ANTICIPATORY ACTION UPDATE
CERF Advisory Group Meeting, November

United Nations | CERF Central Emergency Response Fund

Summary

In 2018, the CERF Advisory Group asked OCHA to explore CERF's role and added value in scaling up anticipatory action and endorsed this approach to be tested on a pilot basis in select countries. The following document seeks to provide CERF Advisory Group members with an overview of efforts being made to develop and roll out Anticipatory Action Frameworks in five pilot countries (Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi and Somalia), and one thematic area (cholera). Two frameworks have triggered thus far (Bangladesh and Somalia) offering lessons on how best to undertake this work, as well as initial evidence on the merits of collective anticipatory action at scale. OCHA is committed to learning from the pilots and documenting impact. Initial evidence has shown that anticipatory action works, and enables assistance that is faster, cheaper, and more dignified while also protecting development gains.

Background

Today, we can predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and the humanitarian impact of certain crises, especially climatic shocks and communicable diseases. The available data can help facilitate the decision to release pre-arranged funds for pre-agreed interventions before such shocks occur to mitigate their impact. By taking this anticipatory approach, the humanitarian community can better protect vulnerable people, save more lives and increase the impact of available funds.

Since 2018, OCHA has worked with donors, other funds, implementing organizations, governments and experts to promote change towards more anticipation in the humanitarian system. Following the completion of several studies and technical consultations[1], OCHA began piloting collective anticipatory action initiatives at the country level, designing an anticipatory action framework for drought in Somalia in the second half of 2019 and, in 2020, a framework for floods in Bangladesh and for drought in Ethiopia. OCHA is currently working on another three anticipatory action frameworks: one for drought in Chad, one for drought and floods in Malawi, and a global cholera model.

Thanks to increased donor contributions to CERF, the Fund has been positioned to play a central role in these efforts. It is hoped that these pilots will help contribute to growing evidence that multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral anticipatory action at scale helps reach vulnerable people quicker, better and more efficiently. The pilots are being designed to reveal the programmatic, process, coordination and policy issues that need to be addressed to effectively scale up anticipatory action. CERF's support to these pilots has therefore been critical to supporting innovation and the introduction and testing of new ways of working for the humanitarian system.

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[1] For more information, see: "Anticipatory Action Update, CERF Advisory Group Meeting, 1 June 2020", "CERF and Anticipatory Action. Update to the CERF Advisory Group – June 2019", "CERF for the future: Anticipatory Humanitarian Action. Update for the CERF Advisory Group – October 2018", and "A Revised Operating Model for a Larger CERF. Stocktaking of workstreams and ideas – May 2018". Available on the CERF website [https://cerf.un.org/about-us/advisory-group]

Progress on piloting collective anticipatory action

Each pilot has been owned at the country level and anchored in country-level discussions. Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs), with support from Humanitarian and UN Country Teams have led the establishment of the frameworks and the process of setting these up in collaboration with partner organizations and relevant stakeholders[2] at country and headquarters levels. Field teams have been (and continue to be) supported by a cross-divisional OCHA team.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the roll-out of the pilots, with RC/HCs and country teams focused on ensuring the continuation of humanitarian operations and addressing the direct health and other humanitarian impacts of the pandemic. The work has therefore advanced at the speed and pace dictated by the needs and capacity of humanitarian partners at the country level. Mindful of operational constraints and increased vulnerability as a result of COVID-19, the pilot teams have reviewed options to adjust the scale or speed of moving the pilots forward. Travel is still suspended for all pilot countries and work on the Chad and Malawi pilots had been paused but is now resuming, while the Bangladesh and Ethiopia pilots were set up via virtual collaboration.

The pilots are already producing concrete impact, benefits and positive multiplying effects. OCHA is collaborating with the Center for Disaster Protection and implementing partners to learn and document impact throughout the planning, activation and implementation stages. There are three "buckets" of learning from each pilot: First, learning from the process of setting up anticipatory action frameworks. Second, learning from agency-specific monitoring and evaluations of the anticipatory projects. Third, independent evaluations of each activated pilot. OCHA works closely with other actors in the anticipatory action community to share lessons and evidence on anticipatory action.

