

# Evaluation Report of OCHA's Anticipatory Action trigger : Ethiopia

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It was researched and written by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre;

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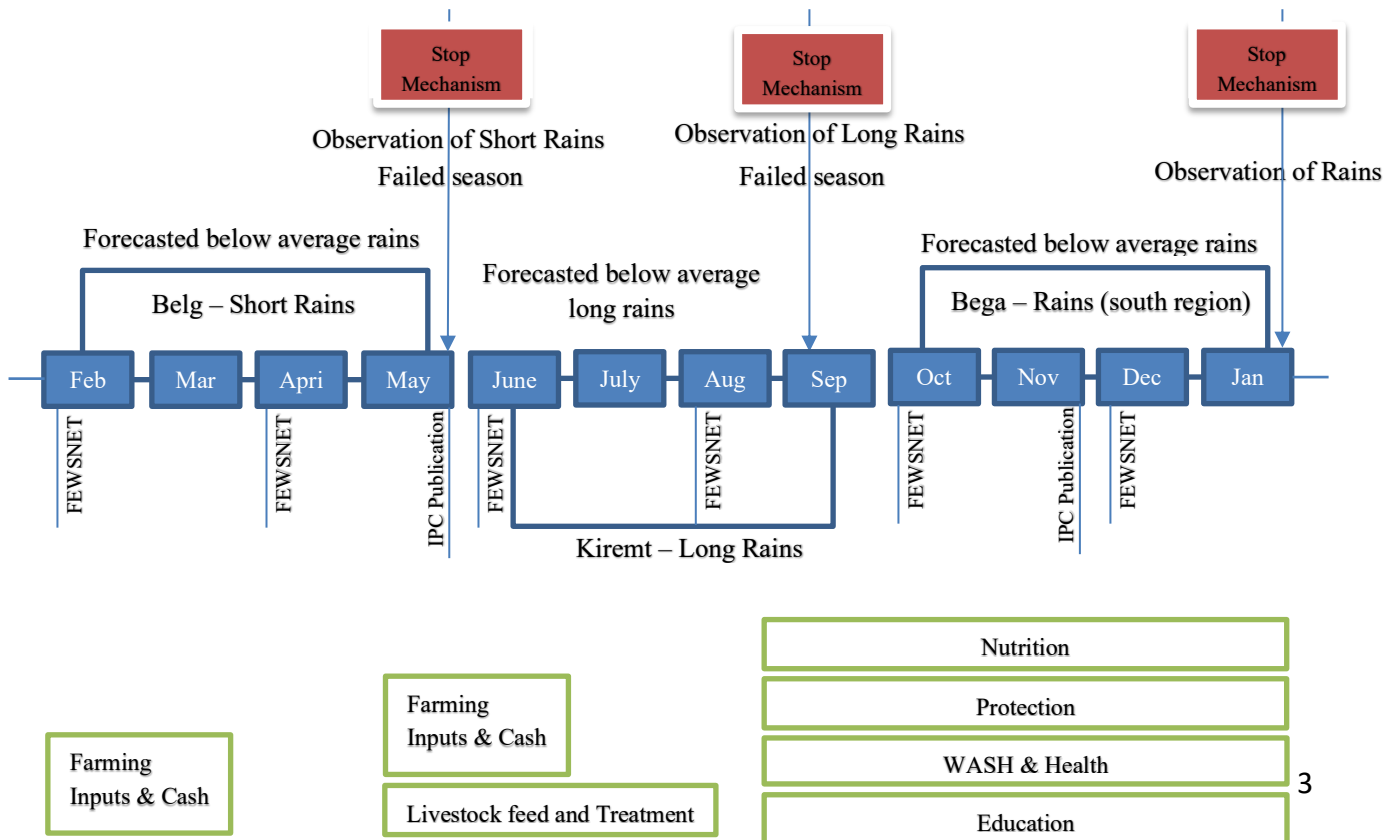
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## 1. Executive Summary

This report aims to identify the strengths and limitations of UN OCHA’s Anticipatory Action trigger in Ethiopia, by examining both the development process and the effectiveness of the trigger mechanism. Key findings focus on 1) streamlining the process for ongoing trigger refinement and development, 2) strengthening top-down /bottom-up linkages between the trigger design and targeted action planning processes, and 3) iterative adjustment informed by coupling evaluation of the trigger with impact assessment, integrated within the context of Ethiopia’s full humanitarian intervention cycle.

Several timeline tools have been derived from research informed by interviews with stakeholder groups to assist in visualising the trigger cycle and support integration, sequencing and coordination among the technical and implementation partners as part of the on-going trigger assessment and adjustment cycle. Further details on the trigger analysis methods and findings are provided in the full report and appendices. Appendices include a synthesis of key learnings from Ethiopia’s trigger experience that can help to inform anticipatory action trigger development processes elsewhere. Key recommendations based on findings are summarized below, with three timeline tools as visual aids:

### 1. Streamline Ethiopia’s trigger monitoring & continuing development process

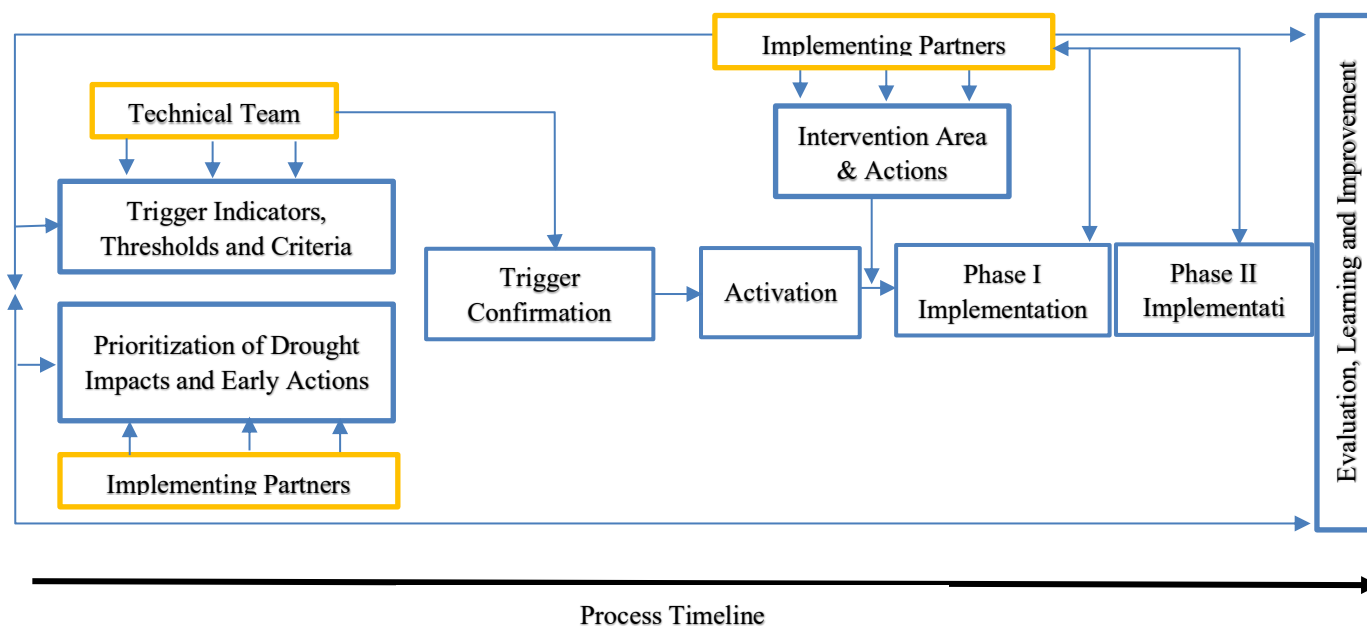


**Figure A. Sequencing timeline for OCHA’s Anticipatory Action trigger, integrating observational data sets, climate outlooks, and food security outlooks with Ethiopia’s seasonal calendar and sectoral interventions**

Recommendations for trigger streamlining in Ethiopia encompass clarifying the process with a sequencing timeline, while also building transparency and ownership among implementing partners at the country level in order to cultivate effective demand for further trigger development:

- ✓ Progressively automate the trigger so that decisionmaking is more data-driven based on scientific observations and analysis, while also involving stakeholders in threshold-setting - which requires subjective decisions.
- ✓ Use a sequencing timeline (Figure A) as a tool to clarify the process for integrating observational data sets, climate outlooks and food security outlooks within the trigger, and to align action planning (including a ‘stop mechanism’) and sectoral interventions with Ethiopia’s seasonal calendar.
- ✓ Consider further developing the role of OCHA’s experimental dashboard as an objective visualisation tool for monitoring the trigger, to provide more of a decision tree, as well as transparency to a widening set of stakeholders.

**2. Strengthen top-down / bottom-up linkages between Ethiopia’s trigger design team and targeted action planning teams**



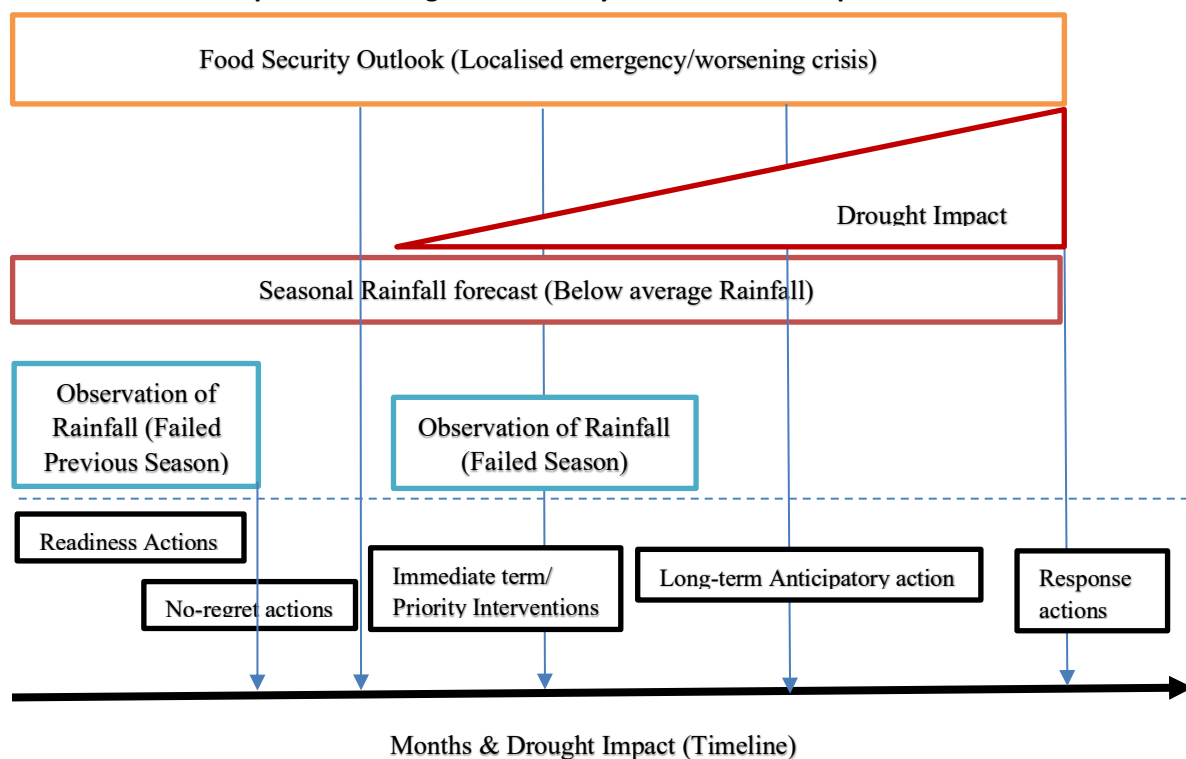
**Figure B: Process timeline for Anticipatory Action in Ethiopia, illustrating key feedback loops for mutually informed decisionmaking between technical and implementing partner teams**

The top-down, largely OCHA-driven, trigger design process needs to increasingly involve national stakeholders at key decision points to review and improve Ethiopia’s trigger and in order to build buy-in for demand-driven development and expanding use of the trigger. The trigger design process was not adequately connected w/targeting, resulting in implementation delays following triggering. Clear feedback loops between the trigger design team and targeting team need to inform the continuing process of trigger refinement and development. This will need to take into consideration both the return period of forecasts and the phasing of early action. Building “bottom-up” buy-in through explicit process linkages is also crucial to advance anticipatory action as a fully integrated normalized way of working, and to ensure the sustainability of Ethiopia’s trigger mechanism.

