

**Adapting  
According to  
Plan: **Early  
action and  
adaptive drought  
response in  
Kenya****

**Alice Obrecht**

**COUNTRY STUDY**

 **ALNAP**

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## Contents

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. About this study</b>	<b>8</b>
Adaptiveness: What is it and why does it matter?	8
Adaptiveness and drought crises	10
Research questions	11
Structure of the Paper	11
<b>2. Methodology and Limitations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3. Background: Drought Risk and Response in Kenya</b>	<b>13</b>
A turning point: The 2010–11 drought in East Africa and the Horn of Africa	13
Ending Drought Emergencies by 2022	14
Kenya today: A nationally-led drought risk and response management system	14
<b>4. The 2017 drought response: Timeline and response</b>	<b>19</b>
Early Warning Monitoring: March 2016 – August 2016	19
The shift to early action: August – December 2016	20
Emergency declaration and response: February – June 2017	22
<b>5. Approaches to adaptiveness and flexibility in Kenya</b>	<b>23</b>
County-and community-based contingency planning	23
Contingency funding in development programmes	24
A systems surge approach: Integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) Surge	25
Scalable social protection mechanisms: Hunger Safety Net Programme	27



## **6. Challenges and barriers to flexibility in the response to drought in Kenya**

**32**

It is not clear who is responsible for early action 33

There are still considerably more resources available for emergency response than for actions taken to prevent or mitigate a crisis 33

Using early-warning data for decision-making is complicated 34

It is not clear how crisis-prevention activities are designed or how effective they are 37

The response system is still poorly equipped to listen to affected people (and adapt to their changing needs) during a crisis 41

Procurement processes are slow across multiple agencies and are a significant inhibitor to timely, adaptive action 41

Delivering early action in a system 42

## **7. What is needed to support adaptiveness in drought crises**

**43**

Strengthen the quality of routine early-warning data 43

Continue to devolve and decentralise decision-making 44

Design phased approaches to early action and use an experimental approach to test different activities 44

Strengthen the quality of routine early-warning data 46

## Acronyms

<b>ACF</b>	Action contre la Faim International
<b>ASAL</b>	Arid and semi-arid
<b>CEC</b>	County Executive Committee
<b>CSG</b>	County Steering Group
<b>DCF</b>	Drought Contingency Fund
<b>DCP</b>	Drought Contingency Plan
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>DEVCO</b>	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development at the European Commission
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>ECHO</b>	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations of the European Commission
<b>EDE</b>	Ending Drought Emergencies
<b>EWB</b>	Early Warning Bulletin
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GAM</b>	Global Acute Malnutrition
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>HSNP</b>	Hunger Safety Net Programme
<b>IBLI</b>	Index-Based Livestock Insurance
<b>IPC</b>	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
<b>IMAM</b>	Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition
<b>INGO</b>	International non-government organisation
<b>LEGS</b>	Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards
<b>LIC</b>	Low-income country
<b>LRA</b>	Long Rain Assessment
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>KFSSG</b>	Kenya Food Security Steering Group
<b>MIC</b>	Middle-income country
<b>NDMA</b>	National Drought Management Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government organisation
<b>NVDI</b>	Normalised Difference Vegetation Index
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>PNSP</b>	Productive Safety Net Programme
<b>RUTF</b>	Ready-to-use therapeutic food
<b>SRA</b>	Short Rain Assessment
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VCI</b>	Vegetation Condition Index

## Executive Summary

Early action in crises caused by drought is aimed at ‘recognizing and managing the risk of drought, rather than waiting for it to affect vulnerable communities’ (IFRC, 2014: 1). Doing this effectively ‘implies substantive change across the system’ (ibid.), including the need for greater flexibility among state, humanitarian and development actors, to respond to fluctuations in risk and vulnerability.

This study looks at the relationship between organisational adaptiveness and the ability of humanitarian and state actors to respond effectively to slow-onset cyclical disasters. We use the term adaptiveness or adaptive capacities broadly to mean: *The ability of an organisation to adjust and respond effectively to dynamics and uncertainty.*

The study focuses on the early action undertaken in response to drought conditions in Kenya from July 2016 to July 2017. It finds that:

**There are different types of adaptiveness relevant to drought-related crises, but current approaches emphasise only one of these: preparedness.** Approaches to flexibility and adaptiveness are shaped by actors’ confidence in the *predictability of conditions on the ground* and in the *reliability of programme effectiveness*.<sup>1</sup> When confidence is high, adaptiveness is approached as primarily a challenge of planning: identifying likely scenarios, planning interventions for these, and pre-positioning or pre-arranging resources. With respect to the response to drought in Kenya, confidence in the predictability and reliability of programme effectiveness is fairly high, and therefore the main approach to strengthening flexibility is through preparedness and contingency planning.

However, in the early response to the drought in 2016, contingency plans were not fully implemented quickly enough. Some of this was due to continuing challenges in funding early action and to bureaucratic obstacles in activating ‘crisis modifiers’ in development programmes. Experiences on the ground suggest, however, that contingency plans were not sufficiently detailed to implement quickly, and time was spent on developing and targeting these after the contingency plans had been activated. Some view this as a weakness in the contingency plans that could be corrected with more detailed planning. In support of this view, the positive performance of the IMAM Surge model (Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition), a capacity-preparedness model for the nutrition sector in several arid and semi-arid (ASAL) counties, demonstrated the strengths of detailed contingency planning. The IMAM Surge model could be used for other sectors as a way to make swifter adaptations to services and capacity in response to spikes in demand.

Others, however, questioned the ability to fully predict how drought conditions will affect different population groups in any specific crisis, and felt that over-specifying contingency plans could lead to unhelpful rigidity.

A different approach to adaptiveness that emphasises an experimental and iterative approach to programming, with regular reviews that inform adaptations to programming and/or location, could be relevant to early action but was not observed as an intentional approach taken by any actor in this study.

Many see preparedness and contingency planning as key to adapting as conditions change in a drought, but findings suggest that preparedness could also be supported with adaptive programming approaches that trial different activities, monitor their effectiveness, and then stop or scale these depending on emerging outcomes and changing circumstances.

**Monitoring and coordination might support a more agile response if they focus on outcomes rather than inputs or activities.** Early-warning monitoring and government-led coordination structures appear to have improved greatly since the response to the drought in 2011, and were viewed as contributing to greater effectiveness and timeliness. There was, however, little evidence of continuous monitoring of programme effectiveness, particularly in terms of outcomes, and therefore little evidence of using monitoring data to improve or adjust programmes throughout implementation. The way in which early-warning data is collected by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), e.g. data on nutritional status, makes it difficult to draw any conclusions on whether improvements in nutritional status are due to effective programmes or to other factors. Similarly, government-led coordination is often focused on achieving coverage of activities or inputs rather than outcomes, meaning that communities in greater need may not receive further assistance if they have been ‘reached’ by a non-government organisation (NGO), even if this support was insufficient to address their priority needs, a situation witnessed in the field visit undertaken for this study in Marsabit county. The focus on coordinating activities instead of monitoring outcomes may be a result of what was described by several key informants as a supply-driven approach in which international actors offer what they can provide, rather than basing programme plans on a prioritisation of needs coordinated by the NDMA.

**Decentralised decision-making is critical for agility.** Agility and flexibility are needed to support timely shifts to early action, response and recovery. For this, actors on the ground need to be able to operate with minimal delays caused by bureaucratic approval processes. Decentralised decision-making, as modelled by the Kenyan government’s devolution process, is a critical component to adaptiveness because it removes a main source of bureaucratic delays and makes it likelier that decisions to change or implement programming are informed by a strong and updated awareness of the response context. This study finds that the Kenyan early-warning system might benefit from devolving even further to the sub-county level, to enable more targeted responses to areas that can vary widely in nutritional status or crisis level. It also finds that a lack of decentralised decision-making by international agencies and donors was a main constraint on the timeliness of the response to the Kenyan drought and to the ability of international agencies to shift their programmes appropriately in response to changes on the ground.

**Horn of Africa, 2006:**

*The relative lateness of the major part of the international response implies that many possibilities for disaster mitigation, especially reduction of asset depletion, were missed or not optimally done. Livelihood interventions and emergency support to the water sector took place, but the size of the response in these sectors was far from sufficient. (Grünewald et al. 2006: 17)*

**Kenya, 2009:**

*The need for many of the emergency related activities could have wholly or partially been avoided if early, clearly identified and targeted activities had been implemented. (Zwaagstra et al. 2010: 59)*

**Horn of Africa, 2011:**

*Waiting for a situation to reach crisis point before responding is the wrong way to address chronic vulnerability and recurrent drought in places like the Horn of Africa. Instead, the international community must change how it operates to meet the challenge of responding to recurrent crises in regions such as this. (Save the Children and Oxfam GB, 2012:4)*

**Kenya, 2017:**

*But always, our response comes when it is emergency, and that is when, now, the government has declared a state of emergency. That is now when they-, all international bodies, millions of them come around. The El Niño of the NGOs is coming. Then, after two, three months, they now disappear. Then, now, people forget also the recovery stage. That one is solely left to the community. To me, the gap is being brought by lack of preparedness plan. The plans are there, but nobody wants to implement. (Key informant interview, Marsabit county June 2017)*

## 1. About this study

This study looks at the relationship between organisational adaptiveness and the ability of humanitarian and state actors to respond effectively to slow-onset cyclical disasters. It focuses specifically on the response to the Kenyan drought from 2016 to 2017 to understand the role of adaptive capacities in supporting timely and appropriate shifts into early crisis prevention and mitigation, and later into emergency response and recovery activities.

### Adaptiveness: What is it and why does it matter?

Supporting people affected by crisis to survive and recover requires considerable flexibility. This is because crises are dynamic, involving the movement of vulnerable populations, changes in need, and the behaviour of different actors that can interact in often complex ways. While humanitarian actors have invested in certain types of organisational flexibility – particularly the kind that allows for logistical flexibility in the movement of people and supplies – they have been less adept at making strategic changes or timely changes to their programmes, based on learning or on fluctuations in a situation or context.

There is some evidence to suggest that these challenges have become more pronounced in recent years, due to four factors that are shaping contemporary humanitarian crises.



The first of these factors is time. Increasingly, humanitarian funding is directed to three types of context:

1. Protracted emergencies featuring moderate to high ongoing risk of conflict, where there is a long-standing humanitarian presence and an absence of development actors or a sustained attempt to find political solutions.
2. Low- or middle-income countries (LICs or MICs) at high risk of cyclical natural hazards.
3. Migration crises, characterised by movements of large numbers of vulnerable populations across borders.

In these settings, where the underlying vulnerabilities to crisis are chronic, humanitarian agencies face longer periods of engagement and must shift this engagement frequently, as immediate threats to life and wellbeing periodically arise and fall away. There are also often important relationships with the state, which plays a major role in leading and coordinating a crisis response, particularly in cyclical natural hazards and migration crises. This longer-term engagement of humanitarian agencies brings with it a second factor of **complexity** – a greater need to recognise the complexity of the contexts in which they work. In short-term, rapid-onset engagements, this complexity can often be ignored or de-prioritised as humanitarian actors focus on immediate and urgent objectives but within longer-term engagements. Finally, combined with the complexity of chronic vulnerability, longer timeframes present a fundamental challenge of how to respond effectively in the face of **continual change and uncertainty**.

As the need for greater flexibility in humanitarian action has risen, so too has the sense among some practitioners that procedures and mindsets in humanitarian organisations have been moving in the opposite direction. These processes, while useful for professionalising humanitarian action and making it more accountable to donors, have led many humanitarian actors to become more rigid and less capable of shifting their response as a crisis changes over time (Mercy Corps and IRC, 2015).

Humanitarian funding mechanisms have taken much of the blame for this increased rigidity: long-term and fluctuating humanitarian challenges have largely been addressed through financing that is short-term, slow, and often restricted by earmarking (ALNAP, 2003; High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016).

Financing is not the only problem, however: for enhanced financial flexibility to lead to better humanitarian action, limitations in the capacity of emergency-response actors to respond to fluid and continually changing contexts must be addressed (Adams et al., 2015; Bailey, 2015; Haver et al., 2012). Specifically, governments and implementing agencies need to develop flexible approaches that go beyond the narrow scope of life-saving needs in short-term crises, in order to respond more effectively and appropriately to changes in need, the preferences of aid recipients, context and other factors.

