion and exclusion errors that

would otherwise occur if proper consultation with IDP communities, local leadership, and government representatives were not implemented. The feedback mechanism, which was established through the complaints management desks set up throughout the targeting, guaranteed that all complaints were addressed during the targeting, ensuring that those who might have been left out by the various criteria became program beneficiaries. Physical verification was also carried out by program employees and contracted laborers, and the names of those selected for assistance were published for public verification, which increased transparency in the selection process. In FGDs, the majority of beneficiaries stated that they were chosen by a community committee, and both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries stated that Samaritan's Purse undertook eligibility verifications in every case.

The beneficiaries, according to the program respondents, were predominantly individuals who were directly affected by conflicts and who had been displaced for a period not exceeding six months. Regardless of family size, all beneficiary HHs received the same assistance.

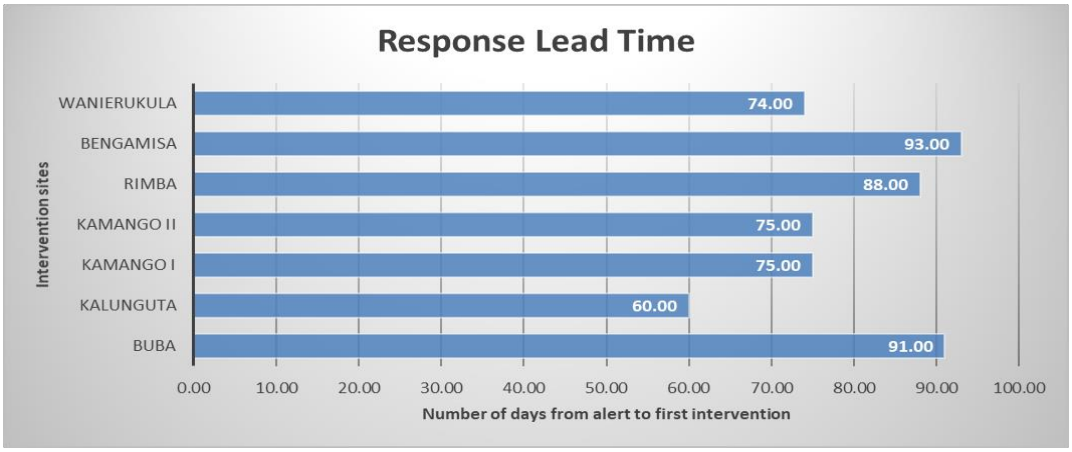
For a variety of reasons, operating within the existing alerts system established by the cluster was a logical option. It helped to identify areas with urgent needs, and helped to minimize the costs and time that would otherwise go into the site selection process, thereby reducing the time between displacement and response.

Efficiency of the Delivery Mechanism

5.2.4 Efficiency of the delivery processes, considering the time and resources required at each stage of implementation, and coordination between different actors

According to the plans, the initiative aimed to provide immediate humanitarian aid through direct distribution in less than 90 days for direct distribution, and 81 days for local market fairs, starting from the time the program received approval from the donor after sending notification of its intention to intervene in an area. By providing the first interventions in Buba and Bengamisa within 91 days and 93 days, respectively, the program fell short of its target of responding rapidly to the needs of beneficiaries in humanitarian distress through local fairs. In Kalunguta, the program provided assistance within 60 days through local fairs; however, insecurity delayed the response time for Kamango I and Kamango II, which led to beneficiaries receiving assistance after 75 days, as summarized in the figure below:

Figure 3: Response Lead Time



According to interviews with staff and FGDs with beneficiaries, the program was able to deliver most of the outputs including food, NFIs, agricultural seeds and tools distributed through fairs, as well as the trainings, on time. However, there were delays in the delivery of food, hygiene kits, and LLINs procured from neighboring countries. That is, only 10,600 of the 157,500 pieces of LLINs expected from the supplier, as entailed in the contract, arrived before the end of the program, resulting in the national office canceling the contract for the remaining deliveries. In a number of the discussions, the beneficiaries noted that SP did not provide them with mosquito nets and hygiene kits as it had announced it would do during the targeting stage of the program. In summary, it took 205 days from the date of the tender announcements to the award of the contract to the supplier for food items procured from Uganda, and another 154 days from the award of the contract to delivery of the supplies to SP's warehouse. It took the transporter more than 10 days to avail the trucks for transporting the hygiene kits for deployment after signing the contract, making it difficult to distribute the hygiene kits to the remaining sites before the end of the program owing to the conditions of the roads and the security situation, resulting in only 29,957 HHs receiving WASH hygiene kits out of the 52,500 HHs planned, accounting for a 57% success rate. These delays resulted in SP submitting a notification dated May 12, 2021 concerning the food and hygiene kits and a request for the disposition of unused supplies on May 26, 2021 for items that were procured and delivered shortly before the award ended and were subsequently carried forward for distribution under the new award**.**

