



**THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS
OF CASH-PLUS PROGRAMMING:
LESSONS FROM OXFAM'S INTERVENTIONS
IN TRIPOLI, LEBANON**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social protection in Lebanon operates through a fragmented landscape of entitlements and parallel interventions, where access to support is shaped less by need than by political affiliation and localised social networks (Abdo, 2014; Proudfoot and Zoughaib, 2025). This reflects a broader political economy characterised by clientelist systems and fragmented authority, which limits the development of a coherent, state-led social protection system (Cammett, 2015; Baumann, 2018; Traboulsi, 2007; Turkmani, 2021).

Lebanon's main formal social protection instrument is the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP), established in 2011 and implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Until 2020, it functioned primarily as a registry and referral mechanism, facilitating access to health, education, and Social Development Centers for poor and vulnerable Lebanese households. Following the 2019 economic collapse, it expanded to include direct cash support at scale.

had already been widely used for Syrian refugees in Lebanon since around 2012-13, following the onset of the refugee crisis, primarily through internationally funded humanitarian programmes (Chaaban et al., 2020)¹.

However, a recent systematic review and meta-analysis finds these effects to be modest and short-lived, with limited evidence of sustained improvements in income or labour market outcomes (Leight et al., 2024), particularly in contexts of protracted crisis (Holland-Szyp et al., 2024). In practice, cash tends to ease immediate pressure without substantially altering the underlying conditions that shape vulnerability.

Cash-plus approaches have thus emerged in response. In Lebanon, these have taken multiple forms, including combinations of cash assistance with vocational training, work-based learning, and enterprise support, as well as, in some cases, referrals to complementary services.



CASH ASSISTANCE BECAME A CENTRAL FORM OF SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE LEBANESE, ENABLING HOUSEHOLDS TO COVER BASIC NEEDS.

(Leight et al., 2024; Ayoub et al., 2020).

Cash assistance has since become a central form of support for vulnerable Lebanese, enabling households to cover basic needs (Leight et al., 2024; Ayoub et al., 2020). This expansion builds on an existing landscape where cash assistance

1. Cash transfers for Syrian refugees was further systematised at scale from 2017 through multi-purpose cash programmes led by UNHCR and WFP. These programmes provided regular, unconditional transfers designed to stabilise household consumption, with evidence showing improvements in food security and basic expenditures, but more limited impact on longer-term economic outcomes, particularly in the absence of sustained support (Chaaban et al., 2020).

Delivery is typically structured through partnerships between international organisations and local NGOs. Evidence from both global and Lebanon-specific literature suggests that their effectiveness remains highly contingent on implementation conditions, including market dynamics, programme design, and participant selection (Holland-Szyp et al., 2024; Qualisus Consulting, 2025; Juillard et al., 2022). Gains achieved through these interventions are often difficult to sustain in contexts where labour demand is weak and economic volatility is high.

This paper examines how these dynamics play out in practice in Lebanon, focusing on Tripoli as a context of prolonged urban crisis. It draws on evidence from Oxfam’s *Empowering Vulnerable Communities: A Holistic Approach to Resilience in Tripoli* project, funded by the Kingdom of Belgium’s

Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), which combined temporary cash assistance with vocational training and work-based learning components². The analysis explores what these different forms of support made possible, where they fell short, and the implications for programme design and policy in contexts of prolonged economic constraint.

2. Empowering Vulnerable Communities project adopted an integrated Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus approach, combining temporary cash assistance (TCA), vocational training (VT), and work-based learning (WBL), alongside protection services and institutional support. The intervention targeted 475 households based on vulnerability criteria (including older persons without support, persons with disabilities, and women-headed households). From within these households, approximately 150 women were selected for vocational training, with a subset progressing to work-based learning for 50 women based on engagement and performance.



2. TRIPOLI AS A CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINT

Tripoli is often described through the language of crisis, but in practice economic strain is not episodic so much as an ordinary condition of life for many households. Even prior to the 2019 economic collapse, Tripoli and the wider North were among the most economically marginalised regions in the country (UN-Habitat, 2016). Nationally, poverty has more than tripled, rising from 12 percent in 2012 to 44 percent in 2022, with particularly acute impacts in the North (World Bank, 2024). Longstanding marginalisation, weak public investment, and poor governance have produced a city in which stable work is scarce, wages are low, infrastructure is unreliable, and public institutions are often absent at the point of need. Recent shocks have intensified these pressures, but they build on a much longer history of neglect and uneven development (Saadeh, 2023; Turkmani and Masri, 2021).