Bearing these factors in mind, many humanitarian actors are recognising that they need approaches and ways of thinking that allow them to embrace, rather than ignore, continuous change and help them navigate uncertainty to provide effective, relevant, high-quality humanitarian action (ICRC, 2012; Mercy Corps and IRC, 2015; Mitchell and Ramalingam,

2014; OCHA, 2015; UN, 2016) These approaches are commonly referred to as ‘adaptive management’ or ‘adaptive programming.’ These are approaches to project management that allow for significant changes to be made based on continuous learning and iteration.

In order to better understand the factors that support and inhibit the flexibility and adaptability of humanitarian actors, ALNAP has undertaken a set of exploratory studies to changes in crisis, context and need over time. Flexibility and adaptiveness are often used interchangeably. We understand flexibility to refer to the ease with which an organisation can change what it does and how it operates (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018).

And we use the term adaptiveness or adaptive capacities broadly to mean: The ability of an organisation to adjust and respond effectively to dynamics and uncertainty.

Adaptiveness requires flexibility, but flexibility alone will not ensure that organisations can respond effectively to change in their environment – other skills and capacities are needed to use flexible systems in the right way. Adaptiveness is an intentional approach to flexibility and, in the humanitarian sector, this goes beyond management and programming to include procurement, supply-chain systems and human-resource management (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018).

## **Adaptiveness and drought crises**

This is the second of two country studies on the existing practices and barriers to adaptive humanitarian action. The first focused on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Obrecht, 2018) and the challenges humanitarian actors face in adapting their programmes and operations to crisis ‘spikes’ against the backdrop of a long-term absence of state-provided services or development programmes.

This study looks at how adaptive capabilities play a role in responding to drought. Drought-related response was selected as the subject of the second country study for three reasons: first, because it is a crisis type that, in principle, should provide more conducive conditions for developing flexible and adaptive approaches. Droughts are both cyclical – occurring every two or three years in some countries – and slow onset, so they are more predictable than other crises created by natural hazards, such as earthquakes. This means that shifts between different forms of support – from long-term development to crisis prevention or to meeting immediate needs – can be better planned for, and there is more time to implement these shifts. Necessary adaptations to programmes can be planned for and are therefore potentially easier to make.

The second reason for selecting drought-related response is because it is a crisis type where flexible approaches would plausibly be more effective at reducing its overall impact on vulnerable households. Flexibility in terms of location and scale of activities is noted as a characteristic of effective approaches to early drought action (IFRC, 2014), yet this continues to be an area of challenge in responding to drought.

A third reason for selecting drought, as well as the Kenyan context in particular, is that this allows for taking a look at the higher-level strategic adaptiveness of the international humanitarian sector. Drought response is an area that is increasingly shifting to become a state-led rather than humanitarian-led process, with international actors playing a largely subsidiary role, focused on providing technical advice.

## Research questions

This study seeks to answer:

1. *What are the approaches (i.e. tools, practices, mechanisms, processes) that humanitarian and national disaster-response actors have used to adapt their activities based on changes in the situation and operational environment in Kenya from 2016 to 2017?*
2. *What role might flexibility and adaptive capacities play in supporting timely shifts to early action, crisis response, and recovery?*
3. *What are the supportive conditions for flexibility? What are the barriers?*

## Structure of the Paper

Following a short Methodology section, the paper is organised in four main parts. Section 3 provides background context to the Kenyan disaster-management system. Section 4 describes the timeline of the drought from the end of the long rain season 2016 to April 2017. Section 5 describes the broad approaches to drought response in Kenya and in Marsabit county in particular, the degree to which these are adaptive to changes in the situation over time, and their challenges and accomplishments. Section 6 summarises the factors that supported and inhibited an adaptive response to changes in the situation and need in the Kenyan 2016–17 drought.

## 2. Methodology and Limitations

This study began with a review of key evaluations and reports on humanitarian action in Kenya in the past 15 years. Thirty-four evaluations were identified through a search of literature from 2000 onwards on ALNAP's [HELP Library](#), using search terms 'Kenya evaluation' and 'drought response' 'Horn of Africa' 'Horn of Africa early action' and 'Kenya.' These evaluations were coded for key terms and phrases related to adaptiveness and flexibility to assess the degree to which their lack was highlighted in humanitarian evaluations, and what barriers were identified. An internal literature review of aid in Kenya was also drafted alongside the evaluation analysis.

A 12-day country visit to Marsabit county and Nairobi took place in June 2017. Thirty-six key informants from development and humanitarian agencies and government were interviewed, including United Nations (UN) agencies, international NGOs (INGOs), NGOs, and donors. These key informant interviews (KIIs) were transcribed and coded using an inductive method to identify core themes concerning the barriers to flexibility and the ways in which change and adaptiveness are experienced and understood. All KII data is presented anonymously, with a number reference for the key informant (e.g. KII 5); where permission was granted, the key informant's organisation type is also provided.

Fact-based conclusions (as opposed to higher-level analytical points or speculative analysis) regarding barriers or trends were drawn when they were supported by more than three sources, at least one of which was document-based (i.e. not an interview). Documents were requested to support statements and claims made by key informants, although this was not

possible in all cases. In particular, there was no external documentary verification of the key informants' accounts of the timeline of the Kenyan government's early-action activities, including release of funds to the counties for their contingency plans. However, this timeline information was triangulated by speaking to many different informants, with knowledge of different aspects of the decision-making process to release these funds, and all accounts corroborated each other.

## Limitations

The primary research visit took place in June 2017. At this point, the emergency response had only recently begun, and there were therefore no evaluations, and limited project documentation, to support the creation of a timeline for the early-action period preceding the emergency declaration for drought in February 2017. Time was allowed to pass between the field visit and the final analysis in order to allow for relevant evaluations of the 2017 response to emerge, but evaluations focusing specifically on the Kenya response were extremely limited. This means that the timelines presented here, and which form a main basis for the analysis, are based on first-hand accounts from key informants, publicly available data through the NDMA Early Warning Bulletins (EWBs), and three external evaluations.

There are different understandings of adaptiveness and flexibility among the key informants. Interviews sought to clarify these different meanings (see Box 1) to ensure examples were comparable to one another. There were also very different views on the role of the international humanitarian community in early-action and prevention activities, which influenced how key informants assessed the timeliness of changes made over the study period (June 2016 to June 2017). The analysis attempts to highlight these discrepancies and provides alternative interpretations for the key findings.



### 3. Background: Drought Risk and Response in Kenya

Drought is a significant cause of crisis in Kenya owing to its geographical characteristics: 80% of the land is classified as arid or semi-arid (ASAL), characterised by generally low rainfall that can vary significantly over time and space (Njoka et al., 2016). Economic and livelihoods dependency on ASAL areas leads to a high exposure to this risk: an estimated 70% of Kenyan livestock is supported in the 23 ASAL counties of Kenya, and 90% of wildlife, around which Kenya has built a substantial tourist industry (Republic of Kenya, 2013b). Between 30% and 36% of the Kenyan population lives in ASAL counties (Uhe, Peter et al. 2017; Republic of Kenya, 2014), and this population is characterised by greater impoverishment and lower nutritional and health status, owing to a combination of the harsh land conditions and a long-term absence of development investment in these areas (Republic of Kenya, 2014; Fitzgibbon, 2012).

The combination of high threat and high exposure has led to multiple drought crises in Kenya and neighbouring countries Ethiopia and Somalia over the past 60 years, with the significant engagement of international humanitarian agencies. Yet it has also become increasingly clear that this is an inadequate and inefficient way to deal with cyclical or recurrent drought risk. Well into the turn of the twenty-first century, an overwhelming number of evaluations, research, and government and agency experience repeated the same lesson again and again: drought crises are preventable, and drought risk ought to be addressed early on in order to avert the need for significant humanitarian assistance.

#### A turning point: The 2010–11 drought in East Africa and the Horn of Africa

While it repeated lessons that were already widely known, the 2010–11 drought in East Africa and the Horn of Africa amplified political demand for a different approach to dealing with drought risk. Characterised by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as the worst drought in 60 years (UN News Centre, 2011), over 13 million people were affected across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia (GEG, 2012), with estimates ranging from 100,000 deaths across all three countries (Save the Children and Oxfam, 2012) to up to 273,000 among Somalis alone (Checchi and Robinson, 2013).

The drought was preceded by several seasons of low rainfall (Turnbull, 2012). Even though the failure of rains was predicted both in August 2010 and in early 2011 for the April–May rainy season, the Kenyan government and the humanitarian community were slow to react (ibid.), and as a result, little preventive action was taken and relief efforts were not scaled up in time. In the end, the response required over USD 500 million, considered to be ‘too little, too late’ (Save the Children and Oxfam, 2012), with much of the crisis and loss of life viewed as preventable through earlier action. The Kenyan government’s post-disaster assessment estimated USD 12.1 billion in total damage and losses to the economy (Republic of Kenya, 2014).

The scale of the drought's impact was a dramatic demonstration of what had been known for years, namely that international and national systems for funding and responding to drought-related risk were not fit for purpose. This generated momentum for stronger national leadership over drought risk management and response in Kenya, better use of early-warning indicators, and re-focusing development investment into building long-term resilience among communities affected by cyclical drought conditions.

## Ending Drought Emergencies by 2022

Possibly the most significant change to arise from this experience was the Kenyan government's new approach to drought risk and emergency response, outlined in its Ending Drought Emergencies (EDE) strategy, approved by the government and implemented in 2013 as part of its second Medium Term Plan for its Vision 2030 strategy (Republic of Kenya, 2013; 2015). The EDE strategy has two main objectives and six pillars beneath these (Figure 1). Four of the pillars focus on building resilience to drought risk and the remaining two are centred around improved risk management.

During the same period, the Kenyan government also began devolving decision-making authority down to the county level across many government departments. The combination of EDE and the devolution process shifted how information is collected for drought-related early action in Kenya, as well as the way in which international humanitarian assistance is coordinated, implemented and resourced.

## Kenya today: A nationally-led drought risk and response management system

In 2011, the Kenyan government converted the Department for Arid Lands into a new National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), mandated to coordinate drought response in the 23 ASAL counties. The NDMA was formally established later through the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) Act in 2016.

In contrast to the 2010–11 response, the Government of Kenya now leads all planning, fundraising and coordination of emergency response to drought in the country. While international actors still play a significant role in fundraising and implementing project activities, it is generally expected that implementation is at the request of the government, and several international actors described a shift in recent years to a more technical advisory role, with less direct project implementation. In conjunction with the broader devolution process, most decisions regarding drought response, including all coordination, occur at county level in a County Steering Group (CSG), chaired by the County Governor. The county-level NDMA is the Secretariat and primary coordinator for each CSG. The engagement of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the country is now primarily technical, although OCHA still runs a coordination mechanism for humanitarian donors in Nairobi which has been valued for helping to address issues of aid duplication and lack of harmonisation with government structures.

The fifth pillar in the EDE, on strengthening Disaster Risk Management, is of greatest relevance to this study and outlines four areas of focus for the Kenyan government in mitigating and responding to drought crises: early warning; community-based contingency planning; coordination of drought response; implementation of response activities.

Figure 1: Pillars of EDE (Republic of Kenya (n.d.), p.1)



### Early warning

There are three main sources of early-warning data used in Kenya:

#### Early Warning Bulletins (EWBs).

Lead: *Kenya NDMA*.

EWBs are monthly reports drawing primarily on the Vegetation Condition Index (VCI), which uses satellite imagery and historical data to assess the quality of vegetation as a predictive indicator of herd health. The Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a quantitative measure of ground vegetation; the VCI compares current NDVI measures, collected monthly, to historical minimum and maximum levels, to assess fluctuations from long-term averages. The NDMA analyses the VCI on a bi-weekly basis and shares this at the county and sub-county level through the EWBs.

The EWBs also monitor socio-economic and health indicators and draw on the classifications produced by the Integrated Phase Classification system managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Figure 2). These indicators are tracked against short- and medium-term averages in order to assess whether they are fluctuating outside the norm. Early Warning Bulletins summarise this data into overall assessments and classify each county based on a four-stage early-warning system (See Table 1).

The four stages are: Normal, Alert, Alarm and Emergency, which are determined by which indicators are fluctuating outside the seasonal norm (based on short- or medium-term averages). A movement to each stage triggers particular actions to mitigate risk, which are outlined in the Drought Contingency Plans (see below).