In an interview with staff from the operations and procurement departments, it emerged that the delays resulted from the complications posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which occasioned the closure of most international borders for an extended period, making it impossible for vendors to get their products cleared at the border on time. The delay in the LLIN supply also resulted from new guidelines implemented in the border clearance offices by various countries in east and central Africa, restricting the number of personnel and operation hours, resulting in more waiting days at the border. The closure of the international borders also made it difficult for SP to continue with the vetting of suppliers, causing the cancellation of the vetting process altogether after quotations expired before the completion of the process, thereby occasioning a repeat of the entire procurement process after the borders reopened.

Given that project was assisting 315,000 participants, these restrictions affected the program operations and SP submitted a notification of suspension of activities to USAID dated March 20, 2020, owing to the COVID-19 outbreak in DRC. Accordingly, in line with the restrictions of the DRC government, the

program slowed down its field level activities affecting the planned project targets. SP closely worked with stakeholders (OCHA, the Food Security and NFI Clusters, and the government) in monitoring the evolution of measures to be taken by actors towards continuation of the program activities in a manner that was consistent with other actors. SP developed minimum Standard Operating Procedures aimed at ensuring that the already vulnerable conflict-affected HHs were provided with humanitarian aid in a timely manner so as to cushion them against negative coping mechanisms while cautiously not facilitating infection and the spread of COVID-19. Although the outbreak of the pandemic affected regional procurement of food and mosquito nets, the project adapted by using local market fairs which ensured continuity of the program. Moreover, inaccessibility of intervention sites due to insecurity and road closures was mitigated by setting up sub-bases in the provinces of intervention hence limiting movement of staff.

The program worked with a wide array of stakeholders with differing incentives, mandates and capabilities to implement its activities. Some of these include government officials, community leaders, vendors, OCHA and other relief organization in the area of operation. Feedback from many of the stakeholders consulted indicates that SP managed to significantly engage them in its implementation of the program, creating enthusiasm and commitment to the improvement of the food security situation in the areas in which it has intervened.

5.2.5 Timeliness of the response in relation to the needs of different social groups, and comparatively with other cash and in-kind assistance in the wider humanitarian response

The evaluation also measured efficiency based on the time taken in the queues during the distributions, service delivery arrangements and the number of times beneficiaries presented themselves at the distribution sites and missed food. When the evaluation looked at each aspect separately, it became clear that the project did well in these aspects, according to the focus group results.

Sixty percent of the beneficiaries said it took less than an hour to get served, 35% said it took between one and two hours, and only 5% said it took more than two hours. Insufficient staff employed by the vendors and the COVID-19 protocols, which called for social distancing, contributed to longer hours spent at the distribution fairs. At all fair sites, the program gave priority to special groups such as pregnant mothers, the elderly, and other disadvantaged groups. In this endeavor, the special queues serving such vulnerable groups were effective and lessened the waiting time, reducing any potential harm that could befall this already vulnerable population.