At the household level, this is reflected in a persistent gap between income and expenditure. Rather than moving between stability and crisis, households operate within different degrees of insecurity. Rent payments are delayed, meals reduced, goods purchased on credit, and support from family and neighbours becomes part of how daily life is sustained (Oxfam, 2025).

Poverty in Tripoli is spatially concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods characterised by inadequate services and deteriorating living conditions, reflecting entrenched patterns of urban inequality (UN-Habitat, 2016). In areas such as Qobbah and Tebbaneh, residents continue to live in buildings engineers have deemed structurally unsafe. Reports indicate that thousands remain in structures at risk of collapse, and recent years have seen multiple fatal building incidents in the city (Amnesty International, 2024). However, for most households, relocation is not a viable option, and families are left to manage risks with little support (Al Asmar, 2026).

Meanwhile, for many households, debt is not exceptional but routine. Borrowing from shopkeepers, landlords, family members, and neighbours forms part of how daily life is managed. While it allows essential needs to be met, it also narrows future options.



INCOME, WHEN IT COMES, IS OFTEN ABSORBED INTO EXISTING OBLIGATIONS, LEAVING LITTLE ROOM TO PLAN OR ACCUMULATE

(Moujabber et al., 2025)

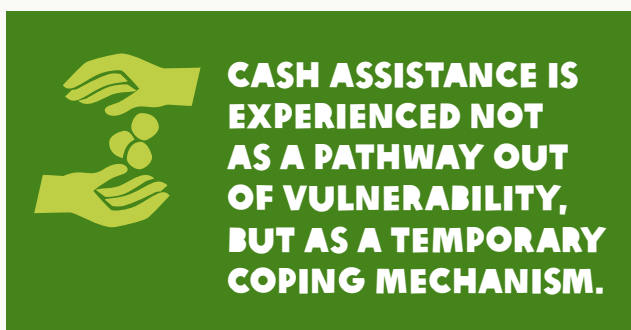
These pressures cut across Lebanese and Syrian households alike. In many parts of Tripoli, relationships between host and refugee communities are shaped by long-standing social, economic, and geographic ties that predate the Syrian crisis. Northern Lebanon has historically been closely connected to Syria through trade, mobility, and kinship networks, and communities in Tripoli often share social norms, religious affiliation, and everyday practices. This proximity complicates the framing of “host” and “refugee” as distinct or opposing groups. While tensions do emerge, particularly under conditions of scarcity, they unfold within a social fabric that is already deeply intertwined (Turkmani and Masri, 2021).

Considering these conditions, the effects of cash, training, or apprenticeship support do not accumulate in a linear way, but are absorbed into the ongoing work of maintaining daily life. Interventions that assume a progression from support to self-reliance therefore run up against structural limits. Short-term gains are difficult to sustain in an environment marked by long-term de-development, where the conditions required for economic recovery remain weak (Saadeh, 2023).

3. CASH ASSISTANCE TO CASH PLUS: EVIDENCE AND LIMITS FROM LEBANON

The patterns observed in Tripoli are reflected more broadly across Lebanon and align closely with findings from the global literature on cash and cash-plus programming. Research by CAMEALEON, a multi-agency initiative focused on cash assistance and livelihoods in Lebanon and the wider region, shows that households face persistent non-financial barriers, including limited mobility, restricted access to services, and gaps in information, which shape their ability to convert support into improved outcomes (Juillard et al., 2022). At the same time, the broader assistance system in Lebanon remains fragmented, with programmes often operating in parallel and relying on referrals rather than integrated design, limiting the extent to which these barriers can be addressed (Palacios and Sloane, 2025).

As in other protracted crisis contexts, cash improves households' ability to meet basic needs, but does not substantially alter underlying financial trajectories. In Lebanon, this is reflected in the cyclical nature of debt across communities, with households repeatedly borrowing to cover essential expenditures despite periods of support (Moujabber et al., 2025).



