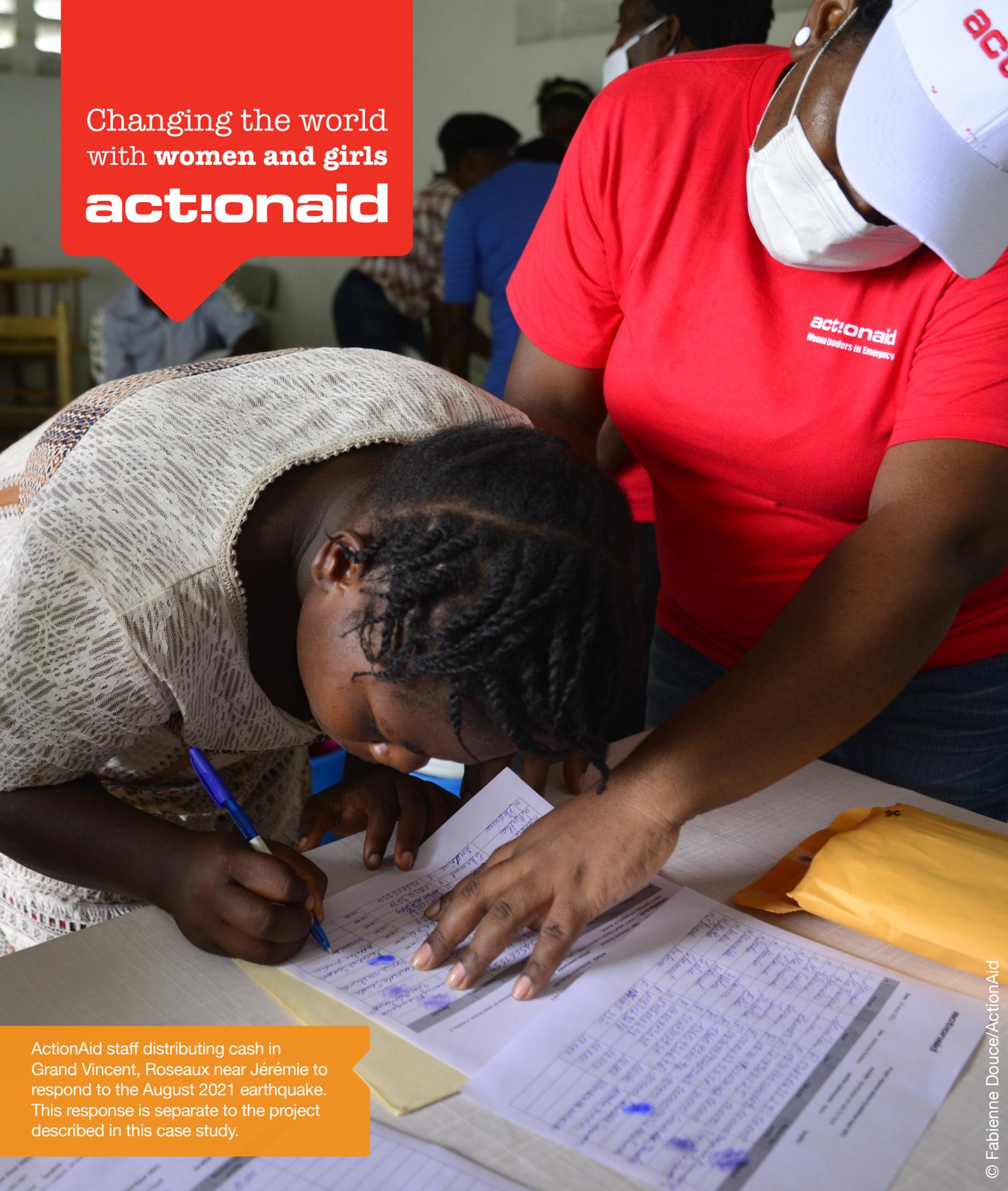


Changing the world  
with **women and girls**  
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ActionAid staff distributing cash in Grand Vincent, Roseaux near Jérémie to respond to the August 2021 earthquake. This response is separate to the project described in this case study.

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## **Women-Led Cash During the Covid-19 Pandemic:** Haiti Case Study

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# Introduction

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ActionAid follows the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) definition of cash transfer programming in humanitarian settings as the provision of cash or vouchers for goods and services that are given to individuals, households, or community recipients (not to government and state actors).<sup>1</sup>

In humanitarian emergencies, ActionAid ensures that those most vulnerable get the lifesaving support they need as quickly as possible. Cash transfers are routinely considered as part of our humanitarian responses and used as a tool to ensure people have the dignity and choice to access basic necessities in a rapid, cost-effective way – whether they most need food, shelter or other essential items.

Our humanitarian work centres around women's leadership and ensuring women are empowered to make decisions about the needs of their community.<sup>2</sup> Women leading humanitarian responses through cash is one effective way of doing this. We consider the role of women in leading and implementing responses, including using Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA), and we believe cash offers dignity and flexibility to women affected by crisis. Transferring cash to women promotes women's leadership in emergencies, by empowering women who might not otherwise have access to money to make spending decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of women-led activities in humanitarian action (and specifically women-led cash distributions) can be further highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and restrictions, imposed to slow the spread of the virus, impeded on livelihoods and meant that responses were completely localised, as international actors were unable to travel to support responses.

Cash transfer programmes give dignity to people who have been affected by humanitarian emergencies and provide a sense of ownership and control in a time of crisis, while allowing money to be channelled into local markets.

