

EMPOWERED AID IN ACTION:

USING EMPOWERED AID TO MITIGATE SEA RISKS IN CASH DISTRIBUTIONS CEFORD & WORLD VISION, LOBULE SETTLEMENT (KOBOKO DISTRICT, UGANDA)

DECEMBER 2022

Background

World Vision (WV) has been in partnership with the Global Women's Institute (GWI) since 2019. This partnership has contributed to strengthening World Vision's programming, specifically on ensuring access to humanitarian aid is safe for women and girls. Through this partnership, tools have been adapted to better capture women and girls' perceptions of safety and risk during the distribution process, with safety measures deliberately put in place at the distribution points to increase safety – for example implementing sex-segregated lines and increasing the number of female staff and volunteers. Staff have also benefited from the partnership through various capacity-building sessions such as trainings on gender-based violence (GBV)/sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), tools, data collection, and analysis.

In 2021, WV continued to partner with GWI in the implementation and uptake of the Empowered Aid model. In this sense, WV was keen on supporting local actors to strengthen SEA risk mitigation as they work most closely with crisis-affected communities and play a key role in ensuring the voices of women and girls from said communities are heard. As such, WV has been collaborating with Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD) as a copartner on the General Food Assistance (GFA) project with funding from the World Food Program (WFP). CEFORD manages cash distribution in Lobule settlement and food distribution in two distribution points in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Zone 5.

CEFORD's experience with Empowered Aid

The partnership between WV and CEFORD takes different forms such as capacity building through trainings and continuous mentorship, allowing many CEFORD staff members to attend trainings delivered by the Empowered Aid team on mitigating risks of SEA in humanitarian assistance.

CEFORD has been able to incorporate prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) messages in the pre-addresses before cash distributions. For the staff and the community, it means that the organization in Bidibidi settlement have rethought their way of organizing distributions, for example, conducting pre-addresses focusing only on the cash distributed to individuals.

"I am among the staff that has actively participated in the project activities like trainings, data collection, data analysis and data validation among others, implementing the project findings has enabled me to learn and appreciate the role women and girls play in mitigating SEA in humanitarian aid, for example, empowering the women and girls with knowledge about SEA has enabled the reduction of SEA cases in aid distribution"

Gender staff, CEFORD

Following the Empowered Aid training, the staff adjusted the pre-addresses and now take time to talk not only about the beneficiary cash ration, but also about GBV, the complaints mechanism, and awareness on SEA among others. This has empowered the community to report cases and also advocate for their rights during distributions.

The team is also able to consult with community members, particularly women and girls, so they can share their feedback on sexual abuse and exploitation and serve as contextual safeguarding experts.

What was being done before implementing Empowered Aid recommendations?

A woman with specific needs shared the following experience after a cash distribution in Lobule:

“We could come to the distribution point but no one bothers to understand that we are vulnerable. Standing in a non-sex-segregated line waiting to be verified has been a challenge of its own to expectant mothers like me. I want to appreciate the efforts of CEFORD for the support rendered to persons with specific needs, I now take few minutes at the distribution point compared to the previous situation. As of today, we are made to stand in sex segregated lines were men/boys line up separately from women/girls.” (Source, CEFORD monthly report)

Staff at CEFORD share that before Empowered Aid recommendations, when beneficiaries would come to receive their rations, all women and men would line up in one same line. The women and girls complained a lot during the distribution, and some of the complaints that came through included sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and pushing or pulling the women out of lines. Staff also observed that women and girls stayed at the distribution longer than the scheduled distribution period, hence putting them at risk of being assaulted when they are returning from distributions.

On the pre-addresses, the staff would just factor in the type on the amount of cash each beneficiary is receiving and there was no attention given to the risk of SEA from staff and other stakeholders. In addition, the community (South Sudanese Refugees) didn't have much knowledge on SEA.

How CEFORD incorporates Empowered Aid recommendations in cash distributions

I. Establishing sex segregated line during cash distributions

During cash distribution in Lobule, CEFORD has implemented sex-segregated lines. Having seen the effectiveness of sex-segregated lines in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement by World Vision, the good practice was as well adapted for Lobule settlement. At the cash distribution point, the men's line was spaced separately from the line for women and girls. The sex-segregated lines for women and girls have worked effectively in enabling women and girls avoid being pushed from out of the lines, harassed or otherwise targeted, A staff said; “unlike previously where men, women and girls lined up together and it would be survival for the fittest, the Empowered Aid recommendation of using sex-segregated lines at the distribution point has enabled women and girls in Lobule settlement access to their cash ration in a fair and dignified manner”.

2. Conducting awareness sessions for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse with key messages disseminated before and during cash distributions

Before the cash distribution, the staff of CEFORD make it a point to have key messages on PSEA. The awareness sessions are conducting during the cash distribution while the beneficiaries are in line, and also when implementing other activities in the settlement after cash distribution. “The team reminds the women and girls that the aid they receive is for free and no one should ask for anything in return” reported one staff member. The awareness sessions are always conducted in a pre-address and also in prerecorded messages that play continuously during distributions. These messages are translated in the local language, Arabic.

3. Increasing the number of female staff/volunteers the distribution points

In a focus group discussion with women and girls living in Bidibidi, participants reported feeling safer sharing their feelings and challenges during distributions with female rather than with male staff. A normal distribution point should have six to eight total staff and 39 volunteers; before, CEFORD had 15 female staff/volunteers and 32 male staff/volunteers at distributions. Through the process of adapting distributions with Empowered Aid, however, the management agreed to hire more female staff and increased them by 33%. Currently, CEFORD has 20 female staff/volunteers involved in the distribution

4. Encouraging the creation of accompaniment systems to travel to distribution points

The staff has also observed through their work in Bidibidi that community members, particularly women and girls, tend to move in groups of three to four people to the distribution point. This may be due in part to efforts by the staff to inform the community of the importance of making use of moving in groups when coming to collect their cash and also when they go into the bush to collect fire wood. Moving in groups was identified by women and girls who took part in participatory action research with Empowered Aid as a risk mitigation mechanism for sexual exploitation and abuse.

ABOUT EMPOWERED AID

Empowered Aid is a multi-country, participatory action research project led by the Global Women's Institute (GWI) at the George Washington University. The initial study was conducted in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and World Vision in Uganda, and with CARE International and URDA in Lebanon; with scale-up activities currently underway in partnership with World Vision in the Middle East, East Africa and South Asia. Its goal is to support the creation or adaptation of aid delivery models that actively work to reduce power disparities and give women and girls a sustained voice in how aid is delivered. Empowered Aid is funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

Learn more at <https://empoweredaid.gwu.edu>

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Suggested Citation: Mercy Atim, Hope Harriet, Godfrey Twesigwe, Nuwamany Richmond, Jessie Weber, Mathilde Belli (2022). *Empowered Aid in Action: Using Empowered Aid to Mitigate SEA Risks in Cash Distributions*