

Qualitative analysis of cash-based interventions for water, sanitation, and hygiene operations and maintenance in internally displaced persons sites in Kachin, Myanmar

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Abstract

Cash-based interventions are increasingly used in humanitarian response, including in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector. To strengthen evidence, we conducted a qualitative study on cash-based interventions programs for WASH operations and maintenance in Kachin, Myanmar. We collected field data for one programme and completed a desk review for two programs. We found camp-based committees were responsible for spending decisions and cash use was aligned with community needs/priorities. Programme strengths included community empowerment, time effectiveness; programme weaknesses included funding insecurity, limited training and monitoring and vulnerable groups inclusion. Recommendations for cash-based WASH operation and maintenance programs in Kachin and similar contexts are presented.

KEYWORDS

cash, humanitarian response, IDP camps, Myanmar, operations and maintenance, WASH

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian emergencies—including natural disasters, disease outbreaks and complex emergencies—are occurring at increasing rates and affecting an increasing number of people (EM-DAT, 2019). Safe water, sanitation and hygiene are immediate priorities for human survival and dignity in humanitarian emergencies (SPHERE, 2018). As such, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions are implemented in most humanitarian responses to interrupt transmission routes and reduce the disease burden (SPHERE, 2018).

Humanitarian response programming has historically focused on providing in-kind assistance (e.g., distribution of items) and directly implementing services. Cash-based interventions have become increasingly used in humanitarian response (Doocy & Tappis, 2017; Yates et al., 2018). Cash-based interventions are defined as ‘the provision of money or vouchers to individuals or households, either as emergency relief intended to meet their basic needs for food and non-food items, or services, or to access assets essential for the recovery of their livelihoods’ (DG ECHO, 2013).

There is currently considerable interest in cash-based interventions in the humanitarian sector, as initial evaluations have found they provide dignity to affected populations; strengthen local markets having positive spillover effect to host communities; can strengthen food security; and, depending on the context, can be more cost effective than voucher and in-kind interventions (Doocy & Tappis, 2017; Gentilini, 2016; World Bank, 2016; Mikulak, 2018; Oxfam, 2018; Tappis & Doocy, 2018; Venton et al., 2015; Le Seve & Mason, 2019).

While many cash-based intervention programs and evaluations are from the food security and livelihoods sectors, cash-based interventions are increasingly implemented in the WASH sector, particularly in urban areas (Le Seve & Mason, 2019; WASH Cluster, 2020). In 2016, the Global WASH Cluster published a position paper that concluded cash ‘may be effective in overcoming financial barriers to accessing WASH goods and services when combined with complementary approaches in contexts with an enabling environment’ (GWC, 2016). In a review of WASH cash-based intervention programs, it was found that (1) programs were carried out using different modalities, including vouchers for hygiene kit items, trucked water and desludging, or cash for hygiene items; and (2) factors that influenced programme success included implementation modality, contextual factors and allowable expenses (Day & Forster, 2018; UNHCR, n.d., 2015a). In particular, cash-based interventions were highlighted as a potential intervention to, in protracted crises, transition towards sustainable WASH. Additionally, a recent WASH Cluster (2020) study assessed 267 documents to review practices for market-based programming in WASH in emergency contexts. Overall, the study found that effects observed on WASH outcomes are positive, although the strength of evidence of market-based programming for WASH in emergency contexts is low, with some variations between modalities (e.g., market support, cash and voucher assistance), sub-sectors (e.g., water, sanitation and hygiene) and outcomes (e.g., availability, access, quality, awareness, use and WASH-related health). Moreover, no studies were identified that compared cash and voucher or market support with in-kind modalities during humanitarian response in the WASH sector.

Based on this limited evidence to date, agencies are developing cash-based intervention guidance documents (ACF, 2006; ICRC, 2014; OXFAM, 2006; UNHCR, 2015b; USAID, 2019). Given the interest in cash-based intervention programming, there is a need to strengthen the evidence based for cash-based intervention programs in WASH, particularly in humanitarian response (Juillard & Islam Opu, 2014; Le Seve & Mason, 2019).