Against a backdrop of entrenched patriarchal norms and practices within Haiti, the impact of Covid-19 has devastated many communities. While initial rates of transmission were relatively modest<sup>4</sup>, with a total of 19,562 confirmed cases of Covid-19<sup>5</sup> as of 21 July 2021, lockdowns have resulted in significant economic disruption and loss of income. This has had a detrimental impact on women and girls and has overburdened the health care system. ActionAid worked closely with the local community, women's groups, and partners to deliver a cash programme response throughout this period.

This case study reviews how ActionAid adapted its multi-year cash project from its implementation in 2019, to the challenges posed by Covid-19 in 2020. It reviews the outcomes of cash support in the light of the Covid-19 crisis and, in particular, the programmes' impact on the role of women in leading and participating in the response and summarises key lessons for future projects. Qualitative analysis was adopted to review the programme, using both participatory and observatory information gathering methods (for example, participation in cash distributions, project evaluation meetings and focus groups and interviews with stakeholders). This case study examines the adaptations that were made to women-led cash programming to enable the programme to continue in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and offers learnings and recommendations for future implementation of cash programming in Haiti.

## Overarching recommendations

1. Promote women-led representation and decision-making during cash distribution.
2. Invest in robust gender analysis, guided and led by women leaders.
3. Integrate gender awareness and protection training with cash distributions and training on cash transfers.

# Background

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## Covid-19 impact: Haiti

Haiti is amongst the poorest countries in the world, with poverty remaining an endemic issue. Almost 59 percent of the Haitian population is living in poverty, with 23.8 percent living in extreme poverty and more than 60 percent of the population unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that, in 2020, 40 percent of the population was in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 57 percent were women, and 45.5 percent were children.<sup>7</sup>

Haiti faced a double emergency as the Covid-19 pandemic impacted areas already facing severe food insecurity, which put significant pressure on Haiti's health care system when the country entered country-wide lockdowns. While significant efforts were made to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, initial concerns in Haiti were raised around the economy and healthcare, as millions of people lacked access to clean water<sup>8</sup> and Haiti was faced with a decline in agricultural production.<sup>9</sup> The additional strains placed on Haiti's healthcare system by Covid-19 saw a shortage of life-saving material, supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE) reported by healthcare centres in the early months of the pandemic. The economic slowdown caused by lockdown restrictions saw an increase in food prices.<sup>10</sup> Lockdowns also restricted movement, meaning Haitians were unable to travel between cities. This affected those who travelled around Haiti to sell goods in agricultural markets. This has especially affected women, many of whom earn their living in the informal economy or have been badly affected by unemployment. It is estimated that women have faced an unemployment rate 23 percent higher than men during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> These secondary impacts have severely impacted the lives of Haitian people.

Traditional gender norms Haiti emphasise the role of women in domestic and care-giving work, with men traditionally holding the role of financial provider.<sup>12</sup> Within this discourse, Covid-19 has further reinforced gendered inequalities and discrimination. For example, lockdowns and other restrictions, such as school closures, mean that children and relatives spent more time at home, increasing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women.

Recent evidence also highlights that women and girls are more likely to experience other secondary impacts of Covid-19, such as psychosocial effects and increased levels of gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>13</sup> Since the pandemic began, GBV, intimate partner violence (IPV) and child, early or forced marriage have all increased. Various agencies have reported on the rise in GBV in the range of a 5-40 percent increase in reports of such violence.<sup>14</sup> Early, child or forced marriage has particularly affected adolescent girls, as well as women and girls with disabilities and women living in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> The effects of the pandemic meant that health resources were diverted to address the needs of Covid-19 patients. This meant that other health services, including those for sexual and reproductive health, were disrupted. As a result, women were unable to access crucial health services and guidance.

Covid-19 has highlighted and further entrenched gendered inequalities, as well as systemic and structural exclusion and violence within Haiti.<sup>16</sup> As the international community mobilises resources to stop the spread of Covid-19, women's rights and local leadership must be prioritised. An understanding of the primary and secondary effects of the pandemic on different individuals, groups and communities is the first step towards the design and implementation of effective, equitable policies, interventions and support, including cash distributions.

An additional challenge in Haiti, which was also flagged by the in country-researchers was the rampant misinformation about the severity of Covid-19.<sup>17</sup> Project staff interviewed during this project reported significant difficulties in convincing recipients to adopt preventive measures during distribution. The research found that recipients were reluctant to adopt new behaviours, due to limited information about the effects of the virus, which meant the project team had to enforce and adapt strict rules on site, with the support of community leaders to raise awareness on Covid-19.

It is worth noting that following the project, the overall security context in Haiti has deteriorated. On the 14th of August, 2021, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake impacted south-western Haiti, affecting more than 800,000 people. Compounded by the

Covid-19 pandemic, humanitarian needs were exacerbated, especially in the country's southern region.<sup>18</sup> The deterioration of the socioeconomic, political and security context in Haiti has led to an increase of internal displacement of over 19,000 people<sup>19</sup> alongside the increased tensions from the assassination of Haiti's president Jovenel Moise in July 2021.<sup>20</sup> Some rural departments of Haiti are being affected on an economic and

livelihood perspective, as economic activities with Port-Au-Prince are considerably reduced due to gang-control of the main entry and exit points. The Centre Department (where the cash-distributions were undertaken) has been affected by these issues, and as such the socio-economic and security context has changed since the project took place from January-July 2020, and therefore implications for programming have also changed.

