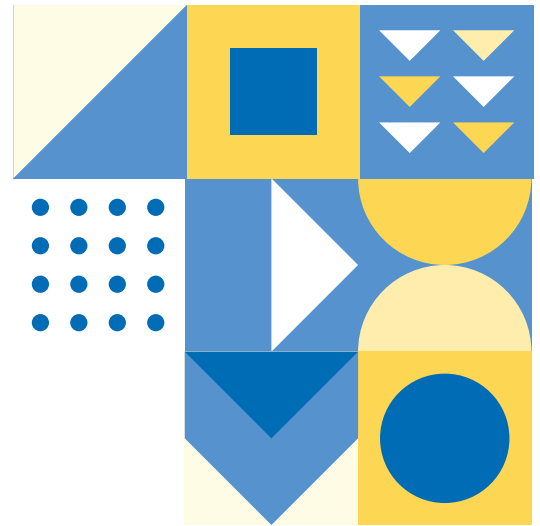


CERF Anticipatory Action

As of 11 November 2021



For many years, humanitarians have argued for the need to respond to emergencies sooner, and in ways that can limit their devastating long-term impact on vulnerable populations. While the argument for acting early has long had intuitive appeal, in recent years, a growing consensus on the value of anticipatory humanitarian action has emerged, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Today, more and more stakeholders in the humanitarian system agree that anticipatory action constitutes an important opportunity to act before the impact of a disaster fully unfolds. Furthermore, given the increased availability of advanced risk assessment and forecasting mechanisms, there is agreement on the need to scale up anticipatory, forecast-based, and risk-informed interventions wherever it is possible.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), established by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2005, has taken on an important role in supporting the set-up and financing of several anticipatory action pilots, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in close collaboration with the broader humanitarian system.

These anticipatory action pilots are set up through an OCHA-wide effort with contributions from the CERF secretariat, the Humanitarian Financing Strategy and Analysis (HFSA) unit, the Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD), the Coordination Division (CD), the Operations and Advocacy Division (OAD) and OCHA regional and country offices.

Each CERF-supported pilot is designed to benefit from and contribute to a growing body of evidence on the merits of collective anticipatory action.

Beyond the OCHA-facilitated initiatives, the anticipatory approach is currently being developed in over 60 countries by, among others, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the START Network of NGOs. Evidence collected from these initiatives shows that acting before the onset of a predictable hazard can significantly reduce suffering, save lives, safeguard livelihoods, and mitigate losses.

This document summarizes CERF's current role in and approach to facilitating and funding anticipatory action based on ongoing discussions, emerging best practices and learning from the anticipatory action frameworks CERF and OCHA have facilitated so far. It is intended as an information resource for donors, practitioners and other stakeholders interested in learning about this dimension of CERF's work.



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CERF and Anticipatory Action

Over its 15-year existence, CERF has established itself as one of the fastest, most predictable, and most flexible ways of delivering humanitarian assistance. As an established and respected instrument with a global remit, the fund provides a balancing and catalytic function, addressing critical geographical and temporal funding gaps, which bilateral funding often struggles to address. Further, by requiring a joint, well-prioritized and coherent response strategy, CERF promotes coordination and collaboration between humanitarian actors and supports leadership by the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC). To date, CERF has financed responses in over a hundred countries and territories, many of which do not have existing international humanitarian response presence and systems.

While its speed, operational impact, and strategic role within the larger humanitarian financing system are well established, through its involvement in anticipatory action, CERF is providing assistance even faster and more effectively.

Complementing other project-based anticipatory funding mechanisms, such as the START Fund, the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) or agencies' internal mechanisms, CERF per design requires a multi-agency coordinated, consolidated response under RC/HC leadership.

CERF plays a central role in supporting innovation, facilitating the introduction and testing of new ways of making the humanitarian system more responsive to predictable hazards whose frequency is expected to increase due to climate change.

Combining OCHA's ability to engage the humanitarian system through its leadership on policy, coordination, advocacy, and information management with CERF's proven track record, funding volume, effective systems and global reach, the OCHA-facilitated anticipatory action frameworks financed through CERF are well-positioned to bring anticipatory action to scale.

CERF funding for anticipatory action complements the fund's core funding functions under the Rapid Response (RR) and Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) windows. CERF has not created a separate window for anticipatory action and houses the anticipatory approach under the RR window.