5.3 Outcomes and Impacts of the Project on Project Participants and Beneficiaries

5.3.1 The extent to which the project has contributed to improved food consumption and food security among beneficiaries

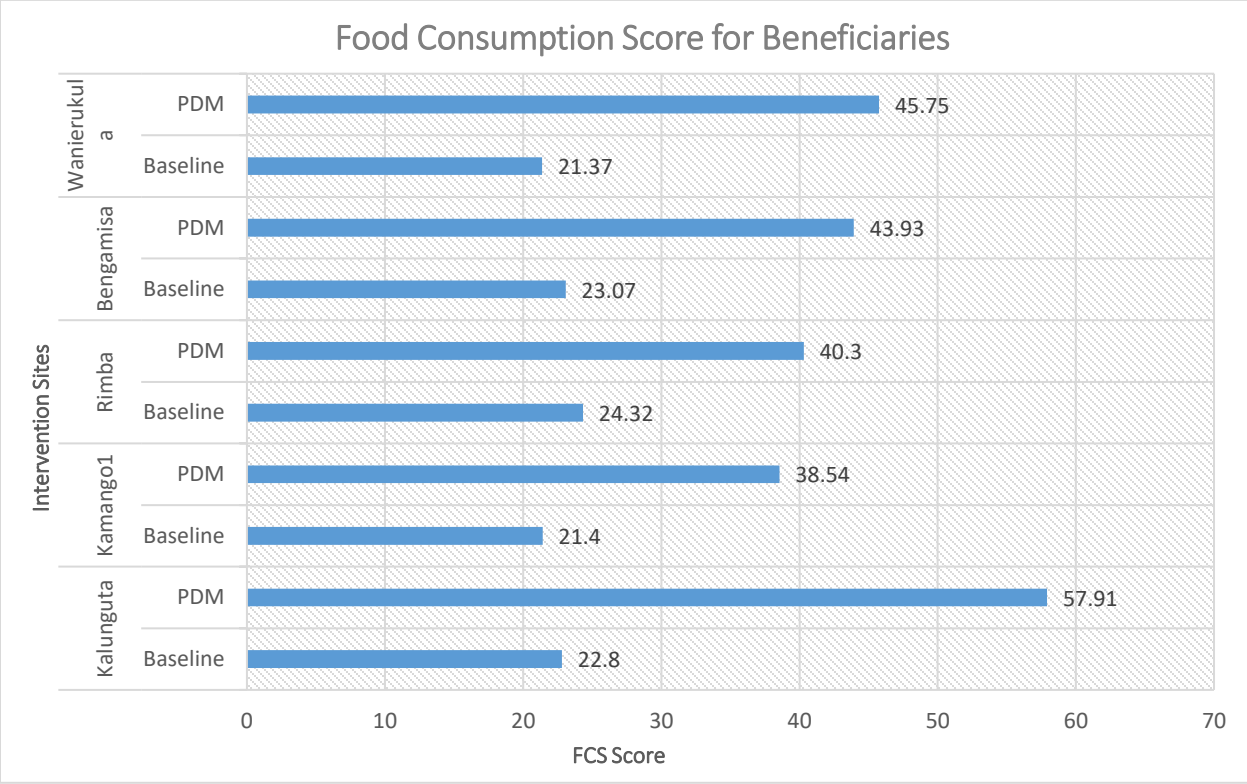
In order to determine the HH-level FCS[2], the evaluation asked respondents a series of questions concerning weekly HH dietary diversity and nutrient intake. The FCS improved across the board for HHs in all five sites who received assistance, as per the PDM.

At baseline, most HHs' FCS fell below the borderline; that is to say, it was less than 28.5. Kamango 1 and Kalunguta recorded the lowest FCSs at baseline, since the intervention occurred very shortly after the

[2] https://resources.vam.wfp.org/data-analysis/quantitative/food-security/fcs-food-consumption-score.

period of displacement, when most HHs were in the middle of a food crisis. Most HHs were able to switch from a poor FCS at baseline to at least a borderline level, with those in Kalunguta, Bengamisa and Wanierukula reaching acceptable levels by the end of the three food cycles. In addition, the results of the analysis show that HHs benefiting from the agricultural interventions in Rimba had an average 11.56-point improvement in FCS from the 23.8 recorded at baseline, as shown in the figure below:

Figure 4: Food Consumption Score across Various Locations



5.3.2 The extent of changes in coping strategies, as reported by beneficiary HHs

To assess the impact on coping mechanisms, PDMs adopted the CSI[3] set of questions. The evaluation sought to understand the various coping strategies HHs used when faced with a lack of means to meet basic needs (i.e., livelihoods or income). By the end of the program, HHs in all recipient groups showed substantially less use of negative coping strategies as depicted by the improvement in the CSI, implying that the voucher assistance was effective in enabling HHs to meet their various needs without resorting to unhealthy behaviors. Households in Kalunguta recorded the highest reduction in the use of negative coping strategies, from a score of 58.3 recorded during the baseline to 9.02 at endline. Wanierukula followed the same trend, dropping from 50.7 at baseline to 10.6 at endline. After the three food distribution cycles, most HHs, regardless of transfer modality, reported a reduction in the use of negative coping strategies, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 5: Coping Strategy Index across Various Sites

[3] https://www.indikit.net/indicator/21-coping-strategy-index-csi#:~:text=The%20Coping%20Strategy%20Index%20 (CSI, reported%20by%20a%20numeric%20score.