Long-term conflicts in Myanmar have led to a protracted crisis. Currently, about 241,000 displaced people remain in camps or camp-like situations after fleeing violence in Kachin, Kayin, Shan and Rakhine states (OCHA, 2022). Since 1961, as Kachin State fights for independence, there has been conflict between the Myanmar Army and armed independent groups that have caused mass displacement (OCHA, 2019). Additionally, Myanmar is a disaster-prone country, at highest risk of natural disasters in South East Asia, such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes (OCHA, 2022). As of January 2020, there were 138 internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Kachin, housing a total 97,322 IDPs (Reliefweb, 2020).

Cash-based interventions were first implemented in Myanmar in 2008, as part of cyclone response, mostly in food security and livelihoods, with <11% in WASH (HARP, 2015, 2018; Oxfam, 2016). This programming was initially undertaken by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with limited prior experience with cash-based

interventions. In 2015, local and international NGOs (LNGOs and INGOs) began cash-based intervention programming to support WASH operations and maintenance (O&M) in some IDP camps in Kachin, along with other WASH interventions such as hygiene promotion, water treatment and latrine management.

In this manuscript, we present results from a qualitative investigation of the effectiveness of cash grants for WASH O&M managed by committees in IDP camps in Kachin, Myanmar, including targeting, selection criteria, delivery mechanism and monitoring; how the cash was used by committees, and if use was in line with community needs and priorities; the level of community participation; programmatic successes and areas for improvement; contextual factors that enabled or inhibited programming; and, whether programs were inclusive of, and responsive to, all IDP needs associated with WASH O&M, particularly the needs of women and vulnerable groups. The study aims to: provide recommendations to improve future cash-grant programming in Kachin IDP camps; and add to the evidence-base on using cash-based interventions for WASH in humanitarian response.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

In July and August 2019, independent evaluators from Tufts University collected data, with the support of UNICEF, in Myanmar. We visited nine accessible medium-sized (50–200 households), and one large-sized (>500 households), IDP camps in Myitkyina and Waimaw townships where cash grants for WASH O&M were distributed by LNGOs. In each camp, we conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with IDPs and key informant interviews (KIIs) with: a member of the WASH Committee (WASH-C); a member of the Camp Management Committee (CMC); and, a female member of the community. At the national and regional level: KIIs were conducted with humanitarian aid agency representatives, INGOs and donors; and available documents on cash grants (including in non-visited areas) were collected and reviewed. Tufts University and UNICEF ethics committees approved the protocol, and all participants signed a written consent form before participation.

In camps, with the support of camp representatives for recruitment, gender-segregated FGDs were facilitated by two enumerators the same gender as participants. FGDs included semi-structured questions on understanding IDP needs and priorities related to WASH O&M, their knowledge and participation towards cash grant management and spending, satisfaction with the programme and feedback. During FGDs, enumerators used a four-card sorting exercise to stimulate discussion on community needs, community priorities and priorities per vulnerable group (children, elderly and disabled) and also completed a 'who pays what' exercise, based on a pre-determined list of camp expenses. FGDs were held in the Kachin language. If all participants agreed, FGDs were recorded. Additionally, in all FGDs notes were taken in Burmese, and then translated into English by a local translator.

In camps, KIIs were based on semi-structured questionnaires. Informants were selected in collaboration with the LNGO and camp representatives. Questions included: programme operations, the committee's role in the programme, feedback, satisfaction, areas for improvement and community involvement. For community members, answers from questions were triangulated with FGD results. KIIs included a two-card sorting exercise used to stimulate discussion on community needs, and a 'who pays what' exercise based on a pre-determined list of camp expenses. At the regional and national level, informants were selected by sending requests to agencies and donor representatives. KIIs included semi-structured questions to understand: the role of agencies and donors in cash grant programming, how programs operated and strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement for programming. All interviews were either conducted by the Tufts researcher in English or a Kachin language translator. Notes were taken in English, and if participants agreed, KIIs were recorded.