Key recommendations for strengthening trigger design and targeting linkages:

- ✓ The Process Timeline for AA in Ethiopia (Figure B) can serve as a guidepost in systematizing process timelines and sequencing to strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement & coordination, especially in adjusting the trigger return period and refining leadtimes.
- ✓ Continual improvement of trigger design requires closing top-down/bottom-up feedback loops with stakeholders; this also builds the support, transparency & inclusion which are keys to ownership, and sustained involvement of on-the-ground partners in the AA process.
- ✓ Fully integrating AA helps to change mindset, enabling a growing roster of implementing partners to act earlier on, in a more flexible, nimble, agile way; Ethiopia’s trigger sets the stage for harnessing AA to scale up and out, as a strategy to cope with uncertainty and build resilience, also harnessing good conditions in a changing climate.

**3. AA success = Impact + Learning -> Iterative cycle of continual improvement**



**Figure C: Integrating timeline** for suggested sequencing of phased Anticipatory Action along Ethiopia's climate information and drought impact timeline and within the humanitarian preparedness and response cycle.

Ethiopia's anticipatory action trigger worked well however it involved an unanticipated phased activation. This timeline indicates a proposed sequencing for a phased trigger, including a clear demarcation of the transition to response. Possible adjustment should be expected to further refine and tailor the trigger following every activation. Over the course of iterative activation, assessment should focus on the effectiveness of each phase of action triggered as well as the effectiveness of the overall phased approach. Assessing the effectiveness of the trigger should be integrated into the assessment of the impact of the actions it is used to trigger. Iterative, inclusive and integrated trigger evaluation is fundamental to making incremental improvements to the trigger mechanism as well as stimulating continuing stakeholder learning, capacity building and demand for anticipatory action.

- ✓ Improving trigger effectiveness requires iterative evaluation of the trigger to be coupled with anticipatory action impact evaluation.
- ✓ Conduct a post-activation trigger evaluation as part the MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) methodology for impact evaluation every time trigger activation occurs, as illustrated in the sequencing timeline (Figure C).
- ✓ Expect potential adjustments to both trigger and actions, based on after-action analysis; also ensure that trigger and AA assessment and learning are linked to and inform evaluation of overall response effectiveness.

## 2. Introduction

### Aims

This report describes the assessment conducted by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre for UNOCHA, to evaluate the trigger mechanism for anticipatory action (AA) in Ethiopia. This evaluation aims to understand the process and operational constraints of the trigger mechanism's development; understand and evaluate the available forecasts; assess the effectiveness of the trigger itself; and suggest future process improvements. It focuses on two main objectives:

1. Learning from the process of collectively developing the trigger mechanism for AA in Ethiopia, and
2. Evaluating its effectiveness, including in regard to: accuracy, interpretability, simplicity, timing, and legitimacy.

The evaluation of this pilot project offers valuable opportunities to reflect on both the strengths and limitations of the collaborative development process and the trigger mechanism, and learning is expected to inform both the immediate improvement of the mechanism during this pilot and more efficient approaches that can strengthen other AA pilots.

### Background

Humanitarian response usually takes place after a crisis has occurred. In an effort to address the effects of food insecurity in Ethiopia, the United Nations and partners are using the latest data and predictive analytics to forecast major drought-related food insecurity and act before disaster hits. This includes a pilot in Ethiopia, which is highly vulnerable to climate-related shocks and stresses, more frequently to seasonal droughts, erratic rainfalls and prolonged dry spells. The AA pilot aims to use a targeted, anticipatory approach to mitigate the impact of possible droughts before they occur, leading to a more timely, effective, efficient and dignified solution to respond to and ultimately reduce humanitarian needs.

Drought-related food insecurity can be predicted, and the pilot project has developed an anticipatory action framework (AAF), which combines three pre-agreed components: forecast and triggers; anticipatory actions; and finance. This evaluation explores UNOCHA's trigger mechanism, one element of the AAF. The trigger mechanism is a two-step determination tool, monitored by the Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD): it firstly determines projected humanitarian need as captured by a food security index, and secondly determines whether drought conditions are projected. An activation would only be triggered if both criteria are met in at least one ADMIN1-region.

For Food Insecurity, the trigger leverages short-term (3-month) and long-term (6-month) projections and the criterion is met whenever one of the following two conditions are met:

- ✓ At least 20% population of one or more ADMIN1 regions projected at IPC4+
- ✓ At least 30% of ADMIN1 population projected at IPC3+ AND increase by 5 percentage points in ADMIN1 pop. projected in IPC3+ compared to current state

For Drought, the trigger leverages seasonal rainfall forecasts from ICPAC, NMA, NMME or IRI as well as the analysis of food insecurity drivers published by Global-IPC or FEWSNET. It triggers when one of the following two conditions are met:

- ✓ At least 50% probability of below average rainfall from at least two seasonal rainfall forecasts
- ✓ Drought named as a driver of the deterioration of the situation in food security report

### 3. Methodology

#### Desk Review

We first conducted a desk review to ensure we fully understood the description of the trigger mechanism and the data, forecasts, and thresholds chosen; information was gathered on the data sources and the forecasts used as well as the stakeholders involved.

#### Interviews

##### *Selection of Interviewees*

Based on the desk review, we characterised the different stakeholder groups to include in the evaluation process: trigger design team, science partners, national and UN system implementers. CHD provided the initial contact information for many of the stakeholders, and approximately 20 interviews were conducted in total, across the four stakeholder groups. We aimed to encompass input from across this range of groups so that we could compare the views of people with different roles, responsibilities, and priorities, and also used some snowball sampling to interview as many relevant stakeholders from within each group as possible.

##### *Questionnaire Development*

An extensive questionnaire was developed, with input from CHD, aiming to encourage insights from all stakeholders on both the trigger development process and the effectiveness of the trigger itself. Containing a series of 18 questions, with several sub-questions, it is included as an Appendix. To enable us to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the responses, three types of questions were included: Yes/No, answers based on a scale of 1 to 5, and open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was used as a basis to develop tailored interview guides for each stakeholder group, so that we could ask the most relevant questions for each group. For transparency and so they could see the full scope of the evaluation, the questionnaire was later shared with all interviewees, encouraging them to email any further insights based on the full range of questions.



This allowed us to gather deep insights from each group based on their contribution to the trigger, and a wide range of insights overall.

### *Interview Analysis*

We used qualitative analysis of interview responses to compare the viewpoints across all interviewees, highlighting both the shared and conflicting perspectives across stakeholder groups. This enabled us to extract the common themes and priorities within each stakeholder group so that we could also draw out comparisons between the different groups.

### *Feedback*

To ensure stakeholders agree with their reported perspectives, a draft was circulated to interviewees for review, with the attribution of others' contributions redacted to encourage feedback on accuracy without engaging in debate at this stage. The report also benefitted from critical review by members of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre's Forecast-based Financing (FBF) team.

## 4. Results & Findings - Process of Trigger Development

The first focus of evaluation is on the strengths and limitations outlined by interviewees concerning the trigger development process, then on its limitations and operational constraints.

### **4.1. Strengths**

#### Consistent communications

Consistency of communications between the varied actors involved in the development of the trigger was noted as a strength of the process. The trigger design team (CHD) expressed satisfaction with the level of consultation with different organisations, noting the value of back-and-forth communication that ensued, and that this was particularly positive given that all communication had to be conducted remotely. One UN interviewee (from FAO) expressed satisfaction that the debate they initiated around which sectors should be involved in AA was taken seriously and acted upon. Another (from WHO) said that they learned a lot about AA from the many discussions that took place, and they appreciated the back-and-forth over time on financial allocation amounts. UN implementing partners

appreciated the open nature of communications with the CERF/OCHA team and were also generally positive about efforts to keep everyone informed with overall updates and potential trigger timelines.

### Inclusion of a range of stakeholders

Many interviewees described satisfaction with the range of stakeholders included in the development process, although at what stage and to what extent remains open to improvement. The trigger designers were enthusiastic about successful collaboration with the scientific community, the Ethiopian government and other international organisations in the country. Transparency and inclusion in developing the trigger were seen to be helpful in lending impartiality and building ownership of the trigger. UN implementing partners also expressed support for an inclusive process, with general agreement that the right people were involved in the development of the trigger. One UN interviewee (from FAO) noted that taking the approach of working via clusters was particularly successful, as it was both inclusive and time efficient while allowing the engagement of different technical perspectives. Another (from WHO) noted that:

*“This was really a participatory process, with big engagement across different partners and across different stakeholders.”*

Partners were generally satisfied that their input was taken into consideration and that the decision wasn't made by OCHA alone and “imposed on partners”.<sup>1</sup>

### Progress, not perfection

A number of different stakeholders acknowledged that perfection should not be the objective of this pilot, and that ‘good enough’, with a focus on impact, is preferred. This is important because for years many organisations have been working on the technical analysis to determine a drought trigger, with no single ‘perfect’ answer. The trigger design team were impressed that there was agreement that, despite the fact that this trigger was not perfect, it proved good enough to start the process, and

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<sup>1</sup> One UN agency (WHO) appreciated the open discussion with the CERF team, in particular regarding their experience requesting additional funding for early actions, whereby after some discussion, their concerns were acknowledged, and the requests were granted.

were satisfied with this ability to reach agreement on an ‘imperfect’ proposal. Similar sentiment was underscored by a UN implementer (from WHO), who said:

*“If you wait for something to be perfect, you’ll never do anything. You have to start from somewhere... The most important part is to move forward, not to stagnate in trying to be perfect. We will never be perfect. We need more progress than perfection”.*

Noting that this is the starting point of a learning by doing process, another UN implementer (from FAO) highlighted that, as a new initiative, it is important simply to start somewhere; the approach will be revised and improved with time, but it marks a good place to start.

#### Building on lessons learned from previous pilots

The trigger design team cited lessons drawn from Somalia’s experience which informed incorporating more scientific climate forecasts in the indicators to complement food security projections, and increased effort to be more targeted. Multiple stakeholder groups in Ethiopia expressed appreciation for building on lessons from similar pilots in other countries as valuable to trigger development.

#### The trigger succeeded in doing what it was designed to do

The trigger design team spoke with pride that this collective effort, particularly by the country team, demonstrated the ability to direct impactful funding to Ethiopia which otherwise would not have reached the country. While one UN implementer (from WHO) commented positively on the trigger’s ability to open up space for funding, another (from FAO) described an initial negative reaction from the non-UN humanitarian community to the idea of AA, explaining that the mechanism was at first perceived to be a way for the UN to access funding and bypass the standard selection of partners<sup>2</sup>.

## **4.2. Limitations and Operational Constraints**

### Length of the development process

A frequently raised issue was the lengthy investment of time and energy required in trigger development. Several UN implementers commented that the process was quite slow and very long.

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<sup>2</sup> This highlights the larger question of who AA funding is channeled to.

Some found the amount of time demanded to be a serious constraint given several other major events and competing emergencies to deal with simultaneously. Trigger development was described as “lengthy discussions”, “process heavy”, “laborious”. Albeit negative feedback on the long process, parallel feedback praised the space for debate and “lots of healthy discussions”.

### Sequencing of the development process

The trigger design process was undertaken in parallel to the planning of implementers’ early actions, with little back and forth between the two processes, despite the fact that they are inherently linked. There are chicken/egg issues that require back and forth between the trigger design and targeting teams, especially around threshold-setting. For example, the threshold percentage of population in each IPC level required to trigger represents a level of appetite for risk, hence the input of implementers at this decision point is important to the design of the trigger mechanism.

