SOMALIA

REVIEW PAPER ON TARGETING SHIFT IN HUMANITARIAN CASH ASSISTANCE FOR SOMALI CASH CONSORTIUM

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CARI	Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators
CRM	Complaints and Response Mechanism
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale
DP	Discussion Point
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DSAG	Data Saturation and Analysis Grid
DST	Discussion Sub-Topic
DT	Discussion Topic
ECMEN	Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSM	Food Security Monitoring
HHS	Household Hunger Scale
HiP	Humanitarian Implementation Plan
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
HH	Household
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCSI	Livelihood Coping Strategies Index
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPCA	Multipurpose Cash Assistance
MoE	Margin of Error
NAT	New Arrival Tracker
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NFI	Non-Food Item
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
rCSI	Reduced Coping Strategies Index
SCC	Somali Cash Consortium
SCI	Save the Children International
SDR	Secondary Data Review
SoDMA	Somali Disaster Management Authority
USD	United States Dollar
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
VRC	Village Relief Committee

About IMPACT

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva-based think-and-do-tank, created in 2010. IMPACT is a member of the ACTED Group.

IMPACT's teams implement assessment, monitoring & evaluation, and organizational capacity-building programmes in direct partnership with aid actors or through its inter-agency initiatives, REACH and Agora. Headquartered in Geneva, IMPACT has an established field presence in over 30 countries. IMPACT's team is composed of over 300 staff, including 60 full-time international experts, as well as a roster of consultants, who are currently implementing over 50 programs across Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Central and South-East Asia, and Eastern Europe

About Somali Cash Consortium (SCC)

The Somali Cash Consortium is led by Concern Worldwide and includes ACTED, COOPI, DRC, IMPACT, NRC and SCI as partners.

Through the Somali Cash Consortium (SCC) humanitarian aid has been provided through multipurpose unconditional mobile money transfers to Somali communities since 2018, reaching over 1.8 Million Somalis to date.

The consortium with its partners aims at improving the ability of vulnerable HHs to meet their basic needs and reduce consumption gaps through life-saving humanitarian unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) in the most in need regions in Somalia.

SUMMARY

The Somali Cash Consortium (SCC) has been in operation since 2017, providing Multipurpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) to newly displaced populations and critically underserved individuals in Operational Priority Areas. After October 2022, Somalia's Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) adopted a vulnerability-based approach for selecting aid recipients. This approach entailed sector integration with Cafimad plus[1](+) partners offering WASH, Nutrition, or health services, and moved away from status-based and geographically focused targeting that relied heavily on IPC classification. This shift aimed to support more sectors and partners by focusing on individuals' specific needs and vulnerabilities.

To implement a vulnerability targeting approach effectively, an Integrated Response Framework (IRF) was introduced by the SCC, following recommendations from HCT. This represents a change of focus from the previous community-based approach to humanitarian assistance[2] which relied on village relief committees to identify beneficiaries. The IRF uses standard verification surveys to assess eligibility, ensuring assistance reaches those most in need, including minority and marginalized populations. The IRF focuses on rapid delivery within a 7-day timeline for accessible locations and a 14-day timeline for hard-to-reach areas. Given the rapid nature of the response, an initial phase is established where households receive a first cycle of cash assistance upon registration (first line response). Later, the CMU conducts a thorough verification of the registered households based on their vulnerabilities to retain only those most in need. Households who do not meet the criteria are replaced by others who do. This is the second-line response.

The assessment aims to evaluate the effectiveness, acceptability, and impact of the shift made by the Somali Cash Consortium (SCC) in 2022 from community-based targeting to vulnerability-based targeting. This study will provide key stakeholders with valuable insights on both approaches to support decision-making on targeting of assistance to affected populations. IMPACT conducted a primary qualitative assessment utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key stakeholders in MPCA to gather insights into their experiences with the implementation of community and vulnerability targeting approaches. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with MPCA beneficiaries in districts with the highest levels of MPCA implementation to explore their experiences with cash support. This was supplemented with a Secondary data review (SDR) from PDM baseline and endline assessments conducted by IMPACT initiatives between 2021-2023[3]. The SDR examined food security and livelihood (FSL) indicators to enhance the qualitative data in the Cash and Voucher Assistance targeting paper, using ECHO humanitarian implementation plan (HiP) assessments from 2021 to 2023 for cross-verification. Somalia experienced severe drought followed by floods in 2023, affecting seasonal variations. Community-based targeting (CBT) was used in HiP 2021, the main caseload in 2022, and MR 1 in 2022, while Vulnerability-Based Targeting (VBT), endorsed by

[1] Caafimaad Plus, is a consortium providing vital aid to Somalia's hard-to-reach areas.
[2] Humanitarian Response Plan (HNRP), Somalia 2024
[3] The evaluation of the Somali Cash Consortium's MPCA program assesses their impact on beneficiary households' spending habits and food security. This informs ongoing improvements and future interventions for Somalia's humanitarian response.

the HCT, was employed in MR 2 in 2022 and the 2023 HiP. Baseline findings were used throughout the SDR to understand household conditions.

Key Findings

Perception and Acceptability of MPCA:

Community-based targeting is **preferred** by **FGD participants** for its participatory approach involving **local committees** and **elders**, fostering trust and a sense of fairness. In contrast, KIs express concerns about CBT due to risks of local authority influence, aid diversion, and fraud. They prefer Vulnerability-Based Targeting (VBT) for its structured, precise approach, which reduces corruption and ensures aid reaches the most vulnerable without bias. The humanitarian community is moving from community-based to vulnerability-based targeting because the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) detected aid diversion practices in community-based targeting.[4]

Effectiveness of MPCA in Meeting Needs of Beneficiaries:

Vulnerability-based targeting was proven effective in identifying and reaching households experiencing severe food insecurity, as evidenced by lower Food Consumption Scores (FCS) and higher Livelihood Coping Strategy Indicator (LCSI) scores compared to community-based approaches. Different research studies namely VBT1 and CBT 2 were used to illustrate this finding (on page 10). As highlighted, vulnerability-based targeting adopted the IRF approach where partners integrate with the Caafimad + partners while the community-based approach relied solely on community leaders. **This approach also demonstrated a greater capacity for improvement over time in reducing negative coping behaviours**, such as the reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI), suggesting its efficacy in addressing acute needs. **The vulnerability-based approach effectively identifies households with severe coping strategies, as indicated by higher rCSI scores, and is instrumental in reducing these negative behaviors over time compared to the community-based approach.** However, qualitative discussions have pointed out challenges such as stringent delivery timelines and negotiation delays with local authorities hindered its implementation. Conversely, community-based targeting leveraged local knowledge and involvement to ensure relevance and acceptance within communities, potentially covering a broader range of needs with varying severity. It facilitated stronger community relations but did not always target the most severely affected households effectively. Overall, **while vulnerability-based targeting likely targeted the most vulnerable, it required ongoing**

[4] https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2024/04/22142827/Somalia-HCA-2024.pdf

support to fully meet complex needs, whereas community-based approaches offered flexibility but could benefit from refinement in targeting precision.