Recorded English interviews were transcribed using Temi (San Diego, CA, USA), and cleaned. Interviews and notes from non-recorded KIIs/FGDs, or KIIs/FGDs conducted not in English, were transcribed and cleaned. All FGD and KII data were then uploaded to NVivo (Burlington, MA, USA). Qualitative content analysis was used because of the lack of an initial evidence basis to pre-select themes and the wide range of topics of interest. Interview segments were coded into themes that emerged during analysis and results are presented by identified themes.

Additionally, where it was not possible to collect field data due to access restrictions, we reviewed documents from informants and documents made available by the WASH Cluster Myanmar on a Google Drive (Mountain View, CA, USA) platform to extract information on cash grant programs implemented in other Kachin townships. These data were summarized to compare with data collected in accessible camps.

3 | RESULTS

In the 10 visited camps, 20 FGDs were conducted, one per gender, with an average participation of 6 people in men's groups (range: 3–9) and 9 in women's (range: 6–12). Of the 30 requested KIIs in camps, 28 were conducted, including 10 with WASH-C members, 9 with CMC members and 9 with community members. Additionally, five KIIs were conducted with humanitarian agency, NGO and donor representatives. Overall, eight themes emerged from FGDs and KIIs, including camps and committee overview; WASH programme operations; cash grant amounts; spending decisions and control; feedback, transparency and training; satisfaction; IDP needs and priorities; and strengths and weaknesses of the cash grant programme. Each of these is further discussed below.

3.1 | Camps and committee overview

Of the 10 camps visited, eight were in Myitkyina and two in Waimaw. All were peri-urban or urban, with camp size ranging from 55 to 519 households. Eight camps opened in 2011–2012, and two in 2018; two camps were resettled in 2019. All camps were served by the same WASH LNGO, donor and WASH O&M cash grant project funding period. All camps had established CMC and WASH-C. CMCs were established in camps to create community governance and tasked with coordinating services and maintaining infrastructure. CMCs receive a monthly grant to cover camp operating costs (e.g., electricity, shelters repairs and administration). WASH-C's were formed by LNGOs to empower community members towards WASH related camp needs. WASH-C are composed of IDP community members, chosen by CMC members (six camps), community members (two camps) or by CMC and community members (two camps). Except for the WASH focal person, WASH-C members are volunteers. In surveyed camps, women comprised >50% of members in all WASH-C's, and 2 of 10 CMC's. Commonly mentioned WASH-C activities were organization of hygiene campaigns, community mobilization for cleaning (camp, latrines and house) and distribution of incentives and items for cleaning/hygiene. While most respondents identified the WASH-C as the responsible party for WASH O&M grant management, the only respondents who knew the specific responsibilities of the WASH-C related to the WASH O&M grants were the committee cashiers.

In all camps, WASH infrastructure major repairs and renovations, and desludging, were directly covered by the LNGO. Smaller repairs were sometimes completed by camp residents, with support from the WASH-C or CMC to cover expenses. Additionally, IDPs and WASH-C members can identify WASH needs and submit requests to the LNGO. Hygiene items such as soap and sanitary pads were provided in-kind by the LNGO. Across all camps, respondents stated no issues to accessing markets or finding needed hygiene materials; however, two respondents reported increased prices in the rainy season.

3.2 | WASH program operations

During April–July 2019, a short-term 4-month unconditional cash grant programme, specific for WASH O&M, was implemented. The cash was distributed to the WASH-C by providing cash directly to the WASH-C treasurer,

acknowledged by the CMC and intended to cover expenses in three categories: (1) support of community campaigns, including purchase of incentives for hygiene promotion and cleaning campaign participants, and purchase of tools and products for camp cleaning; (2) fuel for the generator or electricity for the water pump; and (3) solid waste fees, including municipal fees, tricycles for garbage transport and/or purchase of tools for waste collection. These allowable spending categories were determined by the LNGO based on what they considered were a priority and able to be managed by WASH-C's.