The approach taken in this pilot was top-down, with triggers set by the ‘experts’ and communicated to implementers. The UN implementers seemed satisfied to have triggers determined separately by scientific experts as it gave them confidence in the trigger, because they trust the science and see experts as credible and holding authority. However, because these bottom-up linkages were missing, one implementer (from GBV Area of Responsibility/UNFPA) commented on the difficulty of being expected to develop the early actions before having details on the trigger itself:

*“A potential weakness is what gets developed first: we were developing interventions without understanding the triggers... The sequencing could have been stronger”*

The trigger design team also commented that engaging with climate scientists earlier on in the process would have been helpful in determining the trigger, and in giving direction to the implementers, particularly around lead times and time-appropriate interventions. They said this pilot was useful in producing learnings on the sequencing of the development process:

*“We can now also start to see how to map the structure of the trigger development process with what info is needed at what point, in order to set up for the next step.”*

As decisions around trigger thresholds and indicators are not purely science based, but also values based, there should be more engagement between the trigger design team and the targeting/implementing team going forward.

#### Selection of the hazard

One UN implementer (from WHO) posited that the selection of the anticipated hazard more or less defines the general trigger mechanism and determines the key agencies to lead implementation, and while a participatory process was employed to determine the early actions and steps once the hazard had been identified, they argued that the more significant decision was the choice of hazard itself. They questioned who chose drought as the hazard, to what extent the country team had been involved in this decision, and why this too had not been a participatory process. The OCHA country team mentioned having very little influence on the selection of drought, as this was decided from the headquarters level - from whose perspective there was consensus. Differing views highlight the importance of communicating how such decisions are made, justifying why, and ensuring stakeholder participation even at this early stage of the trigger design process.

#### Flow of understanding anticipatory action

There was a mixed response as to the flow of understanding on AA both between and within participating agencies and institutions. Most of the UN implementing partners were familiar and comfortable with the concept, however one agency (UNHCR) expressed a need for additional guidance and training on AA and what it involves that is different from other CERF funding:

*“I think this pooled funding lacks the concrete guidance of all of the other pooled funding where the guidance is very clear.”*

This is important to recognise, as assumptions, hierarchies or silos in the internal organisation of UN partners may be limiting factors in building a shared baseline understanding of AA. Understanding and engagement in the process must flow from the focal points to the larger institutional teams, which did not seem to happen in this case. The team in question requested that there be further

information sharing, training, or workshops with a broader audience, beyond just those involved in technical trigger development and planning, and particularly for those who are not familiar with AA<sup>3</sup>.

*“It’s been difficult for us to understand the concept... The concept and what is expected of us weren’t clear. ”*

Another UN implementer (from WHO) explained that, while they were satisfied with their own understanding of the process, partners may have been engaged at different times, which affects the level of shared understanding. They thought it best to bring everyone on board to the same level of understanding right from the beginning, so no one falls behind during the discussions.

#### Uncertainty on timelines for AA and response

A number of interviews revealed uncertainty around how AA fits with response programming. Given that the same agencies tend to implement both, it is important to have clarity around these timelines. In interviews with UN implementers, one participant (from WHO) suggested establishing a trigger for rapid response, to determine at what point the anticipatory actions move into response actions:

*“At what point do we move from anticipating into responding? I don't think that has become clear in this country.”...“Unless you have clear timelines the two become superimposed.”*

Acknowledging the challenges of working in a different way to the implicit standard ‘rapid response’ mindset, and that there is a lack of clarity on where AA fits, the trigger design team felt that this would emerge as a learning from the pilot projects. Implementing partners emphasised that AA is helpful for the response actions that follow, as it saves on time and resources, and noted a need for clarifying how AA financing can be spent, i.e. whether it can no longer be used once response activities begin.

#### Clarifying roles and responsibilities

A UN implementer (from WFP) noted their surprise with the communication that emergency food assistance is not an anticipatory action, resulting in the food cluster activities being taken out of the

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<sup>3</sup> They were keen for training, as being much more useful than “simply reading through lots of documents”.

funding allocation. Given WFP has a body of institutional experience and expertise in AA, is a key stakeholder for AA in Ethiopia and is currently developing its own Forecast-Based Financing project for drought in the Somali region, there seems to be a missed opportunity here to collaborate and build on existing knowledge to develop Ethiopia's trigger. This points to opportunities in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different agencies involved in both trigger design and implementation, with a view to how other experience in Ethiopia can help to refine the trigger as well as how respective programming fits together and may be able to layer in additional financing linked to the trigger.

### Need for a stop mechanism

Part of the rules-setting of the trigger that was missing from the development process is the determination of what is known as a 'stop mechanism', which allows for early actions to be reduced and halted completely if the forecast changes and no further actions are required. Without such a mechanism, it is unclear what process to follow if the forecast changes dramatically and some stakeholders want to call off AA, which may even be underway. Although stakeholders interviewed had not considered specific scenarios, the need to address this gap was galvanised when the hypothetical question was asked, "what if AA is triggered for drought, cash transfer begins, and there is a dramatic improvement in the forecast for rains: should you stop, or complete the operation, and if some people have received cash but others have not, what do you tell them?"

## 5. Results & Findings - Effectiveness of Trigger /satisfaction

### 5.1. Overall satisfaction

The trigger design team (CHD) expressed overall satisfaction with the effectiveness of the trigger, given that it did trigger when needed and expected:

*"Pretty confident we'd trigger - and was the goal. We got funding when needed, did the job, built enough of a case for funds to be disbursed for impact - whether efficient or not, but did the job." ... "We pulled it off - some strengths in the simplicity, triggered at right time, but in future have to see if triggering too much"*

Although there are mixed responses among implementing partners, particularly the UN agencies, most seem more or less satisfied with the effectiveness of the trigger.

*“To the extent that the trigger is able to open up space for funding - I would give it between 3 and 4 [out of 5]. We still have room for development and improvement.”*

Still, stakeholders share concerns relating to the limited time it provided for implementing actions, considering that a lot of preparatory work, such as partnership agreements and procurement which had to be done, did not match up well with the constraints of the defined window of opportunity.

## **5.2. Choice of Indicators**

The trigger makes use of two sets of indicators: the seasonal rainfall forecast and the food insecurity projection, the former being the weather phenomenon leading to drought, while the latter entails the impact of drought; and both do not operate on the same timeline. Perhaps weather/impact “combo” indicator framing functions might be viewed as a failsafe set of triggers; but drought is a complex phenomenon and there can be several instances when either of the triggers are met and both are not necessarily complementing each other. Also, drought-related crises can last for several years, as witnessed by Ethiopia in the past, therefore the drought triggers should consider a long-term perspective on the changes of the different indicators. This is rather important when a phased approach to implementation is followed, as with Ethiopia’s first activation. Although not the original intention, a phased approach did provide room for acting early under less certainty. Some implementers (particularly from GBV Area of Responsibility/UNFPA) argued that since delay of the 2nd tranche for activation affects implementation, this should have been thought through from the start during the design of the trigger.

*“That the triggers did not seem to completely fit for purpose, and it ended up splitting the trigger, which should have been thought through at the start. Ended up with late 2nd tranche activation”*

Had there been more connection between the two aspects of triggering in the development of the actions, greater coherence and communication with implementers might have improved effectiveness. This could help build trust and confidence going forward, in turn enabling greater streamlining and automating of operations. The OCHA country team highlighted the fact that drought is a complex phenomenon, and while the approach to making the indicators for triggering simple



enough is highly appreciated, perhaps more elaboration is necessary to clarify the type(s) of drought being predicted and consider cumulative seasonal effects to better tailor the selection of indicators.

*“There needs to be clarity in what type of drought we are trying to predict through these indicators. Also, it would be good to integrate the rainfall seasons in the trigger. In certain areas, there are consecutive rainfall seasons, so any previous failed rainy season can lead to food insecurity (drought) in those areas.”*

The central elements of the trigger are the Global IPC indicators, however the trigger design team (CHD) and others highlighted some of the challenges using both IPC and FEWSNET products, with respect to the timing of the projections, data-sharing and transparency in decision-making. Their desire is for a stronger role for quantitative scientific climate inputs to increase the objectivity of the trigger. Considerable frustration was expressed with the limited documentation on methodology, i.e., understanding how the projections are derived so they can be analysed to define the trigger.

*“just to be able to be more transparent with different forecasts and more quantitative trigger in future”*

Concerns were also shared with the difficulty of understanding the differences between IPC and FEWSNET products, pointing to a need for greater transparency in data availability, as well as the underlying calculations used. Although FEWSNET makes use of several indicators such as successive seasons of below-average rains, flooding in riverine areas, livestock disease, armyworm infestation, conflict, inadequate humanitarian assistance, and extremely high food prices, the way all these indicators are assessed and relevant calculations done still remain a black-box to the outer world. Future trigger development perhaps needs to allow for consideration of these different types of indicators that is more open to analysis than the current IPC process and FEWSNET calculation.

The trigger could have highly benefited from the use of observational data sets from previous rainfall season monitoring. As one UN implementer (from WFP) reflected:

*“We sort of rushed to discuss and come up with triggers, we should have used climate indicators – to predict what is likely to happen to the end of the year.”*

Noting that different regions of Ethiopia observe different rainy seasons, and failure of one of the rainy seasons can be a crucial indication of higher likelihood of drought if the rainfall for the upcoming

season is also forecasted to be below average, the OCHA country team specifically raised this point encouraging more consideration of the use of climate indicators and monitoring of previous rainfall seasons. As is often the case in most parts of Ethiopia, some areas observe consecutive rainy seasons where there is a short rains season (Belg) running from February to May, followed by the long rains season (Kiremt) between June and mid-September. Monitoring of these rainfall seasons can be especially helpful as there are high uncertainties in the seasonal forecast for these months.

### **5.3. Setting of Thresholds**

For each indicator (set of trigger criteria), it remains unclear on what basis the thresholds need to be set (i.e., 50 percent probability for seasonal forecast, and percentage of population in food insecurity as per IPC class). The trigger design team is already getting a sense that the 50 percent probability for the seasonal forecast is too high for drought, considering that the threshold was not met in the recent activation when the food insecurity indicator did reach the threshold. Consensus among stakeholders is a good starting point, however the overall process of threshold-setting needs to become increasingly data-driven to streamline and further automate the trigger going forward. Perhaps more work is necessary going forward to calibrate these thresholds based on correlations with past drought events and impacts.

WHO seems quite comfortable with the way the population percentage thresholds have been set: considering both the scenarios with a higher proportion of the population food insecure but for relatively few areas, as well as with a lower proportion of the population food insecure but more widespread. However, implementing partners did question waiting for the percentage thresholds to be reached when they already start to see issues on the ground. Some implementers believe that the population threshold should be lower, as using the current threshold on the percentage of population might leave a larger chunk of the most vulnerable behind and unsupported.

*“Of course, we need a threshold but in real life we need to look at case by case basis”*

Recognising that CERF AA is not necessarily targeting lower scale food security crises (given other instruments for this), as more places will trigger with a lower threshold it would definitely require more resources, more capacity, and more work to implement. Although it may be difficult to reconcile

with an automated trigger-based mechanism, this highlights a tradeoff in that the trigger should also be flexible enough to cater for tailoring with some agility.

#### **5.4. Accuracy**

There is a general agreement among the OCHA team, at headquarters and country level, and among UN implementing partners, that the trigger was accurate enough to deliver tangible benefit. Nevertheless, it is well acknowledged that trigger accuracy can and will be improved over time.

*“Trigger should be linked to geographical targeting”.*

The OCHA country team and most of the UN implementers share a common view that the trigger mostly aimed to define a broad geographic area that is likely to be impacted by drought in the coming months, so it is understandable that with areas still too broad, no further sets of criteria and less guidance on the targeting and prioritizing of the intervention areas, additional analysis was necessary for the country team and the implementers to use it. More rigorous analysis for targeting had to follow, in order to understand which region/pockets or groups would have more drought impacts. OCHA’s country team feel strongly that impact analysis needs to be linked to the trigger mechanism, and they see this currently as a missing piece in the overall trigger and AAF.

The mandate of the trigger design team was for the trigger to provide information just on the timing of activation to dictate the release of the AA funds. The whole other process of identifying the impact areas and vulnerable groups for interventions was the implementing agencies’ responsibility.