Potential Risks Associated with MPCA and Targeting Approach:

The discussion on humanitarian cash assistance and effective targeting approaches highlighted the issues inherent in both vulnerability-based and community-based methods. **Vulnerability-based targeting, while praised for its systematic and objective nature, risked excluding some of the most vulnerable due to rigid criteria and challenges in understanding different complex community backgrounds. Conversely, community-based targeting fostered local engagement and adaptation but was susceptible to biases influenced by local dynamics and power imbalances.** Marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and minority communities, faced heightened risks of exclusion under both approaches due to these dynamics. Effective humanitarian aid requires a balanced approach that integrates objective vulnerability assessments with community participation to mitigate biases and ensure equitable distribution of assistance. This involves maintaining transparent criteria, encouraging active community involvement, and implementing careful oversight to address the diverse needs and complexities within humanitarian settings.

Strategies for Improvement:

Insights from KIIs and FGDs have highlighted key strategies for enhancing both vulnerability-based and community-based targeting approaches in humanitarian aid. **For vulnerability-based targeting, conducting thorough needs assessments is important** to understand the specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups like minority households and people with a disability. This ensures that aid programs are tailored precisely to meet their unique needs. **Improved coordination among implementing agencies was also emphasized to streamline processes**, minimize duplication of efforts, and refine targeting criteria based on continuous feedback. Additionally, **integrating disability-specific criteria into the targeting process was recommended** to ensure comprehensive coverage. On the other hand, **for community-based targeting, there was strong advocacy for active community participation in decision-making processes**, especially involving marginalized groups and people with a disability. This participatory approach is believed to enhance the accuracy, relevance, and acceptance of cash distribution efforts. **Recommendations to mitigate biases** in community-based targeting included implementing external audits and on-site selections t**o ensure fairness and transparency**. Overall, these strategies aim to optimize the effectiveness, fairness, and inclusivity of humanitarian aid delivery, ensuring that assistance reaches those who need it most while minimizing exclusion errors and biases.

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INTRODUCTION

Somalia, with a population of approximately 18.7 million, faces persistent humanitarian challenges arising from recurring conflicts, climatic shocks, and widespread poverty. Cash assistance has emerged as a key tool for humanitarian response, providing flexibility, dignity, and efficiency in meeting the diverse needs of affected populations. Humanitarian actors in Somalia have recognized the importance of delivering efficient and targeted aid in emergency response operations. Cash-based transfers have been integrated as a stand-alone sector into the humanitarian responses, as outlined in the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)[5]. The selection of the most effective targeting methodology for delivering humanitarian assistance to those most in need has been a central topic of discussion for several years in Somalia. The goal is to reach the most in need minimizing inclusion or exclusion errors[6]. A lack of understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of the different targeting approaches by humanitarian organizations has hindered a holistic approach and coordination among stakeholders.

The Somali Cash Consortium has been operational since 2017, led by Concern Worldwide. Current members include ACTED, COOPI, DRC, NRC, SCI, Concern, and IMPACT Initiatives as TPM. Since October 2022, SCC has been utilizing Integrated Response Framework (IRF) to provide, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance to newly displaced populations and critically underserved individuals in Operational Priority Area (OPA), IRF also involved integration with health and nutrition sectors with the Caafimaad plus partner (a consortium providing vital aid to Somalia's hard-to-reach areas), encompassing rural and urban areas marked by extreme access constraints or being hard-to-reach locations. This framework incorporates three key assessment approaches Nutrition-Based Assessment, which targets households with children under the age of 5 screened for malnutrition and admitted to stabilization centers (SC) due to severe acute malnutrition (SAM), Early Warning Assessment, an anticipatory action using MPCA, to flood prone areas, and the NAT 2.5 Approach, which is a IDP camp coordination and camp management based assessment (CCCM) utilized to target the IDPs upon arrival to the camps.

In 2022, the SCC changed its approach to MPCA implementation from a community-based targeting method, which involved targeting and registrations through Village Relief Committees (VRCs) and community leaders who identified vulnerable households based on local knowledge, to a vulnerability-based targeting method. This new approach involves including households for MPCA based on an objective vulnerability assessment, using a set of questions that consider factors such as the Food Consumption Score (FCS), coping strategies, socio-economic status, and displacement. It focuses on newly displaced or critically underserved households living in newly accessible, hard-to-reach, or extremely constrained OPA1 areas, as endorsed by the HCT in 2022.

[5] Somalia 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) - Somalia | ReliefWeb
[6] Targeting Vulnerable Households CTP case study, December 2017

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MPCA has the potential to bring a significant transformation in both humanitarian and developmental settings. Through cash transfers, MPCA aims to improve food insecurity and address the basic needs of vulnerable households. These transfers promote dignity, empowerment, and flexibility, while also enhancing operational efficiency and stimulating local economies. Additionally, MPCA introduces an innovative approach to crisis response that prioritizes individual autonomy.

However, there is still a need for more comprehensive data and analysis to fully understand the impact of this shift in targeting methodology. Questions remain about the long-term effectiveness of vulnerability-based targeting compared to the previous community-based approach, the adequacy of the assessment criteria, and the overall outcomes for the affected populations. Addressing these information gaps is crucial for optimizing MPCA strategies and ensuring that the most vulnerable households receive the necessary support.

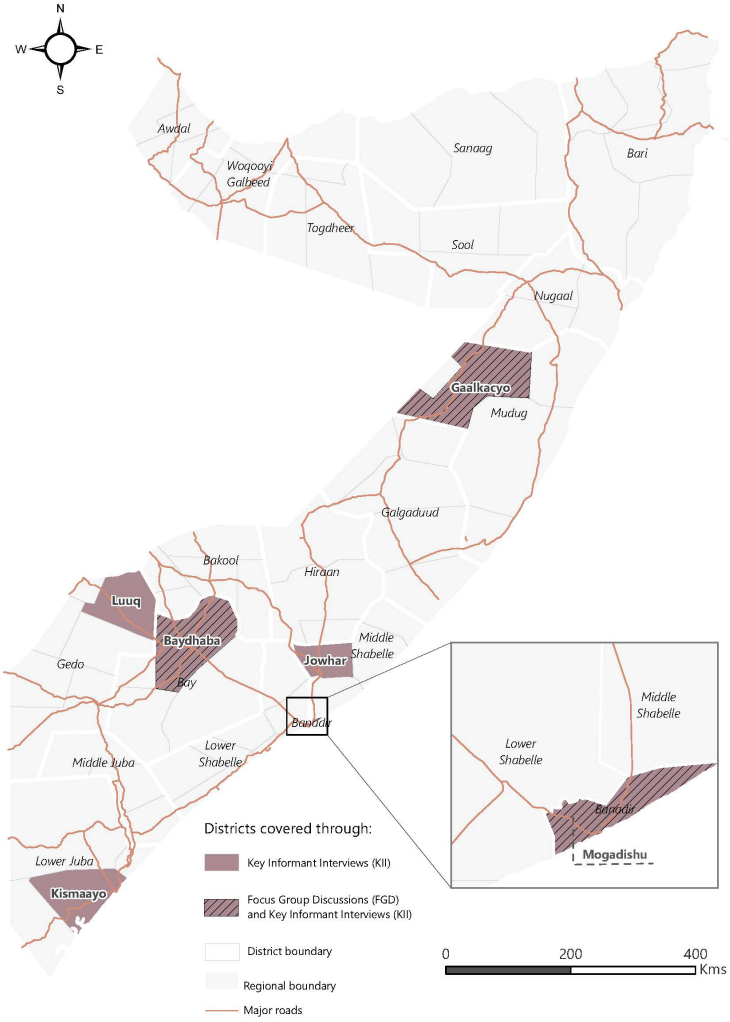
In an effort to provide more information on the shift in targeting methodology, IMPACT conducted a Review Paper on the effectiveness and efficacy of the different targeting methodological approaches in reaching the most vulnerable households using semi-structured qualitative KIIs and FGD. The qualitative data collection was done between 20 February to 6 March 2024. IMPACT also used SDR intensively using the multiple rounds of baseline and endline studies conducted between 2021-2023 – from 2021 and 2022 under a community-based targeting approach and 2023 under a vulnerability-based targeting approach. The primary goal of this assessment is to produce a learning paper that will compare and contrast these two targeting approaches employed by the SCC in humanitarian cash assistance programs. This comparison aims to evaluate the effectiveness of each approach in terms of acceptability, risks, and their capacity to minimize exclusion errors and effectively reach minority groups.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment consisted of primary qualitative data using KIIs and FGDs, as well as SDR from baseline and endline PDM assessments for the SCC from 2021-2023. The assessment covered districts where the SCCs MPCA program is implemented, Gaalkacyo, Banadir, Kismayo, Luuq, Jowhar, and Baydhaba.