**Table 1: EW Phase Classification System**

EW Phase Classification System	
Normal	All three sets of indicators remain within the expected range
Alert	Environmental indicators (VCI) are outside the usual range for the season
Alarm	Environmental indicators and production/livelihood indicators (e.g. herd health) are fluctuating outside the usual range, indicating potential high risk for human health
Emergency	All indicators are outside normal range; local production systems are collapsing/have collapsed

#### Long Rains and Short Rains Food Security assessments.

Lead: *Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG)*.

The Long Rains and Short Rains Food Security assessments are carried out twice a year after each rainy season to assess deviations from historical trends and to monitor key nutrition indicators. The KFSSG is led at the national level by the Office of the President, and is one of the oldest structures in Kenya for early warning and information sharing. Its work is carried out in partnership with a wide range of donor, UN and INGO partners. It uses EWB data as an input to the assessment.

**Table 2: Example of EW Phase classification in an Early Warning Bulletin (Marsabit County EWB February 2017)**

Early warning (EW) phase classification		
Agro-pastoral	Alarm	Worsening
Pastoral all species	Alarm	Worsening
Fisherfolk/ Casual labour/ Petty trading	Alert	Worsening
County	Alarm	Worsening

**SMART nutrition surveys.** Lead: **Kenya Ministry of Health**. SMART surveys are intended to take place twice a year but in several counties they occur only once a year. These are in-depth empirical surveys which collect nutrition and health data and they are led by the county-level Ministry of Health with technical support from partners, in particular UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and Action Contre la Faim International (ACF). The SMART surveys are influential in understanding the severity of impacts on human wellbeing in drought conditions and they are referenced in the EWBs.



Figure 2: IPC classification description (FAO)

<b>PHASE 1 Minimal</b>	More than four in five households (HHs) are able to meet essential food and nonfood needs without engaging in atypical, unsustainable strategies to access food and income.
<b>PHASE 2 Stressed</b>	Even with any humanitarian assistance at least one in five HHs in the area have the following or worse: minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in irreversible coping strategies.
<b>PHASE 3 Crisis</b>	Even with any humanitarian assistance, at least one in five HHs in the area have the following or worse: Food consumption gaps with high or above usual acute malnutrition. OR Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs only with accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps.
<b>PHASE 4 Emergency</b>	Even with any humanitarian assistance, at least one in five HHs in the area have the following or worse: Large food consumption gaps resulting in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality. OR Extreme loss of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps in the short term.
<b>PHASE 5 Famine</b>	Even with any humanitarian assistance, at least one in five HHs in the area have an extreme lack of food and other basic needs where starvation, death and destitution are evident. Evidence for all three criteria (food consumption, acute malnutrition and mortality) is required to classify famine.
<b>!</b>	Phase classification would likely be worse without current or programmed humanitarian assistance.

### Community-based contingency planning

The EDE commits to ‘people-centred planning’, using participatory processes to establish county-level contingency plans. These plans use participatory analysis and prioritisation exercises to outline what will be needed in a drought, and at what stage, and applies costs to these projects to create a contingency budget (Republic of Kenya, 2015). However, the degree to which these contingency plans are truly participatory is open to question, and many key informants stated that community engagement was often limited. Much of the contingency budget is allocated for per diems and travel costs for government workers rather than the provision of goods or services that go directly to drought-affected communities.

Drought Contingency Plans are agreed at County level and approved by the CSG. Funding for these plans is paid monthly into a centralised Drought Contingency Fund (DCF), which can then disburse the funds according to the county plans and pre-agreed costs, once a county has moved into an 'alert' or 'alarm' phase. The purpose of this arrangement is to spread the cost of drought mitigation and response, in order to avoid spikes in the Kenyan government's annual budget.

## Coordination

All coordination of emergency response takes place at county level and is led by the NDMA through the CSG. The CSG convenes monthly or weekly during an emergency. Data from the VCI and needs assessments are collectively produced at the CSG and used by implementing partners in their proposals to donors. Decisions about targeting and where each partner will go within the county is meant to be discussed and determined in collaboration with the NDMA at county level, although significant departures from this agreed approach were observed during this study, as described in later sections. The CSG reports regularly to the County Executive Committee (CEC) chaired by the governor in each county and provides additional oversight to the response.

## Early Action and Response Implementation

With its partners, the Kenyan government also implements drought early-action and response activities across multiple sectors, according to the actions outlined in the County Contingency Plan. The Kenyan government tends to rely on partners for filling gaps in targeting rather than programming gaps, meaning that the government may engage in borehole repair and destocking activities, but also request its partners to implement the same activities in areas where it is not operating. Most significantly, the NDMA manages the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), a scalable cash transfer programme piloted in 2011 that provides regular payments to a core set of vulnerable households. In the case of a drought emergency, HSNP payments are expanded to a wider number of households which have been pre-registered on the database to receive emergency payments. Supported substantially by the Department for International Development (DFID), the HSNP offers a standard payment to 100,000 vulnerable households, then expands to reach a further 275,000 households once certain drought indicators are triggered (Fitzgibbon, 2016). HSNP is described in greater detail below.

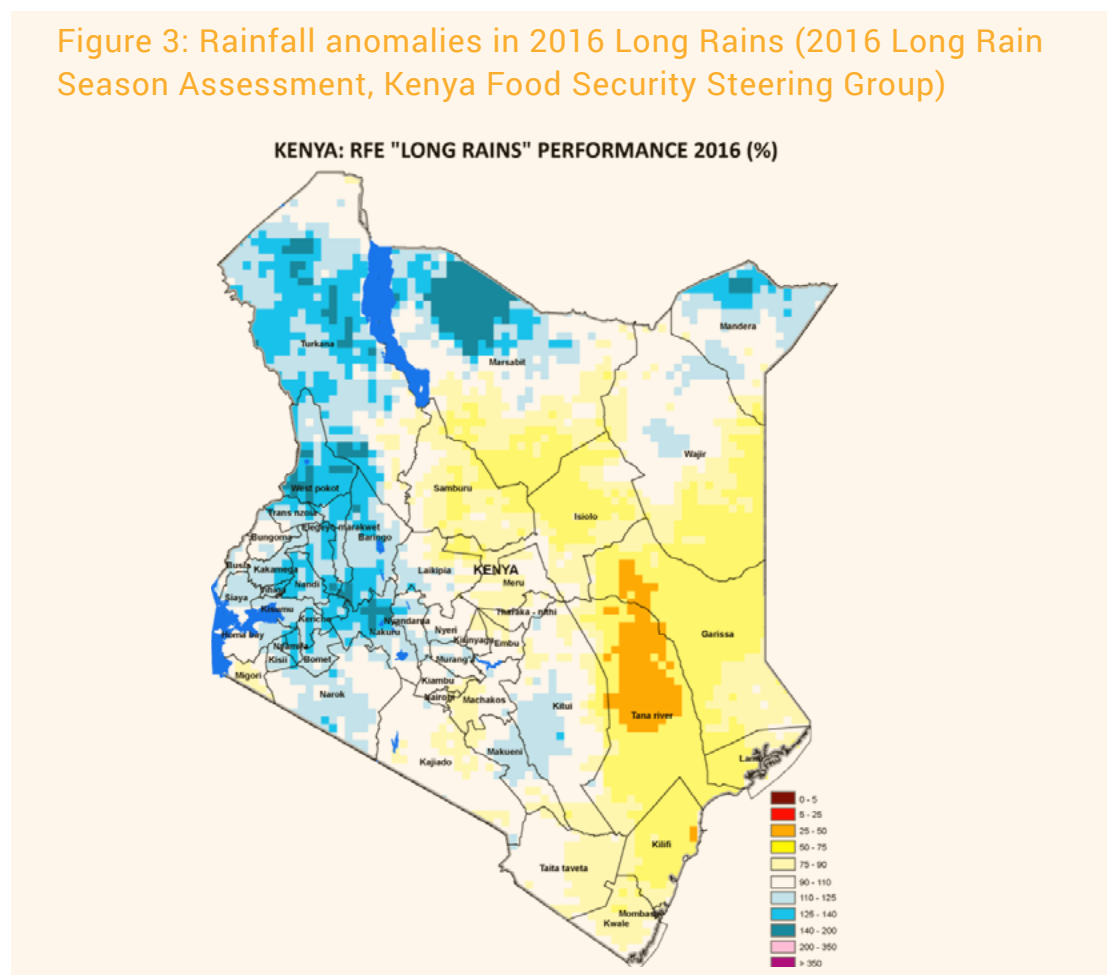
## 4. The 2017 drought response: Timeline and response

Assessing the timeliness and sufficiency of the 2016–17 drought response was outside the scope of this study, although the timeline of the drought and early action are critical for understanding the degree to which programming and support to vulnerable households were adapted as crisis indicators rose and fell. The following timeline is based on 36 KIIs, observational data collected in a site visit to Marsabit county in June 2017 and a review of real-time evaluations and government documents.

### Early Warning Monitoring: March 2016 – August 2016

Kenya's seasonal calendar features two rainy seasons: the 'long' rains that start around March and end in May/June and the 'short' rains between late October and late December. The beginning of the 2016–17 drought crisis began with the long rains of 2016 (March–June). While many humanitarian agencies described these rains as a failure, in reality they failed only in certain counties; rainfall was higher than average in others, including the northern ASAL counties of Kenya which are typically more vulnerable in drought crises. The failed rains occurred primarily in the southeast, in Garissa and the coastline.

Figure 3: Rainfall anomalies in 2016 Long Rains (2016 Long Rain Season Assessment, Kenya Food Security Steering Group)



## The shift to early action: August – December 2016

Early action is sometimes used broadly to mean early response to a crisis. More commonly, early action refers to *preventive actions* that seek to avert a crisis or mitigate its impact. Early action is expected to reduce the overall cost of a crisis response and has been a repeated area of weakness in drought-related responses in East Africa.

In summer 2016, several counties shifted to ‘Alert’ status and the number of children at risk of malnutrition shifted slightly upwards. In Garissa county, malnutrition prevalence reached above long-term averages (Garissa County, 2016c; d; e; Marsabit County, 2016b; c; d; e). Figure 4 (on page 36) provides a timeline of key events in the shift to early action in one particular county—Marsabit, including the early warning phase classifications, a selection of early warning indicators, and the key interventions implemented by the County NDMA and its partners.

Counties began requesting early-action support through the Drought Contingency Fund (DCF) in July 2016 and the government began releasing DCF funds in the same month, with a total of USD 1.7 million spent between July and December 2016 (see Table 3). In terms of what activities on which this money was spent, Table 3 gives examples of early action implementation reported by the Marsabit County EWBs. Descriptions do not provide details on the activities undertaken, which can make it difficult to understand the effectiveness of these efforts, as discussed below in Section 4.2

In addition, the emergency cash payments through HSNP were activated, although the first payment was not disbursed until late December (Farhat et al., 2017).

Some development programmes also began requesting permission to divert funds to crisis prevention and response using a crisis modifier clause. Drawing on internal monitoring and its Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), FAO also began requesting internal funds for early mitigation and prevention programming, primarily to provide animal feed, livestock health interventions, and borehole repair. This internal funding was released in September, and soon after, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development at the European Commission (DEVCO) permitted FAO to redirect EUR500,000 from a long-term development programme towards drought-related early action and response; and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (ECHO) also permitted its partners to redirect funding from resilience programmes towards drought response using emergency cash transfers, beginning in November 2016.

Other UN agencies and INGOs only began efforts to obtain early-action funding in August. Some INGOs reported being able to secure small amounts (approximately EUR 20,000) in contingency funding in August 2016,

“For the Kenyan government, devolved county-based contingency planning is the primary mechanism for early action to prevent drought crises.”

including ACF, which was able to shift ECHO funding to early response in November 2016. For the most part, however, international funds arrived much later, after the emergency declaration in February 2017. This is despite the long rains assessment in August 2016 showing alarmingly high prevalence of malnutrition in several sub-counties (higher than 30%) (Republic of Kenya, 2016).

Across seven counties, UNICEF's Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) Surge, an early-action system in the nutrition sector, was activated in August (UNICEF, 2018). Some actors reported engaging in commercial off-take and destocking activities throughout September-November 2016, while others focused on providing hay feeds to support surviving animals. Water interventions focused on borehole rehabilitation, although the Kenyan government and some local NGOs also carried out water trucking in several counties.