*“Trigger is looking at widespread food insecurity, we are not using a community-based approach, rather the trigger caters for a large-scale response, this is a basic requirement for CERF. We are interested in the type of events only, in terms of targeting it was up to implementers to further analyze and prioritize. Triggers in Somalia were at national level, but Ethiopia pilots looked at sub national level”.*

Perhaps this message was not well communicated among the country team and implementers, leading to a general assumption that targeting would be clear based on this information. However, it is always desirable to have the trigger processes incorporate both the elements of when and where information, regardless of the scale and scope at which the AAF operates.

*“Every region has its various specificities - you can't apply a ones-size-fits all in Ethiopia. Different regions are like two different country operations. It is difficult - can't use the same mold across the country.”*

Given that the trigger was looking at a much broader area, the concomitant development of guidance on indicators and criteria for targeting becomes even more pertinent for the implementing agencies, to ensure that the given (inherently limited) lead time is utilised to its fullest. There was surprisingly little mention of the need for a lot more scenario planning based on the trigger, which would allow this targeting gap to be bridged before the next activation.

### **5.5. Timing and Trade Offs**

While the trigger design team felt confident regarding the lead time provided by the trigger for early action implementation, there was a mixed response from the implementers. Participants from two agencies (FAO and UNHCR) shared the view that the timeline and the lead time was not reasonable to implement some activities in the early action.

*“A fundamental issue - was the timing sufficient for UN agencies to actually do things on the ground? - need partnership agreement from the government and this takes a lot of time and follow up in Ethiopia. When you factor in partnership agreement it leaves you no time.”*

Some interventions require more lead time while some require less; perhaps that was the reason some sector-specific interventions (e.g., health) were prioritized in the second tranche of activation. The trigger design team seems to expect that streamlining will naturally result from activation, whereby the load will be lightened for some activities that felt heavier the first time as they will not need to be redone from scratch each time AA is planned or triggered. In addition, from the first activation, a timeline for the trigger is established, that correlates to the sequencing of actions by different actors, which first needs to be codified in order to begin to serve as a guide for optimal timing of implementation for subsequent activation.

While the trigger was being developed, the implementing agencies were identifying the crisis timeline, required lead time and early actions. The pressures of time and crisis circumstances did not

allow adequate back and forth discussion and feedback to guide the trigger design process. The trigger design team shared concerns with coordinating the sequencing of the development process:

*“Trigger development and anticipatory action went in parallel. Having more clarity what needs to start when seemed necessary, while the trigger was being developed, same time implementers were also figuring out the crisis timeline, lead time, actions.”*

WHO colleagues strongly highlighted the information gap around the time interval between the first sign of drought and the peak impact; resulting in the effective implementation time for early action remaining still vague and uncertain. The Ethiopia pilot’s split activation was an ad-hoc decision, assuming some actions can wait as they did not require much lead time, but this needs to first be discussed and agreed among the country team and the implementers. As one implementer (from GBV Area of Responsibility/UNFPA) noted:

*“Sooner with less certainty is better. Hindsight is a great thing - I think we should have gone earlier to have an appetite for risk, to do it properly and not scrambling now.”*

Most agree that acting sooner in less certainty would allow them to initiate certain time sensitive processes. In an interview with FAO, one participant mentioned they always need more time to prepare and intervene effectively. They would prefer to get a heads up 6 to 8 months in advance (with uncertainty), and later get it confirmed with 3 to 4 months lead time, which would be more relevant and useful for the agricultural sector. UNHCR, WHO and GBV Area of Responsibility/UNFPA shared similar concerns on the need for longer lead time, despite less certainty at that stage, as it would provide more time in terms of preparedness, which is indeed necessary given that Ethiopia has a very unique context and so many unforeseen factors come into play.

More clarity and understanding of implementation leadtimes are necessary for the trigger design and to guide future activation, particularly when a phased approach and trigger are chosen.

## **5.6. Legitimacy & Interpretability**

Interviews revealed that overall, partners understand the trigger enough to trust it. This is partly because the trigger and indicators are simplified to the extent possible, although it can sometimes be

a bit confusing that there are a number of criteria per indicator for the trigger to meet. However, the use of well-accepted IPC indicators helps stakeholders to trust and understand the triggers.

The trigger development process was also consultative and collaborative, with several engagements and regular check-ins and updates, which led to participants seeing the trigger as legitimate and trustworthy<sup>4</sup>. This process ‘piggybacked’ on long-standing pre-existing relationships between these actors, which provided most of the implementers a basis of trust that precluded needing to fully understand the technical basis. Legitimacy does not require deep technical understanding; it simply requires sufficient clarity in communications that it is trustworthy. As one implementer (from GBV Area of Responsibility/UNFPA) explained:

*“I think it’s fairly understandable from a non-science background. Maybe science people want to see more.”*

The OCHA country team flagged the issue around justifying the triggering for particular regions. There is a feeling that the unit of analysis in the current trigger mechanism is too broad, as some regions are very big and have different climatic areas.

*“The trigger is understandable, however the only question that came up was why this region has been triggered but not the other region, the vastness in the geographic scale has raised these questions.”*

The trigger design team believes that there is always a general assumption among the implementing partners that everyone everywhere has the same priority, which is where the AAF forges a unique and distinct approach. They do however anticipate possible concern going forward that some ADMIN1 regions may be too large and/or have different climatic patterns within them which might affect their likelihood of triggering even in the face of an unfolding crisis. Some implementers highlighted the need for tailoring information to the stakeholder: whereas the use of technical jargon (such as ‘IPC 3 or 4 classification’) might be common among UN agencies, this may not be understandable to others, particularly the local NGOs and implementing partners.

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<sup>4</sup> Lingering concerns among a few of the implementers in understanding the overall concept of AA and its framework, perhaps have more to do with the implementation and endorsement of the AAF in general.

## 6. Results & Findings - Implementation of the first activation

These findings are informed by the perspectives of the different stakeholder groups involved, including international agencies and country level implementation teams, to understand both what worked well and what can also be learned from challenges or “pain points” experienced. Two key learning or intervention points emerge from their reflections on the first activation process, which offer opportunities for improvement:

- Timing and sequencing of the trigger
- Integration and mobilisation of operational actions

### 6.1. Timing and sequencing

Timeliness of funding is central to the rationale for AA, and while the initial activation of the trigger delivered timely new funding into Ethiopia, it also demonstrated that enough of a case had been built for funds to be disbursed - and to have an impact. It is notable that even with the outbreak of conflict, because of the dedication and hard work of the country team, and despite some partners’ feelings of exasperation with this new process, the trigger performed under extraordinarily difficult circumstances and Ethiopia received AA funding in a timely manner. From OCHA’s perspective:

*“Despite being so taxed when conflict erupted, the country team STILL made it work: all credit goes to the country team!”*

In the lead-up to the first activation in December 2020, a high enough level of confidence that the AA mechanism would trigger meant implementing partners had started preparing for this eventuality and were feeling quite well-prepared as soon as the confirmation was received. Knowing this news was about to come, coupled with knowing from past experience that the planned action was “the only way to do it”, OCHA felt that their country team partners were all able to act fast.

Some partner agencies flagged concern about being involved in donor funding just for the sake of it, emphasizing the importance of being able to say no if it doesn't suit the specific context. This is an important caveat, especially with respect to timelines; it was clearly noted that based on the inputs needed on the preparedness side and being honest about what can really be achieved within the AA window, a lot of actions are still not fitting the time window.

Hindsight highlights the importance - during the negotiations on which activities each sector was prepared to do - of questioning their respective rationales for being involved. As this lengthy debate and discussion gained momentum, narrowing down the sectors that have a role within the confines of AA did result in some sectors agreeing to withdraw. Although seen as positive during the trigger refinement process, some implementing partners who came into the process later may have perceived this as inflexibility on the part of CERF, and the lack of clarity which surfaced during activation may account for some negative reaction towards the trigger from the non-UN humanitarian community. Persistent questions around how to include food in AA underscore the importance of sequencing and synchronisation of AA within the context of the larger response cycle.

WFP and FAO basically collaborate on food security as sister agencies, where often communities may receive short term assistance from WFP, and FAO may come in with medium- and longer-term support. The question, “What are you trying to protect by giving food before a disaster?” has proven difficult to answer. While noting that some pieces of the activation process went well, in light of the fact that AA was triggered in December and by March the agriculture and food security sector had yet to have a single beneficiary, the results of implementation are yet to be clear.

Tightening the linkage between the rapidity of delivering financing and AA timeliness will require further refinement. Some partners (FAO, WHO) were still conducting assessment/ verification after the trigger activated (for example, to fine-tune targeting), despite the fact that most showed a good understanding of AA. There is general consensus that the trigger would be "better sooner". Yet this may be in part because they are accounting for some time taken for verification/ assessment that is a carryover from standard response operations. While not perceived as such, the need to do significantly more advance scenario planning is a pain point insofar as downscaled targeting and action planning should not be part of activation based on an AA trigger. AA should be mobilized immediately following the trigger being met, based on “good enough” prior targeting assessments.

As a collective approach, if other agencies and sectors are putting AA in place it can help to mitigate some predictable cascading impacts. If WASH fails, cholera starts. When food fails, if WFP doesn't provide timely support, malnutrition increases. When a nutrition cluster fails to provide outpatient



therapeutic support more people with deficits may overwhelm health facilities. The co-benefits of what is done through anticipatory health action is likened to the same logic for wearing masks now to avoid overburdening the health system: it empowers other clusters to do what they need to do, and at the same time prevents those other situations from getting worse.

*“It needs to be streamlined across all agencies – it’s difficult to balance as each agency has their own timeline of operations.”*

From the WHO perspective, preparedness is already part and parcel of the response process, so AA is seen as more or less a continuation and enhancement of what has been ongoing; procurement and prepositioning could have begun without the AA project. Already preparing to implement training for the rapid response teams, and having been in these communities for a long time, trends were well understood, so the AA pilot provided a good opportunity to build capacities where needed. Once the capacity gaps were identified, internally WHO was ready to respond to whatever events might come out of the drought situation, and “knowing the whistle has not been blown”, to prepare their teams for accelerated response rather than wait for an outbreak. Since the AA grant was additional to what they were already doing, not waiting for funds to be disbursed was key.

It only became clear during the initial activation process that full activation was not in fact feasible as planned. The workaround at this significant “pain point” was to effectively split the trigger into near-term and longer-term actions. The lengthy discussions between August and December didn’t adequately factor in the time programmes of action need to be implemented and that if technical deadlines (defined by weather and not by donors) are not met, the programme can totally fail. One partner asked for the timeline to be extended for joint activities with other agencies, noting that while activation needs to be streamlined across all agencies, this proved difficult to balance as each agency has their own timeline of operations.

While paramount with agriculture-related activities, timing requirements also apply to sectors that aren’t as time-bound. With food, if you distribute with one month delay communities will suffer yet they will still make use of the food, but if you miss planting seasons, the seeds you're distributing are not useful anymore. Other sectors may be less impacted by a one- or two-month delay than agriculture, pointing to the importance of understanding the different consequences of delay

according to sector. This points to the importance of categorising actions according to their specific time window for effectiveness, particularly in determining “low- or no-regrets” actions. This points to a need for linking trigger evaluation to impact or effectiveness evaluation of the actions undertaken.

Division of the activation into two stages effectively opened up a phased approach that revealed significant room for improvement in the timing of actions. As noted previously this highlights the need for much more scenario planning in the ongoing trigger development process. There is broad consensus on the need for learning from practical experience to refine timing and sequencing for sectoral implementing partners, which should become an increasingly normalised, streamlined part of regular AA programming. Regularised after-action assessment of the trigger and AA impact needs to also become an explicit part of the AAF learning-by-doing method to continually improve the trigger, informed by learning from every activation and implementation.

Ethiopia’s AAF may be a successful strategy, but the pace of stakeholder adoption is *slow*. Given the considerable time and effort, human and financial resources invested to set up the AAF there is a serious risk that all this effort could be lost. The complicating issue of conflict illustrates the fact that Ethiopia often faces compounding shocks and the cascading impacts of more than one problem at a time. Yet as one humanitarian strategist noted “anticipatory action should not be held back if there are things that can be done to get ahead of a crisis”. A timeline for integrating trigger monitoring with seasonal forecasts and sectoral actions, as well as an overall process timeline for AA could help.

