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Harnessing the Lessons: Can Lebanon Pioneer Government–Humanitarian Complementarity in Cash Emergency Response?

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The escalation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel and exchange of fire and aerial bombardment of civilian infrastructure since the March 2nd, 2026, has again displaced over an estimated million people from the South of Lebanon, the southern suburbs of Beirut, and areas in the Bekaa-Hermel governorate. In the critical early phases of yet another emergency response, CAMEALEON has developed the following recommendations that draw on research and learning from the 2024-25 response in Lebanon, and ongoing research into humanitarian cash programming and social protection systems in emergencies.

Context Snapshot

The establishment of a formal and open Cash Working Group (CWG) in Lebanon, and the proactive work of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) in operationalizing the Shock-Responsive Social Safety Net (SRSN) lay a strong foundation for the response. MoSA have assumed an overall leadership stance for the response, and UNHCR leads the response for Syrians. However, the humanitarian community has so far fallen short in articulating what an effective cash response should look like, to make sure the adequate amount of assistance reaches the most vulnerable in the most timely and efficient fashion and proactively advocating for this vision. Immediate action is called for to ensure a population-blind, cross-sectoral cash strategy is developed to strengthen the effectiveness of the response for the most vulnerable households across Lebanon.

Coordination

Cash Working Group (CWG): The newly established CWG is integral in supporting humanitarian agencies to leverage their collective added value while ensuring linkages with the government's SRSN, and non-Lebanese responses. The CWG is led by a triumvirate of one UN agency, one INGO and MoSA, and is expected to fill a technical leadership role. Proper stewardship of the CWG will enable clear coordination with sectoral actors paving the way for a timely and coherent response, and proper articulation with the SRSN. The CWG should:

- **Lead advocacy and coordination efforts on cash** (Multi-Purpose Cash and sectoral) alongside relevant sectors to enable the use of independently targeted top-ups to complement MPCA and SRSN responses to provide essential support to the most vulnerable households.
- **Coordinate the technical design of cash top-ups**, alongside sectors for all cash assistance programs to affected people.
- **Champion technical coherence of a cross-population, cross-sectoral cash response** as primary technical interlocutor.



Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA): Under the SRSN, the consolidation of data under one registry and one government body for supporting those who have been displaced and affected by the recent escalations is a positive development and should be maintained.

- As there is a governmental vision, MoSA should **continue advocating for a robust funding stream directly to them or with the least intermediaries possible.** However, in the absence of funding channeled directly to the Government, MoSA should make the most of the CWG to articulate the response with humanitarian actors, understanding respective mandates.
- Prioritization strategies and **targeting in later phases should be coordinated with a CWG Targeting task team** to coherent complementary pathways.

Humanitarian NGOs: As stakeholders of the humanitarian cash response, NGOs should be forthright and outspoken in coordination to enhance technical discussions. Diverse humanitarian actors can and should, if properly engaged in coordination, add value to the response to fill the gaps for those who cannot access adequate support to meet their needs.

Transparency

Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA): MoSA leads the SRSN implementation. Transparency would serve two purposes: on the one hand, make donors confident about their understanding of the scale of the needs, and prioritization in and implementation of the response to those needs so that donors may increase their support; on the other hand, allow for the identification of gaps and maximize referral pathways so that the adequate amount of assistance reaches the most vulnerable. Therefore, MoSA should:

- **Ensure processes are transparent and well documented to encourage open engagement** about improvement and gaps and reduce exclusion of the most vulnerable and those who are displaced and in need of humanitarian support. Maintaining some transparency about processes and data (including feedback collected through the existing grievance redress mechanism) would support future research and learning on SRSN effectiveness.
- **Develop systematic reporting on those who have been supported,** inclusive of demographic statistics and area of origin to support prioritization, targeting, and gap analysis for all concerned actors.
- Consistently and **clearly communicate detailed planning** with timelines, financing requirements, and gaps to maximize the chance for fund raising.

Cash Working Group (CWG): The CWG plays a central role in leading transparent technical decisions including the timely development of targeting, harmonized transfer values and program design, coordinating across sectors through dedicated task teams.

- The CWG should ensure transparent and systematic data exchange between the SRSN and humanitarian systems to maximize the use of existing data, recognizing that these systems are complementary in informing the response rather than mutually exclusive.
- Engage in technical discussion and ensure the best response possible. That would include ensuring strong cooperation with the SRSN as well as being a pragmatic technical challenger to improve the response quality.