**Table 3: Disbursements by the Kenyan Government (in Kenyan Shillings) through the Drought Contingency Fund, July-Nov 2016. (Republic of Kenya 2016: 7).**

County	Coordination	Education	Health & Nutrition	Livestock	Security	Water	Total
Garissa	1,585,800		1,172,000	5,373,700		2,893,300	11,024,800
Garissa	1,593,100	7,732,200	4,084,800	9,704,300		4,591,400	27,705,800
Kajiado	1,000,300		1,094,300	5,148,000		2,599,200	9,841,800
Kilifi	627,900		545,500	4,323,800	115,450	961,000	6,573,650
Kilifi				5,020,400			5,020,400
Kilifi				10,261,400		7,622,800	17,884,200
Kilifi			2,963,700				2,963,700
Kitui	931,200		1,076,100	4,699,600		1,060,300	7,767,200
Kwale	689,575		594,650	4,035,250	93,000	1,126,568	6,539,043
Kwale			1,835,200	8,725,000		1,506,000	12,066,200
Lamu	333,200		567,800	3,063,900	253,200	1,767,800	5,985,900
Lamu						418,000	418,000
Lamu				3,377,600			3,377,600
Makueni	784,700		1,362,600	2,046,800		862,300	5,056,400
Marsabit	3,776,000		4,420,600	4,622,600	555,200	3,273,400	16,647,800
Narok				3,331,440		3,056,640	6,388,080
Taita Taveta	700,100		188,000	2,618,900	653,100	3,572,880	7,732,980
Tana River	714,600	315,000	795,000	904,800	519,000	50,000	3,298,400
Tana River	235,200	3,265,300		1,592,900		1,248,600	6,342,000
Wajir	1,048,500		1,816,200	898,000		6,092,000	9,854,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,020,175</b>	<b>11,312,500</b>	<b>22,516,450</b>	<b>79,748,390</b>	<b>42,702,188</b>	<b>42,702,188</b>	<b>172,488,653</b>

Despite the early action of the Kenyan government and international and local partners, the failure of the short rains in November–December 2016 placed additional stress on vegetation and livestock. The Short Rains Assessment (SRA) released in January 2017 confirmed that these efforts had been insufficient to ward off a crisis, and that communities were becoming more vulnerable to the effects of a prolonged drought.

## Emergency declaration and response: February – June 2017

In February 2017 the Kenyan government declared a national drought emergency in 23 counties. Key informants from international agencies reported that this step enabled them to increase their fundraising appeals, although donor funding was still slow to arrive, with an initial appeal of USD 165 million still being significantly underfunded at the time of the research visit in June 2017. Reasons for underfunding the response were varied, ranging from competing priorities in responding to crises in the Middle East region and neighbouring Somalia and South Sudan, the view that the drought was less severe than the one in 2010–11, and the overarching perception that the Kenyan government would increasingly fund its own disaster response, and therefore less international assistance would be necessary.

There may also have been issues in how the appeal document was written – led by OCHA, the original Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) focuses entirely on the international humanitarian actors' work in country, with only three minor references to the Kenyan government (OCHA, 2017a). It portrays a response led by UN agencies and INGOs, without reference to existing government-led coordination structures or government drought-response programming. This may have negatively affected how donors received it, given their strong strategic preference to support government capacities and structures. Some donors also questioned why the figure was so high and requested further needs assessments, while others accepted the figure but were unable to increase contributions due to competing regional priorities in South Sudan and Somalia. In response to the very low donor response, OCHA revised its appeal for September 2017 to USD 106 million (OCHA, 2017b). The revised appeal also included full-page spreads on the Kenyan government's role in the response and provided a clearer explanation of how the international response would support national actors.

By June 2017, agencies were in full-scale implementation, a year after the initial early-warning signs in Garissa county and nine months after Marsabit and Turkana counties, among others, shifted to an 'alarm' phase. At the time that most emergency-response activities were being implemented, several counties were already moving out of a crisis phase and into early recovery – as indicated by the change in both the Garissa and Marsabit county early-warning status reported for May and June 2017 (Garissa County, 2017e; Marsabit County, 2017d). Most emergency-response activities continued throughout 2017, as drought crisis indicators improved by 2018. HSNP emergency payments also continued throughout 2017 (Merttens et al., 2017).

## 5. Approaches to adaptiveness and flexibility in Kenya

Adaptive programmes are those which shift activities based on monitored changes in the operational environment or based on new learning as a programme is implemented. It is important to highlight that adaptive approaches are a sub-set of a much broader set of programmes that aim to support resilience and communities' adaptive or coping capacities. There are many innovative programmes being trialled and scaled in Kenya that seek to achieve a more drought-resilient system. One such example is the Index-Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI) programme, which provides insurance for livestock in the ASAL counties. Pastoralists receive payments on the death of livestock that they have insured through the programme. IBLI is an alternative to commercial de-stocking (whereby pastoralists are encouraged to sell their livestock for slaughter before they become too weak). Initially subsidised by the Kenyan government, IBLI is moving towards a market-based model, in which pastoralists will eventually pay for their own insurance. IBLI is one of several programmes for increasing resilience of Kenyan communities to drought that came up in the research for this study; but since IBLI does not require significant and continuous adaptations to be made to the existing programme, we do not focus on it in depth here.<sup>2</sup>

This section describes four examples of adaptive approaches taken to early action and response in Kenya.

### County-and community-based contingency planning

For the Kenyan government, devolved county-based contingency planning is the primary mechanism for early action to prevent drought crises. County Steering Groups compile Drought Contingency Plans (DCP), which are costed and submitted to the national government. These include general activities that will be taken on the basis of declaration of 'alert' or 'alarm' early-warning phases, or a final 'emergency' phase (see examples in Figure 2) When counties go into 'Alert', they can place a request to the DCF at the national level to release contingency funding.

While the policies and frameworks outlining a DCP actively encourage plans to come from communities, in practice the links between community suggestions and the CSG process can be weak and vary from one community or Ward to the next. For example, the community of pastoralists outside Marsabit town who were interviewed for this study had not been part of any contingency planning process and were unaware of the Marsabit DCP. Separate to this process, individual NGOs, such as Concern and Adeso, work with communities to develop their own contingency plans, which can be used for fundraising and partnership in a drought crisis.

**Advantages:** In terms of facilitating an early release of funds, the DCP appeared to work in a timely manner in the 2016–17 drought response, with funds being released to counties as early as July 2016.

**Challenges:** It is not clear whether the DCPs sufficiently focus on goods and services provided directly to communities in crisis, nor whether these plans are sufficiently detailed

to operate as quickly actionable contingency plans. According to some key informants, a large portion of the funding in the DCP pays the per diems and other costs of government staff for travel and work they undertake for early action. It is not clear how much of the funding goes directly to the activities and programmes themselves.

In order to receive funds for implementing a DCP, the CSGs must provide a rapid needs assessment and put together a more detailed action plan. This poses questions for the ability of the County Contingency Plans to facilitate timely adaptation. The process of rapid assessment can take upwards of a month, causing precious time to be lost for crisis mitigation. While current guidance suggests that contingency plans aim to be as detailed as possible (IFRC, 2012), some key informants felt it is impossible to fully predict what specific activities would be needed for which parts of a county ahead of time.

Food distribution is in the contingency plan. But, when you are at the point when you are deciding, so when you are doing resource mobilisation, you know, that time now, you are mobilising resource for a specific village in mind. So, the details on whether food vouchers is available for this village or not- we take up the discussion now at that stage, with those finer details. But the general plan, that in case of drought, this is how we are going to respond, is in the contingency plan. [KII7]

## Contingency funding in development programmes

Since the 2011 drought, development donors have made efforts to incorporate greater flexibility to respond to cyclical crises in Kenya, allowing some portion of development finance to be reallocated towards mitigation and response as needed. Sometimes referred to as ‘crisis modifiers’, a term used by USAID, contingency funding can take different forms depending on the donor. DEVCO and ECHO, the development and humanitarian arms of the European Union respectively, have run coordinated and complementary programmes in Kenya since 2013 focused on building resilience, with the understanding that funding can be reallocated to emergency drought response as needed.

USAID runs several large development programmes with either crisis modifiers or a ‘10% variance’ in the budget, allowing those programmes to direct funding towards early action and/or drought response. While crisis modifiers were originally, and are still commonly, paid from development funds, some approaches operate more as a pre-positioning of modest humanitarian funds for early response within a longer-term resilience programme (Feinstein, 2015). Some key informants in INGOs and UN agencies reported that their early-response activities in Kenya were funded through crisis modifiers, while members of development programmes indicated they were unable to activate contingency funding successfully and felt that current processes and mechanisms were inadequate. This reinforces broader findings that crisis modifier funds can be too slow and administratively cumbersome to be effective (Peters and Pichon, 2017).

**Advantages:** Development programmes command considerable funds, well over five times the amount spent on the drought response in a single year (OECD, 2018). The ability to shift a portion of these funds to preventing and mitigating the effects of drought is potentially



“While crisis modifiers can allow for faster decision-making and release of funds, donor representatives and agencies alike expressed frustration with the rigidity of these indicators, which prevented the reallocation of funds to threats that had not already been pre-specified.”

useful for maintaining or ‘holding’ onto development gains while also reducing the overall cost of a drought response through early action (Cabot-Venton, 2018).

**Challenges:** There are several limitations to contingency funding in development programmes, some of which correspond to the limitations identified above with the county contingency plans. When done well, crisis modifiers are agreed in advance based on a set of predetermined indicators or triggers. While these arrangements can allow for faster decision-making and release of funds, donor representatives and agencies alike expressed frustration with the rigidity of these indicators, which prevented the reallocation of funds to threats that had not already been pre-specified: examples include crisis modifiers specifically put aside for floods, which could not be used to respond to drought.

The processes for approving the use of a crisis modifier can also be time-consuming, sometimes considered too onerous for the amount of money involved, and lead to significantly delayed response times (Feinstein, 2015). Those implementing development programmes also felt they lacked the technical knowledge and staff capacity to effectively implement humanitarian assistance, a trend noted in the broader literature on crisis modifiers (Peters and Pichon, 2017). Stand-alone development organisations (i.e. those with no humanitarian department or function) struggled to find the appropriate personnel to implement their crisis modifier, and to adapt procurement systems for rapid response. At a broader level, there is lack of clarity on whether crisis modifiers are intended to be used for crisis prevention or early response to a crisis and whether the appropriate trigger for a crisis modifier is early warning or an emergency declaration – trends noted in the Kenya response in 2016 as well as in the broader literature (Feinstein, 2015).

“The IMAM Surge model [...] is a potentially valuable model for the systems and processes needed for flexible health programming in response to fluctuations in demand for IMAM services in times of shock or stress.”

## **A systems surge approach: Integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) Surge**

The IMAM Surge model is an approach to nutrition programming, run through the Kenyan Ministry of Health, in partnership with UNICEF and Concern Worldwide. It is a potentially valuable model for the systems and processes needed for flexible health programming in response to fluctuations in demand for IMAM services in times of shock or stress.

The model works at county level, setting indicators to monitor both the health of the population (demand) as well as the resources and capacities of the health institutions needed to address malnutrition (supply) – both of these can vary, and the IMAM surge approach begins with the recognition that adequate preparedness must take account of the specific capacities of each health facility, in order to know when those facilities are reaching their

capacity and falling into emergency (Ministry of Health, 2016). Indicators for monitoring are established with each county, and thresholds are set for each health facility to understand what constitutes an ‘alert’ or ‘alarm’ phase for each. For example, if capacity of a facility is low, a 10% increase in intake may be enough to push it from ‘alert’ into ‘alarm’, whereas a better-equipped facility can absorb this increase without moving into alarm. For each phase, specific actions are outlined for the health professionals to take – in the alert phase these are all mitigation actions, focused on prioritising resources to identify cases of malnutrition, and prevent the caseload from rising. Examples of common actions taken include the distribution of bi-weekly ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) rations, increasing the number of community volunteers or paid community staff, increasing the frequency of monitoring cycles, and moving outpatient therapeutic care from weekly to daily (Ministry of Health, 2016). The surge model works by drawing on other parts of the health system to plug gaps and support weaker facilities. Detailed stocklists are kept, and arrangements are made in advance to move stocks from one facility to another in the event of shortage. Similar arrangements are made to redeploy staff in the event of personnel shortages.

2016 saw the first use of the IMAM Surge model. Funds were released to county health services as early as September 2016 and used for an initial response of increased advocacy and screening for acute malnutrition. In Marsabit county, ‘it was reported by the Government and partners that its system of flagging increases in need had a significant impact on county and sub-county level planning, communication and response to support health centre capacity. It appears that the surge in needs at the health centre level was a result of the mass screenings triggered by the poor nutrition survey results’ (Hailey et al., 2018: 21). A key informant working on IMAM Surge noted that health facilities were more likely to indicate that their capacity was overwhelmed and that the model had made this more of an objective assessment.