## **6.2. Operational mobilization and coordination**

Mobilisation of actions did not occur immediately in response to the trigger being met. The extent to which automating this marks a departure from “business as usual” became clear on activation. The rapidity of trying to set things up for the first time did not always allow for the most meaningful engagement at early stages with all of the different regional stakeholders, given understandable concern not to overload them. The OCHA trigger team tried to communicate early when activation was imminent, so implementation teams could begin to get ready, but they faced internal challenges with waiting to start until things are signed and approved. One implementing partner reflected that:

*“It felt like ‘Even though you don't have the money, it will come soon so you can begin preparing.’”*

The overall rationale for AA can challenge established operations. To depart from the status quo requires trust in new ways of working among international agencies and partners in-country, which takes time and practice. When partners form agreements they also need to clear their operations with government; in sequencing the trigger development process to avoid operational bottlenecks, putting the required agreements in place needs to be prioritized early.

FAO did a rapid assessment to identify issues following activation and found that in areas where the situation is actually chronic, communicating the trigger to stakeholders was not as easy as expected from a technical level. What if food stocks are low? This blurs the line of readiness and capacities with AA. The question they see going forward is whether they want to focus on the actions, or will the work be picked up, so people are ready for the next activation. This points to the critical need for rigorous regularized after-action assessment, and a clear process to close the top-down / bottom up learning loop between the trigger design team and implementing teams to refine both trigger and actions as part of the activation cycle, and to also build clarity on the role of AA in the larger response.

It is notable that WHO had previously developed an event calendar, enabling implementation teams to know what to expect, when and where. Based on the event calendar WHO was able to place surveillance teams in different zones to monitor significant changes in events and data from the field, so if they had to respond to a real event, there would already be capacitated teams in place. Using lessons learnt from a similar event in 2016-17 further enabled putting together anticipatory activities aimed at preventing communities sliding back to where they were known to have been in 2016. Otherwise, preparedness would have gone ahead in the affected regions based on data from several years back. This in turn helped to ensure that on activation, knowing time would not be spent during the response sending teams to the field - they could mobilise available funding immediately. This offers a compelling example to build on for efficient trigger activation.

There was a point in December when it was implicitly agreed that if insecurity should arise, the trigger would activate. When it came to activation, being able to use the AAF allowed the OCHA team to

think about the data and broaden their thinking about what is AA. They initially foresaw impact arising from a shock and predicting the shock in order to act before the shock happened. In reality a reordering occurred; the reversal was that data first verified the need, rather than the likelihood of a shock. This fore-knowledge of impact made the projection of the shock allow triggering; with this shift in the order of things OCHA and partners were able to proceed as agreed.

The establishment of the trigger mechanism - even if imperfect - gave the Ethiopia team the ability to now continue to ask with confidence for early action financing, and to incrementally improve operational efficiency with every subsequent activation. Internalising the assessment of activation is crucial in order that both data and practical experience build a body of (increasingly downscaled) knowledge to inform increasingly robust scenario planning for the next cycle, as an iterative part of the implementation process. Learning from the first activation effectively sets a strong precedent for continuation with a “learning by doing” mode of operation; the establishment of feedback loops that translate insights from assessment into operational improvements and uptake by implementing partners will be the real test of the trigger – and the AAF.

The role of the dashboard currently being developed by OCHA as a data visualisation and trigger automation tool has not received much comment from AA partners, given it was only experimental and mainly used as an internal tool and not shared broadly. This should not be construed as downplaying the role played by the dashboard in the activation to implementation process; it has potential to become a more useful tool in further automating the trigger as well as in enabling all partners to be ‘on the same page’ with a clear understanding of the monitoring sequence for climate and food security data and outlooks, decision points at which trigger and targeting teams need to engage in the trigger-setting/refinement process, and how anticipatory action trigger and impact evaluation are integrated within the full humanitarian cycle of preparedness, early action and response. In any case the input of implementing partners appears to currently lack a systematic channel, and their insights could usefully guide further improvements to Ethiopia’s trigger.

## 7. Recommendations

## Summary table

### **7.1 Streamline Ethiopia's trigger monitoring & continuing development process**

- ✓ Systematize coordination of timelines
  - Use a sequencing timeline (Figure A) for integrating observational data sets, climate outlooks and food security outlooks within the trigger and align action planning and sectoral interventions with the seasonal calendar
- ✓ Progressively automate the trigger: so that decisionmaking is more data-driven based on scientific observations and analysis, while also involving stakeholders in threshold-setting - which requires subjective decisions
  - Implement a stop mechanism
- ✓ Further develop sub-regional triggers
  - Back and forth w/implementers to refine action plans
- ✓ Develop role of dashboard as visualisation tool
  - For transparency, to clarify process, further develop to provide more of a decision tree and build ownership among implementing partners at country level

### **7.2 Strengthen Top-down / Bottom-up linkage between trigger design team & targeting team**

- ✓ Multi-stakeholder engagement & coordination benefit from systematizing the process timeline
  - Transparency & inclusion sustain involvement, build support
- ✓ Trigger design was parallel to and not connected w/targeting
  - Targeting is subjective, needs to inform and respond to objective trigger criteria, including return period, to refine leadtimes and phasing of actions
- ✓ Indicator selection: include consideration of other hazards and priorities
  - Include targeting (downscaling) team in trigger definition conversation
- ✓ Phased approach with longer lead time can support progressive tailoring of actions fitting the available time window
  - Acknowledging risk of false alarms
- ✓ Start small, strive for impact not perfection towards AA normal way of working for all sectors
  - Grow as an organic process towards multi-user sustainable national trigger systems
- ✓ Complete integration of AA helps advance needed change in mindset
  - Rapid response can also act earlier on, in more flexible, nimble, agile way

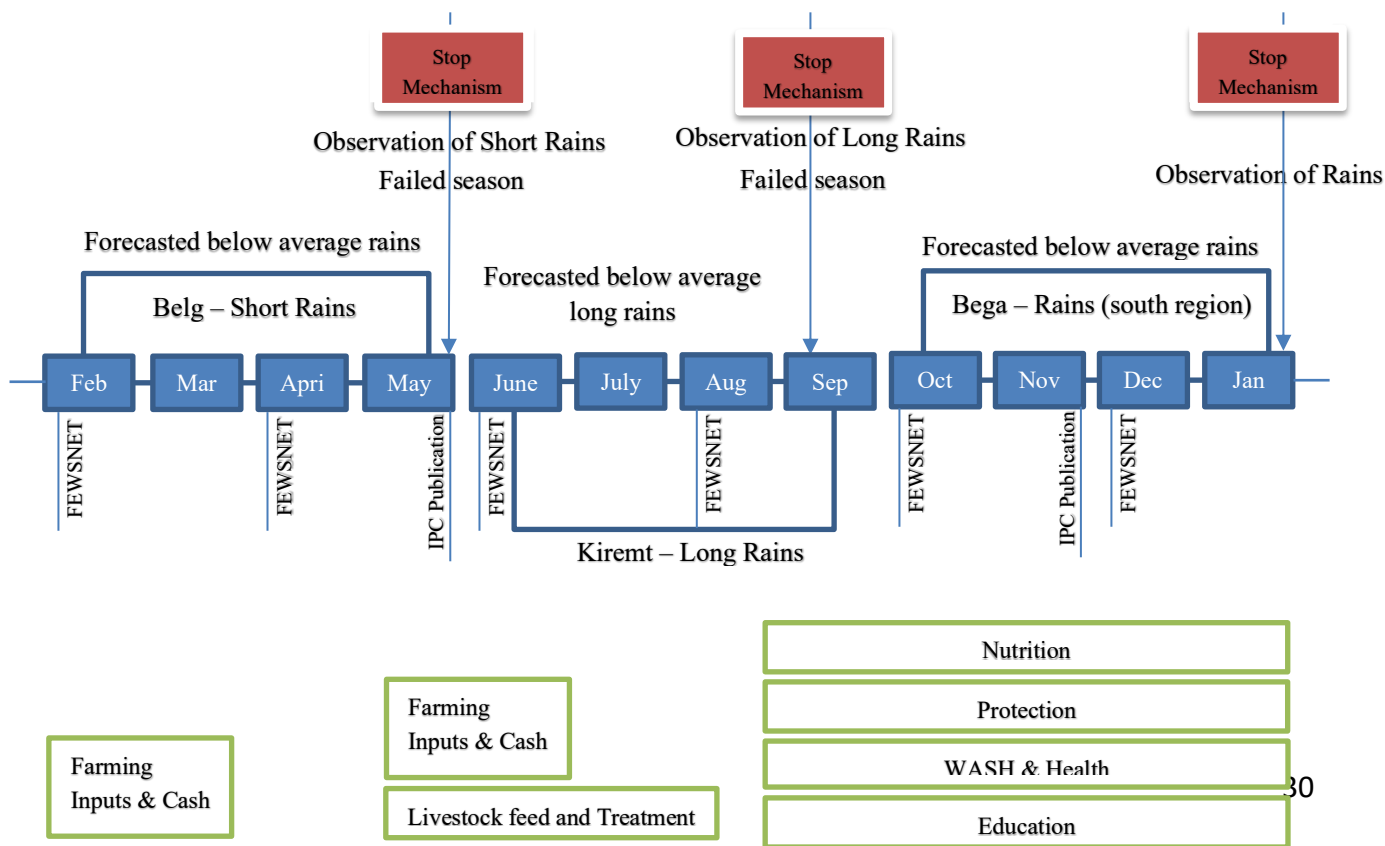
### **7.3 Iterative assessment = Trigger + Impact learning -> continual improvement cycle**

- ✓ Conduct a post-activation trigger evaluation as illustrated in the sequencing timeline (Figure C).
  - Use the MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) methodology for impact evaluation every time trigger activation occurs
- ✓ Improving trigger effectiveness requires iterative evaluation of the trigger to be coupled with anticipatory action impact evaluation.
  - Expect potential adjustments to both trigger and actions, based on after-action analysis

- ✓ Coupling iterative evaluation of trigger & AA impact are keys to ownership and sustainability of Ethiopia's AA process
  - Continuing capacity building & learning by doing require closing the top-down/bottom-up learning loop
- ✓ Also ensure that trigger and AA assessment and learning are linked to and inform evaluation of overall humanitarian (response cycle) effectiveness.
  - Future potential for AA to scale up and out, as strategy to build resilience and also harness good conditions in a changing climate

### 7.1. Streamline Ethiopia's trigger monitoring & continuing development process

Recommendations for trigger streamlining in Ethiopia encompass progressively automating the process so that decisionmaking is more data-driven based on scientific observations and analysis, while also involving stakeholders in threshold-setting - which requires subjective decisions. A sequencing timeline is proposed as a visualisation tool to support both technical and implementing partners in integrating observational data sets, climate outlooks and food security outlooks within the trigger, and to align action planning and sectoral interventions with the seasonal calendar. It is suggested to further develop role of OCHA's dashboard as visualisation tool to provide transparency and more of a decision tree to further clarify the process and build ownership among Ethiopia's implementing partners. See appendices for further discussion.



**Figure A:** This *sequencing timeline* illustrates OCHA's Anticipatory Action trigger, integrating observational data sets, climate outlooks, and food security outlooks with Ethiopia's seasonal calendar and sectoral interventions

The timeline diagram in Figure A provides a schematic view for sequencing and integrating climate and food security monitoring with the seasonal calendar and the sectoral interventions. Obviously, this is just one of the assumptions among many drought scenarios, since there are diverse climatic contexts within Ethiopia and drought phenomenon can last for several years, but phasing the trigger and activation can be improved by using this sequencing timeline as a clarifying tool.

The most important takeaway from Ethiopia's pilot experience is: **SIMPLIFY**. Gaining buy-in on the utility of pursuing AA beyond the first activation is paramount. With clear intentions and objectives, don't strive for the most sophisticated trigger: it is more important to start with "good enough" and go forward step by step. There will still be the issue of "cry wolf" but the trigger is only useful if it is used again, until it becomes the rule. To do that, thresholds need to be revisited and IPC indicators dug into, but the trigger needs to sing with a clear voice: it needs to communicate, not confuse.

