

# PROCESS LEARNING FROM UN-OCHA 2020 MONSOON ANTICIPATORY ACTION PILOT IN BANGLADESH

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# PRESENTATION OUTLINE

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# INTRODUCTION (1 OF 2)

- In 2018, the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF), the financing arm of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) explored anticipatory action funding to complement traditional humanitarian response functions
- This resulted in the design of pilot projects to strengthen evidence on its benefits in reducing human suffering, loss of life, and the cost of response, and to understand and develop CERF's role
- The first pilot launched in Somalia for drought in the fall of 2019. The second was endorsed for flooding in Bangladesh in July 2020, and a third is under development for drought in Ethiopia (with possible future pilots in Malawi and Chad)



## INTRODUCTION (2 OF 2)

The 2020 Monsoon anticipatory action pilot in Bangladesh, along with the two others, offers three ways to enhance global learning on the benefits and challenges of anticipatory action:

- 1. Learning from the process** to put in place anticipatory action plans, and key benefits and challenges
- 2. Monitoring of key indicators** by partner agencies on the delivery of timely support to at-risk households when actions have been triggered
- 3. Independent evaluation** of the impact of triggered actions on household welfare

The focus of this PPT Report is here

“As we innovate more, try to use data better and anticipate problems before they occur, we need to analyse what is working and what is not. And we need to be honest about the lessons.”

- Mark Lowcock  
(December, 2019)



# APPROACH TO PROCESS LEARNING

Anticipatory action pilots are intended to expand and deepen new ways of thinking about, planning for and implementing humanitarian action within highly complex national and global systems.

This takes courage, persistence, and humility.

As such, the following points are central to the approach and mindset of process learning:

- **Simple solutions rarely exist** for the practical challenges that arise in promoting a new way of operating within highly complex systems
- Rather, **learning and progress occur by incrementally navigating** and testing how to value and balance seemingly contradictory requirements, or paradoxes
- Thus, the learning presented here is best understood as **focus areas for further inquiry, deliberation, decision-making and adaptation** as future projects unfold

“Everyone in a complex system has a slightly different interpretation. The more interpretations we gather, the easier it becomes to gain a sense of the whole.”

- Margaret Wheatley



# PROCESS LEARNING METHODOLOGY

- 1. Desk review of relevant documents,** including the Anticipatory Humanitarian Action Plan for 2020 Monsoon floods in Bangladesh
- 2. Observation** of weekly technical meetings, as well as a select number of OCHA team meetings
- 3. Qualitative interviews with partners and colleagues at HQ and country level:**
  - OCHA/CERF colleagues (3)
  - HQ and regional colleagues with partner UN-agencies and organizations (4)
  - In-country colleagues (9)
- 4. Action Learning** discussions with a total of 20 HQ, regional and in-country colleagues, via a series of three facilitated discussions

The Centre for Disaster Protection is supporting OCHA in capturing **process learning** by gathering qualitative data from key partners in real-time.



# COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND (1 OF 3)

## Monsoon flooding in Bangladesh

- Flooding in Bangladesh consistently surpasses communities' ability to cope, damaging livelihoods, homes, and infrastructure, and requiring major humanitarian response
- Forecasting systems now make it possible to predict severe flooding events in advance, enabling targeted and timely actions that offer dignified solutions and reduce humanitarian needs

## Humanitarian coordination and response in Bangladesh

- The Government of Bangladesh has significant disaster management capacity and plays an influential role at regional and international levels around climate adaptation and response
- OCHA closed its operations in Bangladesh in 2015, with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) now coordinating humanitarian affairs in the country, with the primary aim of facilitating constructive engagement in support of the Government's leadership role



# COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND (2 OF 3)

## Forecast based financing (FBF) and action (FBA) in Bangladesh

- Since 2015 the German Red Cross (GRC) , Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and World Food Program (WFP) have developed, tested, and strengthened FBF for flooding
- With this foundational work, partners began exploring how to scale and integrate FBF into the National Resilience Plan
- Additional partners joined these efforts, and a working group was formed in June 2019 to harmonize FBF in Bangladesh. Objectives included (among others):
  - **Improving coordination, deliberation and discussion among stakeholders**
  - **Consolidating FBF efforts in the country and providing a platform for collective engagement and advocacy with the Government**
  - **Working jointly to institutionalise FBF/FBA in Government policy and strategies**



# COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND (3 OF 3)

## 2020 Monsoon anticipatory action pilot

- Through consultation and discussion with global partners in the anticipatory action space, such as FAO, WFP, UNICEF, START Network, IFRC and others, Bangladesh was chosen to implement one of OCHA's five anticipatory action pilots with CERF funding, recognizing the experience and expertise that could facilitate relatively rapid scaling of existing efforts and systems
- The 2020 Monsoon pilot in Bangladesh was therefore built on significant prior coordination efforts, protocols, tools and expertise for forecast based financing and anticipatory action in the country
- The objective of the pilot was to deliver more effective, timely and dignified humanitarian response in anticipation of severe monsoon flooding of the Jamuna River in Bangladesh in five highly vulnerable districts



# OVERARCHING LESSONS

Thanks to prior FBF and FBA experience in Bangladesh, OCHA's strong coordination role, and trusting and transparent partnerships, the pilot served its purpose by:

- Demonstrating the feasibility of scaling anticipatory action with CERF funding
- Bringing greater international attention to the value and impact of acting in advance of a disaster where possible
- Reminding partners what is achievable in a short amount of time when a motivated "coalition of the willing" comes together around a clear common goal
- Generating significant learning on bottlenecks and administrative hurdles to overcome for rapid onset disasters



Photo Credit: Sultan Mahmud/AFP

# LEARNING THEMES

1. Early engagement and buy-in among stakeholders
2. Partnership and collaboration
3. Forecasting technology and early warning system
4. Intervention selection and design
5. Forecast-based financing
6. Implementation

# 1. EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

## **Process for promoting early engagement and buy-in:**

- In early 2020 OCHA developed an internal, cross-divisional team to support the pilot in Bangladesh
- Given the sudden onset nature of floods, the original plan was to scale WFP and BDRCS cash transfers, complemented with health, WASH and gender-responsive activities from UNICEF
- However, impacts of Covid-19 delayed planning and affected partnerships
- UNICEF withdrew to focus on Covid-19 response. FAO and UNFPA joined later
- Planning occurred over a two-month period, from late April to late June 2020

# LEARNING FROM EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN EFFORTS (1 OF 3)

## 1. Significant prior foundational work on anticipatory action systems, as well as government directives and understanding within select agencies enabled the rapid roll-out of the pilot

- Prior systems development and foundational work enabled the rapid roll-out of a successful pilot that built on existing expertise, learning and protocols. Bangladesh was selected because of the potential to scale pre-existing systems and disaster response experience
- Partner agencies in-country were already committed to anticipatory action, looking for opportunities to scale, and excited to have CERF's support in doing so
- There can be a tendency to prioritize global models and experts (which have value), but this pilot demonstrates what can be achieved by building from highly localized expertise

## 2. Partners shared a clear common purpose and sense of urgency

- Clear purpose and urgency led to high levels of motivation and buy-in. The pilot offered greater visibility and potential for shifting the landscape of humanitarian response
- OCHA engaged colleagues for whom anticipatory action is core to their work. Partner agencies also pulled in resources from global, regional and local levels to support the work and address challenges. Once joining, FAO and UNFPA quickly got up to speed

# LEARNING FROM EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN EFFORTS (2 OF 3)

## 3. OCHA's organizing and coordination skills were commended as highly effective

- Consistent weekly meetings brought partners together to achieve something extraordinary within short timeframes and in a challenging context (given Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan)
- OCHA's facilitation and coordination efforts demonstrated inclusiveness, flexibility and pragmatism in addressing the challenges that arose
- Meetings among technical stakeholders helped build a strong and collaborative working relationship and promoted consistent engagement. These were complemented with bi-lateral meetings with OCHA to clarify pilot concepts and support progress in planning

## 4. Short timeframes limited ability to sensitize implementing partners and Government counterparts less familiar with anticipatory action

- Partners described having to rely on political capital and trust in moving ahead, which worked thanks to longstanding partnership, but put undue pressure on relationships
- From UNFPA's experience in successfully delivering the pilot with implementing partners, it very much helps to get them on board early, so they are clear not only about what they are doing, but why – including the project's global significance

