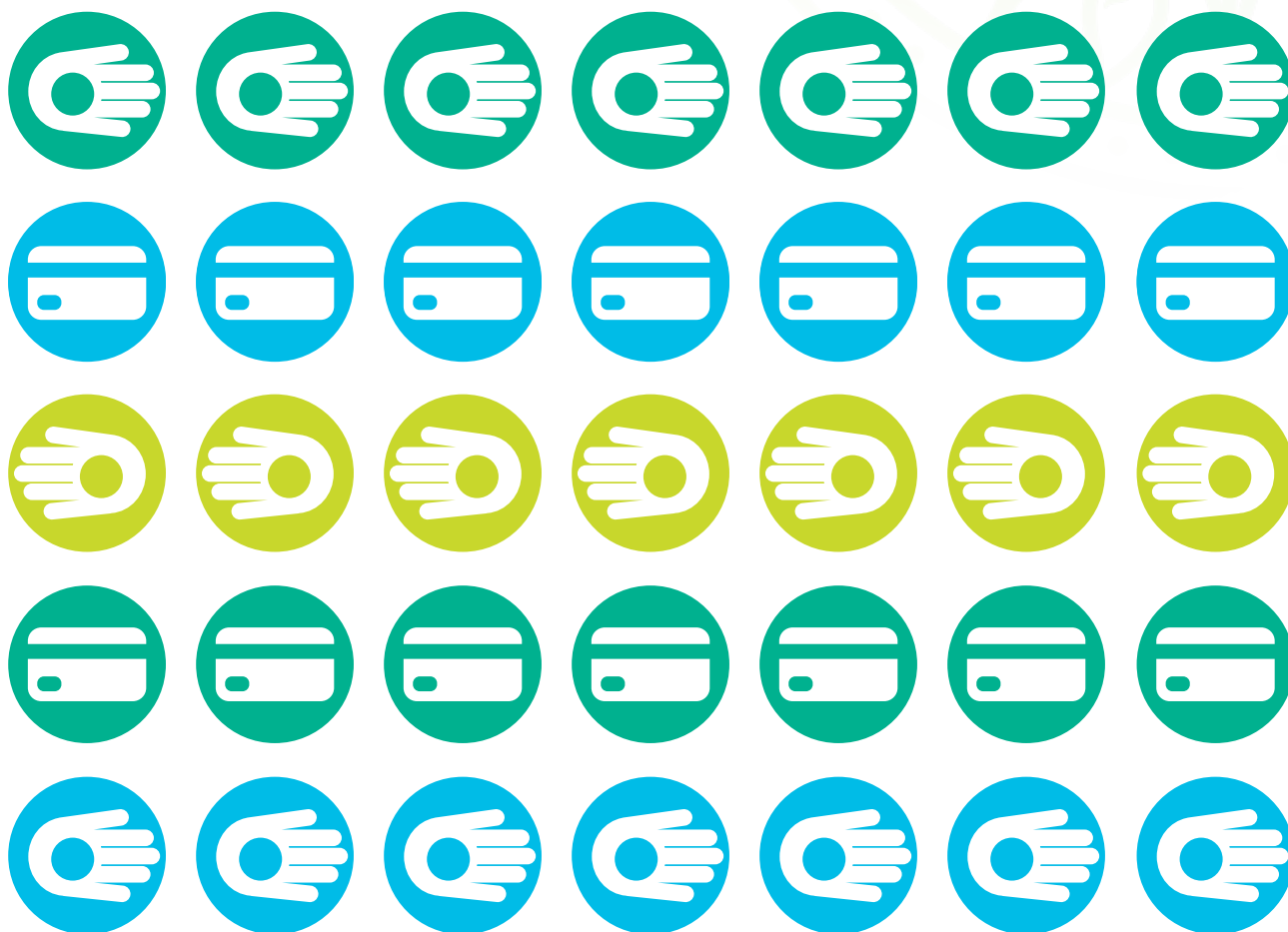




Cash and Voucher Assistance Feasibility Checklist





Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Catholic community. CRS' relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. CRS eases suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

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Acronyms

CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CTP	cash transfer programming
CVA	cash and voucher assistance
EFOM	Emergency Field Operations Manual
FSP	financial service provider
HARC	Holistic Assessment for Readiness in Cash
NFI	nonfood item
SSN	social safety net

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PURPOSE

This guidance was developed to support CRS country programs and partners to 1) identify the factors to consider in assessing [Cash and Voucher Assistance](#) (CVA) programming feasibility; and 2) facilitate decision-making to include cash-based interventions as a viable response option in emergency and recovery operations.

