

ANTICIPATORY ACTION UPDATE

CERF Advisory Group Meeting, 1 June 2020



I. Summary

Building on pioneering work done by partners over the last years, OCHA is working with the humanitarian system to make anticipatory action work at scale. Following comprehensive consultations and technical groundwork, OCHA started to pilot collective anticipatory action in Somalia in 2019 and is adding four more pilot countries. Despite COVID-19, all pilots are progressing, with pace and approach of the pilot roll-out tailored to each country.

In Somalia, an anticipatory action framework against drought was developed in collaboration with the World Bank and partners and became operational in 2019. The thresholds for triggering have been checked against food security forecasts but have not been reached so far. In 2020, OCHA is piloting anticipatory action frameworks using CERF funding to support faster collective action on predictable shocks. Based on a set of agreed-upon criteria, Chad, Ethiopia, and Malawi were selected to pilot anticipatory action against drought. In Bangladesh, anticipatory action against monsoon flooding will be scaled up. And anticipatory action for disease outbreaks continues to be pursued focusing on the validation of a cholera model that is expected to be applied in Sub-Saharan Africa.

II. Background

Today, we can predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and the humanitarian impact of certain climatic shocks and communicable diseases. Neither the shock nor the course of a crisis should come as a surprise. The available data can help facilitate the decision to release pre-arranged funds for pre-agreed interventions that take place before such shocks to mitigate their impact. By taking this anticipatory approach – using evidence of risk instead of needs – to respond, the humanitarian community can better protect, save more lives and increase the impact of available funds.

In 2019 and 2020, OCHA has continued to work with donors, aid financing instruments, implementing organizations and experts to promote change towards more anticipation in the humanitarian system. CERF has played a central role in these efforts building on its global reach, funding volume, proven track record and effective systems. CERF is helping to take multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral anticipatory action to scale and provide proof of concept. Increased donor contributions to CERF have given the financial room to pilot this new approach.

III. Progress on piloting collective anticipatory action

Following the completion of several studies and technical consultations in 2018 and 2019,¹ OCHA is now in the piloting phase for collective anticipatory action, which began with the design of an anticipatory action framework for drought in Somalia in the second half of 2019.

¹ For more information, see: "[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>]

Piloting anticipatory action in carefully selected contexts helps reach vulnerable people quicker and more efficiently and allows to generate proof of concept and further develop the evidence base for advancing coordinated anticipatory action at the system-level. Pilots also help explore CERF's suitability as an anticipatory financing instrument and its potential niche in funding anticipatory action. Furthermore, 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.

In 2020, OCHA is seeking to diversify the portfolio of anticipatory action frameworks to pilot across different geographical contexts and hazards to increase the probability of triggering and maximize learning. The selected countries are Bangladesh (flooding), Chad (drought), Ethiopia (drought) and Malawi (drought). The selection criteria for these pilots were the same as applied to the Somalia pilot: exposure to type of hazard, humanitarian impact of the hazard, predictive capability for country, window of opportunity, country-level leadership and capacity, partner implementation capacity, potential for bringing in other contingency finance, donor interest, ability to monitor and evaluate, and minimal complicating factors. In addition, OCHA continues to work towards the use of a cholera model in anticipatory action.

Each pilot framework is coordinated by a cross-divisional OCHA rollout team, co-led by the CERF Secretariat and the Humanitarian Financing Strategy and Analysis Unit. The rollout teams work collaboratively with Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs), country teams, Resident Coordinators' Offices, Governments, and partner organizations² at headquarters and country levels to roll out an anticipatory action framework. Ultimately the ownership of the established frameworks will rest with the RC/HC and country teams, supported by OCHA.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is also affecting the implementation 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. Mindful of operational constraints and increased vulnerability as a result of COVID-19, the OCHA pilot teams have reviewed options to move the portfolio of pilots forward. While travel has been suspended for all pilot countries, work on the pilots will continue, with pace and approach adapted to each country in line with the specific situation and capacity of in-country partners.

IV. Update on anticipatory action pilots

Slow-onset disasters

In 2019, **Somalia** became the first country where the Humanitarian Country Team, together with OCHA (including the CERF secretariat), the World Bank and other partners, set up a system-wide Anticipatory Action Framework to respond to an out-of-the-ordinary drought. When a drought is predicted to lead to severe humanitarian need, such as was the case in Somalia in 2010-2011 and 2016-2017, CERF will release funding against a pre-developed Anticipatory Action Plan. The funding will help mitigate the projected life-threatening humanitarian impact and protect vulnerable people under worsening conditions. The

² In particular the World Bank, FAO, WFP, the Start Fund and IFRC which all have experience with anticipatory action, and other partners.

