Digitization of CVA program in Botswana: Remote Cash IM in practice

Red Cross' road to digital cash aid in Botswana

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many National Societies (NS) increased Cash & Voucher Assistance (CVA) components in their emergency responses. In order to guarantee program quality of these CVA programs, Information Management (IM) plays a pivotal role. Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCS) was one of the NS looking to improve the use of data and digital in their cash based aid, but with travel restrictions and social distancing in place, remote collaboration became crucial to develop these skills and capacities. This case study will explore how BRCS and 510, the data and digital initiative of the Netherlands Red cross, worked together on Cash IM.

1. The remote support start-up

1.1 The Botswana Red Cross

On 29 March 2020, Botswana recorded its first three COVID-19 cases. Soon after, Botswana went in lockdown with the rest of the world. The BRCS began assisting the government in its efforts to stop the virus from spreading and to preserve the most vulnerable people's safety, well-being, dignity, and livelihoods. The BRCS came up with a strategy to combat the crisis, based on five fundamental pillars, one of which is basic needs. There were multiple needs (health, WASH, food etc.) and unconditional multipurpose cash grants held the potential to satisfy various needs at once, which was why CVA was deemed an appropriate modality. BRCS had previously worked with CVA in ad-hoc and manual processes, but realized that to deliver aid quickly and efficiently during the COVID-19 crisis, they needed to start looking into digital solutions.

After this decision, BRCS started consultations with stakeholders. At this point BRCS was contacted by 510, the data and digital initiative of the Netherland Red Cross.

1.2 The Netherland Red Cross

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) supported 510's efforts on providing remote technical assistance on Cash IM to National Societies. 510 contacted the IFRC Regional Office in Nairobi and met with the regional cash focal point. Through the Regional

Office and country cluster support teams, 510 was brought into contact with BRCS. 510 came into contact with Onkemetse Joseph, the Cash Focal Point in the Disaster Management Department, and Tshepo Garethata, the Programs manager, and in October 2020, 510 started up with co-design sessions.

2. How the project was informed by Human Centered Design (HCD)

510's Human Centered Design (HCD) team, uses a standardized process of getting the right, non-biased contextual information to (remotely) understand the needs of a person and/or organization.

1. The team started with creating a basic overview of the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTEL) situation.

2. Five key stakeholder roles were invited to partake in one-hour individual co-design sessions. (Sometimes less co-design session are needed. For example, when co-designs that have previously been conducted for other projects can be re-used.)

3. In each session, the participants were asked 3 questions:

- What digital tools do you use for your work?
- What is your experience with giving, or setting up, Cash Based aid?
- What, if anything, could have helped you with the experience you just described?

With these simple 3 questions many insights are gained, that can be clustered into standard formats. These insights include topics such as: 'What are familiar tools the NS is already successfully working with that can be built on?' and 'What are the real challenges, to avoid recommending tools that may be unsuitable?' Read more here

4. Next, the insights were presented back to all the BRCS stakeholders who participated in the co-design process (to ensure they validate them) and the 510 Cash IM team.

5. Once the NS confirmed the insights were correct, the HCD team facilitated a list of tasks that the NS wanted to achieve with the support of the Cash IM team. This became the basis of the project roadmap.

3. Key insights from co-designs

"The co-design sessions were really beneficial because it helped us identify the gaps that we have." Tshepo Garethata, Programs Manager at BRCS

There were three significant takeaways that flowed from the co-design process in this case:

First, HCD is essential when providing remote technical support that ensures both the NS and 510 work together as efficiently as possible. BRCS owned the formulation of their help request without having to be explicit on what data or digital tools they needed, because it was problem-focused and not solution-oriented. It helped 510 understand the context to a certain degree and what support was to be prioritized, without having local presence.

"Co-design allows you to get a good sense of context while not being there. It gets you ahead of the game." Lars Stevens, Project coordinator at 510.

Second, HCD process ensured the BRCS to paint a full picture of what they were already successfully doing, preventing 510 from trying to reinvent the wheels BRCS already had. BRCS insights often times added to the best practices and learnings, which can be reapplied across other projects.

"The BRCS had already succesfully implemented learnings from their previous projects; the 510 Cash IM team learnt about best practices when working with FSP's."

Orla Canavan, Strategic Product Design lead at 510.

Third, although co-design sessions mitigate the risk of relying on assumptions it is part of a longer process of consistant validation with the BRCS team. Subsequent the solutions and tools need to be confirmed too. A perfect example is that there was an observed need for a data management template that was created by the cash IM team (but not co-created nor validated with the end user). This resulted in the template not being adopted.

4. The benefits the collaboration brought to the BRCS

After receiving the insights of the co-design sessions, 510 began setting up the cash support systems. 510 mainly collaborated on the systems with Onkemetse (Disaster Management) and Garethata (Programs Management). 510 supported with creating the following products and services:

Products

- Mobile data collection forms for KoBo Toolbox (registration, post-distribution monitoring, food consumption scores)
- Data management templates in Excel
- Data visualizations in PowerBI dashboards (post-distribution monitoring, food consumption scores)
- **Services**
- Monitoring of data collection in KoBo Toolbox
- Data cleaning and data analysis focusing on missing data, duplicates and incorrectly formatted data
- "510 could actively monitor data being collected. This way we could proactively reach out and support" Stevens
- Training on mobile data collection in the field (training of trainers), data cleaning and analysis, preparing data sets to be shared with Financial Service Providers
- Digital Community Engagement by sending bulk SMS using Twilio
- Preparing datasets to be shared with Botswana Post in their payment portal
- Financial support
- 30 tablets for mobile data collection
- 10 TB Server for data storage and data sharing
- Salary support for IT officer to configure server and set up IT infrastructure

"Without the right hardware... safe fast and efficient storage of mobile data is more difficult. Through financial assistance to the BRCS, tablets and a server were procured." Stevens."

"510 was always there for us any time of the day when there were challenges in the field." Garethata

5. Challenges with remote Cash IM working

BRCS and NLRS are not in an official partnership, so there were no delegates or previous collaboration experiences to speed up the process. With field work, often in low connectivity areas, being a demanding task for the BRCS, scheduling appointments and having meetings could sometimes be challenging. WhatsApp proved helpful because short, asynchronous messages sometimes provided the critical information needed for 510 to continue their work remotely.

6. Conclusion

It may be concluded that BRCS and 510 had a successful collaboration based on the outcomes of an effective Human Centered Design process. The open mindset and eagerness of BRCS to introduce digital

solutions, overcame the sometimes challenging communication that remote technical assistance can entail. Throughout the project lifecycle continuous support could be given while also building sustainable capacity and skills. In terms of knowledge transfers but also in terms of an IT infrastructure that can function as the backbone for many BRCS operations.

“The BRCS will manage Cash IM without any additional support.” Tijs Ziere, Cash Information Manager