The CVA Feasibility Checklist (page 4) was developed by the American Red Cross and is part of the IFRC/ICRC [Cash in Emergencies Toolkit](#). CRS adapted the tool to ensure alignment with internal CRS processes and relevance to the Caritas network. The checklist presents all the criteria to consider when deciding to implement a cash and/or voucher assistance program in emergency and response contexts. The checklist was simplified to enable field teams with limited CVA programming experience to quickly come to a decision on the feasibility of cash-based interventions, while helping to identify barriers to such programs. The guidance detailed after the checklist is intended to give a further explanation of each set of criteria, but should not slow down the initial assessment.

The CVA Feasibility Decision Tree (page 16) helps users practically respond to the key feasibility considerations and advance through the decision-making process to determine whether CVA is a feasible programmatic option. The decision tree complements the checklist and provides a visualization that facilitates the “go/no-go” decision on the feasibility of CVA programming.

This guidance gives an overview of the factors to consider in CVA feasibility assessments, establishes the tool’s methodology, and defines the process for assessing the viability of a cash-based response.

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The checklist presents all the criteria to consider when deciding to implement a cash and/or voucher assistance program in emergency and response contexts.
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Data gathering for a rapid cash feasibility assessment

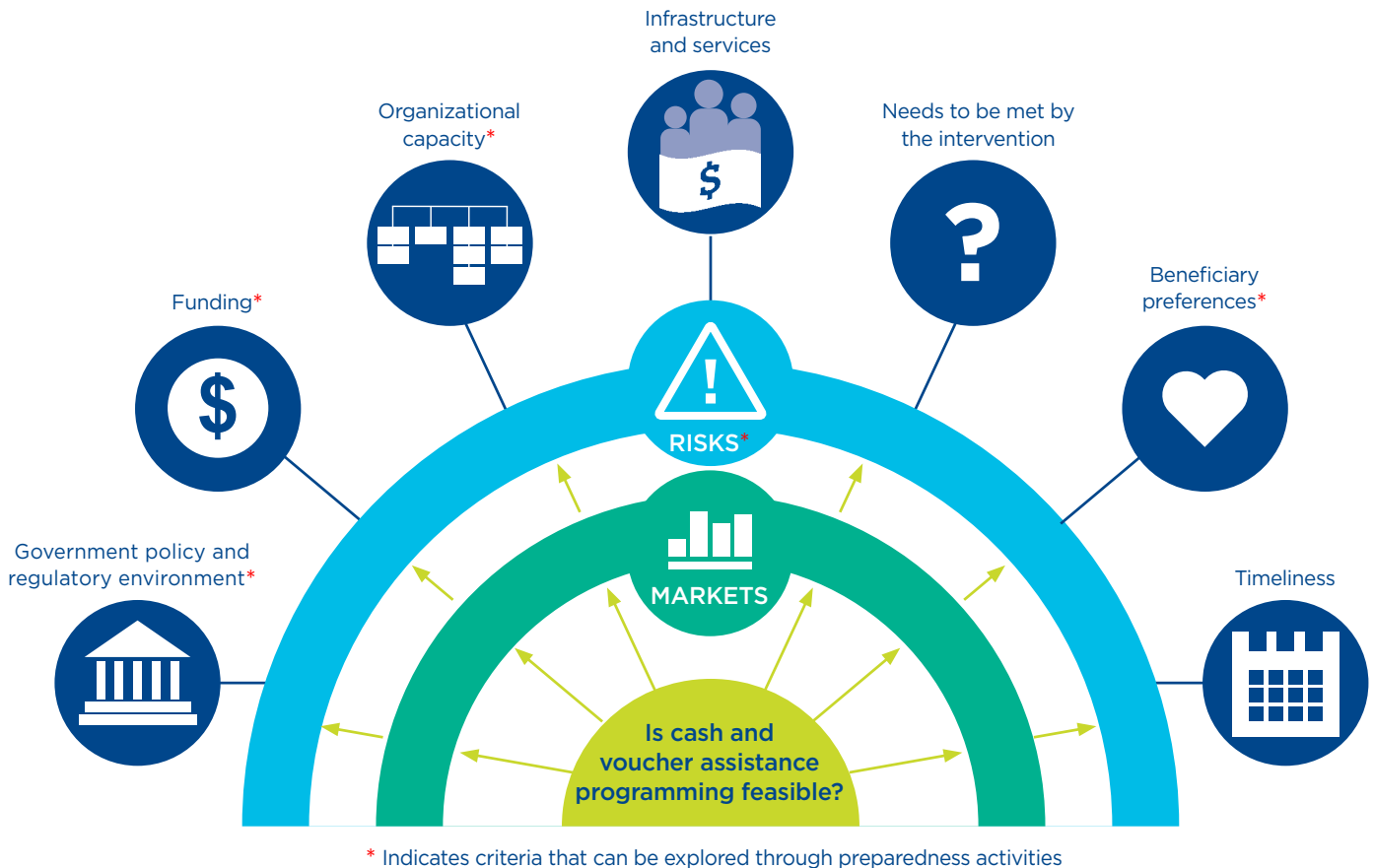
The information needed to sufficiently conduct a cash feasibility assessment may already be available internally (i.e. from CRS or partner teams) or externally (i.e. from partner organizations, coordination mechanisms, national and local government, other community structures and stakeholders). In most cases, the process to conduct this assessment will first involve gathering available data specified in the criteria, identifying gaps in available data, and creating a plan to efficiently collect the remaining data to enable a timely assessment of CVA appropriateness and feasibility.