Anticipatory Action Plan has been completed and provides details on forecasting and decision-making rules, trigger,³ pre-arranged financing and pre-agreed actions and implementation arrangements.

Beyond the very fruitful collaboration with the World Bank, OCHA has worked with several donors, including the Education Cannot Wait fund, and identified opportunities to support components of the Somalia anticipatory action framework. The threshold for triggering a funding disbursement for anticipatory action has not been reached to date and OCHA and in-country partners continue to monitor the forecast.⁴ At the same time, OCHA initiated work with technical partners on the development of subnational triggers in order to be able to launch anticipatory action for more localized extreme drought events within Somalia.

Ethiopia has the world's fifth-highest number of food-insecure people and 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 decades, and droughts have become more severe. The drought in 2015/16 quadrupled the number of people in need of humanitarian aid from 2.5 million to 10 million. Ethiopia is the fourth-biggest CERF recipient overall, at over \$330 million since 2006. Ethiopia has strong early warning data and systems, strong UN leadership and capacity, a strong OCHA country office and a supportive government. There is potential for bringing in complementary finance to support components of the anticipatory action plan. For example, 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. Other funds or funding sources that are active in Ethiopia may decide to support the Anticipatory Action framework as well. Although different in important ways, Ethiopia shares several characteristics with Somalia (pattern of rainy seasons, exposure to regional climatic phenomena, etc.) which should favor application of lessons learned in Somalia. First consultations between OCHA headquarters and the country level on the set-up of an anticipatory action framework for drought as well as analytical work to identify suitable forecasts and triggers have taken place. The size of the country – with different agroclimatic zones – may require a focus on a specific area or the identification of different triggers to anticipate risks in different parts of the country. The RC/HC and OCHA Country Office are supportive of the pilot proceeding in collaboration with OCHA headquarters, highlighting the need to tackle predictable problems such as drought and minimize the compounding impacts of COVID-19 and other risks.

Chad is among the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. Chad is exposed to recurrent climatic shocks, including recurrent rainfall deficits and droughts in the sahélo-sahara area, and heavy rains in the southern and northern areas. Chad is the sixth-biggest CERF recipient overall, at over

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/>

⁴ To assist Somalis suffering from the impacts of the extremely poor 2018 Deyr rains and the poor 2019 Gu rains, CERF provided two allocations from the Rapid Response window in 2019 – a \$12 million allocation in March and a \$30 million allocation in July. In addition, CERF provided an \$8 million allocation in December 2019 and a \$7 million in May 2020, both in response to flooding.

\$220 million since 2006. Overall food security data is available, and Chad is part of regional initiatives against drought, such as the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) which supports members in drought monitoring and capacity building. While there is no direct experience with anticipatory action, partners in Chad have worked through various contingency planning processes, including for the African Risk Capacity. The pilot roll-out team is also looking to apply lessons learned by the Red Cross which is setting up an Early Action Protocol in neighboring Niger. The OCHA Country Office in Chad is highly committed, especially given the country's high vulnerability and low funding coverage. The World Bank has selected Chad as one of the "first mover" countries under its Famine Action Mechanism (FAM) and OCHA and the World Bank will be looking to harmonize piloting for a coordinated anticipatory action framework similarly to the approach for Somalia. First consultations between OCHA headquarters and the OCHA country office to set-up an anticipatory action framework for drought as well as analytical work to identify suitable forecasts and triggers have taken place. As the COVID-19 pandemic requires all in-country resources, efforts under the Chad pilot have now shifted mostly to desk research and analytical work in preparation for more engagement with the field, once operational capacity allows.

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. While there is no OCHA Country Office, Malawi has strong UN leadership and capacity inside the Resident Coordinator's Office. There is potential for bringing in complementary finance, including from the World Bank, as the international community is pushing to build resilience in Malawi. The OCHA rollout team has led first consultations with the Resident Coordinator's Office to set-up an anticipatory action framework for drought. Although there is interest in promoting an anticipatory approach to vulnerability and crisis risk in Malawi, the rollout the pilot is currently on hold as the UN Country Team is fully concentrated on supporting Malawi's response to COVID-19. The pilot will be revisited in the second half of 2020, depending on capacity and on how the pandemic evolves.