## Project background and research methodology

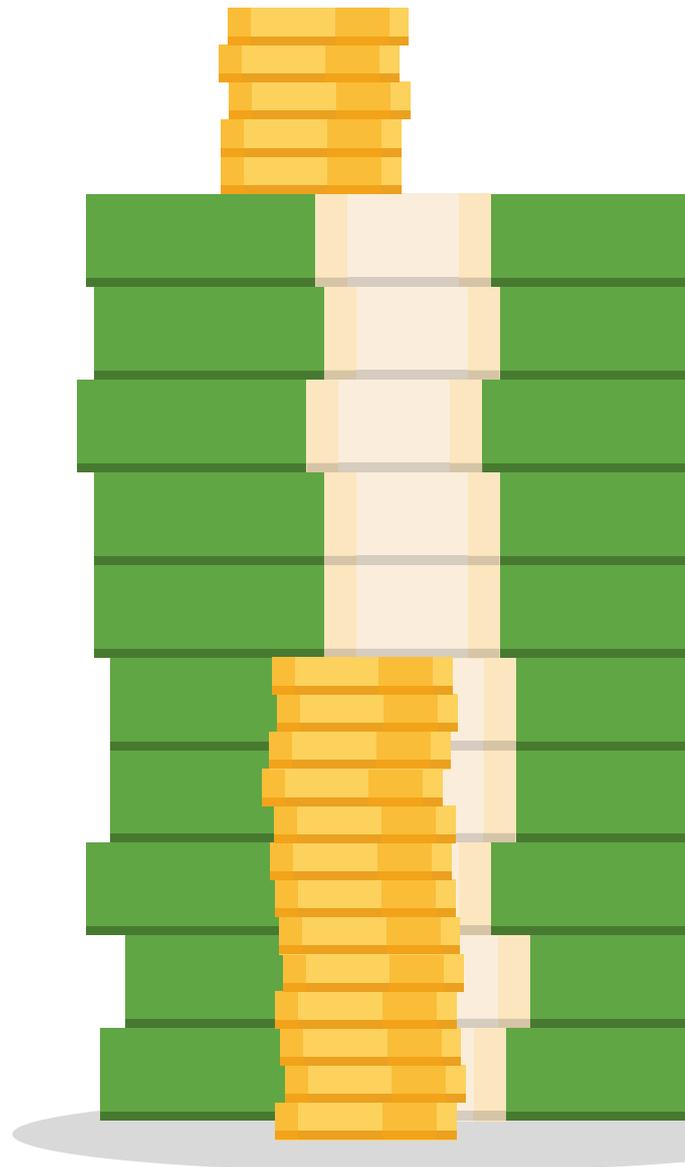
ActionAid Haiti has worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) since 2019 to support households in the most food insecure areas in Haiti.<sup>21</sup> In 2020, ActionAid Haiti and WFP partnered with local women's rights organisation, Papaya Peasant Movement<sup>22</sup>, (MPP) on a seven-month project from January-July 2020, which involved supplementing households with cash transfers. When the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020, the project adapted to prevent any further deterioration of food security and meet the urgent needs of Covid-19.<sup>23</sup>

The cash distributions were implemented in Maïssade and Thomassique, two rural municipalities of Haiti located in the department of Centre. They are characterized by two seasons: a dry season from November to April and a rainy season from May to November. The economic life of the two municipalities are fundamentally based on agriculture, livestock and crafts. The commune of Thomassique is bounded to the east, south and northeast by the Dominican Republic.

The project targeted 4,789 families (4,250 women; 539 men).

- It placed particular emphasis on preventing malnutrition and targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women, children aged 6-59 months and people with disabilities, in the municipalities of Maïssade and Thomassique.
- The project provided training on gender equality and sexual reproductive health to 1,167 women, with women making up 90 percent of the project beneficiaries.

The cash-transfers were done in four cycles, with 80 USD per cycle/family. The total amount of cash transfers involved in the whole process was 1,532,480 USD. For the purpose of this case study, qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and interviews with community members and other key stakeholders. This included the participation of 127 key informants (76 percent female, 24 percent male, with the age of the interviewees ranging from 17 to 86 years), a total of five focus groups (three in Maïssade and two in Thomassique)<sup>24</sup>, four group interviews in Maïssade and Thomassique along with one-on-one interviews, which were conducted during the period from June to August 2020.<sup>25</sup>



# Findings

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## A Feminist Approach to Cash: Integrating women's rights and women's leadership in Covid-19 adaptations and cash distributions

At ActionAid we have advocated for investment in local and women-led response efforts for many years. We know that women bring vital skills, resources and experiences to humanitarian response.<sup>26</sup> When crises happen, women are often the first responders, taking risks and playing critical roles in the survival of families and communities, as well as taking responsibility for the care and emotional rebuilding of communities in the aftermath of crisis. This has been evident with the Covid-19 pandemic as women have used their strong local knowledge, which is a critical resource during humanitarian response, to lead crisis response.

ActionAid's women-led community-based protection approach<sup>27</sup> emphasises the importance of cash as transformative. The approach, in line with AA's feminist approach to cash<sup>28</sup>, highlights the essential role of women leaders within all cycles of a humanitarian response (in preparedness and response, as well as longer-term development), as critical to strengthening community resilience. Providing cash transfers, and redistributing resources through cash and livelihoods recovery, allows longer-term gain in enabling women to protect their rights, as this assistance provides an opportunity to address structural inequality. This allows affected women to have access to an equitable share of resources in disaster preparedness and response, such as cash and assets for livelihoods to withstand and recover from crisis and to reduce their vulnerability.

ActionAid Haiti prioritised women's participation in decision-making positions throughout the project. Women played a key role in the development of the project and were involved in all project activities. These included validation of the criteria, the identification and training of selected beneficiaries, as well as planning and implementation of distributions. Female AAH and MPP staff were in decision-making positions (the Project Coordinator, the Officers, the Accountants, the humanitarian focal point on the ground) and 30 percent of community committee roles were filled by women.