The cash feasibility assessment only requires new assessments in the absence of key checklist information. Using existing data is not only encouraged, but it allows for a rapid initial go/no-go decision regarding the use of CVA, which can then be monitored as the context changes.

TOOL METHODOLOGY

The checklist notes two essential criteria (markets and risks) and seven additional criteria that are required for the implementation of a high-quality, at-scale and timely cash-based intervention.

Figure 1 : Criteria for assessing CVA feasibility



Markets and risks are essential criteria for determining the feasibility of CVA programs in emergency and response contexts, as their conditions cannot be influenced in the short-term by program interventions. In other words, response design cannot affect existing market conditions or potential security or protection risks posed to target groups. As fixed aspects of the greater context, markets and risks must be holistically considered in assessing CVA feasibility. If the target market and possible risks are not critically considered, the possibility of doing harm to target and non-target communities is increased and the overall success of the project may be jeopardized.

The feasibility checklist provides key standardized yes-no consideration questions for each criterion. To answer each key question, field teams must develop and answer a set of sub-questions with yes-no answers that address the focus of the related question. This document provides an explanation of each criteria and key consideration, along with examples of sub-questions.

Further assessments¹ will often be required to answer the sub-questions. In some scenarios, a simple yes-no answer may not be possible; instead, “*if X, Y, and Z, then yes*” type answers are required. These mitigating factors—or factors that allow criteria to be met through targeted actions—enable CVA to be feasible under adapted circumstances or at different times within a response.

Some information on criteria marked with a red asterisk (*) in Figure 1 can be gathered as a preparedness activity before a crisis. Preparedness activities will make the go/no-go decision process on CVA more efficient and ultimately speed up the response time.

PROPOSED AUDIENCE

This guidance is designed for new practitioners of cash and voucher assistance programming, as well as for experienced CVA program implementers who can benefit from a refresher on factors to consider prior to the implementation of a CVA response. CVA program implementers may decide to skip certain feasibility criteria, based on their level of knowledge and experience in cash-based responses. When skipping feasibility criteria, it is recommended that users justify their decisions in their CVA feasibility report.²

1. Other assessment types include multi-sectoral, beneficiary needs, markets, risks, financial service providers and delivery mechanisms.

2. Cash feasibility checklist example: [European Refugee Crisis](#); CRS [EFOM](#).

CHECKLIST – IS CVA FEASIBLE?

Criteria	Key considerations	Yes	No	Comments/ possible mitigation measures
Markets [Essential]	Is the economy monetized?			
	Does the population usually use markets to access its needs?			
	Are markets physically, socially and financially accessible to all people after the emergency?			
	Are needed items available in sufficient quantity, quality and at acceptable prices in the local markets?			
	Are traders able and willing to adapt to an increased demand?.			
	Are prices likely to remain stable in the coming weeks/ months?			
Risks* [Essential]	Are the risks associated with CVA acceptable or possible to mitigate? <i>Consider beneficiary and staff security, as well corruption issues.</i>			
Government policies and regulatory environment*	Is CVA in accordance with national and local government policies? <i>Ensure that there is no prohibition.</i>			
Funding*	Is CVA within donors' funding policies and framework?			
Organizational capacity*	Does the agency have the internal capacity (programmatic, financial, logistical) to implement a CVA intervention? <i>Consider previous experience and potential partnerships.</i>			
Infrastructure and services	Are the infrastructure and services needed to transfer cash to beneficiaries available? <i>Consider financial and technological requirements (banks, microfinance institutions, mobile phone coverage, etc.).</i>			
Needs to be met by intervention	Can the needs be met through specific commodities and/or services?			
Beneficiary preferences*	Is CVA a preferred option for the beneficiaries? <i>Consider empowerment, dignity issues and beneficiary capacity to use technology (mobiles, cards, etc.).</i>			
Timeliness	Is it possible to set up and implement a CVA with the necessary speed and at the intended scale? <i>Consider the time that might be required to roll out the different delivery mechanisms.</i>			

The extent to which possible mitigation measures can be applied to considerations marked as “No”, in combination with “Yes” responses, will determine whether cash is a feasible response modality. Further information on these points is included in the decision tree at the end of the document.