Findings from recent community consultations conducted by Mercy Corps in 2023, designed to inform improvements in cash assistance

programming, reinforce this pattern. Drawing on discussions with vulnerable Lebanese households, the consultations highlight how poverty cuts across traditional categories and how assistance is experienced not as a pathway out of vulnerability, but as a temporary coping mechanism. Many participants expressed a preference for forms of support that offer more durable income-generating potential, pointing to a gap between short-term transfers and the longer-term pathways households are seeking (Mercy Corps, 2023). Similar findings emerge from Oxfam's focus group discussions with programme participants, who emphasised the need for longer and more advanced training, more consistent and higher-quality internship opportunities, and clearer, more predictable forms of financial support. They also highlighted the importance of post-training pathways, including access to micro-financing, job placement, and continued support, reflecting a broader demand for interventions that extend beyond short-term assistance and offer more sustained income-generating opportunities.

Cash-plus interventions are intended to respond to this gap by addressing the non-financial and structural barriers that limit the effectiveness of cash alone, including restricted access to services, weak labour market integration, and gaps in skills or assets. In practice, however, these interventions into the same financial pressures they are intended to relieve. Evidence from Lebanon shows that while cash-plus can temporarily ease debt burdens, households continue to rely on borrowing to meet essential needs (Qualisus Consulting, 2025; Juillard et al., 2022). Where outcomes are sustained, this is largely due to the "plus" components, such as skills or productive assets.



However, these only translate into durable gains when households have access to labour markets and the resources to apply them, resulting in uneven outcomes across groups (Moujabber et al., 2025; Qualisus Consulting, 2025; Juillard et al., 2022).

Importantly, these patterns are not evenly distributed. Households with some existing assets, access to networks, or partial integration into labour markets are better positioned to translate programme participation into income. By contrast, more vulnerable groups, including displaced populations and women with caregiving responsibilities, face additional constraints related to mobility, time, and access to opportunities, limiting their ability to benefit from these interventions. For example, asset-based

components such as agricultural support tend to benefit households with land, while offering limited value to displaced populations without secure access to productive resources (Qualisus Consulting, 2025; Juillard et al., 2022; Turkmani and Srour, 2025).

Cash and cash-plus interventions thus support short-term stabilisation, but struggle to translate this into sustained improvements in income or financial security contribution (Moujabber et al., 2025; Qualisus Consulting, 2025; Juillard et al., 2022). Their effects are shaped less by programme design alone than by the conditions in which they operate. This raises a central question: under what conditions, and for whom, are cash-plus approaches able to extend the effects of cash beyond immediate relief?

4. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper examines how cash and cash-plus interventions are experienced in practice in Tripoli. Drawing on evidence from Oxfam’s *Empowering Vulnerable Communities* programme, it focuses on what different forms of support made possible, where they fell short, and how outcomes were shaped by the conditions in which they were implemented.

The analysis combines a review of global and Lebanon-specific literature on cash and cash-plus programming with primary qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

Primary data collection included three interviews conducted by the consultants with implementing partners and programme staff, including representatives from SHiFT Social Innovation Hub, UTOPIA Organization, and Oxfam’s monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning team. In addition, focus group discussions conducted by Oxfam included 27 participants across two sessions (14 in Group 1 and 13 in Group 2). Participants were predominantly Lebanese, with seven Syrian nationals represented across both groups.

The age range was 20–50 years. Most participants were enrolled in cooking and pastry-making tracks, with two in nursing and basic healthcare. Nineteen trainees had completed or partially completed practical internship placements. All participants had received six months of temporary cash assistance prior to entering the training and work-based learning components. .

Data collection tools were developed collaboratively between consultants and Oxfam to align programme monitoring with analytical objectives. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, with attention to how participants experienced different forms of support and how these were shaped by broader structural conditions.

This analysis is subject to limitations. The number of KIs and FGDs conducted was limited, and the qualitative data should be understood as indicative rather than representative. These insights were supplemented by a close reading of existing literature and available programme data, including baseline and endline assessments.



5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1

CASH PROVIDED SHORT-TERM STABILISATION BUT DID NOT ALTER UNDERLYING FINANCIAL TRAJECTORIES

Temporary cash assistance functioned as short-term consumption support for participating households. For most participants, it had an immediate and tangible effect on their direct needs. It was primarily used to cover food, rent, and other basic expenses at a time when income was either absent or highly unstable. Participants in focus groups consistently described the transfer as something that allowed them to “get through the month” and absorb some of the pressure of rising costs. This is also reflected in Oxfam’s May 2025 baseline–endline assessment of the Temporary Cash Assistance programme in Tripoli, where 90% of respondents reported some ability to recover from shocks³.

