Case Study: Multi-Purpose Aid Vouchers in DR Congo

How e-vouchers overcome challenges to cash-based assistance in North Kivu

Summary

- Aid delivery in eastern DR Congo faces severe challenges, including limited financial liquidity and low adoption of digital payments, preventing scaled-up multi-purpose cash assistance.
- AIDONIC's QR-based multi-purpose vouchers enabled successful aid delivery to internally displaced households in Goma, distributing aid through a trusted network of local vendors.
- The pilot demonstrated that e-vouchers combined with vendor network management affords aid recipients participation, choice, and dignity.

Context



Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo faces an ongoing humanitarian crisis with millions of internally displaced persons requiring urgent assistance.

Traditional cash assistance programs face significant barriers including bank closures, lack of liquidity, limited internet connectivity, and low adoption of mobile payment systems.

These conditions mirror challenges in other conflict-affected regions like Syria, Haiti and Sudan, where e-vouchers have enabled a scaled-up, dignified solution.

Solution Overview

In June 2025, AIDONIC implemented a pilot using QR-based multi-purpose vouchers designed to operate both online and offline. Unlike traditional paper vouchers tied to single vendors, these e-vouchers can be redeemed at multiple establishments – from food vendors and shops to health clinics and taxi services – providing beneficiaries with genuine choice.

The solution combined innovative voucher technology with comprehensive vendor network management. AIDONIC identified and contracted individual private vendors as part of an economic empowerment approach, handled training and onboarding, and managed payment reconciliation. This end-to-end approach allowed aid organizations to focus on beneficiary targeting while AIDONIC handled technical and logistical complexities.

> "Distributing the vouchers and training the boutique staff went extremely well, and the voucher redemption progressed rapidly after the households arrived."
> **Luc Yegaba Buyana**, *Project Coordinator*

Implementation Steps

1. **Beneficiary Registration:** AIDONIC registered 33 internally displaced households and issued paper QR-based value vouchers. Each voucher was linked to a digital wallet.

2. **Vendor Partnership:** From dozens of vendors and taxis, AIDONIC selected participating boutiques and drivers, and trained them to use the mobile application for redeeming vouchers.
3. **Redemption Monitoring:** Every purchase transaction was monitored in real-time through AIDONIC's platform, which included a photo of the goods purchased and a signature by the customer.
4. **Payment settlement:** The platform automated the reconciliation of all vendor payments via either cash or mobile money. AIDONIC handled all the contracting and re-payments to vendors.

Impact



- **33 households** reached with food, NFI assistance, and taxi services
- **High satisfaction** from beneficiaries and vendors
- **Lower operational costs** compared to traditional multi-purpose cash assistance programs
- **Real-time monitoring** of vulnerable groups, including women and elderly
- **Same day reconciliation** payments to vendors
- **Zero connectivity issues** during operation

"It is so much better when we can choose the items we need most to purchase from the shop. Thank you for remembering us." - *Program Participant*

Lessons Learned

The Goma pilot provided valuable insights into deploying digital voucher systems in conflict-affected urban environments with displaced populations.

1. **Simple design enables rapid adoption**. Both beneficiaries and vendors mastered the technology quickly despite having no prior experience with QR codes. The intuitive interface and straightforward training process proved that user-friendly design is essential for successful rollout in crisis settings.
2. **Multi-purpose vouchers restore genuine choice**. Unlike traditional single-vendor vouchers, participants could use their QR codes at food shops, for transportation, for medical aid, as well as for non-food items, or medicine at pharmacies. This flexibility gave displaced families real decision-making power over how to meet their most urgent needs.
3. **Trusted local vendors are the foundation**. Success depended entirely on building relationships with respected community vendors. Training them on humanitarian principles and fair pricing - not just app usage - created a network that participants could trust and rely on.
4. **Real-time monitoring protects vulnerable groups**. The system tracked which demographics were accessing services where and when, enabling immediate identification of barriers faced

by women, elderly, or other vulnerable participants. This visibility allowed for rapid program adjustments to ensure equitable access.

5. **Automated payments eliminate delays**. Same-day vendor reconciliation removed the administrative burden and payment delays that typically frustrate voucher programs. This efficiency improved vendor satisfaction and program sustainability.
6. **Rapid deployment responds to urgent needs**. The quick implementation timeline proved that well-designed digital systems can launch immediately in emergency contexts, without the lengthy setup periods required by traditional cash programs.
7. **Offline technology breaks connectivity barriers**. The QR system worked reliably without internet connection, eliminating a major obstacle to digital aid delivery in Eastern DRC. When telecommunications infrastructure fails due to conflict, offline-capable solutions ensure program continuity.
8. **Small pilots reveal clear scaling pathways**. Testing with limited vendors identified exactly what expansion requires: more vendor types (health clinics, pharmacies), larger beneficiary numbers, and enhanced training protocols for different service sectors.

Conclusion

The Goma pilot successfully demonstrated that digital voucher technology can effectively deliver humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected environments with limited infrastructure. AIDONIC's e-voucher system maintained security, efficiency, and impact even in fragile contexts like Eastern DRC.

For humanitarian organizations in similar challenging environments, this pilot offers evidence that digital solutions can overcome traditional barriers to aid delivery while maintaining the choice and dignity that cash-based assistance provides.

"The technology works perfectly, so this is a great way to help the displaced people. Thank-you for trusting us." – *Boutique Vendor*

AIDONIC plans to expand throughout North and South Kivu provinces to address ongoing liquidity challenges from bank closures and insecurity. The success of this pilot, combined with positive results in Sudan, positions the "Voucher PLUS" solution as a viable alternative for aid organizations seeking to scale cash-based assistance in challenging environments.

View the project video here: https://youtu.be/eNoQUU2c5fg?si=Taomgg8vpxa3B25y

For more information:

Luc Yegaba Buyana, *Project Coordinator,* AIDONIC
luc.yegaba@aidonic.io

Joel Kaiser, *Chief Innovation Officer*, AIDONIC
joel.kaiser@aidonic.io

AIDONIC