Criteria 1: Markets

Market capacity is *essential* for determining the feasibility of cash and voucher assistance programs. Without a functioning market, cash and voucher programming is not possible. However, markets tend to recover and adapt quickly after a shock, so the market situation should be regularly reassessed to revisit programming feasibility decisions. The term ‘market’ is not limited to a specific location; rather, it is defined as a virtual or physical place that facilitates transactions between parties and actors for goods and/or services.³ Cash-in-emergency interventions are primarily directed at supporting families to buy food and nonfood items from local vendors, traders and producers. Because of this, the market-related key considerations listed below gauge the capacity and functionality of the local market in the affected area and/or intervention area. Below are the specific factors to consider when gauging the functionality of a market in relation to a CVA program.

- **Key consideration 1: Is the economy monetized?**⁴ Most economies are monetized; however, emergency situations may reduce access to cash for vulnerable communities. **This key consideration requires field teams to confirm the monetization of a local economy.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ Do people pay for goods and services using money?
- ◆ Where do people get cash before and/or during the emergency?

- **Key consideration 2: Does the population usually use markets to access its needs?** Communities that are marginalized or cut off may not typically travel to markets to buy goods or services to meet their basic needs. **This key consideration requires field teams to confirm that the target population usually travels to markets for their needs.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ How often do members of the target population travel to a market to meet their basic needs?
- ◆ Which markets do the target population typically travel to for their basic needs?
- ◆ How long does it take for the target population to reach the local market?
- ◆ What type of goods or services do people typically access in the local market?

3. CaLP [Glossary](#).

4. A monetized economy is characterized by the use of money as the medium of exchange and store of value. A barter economy is cashless, or a non-monetized, economic system in which goods or services are traded at negotiated rates.

- **Key consideration 3: Are markets physically, socially and financially accessible to all people after the emergency?** Barriers to accessing markets may be physical (e.g. distance, security, transportation availability etc.), financial (e.g. due to transportation costs), cultural/social (due to male-dominated market systems). This key consideration requires field teams to confirm that all target communities and groups can access functioning markets; defining access as being able to physically reach markets and transact with traders, vendors and producers.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What barriers prevent target community members from transacting at functioning markets?
- ◆ Can the barriers be overcome to ensure that target communities are able to buy goods and services to meet their urgent needs?
- ◆ Are there specific groups who will struggle to access markets?
- ◆ Can these challenges be addressed?
- ◆ How has the emergency reduced market accessibility for target populations?

- **Key consideration 4: Are preferred items available in enough quantity and at acceptable prices in the local markets?** Limited supply of common items (of the necessary quality) in local markets may result in a cash program creating price inflation, doing harm to non-beneficiary households, and preventing beneficiaries from accessing the goods and services they need with the cash provided. A market assessment is required for any at-scale CVA program, to avoid price inflation from increased demand and ensure available items are of sufficient quality. Based on available information of the target population's needs, sector-specific market assessments may also be conducted (food, NFIs, rental, etc.). This key consideration requires field teams to assess the availability of key items most needed by the target group, ensuring enough quantity, quality and suitable prices in the local market.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ Are commonly purchased items available in the local market?
- ◆ Are available items of a suitable quality, relative to local standards?
- ◆ Are prices acceptable to target populations?
- ◆ How have prices changed over time?
- ◆ If items are not available, why?
- ◆ Can vendors or traders source commonly purchased items even if they are not currently available?

- **Key consideration 5: Are traders able and willing to adapt to an increased demand?** It is essential to measure the local traders' capacity to meet an increased consumer demand for key items. To avoid a supply-side limitation on goods and services, discussions with traders and vendors are required prior to any humanitarian assistance program. This key consideration requires field teams to assess the traders' capacity to supply key items, ensuring that traders, vendors and producers can continue to resupply stocks of commodities.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ How long does it take for vendors to resupply their stocks of key items?
- ◆ How frequently are they resupplying their stocks of key items?
- ◆ Do vendors have the capacity to meet the needs of the target population with key items?
- ◆ Would vendors face challenges in increasing their supplies? If yes, what challenges exist and how could these be mitigated?
- ◆ If there are disruptions to vendor supply chains after the emergency, can they be addressed and in what timeframe?