At the same time, its effects were constrained. The transfer was used to meet immediate needs rather than to reduce underlying financial pressures. As one participant noted, “the debts didn’t go away because of the assistance.” Others described using the support to settle small portions of rent or shop credit, only to accumulate new dues in the following weeks. The assistance eased pressure, but did not change their overall financial situation.

³ Baseline–endline findings from Oxfam’s Temporary Cash Assistance programme similarly show limited labour market effects: while 76% of respondents reported some improvement in accessing better employment conditions, only 1% reported fully achieving this outcome.



CASH ASSISTANCE WORKED WELL AS A FORM OF SHORT-TERM PROTECTION, BUT DID NOT PROVIDE A PATHWAY TOWARDS SUSTAINED INCOME.

Key informant

Oxfam’s 2025 baseline–endline also reported that 76% of respondents were at least somewhat able to meet their basic needs following the assistance, but only 5% reported being fully able to do so.

As a result, most participants entered the next stage of the programme still carrying significant financial burdens: unpaid rent, outstanding debt, and ongoing uncertainty around income. The end of the transfer was often felt sharply.

Implementing partners reflected this distinction clearly. As one key informant said, “Cash [assistance] worked well as a form of short-term protection, but did not provide a pathway towards sustained income.” Another informant noted that where cash was not linked to further opportunities, it could leave participants vulnerable once it ended, as households face renewed financial pressure after a period of relative stability.

The value of cash therefore lies in what it enables. It allows households to meet immediate needs, participate in programme activities, and cope with the impact of price shocks. However, it does not address the underlying drivers of vulnerability, nor does it change households’ long-term economic situation.



5.2

TRAINING IMPROVED SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY, BUT GAINS DID NOT TRANSLATE INTO STABLE EMPLOYMENT OR INCOME

The vocational training and work-based learning components improved participants' skills and employability. Participants developed practical skills, particularly in cooking, food processing, and basic healthcare, and gained exposure to workplace environments through supervised, hands-on experience.

Several participants described identifying gaps in their prior knowledge through the training process. As one participant noted, "I thought I knew how to cook. It was only when the training started that I realised how much I didn't know." The work-based learning component built on this by giving participants direct exposure to the workplace and a clearer sense of what kinds of work they enjoy, as well as what is accessible to them.

At the same time, many of these skills were applied within the household rather than the labour market.

Participants described using their training to substitute for purchased goods, improve food management, and, in some cases, generate "modest but meaningful" household savings.

Women in the cooking and pastry track, for example, described replacing previously purchased items with home production. For those in the healthcare track, skills were often used in caregiving, particularly in managing minor health issues at home. These applications were helpful, but largely remained within existing domestic roles. It is also worth noting that not all participants were aiming for formal employment. In several cases, the combination of training and in-kind kits enabled women to apply skills at household or community level, whether by reducing expenses, starting small home-based activities, or supporting others.

In a small number of cases, participants in FGDs reported being able to translate skills into small income-generating activities. One participant launched a home-based pastry business with family support, making her first sale through online channels.

As she reflected, “it was only five dollars, but it meant everything. It showed me that I could actually do this,” later keeping the money as a symbolic marker of that moment. Across both groups, job offers were extended to approximately five participants following training and internship completion.

68% OF ASSESSED PARTICIPANTS REPORTED AN IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR ECONOMIC SITUATION, EITHER THROUGH INCREASED INCOME OR REDUCED HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES⁴

Follow-up data collected by ShiFT among vocational training participants

However, for the most part, these gains did not convert into stable or sustained income. They remained concentrated at the level of the individual and the household, pointing to a gap between improved capacity and the ability of the local economy to absorb it.

4. This finding was based on a supplementary survey and follow-up phone interviews conducted by ShiFT among 50 vocational training participants. While 55% reported a direct increase in income, additional respondents described these improvements through reduced household expenditures enabled by the application of acquired skills (e.g. producing goods at home). The combined measure of “economic improvement” therefore includes both income gains and cost-saving mechanisms.

5.3

PARTICIPATION ACROSS VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND WORK-BASED LEARNING WAS SUSTAINED THROUGH ONGOING TRADE-OFFS SHAPED BY STRUCTURAL AND HOUSEHOLD CONSTRAINTS

Engagement in training was shaped by both programme design and the realities of participants’ lives. While engagement among those selected was sustained, the conditions under which participation took place were uneven and often required ongoing negotiation. As noted, the programme targeted 475 highly vulnerable households, from which 150 women were selected for vocational training through a process combining participant preferences with short career guidance and assessment. Despite this high level of vulnerability, there was no reported drop-out among those selected.