Anticipatory Action Frameworks Developed & Triggered

Somalia: Food Insecurity

In the last quarter century, Somalia has experienced three major droughts and two famines. Famine in 1992 killed over 200,000 people and displaced one out of every five Somalis. During the 2011 East Africa drought, over 250,000 people died in Somalia and 955,000 became refugees in neighboring countries. In 2016-2017 Somalia experienced another devastating drought which left 5.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, displaced more than a million and caused damages and losses of over $3.25 billion. Poverty in Somalia is widespread with 77 per cent of the population estimated to live in poverty in 2017 and Somalia's infant mortality rate of 9.5 percent is the second highest in the world – largely driven by malnutrition. Somalia is also the third-biggest CERF recipient since the fund's inception ($361 million), with drought allocations accounting for half of the funding. Since the 2016/2017 drought, the Government of Somalia and international partners have developed strategies to mitigate severe food insecurity and other risks, for example the Somalia Resilience and Recovery Framework.

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[2] In particular Governments, the World Bank, FAO, WFP, the Start Fund and IFRC which all have experience with anticipatory action, and other partners in country, including UNFPA and UNICEF.

To bolster these efforts, the Somalia anticipatory action framework was set up in 2019 in collaboration with the World Bank, FAO, WFP and other partners for out-of-the-ordinary drought shocks (similar to the famine in 2011/2012 and the severe drought in 2016/2017). CERF funding was to be released if one of two pre-identified thresholds were reached.[3]

In June 2020, the trigger for the framework was reached when food insecurity was forecasted to rise due to the triple impact of Covid-19, floods and desert locust infestations. Although the triggering was not due to drought conditions as originally foreseen, the agreed action plan remained relevant in that it proposed a range of actions that could mitigate the impact of these threats on food security. The ERC thereby decided to allocate $15 million from CERF for a "support package" of shock-relevant activities outlined in the Anticipatory Action Plan that had been developed. The allocation targeted 1.3 million people across Somalia with assistance in the sectors of health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security and protection with the aim of mitigating loss of livelihoods, deterioration of nutrition and outbreak of diseases.

The allocation in Somalia was also a learning opportunity, that has already begun demonstrating the value of triggering a pre-agreed plan to reduce suffering and costs. For instance, during the activation stage, OCHA found that the preparatory work ahead of the shock and close inclusion of the CERF team in developing the anticipatory action projects reduced the time needed for funding to be released by a factor of two to three.

OCHA is applying the three-pronged learning approach, adapted to the Somalia context. A process review by the Center for Disaster Protection has included a range of interviews with agency and OCHA personnel and is expected to be completed in mid-November. Initial lessons from the planning phase revealed the importance of having existing systems and capacity in place, of adopting a design that focuses on impact first, and the opportunities and challenges of working in the development and humanitarian nexus.

Agency-specific monitoring and evaluation has so far demonstrated quick implementation by the agencies. Within the first six weeks of implementation, over 75,000 children were screened for malnutrition and 5,700 children and 20,000 pregnant and lactating women improved their nutrition status through supplements. In that same time period, 53,000 people received hygiene kits to prevent disease outbreaks and 30 wells were rehabilitated. In northern Somalia, 4,600 hectares were sprayed against desert locusts to prevent loss of livelihoods. Emergency health supplies were delivered to target locations, including cholera kits, trauma kits and severe acute malnutrition kits, and three laboratories were provided with supplies to conduct analysis for COVID-19 and other priority epidemic-prone diseases. These activities were implemented at far faster rates than is customary. The remaining anticipatory activities were completed by mid-October and results will be documented by OCHA and the implementing UN agencies and become available by the end of November.

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[3] To trigger CERF finance in Somalia, there are currently two thresholds, of which either one has to be met: (1) The projected [population weighted] districts in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 3 and above exceed 20% (or 5 million), and the projected [population weighted] districts in phase 3 is projected to increase by a further 5%. (2) The projected [population weighted] districts in IPC phase 3 and above exceed 20% (or 5 million), and the projected [population weighted] districts in phase 4 or above is 2.5%. For further details on IPC phases, see [http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-manual-interactive/en/]

Lastly, the Centre is supporting the design of **an independent evaluation** through a beneficiary assessment to measure the benefits of the anticipatory action allocation, involving beneficiary interviews and analysis by an external company. Findings are expected to become available in early 2021.