- **Key consideration 6: Are prices likely to remain stable in the coming weeks/months?** Understanding price fluctuations by way of a price baseline of key items is ideal.⁵ Every cash program should include a price monitoring activity to ensure the cash transfer amount continues to be relevant and appropriate to cover the proposed needs, as well as to avoid price increases caused by the cash program. This key consideration requires field teams to log and understand price fluctuations and their causes, such as seasonal changes, through the collection of price data for key commodities.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What are the expected seasonal price changes and their causes?
- ◆ What are the prices of key items and how do they change (expected increases/decreases) over the calendar year?

Market Price Monitoring and CVA

Changes in the prices of commodities or services provided through project interventions can be linked to several factors related to and separate from CVA programs. Understanding market conditions and prices throughout the planned CVA project cycle will ensure the project stays responsive to beneficiary needs, while not negatively affecting market conditions.

To standardize price monitoring efforts and improve program quality, CRS led a team to create the *MARKit: Market Monitoring, Analysis and Response Kit*. The kit outlines key steps in setting up a price monitoring system for projects, including preparation, data collection and input, analysis and reporting.

- ◆ [MARKit](#) is hosted on CRS' [Emergency Field Operations Manual](#).
- ◆ Other general market assessment tools can be found on the EFOM [Market Assessment](#) page.

⁵ Other organizations or the Cash Working Group may already have market price data available for key items.

Criteria 2: Risks*



Assessing and mitigating various types of risks—be they institutional, programmatic or contextual—is considered essential for the feasibility of cash programs. All humanitarian assistance programs should consider the different types of risks present at all stages of their intervention, and the mitigation measures to be taken. Risk assessments and analysis should happen before the start of a CVA program and be updated over time, as program conditions evolve.

- **Key consideration: Are the risks associated with CVA acceptable or possible to mitigate?** Cash programming is not feasible when significant risks specific to CVA exist without an identified and appropriate mitigation measure.⁶ A risk analysis identifies risks, gauges impact and probability, and defines specific mitigation measures for each risk. Risk analysis should include risks related to 1) the safety and dignity of target and other groups; 2) humanitarian access to crisis-affected populations; 3) crisis-affected populations' access to aid; 4) data protection and beneficiary privacy; 5) individuals with specific needs or risks; 6) social relations – household and community dynamics; 7) fraud and diversion; and 8) market impact.⁷ The goal of the risk analysis is not to eliminate every risk, but to identify the most significant context-specific risks and establish mitigation measures for them. **This key consideration requires field teams to carry out a risk analysis to identify potential moderate to high risks associated with proposed cash-based interventions. Once risks are identified, specific mitigation measures can be defined.**⁸

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What are the main risks associated with potential CVA interventions in target locations?
- ◆ Does the agency have control mechanisms in place to monitor and control risks of fraud in CVA?
- ◆ What are the security risks for staff, beneficiaries and partners associated to the provision of cash in target locations; and how are these risks mitigated/managed?

6. The term “significant risk” is defined based on risk assessment results. Standard risk calculations use the impact x likelihood of a risk to determine how to prioritize and attempt to mitigate each one. Senior managers and/or technical advisors should be consulted through the risk review and mitigation process.

7. [Operational Guidance and Toolkit for Multipurpose Cash Grants](#) and [Protection Risks and Benefits Analysis Tool](#).

8. The CRS Emergency Field Operations Manual includes specific examples for [risk assessments](#) when planning programme interventions.

Criteria 3: Government policies and regulatory environment*



Dependent on their capacity, governments may or may not have policies or positions on the distribution of humanitarian assistance, and more specifically on cash and voucher programming. The feasibility of CVA programs at times can be restricted or promoted by government actors, either through formal written policy or more informal positions expressed through interactions with agencies or in providing (or not) permissions or authorizations for specific interventions.