A key challenge faced by the project was the misinformation on Covid-19, and the disbelief in communities that the virus existed. During the distribution, people were looking for excuses to avoid wearing masks and even to wash their hands on site. Women leaders played a vital role in raising awareness about Covid-19, and reminding people about the rules and preventive measures, at each location on site.

Prioritising women's leadership is a key entry point to support transformational change in line with awareness raising on the virus, but also on the cash process and distribution. Further, women's leadership was a key mobiliser in ensuring the cash distribution was efficient in reaching those most at need during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking a feminist leadership approach led to some clear learnings:

### i. Women-led community-based approach led to timely Covid-19 adaptations

Covid-19 restrictions made the logistical planning of the cash distribution more complicated. The Covid-19 response built on ActionAid Haiti's experience in responding to Hurricane Mathew<sup>29</sup>, where women-led Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) was embedded in communities. The same approach was applied to the Covid-19 crisis, which meant that communities were ready to review and initiate key adaptations to mitigate disease spread whilst ensuring distributions would continue uninterrupted. Consultations were held with women's groups, community committees and local authorities to discuss how they could adapt

the project to deliver in the context of Covid-19. Women leaders discussed potential solutions to continue distributions while mitigating the risks of Covid-19 to communities, as well as supporting the preparation of planned activities with target groups. At each stage of the cash distribution, ActionAid implemented significant Covid-19 measures to ensure that the crucial food security assistance and cash distributions could continue safely. These adaptations required much work, planning, time, materials and human resources, as well as additional costs. A list of these adaptations can be seen on the following page.

<p><b>Project design</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapting payment schedules and modalities and simplifying contact-intense enrolment processes, such as mitigating exposure through reducing distributions. The initial scheduled four cash distributions, was limited to two distributions (with two tranches given in the two slots). This reduced the amount of time women came to the site, as well as reducing time staff were exposed to risks. It was also determined that the risk in recipients receiving two-month transfers at one time was a tolerable risk, as this was a reasonable amount of money to manage.</li> <li>Mitigating exposure by reducing daily caseload. This second step was to reduce number of beneficiaries per site per day from 600 beneficiaries to 250 during the pandemic. This resulted in the distribution being extended to four days per site during the pandemic (two days per site normally). There was the same total number of beneficiaries.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity development for project staff</b></p>	<p>Additional funding was needed to buy materials, equipment, and products for disinfection, communication and mobilising more people. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-day training for 36 staff on Covid-19 prevention.</li> <li>Recruitment of additional staff (such as community health workers and field agents) to support in social distancing activities.</li> <li>Distribution of PPE to AAH and MPP staff (masks, hand sanitiser, visors).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Awareness raising in communities, Ministry of Public Health and Population Civil Protection on Covid-19 prevention</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broadcast key messages via flyers, boom box radios and community radio.</li> <li>Mobilisation through door-to-door awareness raising, including ensuring participants are aware that they should not attend sites if they are sick.</li> <li>Include the hotline number they can call to; ask questions about their cash distribution, as well as the specific details of their distribution (times and dates, distribution centre locations).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outside site</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At each site, there was a handwashing point and posters with awareness messages about virus transmission as well as disinfectant and chlorinated solutions on check in and payment tables.</li> <li>Mandatory mask wearing for recipients and staff.</li> <li>Mandatory training and sensitisation on Covid-19 prevention, GBV, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health.</li> <li>ActionAid Haiti conducted training for a total of 1,282 beneficiaries, of which 1,211 were women.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The following Covid-19 prevention methods were used inside the payment centre</b></p>	<p>Covid-19 awareness-raising sessions were introduced inside the payment centre, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to wear a mask effectively.</li> <li>Protocol for involving health and civil protection agents.</li> </ul> <p>Measures taken included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An expanded site with floor markings, to ensure adequate flow, two-metre social distancing and adequate ventilation.</li> <li>Handwashing station at payment area.</li> <li>Maximum of 10 individuals at payment desk.</li> <li>Visual materials explaining the importance of social distancing.</li> </ul>

## Case study

### Shifting the power around targeting away from authorities to communities, specifically women leaders.

Local women played a vital role in supporting the validation sessions for cash distributions which were conducted during and after the registration of beneficiaries on the scope platform. This confirmed compliance with targeting criteria and detected entry errors, ensuring there was no fraud and corruption during the cash distributions.

Our research showed that women leaders played an instrumental role in supporting the verification of identity of beneficiaries, even though their role is not always acknowledged.

In validation sessions local women often identified and corrected errors such as entry of false names, name duplication and misspelling, errors which might have otherwise led to corruption or fraud. Women were able to verify this information due to their knowledge of the community.

In addition to this, decisions around household targeting and recipients in the project were agreed following consultations with women's groups who held strong community knowledge and understanding of the needs of the community at large. Cash provided was spent based on household priorities and allowed families to address their most urgent needs such as food, medicine and shelter, which were often exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis.

A mother from the commune of Thomassique stated that: "I have five children and my husband is sick. We didn't have a house to sleep in, we lived with a neighbour. But thanks to this project now we have our own little house."

Several older women and men gave a similar testimony, with 100% of respondents noting that the cash distributions allowed them to access food which they would otherwise have struggled – or been unable – to access, due to the food shortage in their families and communities at the time of distribution. Research findings indicated that women leaders were also able to best identify those most in need of aid.



## **i. Women’s meaningful participation is not possible without shifting power at all levels**

ActionAid’s women-led approach means that women lead at every phase of the planning and implementation.<sup>30</sup> During the response ActionAid Haiti and MPP made significant efforts to promote women’s participation and managed to ensure that at least 30 percent of national and local committee members were women. Although 11 out of 26 committee members were women, AAH found that women still remained systematically excluded by male colleagues from information sharing and decision making throughout the targeting and project implementation process. Male community representatives routinely withheld information from female counterparts and did not pass on invitations to women representatives about upcoming meetings.