Effectiveness and Accountability

Humanitarian NGOs: To enhance the effectiveness of the response, it is imperative that humanitarian NGOs align and communicate clearly on where they can add the most value amid a landscape of insufficient resources, where the emergency response is mostly channeled through the government's shock responsive safety net (SRSN) and large UN actors.

The added value of NGOs and the space that they can take up can consist of the following:

- **Leveraging field presence and links with civil society organizations (CSOs) and locally-led initiatives** to immediately serve the most vulnerable with cash assistance, and link with the SRSN as soon as it is in effect using a fast-track referral mechanism.
- Facilitating **sectoral top-ups and referrals** to additional services enable targeted and fast responses to households with specific additional needs, or those at risk of protection violations who would otherwise be missed in large-scale safety-net programming.
- **Expand targeted support to communities and households who are not displaced** and are refusing evacuation, and who are therefore ineligible for the SRSN. This support should include market monitoring and the provision of cash assistance where markets remain functional.

Cash Working Group (CWG): The CWG has a clear role in enhancing the effectiveness of the emergency response through the following priority actions.

- **Prioritize the development of immediately required tools**, setting up task teams with tight deadlines, and a sense of urgency.
- As a priority, **establish an emergency basket** for the current situation and update sector guidelines for NGOs to have a clear framework to refer to when implementing cash programs. This would also serve to advocate to donors.
- **Develop cross-sectoral guidelines with Protection and Shelter sectors**, as per the Flash Appeal, to identify the bottlenecks and ways to best synergize for a cash response that meets the needs of the most vulnerable.
- Provide targeted technical assistance through the establishment of a dedicated task team to work alongside MoSA in **systematically reviewing SRSN feedback and accountability mechanisms**, with the aim of strengthening and refining the technical design of cash assistance.

Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA): As lead of the SRSN, MoSA should be in a position to channel the bulk of the cash response to displaced people. MoSA should remain open to engage on a few critical points that would strengthen the response, while not being challenged in their leadership.

- **The current transfer value ranging from \$65 to \$145 USD** depending on the family size is not enough to cover the needs created by the displacement, especially within a context of severe pre-existing vulnerabilities. The value is pegged to the AMAN transfer value which is based on the survival and minimum expenditure baskets (S/MEB) established in 2014. Neither baskets have been updated nor adjusted for the multifaceted shocks induced by conflict. As of May 2025, the

¹ Being 45\$ per household and 20\$ per household member, capped at 5 members.

baskets were valued at \$494 USD (SMEB) and \$622 USD (MEB) respectively². **MoSA should commit to periodical revision of the transfer value** to adjust to inflation to provide more meaningful and effective support to affected populations. Understanding the budgetary constraints MoSA operates under, MoSA should ensure the SRSN creates space for **vertical expansion through coordinated sectoral top-ups** to support vulnerable displaced households.

- **Financing Models:** Ensure that the SRSN is funded through an efficient and streamlined system by advocating for donors to channel funding directly where possible, or to minimize intermediary layers and the number of actors involved.
- **Feedback mechanisms and referrals:** Ensure systematic, timely, and transparent access to data from feedback and redress mechanisms from the SRSN. Work with the CWG to use Grievance Redress Mechanism data to inform the development of referral pathways, enabling partners to rapidly identify, prioritize, and follow up on the most urgent and high-risk cases.
- **Prioritization and targeting:** Use historical data to inform a structured, categorical targeting approach for the next phases of the SRSN. Enhancing transparency and simplifying targeting approaches (as opposed to using the proxy means testing) will enable clearer communication with affected populations, helping to reduce community tensions and strengthen the social contract. Adopting this approach may also reduce the time and financial resources associated with proxy-means testing while improving the timeliness of assistance delivery.

² WFP. August 5 2025. WFP RAM | Food Security Analysis - Lebanon Market Monitor, June 2025.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/wfp-ram-food-security-analysis-lebanon-market-monitor-june-2025>.

CAMEALEON is an NGO-led research and learning network established in 2017 to support the effectiveness and accountability of social assistance for refugees and host communities in Lebanon. It is co-managed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam Italy, and Solidarités International (SI).

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