ASAP III

1. Ability to Get to Target Clients

The market-based seed voucher and cash transfer approach under ASAP III proved highly effective in reaching the most vulnerable farming households, including those in remote and crisis-affected areas. CRS implemented the project through a consortium of local Church-affiliated NGO partners whose established community presence and government relationships enabled rapid, transparent identification of beneficiaries. Targeting relied on a rigorous, multi-layered community-based mechanism: kebele food security task forces (KFSTFs), comprising local leaders, development agents, health extension workers, women representatives, and respected elders, identified seed-insecure households against documented criteria, and the resulting lists were then validated at open community meetings to minimize inclusion and exclusion errors. **Both voucher and seed distributions were organized at the kebele level — the lowest administrative unit — with seed vendors responsible for transporting seeds directly to final distribution points.** Post-distribution monitoring data showed that project participants traveled an average of only **46 minutes to voucher distribution centers and 42 minutes to cash distribution centers**, with **97.9%** of voucher households and all cash households reporting satisfaction with the support received. The project specifically prioritized **female-headed households** (ultimately **24%** of all participants) and targeted women directly for cash transfers for nutrient-dense vegetable seeds, recognizing their central role in household food and nutrition security. Temporary markets were organized at cash distribution sites within kebeles, bringing accredited vegetable seed vendors to participants rather than requiring travel to distant market centers, which reduced mobility barriers, lowered protection risks, and facilitated timely seed access for **women**.

2. Reduced Costs

The voucher and cash modality substantially reduced the cost of delivering seed assistance compared to centralized in-kind seed procurement and distribution. **Three mechanisms drove cost efficiency.** First, by channeling seed procurement through local Farmers' Cooperative Unions and qualifying private-sector vendors already operating in target areas, the project eliminated the need for long-haul transport, centralized warehousing, and complex logistics chains — seed vendors themselves bore the cost of transporting seeds to kebele-level distribution points. Second, CRS leveraged its network of local implementing partners — organizations with mature institutional capacity, deep community knowledge, and existing staff and infrastructure to "cost-efficiently and expeditiously reach the most vulnerable communities". These

partners maintained strong relationships with regional, zonal, woreda, and kebele governments, which facilitated smooth implementation and reduced coordination overhead. Third, the project achieved **economies of scale by centrally designing and printing all vouchers** while partners handled last-mile distribution, minimizing duplication of effort. For the cash-for-vegetables component, CRS coordinated with financial service providers such as the **Awash bank/Commercial Bank of Ethiopia** to transfer funds directly to women at the kebele level, avoiding the logistical burden of physical seed procurement for diverse vegetable varieties. A key tradeoff, however, is that this model's cost advantage depends on the availability of quality seed in local markets; when supply constraints arise — as occurred with sorghum (which failed minimum quality standards) and tef (where government price-setting was delayed) — the project must source from further afield or substitute crops, which can increase per-unit costs. Despite such challenges, the market-based approach kept overall delivery costs lower by embedding the response within existing market infrastructure rather than building a parallel supply chain.

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3. Ability to Work During Conflict Periods

The decentralized, market-based design of the seed voucher approach demonstrated meaningful resilience during periods of active conflict and insecurity. Ethiopia experienced persistent armed conflict during the ASAP III implementation period, including **restricted movement in Oromia and Amhara regions in 2023 and 2024**, which "affected somewhat the seed production, movement and market" and contributed to seed supply shortages in local markets. Despite these constraints, the project continued to operate by leveraging several adaptive mechanisms. **First**, local Church-based partners — embedded within their communities and possessing long-standing government relationships — maintained operational continuity even when external access was limited. **Second**, when security conditions restricted seed movement within a specific region, regional government bodies facilitated cross-regional procurement: "the regional government bodies facilitate the procurement of seed from seed suppliers located in another region by reaching out to adjacent regional public seed enterprises, which makes the seed procurement process smooth and effective. **Third**, organizing distributions within communities at the kebele level — rather than requiring farmers to travel to distant centralized sites — minimized exposure to insecurity along transit routes. A critical limitation to acknowledge is that during the most intense phases of conflict, seed supply chains and market functioning can be severely disrupted — as evidenced by the shortages and price escalation ASAP III encountered — meaning the approach may require complementary procurement strategies or pre-positioning in the most volatile contexts. Nevertheless, the reliance on

community-based networks, local procurement, and adaptive management enabled continued seed delivery to vulnerable households even amid significant insecurity.

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4. Applicability to Other Crops, Including Grains

The ASAP III experience demonstrates that the market-based voucher and cash model is directly applicable to a range of grain and legume crops — and, with appropriate adaptation, can be extended further. The project has already distributed certified seeds of **multiple major staple grains and pulses via vouchers**, including **open-pollinated variety (OPV) maize, tef, wheat, sorghum, and haricot bean**, sourced through local cooperative unions and private vendors across diverse agroecological zones. The complementary cash modality for nutrient-dense vegetable seeds (carrots, tomatoes, cabbages, beetroot, Swiss chard) demonstrated that the same market-based principles — temporary markets, accredited vendors, kebele-level distribution — could serve an even wider crop portfolio.

However, feasibility constraints must be acknowledged. The model's effectiveness is contingent on **adequate certified seed supply in local or regional markets**. ASAP III encountered significant challenges on this front: sorghum seed available in the market "could not meet the minimum seed quality standard and was rejected"; tef seed was available but "seed suppliers could not provide seed price quotations during the procurement time as the government task force responsible for setting the seed price failed to set the price in time"; and maize seed (particularly open-pollinated varieties) was "in short supply for the season". Seed prices also escalated dramatically — tef seed prices rose **182.86%** between 2021 and 2024, wheat **226.36%** between 2021 and 2023, and haricot bean **126.84%** between 2021 and 2024 — which constrained the volume of seed the project could procure within its budget. When supply of a target crop was insufficient, the project substituted alternative crops (e.g., replacing sorghum and tef with additional haricot bean), which has implications for crop diversity and farmer preference.

Conditions for successful extension to other crops therefore include: (a) verified local or regional availability of certified, quality-assured seed for the target crop; (b) timely government price-setting and seed quality certification processes; (c) engagement of multiple seed suppliers — both public enterprises and private vendors — across regions to buffer against localized shortages; and (d) alignment with the agricultural calendar so that procurement and distribution occur before planting windows. Where these conditions hold, the voucher/cash model can be extended to additional grain crops.