Training topics were informed by a market validation process involving both technical experts and women from the same communities. While this helped align training with local opportunities, cultural and social considerations continued to shape engagement, particularly in tracks such as home-based care, where some women were initially hesitant to participate. This required additional effort during outreach and selection, and influenced how participants navigated the options available to them.

Participation was also supported through specific programme mechanisms. During the vocational training phase, participants received a small transport allowance linked to attendance (2 USD per day), which helped offset the cost of participation. During the subsequent work-based learning phase, participants received a monthly incentive of 150 USD. These supports were important in enabling attendance, particularly for participants with limited or no income. As one participant noted during an FGD, “Without the transport allowance, I honestly would not have come. The cost of getting there and back each day was something I could not afford.”

At the same time, the allowance was widely described as insufficient to fully cover transport costs, and delays or inconsistencies in payment created additional challenges for some participants. These participation-specific supports were designed separately from the temporary cash assistance, which was provided at the household level to meet basic and protection needs, rather than to enable engagement in training.

Even with these supports in place, participation was rarely straightforward. Many participants balanced attendance with competing demands on their time and resources, including caregiving responsibilities and the need to contribute to household survival. Gendered responsibilities were particularly significant. Many women described wanting to work but being unable to commit to available opportunities due to childcare constraints and expectations around their role within the household.

In some cases, the challenge was not participation in training or work-based learning itself, but the transition to employment beyond the programme. As one participant put it, “The work they offered... it’s not worth leaving my children for.” This reflects the participant’s assessment of available job opportunities following training and work-based learning. Participants pointed to long hours, low wages, distance from home, and a lack of stability or formal protections as key barriers to taking up employment opportunities.

These dynamics also shaped how participants engaged with training. Choices were often guided by proximity and feasibility rather than long-term suitability, reflecting both practical constraints and the realities of daily life.

At the same time, not all participants were aiming for formal employment. In several cases, training and in-kind support enabled women to apply skills at the household or community level, whether by reducing expenses, starting small home-based activities, or supporting others.

Participation was therefore not simply about access, but of how well programme design aligned with the structural and household constraints shaping participants’ lives. More broadly, it reflects a trade-off inherent in programmes targeting highly vulnerable populations: while such targeting is essential from a protection perspective, it also shapes the extent to which livelihood pathways can be taken up and sustained.

KEY BARRIERS TO TAKING UP EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Long hours
- Low wages
- Distance from home
- Lack of stability or formal protections

5.4

HOUSEHOLD-LEVEL TARGETING PRODUCED UNEVEN PATHWAYS FROM PARTICIPATION TO LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES

The programme’s targeting approach prioritised households facing high levels of vulnerability, including women-headed households, persons with disabilities, and those with limited or no income. While this aligns with protection objectives, it introduces important distinctions between household-level targeting and individual-level participation, as training and work-based learning were undertaken by selected individuals within households whose capacities, interests, and circumstances varied.

In practice, participation in vocational training and work-based learning was sustained across selected individuals. However, the ability to translate this participation into paid opportunities and sustained employment outcomes varied significantly. This reflects broader structural and contextual factors, including restricted mobility, caregiving responsibilities, and health-related constraints, which shaped what forms of engagement were realistically possible. These factors did not necessarily prevent participation in training or work-based learning, but they influenced the extent to which participants could move beyond these stages into stable, income-generating activities.

Implementing partners reflected this dynamic directly. As one noted: “The households selected for cash were the most vulnerable, but not all of them were able to continue into training or work.” This points to variation in the capacity of individuals within these households to engage in and sustain livelihood pathways, rather than a general inability to participate. While participation in vocational training and work-based learning

was largely maintained among those selected, differences in mobility, time availability, health, and caregiving responsibilities shaped how participants were able to engage, and the extent to which they could translate participation into longer-term outcomes.

This points to a divergence between the profile of households reached through targeting and the conditions required to engage in livelihood pathways. While cash assistance reaches those with the highest levels of need, engagement in training and employment depends on a different set of individual-level capacities and enabling conditions, which are unevenly distributed across households.

More broadly, this reflects a structural tension within cash-plus programming. Households are not uniform units, and the ability to translate participation into sustained income varies within them. As a result, pathways from assistance to employment are uneven and cannot be assumed to follow a linear progression.