Bangladesh: Floods

Bangladesh is one of the 10 most disaster-affected countries in the world and is highly exposed to severe monsoon flooding. Since the beginning of the millennium, more than 112 million people have been affected by climate-related events.[4] In an 'average' year, about a quarter the country is inundated during the monsoon; every four to five years severe floods may cover two-thirds of Bangladesh. Intense floods surpass the ability of communities to cope, leading to deaths and the destruction of key infrastructure, livelihoods and homes, creating widespread humanitarian needs with longer-term development consequences. Bangladesh has received over $110 million in CERF allocations since 2006 for traditional humanitarian responses. There is significant expertise and experience related to early warning and anticipatory action at Government level and within the humanitarian community.

In late June 2020, the Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh pre-approved and endorsed an anticipatory action framework to scale up more effective, timely and dignified humanitarian assistance ahead of peak monsoon flooding. Building on existing structures and experiences by the IFRC, WFP and the Government of Bangladesh, the framework was set up in two months. It combines a 10-day lead-time probabilistic with a 5-day lead-time deterministic flood forecast. Thus, a trigger is issued at least 10 days before flooding peaks and may be confirmed 5 days before flooding peaks. The first acts as a "readiness trigger", while the second acts as an "activation trigger".

In early July, the framework was triggered, enabling agencies to deliver humanitarian assistance to more than 220,000 people before the peak floods hit.[5] With projects, funding mechanisms and triggers having been pre-agreed, CERF was able to launch what became the fund's fastest-ever allocation of $5.2 million. Once the trigger was reached, within 4 hours on 4 July 2020 the funds were allocated, allowing agencies to start delivering assistance. Some 23,000 families received multi-purpose, unconditional cash, 7,000 families received water-tight dry storage drums, some 12,000 farmer families received animal feed. In addition, some 15,000 women, girls and transgender people received dignity and hygiene kits, and benefited from prepositioned health, safe birth and rape management kits.

Anticipatory actions to mitigate the humanitarian impact of monsoon flooding in Bangladesh have now been successfully completed. Evidence shows that more people were reached earlier, faster, and at half the cost of a regular response (when compared to the 2019 floods, for instance) and in a manner that was more empowering. Some key benefits that have emerged are:

1. Anticipatory action was **faster** than regular rapid response, with agencies being able to implement before the peak floods.

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[4] UNDRR (2020), The human cost of disasters: an overview of the last 20 years (2000-2019).

[5] Of an initial $5.2 million allocation in support of the framework, $2.8 million was used for anticipatory action reaching 220,000 people ahead of the peak floods (demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of anticipatory action; see last paragraph on this page). The remaining $2.4 million were reprogrammed for rapid response covering an additional 182,500 flood-affected people through cash transfers after peak floods.

2. The anticipatory response was also **cheaper** than comparative rapid responses in previous years, with efficiencies gained thanks to lower pre-crisis goods and logistics costs. As a result, FAO could distribute animal feed to more people and UNFPA had more than 10% cost savings.

3. Anticipatory action was **more dignified:** Beneficiaries received support ahead of the peak of the floods, empowering them to be prepared and face the crisis on their own terms. There were concrete spill-over effects and productive assets were spared. For example, women and girls who received dignity or hygiene kits were more likely to access health care and continue their education.

4. Anticipatory action has **improved the quality of programming**: Planning ahead allowed agencies better to take into account aspects such as gender. UNFPA, for example, for the first time specifically designed dignity kits for the transgender community in Bangladesh.

Documenting the impact, lessons and evidence from the Bangladesh pilot is ongoing, following the above-outlined learning approach, in collaboration with the Centre for Disaster Protection, Oxford University and the implementing agencies. An independent process learning review by the Centre for Disaster Protection has been completed. It confirmed that "through effective coordination and encouragement, even with a very short turnaround, partners took a major step in scaling up anticipatory action with CERF support, demonstrating what it takes and the potential human impact". The review also confirmed that the pilot demonstrated "the feasibility of scaling up anticipatory action with CERF funding". According to the review, the anticipatory action pilot in Bangladesh demonstrates what can be achieved by building on previous experience, country-based systems, and expertise.

Results from agency-specific monitoring and evaluation activities are currently being collected and a final report is expected in November. Preliminary findings show a high satisfaction rate by beneficiaries and appreciation for timeliness of the assistance. Quality of life and financial health of recipient families are better compared to other groups. The quality of the assistance provided was higher overall (effective targeting of those most in need, women and men equally supported). In addition, spill-over effects of anticipatory action become more evident. For instance, that women and girls who received dignity/hygiene kits were more likely to access health care and continue their education.