But overall what we have seen is that it had improved compared to the previous time it took to initiate support before IMAM surge, the reports we received, it has really helped them. Because previously they had to break the news and make the case when they are overwhelmed. Now because there are already predefined levels and then there is a dashboard that is shared for them to track in terms of how close or how far are they from the threshold for each facility, then the sub-county management team were also relatively better positioned to respond. So, there was much improvement from before but still it was not uniform across the board. [KII23]

**Advantages:** Early use of the model is promising. The IMAM Surge was singled out as UNICEF’s most important contribution in an evaluation of the agency’s 2016–17 drought response and was noted as an example for early action that other sectors should attempt to follow (Hailey et al., 2018). In an interview, a senior nutrition specialist with decades of experience described the IMAM Surge model as the most advanced approach to nutrition programming he had seen in his career.

**Challenges:** The primary challenges noted with the IMAM Surge model is that it is still being introduced and therefore is not consistently applied. An internal UNICEF review of IMAM Surge found that implementation was mixed across different counties, depending on the existing relationships between the health facilities and strength of the Ministry of Health at the county level. The UNICEF evaluation also found that, while the model was

highly effective at activating screenings, there were gaps between the health centres and community-level health services that affected the available provision of services, as community-level services were quickly overwhelmed (ibid.). To improve, the Surge model will need to be more comprehensive and community-level health services will need to be included in the preparedness plans.

A further challenge is that the IMAM Surge system does not seem to be well integrated with other early-warning systems, despite the reliance on nutritional data for assessing food security and emergency status at county level. Using data from the IMAM Surge system to supplement the less routine SMART surveys may be a fruitful area for further exploration.

## Scalable social protection mechanisms: Hunger Safety Net Programme

The Kenyan government operates several cash-based social protection mechanisms, the most relevant for drought response being the Hunger Safety Net Programme. The HSNP runs in the four poorest counties in Kenya: Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir and is intended to support longer-term economic resilience for 100,000 households through regular cash payments that can protect from shocks and support asset growth. Importantly, HSNP also scales out to provide support to an additional 180,000 households in an emergency (Fitzgibbon, 2016).

A major part of HSNP's implementation has involved the creation of a large, single system for registering and delivering cash payments to vulnerable households. This system is now integrated with the registries of Kenya's wider social protection programming and is referred to as 'The Single Registry.' International agencies are increasingly expected to use this registry for targeting their cash-based programmes, in lieu of setting up alternative systems.

HSNP is funded by DFID but is expected to be increasingly paid for by the Kenyan government over the next decade. The first phase of HSNP began in 2011, followed by an evaluation and changes to the programme based on its findings; its second phase started in 2015 and was evaluated in 2017–18.

For the 2016–17 drought, the emergency HSNP payments were triggered during the failed short rains in October and November. The first payments were made on 23 December 2016, but did not go out to all households on the emergency register (Farhat et al., 2017: 7). In Marsabit county, there are 20,400 Group 1, or regular, beneficiaries of the HSNP and 35,000 households registered for the scaled emergency payments, also known as 'Group 2.' In December 2016, the NDMA had funds to target 5,400 of the Group 2/ emergency households, which increased to 9,400 in February and 12,800 in March (Interview with Marsabit County NDMA).

**Advantages:** The registry created for HSNP is a significant achievement, and the scaling-up mechanism, which uses early cash transfers to vulnerable households to protect them from the impacts of drought, holds significant promise. HSNP is frequently highlighted

outside Kenya, along with the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), as an example of a support mechanism that can flexibly serve both development and humanitarian objectives and provide longer-term sustainability by operating through state systems. An impact study of the HSNP found that, for routine beneficiaries (the 100,000 households receiving regular payments), the programme has measurable economic benefits, including higher rates of asset diversification, and the same study also found positive impacts on the local economy (Merttens et al., 2017).

**Challenges:** The emergency expansion of the HSNP merits further review and consideration. There were significant issues with the implementation of HSNP in the 2017 drought related to the adaptability of the programme in response to changes in vulnerability and in markets. These issues touch on themes of targeting, sufficiency and the coordination of different humanitarian actors' cash-based programmes with HSNP. The challenges seen in the emergency payments in Phase 2 of the HSNP also highlight that, while social protection programmes like this can in principle bridge humanitarian and development purposes on paper, in reality there remain sharp divergences between the two approaches, particularly in relation to targeting.

### Timeliness

Before the HSNP emergency payments were triggered, several humanitarian partners in Marsabit county raised concerns about the global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates, particularly in certain pockets of the county such as North Horr. Concern Worldwide and the Kenya Red Cross carried out assessments in partnership with the Ministry of Health, and the Long Rains Assessment produced by the KFSSG noted that malnutrition rates in the North Horr sub-county of Marsabit (at 29.2%) were 'concerning' (KFSSG, 2016b). However, the first emergency payments were only made in late December, several months after the Long Rains Assessment, and these payments were gradually made to all 35,000 households over a four-month period.

In addition, payments to many households were delayed due to problems with the registration data and the inability of certain households easily to obtain their payment from an Equity bank pay point. Several key informants felt there was a lack of transparency in how the NDMA set the HSNP payment amount, and that there was no formal process within the HSNP system for monitoring markets and reviewing payment amounts in light of this information.

### Sufficiency

Overall, evidence suggests that the HSNP payments, while appreciated by those who received them, fell far short of what was required to support drought-affected households and prevent them from requiring further

“However the challenges seen in the emergency payments in Phase 2 of the HSNP also highlight that, while social protection programmes like this can, in principle, bridge humanitarian and development purposes on paper, in reality there remain sharp divergences between the two approaches, particularly in relation to targeting.”

humanitarian assistance. There are different reasons given for why the payments were insufficient: one key informant with knowledge of the situation in Marsabit county stated that traders started off in the crisis with a shortage of goods due to supply-chain issues and the fact that many people had been taking items on credit, meaning that they had less cash themselves to procure items. Once the cash payments were made, traders were able to increase supply.

Others in Marsabit and Turkana county suggested that the HSNP payment, which remained fixed throughout 2016–17, was unable to support the purchase of basic items in the face of market fluctuations. In Turkana, ACF, Save the Children and the Kenya Red Cross conducted their own market analyses which found that the HSNP payment was far too low to enable households to purchase the basket of goods necessary to support them through the drought. Their study found that a basic food basket would cost minimum KSh 12,000 per month per household, while the HSNP was providing payments of only KSh 5,000 per month (KII).

...the key learning point at this stage that I see are one, as the drought evolves, the amount provided by the programme [HSNP] is not sufficient...So, because HSNP does not have the vocation to give a full ration, it's a social programme. They're providing a little stipend to support the poor families in danger of emergency, a larger base of poor families to complement the diet and the livelihood they might have. But we came with such a dire situation that it became completely insufficient. [KII22]

How was the amount calculated? This is a problem we're having. [In other countries] we have a cash working group or cash platform, call it as you want. There is this discussion that happens. As of today, it doesn't happen [in Kenya]. [KII18]

In response to this, humanitarian NGOs and the Kenya Red Cross began fundraising for and delivering their own cash-transfer programmes to households based on their market analysis, outside the HSNP system. In Marsabit county, these payments were significantly higher than the HSNP – from KSh 6,000 to KSh 8,000 per household per month. This presented issues with targeting and coordination (see further below), as well as accountability challenges for the Marsabit NDMA, as they had to explain to angry community members why certain households were receiving higher payments while others registered with HSNP had received nothing.

However, the problems of sufficiency in the HSNP, which motivated humanitarian actors to circumvent the HSNP system, are also real and had potential impact on the ability of households to cope during the drought. Research for this case study included a focus group discussion (FGD) with a pastoralist community especially hard-hit by the drought in Bubisa, where households had received a single cash payment of KSh 3,000 from the Kenya Red Cross. Pastoralists interviewed reported that the payment was insufficient, but that when a local NGO had visited them for an assessment, they were told they could not provide further cash payments to the area due to concerns about the duplication of aid, which may have been connected to the discussions between the county NDMA and its partners on the introduction of cash payments, described above. Focus group participants mentioned the need for more support to breastfeeding mothers and shelter for their children's classes, neither of which was being addressed by the government or a humanitarian agency.

A review of HSNP payments across all four counties in April 2017 found that most Group 2/ emergency households received only a single one payment of KSh 2,700 (Merttens et al., 2017). The same study finds that both the routine and emergency payments are not enough to contribute to longer-term economic resilience. Emergency payments in particular are appreciated by those who receive them, but their benefits, particularly for outcomes such as a varied diet, do not stretch beyond a couple of weeks:

In short, the fact that the emergency payments are less reliable and predictable means that emergency beneficiary households cannot plan for HSNP2 transfers in their expenditures, and consequently almost exclusively use those transfers to support immediate basic needs. This is further compounded by the context of the shock in which the emergency payments are made – recipient households are likely to have more pressing immediate needs that supersede longer-term investment plans. (Merttens et al., 2017:60)

### Targeting and Coordination

Since its first phase in 2011, HSNP has faced particular challenges in targeting households for registration and communicating this clearly to communities. A common complaint from beneficiary and non-beneficiary households is that it is unclear why certain individuals are included in the HSNP and others excluded. However, targeting is difficult owing to the high rates of poverty in the four HSNP counties: it is extremely difficult to set a cut-off line in which households included in the programme are significantly worse off than those excluded, especially in a manner that is transparent to community members.

In Marsabit county, the inadequacy of the HSNP payment to meet basic food needs, and the gradual introduction of emergency payments, led to a disagreement between the NDMA and some of its partners about targeting. The Marsabit NDMA was keen to see that all 35,000 households registered for the emergency payment would receive at least one payment, before additional resources were provided to exceptionally vulnerable households. According to those involved (though this could not be verified through project documentation), some households were receiving cash from NGOs or the Kenya Red Cross in addition to their HSNP payment, which led to concerns in the Marsabit NDMA that these households were ‘double dipping’. At the same time, the NDMA was receiving complaints from communities in other parts of the county that were not receiving any cash assistance, since the HSNP emergency payments were still being introduced.

Humanitarian agencies, in contrast, felt that resources needed to be more targeted to the most vulnerable areas, as defined by malnutrition indicators, rather than providing them to households that had preregistered on the HSNP but may not be as vulnerable in this particular drought. Indeed, some of the Group 2 registered households were located in sub-counties less affected by the drought, which had much lower rates of malnutrition.

This incident reflected a broader argument over whether the emergency scaling-up of the social protection system should occur vertically (i.e. increase quantities of support to the same group of vulnerable households in an emergency) or horizontally (i.e. increase the number of households reached, but maintain the same level of support across all) in a crisis

situation. The Kenyan government sees HSNP as most useful if scaled horizontally, reaching a greater number of people in a crisis. Against this, humanitarian actors at county and national level argued for vertical scaling, on the basis that this is more in line with humanitarian principles and the prioritisation of households based on the level of need, rather than seeking to serve as many people as possible, when those individuals' needs might vary.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, the focus on activities – who is receiving cash – superseded a focus on outcomes, such as whether households can meet their basic needs with the cash received. This meant that families such as those visited in Bubisa, who struggled to get by with a single cash payment, were left without further support on the principle of avoiding 'double dipping' and the desire to see aid reach a higher number of households overall.

*Photo: Jervis Sundays,  
Kenya Red Cross Society*



## 6. Challenges and barriers to flexibility in the response to drought in Kenya

No project, particularly as part of an early-action intervention, unfolds as planned. Being able to learn and respond by iterating and changing an intervention is arguably a critical capacity for early action. This capacity depends on organisational flexibility and a mindset for adapting programmes. This section reflects on the barriers and challenges regarding organisational flexibility, and how this affected the timeliness and relevance of early action and response in Kenya between 2016 and 2017.

There is a difference between engaging in ‘timely’ response and early response: timely response often refers to emergency relief activities that occur at an appropriate time, when a crisis begins. Early response, or early action, tends to refer to action taken before a crisis, with the aim of preventing or mitigating its impacts. A key question in the 2016–17 drought response was whether the Kenyan government and international community had incorporated the lessons of previous crises and adapted their priorities in a timely manner to enable early preventive action.