This was highlighted as a frustration by women participants, who told us that at government level *“the majority of the Covid-19 pandemic management was given to men.”*

Another female participants confirmed this:

*“In practice, this was frustrating. Whilst we were present in the committees, we would sometimes be left out of the discussions. Sometimes, male*

*authorities received the invitations and information, and they did not share them with us. The big decisions were made by men to a large extent. They were the ones who led the committees. They had the last words in the discussions. They were more numerous and more influential.”*

Women are often excluded and intimidated by male colleagues in society, even women elected officials.<sup>31</sup> When this happens, women’s rights and needs are often overlooked and their contributions are not valued, with devastating impact. Women who fill decision-making position are often faced with men who dominate and constantly seek to intimidate them. This barrier remains a fierce struggle for women leaders.

Despite the underlying root cause (patriarchy and structural inequality) remaining a barrier to women’s empowerment, it is important to continue to promote women’s participation in all project aspects. It is equally important to raise awareness among communities about gender equality, to bring about greater participation and to address the needs of the whole community. Women are key in both the crisis response and in combatting misinformation.

## **ii. Evidence of women’s decision-making on the use of cash supports the opportunity to transform social and structural factors that reinforce women’s inequality**

Gender inequalities and discrimination experienced by women and girls in their daily lives mean that they are less able to access life-saving aid and be involved in crucial decision making when disasters hit. Evidence shows providing cash to women can reduce physical abuse and rates of child marriage, improving women’s health and economic status.<sup>32</sup> Mainstreaming protection into cash programming can increase the security and safety of women in a humanitarian response.<sup>33</sup> Managing and receiving cash offers women and girls the dignity, ownership, and flexibility to meet a wide range of changing needs<sup>34</sup>, both for themselves and for their communities. It provides the opportunity to shift power to women, and promotes their leadership in emergencies, by empowering women who might not otherwise have access to money to make spending decisions.

*“This money gave women the power to negotiate, to discuss, to claim, to free themselves and to build their self-esteem. When we are economically dependent on our husbands, we do not represent anything in their eyes and those of their parents. At this time, there is dialogue in our house,”* shared one project participant.

This study found that female respondents felt empowered to take on and make decisions about how they spend and manage the money they receive. In addition, participants reflected that this allowed them to have more joint conversations in the household, about how joint money should be spent. The recipient had the choice of either cash or ‘in-kind’<sup>35</sup> resources in this programme. This resulted in 84% of recipients choosing cash, and the remaining

16% choosing in-kind resources. Cash allowed participants, and their households, to prioritise and meet their needs, as they saw most appropriate. According to a female recipient, in this instance cash was *“better than food or other things because you can spend as according to your needs. This allows you to meet multiple needs at the same time.”*

During the cash response, there were no reported issues regarding women receiving and managing the cash transfer. Previous studies in Haiti also confirm that it is culturally acceptable that women handle and manage cash, and that decisions are made jointly on expenditure.<sup>36</sup>

Several participants raised that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the decision-making dynamics within the household. The cash distribution empowered recipients to provide for their households and decide what their households needed most. This was beneficial for the recipients, particularly during a time when economic instability was high due to the pandemic and its secondary

effects. Cash distributions eased household tensions and the risk of violence that women and girls disproportionately face in Haiti.<sup>37</sup>

*“There is more harmony in the house and less verbal and physical violence,”* reported one participant who received cash during this process. Participants discussed a direct link between being able to make decisions on the use of cash, and an increasing acceptance of women’s social mobility in their community, as well as their involvement in income-generating activities. Cash offers crises-affected women and girl’s dignity, control, ownership, and flexibility to meet diverse and changing needs and can provide women with the choice to mitigate against harmful coping strategies that are sometimes adopted in or exacerbated by crises. Facilitating women’s leadership and access to resources, further fosters a sense of self-confidence and empowerment among women that can help transform gender power relations in their households and communities and overcome barriers that have traditionally excluded women from decision-making.

### **iii. When given the choice, women are saving or investing in income-generating activities**

Cash transfers are by nature flexible and multi-purpose, therefore they do not always fit into the rigid silos of the humanitarian sector that often aim to meet a single objective such as food security, WASH or shelter. Cash transfers can provide the chance to enhance economic resilience, through resources that enable women to save or invest in Income Generating Activities (IGAs), and to increase credit and/or pay off debts.<sup>38</sup> Poverty and lack of economic autonomy for women intersect with and reinforce gender inequalities, placing women in dependent relationships with men who typically have higher social and economic power. This makes it more difficult for women to exit abusive and violent relationships, increasing a range of risk factors that may play a role in increasing violence against women and girls (VAWG).<sup>39</sup> In the aftermath of a crisis cash can provide the opportunity to foster and promote women’s economic empowerment and resilience. It also increases women’s engagement in community power structures, achieving the long-term goal of strengthening women’s rights and reducing poverty.

One research participant shared that:

*‘In the commune of Maissade, there was a female recipient who fulfilled her dream by buying a cow.*

*She’s really happy. Normally, the majority of rural women do not have enough economic means to purchase a cow and are often economically dependent on their husbands, without being able to make their own financial decisions.’*

Findings showed that many people invested a portion of cash in livestock. They bought chickens, goats, sheep, and oxen. It was mentioned by one respondent that in Haiti, investing in the natural environment is viewed a form of savings, which can increase over time and, when needed, sold. Recipients that invested in livestock contributed to increased price and sale of animals in local markets because of the cash distribution.

