# LEARNING FROM THE ANTICIPATORY ACTION PILOT IN SOMALIA

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CENTRE FOR DISASTER PROTECTION

# INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) launched anticipatory action (AA) pilots in three countries: Somalia, Bangladesh and Ethiopia.

The Centre for Disaster Protection supported real-time learning from these pilots by gathering and analyzing qualitative data on important lessons learned from the AA Plan development process, as well as the pilot's activation.

## PURPOSE

1. **Support OCHA in integrating learning** from the plan development process and trigger in Somalia to inform ongoing pilots and future support for AA

2. **Share important lessons** with a global audience interested in the potential for AA to mitigate the impact of disasters on lives and livelihoods



A food distribution to people affected by floods in Eljale, Somalia, May 2020.
Credit: OCHA / Warsame

# LEARNING FROM AA PILOTS

CDP supported UN-OCHA's design of learning activities for the pilots in three areas:

1. The process to put in place AA action plans, and benefits and lessons arising from this (process learning)

2. Developing a Theory of Change and proposed indicators for monitoring intermediate outcomes

3. Potential strategies to document and understand the impact of triggered actions on household welfare

**The focus of this presentation**

**The primary purpose of the process learning effort was to support real-time learning among those working on AA, thereby promoting more effective engagement and decision-making processes for collaborative AA plan development.**

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# FRAMING

- It takes **courage, commitment and leadership** to innovate and advocate for systemic change within organizations, let alone within an entire field

- Much learning occurred over the course of the first pilot (and continues to occur), which has **been integrated into the approach** to current AA plan development

- Partners are excited about and motivated by OCHA **bringing institutional credibility, convening power and large-scale funding** to AA

"**Without courage we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.**"

**- Maya Angelou**

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# METHODOLOGY FOR SOMALIA LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

- **Desk review** of relevant documents, including the Draft Somalia Anticipatory Action Plan, and OCHA's internal Lessons Learned Report

- **24 Qualitative interviews:**
  - **OCHA/CERF Colleagues at HQ (6)**
  - **HQ Colleagues with WFP, IFRC, and START Network (5)**
  - **In-country colleagues with OCHA, the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group and partner UN agencies (13)**

- **Observation** of OCHA and UN-partner coordination and planning meetings

This report is based on ex-post research and learning of the plan development process, as well as real-time observation of meetings and interviews as the pilot was triggered for the first time.

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## BACKGROUND:

"OCHA's mission is to coordinate the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises. OCHA advocates for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all."

## OCHA SUPPORTS HUMANITARIAN ACTION THROUGH:

1. Coordinating emergency response

2. Advocacy for crisis-affected people

3. Humanitarian policy reform

4. Information management

5. Humanitarian financing tools and services

## BACKGROUND:

**OCHA's anticipatory action pilots**

- In 2018, the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) explored use of AA funding to complement humanitarian response functions

- This resulted in the design of pilots to strengthen evidence on the benefits of AA in reducing suffering, loss of life, and the cost of response, and to understand & develop CERF's role

- The AA Plan for **drought in Somalia** was the first, with others now completed and/or underway in a dozen countries

# BACKGROUND:

**Anticipatory action pilot in Somalia**

**The planning process to address the risk of drought in Somalia started in 2019:**

- Initial pilot country identification and planning took place in early 2019

- HQ and in-country partner engagement began in May/June 2019, with design workshops held in Somalia and Kenya in August & September 2019

- Development of the draft AA Plan was completed by September 2019

- The trigger for activating AA and releasing funding was not reached in 2019, though it came very close. In May 2020 the trigger was reached, though not due to drought