While this study does not set out to assess early action and response, it is relevant to note that key informants widely felt that there was significant improvement felt across the key informants that there was significant improvement in the 2016–17 drought response compared with 2010–11, much of which was attributed to investment in resilience and stronger leadership by the Kenyan government. The Kenyan government appeared to adapt relatively quickly, activating contingency plans and releasing funds. Devolution, combined with the establishment of the CSGs and the leadership of the NDMA, were repeatedly cited strengths that enabled better information-sharing and coordination, although many key informants and evaluations also noted the strained relationships between the NDMA and some CSGs at county level, which hampered the response. The Kenyan government was the first to release funds for early action and to engage in early-action activities (Republic of Kenya, 2016). While these efforts were not enough alone to prevent the need for emergency assistance, they reflect a substantial mindset shift towards acting early to prevent crises from developing.

However, the international response to the 2016–17 drought was once again too late, and the participants in the aid-recipient FGD in Marsabit county felt that the impact of this drought was worse for them than the 2011 drought. The international community was yet again slow to react to early-warning data and engaged little in preventive action, other than technical support to the government. As a result, the number of people in need of assistance doubled from 1.25 million to over 2 million between August 2016 and February 2017, requiring over USD 175 million in international funding to address the crisis by the end of 2017. There are also ways in which the Kenyan government could potentially improve the effectiveness of its early action, much of it related to flexibility and establishing more regular and intentional opportunities to review and adjust activities.



“When it comes to adapting services and support to meet changing conditions in ASAL areas, the combination of risk and uncertainty in early warning indicators can make it difficult to identify the best course of action to take.”

## **Amongst international actors, it is not clear who is responsible for early action**

Organisations will not adapt to changing circumstances if they view such changes as lying outside their main areas of responsibility or the scope of their mission. This is still a problem in early-action and early-drought response, leaving large gaps between what is considered a ‘development’ versus a ‘humanitarian’ mandate.

International humanitarian actors that attempted to generate funds in mid-to-late 2016 reported that donors were reluctant to release funds before an emergency declaration – several donors noted that their policies prevented them from undertaking early action, as this was seen as primarily a government responsibility. Meanwhile, some development actors see crisis prevention as primarily an area of humanitarian expertise. This contributed to a situation in which preventive action was too little (from development actors) and too late (from humanitarians) to fully protect households from the impacts of drought. Recent reviews of crisis modifiers have found similar disagreements over scope and use, and different understandings of the meaning of ‘early action’ which impede the effectiveness and relevance of activities they fund (Feinstein, 2015; Peters and Pichon, 2017).

## **There are still considerably more resources available for emergency response than for actions taken to prevent or mitigate a crisis**

Despite the attention drawn to the importance of early action and prevention, several humanitarian donors still have limited ability to fund these activities. On the development side, investment in resilience has not been matched with similar investment in fast and timely funding for early mitigation. Reasons given for why donors were unable to fund early action included: policy or legal reasons (they were not approved from HQ), the view that the Kenyan government is primarily responsible for early action and donors would step in only if an emergency were declared; lack of faith in how funding for early action would actually be spent, due to lack of detail in contingency plans, and concerns regarding the politicisation of aid in the Kenyan political campaigns of 2016–17.

This problem does not rest with institutional donors alone: INGOs also struggled to release internal contingency funds before the emergency declaration in February 2017. Members of the Start Network attempted to raise an alert through the Start Fund in late 2016, however these initiatives were not funded, as the activities deemed necessary for effective early action were resource-heavy and surpassed the size of the typical Start Fund grants.

## Using early-warning data for decision-making is complicated

Real time early warning data is considered to be critical for informing more nimble and timely decisions on preventative action. In the past decade, significant investments were made in Kenya to improve data collection and analysis for the activation of contingency plans and the current system is considered by many actors to be strong in principle.

Despite these strengths, in practice, decisions to take preventative action are more complicated. Predicting droughts and drought crises is challenging and relies on the interpretation of many different sets of data, which can point to contradictory trends and make it difficult to determine whether a crisis is likely to increase or decrease. When it comes to adapting services and support to meet changing conditions in ASAL areas, the combination of risk and uncertainty in early warning indicators can make it difficult to identify the best course of action to take.

In particular, there are two variations across early-warning data that can be challenging for analysis and decision-making: variation across different early-warning indicators, and variation across geographical areas within a single indicator.

### Dealing with variation across different early warning indicators

As described in earlier sections, there are two main early-warning systems used in Kenya for droughts: the Kenyan NDMA drought early-warning system and the IPC system. The Kenyan early warning system uses a transparent method to assign early warning classifications, with four sets of indicators that are measured monthly and compared to long term seasonal averages in order to understand the degree to which current measures are outside expected trends for each county. These indicators are: environmental, production (livestock and agriculture), utilisation, and access. The IPC uses indicators for the impact of drought on human health, and therefore covers many of the same data points as the ‘utilisation’ and ‘access’ indicators in the Kenyan system.

Table: EW Phase Classification System	
Normal	All three sets of indicators remain within the expected range
Alert	Environmental indicators (VCI) are outside the usual range for the season
Alarm	Environmental indicators and production/livelihood indicators (e.g. herd health) are fluctuating outside the usual range, indicating potential high risk for human health
Emergency	All indicators are outside normal range; local production systems are collapsing/have collapsed

The Kenyan drought early-warning system is clearly staged, but in doing so it poses assumptions about the relationship between different early-warning indicators. Movement into an ‘alert’ stage is based on environmental indicators only; followed by production (for ‘alarm’) and then access and utilisation indicators. This presumes a causal relationship in the unfolding of a drought crisis: extremes in the environmental conditions lead to lower agro-pastoral production levels, which then have a negative impact on access to food and nutritional status.

However, in the lead-up to the beginning of the drought crisis in October 2016, nutritional indicators were fluctuating well outside long-term averages in some areas, while production and access indicators were declining more slowly, keeping some of the counties, e.g. Marsabit, in the alert phase into September (Marsabit NDMA, 2016b-e; Marsabit County Ministry of Health, 2016). A primary reason for this is likely to be due to the variations across sub-counties, discussed below in the next section. But it also suggests the relationship between the early-warning indicators is not one of linear causality, in which access indicators, such as nutritional status, will fluctuate only if environmental and production indicators have moved outside the norm.

The method used to reach the IPC classification is less transparent and relies on the considered judgements of experts who weigh data points using methods that are not described in detail in public records (IPC Global Partners, 2012). One reason for this approach is to avoid the challenges of a standardised system that assumes linear causality among food-security indicators, as well as avoid the risk of prioritising one indicator over another as more indicative of food insecurity. Even so, within the ‘utilisation’ and ‘access’ indicators used to assess food security, there can be contradictory trends. An evaluation of the drought response notes that, in several counties, indicators of severe drought stress used for the IPC did not correlate with nutrition indicators – GAM prevalence remained within normal ranges even though there was indication of severe drought stress (Hailey et al., 2018).

The relationships between different early-warning indicators—particularly utilisation indicators such as nutritional status, and environmental drought stress indicators—would benefit from further exploration. This also highlights how difficult it can be to engage in adaptive decision-making on the basis of continuous monitoring and real-time data, when indicators point to a mixed picture or when the relationships between different data points are complicated or unclear.

### Dealing with variation in early-warning data across geographical areas

The devolution of contingency planning and early action at the county level is viewed as supporting more effective early-action decision-making by bringing the locus of decision-making closer to real-time data collection and assessment processes on the ground. However, many ASAL counties face high variation between sub-counties in food security, malnutrition prevalence and other early-warning indicators. These differences are obscured when using county-wide averages to determine early-warning phase classification.

A key characteristic of the 2016–17 drought was the high variation in early-warning indicators at a highly specific, micro level – from one sub-county to another, and also from ward to ward within a sub-county. This may have made decision-making for early action more complicated and led to delays in taking appropriate decisions for different sub-counties.

At the national level, there was significant variation across counties. For example, in Lamu the rainfall deficit was a one-in-120 years occurrence while in Marsabit it was a one-in-12 years occurrence. This meant that while ‘the 2016 event may not appear to be an extremely dry year over the spatial average of rainfall, individual locations may have had little to no rain’ (Uhe et al., 2017).

**Table 4: Prevalence of acute malnutrition by WHZ**

	North Horr 2014	North Horr 2016	Moyale 2014	Moyale 2016	Saku 2014	Saku 2016	Laisamis 2015	Laisamis 2016	Weighted County
Global Acute Malnutrition	29.2% (23.3- 36.0)	22.8% (17.8- 28.7)	7.7% (5.4- 10.9)	7.5% (5.2- 10.7)	5.3% (3.3- 8.3)	7.4% (4.8- 11.3)	23.7 % (18.6 - 29.6)	22.5% (18.2- 27.4)	14.4% (12.6 - 16.3)

*Marsabit Long Rains Assessment June 2016*

Even more importantly, there were variations in early-warning indicators at the sub-county and ward level. Particular sub-counties and wards were in significantly higher levels of crisis despite the county average remaining below the threshold required to trigger early action. In Marsabit county, the sub-counties of North Horr and Laisamis reported significantly higher rates of malnutrition than other parts of the county (see Table 4): 22% in North Horr compared with 7.7% in Moyale, for example.

While North Horr and Laisamis were above emergency thresholds, the county average remained below, at 14.4%. These discrepancies across sub-counties were acknowledged in the Early Warning Bulletins and Long Rains Assessments. However, since the county-wide rating remained at alert through September, it is not clear what contingency plans were activated to address the needs of these specific sub-counties, if any.

The dispute between some INGOs and the NDMA in Marsabit over the targeting of cash-transfer programmes, discussed in Section 5, further highlights the gap between county-level contingency planning and the way in which drought impacts are felt by the most vulnerable at the micro level. By spring 2016–17, INGOs were attempting to focus their aid to the sub-counties of North Horr and Laisamis, on the basis that there was a higher prevalence of GAM risk in these sub-counties. However, the NDMA claimed that focusing at the sub-county level was not a useful approach to targeting, given further variation across wards (the next unit down from sub-counties). Households that were food-insecure in Moyale sub-county (where average GAM prevalence was much lower) were concentrated in particular pockets. This meant that there were wards in Moyale sub-county that were receiving no assistance, despite having the same average GAM prevalence as certain wards in North Horr that were being supported by multiple organisations, according to the NDMA. While it was not possible to verify the NDMA's claims on these figures, the site visit to a community in Saku sub-county seemed to reflect this point: while the average GAM prevalence is lower in Saku sub-county than North Horr or Laisamis, pastoralists there reported losing significant numbers of livestock and had several small children in need of nutritional support, yet had received little assistance from agencies.

Effective early action needs to be targeted at sub-county and ward levels, based on timely monitoring data. It is not clear that current contingency planning systems were equipped to support this. Therefore, even further devolution of the early-action system may be necessary to enable a more timely and relevant response.

## It is not clear how crisis-prevention activities are designed or how effective they are

Despite early action taken by the Kenyan government and a limited number of its partners in August – December 2016, the number of people in need of assistance doubled from 1.25 million to over 2 million between August and February 2017. This raises questions as to how effectively actors were able to adapt their activities and interventions to mitigate the crisis.

For many of the activities that were implemented as ‘early action’, it was difficult to determine whether they were actually early crisis *response*, with the intention of reducing current needs, or early preventive action, with the intention of preventing future needs by protecting households from the impacts of drought. While key informants felt there is sufficient evidence of ‘what works’ for early action, multiple programme designs are used by different organisations with conflicting theories of change, and many programming decisions were described as being led by supply rather than demand, based on an agency’s prior experience and technical capacity.

Two specific issues arose in relation to early-action programming: gaps in how interventions were designed and targeted, and gaps in outcome monitoring and other programming data that could be used to assess effectiveness and identify changes to programming.