The primary qualitative assessment purposively sampled participants in 12 KIIs and 5 FGDs. The KIs consisted of stakeholders in MPCA, including 6 KIs from humanitarian agencies implementing cash programs and 6 KIs from the Government of Somalia with sufficient knowledge of humanitarian cash support implementation. In addition, 5 FGDs (3 female and 2 male) were conducted with MPCA beneficiary households. Each FGD consisted of an average of 8 participants. The FGDs were conducted in accessible districts with the most frequent MPCA implementation activities and the most accessible for this exercise (Gaalkacyo, Banadir, and Baydhaba). These results must be considered indicative only.

Map 1: Primary data coverage map



Primary Data Collection

The KIIs were conducted remotely by IMPACT's field team via phone or on Teams. The FGDs were carried out by two trained enumerators for each FGD: a facilitator and a note-taker. The assessment took place from 18 to 23 February 2024.

The data analysis used an inductive and iterative approach, starting with debriefing notes to identify gaps and areas of focus. A data saturation and analysis grid (DSAG) was created to summarize themes and patterns from the interviews. The DSAG method was shaped by an inductive approach and aimed at exploring the acceptability and risks of various targeting methodologies in humanitarian cash assistance programs. This method ensured thorough and transparent analysis,

providing nuanced insights into the effectiveness and potential risks of different targeting methodologies specifically community-based vs vulnerability-based approaches, and their capacity in reaching minority groups and minimizing exclusion errors, directly addressing the research objectives in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

Secondary Data Review (SDR)

SDR was instrumental in the evaluation of the short-term impact of MPCA program. PDM data, including baseline and endline assessments. This comprehensive analysis allowed the identification of trends, patterns and changes in key indicators related to food security, livelihoods, and coping strategies

The SDR examined food security and livelihood (FSL) indicators to support the qualitative data in the Cash and Voucher Assistance targeting paper. ECHO (HiP) assessments from 2021, 2022 and 2023 were utilized for cross-verification. It was important to note that Somalia faced a prolonged drought, the most severe in nearly 40 years, followed by floods during the Deyr rainy season in 2023. Given these seasonal variations, it was essential to interpret the findings within this context. According to the data provided, community-based targeting was used in HiP 2021, the main caseload in 2022, and Modification Request (MR) 1 in 2022, this report will to them as CBT1, CBT2, and CBT3 respectively. For the vulnerability-based targeting approach endorsed by the HCT, which was employed in MR 2 in 2022, the 2023 HiP, and the flooding response in 2023, this report will refer them to VBT1, VBT2, and VBT3. To fully understand the households' (HHs) conditions, the findings of baseline and endline per each study round were used throughout this SDR. This approach yielded valuable insights that informed programmatic decision-making and future planning.

The baseline and endline study rounds were used in two ways:

1. **Comparative analysis of endline trends:** We compared the endline trends of key indicators on food security and livelihood, such as savings and debt, expenditure patterns, and coping strategies, for assessments conducted on the two approaches: community-based targeting versus vulnerability-based targeting. This comparison was referenced with qualitative findings to explore the short-term effectiveness of MPCA under both methods.

2. **Baseline comparison for targeting efficiency**: We analyzed baseline data to assess targeting efficiency and inclusion by examining trends in key indicators of food security and livelihood, such as savings, debt, and expenditure patterns. This analysis aimed to determine which community-based or vulnerability-based approach was more effective in targeting the most vulnerable populations.

Table 1: Showing the assessments and month of data collection per approach

	Community-based approach			Vulnerability-based approach		
ECHO HiP Year	2021	2022	2022	2022	2023	2023
Code	CBT1	CBT2	CBT3	VBT1	VBT2	VBT3
Baseline DC timeline	April/May 2021	August/September 2022	August/ September 2022	Feb/March 2023	May/June 2023	December 2023/ January 2024
Endline DC timeline	July/September 2021	October/November 2022	October/ November 2022	May 2023	September/ October 2023	February/ March 2024
Level of representativity	Representative	Representative	Representative	Indicative	Indicative	Representative

Challenges and Limitations

This review paper on the targeting assessment for humanitarian cash assistance in Somalia had several limitations. The limitations are classified according to the methods applied in this paper, qualitative method and the quantitative methods relying on the secondary data.

Qualitative method limitations:

Stakeholder Interest: Interviews were conducted with individuals directly involved in designing and implementing the approaches, potentially limiting their objectivity due to confirmation bias, social desirability bias, selective memory, vested interests, and a limited perspective on broader outcomes.

Quantitative method limitations:

Baseline assessment integrity: The integrity of some of the baseline assessments is compromised as they were not conducted before any intervention (i.e., after the first cash transfer). This timing could lead to results that are influenced by initial cash transfer, rather than providing a true baseline for comparison. As such, for these baselines and endlines, beneficiary households who reported receiving cash assistance before the baseline interview were removed from the analysis. The data of this round study should be considered indicative.

Availability of trend data: The introduction of food security indicators like a Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI) was introduced in HIP 2022 MR1,

so getting a trend for this indicator before 2022 remains impossible. This limits the ability to evaluate changes over time.

Social desirability bias: There is a potential for social desirability bias among respondents. This bias occurs when individuals modify their responses to align with perceived social norms or expectations, rather than expressing their genuine opinions. This tendency can affect the accuracy of survey results as participants may not fully disclose their true beliefs or attitudes, thus skewing the overall findings.