3.3 | Cash Grant amounts

The LNGO determined the cash grant amount to be distributed to each camp, based on size and funding availability. A fixed amount was distributed on a monthly basis, ranging from 152,000–458,000 Myanmar Kyats (101–305 USD). The major expense in surveyed camps was fuel or electricity to run the water pump. Of the total amount assigned, an average of 41% (range 26%–55%) was allocated for running the water pump, 36% (range 27%–44%) for solid waste management and 23% (range 16%–31%) for campaigns. Respondents consistently considered the cash grant amount insufficient, particularly during the dry season because of increased pump use, stating 'In last month, the electric fee is not enough'. and 'This is not enough. Fuel sometimes is higher'. In some camps, respondents noted cash was received late, and they used cash grants to pay back the committee after spending the money.

The LNGO identified the funding amount gap as approximately one third of the distributed grants to communities. While responding agencies attributed the gap to limitations in amount and time of grants by donors, donors attributed the gap to restrictions in changing allocation of funds between spending categories, and LNGOs wanting to comply with spending category rules. To improve this, one donor reported working with agencies to collaboratively determine IDP needs and allocate a sufficient amount of flexible spending for cash-based interventions.

3.4 | Spending decisions and control

In all camps, informants noted community members not on committees were not involved in cash-grant spending decisions, stating 'We are never involved in such decisions. No one in the camp are involved'. and 'We do not know who takes decisions, we have no right to be involved in making financial decisions'. Decisions on spending were made by the WASH-C only (six camps); the CMC only (one camp); and the WASH-C and the CMC (three camps). In two camps, FGD participants stated the WASH-C organized monthly meetings to discuss expenses, but there was no information describing the extent of community involvement and if these meetings were informative or decisional. While regional and national-level informants raised concerns about disparities in decision-making power among more powerful members or due to gender, informants at the camp level reported no concerns about power imbalance or conflicts during the cash-grant spending decision process.

The WASH-C was required by the LNGO to keep records of expenses and pump running times in a cash book and to submit the cash book, receipts and a report to the LNGO. The WASH-C was not required to ask the authorization of the CMC or LNGO to spend grant funding. While camp informants never mentioned cases of fraud or misuse of money, regional and national-level informants consistently discussed the existence of cohesion and trust among IDPs in Kachin that could be a barrier to report (or even know about) cash grant misuse. A camp informant did not think it would be possible to misuse funds, as 'The process it is the cash grant payday is very late. So that is why they have no chance to steal ... to keep the money for even a day. So, when they receive the money today and they spend all the same time, just within an hour'.

3.5 | Feedback, transparency and training

Respondents reported that all camps have feedback systems in place that can be used for WASH related issues as suggestion boxes, talking to a committee member or line shelter leader and/or meetings. However, there were no cash grant specific feedback mechanisms. Committees and community members stated they were satisfied with feedback mechanisms, except for two community members who stated their feedback was not addressed. In one case, it appears the complaint was not correctly reported; in the other case a requested repair was completed, but not as requested by the community. Lastly, one respondent expressed concern that response mechanisms are not universal, stating: 'Not sure everyone has the same opportunity to say a word'.

Across all camps, eight WASH-C committee members clearly described how the cash grant programme worked, while no CMC members and the remaining two WASH-C respondents only partially (or not at all) describe the cash grant programme. While the LNGO stated that meetings were held to train committee members on the cash grant programme, the LNGO also mentioned the level of understanding could be affected by low literacy and committee member turnover. At the national or regional level, respondents stated that no training on cash-based interventions had been organized for them.