Sudden-onset shocks

Building on the work undertaken by the World Food Programme (WFP), the Red Cross/Red Crescent and others, OCHA is piloting anticipatory action at a larger scale, in response to riverine flooding in **Bangladesh**. Bangladesh is highly exposed to flooding, despite gradually increasing resilience. In the past 25 years, storms and floods have resulted in around 15,000 deaths while all disasters combined have affected 150 million people. Bangladesh has received over \$95 million in CERF allocations since 2006. There is significant expertise and experience related to early warning and anticipatory action, at Government level and within the humanitarian community. The objective of the pilot is to increase the number of vulnerable people covered and extend the geographic scope of the anticipatory action efforts to date, and design a collective, inter-agency action plan to include cash transfers as well as other impactful actions. Inter-agency work with WFP, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, national partners and others is currently ongoing.

The aim is to complete the framework by June in order to be able to trigger anticipatory action during the monsoon season, if the thresholds are reached. With the likely compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, the RC and her office, OCHA regional office and main partners at field and headquarters level are keen to advance the pilot as part of a broader effort to become more anticipatory in Bangladesh. The rollout team is working with partners to overcome operational constraints related to COVID-19.

Disease outbreaks

OCHA is validating the Global Cholera Risk Model developed by the Universities of Maryland and Florida with NASA funding. The model predicts one month in advance the onset of **cholera** by combining environmental conditions, infrastructure and human behavior. It has a maximum resolution of 250m by 250m. 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.

V. Learning

Collectively learning and building the evidence base for anticipatory action are key to effectively scaling up this approach. Therefore, OCHA is collaborating with the London-based Centre for Disaster Protection on an independent evaluative learning component that is accompanying the pilots throughout the planning, disbursement and implementation stage. Findings from the learning workstream will be presented to the Advisory Group as soon as they become available and feed into the decision-making regarding the further development of a CERF anticipatory action approach. In the meantime, several preliminary lessons are beginning to emerge, of which we would like to highlight the following:

Collaboration. To be successful, anticipatory action must be part of a collective approach, based on strong partnerships. Proof of concept is key to illustrate the power of an idea but not enough to make large-scale impact and foster irreversible system change. The anticipatory action frameworks OCHA is promoting are collective and collaborative by design, intended to bring in the analytical, financial and operational expertise of humanitarian, development and scientific partners to get ahead of shocks and mitigate the impact of crises.

Impact before instruments. There is a tendency to approach risk financing by first looking at the model, i.e. the forecasting tools and technology as well as the thresholds, to trigger a finance disbursement. However, models and triggers do not advise on *what* to do - their main function is to advise on *when* to act and to facilitate that acting becomes the default. The focus of anticipatory action needs to be maintained firmly on getting the right interventions and working back from that: *first* determining the

actions that are impactful, feasible, and which we are operationally ready to implement, and *then* identifying the best forecast and trigger.

Ownership. If we want humanitarian operations to become more anticipatory in the long run, in-country partners must own and drive the process of setting up anticipatory action. The leadership of the RC/HC is crucial in order to ensure buy-in from organizations and clusters. Technical-level staff in the respective countries should be actively involved in the elaboration of the framework design from the very beginning.

Subnational triggers. Subnational-level triggers should be considered from the early stages, as they have several benefits, allowing CERF to anticipate pockets of extreme needs within a country. In countries with large populations, an out-of-the-ordinary shock in a part of the country will affect a huge number of people. Subnational triggers also allow for a more precise triggering the anticipatory action framework.

From trigger to CERF disbursement. The Anticipatory Action Frameworks that OCHA is setting up in the pilot countries consist of three elements: (a) validated forecast with established triggers, (b) pre-arranged financing, (c) pre-agreed humanitarian actions. The piloting over the past months has shown that, once these three elements have been identified, there is still significant work to be done to link the frameworks to CERF processes, such as the funding decision, application review and disbursement. A positive lesson learned is that it will likely be possible to pre-draft almost complete CERF applications based on an anticipatory action plan. For sudden-onset emergencies, funding needs to be moved at very short notice, so work is underway with UN agency partners to better understand cross-agency and intra-agency cash flows.