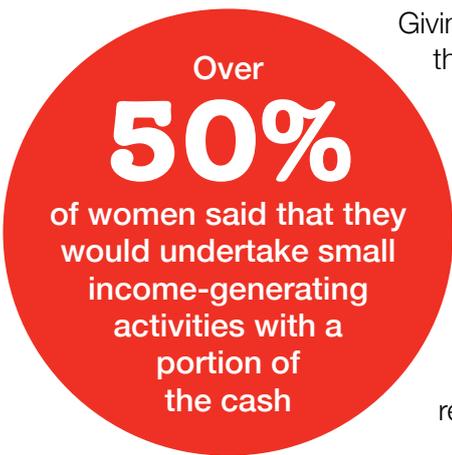
In addition to this, cash transfers can help to shift financial power by switching from centralised, single supplier procurement models to providing cash to women. Women then inject cash into local markets, contributing to the recovery and resilience of the local economy.

Over half of the women recipients said that they would undertake small income-generating activities with a portion of the cash they received. Most of them set up

a small shop at home while others also went to local or regional public markets for the sale of their goods. Women mostly build on their experience and expertise in a particular product. Some chose to sell sweets, others food products (imported rice, beans, cooking oil, potato, banana, peanuts, soft drinks and others) or cosmetics (soap, toothpaste, deodorants and others). Some women chose to be food vendors. The income generated provided for basic needs in a more sustainable way.

Many respondents also stated that the IGAs promote empowerment of women and girls. They say that when they have a small business, they gain respect in their homes and communities. Their husbands respect them, and they can participate more in decision-making processes as a result.

One recipient said, *"I've wanted to be a merchant for a long time, but because of a lack of economic means, I couldn't: I didn't have access to credit. And now I am."*



Giving the flexibility of choice and working directly with local women and their communities, supports the immediate humanitarian needs, while also assisting long-term recovery of the community at large. Cash can be used to access all markets, save and better prepare for future crises and directly contribute to livelihoods protection and resilience building. Local authorities interviewed said that the project has supported the revival of the livelihoods of recipients, families, local trade and supported economic recovery in the short and long term. Cash has stimulated markets while benefiting merchants and suppliers, local service providers and the transportation sector, increasing the resilience of women and their families, with an increased reliable income as well as improved food security for the community.

#### iv. Safety, access and protection

A range of women's protection risks, and mitigation measures, may be associated with managing resources like cash. For example, a disagreement and or backlash over the targeting of households to receive in-kind food and cash, or exposure to risk when travelling to distribution sites or markets in insecure locations.

Risks can be mitigated by clear, transparent, women or community-led target criteria setting. This target criteria setting should be based on collected data, coupled with fully operational complaints and response mechanisms that are built on a foundation of trust, as well as an analysis of security risks for beneficiaries on their journey to and from distribution sites.<sup>40</sup> It is important to mitigate against these risks at all stages of response, and even more so during crises such as Covid-19, where gender mainstreaming activities may be deemed non-essential and be deprioritised by donors. Women leaders were also crucial in managing any tensions associated with targeting communities, by being involved in re-verification process to validate community members receiving cash distributions. At some sites during this project, a number of

untargeted people gathered in the hopes they would be selected. Women leaders supported communities in raising awareness within community members about the criteria, and the selection process, as well as the specific project benefits and modality of cash so that it would mitigate confusion and uncertainties of the targeting criteria.

In combination with the cash transfers<sup>41</sup>, the project included awareness raising and training on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health, as well as Covid-19 risk communication messaging on site (such as radio awareness, mobile spots, and distribution of awareness flyers). It was essential that the gender equality and sexual and reproductive health component of the response was retained to ensure that women's rights and gender equality were reinforced and not dismissed. The training was an opportunity to raise awareness of women's rights and protections, which was particularly important as ActionAid Haiti's research found that during the pandemic, women embarked on high-risk coping mechanisms such as begging, foraging, removing girls from school, debt and transactional sex which exposed them to protection risks. This was done

in collaboration with context gathering, in line with the Covid-19 pandemic, through socially distanced focal groups and telephone interviews. The intention was to understand the gendered concerns being faced in the community, and how best to provide support and training during the pandemic. The additional communication methods (socially-distanced focus groups and telephone interviews) supported survivors by providing further channels through which to get information on gender-based violence quickly and safely during the cash distributions. This also allowed for adapting measures for beneficiaries in the cash distribution, where based off of learnings, different steps were taken, such as supporting women from communities to organise to either come or leave distribution sites by groups of 3-5 people of which

they were acquainted with (and aligned with the appropriate Covid-19 restrictions) to walk or take transportation safely towards their homes.

This project ensured that, alongside a hotline for beneficiaries which was accessible 24/7, each distribution site also had a dedicated space for providing feedback. Where concerns were raised, community meetings were held to discuss these.

Throughout this process, those interviewed unanimously shared that they felt distributions were set up in a safe matter, allotting for their varied needs. The study also showed that recipients raised that they were treated with dignity and respect during all activities, from the training, awareness raising sessions and distributions.

## **v. Women's empowerment can't be achieved through unconditional cash alone**

ActionAid promotes individual and collective empowerment of women, and the transformation of the social and structural dimensions of women's inequality and subordination, which underpin protection risks and threats. It also recognises the critical importance of social life and community in achieving women's human rights in safety, security and dignity.