In three FGDs with IDPs, respondents stated they did not know how the cash grant programme worked; and in two cases respondents stated they did not like this with one respondent stating: 'But we are not explaining how the projects [cash grant] are working. I do not like that'. and wanted more information. During the 'who pays what' exercise in the FGDs, community members provided inconsistent responses and did not know who managed what listed expenses. In only one camp could FGD participants clearly explain expenses.

3.6 | Satisfaction

Informants and participants across all camps consistently expressed satisfaction with current WASH O&M cash grant programme operations, and their desire for WASH-C programs and activities to continue without change.

When asked about the possibility of combining WASH-C and CMC grants, informants consistently stated they preferred separate grant programs stating 'Completely not. It is a different program issue. It may be a problem if they combine the two grants' and expressing the belief separate grants was simpler and gave committees clear roles and balanced workloads. Donor and national-level informants supported combining the grants for cost effectiveness, stating 'It should be feasible advantage to combine the WASH and CMC grants' but also raised the concern that money given to CMCs directly might not be prioritized for WASH needs and the opposing view that 'Why agencies and partners and donors should think that a community cannot be trusted to not prioritize water?'

When asked about the possibility to give more responsibility on WASH O&M to committees, including assigning more spending categories (major repairs and desludging), informants at that camp level stated they preferred expense management as it is; the LNGO stated giving more responsibilities to committees was too difficult because these projects require cash advances to pay materials and workers, and informants at national level and donors suggested to have committees take on additional repair tasks by establishing agreements with the municipality or qualified contractors. One national-level informant stated: 'It's funny. We call it resilience and empowerment. And they call it like an inconvenience'.

3.7 | IDP needs and priorities

The greatest needs identified by IDPs across all camps for men and women (Figure 1) were hygiene items (soap, sanitary pads) (10/10 women's groups, 10/10 men's groups) and fuel to run the generator (8/10 women's, 9/10 men's). Other needed expenses that emerged with higher frequency were: repairs of handwashing facilities (9 women's,

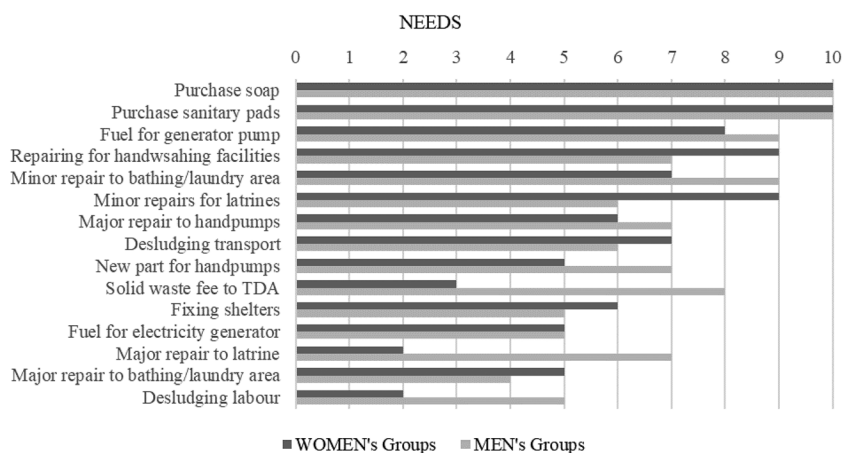


FIGURE 1 Needs results from focus group discussions (FGD) card sorting exercise. Number of groups mentioning the listed expense as a need