### Gaps in how early-action interventions are designed and targeted

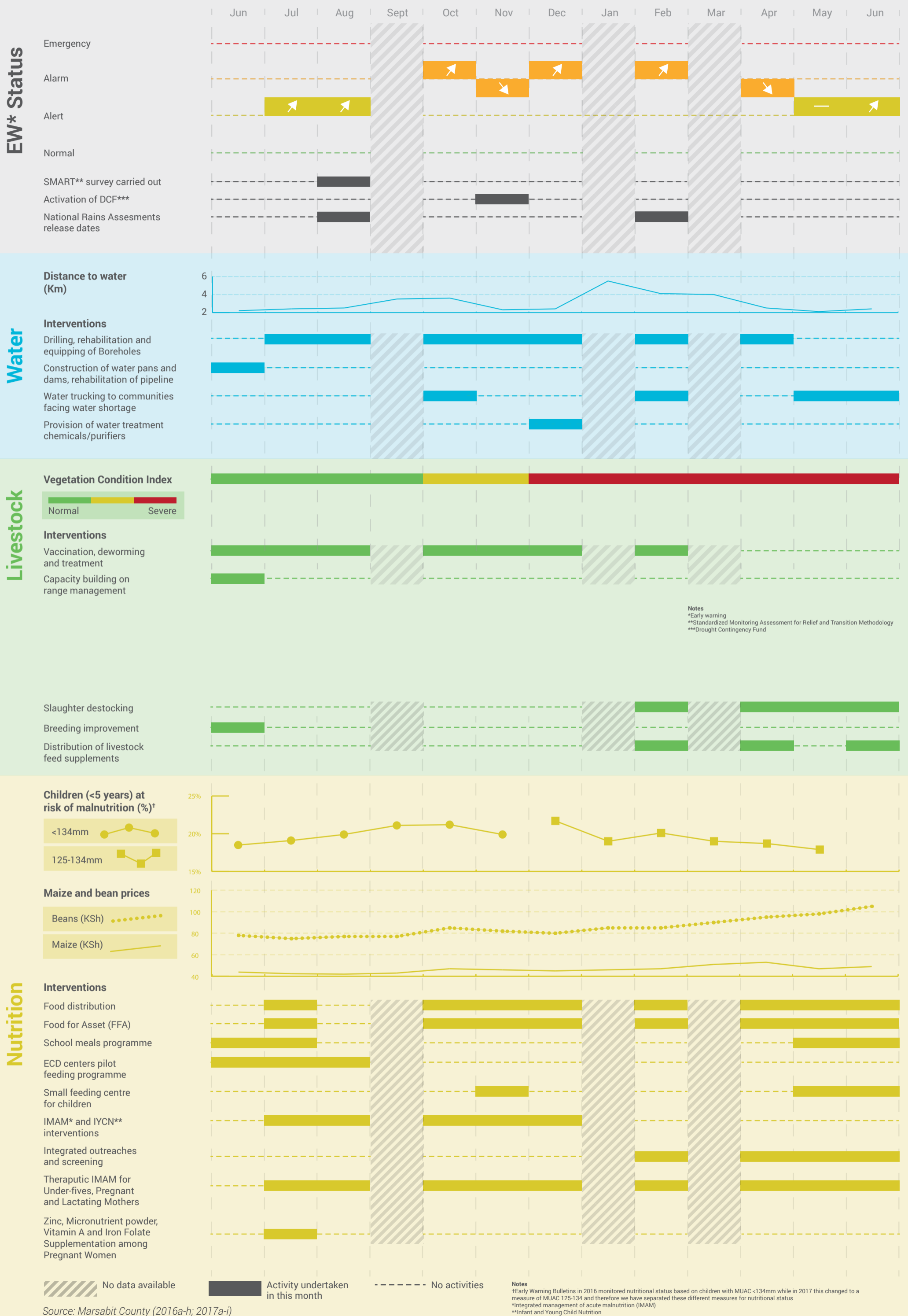
Prior research and recent experience in trialling flexible financing mechanisms for early action have indicated gaps in humanitarian approaches to programme design in early action and prevention (Maxwell et al., 2013; elrha, 2018). A reflection on the 2011 response argued that: ‘Early response does not just mean “business as usual but earlier”: it opens up the possibility of new types of intervention, and using interventions to reach different goals’ (Levine et al., 2011). Looking at the 2016-17 response, however, there are not strong distinctions between the interventions undertaken as early action and those undertaken as drought response.

Figure 4 illustrates this point by presenting the activities listed by the Marsabit NDMA for June 2016 to February 2017 alongside a selection of early warning data and the drought phase classification for the county. As seen in Figure 4, several activities, including livestock vaccination, borehole rehabilitation, and integrated management of malnutrition, were carried out consistently across the time period with little variation.

I think people are fairly slow to try new ideas. In institutions I think people tend to stick to what they know works. There’s also no doubt a dependency syndrome amongst many of the livestock keepers and amongst government and NGO people where they like to do what to know. They know what to expect from each organisation. And if you suddenly say no, we’re not going to do that, that’s your responsibility, there’s a sudden gap on what to do next. [KIII2]

Several actors described using cash-based programmes as a form of early action, emergency response, and early recovery. However, if cash is used for early action, and preventive action fails due to price changes in the market, then it is not clear that further cash support is an appropriate form of emergency response. Moreover, the effectiveness of cash in averting

Figure 4: Drought timeline for Marsabit County June 2016-June 2017



Source: Marsabit County (2016a-h; 2017a-i)

the need for a larger emergency response has not been studied in detail. Experience from the HSNP payments in 2017 indicate that, in order for cash to prevent households from being affected by drought, there must be timely market analysis, support to market supply, and adjusting payment amounts on a more regular basis in relation to changing conditions (Farhat et al., 2017).

There are similar examples of gaps in early-action programme design in the livelihoods and food-security sectors. Several key informants described using Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) as a reference point for designing their livelihoods early action, which included destocking, or offtake, vaccinations, and the provision of feed. It was not clear, however, how particular interventions were selected using the design criteria in LEGS, or how this patchwork of services was targeted for different households. Several people involved in these programmes discussed the difficulty in getting pastoralists to participate in destocking activities, which suggests that pastoralist participation in response design was fairly limited.

Similarly, the evaluation of UNICEF's response noted that, apart from the IMAM Surge model, UNICEF lacked a 'phased approach' to engaging in early action which contributed to delays in UNICEF's response and a heavy emphasis on crisis response over prevention and early action (Hailey et al., 2018). The lack of a phased approach, where different types or scale of activities are employed progressively, was also common across the government and INGO response.

### Gaps in performance data

A further challenge lies in the lack of adequate information and evidence to understand whether or not early-action programming is effective. Impact studies of early-action work are surprisingly rare. Attempting to understand effectiveness in real time is also limited, due to the level of detail of information available and the methods used to collect it.

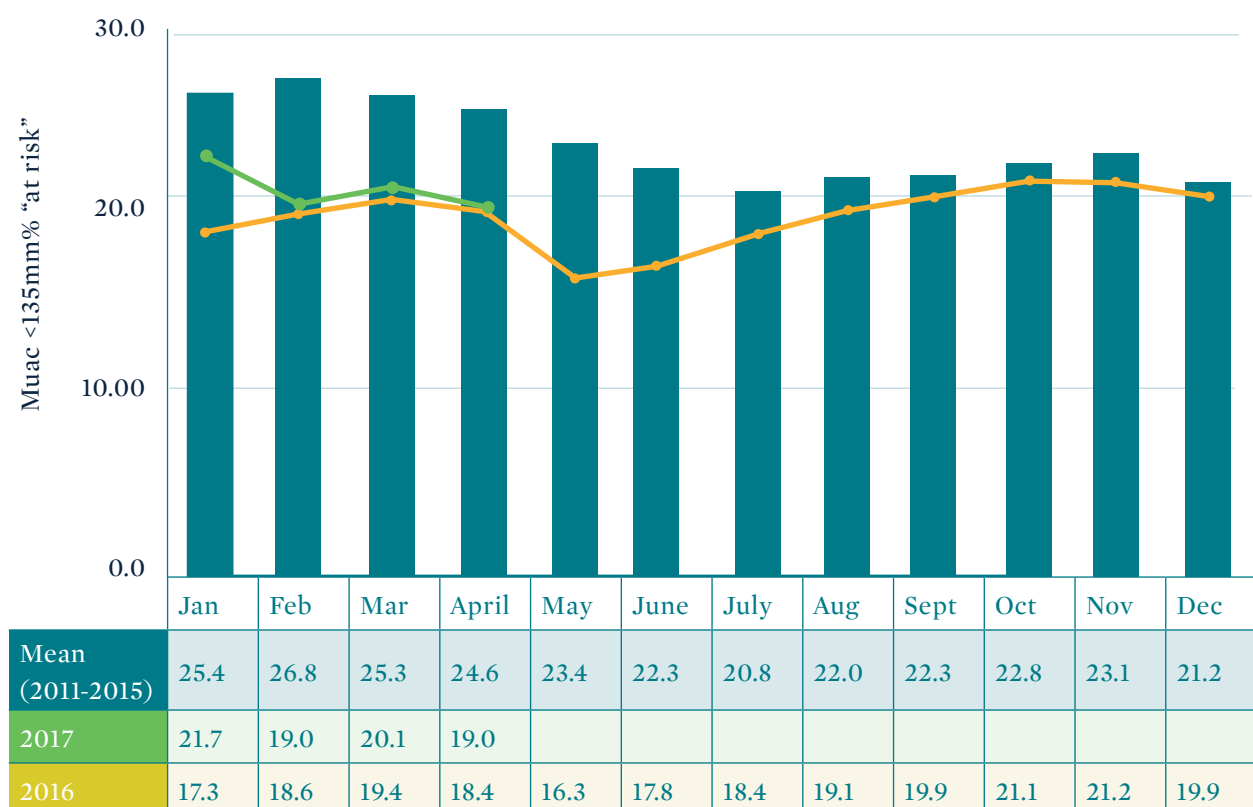
Information published on the early-action work undertaken by the NDMAs is not detailed, and it is therefore unclear how these activities – listed above in Figure 4 – are targeted to achieve greatest impact. In addition, outcome data is not generated in ways that allow for a regular review of whether early-action programming is working, making it impossible to understand, if an emergency response was needed because interventions came too late, because they were timely but insufficient to address the scale of vulnerability, because interventions were not effective, or because of some other, further reason. While the monthly publication of data on nutritional status in the EWBs is valuable, for example, the sample size used in many counties for calculating these statistics is too low and vulnerable to bias (KII 38).

**“The complexity of early action requires continuous monitoring, not only of individual interventions, but of the broader situation and the cross-over effects of running different types of early action programmes simultaneously”**

Drawing links between implemented activities and outcomes is difficult and would require a great deal more detail than is currently presented in implementation reports and early-warning data. One way that we might achieve a better understanding of the effectiveness of early action and how to prevent crises is by using outcome monitoring during a crisis to assess whether key outcomes improve once early action has begun. As an example of what this type of analysis could tell us, and the current challenges in carrying it out, consider Figure 5, which shows the average prevalence of malnutrition in under-fives in Marsabit county. The yellow line depicts the trends for 2016 and the green is the first five months of 2017.

There is a steady increase in GAM prevalence from July to November 2016. During the latter half of this period the Marsabit county government began implementing early-action activities, which included the opening of a small feeding centre for children. Nutritional status begins to improve in December 2016, before peaking in January, while still remaining below the five-year average. This raises a number of unanswerable questions: was the decline in prevalence due to early action undertaken in October–November 2016? Or is it explained by the seasonal trends reflected in the blue bars? Similarly, do the numbers peak in January due to inadequacy of early action, or due to seasonal trends? Or are there completely different factors that shape these outcomes?

**Figure 5: 2017 Child Nutritional status compared to 2016 as well as 2011-2015 averages**





These questions cannot be answered on the basis of existing data. Strengthening outcomes data collection and matching this to targeted early action interventions could therefore be a valuable focus for future improvements to early action monitoring. This is important not only for after-action reviews and evaluations, but also during early-action programming, in order to support effective adaptations.

## **The response system is still poorly equipped to listen to affected people (and adapt to their changing needs) during a crisis**

Much of the efforts in coordinating, designing, and implementing early action lie in the interactions between internationals and the Kenyan government. While several actors highlighted their use of participatory approaches to contingency planning, it is unclear to what degree these plans are fully 'owned' by the community. The pastoralist community visited for this research did not have any experience of being involved in creating contingency plans and was unaware of their existence. Several key informants felt that contingency planning was not as participatory as desired, and that there remain highly sensitive issues around the practices of destocking, which come into direct tension with the tenets of pastoralist culture.

Moreover, as several humanitarian actors observed, the needs of people in crisis change over time, as different events affect them and as different forms of aid become available – apart from some examples of cash-based programming, there was no evidence of feedback loops being used during implementation to make changes to programming.

## **Procurement processes are slow across multiple agencies and are a significant inhibitor to timely, adaptive action**

Procurement processes were cited as a challenge for several organisations in limiting their flexibility and speed. Agencies that used pre-agreed contracts and pre-positioning noted how much this had helped them reduce their response time. Procurement appeared to be a particular problem for development actors using crisis modifiers to support early action and response, as their procurement systems are established for longer-term programmes with additional accountability and anti-corruption checks required. Looking at linking humanitarian and development procurement systems more closely and with a focus on flexibility and speed may be a fruitful area for supporting faster adaptations to early action and early response.