Cash support can result in a range of beneficial outcomes such as, discussed above, women owning and making key decisions on income-generating activities that contribute to women's empowerment.<sup>42</sup> However, it is unlikely that a short-term cash response will result in the sustained empowerment of women, nor will it result in meaningful changes to social norms, women's agency, management of resources and ability to make and influence decisions in the community on its own. According to the testimonies of recipients, community members, field leaders and local authorities, the project has had a positive impact on the recipient communities. It has energised and strengthened commercial activities, as well as socio-political and economic groups. It has built a form of female leadership in communities. Women feel more valued, because they contribute economically to their families and have earned an additional layer of respect, noting that they feel their views and concerns are further listened to. Some of the recipients also showed solidarity with other family members and/or neighbours who were not recipients. In this sense, cash transfers can in the long term, incentivise a community to adopt new, more sustainable practices, as well as positive,

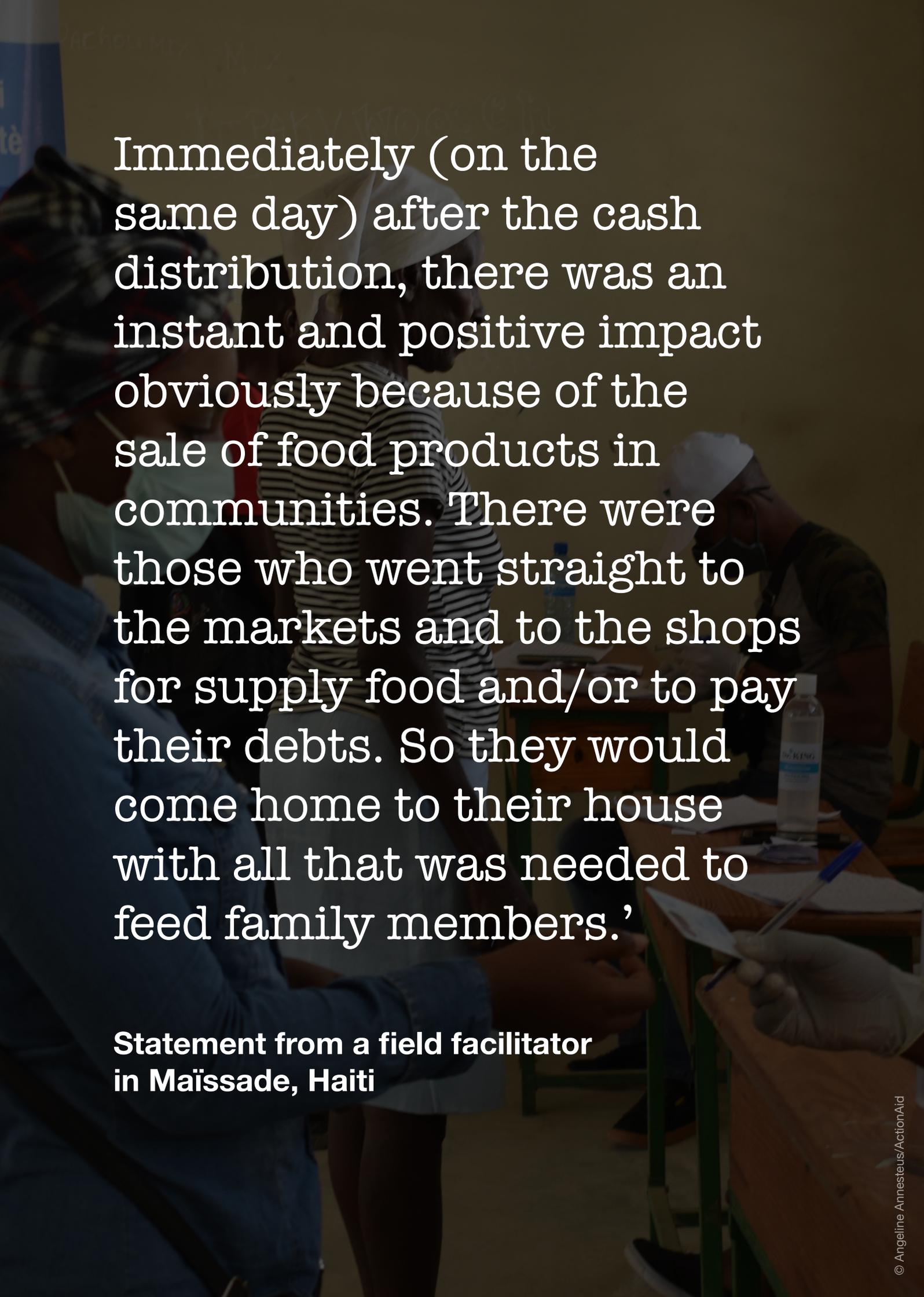
adapt behaviour changes to structural norms when incorporated in humanitarian programming.

Interviews conducted within this research reported widely on the positive effects of cash transfers on women, their households and their communities. This project has shown that cash distributions have enabled women to build their self-esteem and social empowerment.

**This project has relieved communities of poverty and food insecurity. It has helped women a lot. It has strengthened the power of women in the household, investment in productive goods and our resilience.**

**Statement of a women leader from MPP who took part in the cash distributions**

In particular, the programme partner organisation, MPP, stresses the positive effects on food security and nutrition as well as the status of women. Complementary activities in nutrition, gender, sexual health, and Covid-19 have increased knowledge and practices (awareness sessions) and brought about positive changes in households. New positive behaviours have been adopted because of training and awareness-raising activities.



Immediately (on the same day) after the cash distribution, there was an instant and positive impact obviously because of the sale of food products in communities. There were those who went straight to the markets and to the shops for supply food and/or to pay their debts. So they would come home to their house with all that was needed to feed family members.'