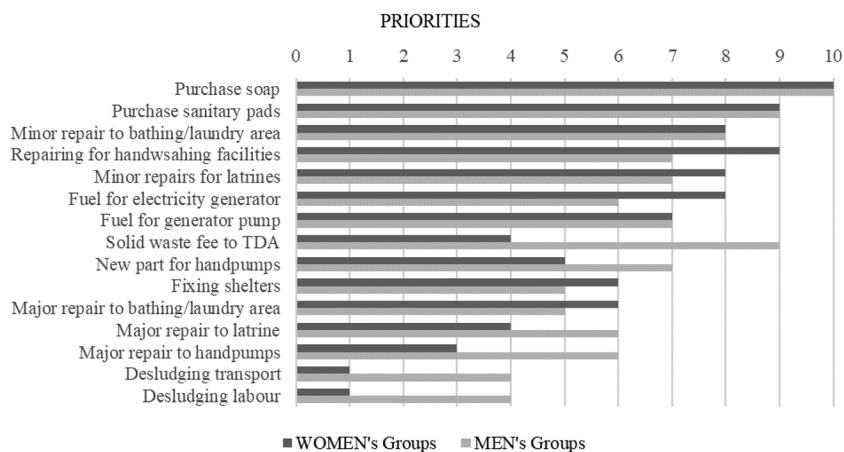


FIGURE 2 Priorities results from the focus group discussions (FGD) card sorting exercise. Number of groups mentioning the listed expense as a priority

7 men's); minor repairs of bathing/laundry areas (7 women's, 9 men's); minor repairs to latrines (9 women's, 6 men's); major repairs to handpumps (7 women's, 6 men's); desludging transport (6 women's/7 men's), new parts for handpumps (5 women's, 7 men's), solid waste fee (3 women's, 8 men's), fixing shelters (6 women's and 5 men's) and fuel for the electricity generator (5 women's and 5 men's).

Additional needed expenses not included in the card sorting exercise that emerged were: renovation of wells, latrines and drains (seven camps), to have a specific disposal system for sanitary pads (seven camps), to have tools and materials for cleaning around the camp (seven camps); to install more bathrooms (five camps); to install more wells/pumps (five camps); to install lights and pave the path to latrines (four camps); separate bathrooms for men and women (three camps); to have more latrines (three camps); and to increase waste removal frequency (two camps).

Overall priority expenses were similar to needs, with soap (10 women's, 10 men's) and pads (10 women's, 9 men's) mentioned the most frequently (Figure 2). The remaining priorities were similar to the above identified needs, with some small changes in order.

When asked about vulnerable group needs and priorities (e.g., children, elderly and disabled persons), expenses that were mentioned most were soap and handwashing facilities for children (eight camps), soap for elderly (four camps) and soap for persons with disabilities (four camps). In two camps (women) and three camps (men), respondents suggested diapers, potties and special toilets near their shelters for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Camp and regional level informants stated that vulnerable groups were not specifically considered in WASH O&M cash grant programme. Informants noted that NGOs have special programs for children or protection programs/group set up; in one camp it was mentioned the presence of an association working with people with disabilities; in another camp, informants mentioned that 'the family takes care of special needs'.

3.8 | Strength and weaknesses of cash grant program

In terms of strengths of the cash grant programme, camp-level informants stated they were satisfied with the cash grant programme, with one informant specifically stating they preferred cash over in-kind items. Regional-and national-level informants consistently stated that cash grant programme strengths were community empowerment and increased community responsibility. Additionally, one respondent highlighted a strength, specifically for women: 'Most empowering for women. Because asking someone for money means that you have to be accountable to them and basically report back how you spent it. But the fact that they are getting it directly for themselves, they do not have to basically be accountable to any man in the camp, except to the donor' (KII regional). At the national level, informants also highlighted cash grant programme benefits were the reduced time to access WASH services due to being able to directly spend money; increased dignity to make their own choices; and supporting the local economy.

In terms of weaknesses of the cash grant programme, camp-level informants stated the cash amount was insufficient, especially during the dry season, to cover water needs (three camps), and that there were delays in receiving cash (two camps). Regional-level informants also mentioned the insufficient amount and stated funding delays and fund insecurity from donors led to have short-term projects and camps reduce expenses and having to fire/rehire staff. Additionally, one informant stated that monitoring cash use could be difficult. National-level informants included as weaknesses the risk of corruption, lower quality of services or repairs and that decisions could be skewed to more powerful people, with one respondent stating: 'How much are the different segments of the population is included it's one of the risks, for example, girls, persons with disabilities, women, if they are not heard, they'll spend the way they wanted'.