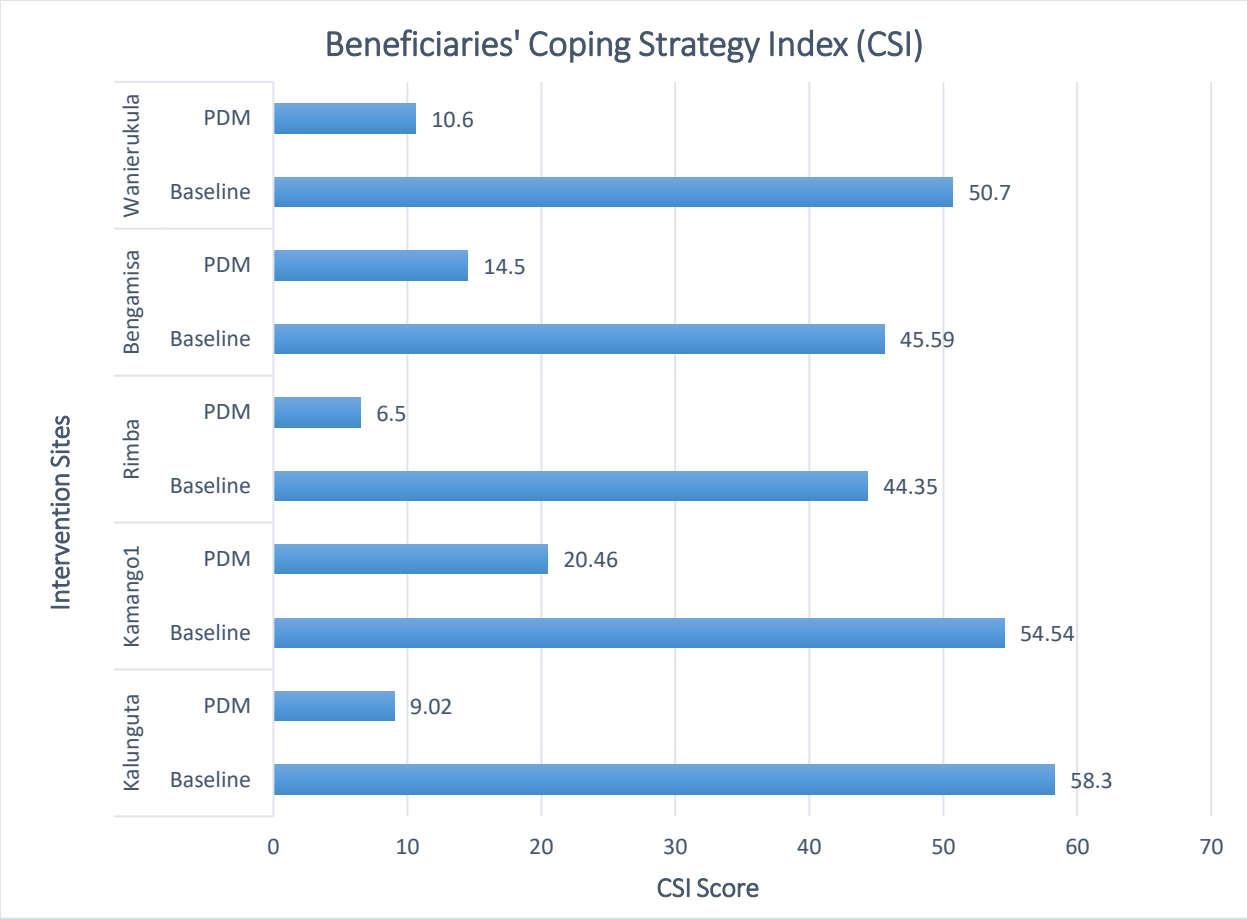


Table 5: Changes in FCS and CSI in all the Axes

		FCS	CSI
Kalunguta	Baseline	22.8	58.3
	PDM	57.91	9.02
	Change	**35.11**	**49.28**
Kamango1	Baseline	21.4	54.54
	PDM	38.54	20.46
	Change	**17.14**	**34.08**
Rimba	Baseline	24.32	44.35
	PDM	40.3	6.5
	Change	**15.98**	**37.85**
Bengamisa	Baseline	23.07	45.59
	PDM	43.93	14.5
	Change	**20.86**	**31.09**
Wanierukula	Baseline	21.37	50.7
	PDM	45.75	10.6
	Change	**24.38**	**40.1**

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Discussion and Conclusion

Under the USAIDizi program, SP established necessary structures for coordination and collaboration with the beneficiaries, vendors, community leaders, and government. The program strengthened this coordination further through regular community-level stakeholder meetings, and strengthening the capacity of community committees, local leadership and those involved in the sensitization activities to reinforce communication and sensitization efforts. This type of collaboration and partnership, in general, played a significant role in the program's success; therefore, maximizing on the synergies it created is an essential ingredient in sustaining the outcomes and impact.

Overall, the emergency response was appropriate and effective, with a notable level of flexibility. Given the program's prioritization of beneficiary needs through needs assessments, and the long-standing observation that a more rapid and flexible approach to food assistance was required, the intervention was appropriate.

The linking of the assistance to the OCHA-provided alerts that informed “Go and See” missions and targeting was a logical approach, because it aided a timely multisector response, through voucher and direct distribution approaches, which were the appropriate modalities given the preferences and constraints associated with markets and risks. The linking of the response to the alerts eliminated the need for parallel systems for rapid assessments and targeting, and increased efficiency by avoiding duplication of services provided by other actors to the same population.

It is reasonable to conclude that the intervention was successful because the beneficiaries were able to access high quality and locally preferred foods and NFIs, as well as seeds and agricultural implements. Overall, the beneficiaries were very satisfied with the assistance they received. They understood the voucher and market fair processes well, owing to strong sensitization through community committees.