**Statement from a field facilitator  
in Maïssade, Haiti**

# Recommendations

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## 1 Promote women-led representation and decision-making during cash distribution

- **Women's participation and active involvement in project committees and discussions is critical to meet the needs of the community.** Shifting decision-making processes to local communities, specifically women leaders, allows cash to be diverted to those most at need. Women leaders should lead and participate in the assessment of needs and in the identification of socially and economically vulnerable households, including which households will benefit most from cash transfers. This will ensure consideration of gender and power dynamics in the community.
- **Promoting women-led activities and participation supports the empowerment of women and the transformation of social and structural factors that reinforce women's inequality.** In the longer term, cash transfers can enhance economic empowerment through providing opportunities for women to save and invest in enterprises, as well as to increase credit and/or pay off debts. This helps to address structural issues pre-defined in the communities and supports a shift in power to build women's individual and collective power and transform the systems and structures that precluded their access to rights, services, and resources.

## 2 Invest in robust gender analysis, guided and led by women leaders

- **A robust gender analysis led by women will allow programme design and cash distribution to take into account local social and cultural norms.** Cash programming should be underpinned by women-led gender and protection analysis and robust, continuous market analysis. This requires working in close collaboration with local implementing partners such as women's groups, micro-finance organisations and market traders to meet the needs of disaster-affected women and their communities.

## 3 Integrate gender awareness and protection training into cash distributions and training on cash transfers

- **Cash can provide the opportunity to foster and promote women's economic empowerment and resilience, especially when used alongside gender-awareness training.** It is also a powerful tool in women's protection, as it can help mitigate against harmful coping strategies, or be used in means that otherwise would be unaccounted for. This is critical for cash distributions to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment and support the resilience of the community. It allows the community to consider protection risks to women and girls, as well as to understand the root causes and mitigating measures.
- **Promote women-led, community-based approaches to adapt Covid-19 cash programmes.** Integrating these approaches during distributions (for Covid-19 relief) also helps to address misinformation in communities. With the support of local partners and women leaders in designing and delivering these messages, cash programmes can promote a two-way communication system that allows for better monitoring of the impact of messages, awareness, and actions of the community. Women-led, community-based approaches are also able to adjust to remote or digital provisions that work best for the community. By appropriately adapting functions, such as payment schedules and modalities, communities are able to better protect their communities from Covid-19 contagion – and therefore save lives.

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- <sup>4</sup>Haiti’s first confirmed case of COVID-19 was announced on March 19, prompting the government to declare a state of emergency. At this stage, “data is limited due to low testing rate, and it is estimated that number are much higher”. See: Paultre, A. and Marsh, S. (2021) “Coronavirus wave takes Haiti, yet to begin vaccinations, by surprise”. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/coronavirus-wave-takes-haiti-yet-begin-vaccinations-by-surprise-2021-06-09/>
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- <sup>7</sup>UN Humanitarian (2019). Available at: <https://twitter.com/UNOCHA/status/1210604424202244101>
- <sup>8</sup>The World Bank (2020) “As Haiti Braces for the COVID-19 Pandemic, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Are More Important Than Ever”. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/05/29/as-haiti-braces-for-the-covid-19-pandemic-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-are-more-important-than-ever>
- <sup>9</sup>Haiti’s economy is based on agriculture, as the population depends on subsistence farming. 70 percent of Haitians live on less than 1 USD per day, and in an area which is vulnerable to climatic hazards and climate change. See: Mitja, N. (2020) “Hunger in Haiti: addressing Food Insecurity Challenges”. Action Against Hunger. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/hunger-haiti-addressing-food-insecurity-challenges>
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<sup>14</sup>CARE “Haiti COVID-19 Rapid Gender Analysis”. Available at: <http://www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/RGA-in-Haiti-Effects-of-COVID-19-Brief-2020.10.14.pdf>

<sup>15</sup>ibid.

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<sup>22</sup>Areas that meet IPC 3 (Crisis) and IPC 4 (Emergency) food insecurity criteria according to FEWSET. See: Famine Early Warning System Network “Integrated Phase Classification”. Available at: <https://fews.net/IPC>

<sup>23</sup>According to a joint study by the World Bank, UNICEF and the World Labour Organization (WTO) on the types of social assistance provided to address the economic impacts of the Covid-19 crisis, nearly 34 percent of the 126 countries studied use the concept of money transfer. Available at: <https://ayibopost.com/> (Ayibopost, 2020).

<sup>24</sup>Participants were from diverse backgrounds and included individuals from local authorities (CASEC members, ASEC and city delegates), local leaders (men and women), cash recipients, field facilitators, local organisation and women’s organisation and network members, and municipality health officials. Telephone interviews were also conducted.

<sup>26</sup>Women’s rights have always been an integral part of ActionAid’s agenda. They are now a priority of ActionAid Haiti’s multi-year plan (2018-2020): to promote economic justice and address the structural causes of violence against women and girls

<sup>27</sup>ActionAid (2019) “Safety with Dignity: ActionAid’s Women Led Community-Based Protection Manual”. Available at: <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019%20-AA-WLCBP-Manual-A4-digital-v4.pdf>

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<sup>34</sup>The Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP)(2018) “Collected Paper on Gender and Cash Transfer Programmes in Humanitarian Context”, p.15. Available at: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/calpcollectedpapersongenderandctp-vol.3-1.pdf>

<sup>35</sup>In-kind’ resources refer to food and non-food item (NFI) parcels.

<sup>36</sup>CARE (2019) “What does gender-sensitive cash and voucher assistance look like?”. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/what-does-gender-sensitive-cash-and-voucher-assistance-look>

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<sup>38</sup>Evidence from a large meta evaluation conducted by ODI:

<https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/8601.pdf>

<sup>39</sup>Fulu, E. et al (2014) “What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence Review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls”. Medical Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa, p.11. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/337615/evidence-review-interventions-F.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337615/evidence-review-interventions-F.pdf)

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