5.5

LABOUR MARKET CONSTRAINTS IN TRIPOLI LIMITED THE CONVERSION OF SKILLS INTO SUSTAINED INCOME

Across interviews and focus group discussions, a consistent structural constraint emerged: the availability of stable, adequately paid work in Tripoli was extremely limited. Opportunities were concentrated in informal, low-wage sectors, often characterised by long hours, weak protections, and little prospect for progression.

As one participant noted, “Even if we find work, it’s for very little. You work all day, and it’s not enough.”

This reflects broader labour market dynamics in Tripoli, where informality constitutes a dominant mode of employment rather than a marginal segment. Much of the available work is irregular, unregulated, and lacks formal contractual arrangements or social protection (Abdo, 2019). Workers frequently move between short-term or unstable roles, often combining multiple forms of income to sustain basic needs, while facing limited bargaining power and downward pressure on wages (Abdo, 2019; UN Habitat, 2016; Masri & Turkmani, 2021).

Implementing partners emphasised that this constraint operates at a structural level within the city’s local economy. Even where training topics were broadly aligned with market demand, the market itself lacked the capacity to absorb additional labour. As a result, available income-generating opportunities exist, they may not be able to provide a reliable or sufficient basis for longer-term financial recovery. Instead, they tend to reproduce conditions of insecurity, with earnings that are intermittent, inadequate, and highly sensitive to external shocks. This constrains the extent to which programme participants can translate improved skills or temporary support into sustained livelihood gains. A key informant noted that the issue was not only skills mismatch, but a broader economic environment in which “there is no space to hire.”

These constraints are further shaped by the spatial structure of Tripoli and its surrounding areas. Economic activity and employment opportunities are concentrated in central urban centres, while many participants live in more marginalised neighbourhoods and peripheral areas with limited access to transport and services. In this context, the cost, time, and feasibility of mobility become significant barriers, particularly for women and those with caregiving responsibilities. For many participants, the question was not only whether jobs existed, but whether they could realistically reach, afford, and sustain them on a daily basis.

Work-based learning placements provided exposure to employment environments, but did not consistently lead to longer-term opportunities. Placements were coordinated by SHiFT, drawing on a network of host organisations that included small businesses previously supported through its programmes, partner enterprises engaged through formal agreements, and specialised institutions such as hospitals and elderly care centres for the healthcare track. In some cases, participants reported challenging or exploitative conditions, including very low compensation for labour-intensive work, with limited prospects for continuation beyond the placement.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE CONCENTRATED IN CENTRAL URBAN CENTRES, WHILE MANY PARTICIPANTS LIVE IN MORE MARGINALISED NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO TRANSPORT.



5.6

GENDER SHAPED BOTH ACCESS TO WORK AND THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION

All participants in the focus group discussions were women, as the qualitative sample was drawn from vocational training and work-based learning components that primarily engaged women. This provides a focused lens for examining how participation is shaped under conditions shaped by care responsibilities, limited mobility, and social expectations.

While earlier sections show how these constraints shaped access to training and work, they also shaped what participation came to mean. For many participants, the programme functioned not only as a pathway to employment, but as one of the few structured opportunities to step outside the boundaries of daily routine.

Participants described leaving the house regularly, engaging with others, and recovering a sense of purpose that had narrowed over time. “For the first time in years, I had somewhere to go. I felt like I was doing something for myself.” Participation also shifted how some women understood their position within the household. “I used to wait for my husband to decide everything. Now I have an opinion, now I speak.” These changes were uneven, but point to shifts in confidence and voice that extended beyond the training itself.

Training spaces also functioned as sites of social interaction. Women of different ages and nationalities engaged with one another through shared experiences of care, work, and financial pressure. Participation was not only about skills, but about access to social space that had, for many, narrowed over time.

At the same time, these gains remained bounded. The programme expanded what participants could do within their existing circumstances, but did not substantially alter the conditions that shape access to work. Structural constraints, including wage inequality, discrimination, and the burden of unpaid care, remained largely unchanged.

This reflects a central tension. Confidence, skills, and social connection increased, but these did not translate easily into sustained income.



IT'S NOT THAT THEY GAVE US FISH. THEY GAVE US A FISHING ROD. NOW WE HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO USE IT, BUT AT LEAST WE HAVE IT.

Participant

The sense of possibility was real, but the pathway remained uncertain. In practice, this reflects a context in which participants may acquire the tools and skills to generate income, but face a labour market that offers limited and unstable opportunities to apply them.