- **Key consideration: Is CVA in accordance with national and local government policies?** Collaboration must take place with local, regional and national governments during the response option analysis and design of cash programs, to ensure that the proposed actions are in line with government policies and positions. This collaboration can also provide relationship-building opportunities with government stakeholders in cases where they are unfamiliar with or skeptical of CVA. Consulting other humanitarian actors and the Cash Working Group (if active) on cash programs and related government authorizations might also be helpful, as well as consulting financial authorities, such as the central bank. A significant amount of information is likely available online or through a basic desk review. **This key consideration requires field teams to consult government representatives and identify any barriers from the government's side to implementing a cash program.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ Is the government (local, regional or national), using cash or voucher assistance in any of its programs?⁹
- ◆ What, if any, are the concerns presented by government representatives around cash programs in emergencies? How can these concerns be mitigated?
- ◆ What are the laws affecting cash and voucher assistance programs, and different payment mechanisms to deliver cash to beneficiaries (e.g. currency of distribution, Know Your Customer¹⁰ requirements for beneficiaries, transaction limits, sanctions, etc.)?
- ◆ What process, if any, do government authorities require to grant permission to humanitarian actors to implement cash programs?

9. Examples of governments using cash transfers include social safety net (SSN) and pension programs, emergency support for communities affected by disasters, and enterprise grants, among others. Governments may also already have price monitoring or market regulation systems in place within local markets; these can be explored further within feasibility assessments.

10. Know Your Customer (KYC) refers to the information that the local regulator requires financial service providers (FSPs) to collect about any potential new customer to verify their identity and discourage financial products being used for crime.



Criteria 4: Funding*

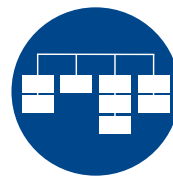
All humanitarian assistance programs are dependent on available funding for their implementation, and donors may have specific positions on cash programming at the global level and in a specific emergency context. For CVA programming to be feasible, donors must be willing to finance the intervention.

- **Key consideration: Is CVA within donors' funding policies and framework?** Donors typically have established policies or response frameworks through which intervention strategies are approved for financing, including CVA programs. At times, response agencies have their own funding to implement cash programs. Consulting grant agreements, publicly available policies and guidance documents on cash programming from relevant donors, and meeting with donors in country can all help to understand the funding environment and appetite for the funding of cash-based interventions, including specific conditions. **This key consideration requires field teams to ensure funding sources are willing to finance the proposed cash intervention for the length of the response, as well as maintaining compliance with any specific donor policies or requirements.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What are the potential funding sources for cash-based interventions?
- ◆ Do these donors traditionally support cash-based interventions?
- ◆ Do these donors have any specific policies or requirements for the design and implementation of cash-based interventions? If so, what are they?

Criteria 5: Organizational capacity*



The organization's internal operational capacity is directly related to the scale of the proposed cash distribution. CVA feasibility is dependent on the size of the cash program and the organization's capacity to set up, implement and monitor a quality cash program.

Assessing organizational cash capacity

Having a realistic understanding of the organization's internal capacity to plan, set up, coordinate, implement and monitor a quality CVA program is crucial in determining CVA feasibility.

CRS developed a tool to structure the process of collecting this information, called the Holistic Assessment for Readiness in Cash (HARC). HARC uses a weighted scoring system to assess key aspects of cash capacity, including institutional support, existing standards and policies, planning, programming capacity, operations support, and coordination. The tool was designed to determine the existing cash capacity of an organization and to highlight focal areas for improving that capacity. An assessment this detailed is best conducted as a preparedness activity (i.e. not in the immediate aftermath of an emergency) but can guide a rapid review of internal capacity as needed.

The HARC tool and guidance is hosted on the [MBRRR Preparedness](#) page of CRS' EFOM).

■ Key consideration: Does the agency have the internal capacity (programmatic, financial, logistic) to implement a CVA intervention?

Necessary organizational capacity will vary depending on the size of the project and planned CVA interventions. An organization's operational capacity is dependent on relevant staff's CVA experience; its established and tested operating procedures; and its financial liquidity.¹¹ In-depth CVA-specific operational capacity assessments can be conducted prior to an emergency (i.e., preparedness); however, during a crisis there may only be time for a rapid assessment to quickly determine whether CVA is feasible.

This key consideration requires field teams to assess the operational capacity of the implementing agency relative to the size and scale of the intervention.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What experience do key programs, operations and leadership staff have with cash-based programs?
- ◆ To what extent are standard operating procedures in place for the expected scale of distribution and reconciliation of cash-based programs?
- ◆ To what extent are agency cash reserves able to finance an operation prior to donor reimbursements?
- ◆ What gaps in capacity must be filled to make CVA a more feasible response option?
- ◆ Can surge support be mobilized to address any noted capacity gaps?

11. Financial liquidity, or the availability of cash, is most relevant when considering actions with national organizations that do not have large cash reserves.