*"Getting ever more sophisticated with our triggers, the risk is that it becomes a signal 'only dogs can hear'."*

**At what point do implementers move from anticipating into responding?** OCHA's Humanitarian Response Program has done a good bit of work to integrate risk analysis into the process and guidance has been developed. However, it can still take a long time for people to receive supplies, etc. and even rapid response is still chronically "too little, too late". WHO colleagues suggest considering a trigger for rapid response activation, as something to work on "at the back of our minds, and learn as we go". For example, when you are late - the events may not wait until you prepare - so how do you determine at what point the rapid response needs to happen?

*"Rapid response teams need to change mindset and take more risks, so as to act earlier on, through no regrets interventions, working in a more flexible, nimble, agile way, in order to get going much earlier."*

**Over time, the need for set-up measures that need to happen on a regular basis that are outside of the AA window will become embedded into the regular response cycle** as disaster risk reduction or

preparedness decisions and action. Although OCHA and partners were able to move faster because they hadn't tried to first solve all those relationships and dependencies, they may not have done enough to leverage work already put into the response program. Part of the learning is understanding where AA fits in the ecosystem of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and resilience. In reality, AA requires several iterations to begin to embed the set-up or preparedness measures that need to already be in place to be fully effective. A thought leader in the CHD team reflected that one way to jump-start the process might be by investing in a "meta-pilot" or in infrastructure for AA to increase the chance of successful activations in the future and help implementers be prepared more readily.

*"...ultimately working towards trigger decisions that are as automated (data driven) and transparent as possible.*

**WHO and OCHA described a similar vision where defining the trigger follows almost automatically from selecting the anticipated hazard.** The more significant step is the participatory process with the key technical agencies to identify the hazard, whereby in doing the technical details, the triggers are also automatically defined. For example, if the anticipated hazard is a huge malaria outbreak, then, automatically WHO leads the process of defining the thresholds. When the AA concept was presented in the first meeting in Ethiopia, "all of us said Ethiopia has suffered from cyclical drought for decades" so it was an obvious choice. While the overall perception of trigger development among partners in OCHA's Ethiopia pilot is of a long, slow process, there is already an understanding that baselines will evolve, sequencing can be improved, and that initial timelines can be derived and systematized.

*"It needs more transparency, more rigorous process documentation and understanding of what will be next."*

**Sustaining stakeholder engagement also requires the establishment of transparency and inclusion with tools and methods.** As confidence builds through iterative trigger activations, the experimental dashboard developed by OCHA could be further developed to play an increasingly important role in mutualising confidence and understanding of objective information across a broader set of stakeholders; ideally it could become a common trusted source of trigger information. Fostering its use can contribute to streamlining and the progressive automating of decision making. Further development of the dashboard will require an expanding focus on localized trigger monitoring, enable



greater regionalisation of activation, support the mutualisation of knowledge and understanding on a growing set of triggers with a broad spectrum of user/implementing actors.

## 7.2. Strengthen top-down / bottom-up linkages between technical design and targeting

Continual trigger improvement requires closing top-down/bottom-up feedback loops among stakeholders. The top-down, largely OCHA-driven, trigger design process needs to more systematically involve national stakeholders at key decision points to review and improve Ethiopia's trigger. This also helps to build the support, transparency & inclusion in order to build buy-in which are keys to ownership, sustaining demand-driven development, and expanding use of the trigger.

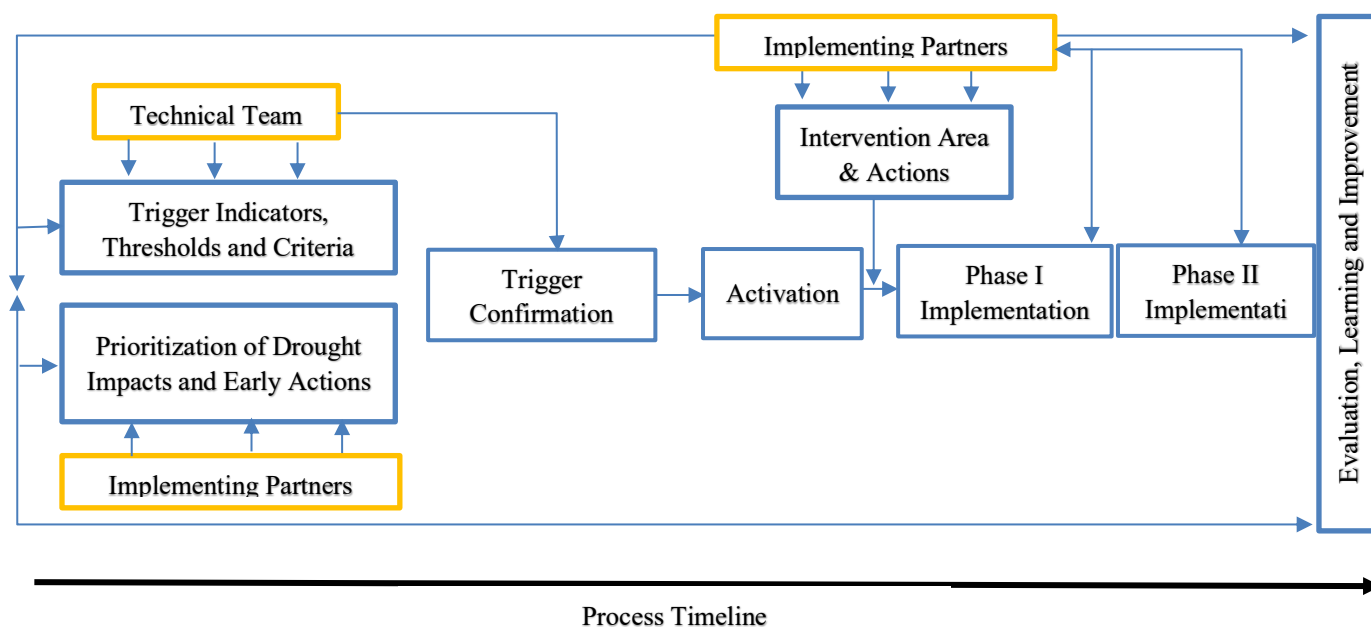


Figure B: This process timeline for Anticipatory Action in Ethiopia illustrates feedback loops for mutually informed decisionmaking between technical and implementing partner teams

**Sequencing of the process and activities is crucial, particularly because decisions around trigger thresholds and indicators are not purely science based, but also values based.** Technical design of the trigger needs to factor in the crisis timeline, early actions and the lead time required to implement, which was less accounted for in the initial design phase. As both processes happened in parallel, the trigger design process was not adequately connected w/targeting, resulting in

implementation delays following triggering. Targeting is subjective and needs to inform the objective ‘automating’ process. Clear feedback loops between the trigger design team and targeting team need to inform the continuing process of trigger refinement and development, in order to take into consideration both the return period of forecasts and the phasing of early action. The use of a process timeline is recommended to ensure these linkages at key stages as illustrated in Figure B.

**Multi-stakeholder engagement requires transparency and inclusion to sustain involvement, build support, and improve the trigger.** The top-down largely OCHA-driven trigger design process needs to increasingly involve national stakeholders to build buy-in for demand-driven development and expanding use of the trigger. Revision and improvement in the trigger should be able to ensure robust back and forth communication, such that the in-country discussion on early actions and the implementation timeline should be actually guiding the whole trigger refinement and threshold setting further. Building “bottom-up” buy-in through explicit process linkages is also crucial to ensure further development and sustainability of Ethiopia’s trigger mechanism and for anticipatory action as a fully integrated normalized way of working.

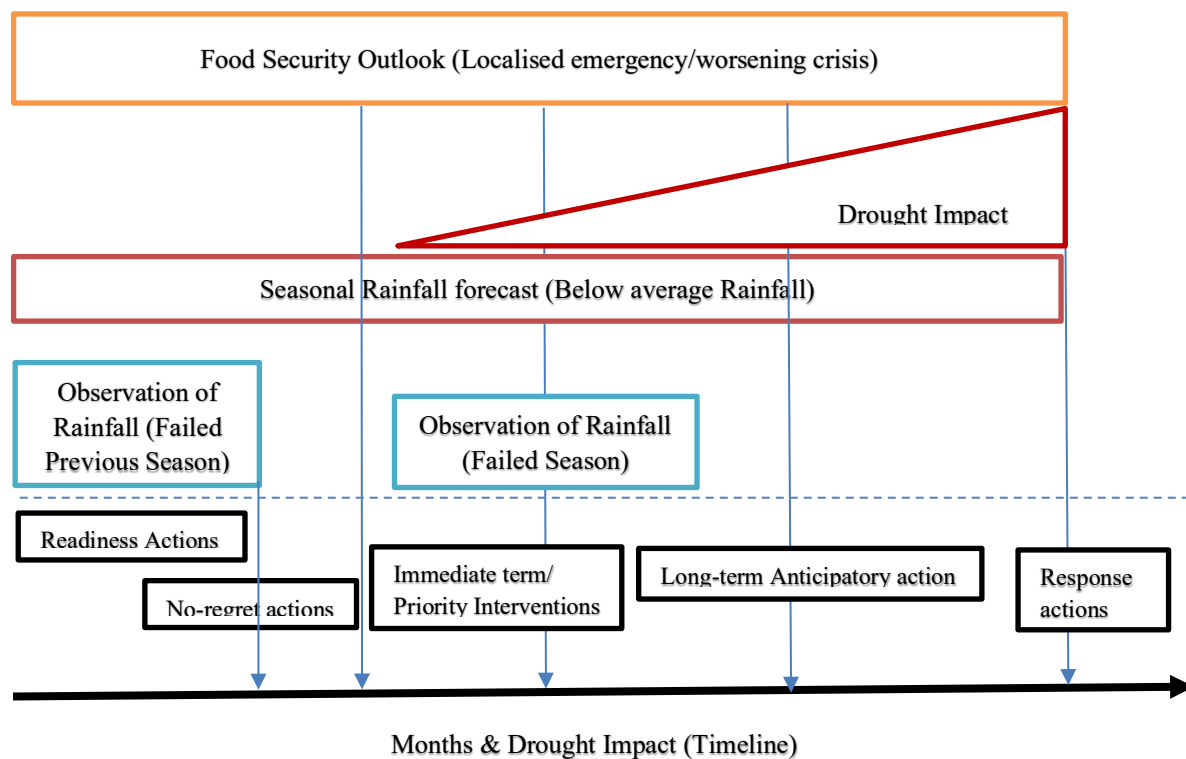
**Currently AA can’t be used in every type of crisis and circumstance, yet Ethiopia’s experience of a crisis and drought at the same time provides a good example showing that AA can be done for one shock in one area and still respond to another crisis in rapid response in another part of the country.** AA needs to become more closely aligned with climate resilience in order to more effectively address food insecurity, and subnational triggers may allow for national or regional partners coming in sooner. Although the first activation in Ethiopia did not include food activities, WFP is very much in the loop and keen for OCHA to share data so that WFP can align and provide funding for additional activities going forward. Having rainfall data and knowing for which areas drought will be triggered at the subnational level means that can now be done well.

**At present the humanitarian sector is not working on anticipatory mechanisms to address the large percentage of needs in Ethiopia that are due to conflict and displacement.** Not because it is not applicable; only because although there are efforts trying to forecast displacement (which is likely to be promising in the longer term), “we are not there yet”. People affected by ongoing conflict, in

particular IDPs and refugees from previous crises, are likely to be very highly food insecure in times of drought. Therefore, it is important that the trigger process considers the impact of conflict and distinguishes the different levels of drought impact that different populations might experience across regions likely to be affected.

### 7.3 Iterative assessment = Trigger + Impact learning -> continual improvement cycle

Ethiopia’s anticipatory action trigger worked well despite an unanticipated phased activation; learning from this is crucial to inform improved phasing of actions going forward. The schematic diagram below presents one of the possible ways of systematizing the sequencing of anticipatory actions along the climate information and drought impact timeline. As soon as a failed rainy season is observed, no-regret actions can be implemented, while further projection of below average rainfall and a possible food insecurity situation for the next season can trigger immediate-term and priority interventions. Monitoring of the drought impact indicators during this time will be crucial, as this can inform the need for more longer-term anticipatory action before the impact reaches its peak; the start of response actions that will likely follow is also clarified within the trigger timeline. Possible adjustment should be expected to further refine and tailor the trigger following every activation.