Seasonal variability: Reported improvements in food security, livelihoods and household expenditures may partly stem from seasonal changes in Somalia. These improvements cannot solely be credited to the adoption of vulnerability-targeting approaches.

Cultural reporting biases: Cultural sensitivities, such as the taboo surrounding discussions on khat consumption and income derived from gifts or charity, likely led to underreporting on specific indicators. This could affect the accuracy of data related to monthly household expenditures.

FINDINGS

This paper explores the perception and acceptability of the different targeting criteria, potential risks associated with humanitarian cash assistance, strategies for improving the inclusion of vulnerable minority households, and recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of targeting approaches. This paper aims to provide insights into the successes, challenges, and opportunities for improving MPCA targeting. The key findings of the primary qualitative assessment and SDR are discussed below.

Perception and Acceptability of the Targeting Criteria

From the FGD, Community-Based Targeting was preferred. Participants appreciated Community-Based Targeting because it involved local committees and elders, ensuring community participation and consultation. This method was perceived as fair and representative, fostering a sense of ownership and trust among community members. Although Vulnerability-Based Targeting was acknowledged for its effectiveness in identifying the most vulnerable, there was an implicit trust in local mechanisms, indicating a preference for the participatory approach of Community-Based Targeting.

On the other hand, KIs expressed significant concerns regarding Community-Based Targeting. They highlighted risks such as the influence of local authorities, aid diversion, and potential fraud. These issues raised questions about the reliability and fairness of Community-Based Targeting. KIs viewed Vulnerability-Based Targeting as a more controlled and precise method, reducing the risk of corruption and ensuring that aid reached the most vulnerable without biases or manipulation. They emphasized the structured approach of Vulnerability-Based Targeting, which aligned better with the program's objectives of providing targeted assistance based on individual needs and vulnerabilities.

Effectiveness of MPCA in Targeting and Meeting the Needs

KIIs and FGDs provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of vulnerability-based targeting compared to community-based targeting in addressing the needs of beneficiaries.

Vulnerability-based targeting was lauded for its reliance on objective criteria. This method employs quantifiable indicators such as the Food Consumption Score and reduced Coping Strategy Index, which guarantees that aid reaches those in immediate. Despite its methodological strengths, this approach is not without challenges. The biggest challenge is the stringent seven-day delivery timeline following approval, which can be difficult to meet. Moreover, there are often delays in negotiations with local authorities that can further complicate the timeline. Nevertheless, its swift cash disbursement within the timeframe is acknowledged as effective. Furthermore, the vulnerability-based approach is perceived as fair and transparent, as a result of clearly defined selection criteria known to beneficiaries and stakeholders, thus fostering credibility in the process.

On the other hand, community-based targeting takes a different approach by leveraging local knowledge and involvement. It engages community leaders, elders, and camp committees in the decision-making process. This nurtures trust and acceptance among beneficiaries. This approach is particularly noted for its flexibility and adaptability to local contexts, allowing community leaders who are attuned to the dynamics and challenges within their communities to guide the distribution of MPCA.

Table 2: Advantages of both vulnerability-based targeting and community-based targeting

Vulnerability-based targeting	Community-based targeting
Utilizes clear, measurable indicators to identify those in critical need.	Engages community figures in the decision-making process, ensuring relevance and sensitivity to local needs.
Recognized for the prompt distribution of funds within the stipulated timeframe.	Strengthens community relations and garners beneficiary support.
The selection process is open and known to all involved parties, enhancing trust in the system.	Adapts to the specific challenges and dynamics of the community.

To understand the effectiveness of the vulnerability-based and community-based targeting approaches , an analysis of the baseline and endline study rounds conducted by IMPACT Initiatives between 2021 and 2023 was conducted. The below findings were collected through the analysis of Food Consumption Scores (FCS) and Livelihood Coping Strategy Indicators (LCSI) trends between baseline and endline study rounds. The analysis includes an evaluation of the influence of these two targeting approaches on household coping strategies by employing the reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) as an indicator. Overall, the analysis has been done by comparing results between baseline and endline study rounds. Moreover, the findings include a better understanding of beneficiary households' spending trends during the baseline and endline rounds, and their ability to meet basic needs after the cash distribution by targeting-method approach. This analysis was used through a comparison between baseline and endline per each study round, by the targeting-method approach used by each study round.

Food Consumption Score (FCS)

The FCS is designed to measure the quantity and variety of foods consumed in a household in the last week. A poor (0-28) or borderline (above 28 to 42) score suggest food insecurity as the household is likely not consuming enough or varied enough food to meet their nutritional needs.[7]

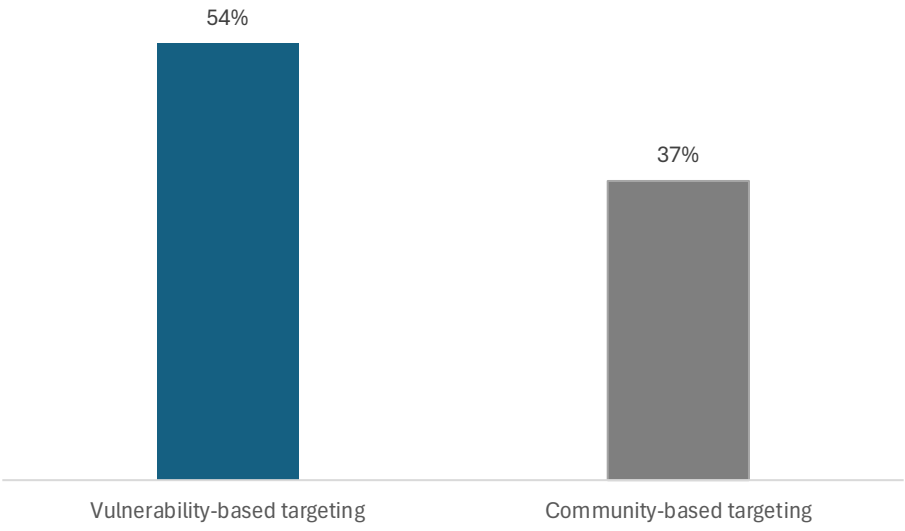
The comparison of the FCS indicators within the vulnerability-based targeting approach reveals that the beneficiary households identified through this approach had lower FCS, at the baseline, than those selected via the community-based approach. When examining the lowest FCS across the three baselines for each modality, the vulnerability-based approach recorded a minimum score of 29.4, while the community-based

[7] VAM Resource Centre, WFP

approach had the lowest score of 38.5. **This data suggests that the vulnerability-based approach is more effective in targeting beneficiaries with lower FCS, indicating a greater level of food insecurity among these individuals than those identified by the community-based method.**

This indicates that a greater number of households with "poor FCS" were reached through the vulnerability-based targeting method compared to the community-based one. For instance, in the baseline assessments conducted by IMPACT, the largest percentage of households with poor FCS was found within a baseline falling under vulnerability-based targeting (with 54% of the beneficiary households from baseline). In contrast, in the baselines associated with the community-based approach, not one had over half of its beneficiary households categorized in "the poor FCS".

