



Economic Recovery & Development At the International Rescue Committee

WHO WE ARE

The mission of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is to help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster, including the climate crisis, to survive, recover and gain control of their future.

All IRC programs are designed to achieve meaningful change in people's health, safety, education, economic wellbeing and ability to influence the decisions that affect their lives. **The Economic Recovery and Development (ERD) Technical Unit** works in nearly 40 countries to ensure that those we serve have their most basic survival needs met and have the combination of assets and income to prosper. The team is charged with staying abreast of the best available research and practices, and to work with partners and policymakers to adopt the interventions proven to be effective.

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Each year conflict, floods, famine, and drought affect over 250 million people.

When crisis happens, people are either forced to flee—leaving everything behind—or struggle to survive and to meet basic needs in unstable regions. They must concentrate on short-term strategies to meet their most urgent needs rather than on their longer-term economic wellbeing.

Our work seeks to support people in meeting their basic needs during emergencies while also investing in an equitable long-term recovery and economic stability. Context-appropriate and evidence-based basic needs and livelihoods programming can support people and systems in addressing lasting economic wellbeing outcomes.

What is economic wellbeing?

- ✓ People meet their basic needs and protect livelihoods during emergencies
- ✓ People develop their livelihoods and recover from shocks
- ✓ People are self-reliant and have long-term economic stability

The market systems IRC works with consist of:



(1) A network of producers, suppliers, processors, traders, and consumers that are involved in producing, exchanging, and consuming a commodity or service;



(2) Various forms of infrastructure, inputs and services connected to the market chain;



(3) Rules and norms that shape this system's particular business environment.

WHAT WE DO

ERD programs take a market-based approach to promote well-functioning and equitable markets that are resilient during and after crises or shocks, responsive to consumer preferences, and inclusive of the people most affected by crisis, including people who are displaced, women, and youth. The nature of our interaction with markets varies based on context and humanitarian needs. IRC facilitates multi-stakeholder partnerships involving civil society, governments, the private sector, and academic and research institutions. Such partnerships are formed with the common goal of sharing experiences, information, and technological and financial resources to support improvements in the economic lives of refugees and host communities.

Our programs also promote gender transformative approaches to tackle systemic gender inequality, such as ingrained gender norms, unpaid care burdens, unequal educational opportunities, lack of health services, land rights, and more. In

Kenya, Niger, and Germany, [our BlackRock project](#) collaborated with working-age refugees and other clients to understand different conceptions, particularly benefits, of women's economic empowerment. These insights informed the IRC's contextually specific activities that the women helped design and are now accessing to grow their economic endeavors in industries such as ICT and care work.

The IRC integrates a gender-sensitive approach to value chain development and entrepreneurship. Across many ERD programs, we work with female farmers to safely enhance their agency. **In South Sudan, over 16,700 women received agriculture training, inputs, and/or productive assets throughout 2020.**



Image courtesy of IRC

➤ Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) is the provision of money or vouchers to individuals, households, or community groups affected by crisis to help them achieve an outcome related to health, safety, power, economic wellbeing, or education. CVA can be used as both in an emergency response to a crisis or in a longer-term development approach. CVA is well established as the best evidence-based intervention to meet basic needs and improve food security in humanitarian programming.

CVA can help promote agency and maintain people's dignity by ensuring choice instead of treating clients like passive recipients of relief. Additionally, cash transfers provide financial injections into local economies, which can support the recovery of crisis-affected markets and the broad community of people who rely on them for goods, services and income. For example, to support Venezuelan refugees, Colombian returnees, and host communities in Norte de Santander, Colombia, the IRC participated in multipurpose cash distributions, with a particular focus on women and girls, from 2019 to 2020 in partnership with civil society organizations. **In 2022, the IRC delivered \$70.6 million in CVA directly to clients – the highest volume IRC has recorded since tracking began in 2015.**

IRC has invested in efforts to establish long-term contracts with financial service providers that can deliver CVA quickly and efficiently as needed. As part of this, the IRC has developed a Global Payments Toolbox (GPT), a pre-set pool of global partnerships with financial service providers, to increase our options for physical and digital cash delivery, especially in the case of sudden-onset emergencies in contexts where IRC's presence is limited.