*It's very clear that the procurement systems are there to protect the organisation. They're not there necessarily to deliver goods to the farmer or the livestock owners. So, we've almost got a different customer or client. To me here, our client is the livestock owner trying to save their animals, trying to make pastoralism and livestock production economically viable. Whereas our procurement systems are there to protect [name of org] from fraudulence, poor quality, getting best value for money. So, the dynamics are different, and I think that's probably true for several organisations. [KII12]*

## Delivering early action in a system

There have been many reforms to national and international systems for responding to slow-onset disasters in the past decade. Despite this, challenges remain in preventing droughts from becoming full-scale emergencies. One reason for this is that successful early action cannot be achieved solely through technical solutions such as threshold-based preparedness plans or through the provision of adequate, timely funding. Even with these critical elements in place, early action is complex and involves the efforts of many different organisations. It therefore requires an understanding of the entire *system* for early action in a given context:

Early warning can never save lives and nor can donors – on their own. They depend on the system of early warning, governments, donors, the private sector and implementing agencies in order to achieve their objectives. A system perspective can often reveal how behaviour that is competent from the standpoint of each individual actor does not contribute to achieving the overall goals which collectively all the actors in the ‘system’ say they are working towards, in different ways. (Levine et al., 2011: 7)

While perhaps more preventive activities should have taken place in late 2016 to avert a disaster, it is also possible that the activities that were implemented could have been better harmonised and adapted in view of their different impacts on the situation. By January 2017, a range of services were being provided to pastoralist households including cash payments through the HSNP, slaughter destocking, water and vaccination provision, and insurance schemes for livestock (where pastoralists receive a pay-out for dead livestock). Each of these can have impacts on the social environment in ways that may affect the effectiveness of the other interventions. A key example of this is markets and the price of basic goods, both of which can fluctuate as an effect of the interventions listed above, and also act as an influencing factor on the effectiveness of these interventions.

The complexity of early action requires continuous monitoring, not only of individual interventions, but of the broader situation and the cross-over effects of running different types of early action programmes simultaneously – while longer-term development programmes may still be continuing or slowing down. Adaptive management practices, which encourage routine monitoring and use of this information to inform pivots and changes to programming, may be useful for supporting a stronger systems-based perspective in early action.

## 7. What is needed to support adaptiveness in drought crises

Delivering timely early action is directly linked to the ability of the national and international systems to adapt strategies and activities to respond to changes in ASAL regions. This section outlines the key lessons for supporting adaptiveness, from the 2016-2017 early drought response in Kenya.

### Strengthen the quality of routine early-warning data

In order to understand the full impact of drought conditions, many actors rely on the Long Rain and Short Rain Assessments (LRA and SRA) as well as the SMART nutrition surveys led by the Ministry of Health and KFSSG. The Rain Assessments are more detailed and take longer to produce than the monthly EWBs, typically between two to three months, and are released between one and two months after each rainy season. The SMART surveys, intended to take place twice a year, in many cases seem to occur only annually for each county.

While both the SMART nutrition surveys and the LRAs and SRAs are widely-referenced monitoring documents, their analysis is quickly outdated by evolving conditions on the ground. An evaluation of UNICEF's response found that these surveys 'were not sufficiently nimble and responsive in an evolving emergency context to provide timely needs assessment information' (Bailey et al., 2018: VI). The monthly EWBs are certainly intended to support more agile and responsive decision-making, but it is unclear how the SMART survey data is integrated into the early-warning classification created by the county-level NDMA. In Marsabit county, for example, the SMART survey nutritional data conveyed a more serious situation than was reflected in the early-warning status for the county (Marsabit County, 2016d-e; Marsabit County Ministry of Health, 2016).

This demonstrates the trade-offs involved in generating data that is both sufficiently in depth to support targeting and programme design and yet also timely enough to capture changes in situations and needs as they change, potentially quite rapidly. There could be value in finding ways to shorten the time needed to produce the SMART surveys and LRA and SRA, in order to provide more routine updates of these highly valued datasets.

If more closely tied to anticipated programme outcomes, routine monitoring can support a more adaptive and evidence-driven approach to early action, by demonstrating whether interventions are having their expected impact, or whether situational factors are having a negative influence on the effectiveness of early action. For example, routine monitoring of nutritional

“There could be value in finding ways to shorten the time needed to produce the SMART surveys and LRA and SRA, in order to provide more routine updates of these highly valued datasets.”

status can help inform decisions on shifting the focus or the target area of nutrition and food-security programming. As discussed in Section 6, this data needs to be appropriately disaggregated to inform more accurate and relevant decisions on early action at the sub-county level or below.

## Continue to devolve and decentralise decision-making

A key factor cited by many key informants in affecting the flexibility and adaptiveness of humanitarian organisations was the quality of their relationship with their institutional donors. Trust and a long-standing relationship help to lower bureaucratic barriers and speed up the time it takes to approve changes to activities or new programmes.

Trust and positive relationships with donors can only go so far, however, if country-based donors are unable to take decisions without significant input from their head offices. Donors and implementing agencies at the country level described the negative effects of centralised decision-making and detailed regulations on their ability to make the best considered judgements based on what was happening in their context. Waiting on decisions to be approved at head offices in Europe or North America was a common factor cited in the delays to implementing early action. In some cases, INGOs claim that they cannot move the locations of where they spend budgets from their pre-existing programming because of donor restrictions on those contracts, unless the NDMA has written to the donor to insist on the change.

*I work for a donor, but I think – because even us, we have – we work within a framework, and we will only allow things within what we know our HQ will accept. So, a partner can come up with a very innovative and, you know, interesting, flexible approach, and we'll just say, you know, 'It's not acceptable.' And the harder the partner will try and convince you, and you might buy the idea of the partner, but then you know that, you know, your employer doesn't allow that. So, I think we are the barrier to the partners' flexibility. [KII28]*

The Kenyan government has made progress in its own decentralisation process, and this should be further continued at the sub-county level in order to enable a faster, tailored response to the varying conditions across sub-counties.

## Design phased approaches to early action and use an experimental approach to test different activities

There are two ways in which faster and more effective changes to programming could be supported in early drought-related action. The first is centred around preparedness, the assumption being that adaptation is more likely if potential changes or shifts are planned in advance in great detail. The second approach is more appropriate if there is a high degree of uncertainty on what will work most effectively.

## Make contingency plans more detailed, and phased

A key theme from the 2016–17 response is that contingency funding needs to embody certain characteristics in order to enable effective and timely adaptations to programming. Contingency funds need to be streamlined, requiring as little bureaucratic hoop-jumping as possible; some agencies described the benefit of agreeing different scenarios with donors or senior decision-makers in advance, and tying these to specific triggers, to facilitate a fast release of funds. Failure to do this meant that some organisations had to wait from two to three months to release contingency funding, even when this came from ‘flexible’ pots of funding within their own organisation.

This demonstrates that contingency funding needs to be matched to good design. Previous work on early action and contingency planning has recommended that such plans tie very specific actions and funding to specific thresholds and triggers (Levine et al., 2011; Peters and Pichon, 2017). The implementation of DCP in Kenya in 2016–17 were broadly in line with these recommendations but lacked a high level of detail. Even once the thresholds for early action were reached at the county level, further work was needed to target specific households with different intervention activities. This process of targeting could take up to two months. Contingency plans were described as acting more like ‘wish lists’ than plans ready for implementation:

[During implementation of early action plans, the government and NGOs] meet on a regular basis. Some of them will come saying, ‘Okay, we want to move to a certain location,’ but then the discussion is, ‘No, this location we already have this.’ So, then looking at who is already there and what are they doing, and how is it going to impact on whatever is going on. So, sometimes they are shifted. Sometimes they are moved to another place. Sometimes it doesn’t work, because donor requirements are also something to go by, because we might have resource mobilised for a certain location. So, I think the interventions that are largely decided [in the contingency plans]-, are not actually decided, because if you look at the plans, of course it’s something that we are also improving. Initially, it was more or less a wish list, but you are seeing an improvement in terms of how you cost them, and then also people questioning, because once it’s done, it’s presented at the CSG, within the technical group, and people are able to question, ‘But why would you do this?’ [KII8]

So, when you go down – actually you found out like in one of the communities that we wanted to do water trucking, it was impossible at that time to do water trucking because these guys had already moved to a place that there’s water. So, we had to revise and tell these guys, ‘No we’re not going to do water trucking. Instead we’re going to convert it to cash transfer. Can we do this?’ So, they take two weeks before they – because now it has to be done in New York so it takes two weeks before they give us a go ahead, yes please, can you do it. Then you have to do the procurement of a money transfer agency, so it takes a lot of time. [KIII4]

One approach to dealing with this is for leading actors to revise contingency plans so that they include greater detail for a wider number of stages of early action (beyond the four stages currently used), with different activities or scales designed for each stage. This approach supports faster adaptations of activities by building the decisions into the contingency plan.

However, it is not possible to fully predict which interventions will have the best effect on reducing vulnerability to drought, due to broader systemic conditions at any given time. Indeed, some actors described facing this problem with highly specific contingency funds, where the actions that had been pre-approved for funding did not turn out to be the most relevant when it was time to implement – typically because another actor was already implementing the same or similar type of activity in the same geographical area. This is why a second approach to adaptiveness, drawing on iterative review and an experimental approach to programming, could also be useful for improving early action.

### **Test, iterate and drop or expand activities using an experimental approach to programming**

A second way to strengthen adaptiveness in early action, seen in ALNAP's country study on adaptiveness in the DRC (Obrecht, 2018), is to use an experimental approach to programming. This involves trialling multiple potential activities or interventions simultaneously, reviewing their performance, stopping those that do not work and increasing the size or scale of those that prove promising. This approach is best when it is unclear what will be the most effective programme design for addressing needs. Strong feedback loops and opportunities to adjust early-action programmes based on changes in outcomes for at-risk populations are critical to making an experimental approach to programming work well.

This approach was not observed in any of the programmes discussed with key informants in the Kenya response in 2016–17. As contingency and preparedness planning continues to evolve, it will be useful to consider how they can strike an appropriate balance between pre-planning and rigidity by using adaptive management techniques along with more flexible funding. This should enable faster assessment and decision-making to implement activities based on real-time data. Contingency planning with pre-established thresholds would ideally work better with an explicit adaptive programming approach, whereby thresholds trigger a range of activities which can then be modified, expanded or dropped depending on what is working most effectively in an area at a given time.

### **Strengthen coordination and set clear responsibilities for financing early action**

Systems of actors can achieve greater adaptiveness as a collective than any individual organisation or agency on its own, but this requires good coordination and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Coordination can be a double-edged issue in relation to adapting: it has the potential to slow down an organisation's ability to shift its work as necessary, and certainly some actors experienced this in their attempts to adjust the amount of cash payments being made to vulnerable households in response to changes in market prices in Marsabit county. But many actors also described county-level coordination structures as supporting a more adaptive response at the collective level, with gaps being identified by the NDMA and passed on to implementing agencies. Several organisations gave examples of coordination meetings leading to changes to their intervention on the basis that needs were being covered by existing efforts.

In terms of clear responsibilities for financing early action, key informants broadly agreed that the Kenyan government holds the primary responsibility for early action and emergency response. There is much less clarity on the responsibilities of humanitarian and development actors in these areas, and on when these responsibilities arise. For several international humanitarian actors, including donors, their engagement remains based on the view that international assistance is only appropriate when state capacity is overwhelmed, i.e. in an emergency declaration. A challenge with this view is that capacity overwhelm is arguably less likely if more support is provided to expand early-action interventions when early-warning thresholds are triggered.

Previous experiences with drought response in Kenya produced two repeated recommendations for donors: greater support to resilience and creating funding mechanisms for early action. While donors have invested more in resilience programming, there has been less progress on funding and supporting early action to prevent state capacities from becoming so overwhelmed that a crisis must be declared.

Clearer roles and responsibilities, built on a model that does not rely on a crisis to trigger international support, need to be outlined to support faster, more adaptive, early action.

## Endnotes

1. This point was made by Jon Beloe (IRC) at the ALNAP workshop on adaptiveness in London, 5-6 September 2018.
2. Those who are interested in learning more about IBLI can find information at: <https://ibli.ilri.org>.
3. As noted by a peer reviewer for this study, this argument is part of a broader debate over whether social protection systems can be used effectively for emergency relief and the degree to which such systems are truly 'shock-responsive.'



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