Due to the focus on basic needs, livelihoods, agricultural production, and other recovery or resilience support were a much smaller part of the program, but they were useful and successful, as indicated in the findings. Many respondents would like to see an increase in integrated cross-sectoral programming to support basic needs. In DRC, the initiative was also very beneficial to the market system. It increased business and trade ties, aided in the restoration of critical buyer-vendor relationships, and strengthened access to vendor credit through improved performance as indicated in bank statements, therefore allowing for consumption smoothing.

The delays in the delivery of NFIs and LLINs to beneficiaries across most locations resulted from supply chain disruptions and shortages brought about by the outbreak of COVID-19. While it is unknown when the pandemic and recession will cease, one thing is certain: the operational impact of COVID-19 on domestic and global supply chains will persist.

6.2 Recommendations

There is a need to adjust the assistance according to HH size; in this case, SP should experiment with this approach since it would offer recipients more choices and potentially lead to better outcomes in dietary diversity.

Samaritan's Purse should maintain its multi-sectoral intervention approach and consider expanding it to cover beneficiary needs not currently addressed, such as health and enhanced WASH coverage, as well as other family expenses. Cash transfer may be the most effective means to meet those needs, but in some circumstances, awareness raising, market support, or vouchers may be required to ensure appropriate quality and quantity of commodities. These factors were not dealt with in the previous phases of the program, resulting in some gaps in satisfying community needs in several sectors.

In the new phase of the program, continued reliance on suppliers from countries that maintain rigorous border controls, as well as costs, scheduling, and shipping delays caused by lockdowns and border closures, may put such supply chains at risk. Working through COVID-19 will require SP using innovative techniques to enable on-the-ground decision-making, and providing the country leadership and the program managers with timely information. These crisis-related risk mitigation measures will need to be realistic and accessible, allowing such leaders to make swift decisions. To avoid future supply gaps, SP should plan to set up a temporary inventory recovery and evaluation process, as well as pursue alternative sourcing strategies. Samaritan's Purse should also prepare a Request for Quotations (RFQ) ahead of time to allow for bid analysis, supplier vetting, and tender award for goods with a long shelf life, such as LLINs and WASH NFIs.

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