Criteria 6: Infrastructure and services



Cash-based programs require the use of traditional financial systems, such as a mobile money system, a remittance network, financial service providers like traditional banks, or a country's central bank for the printing of fiat currency.¹² This includes voucher-based systems. The feasibility of cash-based programs is dependent on the available and accessible financial systems, including infrastructure and/or services to transfer cash safely and efficiently to beneficiary households.

- **Key consideration: Are the infrastructure and services needed to transfer cash to beneficiaries available?** Humanitarian agencies require infrastructure and services to distribute CVA. The delivery mechanisms available to distribute cash assistance are limited by the types of financial systems that are operational in each context. CVA programs rely on some type of financial service provider; however, voucher programs rely primarily on the capacity of the organization and the vendors participating in the voucher intervention. **This key consideration requires field staff to gauge the capacity and quality of the available infrastructure and services to support a cash-based intervention.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What cash and voucher delivery mechanisms are available and operational?
- ◆ Which of these delivery mechanisms can be implemented in the target location?
- ◆ What are the potential challenges related to the implementation of these delivery mechanisms (e.g., coverage/presence of agents/offices, network connectivity, liquidity, accessibility by target groups etc.)?
- ◆ How can these challenges be overcome, and/or what alternative delivery options could be used instead?

¹² Fiat currency is a common type of currency issued by official order, and whose value is based on the issuing authority's guarantee to pay the stated (face) amount on demand (CaLP [Glossary](#)).

Criteria 7: Needs to be met by intervention



The objectives of humanitarian responses are directed to meet specific unmet needs. In most cases, cash-based interventions offer beneficiaries the dignity of choice, responding to diverse needs and empowering recipients. However, prior to any assistance distribution, a needs assessment is necessary to ensure that the assistance to be provided will be appropriate and aligned to meet specific community needs.

- **Key consideration: Can the needs be met through specific commodities and/or services?** Needs assessments inform humanitarian response designs. Prior to designing a cash-based program, field teams must ensure that the target communities' urgent needs are for specific commodities and/or services that are available and accessible. This key consideration requires field staff to assess the urgent needs of the target population; establish whether those needs can be met through the procurement of commodities and/or services; and whether those commodities and/or services can be provided with the necessary quality and safety required for the target population.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ What are the urgent priority needs of the target community?
- ◆ Which of these needs can be met through commodities and services available in locally accessible markets?
- ◆ If needs can be met through local markets, how can quality/safe use practices of commodities and/or services be guaranteed?

Ensuring quality and safe use in CVA programming

Organizations implementing humanitarian programs must ensure that commodities or services being provided to beneficiaries satisfy minimum quality standards and are being used or redeemed as intended. For example, in a cash-for-shelter program that provides families with vouchers to buy construction materials locally, the implementing organization must conduct a robust vetting process to ensure the supplies stocked by participating vendors meet quality standards. Once families redeem their vouchers, the implementing organization may consider conducting Build Back Safer (BBS) trainings with participating groups to provide information and skills on improved construction techniques. These actions help ensure that project outputs (i.e. reconstructed houses) are safe and durable for supported communities.

Criteria 8: Beneficiary preferences*



Response analysis takes into consideration the appropriateness of the proposed intervention, and to what extent it aligns with beneficiary preferences. Consulting with the affected population on how they would prefer to receive assistance is a critical component of decision-making for any humanitarian assistance modality.

■ Key consideration: Is CVA a preferred option for the beneficiaries?

When considering response options, humanitarian actors must measure to what extent CVA is a preferred option for the beneficiary. Cultural and social norms, travel restrictions, and other factors may influence the appropriateness and feasibility of a CVA program. **This key consideration requires field staff to gauge the preferences of the participants around the types of assistance.**

Example sub-questions

- ◆ Does the target population have experience of receiving humanitarian assistance and/or cash or voucher assistance? If so, how does the government disburse social assistance to vulnerable families?
- ◆ What cultural or gender norms and social or household dynamics or other factors influence the acceptance of CVA?
- ◆ What are the reasons for preferences expressed by the target community? If concerns are expressed, can these be effectively addressed?

Criteria 9: Timeliness



At times, humanitarian interventions require an immediate response, which leads agencies to count on established practices and systems to distribute assistance. Without prior preparation or readiness capacity, agencies may be limited in the types of interventions they can implement. When comparing response options in the immediate aftermath of an emergency, it is critical that the timeliness of a modality be considered, be it CVA or in-kind assistance. If a CVA response is not the quickest response option immediately after a disaster, then consider *when* CVA could be implemented.