When asked about suggestions to improve the cash grant programme, camp-level informants recommended increasing the cash amount, decreasing waiting time for payments, to increase transparency and, lastly, informants consistently requested the programme be continued. Regional and national informants recommended to strengthen fund security; increase the skills of agencies and committees; strengthen programme monitoring; improve coordination among donors and agencies to avoid overlaps and to identify gaps; improve the feedback mechanism; combine the WASH and camp management grants at camp level or at donor level; and to gradually increase committee responsibility to begin transition to development.

3.9 | Comparison with documents from other cash-grant programs in Kachin

Two other NGOs implemented cash grant programs for WASH O&M in Kachin. We reviewed documents to compare our evaluated programme (which was in accessible areas) with these two programs (in inaccessible areas).

All three agencies implemented programs in urban/peri-urban camps in different townships. The objectives of the cash-grant programs were all similar, including: accountability to affected populations; to empower communities and committees; to support and facilitate meeting WASH basic needs; and to secure WASH services in camps.

While the LNGO in the assessed camps (LNGO-assessed) was using camp size as the only criteria for determining the cash grant amount, the other agencies (LNGO-desk and INGO-desk) included criteria related to the water supply system (gravity/pump) and O&M estimated costs. While all agencies included spending categories of fuel for the pump, purchase of WASH related materials and small repairs, programme-specific categories included desludging, solid waste management, communication and transport.

In the LNGO-assessed and LNGO-desk programs, the cash was managed by the WASH committee with approval from the CMC. LNGO-desk specifically requested a WASH committee member to be on the CMC. In the INGO-desk programme the CMC was directly responsible for cash management, with support from a WASH Working Group. Both LNGO-desk and INGO-desk developed more detailed tools, guidelines and protocols for the cash grant programme and the composition and roles of the committees than the LNGO-assessed programme.

In all programs, there was intended to be a mechanism for bookkeeping and expense reporting. In no programme were IDPs directly involved in the decision on spending. Additionally, no programme had a specific feedback mechanism for IDPs, and no programme had an established robust monitoring programme other than registering cash flow.

During interviews and in review, the advantages of cash-based intervention programming identified included increases in IDP ownership and responsibility towards WASH needs; camp autonomy; and rapidity of addressing WASH needs, with concurrent decreases in cost. Disadvantages mentioned included: turnover of committee members; limitations on funds available; and difficulties in determining a fixed monthly cash-grant amount. Moreover, additional concerns that emerged from the desk review including: variable access to services (e.g., solid waste collection or desludging) depending on the presence of municipal support; and camps on the Chinese border facing difficulties accessing cash and/or markets due to access restrictions and fluctuation of prices and exchange rates.

4 | DISCUSSION

To strengthen the evidence-base for cash-based interventions in WASH programming, we conducted a qualitative study on cash grants for WASH O&M in Kachin, Myanmar. For one programme, we collected field data through 20 focus group discussions and 33 key informant interviews; for an additional two programs we completed a desk review. The main findings were (1) camp-based committees were responsible for management and spending decisions; (2) cash use was in line with community needs and priorities; (3) there was no evidence of misuse of cash or gender disparity in spending decisions; (4) many IDPs and some committee members were unaware of how the cash grant programme worked; (5) no feedback or robust monitoring mechanisms specific to the cash grant were in place; and (6) vulnerable groups (women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities) were not specifically considered.

Overall, we identified contextual factors favourable to cash-based interventions in Kachin; micro-contextual factors that influenced programming; and a lack of alignment between international/regional and local responses. Each of these is further described below, followed by limitations and recommendations.