# LEARNING FROM EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND BUY-IN EFFORTS (3 OF 3)

## 5. **Bringing the Government in more intentionally from the beginning would support long-term efforts at sensitization and institutionalization**

- Recognizing the Government's capacity in responding to climate emergencies, multiple partners noted it would have been valuable to have time to engage relevant agencies more deliberately from the beginning of the process, supporting stronger co-ownership, and bringing government agencies more explicitly into the conversation from the beginning
- This said, interviewees also noted the power of delivering a successful pilot at a larger scale than had previously been possible to demonstrate to the Government the value and impact of anticipatory action as an integral component of disaster response

## 6. **There was some ambiguity in the beginning around what aspects of communication and coordination should be handled at the HQ level, and what should be at the country level**

- Partners agreed that OCHA thoroughly consulted at the HQ, regional and country levels throughout, though there were occasions where parallel conversations occurred
- In the eyes of some, there could be more attention and clarity around which consultations are held with whom and when, and how this continually supports country-level leadership

## 2. PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

### **Processes supporting partnership and coordination:**

- Starting in April 2020, OCHA hosted weekly technical meetings to establish details of the anticipatory action plan
- These were supported by bilateral calls between OCHA and partners to determine the feasibility and costs of proposed interventions within the given timeframes and to clarify concepts
- Successive drafts of the Anticipatory Action Plan were shared with partners, so that everyone could see how each agency's approach and activities were evolving

# LEARNING FROM PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION (1 OF 3)

- 1. Trust and an explicit “pilot mindset” allowed for transparency in raising challenges, working toward solutions, and being realistic about what could/couldn’t be resolved in time**
  - Partners were clear that the pilot would not be perfect, and that a major objective was to learn from the challenges they could foresee (or not), for future anticipatory action
  - This allowed for transparency among colleagues throughout the process. As challenges arose, the OCHA team and partner agencies assessed whether these were insurmountable in reaching an approved plan by June 2020, which never appeared to be the case
- 2. There is a significant polarity to manage in balancing the speed and purpose of a pilot approach with deeper sensitization and integration in existing systems**
  - This polarity consistently arose in interviews, with people noting the value of designing and implementing a successful pilot with a subset of “willing and able” stakeholders to bring visibility to the benefits of anticipatory action and strengthen evidence in short timeframes
  - However, this needed to be balanced so as to not be done at the expense of wider sensitization, collaboration and consultation for future systems integration

## LEARNING FROM PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION (2 OF 3)

### 3. The experience in Bangladesh demonstrates what can be accomplished with a multi-agency effort with effective coordination and motivations

- Partners lauded a positive process that inclusively brought together people from different agencies and levels (i.e. HQ, regional, local) to accomplish something significant in reducing human loss within very short timeframes, demonstrating that it could be done
- Interviewees spoke to how everyone was encouraged to speak up during weekly meetings to raise questions and challenges, allowing for strong collaboration

### 4. Short timeframes impacted sub-granting to BDRCS and limited additional partnerships

- Sorting out sub-granting agreements within short timeframes, and in addition to other crucial preparatory activities for pilot activation, proved a significant challenge
- Ultimately, the inability to sign a sub-granting agreement in time prevented BDRCS from distributing cash to 6,000 households as intended via a sub-grant included in WFP's allocation from CERF (as CERF only allocates funds directly to UN agencies)
- Longer planning timeframes may have allowed for a wider range of partners to become involved

## LEARNING FROM PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION (3 OF 3)

### 5. The pilot included close coordination with national and local government agencies, however deeper integration with existing government systems would take time and patience

- Technical strengthening and engagement with government agencies to move forward the legal and regulatory frameworks needed to scale anticipatory action, and integration in existing systems will require a sustained effort, likely bolstered by the recent success
- Indeed, the experience in Bangladesh demonstrates the extent to which the approach would need to be scaled to significantly reduce the human impact of major flooding events, given the current levels of devastation

### 6. Some saw a missed opportunity in not working more closely with the FBF Working Group

- Given the existence of a body created to support country-wide coordination around anticipatory action, as well as advocacy and institutionalization in government systems, one interviewee expressed regrets that the process had not better complemented those efforts
- For example, agencies not involved in the pilot were eager to know where CERF funded anticipatory actions were taking place, so as to coordinate with and complement those efforts. The time pressures associated with the pilot made this difficult