■ **Key consideration: Is it possible to set up and implement cash and voucher assistance with the necessary speed and at the intended scale?**

The urgent needs of the beneficiary population cannot be placed on hold while agencies build up the capacity to respond. CVA feasibility must consider the scale of the response and the time needed to build up the capacity of the agency to respond at the appropriate scale.

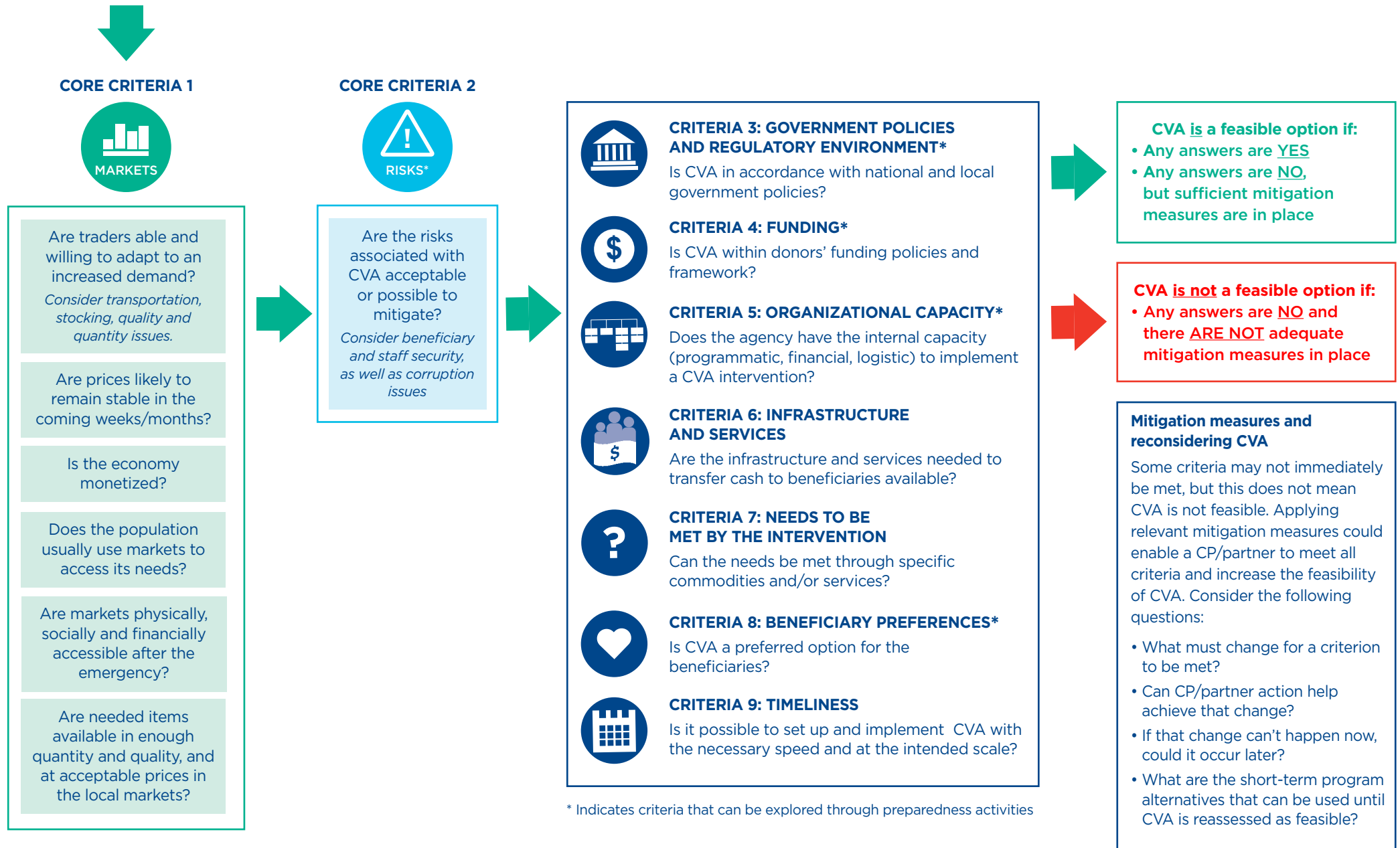
This key consideration requires field staff to balance the level of need with the capacity of the agency to implement a cash-based response, at the appropriate scale and with the necessary speed.

Example sub-questions

- ◆ How much time is required to set-up a CVA program?
- ◆ Can beneficiary needs be effectively met in the meantime?
- ◆ What are the timelines for approvals around setting up and implementing cash programs (and other modalities) for the proposed scale and budget amounts?

Figure 2: CVA feasibility decision tree

Is cash and voucher assistance feasible?



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