# TRIGGER REACHED IN JUNE 2020:

## AA SOMALIA FRAMEWORK TRIGGER:

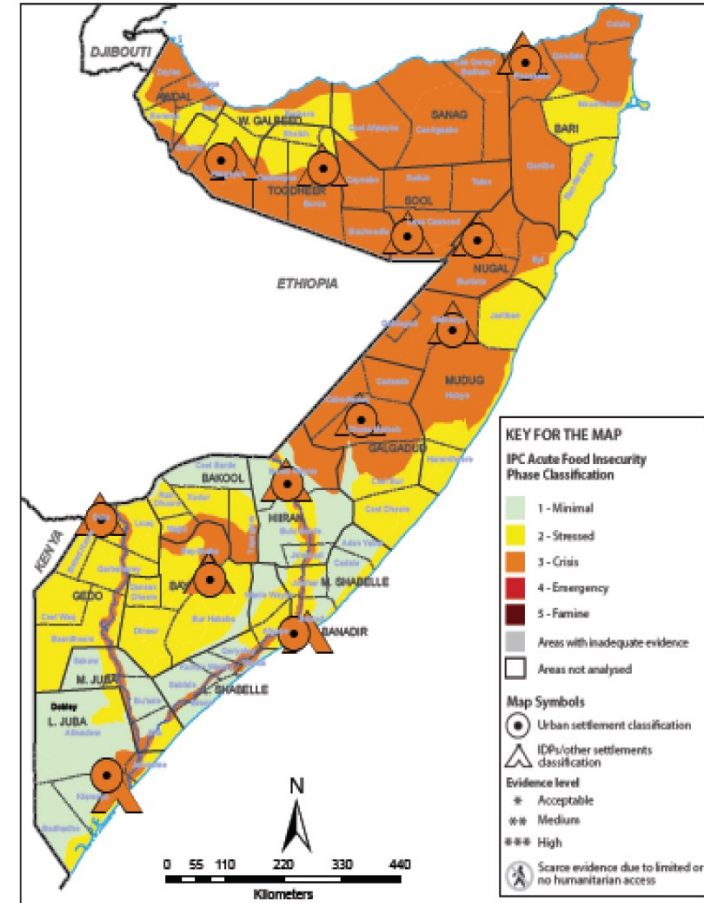The projected population in IPC phase 3+ exceed 20%
**AND**
(a) the projected population in IPC3 is projected to increase by a further 5%
**OR**
(b) the projected population in IPC4+ is 2.5%

PROJECTED FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES, JULY – SEPTEMBER 2020 (FSNAU)



KEY FOR THE MAP

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification

- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Stressed
- 3 - Crisis
- 4 - Emergency
- 5 - Famine
- Areas with inadequate evidence
- Areas not analysed

Map Symbols
- Urban settlement classification
- IDPs/other settlements classification

Evidence level
- * Acceptable
- ** Medium
- *** High
- Scarce evidence due to limited or no humanitarian access

## PLAN ACTIVATION:

**The plan was activated and USD 15 million in CERF funds were released in June 2020 based on the projected food insecurity indicator - due to a triple threat of locusts, flooding and Covid-19**

## OCHA'S RATIONALE FOR TRIGGERING:

- Trigger reached: 22% of the population was projected to be in IPC3+ between July and September (FSNAU)

- Action as default: The function of the trigger is to reduce uncertainty about when to act

- Acting on change in risk: Mitigate the compounding impacts on humanitarian situation of locusts, COVID-19 and flooding (though plan was for drought)

- Signal the need to act early to other contingency financing instruments

- Learning opportunity: Activation advances implementation of anticipatory action, and continued learning

## IMPLEMENTATION:

**Humanitarian clusters implemented AA activities between July and December.**

**CERF funding was disbursed in much shorter timeframes than previously possible following receipt of proposals, thanks to close engagement around proposed activities.**

## CHALLENGES AND TRADE-OFFS WITH ACTIVATION

- Responding to the triple threat called for re-evaluating relevant anticipatory activities/criteria, appropriate geographic targeting, timing, and envelope allocation

- Decision-making related to cluster and geographic allocations required negotiating new processes, given OCHA HQ's role in leading the pilot

- Binding constraint appeared to be capacity to implement, rather than funding

# OVERARCHING LESSONS

1. There are polarities to manage in driving forward a vision for change while listening deeply to partners and in-country colleagues to ensure ownership and contextualization

2. Identify feasible and impactful AA interventions by starting with existing systems and capacity, operational readiness and disaster-specific needs, and build the AA plan and trigger from there

3. Details related to the nature of the trigger, scenario and protocol development, and systems for trigger monitoring need upfront clarification

4. Effectively managing expectations and assumptions supports trust, partnership and patience among stakeholders

5. Major new partnerships may offer prospects for expanded funding, but also come with challenges to negotiate, including institutional readiness for forecast based action

6. Activating the AA plan in response to threats other than drought led to implementation challenges

**"It is a challenging and long-term proposition to shift mindsets and catalyze cultural change, eventually leading to systems change."**