For many participants, the value of the programme therefore extended beyond employment. It created social and emotional space within otherwise constrained lives. These changes are significant, but remain limited in their capacity to shift access to work and income under existing conditions.

6. SYNTHESIS: CASH-PLUS UNDER CONDITIONS OF CONSTRAINT

Across the findings, the key issue is not whether the programme works, but under what conditions its effects can extend beyond short-term stabilisation. In Tripoli, participants were able to engage with training and work-based learning, and in many cases developed skills, confidence, and new forms of economic activity. However, whether these translated into sustained income depended less on the intervention itself than on the context in which participants were operating.

This highlights a gap between programme design and the realities shaping participants' lives. Programme assumptions – such as the availability of accessible work, the feasibility of sustained participation, or the ability to convert skills into income – do not always hold in practice. When they do not, participation and skill acquisition do not lead to stable livelihood outcomes, not because of low engagement, but because of structural constraints related to labour markets, mobility, and care responsibilities.

The findings suggest that more accessible and contextually grounded forms of economic activity offer more viable entry points in such settings. These include home-based or community-based activities, informal micro-enterprises, and forms of work that can be combined with caregiving responsibilities and limited mobility. The programme already reflects this to some extent, particularly in how participants applied skills within the household or through small-scale income-generating activities.

The challenge lies in what happens next. While these pathways can provide immediate or incremental benefits, they often remain confined to low-return segments of the economy, with limited prospects for growth or stability.

Without mechanisms to strengthen, expand, or connect these activities to more stable income opportunities – such as access to markets, finance, or longer-term support – they risk reinforcing, rather than transforming, existing patterns of vulnerability.

This points to the need for greater differentiation in programme design. Households are not uniform, and participants vary in their capacity to engage in and benefit from different types of support. Approaches that recognise variation within households, and offer multiple and flexible pathways, rather than a single linear progression from assistance to employment, are better suited to these conditions. In practice, this may involve supporting a range of trajectories, from home-based or small-scale activities for those with limited mobility or caregiving responsibilities, to more intensive work-based learning and job placement support for those better positioned to engage in external labour markets. It may also require combining skills development with complementary inputs such as access to finance, market linkages, or continued mentoring, depending on participants' starting points and constraints.

Finally, the findings highlight the limits of programme-level interventions in contexts of prolonged economic constraint. Cash-plus approaches can reduce pressure, build capacity, and enable participation, but they cannot, on their own, generate sustained economic change in the absence of broader shifts in labour market conditions. Their role is therefore necessarily partial, and best understood as one component within a wider set of responses to poverty and vulnerability in protracted crisis.



7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to a set of practical implications for how cash-plus programmes are designed, sequenced, and implemented in contexts of prolonged economic constraint.

1. ENSURE CONTINUITY AND ADEQUACY OF CASH SUPPORT ACROSS PROGRAMME STAGES.

Short-term cash assistance played a critical protective role by stabilising households under acute financial pressure. It enabled participants to meet basic needs and absorb immediate costs. However, its duration and value were not sufficient to sustain this stabilisation over time or to support transition into livelihoods. In practice, cash support should extend across the full duration of engagement, including training and early income-generation phases. This may require maintaining transfers for at least 12 months, to allow participants reach a minimum level of income stability. Where possible, transfer values should be calibrated to cover basic needs and participation-related costs, drawing on Minimum Expenditure Basket benchmarks or equivalent context-specific measures. Without this, households quickly return to managing immediate needs, limiting their ability to sustain participation or invest in income-generating activities.

More broadly, this reflects how cash assistance is sequenced within cash-plus programming. Cash cannot be treated as a front-loaded or time-bound component separate from livelihood support. Instead, its duration and value should be aligned with the full sequence of participation, ensuring that basic needs remain covered while participants engage in training and early income-generating activities. In addition, participation-related costs – including transport, meals, and basic materials – should be consistently covered throughout training and work-based learning, so that participation does not create additional financial strain or offset the benefits of cash assistance.

2. STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY PATHWAYS FROM SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TO DECENT WORK AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHIN CONSTRAINED LABOUR MARKETS.

Training and work-based learning improved participants' skills and readiness to work, but these gains did not consistently translate into sustained income. Work-based learning placements were primarily hosted by small businesses within SHiFT's network, as well as partner enterprises and specialised institutions. While these provided valuable exposure, they did not consistently lead to continued work, in part because host firms had limited capacity to retain participants beyond the placement period .