### 3. FORECASTING TECHNOLOGY AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

#### **Processes for developing the early warning system:**

The pilot rests on a two-stage trigger based on what had previously been developed by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre in Bangladesh and used by WFP and BDRCS:

- **Stage I:** A pre-activation (readiness) trigger is reached when the water flow at the Bahadurabad gauging station over a period of three days is forecasted by the GloFAS and/or the FFWC 15-days forecast model with lead time 10 days to be more than 50% likely to cross 100 000 m<sup>3</sup>/s
- **Stage II:** An activation trigger is reached when the water level at Bahadurabad is forecasted by the FFWC 5-day lead time model to cross the government-defined “Danger Level” + 0.85 meters

# LEARNING FROM THE FORECASTING TECHNOLOGY AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (1 OF 2)

## 1. The pilot relied heavily on in-country expertise and prior work on developing the trigger

- The forecasting technology and trigger was established ahead of time thanks to existing forecast monitoring systems and the work of Dr. Hassan Ahmadul, a Technical Advisor with the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre in Bangladesh. He and his team spent years developing a trigger to reflect the impact of flooding on the poorest households
- All involved were therefore in agreement about the trigger, thanks to close alignment with government systems and its efficacy established during prior pilots by BDRCS and WFP. Dr. Ahmadul was a critical partner in the pilot, sharing timely and important information

## 2. The trigger was slightly adjusted to have a 10-day pre-activation trigger that would have a higher probability of being accompanied by the 5-day trigger

- The criteria set for pre-activation was shifted to lower the threshold for a 10-day pre-activation so there would be a greater likelihood (i.e. 40%) of releasing funds early to provide additional preparatory time
- There is a 40% chance the 10-day and 5-day triggers match, 30% chance the 10-day trigger will occur without a subsequent 5-day trigger, and 30% chance there is a 5-day trigger without the 10-day pre-activation

# LEARNING FROM THE FORECASTING TECHNOLOGY AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (2 OF 2)

- 3. Very detailed protocols are needed for what happens when the trigger is reached, and who has the authority to say “Go” or “No go”**
  - It was critical to clearly define who at the country level had the authority to determine whether the pilot would be a go, and exactly how this communication would occur
  - Initially, there had been agreement that it was the RC’s responsibility, and that once the 10-day pre-activation trigger was reached, they would speak up if it was NOT a go
  - The 10-day trigger was reached immediately preceding endorsement of the plan. Though a decision was collectively made to not activate the pilot then, given the timing, this clarified the need for confirmation from the RC to all stakeholders “We are a GO!” once learning the thresholds had been reached. This was done without any delay on 4 July 2020
  
- 4. The pre-activation trigger (while termed a 10-day trigger) may actually leave significantly less than 10 days in real preparation time**
  - Due to the times forecasts are received (i.e. late afternoon) and communication times outside work hours, as well as potential hiccups in access to governments websites, the 10-day trigger may only provide 9 days of preparation and implementation time
  - Additionally, flooding may start even earlier (though below danger levels for the trigger)

## 4. INTERVENTION SELECTION AND DESIGN

### **Processes for intervention selection and design:**

- The pilot had initially been conceptualized to scale cash transfers by WFP and BDRCS, complemented by UNICEF health & WASH
- On recommendation of the Resident Coordinator's Office, efforts were made to bring in additional partners to offer "Cash Plus" interventions with gender responsive services, and livelihood support
- CERF allocations to each of the partners were determined through close technical consultation about what would be feasible within the given timeframes in terms of both preparation and implementation (i.e. with a 10-day pre-activation, and 5-day activation trigger)

# LEARNING FROM INTERVENTION SELECTION AND DESIGN (1 OF 3)

## 1. There is a balance to find in starting with what is operationally feasible, and designing actions from a needs-based approach for anticipatory interventions

- Given time constraints, the pilot anchored activities in technical discussions with OCHA about what was the maximum each of the partners would be able to achieve given constraints, and then working back to determine how much it would cost
- There was a strong focus on doing something practical and achievable, which meant partners were asked to simplify their proposals, based on what was truly feasible
- This approach also came with limitations, as it was not explicitly needs driven and did not include a more bottom-up consultative process. However, the RCO was instrumental in bringing in partners to complement unconditional cash