**- Somalia Lessons Learned Report**

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# LESSON 1

**There are polarities to manage in driving forward a vision for change while listening deeply to partners and in-country colleagues to ensure ownership and contextualization.**

- Somalia was a challenging context within which to start piloting AA, given little existing in-country experience with AA and ongoing humanitarian need

- Polarities and trade-offs arose around OCHA leading the pilot and generating in-country understanding, ownership and buy-in via its traditional coordination role

- Reasons for short timeframes included wanting to get support to those needing it and generating evidence on AA

- It takes time to build understanding of AA and shift mindsets. However, the approach and time pressures limited in-country colleagues' ability to take a lead in the effort

## LESSON 2

**Identify feasible and impactful AA interventions by starting with existing systems and capacity, operational readiness and disaster-specific needs, and build the AA plan and trigger from there.**

- OCHA was commended for efforts to truly understand and start from the perspective of operational readiness

- Integrating the AA plan development with existing systems and processes could support it in being viewed and understood as part of a whole approach (while being distinct)

- Learning suggests the importance of starting with risk-specific interventions and operational readiness to then determine a cascading set of relevant indicators for the trigger

## LESSON 3

**Details related to the nature of the trigger (i.e. non disaster-specific), scenario and protocol development, and systems for trigger monitoring need upfront clarification.**

- A non-disaster specific trigger led to ambiguity about whether to release funds allocated for drought when it was reached by the triple threat of Covid-19, locusts and flooding

- Systems were not in place for consistent monitoring of the trigger outside the initial window, or to account for scenarios where it would be reached by causes other than drought

- Real-time challenges arose with partners in how to adapt the AA plan to the crises, as pre-planned actions were designed for mitigating impacts of drought and not aligned with pre-peak timelines for the triple threat

# LESSON 4

**Effectively managing expectations and assumptions (both internally and externally) supports increased trust, partnership and patience among stakeholders.**

- Expectations and assumptions stay invisible until challenged, so learning from Somalia is crucial in understanding what they may be and the implications

- **Internal** – OCHA built new awareness of the time and resources it takes to shift thinking toward more complex and systemic ways of understanding risk and the impacts of disaster and responding appropriately with AA

- **External** – Managing expectations about funding, as well as risk-tolerance, timelines and decision-making processes helps build trust and allows stakeholders to better situate themselves within the process

# LESSON 5

**Major new partnerships may offer prospects for expanded funding, but also come with challenges to negotiate, including institutional readiness for forecast based action.**

- Partnership with the World Bank brought the prospect of significant additional financing and demonstrated what it takes to work at the development/humanitarian nexus, including challenges associated with large institutional shifts

- This required negotiating different institutional cultures, risk preferences, model and indicator choices (including ultimately using food insecurity as a proxy indicator) and adapting accordingly

- This process, however, engendered some skepticism and a sense of lost transparency among humanitarian partners

## LESSON 6

**Activating the AA plan in response to threats other than drought led to significant implementation challenges.**

- Triggering the AA plan for the triple threat led to appreciation, frustration and consternation among stakeholders – it brought much needed funds but called into question a design process focused on drought – with little flexibility to adjust

- This offered an extreme example of a polarity to manage in curating pre-identified activities (designed for drought) to the current scenario (triple threat) without losing time – and highlights the importance of a disaster specific trigger

- Mapping activities to differing timescales for each crisis was very difficult, as was developing a coherent and collective targeting strategy. It's unclear to what extent implemented activities were mitigative in nature

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the first AA pilot undertaken by OCHA, the experience in Somalia offered crucial lessons and insights that have been carried forward into future pilots. This includes OCHA's ongoing commitment to collaborative learning and transparency in sharing lessons widely. Key overarching lessons have been summarized here, with more detailed in the full report.

## The Centre's recommendations included:

- Establish a peer review process of AA plans for feedback and input on the trigger and how it links to anticipatory activities

- Establish clear and detailed protocols for monitoring the trigger, and the process undertaken once it is reached

- Clarify decision-making processes throughout the plan development phase, both internally and externally

- Establish an intentional and comprehensive approach to support understanding and mindset change among key stakeholders

- Bring awareness and responsiveness to how different individuals cope with systems change, and where they may be in the process

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# QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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