Figure 1: Highest proportion of aid recipient households with poor FCS scores in baselines, by targeting approach type.



It is worth noting that an increase in the FCS was observed when comparing the initial baseline with the subsequent endline for each study round. The greatest increase was observed between the baseline and endline rounds within the vulnerability-based approach, showing a rise of 14.5. Conversely, the smallest increase occurred in the community-based approach, with an increase of 10.9. This outcome implies that both the vulnerability-based and community-based targeting methods were effective. Nonetheless, the vulnerability-based approaches were more successful in reaching households with lower FCS, indicating a higher level of food insecurity among these groups.

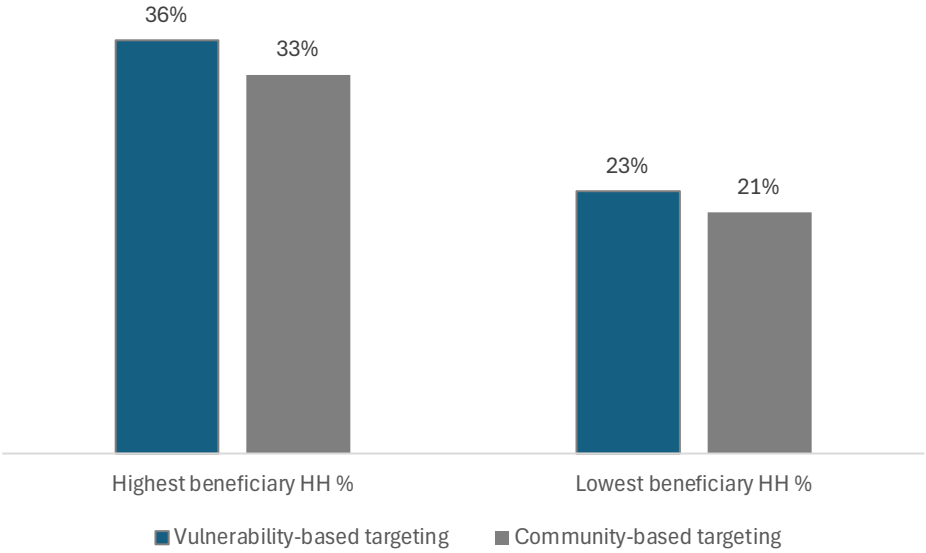
Livelihood Coping Strategy Index (LCSI)

This is an indicator used to understand medium and long-term coping capacity of households in response to lack of food or lack of money to buy food and their ability to overcome challenges in the future. The use of emergency, crisis or stress level livelihoods-based coping strategies typically reduces HHs' overall resilience, in turn increasing the

likelihood of depleting resources to cover basic needs gaps. In addition, a higher LCSI indicates more vulnerability contrary to the FCS. The LCSI includes strategies ranging from normal to stress to crisis to emergency (most severe) coping strategies.

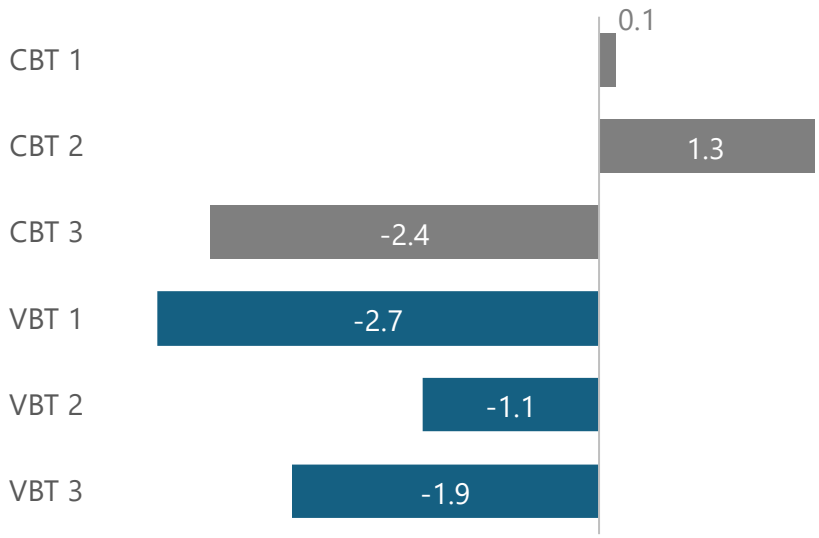
The comparison of the LCSI within the vulnerability-based targeting approach reveals that the beneficiary households identified through this approach had higher LCSI scores than those selected via the community-based approach. Specifically, when examining the baseline data from 2021 to 2023, the largest proportion of households identified as "emergency" – which constitutes 36% - were identified from baseline under the vulnerability-based targeting approach (VT1). In contrast, the lowest proportion of beneficiary households selected in the baselines identified as "emergency" were mostly from baselines under a community-based approach (21% of beneficiary households of baseline of CBT1). This pattern suggests that the vulnerability-based targeting approach has a higher likelihood of selecting beneficiary households that are in "emergency" LCSI classification compared to the community-based targeting approach.

Figure 2: Highest and lowest proportion of aid recipient households with emergency LCSI scores in baseline, by targeting approach type



A downward trend in the average LCSI score over time implies that households are less dependent on drastic measures to secure their essential food requirements. This trend is indicative of an enhancement in food security, reflecting a reduction in the difficulties households encounter in obtaining food or the financial means to purchase it. Observations from study rounds under the community-based targeting approach reveal that in two out of three rounds, households experienced an increase in LCSI scores. In contrast, every study round under the vulnerability-based targeting approach registered a decrease in the average LCSI score when the baseline figures were compared with the corresponding endline data.

Figure 3: The difference of LCSI baseline score compared to endline score, by each baseline and endline study round[8]



Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI)

The rCSI measures the frequency at which households rely on certain negative coping strategies (related to food consumption in the household) within the 7 days prior to data collection to cope with food insecurity.[9] Increases in average rCSI scores over time are considered negative as they imply increases in the reported use of household negative coping strategies (related to reducing food consumption), whereas decreases in average rCSI scores are considered positive. The rCSI thresholds are "0-3", Low, "4-18", medium and above 19 high.[10]