## 2. There were more challenges in scaling unconditional cash transfers in a short time frame than initially envisioned

- Without having more up-front planning time, cash transfers were ultimately more challenging to scale than originally envisioned, with about half the planned reach
- This was primarily due to challenges in establishing the beneficiary lists, as well as administrative lag-times with the financial service provider (bKash)

## LEARNING FROM INTERVENTION SELECTION AND DESIGN (2 OF 3)

### **3. In the event that not all funds are used, it would be useful to have a pre-established agreement between the donor and partner for what will happen with unused funds**

- For the unused WFP funds, CERF had a mechanism in place that enabled WFP to re-programme \$2.4M for cash transfers after flooding had occurred, though this took time to concretize
- Whether unused funds can be seamlessly transitioned by a partner from anticipatory action to regular humanitarian response, or reimbursed to the donor in support of needed cashflow for parallel anticipatory action initiatives, the process would be streamlined by pre-agreement

### **4. Partners appreciated close collaboration and support in intervention design**

- Interviewees found the process for developing interventions very useful, thanks to weekly update meetings where each organization would share their plans and thinking, along with bilateral conversations to refine proposals, and reviewing consecutive drafts of the plan
- There was a strong sense of teamwork in developing a multi-sectoral approach (though targeting remains a challenge, as noted above)
- Ultimately, though some agencies were newer to anticipatory action, they were able to understand and lean on the established framework to offer critical activities

# LEARNING FROM INTERVENTION SELECTION AND DESIGN (3 OF 3)

## 5. Challenges arose with beneficiary identification and coordination

- Partner interviewees described differing strategies and approaches for targeting beneficiaries, with various perspectives on which is best. Issues included whether to make it specific to vulnerability to flooding, or aligning with the Government's social safety net (though these lists may not be recently updated or include the most vulnerable)
- Regardless of the approach, there was little time prior to activation to develop a harmonized approach. It is thus difficult to determine the complementarity of interventions, as the overlap in people reached by cash and non-cash interventions is unclear

## 6. “Cash plus” was an important component of developing partnerships and interventions

- Given the sudden onset floods, the original thinking was to scale WFP and BDRCS cash transfers, complemented with health, WASH and gender-responsive activities by UNICEF
- Once it became clear that UNICEF would not be participating, there was encouragement from the RCO to bring in additional partners who could support needs left unaddressed by cash, including gender-responsive and livelihood related activities
- OCHA and partners widely agreed in the benefits of including non-cash interventions as a way to address important priorities and complement government efforts

## 5. FORECAST-BASED FINANCING

### Processes for establishing forecast-based financing

- The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) set aside up to US\$5.2 million to be released at the monsoon season's first trigger of the 10-day pre-activation to cover essential readiness activities. Funds could be fully used upon the 5-day activation trigger being reached
- Agency allocations: \$4.25 million for WFP, (including for a subgrant to RCRC) \$500,000 to FAO, and \$589,084 for UNFPA
- The Resident Coordinator endorsed the plan on 25 July 2020 and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, pre-approved it on 26 July 2020

## LEARNING RELATED TO FORECAST BASED FINANCING (1 OF 4)

- 1. There is a need to balance and negotiate who incurs the costs of upfront investments in preparedness, without which successful and rapid anticipatory action would not be possible**
  - Conversations between partner agencies, implementing partners and OCHA/CERF revealed a need for greater clarity in how preparatory costs, which might need to be incurred weeks or months before possible flooding, would be covered
  - This was especially true given extremely short timeframes within which agencies were needing to scale up efforts at the country level in order to prepare. Conversations about what costs would be covered by whom took time, delaying work that needed to take place in advance of the plan endorsement and activation
  - Agencies described realizing the need to also invest in capacity building and preparedness to participate in the pilot, advocating with their senior management teams for that funding and support