Inclusive Water Resource Management in DRC

This program intertwined peacebuilding, economic stability, and conservation in the Ruzizi plain and surrounding region.

- About 800 farmers were trained in climate-smart agriculture and agro-enterprise.
- The Tenge-Tenge dam and irrigation canals have been rehabilitated; 18 village committees now manage over 400 kilometers of the sub-watershed.
- 40 youth businesses emerged, focusing on livestock & agriculture production, sale, and transport, and have opened digital saving and lending accounts.
- At the larger market level, 89 tons of rice and 11 tons of maize have been sold to secure markets.

➤ Agriculture and food security

Food security can and should be ensured through improved local production. IRC strengthens local, climate change-adapted production as soon as a given context can transition from emergency response to recovery. We take a multisectoral approach (health, education, governance, and protection) to design, implement, and monitor nutrition-sensitive food security and agriculture programming to address the diverse causes of malnutrition, livelihoods recovery and growth, and disaster preparedness.

Value chain development provides the framework for our agricultural programs whereby various stakeholders – producers, input providers, processors, or private sector retailers – are engaged. Through value chain assessments with active participation from clients, IRC determines the best investment opportunities to improve the functioning of value chains for clients. In Myanmar, a project (2016-2020) funded by the Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund sought to contribute to equitable and sustainable livelihood improvement of 214 villages that were moderately to severely-affected by Cyclone Gir, while addressing root causes of food insecurity. **The project concluded with 9,690 farmers trained in improved rice production methods, 62 freshwater sources repaired or constructed, and 1,409 households reporting increased access to financial services.**

➤ Climate resilience

The IRC has made addressing the effects of climate change a core pillar of our work and adapted our mission statement to include our commitment to supporting communities before, during, and after climate-related shocks and disasters. **Climate adaptation and resilience** are promoted with early warning systems, community planning, sustainable natural resource management, climate-smart agriculture, and improved post-harvest storage and management and diversified livelihoods. This includes:

1. *Training and increasing access to inputs that meet local preferences,*
2. *Increasing crop or livestock productivity (climate-smart practices, soil and water management, animal health),*
3. *Improving food availability and access (access to good seeds and inputs and market system rehabilitation), and*
4. *Generating income (business training and linkages to markets).*



Image courtesy of IRC and Stefanie Gliniski

Piloting Anticipatory Cash Before Flooding: Learnings So Far from our Google.org Study

The IRC is working with the International Food Policy Research Institute and the Center for Disaster Protection on anticipatory cash to protect agro-pastoral livelihoods threatened by severe flooding in Adamawa, Nigeria. With the Upper River Benue Basin Development Authority, the Nigerian Meteorological Agency and the Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency, the IRC is creating a flood risk monitoring platform available to community members and local stakeholders. On July 22nd, 2022, the Activation Phase of anticipatory cash transfers due to potential flooding began. We confirmed some positive results: most spending was on food supplies and agricultural inputs and 42% of respondents said that the household experienced a change to joint decision making between men and women.

In addition to response efforts, the IRC is working to improve disaster risk reduction and resiliency of both individuals and communities to be adaptable to economic shocks caused by environment change and disasters. The IRC's newest Global Research & Innovation Priority will also focus on Climate Resilient Agro-Pastoral Livelihoods, particularly in the areas of seed security, disaster risk reduction, and information access. Our team is investing resources to increase private sector partnerships for “green job” opportunities (jobs that, [according to the ILO](#), contribute to environmental preservation and restoration) across multiple industries to support people who have been displaced by conflict and crisis.

Climate shocks such as flooding and drought can shatter livelihoods and fuel insecurities, but anticipatory action, such as being informed about predictable climate hazards and acting before the onset of a climate shock, can make an immense difference in disaster resilience and recovery. The IRC is piloting and rigorously evaluating the use of CVA for anticipatory action to reduce the impacts of climatic shocks for IRC clients.