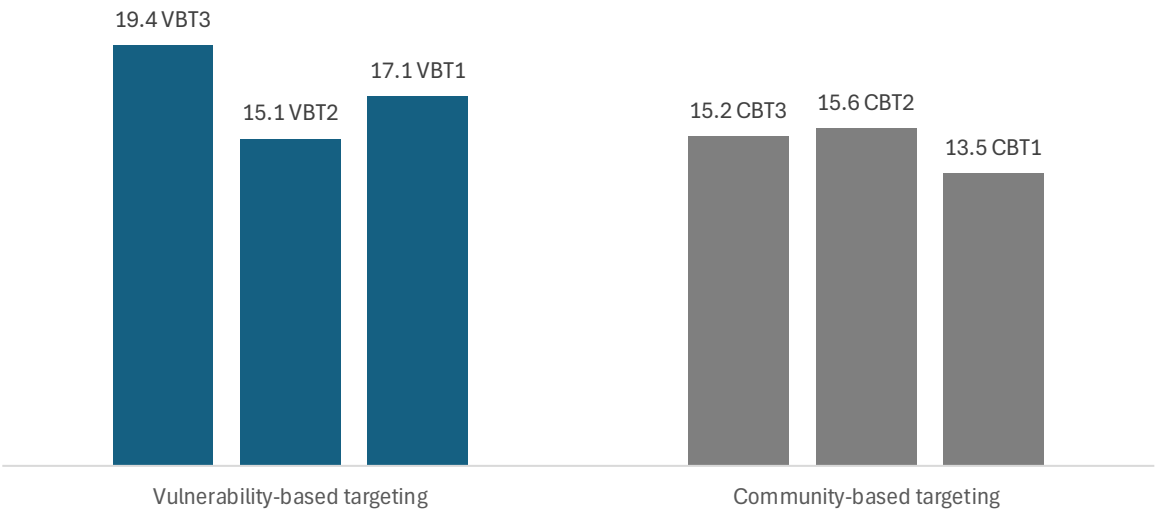
The vulnerability-based approach effectively identifies households with severe coping strategies, as indicated by higher rCSI scores, and is instrumental in reducing these negative behaviors over time compared to the community-based approach. Data analysis from the baseline studies indicates a significant variance in the rCSI, with the highest recorded value being 19.4 and the lowest at 13.5. Notably, the peak rCSI value was observed in households under the vulnerability-based approach, while the minimum was associated with the community-based approach during the baseline phase. This disparity suggests that the vulnerability-based approach may be more effective in identifying households that resort to more severe coping strategies when faced with food scarcity.

[8] The negative signs show a decrease in the average LCSI scores while the positive signs indicate a decrease in the average LCSI, which highlights increased use of coping mechanism.

[9] The rCSI includes coping strategies such as relying on less preferred, less expensive food (1), borrowing food or relying on help from friends or relatives (2), reducing the number of meals eaten per day (1), reducing portion size of meals (1) and restricting consumption by adults in order for young children to eat (3).

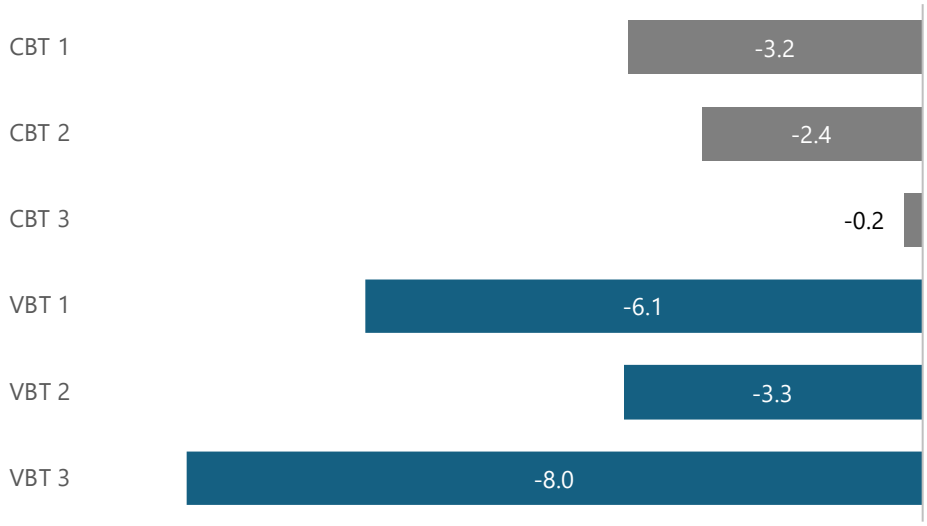
[10] Reduced Coping Strategy Index, People in Need

Figure 4: Amongst the baselines, the average rCSI score of beneficiary households, by the targeting approach type.



Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the baseline rCSI values reveals that the rounds utilizing the vulnerability-based approach demonstrated a greater reduction in the rCSI, signifying a declining reliance on negative coping strategies. The most substantial decrease observed was by 8 points, whereas the least was a marginal decline of 0.2 points. This trend underscores that, over time, the vulnerability-based approach could potentially lead to a more pronounced alleviation of negative coping behaviors among the beneficiary households compared to the community-based approach.

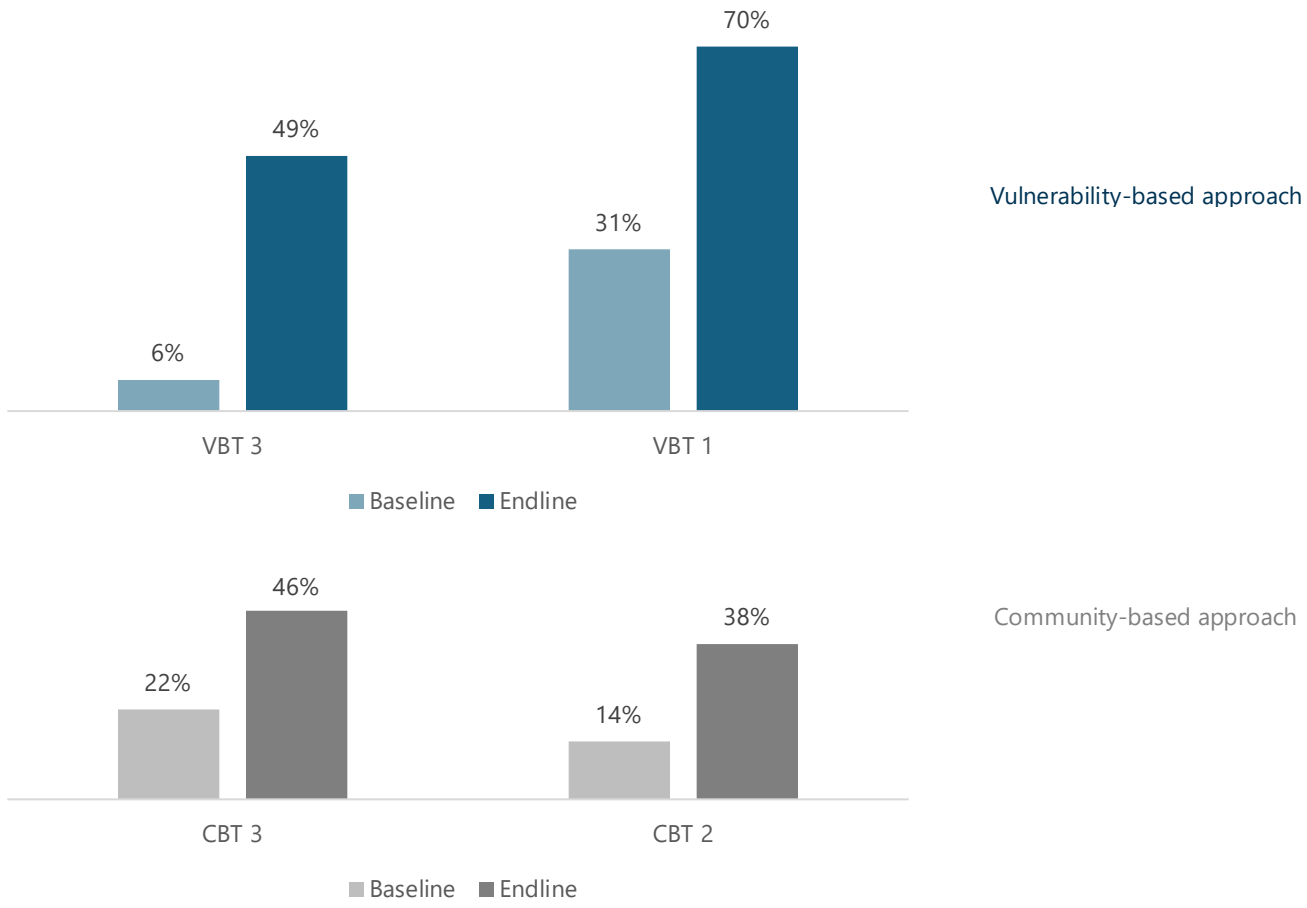
Figure 5: The difference of rCSI baseline average score compared to endline average score, by each baseline and endline study round