**Figure C:** This *integrating timeline* illustrates sequencing Anticipatory Action along Ethiopia’s climate information and drought impact timeline as integral to the preparedness and response cycle.

**Couple iterative evaluation of Ethiopia’s trigger effectiveness with impact evaluation as part of a fully integrated preparedness and response cycle.** Iterative, inclusive and integrated trigger evaluation is fundamental to making incremental improvements to the trigger mechanism as well as stimulating continuing stakeholder learning, capacity building and demand for anticipatory action. Over the course of iterative activation, assessment should focus on the effectiveness of each phase of action triggered as well as the effectiveness of the overall phased approach.

**Expect potential adjustments to both trigger and actions, based on after-action analysis; also ensure that trigger and AA assessment and learning are linked to and inform evaluation of overall response effectiveness.** Conduct a post-activation trigger evaluation as illustrated in the sequencing timeline (Figure C). Use the MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) methodology for impact evaluation every time trigger activation occurs. Expect potential adjustments to both trigger and actions, based on after-action analysis. Also ensure that trigger and AA assessment and learning are linked to and inform evaluation of overall humanitarian (response cycle) effectiveness.

*“In between anticipatory action and rapid response, there is a lot of room for improvement.”*

**Instead of using data to confirm decisions, AA is using it to trade off risks and benefits.** This represents a major mental shift. In principle, this method can also help to accelerate and improve the results of response; there should be complete integration. Assessing the effectiveness of the trigger should be integrated into the assessment of the impact of the actions it is used to trigger. Yet AA can’t replace response. Indeed, sometimes we can only act later with traditional response. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), resilience-building and preparedness approaches are fundamentally different from early action and AA. With DRR, the risk being addressed is not a specific crisis that is coming right around the corner, so there is a practical distinction that needs to be made for agencies to understand that certain activities cannot be included in AA simply because the lead time is too long. Yet making the distinctions can hinder collaboration, e.g., when OCHA may have to tell partners “we can’t fund that” because an action does not fit the AA window, the message that really needs to be conveyed is “act as early as you can”.

*“Is it fair the way we’ve set it up?”*

The OCHA trigger team notes that “who we may be leaving behind is a blind spot” which evaluations need to continually be attentive to. The trigger may have worked, yet it is still necessary to ask, are there any biases that are systematically hidden? Are certain groups over- or under-represented? Is it possible that there could be any negative effects that were not considered? Are we in any way victim to the models we use? What do we need to be asking of whom to surface unintended biases? Being more informed about end-recipients of aid is now missing, so building closer relationships with other teams would help with more end-user impact feedback and learning loops.

*“Not just in evaluation of the trigger but in standards for accountability and scrutiny for humanitarian action; this is the aim, to raise the bar.”*

**Ethiopia needs a more targeted trigger to start optimising what to respond to, for who, and when.**

As stakeholders always want more certainty, documenting and assessing the trigger in the context of implementation and impact is central to being smarter next time. Using iterative evaluation, at the end of the day Ethiopia will have more lessons learnt, and a growing number of AA stakeholders will know what should be put in place to guide their response to more and more types of risks and their anticipated impacts. For the long term, living with climate variability in Ethiopia requires anticipating natural hazards - and being able to harness favourable conditions - for enhancing food security, livelihoods and well-being based on positive conditions. AA offers future promise in Ethiopia for productive scenarios at scale, for example programming water retention or diversion schemes based on extreme rainfall forecasts, both as a protection from flooding and for triggering rainwater harvesting, irrigation, increased hydroelectric production, bulk water storage as a buffer for drought, aquifer recharge, and more.

## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Interview questions

Trigger development process	
1	What was your role in the development of the trigger mechanism?
2	At what stage of the development process were you consulted?
3	Who else were you engaged with in this process: (a) CERF team (b) Country team / implementers (c) Science partners? (d) other/s?
	a) What did this engagement look like? How much/how often did you have contact?
	b) Only applies to country team/implementers: To what extent were you engaged to understand and trust the different sources of information/forecasts?
4	How would you characterize your satisfaction with the process of developing the trigger? On a scale of 1 - 5 (1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied)?
	a) What worked well (strengths)?
	b) Were the right people involved?
	c) Whose perspective may have been missing who you think it would be useful to involve (why)?
	d) What operational constraints arose in the process of developing the trigger?
	e) What would you see as limitations in the collaborative trigger development process?
	f) Where do you see room for improvement in developing the trigger mechanism? - with respect to forecasting? Early action planning? Reliable rapid financing?
5	How is the Anticipatory Action Framework different from the Humanitarian Response Plan?
6	How would you distinguish the trigger measures from risk reduction, resilience building and climate change adaptation? - from response preparedness?
7	Can you identify any evidence or strong potential for multiplier effects stemming from coordinated early action planning?
8	What/who is the trigger aimed towards? i.e., vulnerable regions, specifically vulnerable groups of people, pockets of high need v pockets that are typically underserved? Exactly who are we responding for / who are the beneficiaries? How was this decided?
9	Are there any advantages or disadvantages in distributing cash transfers as an early action measure versus waiting to use cash for response?
10	How do you think investing in early action may affect the need for and availability of contingency financing for response?
Accuracy	

11	How do you feel about the effectiveness of the trigger? On a scale of 1 - 5 (1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied)?
	a) To what extent has it met your expectations?
	b) How accurate was/is the threshold?
	c) Does % pop “appetite for risk” need to be changed based on implementation experience?
	d) How reliable do you think the current trigger is?
	e) How do you feel about the indicators i.e., trust, familiarity, how they were selected, who was involved in the selection?
Interpretability	
12	How understandable do you think the trigger is?
	a) Does it need to be explained with more simplicity or more complexity?
	b) Does meeting the trigger mean that the ERC must activate & implement?
	c) At what stage are the funds committed?
	d) Are there any aspects you feel could benefit from further clarification?
	e) Did any challenges in terms of understanding/interpretation arise when the trigger was activated / during implementation?
Timing	
13	Does lead time match time required for implementation of early action? Yes / No
	a) “In your opinion” Better sooner (less certainty, do more?) or later next time?
	b) What are the tradeoffs?
	c) Even with uncertainty, what more could you do with the level of trigger info available?
	d) Would there be advantages to having an earlier trigger with less skill/certainty?
	e) Would there be advantages to waiting for more certainty and having a shorter lead time for actions?
Legitimacy	
14	How do you and others involved in the process feel about the legitimacy of the trigger?
	a) To what extent do you think those responsible for implementing trust it?
	b) Is it well administered? open to adjustment (by whom)?
	c) How much authority does it have?
	d) Sustainability of the trigger: are responsibility and reliable resources for future activations already defined?

	e) Data sources - to what extent are local versus global (IPC) data prioritized? Do you have concerns about the data sources chosen? (e.g., Political tensions)
	f) How much integrity does it have? / are there risks of institutional rivalries, corruption etc., who controls devolution of action plan from national level to the regions?
Implementation of recent activation	
	Have you been involved in the trigger implementation? Yes / No
15	a) What is your role?
	b) What went well?
	c) Is there anything you and/or others should do differently based on this experience (what and why)?
16	What would you see as the key challenges in terms of operational constraints (resolved and/or ongoing)?
	a) How were or are these being navigated (effectively or not)?
	b) What insights can you draw from your experience thus far?
17	In terms of humanitarian outcomes, can you see evidence or strong potential for mitigating the impact of drought in the targeted areas and/or fewer food-insecure people as a direct result of early action?
18	What could we learn from this experience to improve the trigger process (development & implementation)?
	a) Going forward here in Ethiopia?
	b) For other countries?



## 8.2 Recommendations: discussion

### Streamline Ethiopia's trigger monitoring & continuing development process

**Several weaknesses can be turned into opportunities to improve the trigger in the short term.** As a part of rules-setting, the trigger should incorporate a 'stop mechanism', in order to allow early actions to be reduced, revisited, or completely halted if there is change in the climate forecast and drought predictions. Possibly, in future activation, a phased trigger approach with inclusion of more climate indicators, both observational datasets and the forecast outlooks may allow for a longer lead time. While potentially enabling the implementation of longer-lead time actions, this will require considering the tradeoffs of acting sooner but with less certainty, as well as the risk of false alarms. For this reason, analysis should include understanding which longer-lead time actions are low-regret or no-regret, with durable positive impact. Understanding seems to be limited to the trigger design team concerning the degree to which threshold-setting is informed by the return period of forecasts. However, this represents a seismic shift in objectifying confidence to act early and is likely to become more widely understood as it relates to action planning over time.

*"Compared to the last 10 years, is this year a 1 in 3, or a 1 in 5...?"*

**Triggers should incorporate some targeting aspects, or at least include the provision of adequate guidance and criteria** for Ethiopia's country team and the implementers to undertake impact analysis and identify the most vulnerable areas/groups post activation to inform the next AA cycle. Building on this increasingly robust subnational level information, and depending on the type of interventions, additional 'fall-forward' guidance and targeting criteria can be set for the next activation. Given that aspects of "when" and "where" are inextricably linked in the trigger mechanism, often dictating the actual lead time for implementation, further improvement and development of the trigger/s needs to ensure more co-learning engagement and back and forth communication between the trigger design team and the targeting/implementing teams.

**Learning from Somalia resulted in the use of sub-regional triggers: in Ethiopia there is still a need for going further.** Back and forth with implementers is important to refine action plans and reach a "happy medium". Developing sub-regional triggers can be expected to continue to benefit from learning and practical experience sharing from other AA pilots. More granularity would ease the process of targeting and implementation, given there is already a lot of heterogeneity within an

ADMIN 1 region. The current trigger makes use of geographical targeting based on the percentage of food insecure population, at times looking further down to ADMIN 2 level for data analysis. Some temptation was still expressed to use forecast data for targeting, with concern raised by CERF that the percent chance of impacts in one area versus another should not determine what funding goes where. While this was managed well enough, recognizing that the country teams are the experts and do the targeting, a need was expressed across OCHA teams to “put some guardrails in place to ensure AA is not just a gap-filling exercise”. This points to benefit in further automating the activation process, which would in turn bolster transparency, and the trust among partners that is key to flexibility in ongoing streamlining. When IPC or FEWSNET information is brought in, there is a need to open up this data ‘black box’, perhaps through strengthened collaboration on AA in Ethiopia.

**Triggers should incorporate some targeting aspects, or at least include the provision of adequate guidance and criteria** for Ethiopia’s country team and the implementers to undertake impact analysis and identify the most vulnerable areas/groups post activation to inform the next AA cycle. Building on this increasingly robust subnational level information, and depending on the type of interventions, additional ‘fall-forward’ guidance and targeting criteria can be set for the next activation. Given that aspects of “when” and “where” are inextricably linked in the trigger mechanism, often dictating the actual lead time for implementation, further improvement and development of the trigger/s needs to ensure more co-learning engagement and back and forth communication between the trigger design team and the targeting/implementing teams.

**Feedback from the country teams and implementers would be useful to guide further improvements to the dashboard, its interface, and the decision tree from activation to implementation.** OCHA is currently developing the dashboard for data visualization and to support automation of the trigger. Through iterative activations, the dashboard should play an increasingly important role as a trusted source of robust information about the trigger/s for all stakeholders. Fostering its use can contribute to streamlining in the progressive automating of decision-making. Further development needs to ensure an expanding focus on the localization of trigger monitoring to support greater regionalization of activation. Trigger automation can be streamlined at the country level, and in the longer run, provide transparency and clarity on the process to a widening range of

stakeholders, including national hydromet agencies, who can begin to lead the monitoring of forecasts and indicators and the refinement of decision points on when and where to activate.