Anticipatory Action and CERF's Mandate

While CERF has typically allocated funds in the context of traditional response, helping to kickstart or bolster humanitarian operations following a shock event or in support of underfunded humanitarian contexts, CERF's mandate also provides for time-critical action in anticipation of predictable, severe crises.



For a number of important humanitarian actions, timing is critical, and they must be undertaken within specific seasons or time frames in order to protect and save lives effectively. The Fund will be used to ensure that such time-critical actions can be initiated within the period determined to be necessary to save lives and limit costs.

Secretary-General's report A/60/432, October 2005.

Two of CERF's three General Assembly mandated objectives (resolution 60/124) are to "Promote early action and response to reduce loss of life" and "Enhance response to time-critical requirements." In particular, the second objective speaks directly to CERF's role in promoting time-critical early action to reduce the imminent impact of shocks. The Secretary-General's report A/60/432 from 20 October 2005 elaborates:

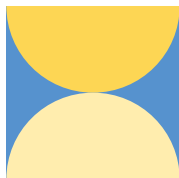
"For a number of important humanitarian actions, timing is critical, and they must be undertaken within specific seasons or time frames in order to protect and save lives effectively. The fund will be used to ensure that such time-critical actions can be initiated within the period determined to be necessary to save lives and limit costs."

In addition to its mandate underpinning a more formalized involvement in anticipatory action initiatives, CERF has supported ad-hoc early allocations in the past, in line with the fund's mandate.

As an example, in 2013, CERF provided nearly \$5 million to Myanmar prior to the monsoon season, based on predictions that 13 rural camps for displaced persons were going to experience flooding. Among other things, CERF funds helped to construct elevated shelters, ensuring that displaced people were better protected from the rising water levels. An independent review later found that while the rains were not as severe as feared, interventions prioritized for CERF funds were consistent with CERF's early action objectives and Life-Saving Criteria and an appropriate use of CERF resources.

Similarly, in 2018, CERF worked closely with field colleagues to analyze drought and food security forecasts in the Sahel and advised RC/HCs in the highest-risk countries on how to access CERF funding as early as possible. A total of \$30 million was allocated to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Mali between March and June 2018. This enabled partners to bolster communities' resilience through animal health initiatives and targeted cash transfers to safeguard livelihoods.

Building on these and other experiences with early action, since 2019, CERF has taken up a more formal role to facilitate and fund anticipatory action in multiple pilot countries and one thematic area (cholera).



Funding Release Process

While anticipatory action is housed under the CERF Rapid Response window, it is a distinct way of providing funding. To maximize the effectiveness of anticipatory action allocations, in the way it is currently set up, the funding release process is predicated on three conditions:

- **Endorsement by the relevant Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator** of the country-specific anticipatory action framework and the application package comprising an application chapeau, agency-specific project proposals and agency-specific budgets.
- **Endorsement by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)** of the specific Anticipatory Action framework and the application package comprising an application chapeau, agency-specific project proposals and agency-specific budgets (this can be a pre-agreed endorsement).
- **Activation of the pre-agreed pilot trigger** as outlined by the specific activation protocol agreed upon in the development stages of the anticipatory action framework. The activation protocol should clearly define trigger thresholds, determine who monitors the trigger, and clarify who has the authority to certify that the trigger has been reached.

During the pilot phase, all frameworks can be activated for a maximum of two years following endorsement by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), meaning that funding from CERF can be released upon trigger conditions met within this period. The ERC has set a ceiling for the maximum automatic CERF payout over the two-year period for each framework, with up to two trigger events.

While the above equally applies to all anticipatory action pilots, aspects of the funding release process may vary based on the type of emergency that a given framework is designed for. Existing frameworks can be grouped into two categories: sudden onset and slow onset.

Frameworks for sudden-onset emergencies, such as floods, may include a two-stage trigger: a pre-action (or readiness) trigger and an action trigger. The funding release immediately follows the first trigger's activation, which sets into motion critical readiness activities. If the second trigger is activated after that, recipient UN agencies can immediately spend funds to deliver assistance. Given the short lead-time between the activation of triggers and emergency peak (generally a matter of days), the whole CERF application, including projects, needs to be finalized before activating the readiness trigger. Pre-approved project proposals will be held on file by CERF. Once the readiness trigger is reached, CERF will promptly send an approval letter to each recipient UN agency (as per standard practices). Once the agency returns a counter-signed copy of the letter to CERF, the funds are disbursed.