Beneficiary Households Spending Rate

Across all baseline and endline study rounds, there was a noticeable rise in the proportion of beneficiary households who reported that their spending met or exceeded the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB). This increase was more pronounced at the endlines. Notably, the higher increase rate in spending occurred during the study rounds that employed a vulnerability-based approach. **This suggests that targeting households based on their vulnerability leads to a more substantial improvement in their financial capacity to meet or exceed the MEB.** This implies that focusing on the most vulnerable households could be a more effective approach to enhancing the beneficiary households' well-being.

Figure 6: The proportion of beneficiary households having their spending amount equal or exceed MEB, by study round and targeting approach[11]



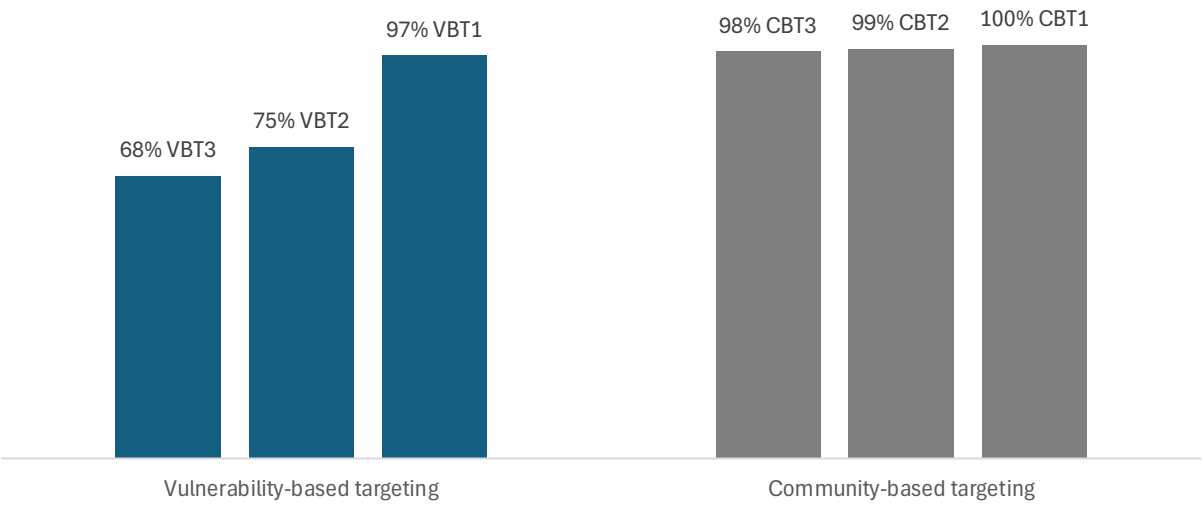
Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs (ECMEN) is a binary indicator showing whether a household's total expenditures can be covered. It is calculated by establishing household economic capacity (which involves aggregating expenditures) and comparing it against the MEB to establish whether a household is above this threshold.

[11] The data for this indicator was not collected during CBT1 study rounds. These indicators were added after CBT1 study rounds was over. Additionally, due to the very low rate of responses in VBT2 study rounds the data of these indicators were taken out.

Beneficiary Households Meeting Basic Needs After Receiving MPCA

During the endline study phase, beneficiary households receiving MPCA were questioned about the adequacy of the MPCA in fulfilling their basic needs. A vast majority of these beneficiary households, across all endline study phases, indicated that their basic needs were met following the MPCA three rounds. Nonetheless, a smaller proportion of households reported this outcome in the endline phase when a vulnerability-targeting approach was used. This could imply that households identified through this approach may require additional rounds of MPCA to meet their basic needs.

Figure 7: The proportion of HHs able to meet their basic needs at the endline after receiving MPCA.



In conclusion, the data from the baseline and endline study rounds completed by IMPACT Initiatives between 2021 and 2023 indicates that the vulnerability-based targeting method is more adept at identifying households with severe food insecurity*, as evidenced by lower Food Consumption Scores and higher Livelihood Coping Strategy Indicator scores. This approach has also shown a greater capacity for improvement over time, suggesting its effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable populations.*

Moreover, while the vulnerability-targeting approach is effective in identifying households with greater needs, it may also indicate that beneficiary households have deeper or more complex needs that are not as readily met by three rounds of MPCA. In contrast, the community-targeting approach might be covering beneficiary households with a broader range of needs, some of which may be less severe, allowing for a higher reported rate of meeting basic needs. ***This suggests that while the vulnerability-targeting approach is more focused and perhaps more efficient in directing resources to those greater needs, it may require more sustained or intensive support to fully address those needs.***

Potential Risks Associated with MPCA and Effective Targeting Approach

Effective humanitarian aid requires a nuanced approach that balances the objectivity of vulnerability-based targeting with the inclusivity of community-based methods, ensuring equitable assistance while minimizing biases and exclusion.

In the field of humanitarian aid, the process of identifying and assisting those in need is fraught with complexities. One KI raised concerns about the vulnerability-based approach. The KI pointed out that rigid adherence to predefined criteria can lead to exclusion errors, where some of the most vulnerable individuals or households may be inadvertently overlooked. Moreover, if the selection criteria are not transparent or widely accepted by the community, there can be a perception of bias, undermining the legitimacy of the aid program.

FGDs highlighted the importance of incorporating local knowledge and encouraging community participation in the selection process. This is in line with the Ground Truth's research, where sense of ownership and resilience building was highlighted. In addition, the Somalia Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) outlining a commitment to "shifting power from aid providers towards communities and local groups[12]. This approach ensures that aid is directed to those who are in need, as community members often have a deeper understanding of the needs within their mindset. However, this method is not without its problems. The community-based approach carries the risk of favouritism and bias, as community leaders and committees may be influenced by personal relationships, social affiliations, or local political dynamics. Such influences can lead to the misallocation of resources, where aid does not reach the intended beneficiary households.

Furthermore, marginalized groups, such as persons with a disability or those belonging to minority communities, may find themselves underrepresented or entirely excluded from aid programs due to existing power imbalances within the community. These groups often lack the voice or the means to advocate for themselves, making it imperative that aid distribution mechanisms account for their vulnerability.