Strengthening the link between training and income generation therefore requires working within these constraints rather than assuming labour market absorption. In practice, this means supporting multiple pathways to income: strengthening small-scale and home-based activities, facilitating access to local markets, and providing post-training support such as micro-grants, mentoring, and business development services. Engagement with host firms should focus on identifying realistic ways for participants to continue earning after the placement – such as being called back for additional work, being paid for specific outputs, or providing services independently, rather than relying only on formal job placement.

Training tracks were generally aligned with local demand, particularly in sectors such as care services and food production. The challenge lies in sustaining these pathways and connecting them to reliable income streams over time. This points to the importance of treating cash-plus as an integrated model in which skills development, market access, and income support are addressed in parallel, with a focus on gradual and contextually grounded transitions into economic activity.

3. ALIGN TARGETING WITH CAPACITY TO ENGAGE IN LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES.

Targeting prioritised households facing high levels of vulnerability, which is appropriate for protection objectives. However, participation in training and employment depended on additional factors, including mobility, caregiving responsibilities, and health status.

Programmes therefore need to account for variation in capacity to engage. In practice, this can be done through light-touch assessments at the individual level to identify constraints and readiness, and by using these to guide differentiated pathways. This may include identifying different participants within the same household for different components, sequencing participation over time (for example, starting with protection support before transitioning to livelihoods), or offering parallel tracks such as home-based, community-based, or labour market-oriented activities.

Delivery should remain flexible, allowing participants to shift pathways as their circumstances change. Without this alignment, gaps emerge between who is selected and who is able to benefit.

4. ADAPT DELIVERY MODELS TO CONSTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATION AND CHOICE.

Engagement in training was often shaped by proximity, time constraints, and household responsibilities rather than alignment with participants' skills or livelihood goals. As a result, participation was driven by accessibility rather than relevance.

The programme mitigated some of these constraints through locally delivered training and implementation via community-based partners, which enabled participation by reducing barriers related to distance, time, and social acceptability.

This points to a clear operational lesson. Delivery models that reduce participation costs – through proximity, flexible scheduling, and participant input into training selection – are more likely to support sustained engagement.

5. ADDRESS GENDERED CONSTRAINTS AS OPERATIONAL DESIGN FACTORS.

Women’s participation was shaped by care responsibilities, mobility limitations, and social norms. Training functioned not only as skills development, but also as a structured and socially acceptable way to leave the household, engage with others, and establish routine in Tripoli.

The programme design partially enabled this through accessible locations and group-based formats, which supported participation within these constraints. This indicates that such features are not peripheral, but central to how participation is made possible.

6. BROADEN THE DEFINITION OF PROGRAMME OUTCOMES.

The programme generated psychosocial and relational gains, including increased confidence at women’s level, social participation, and shifts in intra-household dynamics. These outcomes were consistently reported and form part of how participants experienced the intervention.

In contexts where structural economic change is limited, these outcomes provide an important measure of programme impact. Monitoring frameworks should therefore capture changes in agency, participation, and social engagement alongside employment-related indicators. This can include the use of simple, standardised tools to track women’s decision-making, confidence, and social participation over time.

Beyond measurement, programme design should actively support these outcomes. In practice, this may involve maintaining group-based learning formats, creating safe and accessible spaces for participation, facilitating peer support and collective activities, and ensuring regular follow-up or engagement beyond the training period. Integrating these practices into programme delivery helps sustain the social and relational gains that underpin longer-term economic participation.

7. COMPLEMENT PROGRAMME DELIVERY WITH POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND STRUCTURAL ADVOCACY.

The findings make clear that the effectiveness of cash-plus interventions is shaped by the broader conditions in which they operate. In Tripoli, labour market saturation, informality, and limited job creation constrain the extent to which programme-level gains can translate into sustained income. These conditions are not neutral, they are produced through long-standing patterns of marginalisation, uneven investment, and political and economic decision-making that shape how the city functions and who has access to opportunity.

This points to the need to complement programme delivery with efforts to engage more directly with these structural dynamics. In practice, this may involve working with municipalities, local institutions, and economic actors to address barriers to employment, supporting locally grounded economic initiatives, and contributing to broader advocacy efforts around labour market conditions and service provision.

While such change is beyond the scope of individual programmes, linking cash-plus interventions to wider influencing efforts is essential if their effects are to extend beyond short-term stabilisation.

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