Factors favourable to cash-based intervention implementation in Kachin included that: many camps are located near urban centres with accessible markets (HARP, 2015), there is community cohesion as IDPs are grouped into small camps by ethnicity, religious denomination or place of origin, with churches and local faith-based organizations playing an essential role in the response (HARP, 2015), and the protracted crises has led to the time to form committees that are working towards meeting community WASH needs who could organize using the cash grants. These factors together contributed to create community governance structures, cohesion and trust among IDPs and towards committee members; this in turn led to creating a context for successful cash-based intervention programming.

Within camps, differences in cash-based intervention programme implementation and success were due to micro-context, and differences in agency experience with cash-based intervention. In terms of micro-context, access restrictions to camps, availability of items and services and price fluctuations were different depending on township. Across the programs, there were differences in success based on agency experience, with the one programme

implemented by an INGO with experience in cash-based interventions more structured, with more training to provide quality delivery services, and programs implemented by less-experienced LINGOs provided less support and were less structured.

Across our evaluation, we observed a lack of alignment of feedback, problems and suggestions reported by informants at the camp level and at regional/national level. Issues and problems raised at the camp level were practical, such as the need for more funds in the dry season and payment delays, and requests for hygiene items such as soap and pads, which were not covered by the cash grant programme for WASH O&M. Issues of gender unbalance, inclusion of vulnerable groups, or misuse of funds were not raised at the camp level but were raised often at the regional and national level.

For example, the misuse of funds, feared by informants at national level, was not a concern at camp level, because of trust towards the committee and because, respondents said, there was not a concrete possibility to 'steal' the money: when cash was given, urgent expenses were covered. This example underlines the importance of the field evaluation on cash grants, to facilitate the understanding of how things work in the field, the specificity of the context, and to bring local and national levels closer, and to better orient national programming.

Additionally, increased responsibility towards WASH expenses was discussed at the regional and national level but considered an inconvenience by respondents at the camp level, for example, when national level informants recommended to combine WASH and camp management grants for efficiency, which was not desired at the camp level. In many ways, programmatic goals and ideals were quite different between the camp and regional/national level, and alignment—specifically including IDPs in decision making processes—between the various actors is needed to improve programming.

We recommend the WASH Cluster, in coordination with the Cash Working Group in Myanmar, work to strengthen funding security and amount through multi-year projects; provide training on financial management and accountability; work to include IDPs and vulnerable groups; improve transparency; implement programme monitoring; and work with donors to collaboratively allocate a sufficient amount of flexible spending for cash-based interventions.

Limitations of the study including that due to access restrictions, field data collection was limited to one programme only; many IDPs spoke local languages which led to a triple translation between local language, Burmese and English, in which loss of information or nuance could have occurred; at the camp level, responder bias to only provide positive information about the programs for fear of programme discontinuation could have occurred; there was staff and committee member turnover leading to loss of programme memory; and there were few written documents about the programs. Given our results, which did highlight programme negatives and shows successes and failures, we do not feel these limitations severely impacted our study. Further research is needed to (1) determine the generalizability of our results to other conflict-affected contexts, and other humanitarian responses; and (2) gain a deeper understanding of why there was lack of alignment between international/regional and local responses, and how to overcome that lack of alignment.

5 | CONCLUSION

Overall, we found using cash-based interventions for WASH O&M programming managed by WASH-Cs was suitable in Kachin, Myanmar. Programme strengths included community empowerment, and time efficient responses to O&M problems; programme weaknesses included funding insecurity, insufficient cash amount, limited training provided and weak programme monitoring. Context characteristics favourable to cash-based interventions included: community cohesion and trust, proximity to urban areas and existence of functioning markets. Context weaknesses were inclusion of vulnerable groups, IDP participation, and transparency. We recommend the WASH Cluster work to strengthen funding security and amount, training, IDP and vulnerable group inclusion, transparency and monitoring.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from authors. The data are not publicly available due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

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