Balancing these approaches by integrating objective vulnerability assessments with active community participation and oversight may mitigate these risks, ensuring a more equitable and effective distribution of cash.

Table 3: Challenges of both vulnerability-based targeting and community-based targeting

Vulnerability-based targeting	Community-based targeting
Rigid criteria may result in overlooking some vulnerable individuals or households.	Community leaders and committees may be influenced by personal relationships, social affiliations, or local politics.
If selection criteria are not well understood or accepted by the community, it can lead to perceptions of bias.	Decision-making may be swayed by subjective judgments rather than objective need.

[12] Somalia - Cash Barometer - July 2023 - Full report

Challenges in meeting the tight delivery timelines and negotiating delays with local authorities.	Power imbalances within the community may result in underrepresentation or overlooking of marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities or minority communities.

Strategies for Improvement

KIIs and FGDs provided valuable insights into strategies for improving both vulnerability-based and community-based targeting. In the context of vulnerability-based targeting, participants from KII and FGDs stressed the importance of conducting detailed needs assessments. These assessments are crucial for understanding the unique challenges faced by different vulnerable groups, including minority households and people with disabilities, to ensure that aid is tailored to their specific needs.

FGDs highlighted the critical role of community engagement and participation. There was a strong advocacy for the inclusion of local community members in the decision-making process, which is believed to enhance the accuracy and relevance of targeting. Both KII and FGD participants agreed on the necessity of detailed data collection and disaggregation. This step is important to accurately identify and address the needs of vulnerable groups, thus reducing exclusion errors.

One KI underscored the need for better coordination among implementing agencies. Streamlined processes can reduce the duplication of efforts in vulnerability targeting and allow for the refinement of targeting criteria based on continuous feedback. Another KI recommended implementing secondary in-person verifications to ensure that households are not initially included based on vulnerability criteria and not unjustly excluded. Integrating disability-specific criteria into the targeting process is also recommended to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Regarding community-based targeting strategies, KIs emphasized the value of community participation. They advocate for the active involvement of community members, including marginalized groups and people with disabilities, in decision-making processes. FGD participants stressed the importance of a participatory approach, which they believe can enhance the accuracy and relevance of cash distribution.

To mitigate biases and favoritism inherited in community-based targeting, one KI participant suggested the implementation of mechanisms like external audits. FGD participants, on the other hand, recommended on-site selections and cross-checks to ensure fairness (one FGD). Both groups agree on the need for more community engagement to implement fair and effective targeting.

Table 4: Recommendations flagged by KI and FGD participants to improve both vulnerability-based targeting and community-based targeting approaches

Vulnerability-based targeting	Community-based targeting
Conduct comprehensive Needs Assessments.[13]	Encourage active involvement of community members, especially those from marginalized groups and people with disabilities, in the decision-making process to improve the targeting's accuracy and relevance.
Improve coordination among implementing agencies to minimize duplicated efforts and refine targeting criteria through ongoing feedback.	Implement external audits to counteract biases and favoritism, ensuring that the targeting process remains fair and transparent.
Implement secondary verification to confirm that households meet the vulnerability criteria and prevent the unjust exclusion of eligible recipients.	A more community-centered approach to implementing effective targeting.

Combining the strengths of both approaches, leveraging detailed assessments and local knowledge, ensuring transparency and fostering community participation leads to more effective and inclusive humanitarian assistance.

[13] The SCC has developed a comprehensive system to assess needs through multisectoral assessments. These assessments collect information on community needs across various sectors (health, WASH, protection, etc.) as well as market functionality and accessibility. Multisectoral assessments are conducted in close collaboration with existing Area-Based Coordination structures (ABCs) and local/international organizations when feasible.

CONCLUSION

This assessment aimed to evaluate the acceptability, effectiveness, risks and challenges associated with the two main targeting approaches in humanitarian cash assistance implementation. The insights gathered from both MPCA stakeholders (KIs) and beneficiary households through FGDs underscore the critical factors influencing cash programming actions in Somalia. Findings indicate that MPCA initiatives serve as crucial support systems for households facing crises. This assistance, delivered in the form of cash, effectively addresses immediate needs and demonstrates adaptability by accommodating diverse and individualized requirements. In essence, MPCA program played a pivotal role in fulfilling essential needs during challenging circumstances. While there is general satisfaction with the current distribution system, concerns about inclusivity, transparency and the risks in beneficiary selections were raised. Both discussions emphasized the importance of inclusivity, transparency and effectiveness in targeting vulnerable populations, particularly minority groups and people with a disability.

Effective targeting approaches are crucial in humanitarian cash beneficiary selection, to ensure that support reaches those most in need. Data from IMPACT Initiatives studies between 2021 and 2023 reveal that the vulnerability-based targeting method has demonstrated a high proficiency in selecting households that are experiencing severe food insecurity. This is evidenced by the quantifiable metrics used in the studies: households identified through this method consistently showed lower FCS and higher LCSI scores. These scores are critical indicators; the former measures the diversity and frequency of food consumption, while the latter assesses the strategies households employ to cope with a lack of resources.

The vulnerability-based approach not only identifies those in need, but also shows a remarkable capacity for fostering improvement over time and was more likely to exceed the MEB. This suggests that when MPCA is directed using this method, it can lead to progressive enhancements in the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations. It is a method that adapts to the evolving needs of these households, indicating its dynamic nature and effectiveness. However, it is important to note that while this approach is adept at identifying households with significant needs, it also reveals that these needs may be deep-rooted and complex. The standard provision of three rounds of MPCA may not be sufficient to fully meet these intricate needs. This points to the necessity for a more prolonged or intensive support system to ensure that the assistance provided truly helps these households overcome their challenges.

In contrast, the community-targeting approach appears to encompass a wider spectrum of beneficiary households. This method may include households whose needs are diverse but not as acute, which could explain the higher reported rates of basic needs being met. It suggests that community-targeting, while perhaps less precise, has the advantage of addressing a broader range of issues within the community, some of which may require less

intensive intervention. This might be linked to what was mentioned by FGD participants who focused on the importance of actively involving local communities, particularly marginalized groups and people with a disability, in decision-making processes. This inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration with both local communities and authorities ensure that the right people receive the support they need. Furthermore, collaboration with local authorities enhances the acceptability of targeting approaches, ensuring the inclusion of all relevant individuals.

In conclusion, while both community-based and vulnerability-based approaches have their merits, combining these methodologies can leverage their strengths and mitigate their weaknesses. This ensures a more inclusive, transparent, and effective humanitarian response that addresses the diverse needs of vulnerable populations in Somalia. This integrated method leverages the objectivity and fairness of data-driven vulnerability assessments while incorporating local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and community involvement. By balancing these approaches, humanitarian programs can ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable populations in a transparent, accountable and culturally appropriate manner which enhances the overall effectiveness and equity of cash assistance interventions in Somalia.

However, this assessment is limited in scope. There may be a need to further explore these dynamics through mixed-method research with a special focus on the effectiveness of these targeting approaches regarding inclusivity, transparency, and equity.

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