An independent evaluation conducted by the impact measurement company 60 Decibels in cooperation with the Centre for Disaster Protection and Oxford University is ongoing, including an impact study, a beneficiary assessment and a review of the predictive model. Overall, more than 10,000 beneficiaries and a control group will be interviewed. Initial results and reports are expected through the remaining months of 2020.

Anticipatory Action Frameworks Being Developed

Ethiopia: Drought and Food Insecurity

Ethiopia suffers from chronic food insecurity associated with recurrent and cyclical major droughts, and erratic rainy seasons. The frequency of severe droughts (El Niño and La Niña/Indian Ocean Dipole) has increased from every ten years to almost every five years in the last decade, and droughts have become more severe. Ethiopia has strong early warning data and systems, strong UN leadership and capacity, a well-established OCHA country office and a supportive government. A 2019 inter-agency humanitarian

evaluation called for the country-based pooled fund to become more anticipatory and for development programme budgets to include crisis modifiers.

In October 2020, after comprehensive consultations with the main stakeholders at country, regional and global level,[6] an anticipatory action framework for drought in Ethiopia was completed. Lessons learned in developing the Somalia Anticipatory Action Framework were applied as much as possible and in so far as country characteristics overlapped (pattern of rainy seasons, exposure to regional climatic phenomena, etc.). Examples of key improvements in the Framework are: (a) the ability to trigger at the regional and not only national level, (b) inclusion of drought indicators in the trigger – in addition to the food security element - and (c) a more detailed plan for activation, to further speed up the allocation process. The framework is expected to be endorsed by the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team by early November.

Chad: Drought and Food Insecurity

Chad is the among the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change; it is exposed to recurrent rainfall deficits and droughts in the sahélo-sahara area and heavy rains in the southern and northern areas. Chad is the seventh-biggest CERF recipient overall, at almost $230 million since 2006.

First consultations on setting up an anticipatory action framework for drought as well as analytical work to identify suitable forecasts and triggers took place in April and May 2020. Despite keen interest by in-country and global partners, the pilot had to be paused over the summer as all in-country resources were focused on managing the COVID-19 pandemic. In the coming months, the work will be resumed with partners.

Malawi: Drought and Floods

Malawi is extremely vulnerable and exposed to a range of climatic shocks in southern Africa, especially to severe drought induced by the occurrence of a possible El Niño event. Following the 2015/16 El Niño-induced drought, Malawi experienced its worst food security crisis in over a decade, with 6.7 million people facing chronic or acute food insecurity. CERF has provided over $43 million in allocations to Malawi since 2006, the majority of which were for drought.

There is significant expertise and experience related to early warning and anticipatory action in Malawi, including by FAO, WFP, IFRC and the Start Network. A phased approach was agreed with the Resident Coordinator to develop an anticipatory action framework with OCHA support. Work has started on the data and analytical front (data landscape, trigger development options). Meanwhile, the Resident Coordinator's office and OCHA are finalizing a concept note and timeline for the design and development of the framework, which could cover both drought and floods. Lessons and experience from Somalia,

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[6] Government, the humanitarian clusters, UN agencies, NGOs, Red Cross movement, and humanitarian and development donors were consulted to ensure the alignment of the framework with the existing anticipatory initiatives such as Forecast-based Financing mechanism (Red Cross), the National Productive Safety Nets Programme (from the Government of Ethiopia with the support of the World Bank) and others. Discussions were also held with the IPC-Global Support Unit to determine the triggers indicators and thresholds.

Ethiopia and Bangladesh are applied, including to the design and development process of the pilot and the way of working.

Disease outbreaks

OCHA is validating the Global Cholera Risk Model developed by the Universities of Maryland and Florida with NASA funding. The model predicts the onset of cholera one month in advance by combining environmental conditions, infrastructure and human behavior; and it has the ability to identify at-risk areas as small as 250 by 250 meters.

If the validation process is successful, an anticipatory action pilot would link the risk signals of the model to the release of CERF funding to agencies that can advance risk communication, water and sanitation and health interventions that can prevent or quickly contain the outbreak. A water testing method to verify the predictions is also being explored to confirm there is pathogenic cholera in water sources before the disease manifests in people.

OCHA's Centre for Humanitarian Data is leading the validation process and working closely with the researchers to ensure the model can work for anticipatory action. OCHA will continue working with UN agencies to determine their capacity, operational readiness and presence in Sub-Saharan African locations where anticipatory action against epidemic cholera might be triggered. The COVID-19 crisis has slowed but not stopped the validation process.