➤ Workforce Development

The IRC's enterprise development and employment programs aim to address both supply and demand side challenges of the labor market by offering a bundle of employment and entrepreneurship services customized to the individual needs and situations of our clients. **IRC programs seek to address the multiple obstacles communities face in finding work.** These barriers include limited access to information, restrictions on legal right to work, skills mismatch, limited social networks, and discrimination. The combination of services offered vary across a range of emergency and recovery contexts, such as the Livelihoods Center model for service access.

IRC's Livelihoods Centers

Our model helps clients to access services and referrals at a “one-stop-shop”. Job seekers can access multiple services—such as job matching and referrals, business and life skills training, vocational training, legal counseling, and entrepreneurship support—in one place. Business owners and entrepreneurs can access professional development support, mentorship opportunities, and business start-up support and grants. This innovative model has been successfully piloted in Lebanon, reaching 24,000 people, and has since expanded to other countries including Kenya, Uganda, Central African Republic, and Jordan.

➤ Financial Inclusion

Linking IRC clients to financial services and products is a key enabler for long-term individual- and community-level economic stability. Research has shown that access to capital is an essential component to enterprise development. The IRC provides financial literacy training and allots small business grants to entrepreneurs whom IRC helps to develop viable business plans.

IRC works to increase access to traditional financial markets for small businesses and individuals, at times working directly with local banks, microfinance institutions, and other financial service providers (FSPs) to enable IRC clients to establish savings accounts or receive business loans. IRC Savings and Credit Groups (SCGs) often serve as an intermediary source of business capital before a MSME reaches sufficient scale to take out a traditional loan, or where traditional financing options are unavailable.

The IRC's innovative [Economic and Social Empowerment \(EASE\)](#) model gives women access to financial resources and provides opportunities to both women and men to create more equitable and safe gender dynamics within their households. The IRC is implementing this comprehensive model in nine countries, reaching nearly 25,500 women.



Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)

Informal savings and credit groups such as VSLAs increase financial access and capital building for community members. These groups meet regularly to save income into, and take out loans from, a joint pool of funds (either physical, secured cash or digital savings accounts managed by elected leadership of the group). Just in 2020, 30,958 women were IRC VSLA participants, making up 80% of the cohort. To date, participating women have been able to save almost \$1.4 million.

Our commitment to research and adaptability throughout COVID-19

Our PRO-Jeunes research project worked with youth in Côte d'Ivoire to learn what types of skills training can best bridge gender gaps in male-dominated fields and reduce information gaps. As Covid-19 struck, we adapted our work with partners to provide remote youth training and case management while sharing the latest health updates and psychosocial resources. While we did face challenges, many youths enjoyed their continuous interactions. We launched new digital vocational trainings and ensured youth participation with WhatsApp.

➤ Research & Learning

The IRC strives to ground its programming in evidence-based innovation, to have a large impact and reach, and to ensure IRC programs generate long lasting resilience in the communities we serve. We combine multiple types of expertise and approaches in research projects to learn about what can improve our programs' quality, cost-efficiency, and scale.

Along with designing new programs, we strive to ensure that our programs actually work for our clients and provide positive short- and long-term impacts. To deliver on this commitment to program quality and to reach as many people as possible, IRC has worked across sectors to create a framework of program outcomes, theories of change and core indicators – aligned with international best practices in humanitarian assistance. In every context where we operate, we establish a variety of secure channels for clients and community stakeholders to provide anonymous feedback to us on our performance, to elevate clients' voices, and ensure we are accountable to those we aim to serve.

➤ Policy & Advocacy

Our commitment is to make sure communities continue to experience economic stability and secure livelihoods beyond the IRC's programming; to achieve this, policy and advocacy is essential. Our team works with bilateral donors such as Germany's BMZ GIZ, multilateral groups such as the World Bank, international organizations like the United Nations to advocate for economic policy change, aid reform, protection from violence, crisis response, gender equality, and more. We seek to advocate for the recognition of and solutions to challenges such as documentation access, social and financial service access, social cohesion between refugees and host communities, refugee economic inclusion, and emergency response. Our recent advocacy has also focused on the impacts of COVID-19, conflict, and climate change, and how cash can be used as a key tool for crisis response and recovery.



The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 40 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

[Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org) | 122 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10168-1289 | 212 551 3000