## LEARNING RELATED TO FORECAST BASED FINANCING (2 OF 4)

### 2. CERF (or the forecast-based financier) needs to determine upfront the financial risk it is willing to take

- Ultimately, CERF took additional financial risk to lengthen lead times for agencies, with partner costs incurred up to six weeks prior to the 10-day pre-activation being reimbursable. Once funding was released with the 10-day trigger, agencies could use funds to cover preparatory activities
- The pilot didn't offer a chance to learn what would have happened if there would have only been a T-10 trigger, but no T-5 trigger, and how the refund process would have gone
- Some interviewees noted that the flexible approach CERF took in this case may not be financially sustainable due to cashflow needs (or mission-aligned) in the long term
- Agencies may need to identify other sources of funding to underwrite preparedness expenses, in the event that the forecast-based financing is not released or the forecast-based financier is unwilling to cover those costs

## LEARNING RELATED TO FORECAST BASED FINANCING (3 OF 4)

### 3. The speed with which funds needed to be transferred tested the limits of internal administrative systems, and highlighted bottlenecks to address and adapt for the future

- Interviewees described discovering during the process what was possible within their agencies for administrative approvals and transfer of funds
- There is wide agreement that understanding and addressing administrative hurdles well in advance is crucial to delivering anticipatory action in time. Such challenges had initially been underestimated, though many were ultimately overcome through ongoing consultation
- A dry-run meeting had been planned. However, the 10-day trigger was reached beforehand, so the meeting was used for final coordination and an abbreviated dry-run of next steps, rather than for the entire pilot
- OCHA/CERF and partner colleagues agreed that the pilot put their internal administrative systems under a stress test, and illuminated what would need to be changed and adapted
- Sub-granting represented an additional step within these administrative processes, raising questions among partners as to the potential for flexibility in CERF granting directly to a more diverse set of partners, if a framework agreement could be reached at HQ levels

## LEARNING RELATED TO FORECAST BASED FINANCING (4 OF 4)

### 4. The experience in Bangladesh raises important questions about development of sustainable financial frameworks for anticipatory action within the humanitarian space

- Conditions in Bangladesh are highly conducive for anticipatory action, with strong humanitarian capacity, a supportive government, as well as the recurrent nature of severe flooding events, to which the pilot brought visibility and focus
- However, there are many competing humanitarian priorities (including the Rohingya refugee crisis, cyclones, the impacts of Covid-19), which also exacerbate vulnerabilities for those suffering from flooding on an annual basis
- Within this context, garnering the resources to scale up anticipatory action in the longer term represents a challenge, particularly with stakeholder concerns about funds being diverted from existing humanitarian needs toward something that may be considered risky
- As CERF's policy is to kick-start and complement a response supported by other funding sources, the question of broader resource mobilization remains, and the extent to which the anticipatory action plan could now be supported by other donors

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION

### Implementation process

- The Anticipatory Action Plan was endorsed by the Resident Coordinator and UN agencies on 25 June 2020, and pre-approved by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on 26 June 2020
- On 4 July 2020, the pre-activation trigger was reached and the Resident Coordinator sent an email confirming that it was a “go”
- A confirmation letter that US\$5.2 million would be released to the agencies was then sent by CERF within 4 hours
- The 5-day activation trigger was reached on July 11, with a flood impact map and list of districts most likely to cross the impact limit
- Agencies began distribution, with cash transfers completed by 14 July, and hygiene and dignity kits distributed by 15 July, and feed within several more days

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- **Q1 2020** Preliminary, informal discussions, conceptualization at HQ
- **Mid-April** Formal go ahead from Bangladesh Resident Coordinator
- **23 April** First HQ/Field coordination call
- **29 April** First draft of pilot document
- **12 June** First draft of CERF project documents
- **24 June** Final draft of pilot document and CERF projects/budgets
- **25 June** Endorsement by Resident Coordinator and heads of agencies
- **26 June** Pre-approval by the Emergency Relief Coordinator
- **4 July** Readiness trigger reached
- **11 July** Activation trigger reached
- **By 14 July** All cash transfers completed
- **By 15 July** All hygiene and dignity kits distributed



# ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

Agency	Activities	Target #	# Reached/ timeframe
WFP	Unconditional cash transfers of 53 USD	55,500 HH	In partnership with local partners, provided unconditional cash transfers of \$53 to around 23,000 households by 14 July.
BDRCS/ RCRC	Unconditional cash transfers	6,000 HH	N/A
UNFPA	Dignity kits and menstrual health management kits for adolescent girls	15,000 women and girls	By July 16, distributed 5,955 dignity kits; 4,500 Menstrual Health Management Kits and equipped 3 district hospitals and 3 health complexes with reproductive health, rape management, and safe delivery kits.
FAO	Distribution of livestock feed, and water-proof storage drums	14,000 HH	In partnership with government counterparts, provided water-proof storage drums to ~7,000 households and animal feed to more than 11,500 households. Reached a total of 18,500 HH.
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>~220,000 people reached (1 HH = 5 people)</b>

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION (1 OF 6)

- 1. The pilot confirmed the potential for rapid disbursement of funding and anticipatory action to reach people before flooding, with real impact on their lives (anecdotal for now)**
  - Within a typical response window, beneficiaries would likely have only been reached within a month of the peak of flooding (noting that the 2020 Monsoon season had three peaks), however in this case over approximately 200,000 people were reached days before
  - A detailed step-by-step protocol for administrative processes following the 10-day pre-activation facilitated the rapid disbursement of funds, with all approvals other than a final confirmation by the Emergency Relief Coordinator having been completed ahead of time
- 2. Colleagues felt empowered by the experience, forging through challenges and leveraging the motivation of all involved**
  - A collaborative and learning mindset enabled partners to move ahead knowing things wouldn't be perfect
  - One interviewee described how their team's "heart and soul" was in it, pushing themselves to reach beneficiaries, and finding great pride in what was achieved

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION (2 OF 6)

### **3. There is significant complexity in targeting the most vulnerable in areas with millions of people living at or below global poverty levels affected by floods**

- The timing and challenges in establishing valid beneficiary lists ultimately limited the number of beneficiaries WFP was able to reach with cash transfers prior to flooding
- According to WFP, 2-3 months are needed to develop a database of the most vulnerable households, so transfers at the time of the flooding could be more streamlined. This was not possible this time, with acknowledgement of possible inclusion/exclusion errors
- Others advocated for using primary methods for beneficiary list development more responsive to the situation on the ground, given rapidly evolving situations
- Finally, more time would be needed for better coordination among partners on the lists

### **4. Time was lost to bottlenecks with financial services providers for cash transfers**

- In addition to challenges with validating beneficiary lists, WFP had to ensure households had mobile devices and authenticated bKash accounts
- Since the 5-day trigger was reached on a Saturday, there were delays in being able to transfer funds to bKash, due to operating hours, though WFP was able to advocate flexibility

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION (3 OF 6)

### **5. The timing of activation so close to endorsement of the plan (i.e. within 8 days) led to significant pressure and stress for OCHA, partners and implementing agencies**

- There were trade-offs in completing the plan on time for the 2020 monsoon season, including challenges with coordinated beneficiary targeting, and advance planning for monitoring and evaluation systems, and a joint communications strategy
- Procurement was also a challenge, though activities were largely defined by what partners had available. Both UNFPA and FAO described value in having advance notice to set quality, quantity and cost agreements with suppliers (including the local private sector for feed)

### **6. Partners learned that, while acting in anticipation of peak flooding, there may already be high water levels in some locations, complicating logistics and delivery**

- The pilot was designed to reach people before a peak threshold where livelihoods are threatened. However, flooding of a less severe nature occurs regularly and prior to the peak.
- UNFPA found that flooding and rains had already begun when the trigger came, making delivery of dignity kits challenging. FAO had similar learning around allocating adequate funds and time for transport in such conditions, including shallow boats to reach people in remote areas, as feed and storage drum distribution requires major logistics

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION (4 OF 6)

### **7. Efforts were made to coordinate closely with national and local government agencies**

- Partners described coordination efforts with national and local government actors, on the part of the Climate Centre's Technical Advisor, the RCO, as well as among partners with local Upuzillas (subdistricts) and implementing agencies once the pilot was activated
- FAO delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, which has significant manpower and grassroots outreach. Though their understanding of disaster management and anticipatory response more specifically was limited, they were grateful for the support and offered rapid and high-quality delivery (though data management has harder)

### **8. In the future, more attention could be given to developing a coherent targeting strategy**

- Partners didn't have time to establish and consistently communicate about a common and coherent targeting strategy to ensure beneficiaries were reached with cash plus
- This would be important for demonstrating a more fully coordinated approach that is inclusive of people most in need of anticipatory assistance, and demonstrating how this can be harmonized with government response systems and social safety net programming

## LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION (5 OF 6)

### 9. Coordination on communications could have used more up-front planning time

- Given the speed with which the pilot was activated after endorsement, as well as the timeframes within which actions were implemented, partner agencies found it challenging to coordinate around the communications aspects of the pilot once it was triggered

### 10. Covid-19 impacted implementation in the following ways:

- Protocols were adapted to remote activities, highlighting the benefits of partnering with agencies and organizations with local trust and engagement
- Arrangements with financial service providers were impacted, and WFP colleagues and partners weren't able to complete beneficiary validation in the field
- Given delays in starting the pilot until April due to the uncertainty and re-adjustments necessary with Covid-19, OCHA and partners lost a lot of pre-planning time, leading to some of the implementation challenges described herein

# LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION – IMPACT EVALUATION (6 OF 6)

## **11. Pre-established data sharing agreements would greatly ease the impact evaluation**

- More time could have been used during the planning process to establish clear data sharing requirements for partner agencies, as well as detailed information on beneficiary targeting
- Because these were not agreed upon in detail ahead of time, this led to challenges in accessing the needed information in order to plan and implement the impact evaluation

## **12. It's important for implementing agencies to own the need for an independent impact evaluation, and to see it as a crucial public good to which they are contributing**

- Agencies must buy-in to the broad humanitarian and sector-wide benefits of an independent evaluation (i.e. contributing to important knowledge and learning that will help save more lives in the future), rather than as an assessment of their performance

## **13. Evaluators must understand the difference between targeting plans and reality, in terms of both location and beneficiaries**

- This is crucial in order to establish valid control groups, sample sizes, and identification strategies. This distinction enables an impact evaluation that maximizes learning without jeopardizing humanitarian objectives, which should always remain the prime objective

**QUESTIONS ON  
SCALING AND  
INSTITUTIONALISATION**



# QUESTIONS ON SCALING AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION (1 OF 2)

## 1. **The pilot successfully scaled anticipatory action in Bangladesh enough to garner serious attention, though it represents a small portion of actual needs**

- Flooding impacted 30% of the country, with 7.5 million people affected. Even though the pilot represented significant scaling up, it also highlights the scale of what is needed. There are hopes the pilot leads to additional support from development partners and donors
- In particular, the fact that establishing beneficiary lists was a major constraining factor suggests the need to align with broader goals for the national safety net system and/or a harmonized approach to vulnerability databases that support a “whole systems approach”

## 2. **There is a lot of interest and inquiry among partners about how to integrate experience and learning from the pilot to advocate for anticipatory action in government processes**

- Learning from the pilot as a “proof of concept” is considered invaluable to inspire and motivate the Government in seeing what is possible with anticipatory action
- However, it’s not yet clear how anticipatory action will fit into the broader picture of current government responses, and it will take a lot of work to harmonize and streamline processes to build true ownership and institutionalization. Partners widely agree that must be the long-term approach for reaching the scale necessary

## QUESTIONS FOR SCALING AND INSTITUTIONALISATION (2 OF 2)

- 3. Partners are eager to understand how the experience and learning from anticipatory action pilots will be institutionalized into OCHA/CERF's way of working**
  - The partnership and engagement in Bangladesh between OCHA, UN-agencies and other partners worked extremely well, with a well-facilitated iterative approach to overcoming challenges and forging ahead with purpose, despite major constraining factors
  - This success leads to an eagerness to understand how an anticipatory approach, and more specifically the rich learning from these pilots, will be institutionalized by OCHA within a broader global strategy in responding to humanitarian need

# CONCLUSION

The anticipatory action pilot in Bangladesh **demonstrates OCHA at their best, and what can be achieved** by building on previous experience, country-based systems, and expertise.

Through **effective coordination and encouragement**, even with a very short turnaround, partners took a major step in **scaling anticipatory action with CERF support**, demonstrating what it takes and the potential human impact.

The **implementation challenges were the “good” kind of challenges**: those that will naturally be experienced at the edge of innovation, and that **support real learning** for those involved and globally.





Rombia Begum withdrawing cash from a bKash agent  
Photo credit: WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud

**THANK YOU**