Strengthen top-down / bottom-up linkages between technical design and targeting

**To grow as an organic process towards multi-user sustainable national trigger systems, Ethiopian partners can make incremental improvements to the AA trigger by striving for impact not perfection.** While the risk of “false alarms” cannot be eliminated, there is general consensus among implementation stakeholders that a phased approach with longer lead time would be conducive to progressive tailoring of actions fitting the available time window. Going forward, the targeting (downscaling) team should be included in the trigger definition conversation, in consideration of other hazards, the selection of indicators and priorities. Continuing capacity building through learning by doing, and closing top-down/bottom-up learning loops, are keys to improving AA.

**Ethiopia is on course for AA becoming a normal way of working for all sectors, if ownership of the AA process is progressively cultivated.** Complete integration of AA helps advance a needed change in mindset, in that from the outset it involves engaging national partners in taking a stake, whereby success is ultimately handing the process over to them. The integration of AA as a normal way of working for a growing set of stakeholders also enables rapid response to act earlier on, in a more flexible, nimble, agile way. Ethiopia’s pilot has set the stage for harnessing AA to scale up and out, as a strategy to cope with uncertainty and also build resilience by harnessing good conditions in a changing climate.

AA success = Impact + Learning -> Iterative cycle of continual improvement

**The process of conducting this evaluation and eliciting feedback from all involved in trigger development has prompted important learnings and reflections,** which are valuable for the future development of Ethiopia’s AAF. This has highlighted the importance of conducting such an evaluation and informing the recommendation to conduct a post-activation trigger evaluation as part of the methodology for every pilot. This could be included in the MEAL impact evaluation.

As the trigger design team proceeds with the use of more climate indicators and a potentially planned phased approach for future activation, triggers should be reviewed and (re)defined along with the actions that will be taken. Therefore, thorough after-action analysis is recommended to ascertain whether and to what extent the triggers/actions did positively impact people at risk, so that information can be used in the revision. Given that long-leadtime rainfall forecasts can result in a lot of false alarms in Ethiopia, analysis of whether and how these forecasts could trigger actions that can handle a higher risk of acting in vain is recommended.

Understanding how AA helped is necessary to refine the activities going forward. We are not yet hearing how AA may have better impact than response, however discussion with the activation evaluation team touched on the need to embed cyclical regular evaluation in the AA process to understand the impact of specific actions as well as the performance of the trigger. In order to do better with the next activation, the learning loop must be closed between the technical trigger team and implementers by informing any needed adjustment to improve both the trigger and actions.

We do not necessarily propose precisely the same evaluation occur for every pilot, as over time a more streamlined process for further iterations is likely to suffice. **The following general process is recommended in order to generate useful learnings to inform and iterative cycle of activation:**

1. Draw up a guide of key questions, drawing from the interview questions prepared for this evaluation (see Appendix 7.1);
2. Conduct interviews with a range of key stakeholders from agencies and organisations involved in the trigger development process (trigger design team, UN implementers, national implementers, science partners);
3. Analyse responses and report learnings;
4. Make adjustments to trigger/s and action plans based on the learnings and recommendations.

**It would not have been possible to gain the learnings that have arisen through this process in Ethiopia without such an evaluation of this pilot.** Developing these learnings requires delving into the pilot and facilitating a context-specific learning process. These learnings are crucial to improve and streamline the trigger process in future iterations, based on the expectation that adjustments are made following the learnings and recommendations.

### 8.3 Global learning

Synthesis of learnings from Ethiopia's trigger experience that can potentially help to inform further global introduction and strengthening of anticipatory action trigger development processes:

- a. Start small, strive for impact not perfection, grow as an organic process towards multi-user sustainable national trigger systems
- b. Full integration of AA helps rapid response change mindset, act earlier on, in more flexible, nimble, agile way
- c. Multi-stakeholder engagement & coordination benefit from systematizing timelines and sequencing, while also supporting the transparency & inclusion necessary to build buy-in and sustain involvement
- d. Continuing capacity building & learning by doing, iterative evaluation of trigger & AA impact, and closing top-down/bottom-up learning loops are also keys to ownership of the AA process
- e. Promoting integration of AA as a normal way of working not just for the humanitarian sector, can build country ownership and benefit all sectors as an agile and adaptive methodology for continually improving risk management and resilience
- f. Potential for harnessing AA to scale up and out include building resilience as a buffering strategy to cope with uncertainty, and harness variability in a changing climate, with the development of actions to take advantage of anticipated favorable conditions – especially for agriculture; e.g. to increase income, build reserves, and food and nutritional security

**Anticipatory action is not a separate activity that requires “mainstreaming” into humanitarian operations.** A pilot or project launches a process of organic growth that is grounded in learning-by-doing; in this respect “the process is the product”. AA can best be approached with the expectation of becoming a normal way of working for governments and their humanitarian partners. It should begin as a consultative process that engages all key stakeholders. Over time this is likely to include climate resilient development as well as humanitarian partners. After the first activation of a new trigger mechanism, the answer to this question could well serve as the most fundamental metric of success:

*“If and when activating again, will the work be picked up, will the partners be ready for the next activation?”*

**How long will it take to turn this big ship?** To achieve sustainability, the vision is for all agencies, inclusive of national governments, with civil society and their humanitarian and development partners, to all use the same triggers - and by extension to also contribute to sustaining the development and refinement of triggers for additional hazards, and that these are increasingly

downscaled to geographical sub-regions. The structural challenge is just how big an “ask” AA represents to the humanitarian sector: it’s new, departs from standard operating procedures, and envisions handing over the leadership role to those who can do it in an independent way. In this sense, it is disruptive.

**It is important to recognise that in-country partners know what to do and how to do it; what they need is adequate reliable funding year after year.** Now it is possible to say with confidence that relative to past years this situation is serious enough to warrant AA. The content of activities that have been funded in the past is not very different, but justification has been until now focused on this year, the current situation. It is the role of international agencies to make the argument to donors and convince them to get this funding early.

*“We need to invest in more technical and innovative ways in coming up with triggers.”*

**There is a value proposition in investing time in learning a lot about forecasts and climate science,** and knowledge-sharing to avoid “reinventing the wheel” each time. If someone else has a model that is useful for analysis it would save a huge amount of time. As the trigger becomes increasingly data-driven, it can be automated, and decision-making streamlined. What’s learned now will feed forward in methods and tooling; OCHA’s code has been made public so anyone can build on this work; triggers can be both downscaled to suit different regional conditions within a country and similarly tailored to other countries with similar conditions; this trigger evaluation can be also be adapted and improved upon.

**Establishing technical partners to do the trigger analysis may be different from one country to another,** and who takes ultimate responsibility for continuing to support trigger development on an ongoing basis may also evolve as part of the process. This should not be just OCHA’s work: other partners and funders should be able to use AA triggers and countries should be supported in becoming able to own these processes and able to trigger, including from their own budgets.

*“Governments need to have the knowledge in advance, for example to know when drought is coming in a certain area, so the humanitarian agencies don’t have to convince them – and they don’t have to rely as much on external agencies to access funding.”*

**The vision is towards inverting the paradigm, towards a future where humanitarian agencies will no longer go to governments requesting AA.** Instead, governments will come to the humanitarian agencies with specific issues they are facing and clear requests to trigger AA. Even if not strictly doing AA, applying the methodology for more early action so people get assistance much earlier can establish a bridge between AA and rapid response.

**There is a risk of compartmentalising anticipatory action;** some agencies already have staff that only work on it. How AA fits into the Humanitarian Response Program is part of the conversation with every pilot; clarifying what does ‘anticipatory’ mean, when does it mean to act, and addressing concern that it will be cannibalising response action. It is important to convey that providing an allocation for AA does not preclude provision of another allocation if and when the anticipated (triggering) conditions become serious.

*“How investing in anticipatory action may affect the need for and availability of contingency financing for response is an important question; the idea is that one should not influence the other”*

**Being able to give assurance to donors that we have confidence in the risk scenarios is the breakthrough** that enables donors to give the money sooner. Agencies know what’s required, but it still needs to be made more attractive to donors and become a bigger portion of core funding. Layering in communication towards donors to understand the whole continuum from preparedness and readiness in terms of what is required to do AA and rapid response effectively still needs to be better figured out. There is always a cash flow element, and it is important to convey that providing an allocation for AA does not preclude provision of additional allocations if and when triggering criteria are met.

**Streamlining the process in other countries will become less labor intensive as a function of learning;** from OCHA’s perspective this still requires a lot of work on the technical translation front. It takes a fair chunk of time processing data and “trying to understand what we’re trying to do” and those constraints are unlikely to change for a few years. To continue to learn and be smarter, having more overlap, coordination, sharing knowledge, tools and resources will enable better leveraging of what’s already been done, i.e., with FBF through WFP and the Red Cross, with the World Bank, etc.

**Continuing capacity building is fundamental to handing this process over** so that it becomes wholly owned by national institutions and government. Who can, should, and must “ring the bell” to say a trigger has been reached? Communities may already be putting systems in place so they can avert impacts, and with systems in place, local and national government budgeting should start to include funding for AA. The need for “some sort of workshop for implementers entering the process to get detailed background on what goes into AA, including details of the trigger mechanism, so that everyone has the same understanding of the purpose” was underscored by one implementing partner. Another noted it is not just explaining the trigger as one step in the process, but also making sure to explain the technical details of the trigger throughout the process in as much detail as is needed by partners. A key question raised by a number of partners relates to continuity: what is the long-term effect of AA and what does the future hold, noting that gaining understanding of the details is important so that everyone is on the same page.

*“To explain the trigger so that when it comes to declaring whether the trigger has been met, everyone has a reasonable understanding, so that the decision is based on consensus.”*

**A single agency can respond to a specific local crisis, but at the national level a more objective trigger and better governance need to be developed**, which may mean that technical partners take on the responsibility to do the trigger analysis with national technical teams. This could allow national teams to begin to work more closely to align approaches with IPC, FEWSNET and others, to potentially strengthen data input and analysis so that it becomes less of a ‘black box’. As capacity is built, greater transparency in information-sharing will clarify questions relating to underlying data and the calculations used. In principle OCHA could then focus on the CERF allocation based on analysis coming from an independent process. Strategic dialogue to ascertain the best allocation of roles and responsibilities in the national context will need to guide an overall transition process.

*“We will have evidence we have collected ourselves.”*

**Moving forward, concerted efforts to do after-action reviews and evaluations are crucial to be able to learn from practical experience with a certain regularity.** Across AA pilots, OCHA has been raising the standards and rigor of analysis and operations, systematizing with country partners how it all



comes together in the national context, including where's the impact, what are the actions, understanding the people who should be focused on and closing the loop to the beneficiaries.

**Monitoring and asking a lot more questions is allowing for learning from partners and from other pilots.** The CERF team was very clear about having more leverage doing AA versus in the past “when you know very little”. For example, becoming stricter in targeting while trying to mainstream protection across the project with WFP, UNICEF, and others. With drought, projects weren't pre-approved for a specific district; this was done better in Ethiopia having learned from experience in Somalia, so it was based on objective analysis and not just a gap-filling exercise. Trying to figure out districts and woredas with the highest IPC levels was layered with previous and expected rainfall performance, then agencies were asked to document their targeting after the fact for evaluation.

**For future iterations of AA, the potential to programme resilience-building activities based on good conditions as well as hazard risks will become increasingly important.** In Bangladesh AA was provided for flooding, which turned out to be quite bad, yet when rapid response support was also requested some time later, even though justified at an operational level, it was rejected. However, those people who did receive AA support were able to build bigger rafts and offer space to other households. This is a compelling example of how AA support can generate a social resilience dividend whereby people were able to not only protect more of their own assets, but also those of others. Sharing these experiences from other countries during the process of establishing, evaluating and improving triggers can help to overcome hesitancy in requesting AA funding.

**In conclusion,** it would seem likely that the trigger development process and hence the evaluation process which should be integral to it may have strong regional characteristics. For example, the kinds of hazards and impacts, as well as the constellations of national, regional and international technical, funding and implementing partners involved, can be expected to be similar across the horn of Africa, among East Asian or Pacific Island countries, or among Caribbean countries. This may offer opportunities for streamlining by building on ‘trigger templates’ for different types of shocks and leveraging knowledge-sharing and learning exchange that could further jumpstart the development, and lower the transactions costs of initiating, AA pilots within a geographic or culturally linked region.