Frameworks for slow-onset emergencies, such as drought, may include one or two action triggers to activate sets of projects at different moments in time. The risk of a false alarm (i.e. a situation where the forecast emergency or hazard does not materialize) for long-range forecasts used in slow-onset scenarios may be managed through such a phased payout approach: CERF releases an initial tranche of funding upon first confirmation of trigger thresholds for pre-agreed activities requiring longer lead times and earlier starts followed by a second tranche of funding later once trigger thresholds are reconfirmed closer to the shock. While a large portion of the CERF application should be completed before activating the trigger, given the wider reach of drought and slower timeline, the final prioritization and adjustment of budgets can be undertaken following the activation.

As with all CERF applications, all funded activities must adhere to the CERF Life-Saving Criteria. For frameworks with a two-stage trigger, CERF has developed guidance on what it can fund at each stage. Based on future learning, rules may be adjusted to maximize the impact of CERF-funded anticipatory activities.



Learning

Informed by the overarching goal to move the humanitarian system towards more anticipatory, forecast-based and risk-informed approaches, OCHA and CERF invest in documenting evidence and learning from all anticipatory action pilots. Each pilot is evaluated through a global learning framework designed to expand the evidence base for collective anticipatory action at scale. The generic framework, which can easily be adapted to the specific context of a given pilot, generally seeks to provide answers to three categories of questions:

- ✓ **Impact:** How much more impact does anticipatory action have compared to the traditional response?
- ✓ **Quality:** How can anticipatory action be done better?
- ✓ **Feasibility:** Are there other ways in which anticipatory action is possible?

Within these three categories, there are additional questions to generate learning and increase the overall scalability and sustainability of anticipatory action. Each pilot offers unique opportunities to ask specific questions that may not apply to others in the same way.

Gathering evidence on the categories of questions listed above is generally achieved as part of three learning activities that, like the learning framework itself, can be adapted to the particularities of a specific pilot or context: process learning, agency-specific monitoring, and evaluation (M&E) and independent impact evaluations.

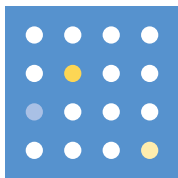
Process learning is designed to capture how anticipatory action pilots are being designed and implemented in real-time. This allows OCHA and CERF to understand the benefits of the process, as well as to learn about how to support the development of high-quality anticipatory action frameworks and effective implementation.

Agency-specific M&E is a key part of the agenda to scale up anticipatory action. To learn what anticipatory activities work best in different scenarios, OCHA and CERF work with implementing partners, especially UN agencies, to document evidence and learning on the implementation of pilots. All agencies that receive funding as part of an anticipatory action allocation are encouraged to share information, including lists of targeted people and their monitoring and evaluation reports, as appropriate.

When an anticipatory action framework is activated, prompting the release of CERF funding for pre-agreed activities, an independent **impact evaluation** is typically conducted post-activation. Evaluators are chosen as part of a competitive tender process to compile data on the intermediate results of the anticipatory action pilot. Guided by the overarching theory of change – that acting before the onset of a predictable, specific and severe hazard is significantly faster, more (cost-) efficient and more dignified than traditional humanitarian responses – evaluators conduct interviews with recipients of assistance to assess whether people were reached more quickly compared to traditional responses in the same country and context and whether people reported less severe hardship and lower welfare loss if they received anticipatory assistance compared to people not targeted as part of the pilot. In addition to the beneficiary assessments, independent technical experts also assess the trigger mechanism used to activate the anticipatory action pilot, providing feedback and recommendations for calibrating, and expanding the framework.

Each of the three learning workstreams outlined above has already generated promising evidence and lessons, highlighting the merits of the OCHA-led and CERF-funded approach to anticipatory action. For instance, an independent evaluation of the 2020 pilot allocation in Bangladesh found that assistance provided in anticipation of severe riverine flooding – and before communities were inundated – allowed recipients to take preparatory measures, resulting in lower asset loss. Further, based on their own M&E, agencies involved in the Bangladesh pilot reported that efficiencies (i.e. cost savings) were gained by implementing activities pre-crisis and that anticipatory action improved the quality of programming and, in particular, targeting, allowing agencies to specifically design aspects of their activities to better meet people's needs.

Applying the learning generated from pilots activated in 2020 and 2021 and cross-referencing it with new data collected from future pilots will be a vital component of OCHA and CERF's efforts to advance the anticipatory action agenda in the coming years.



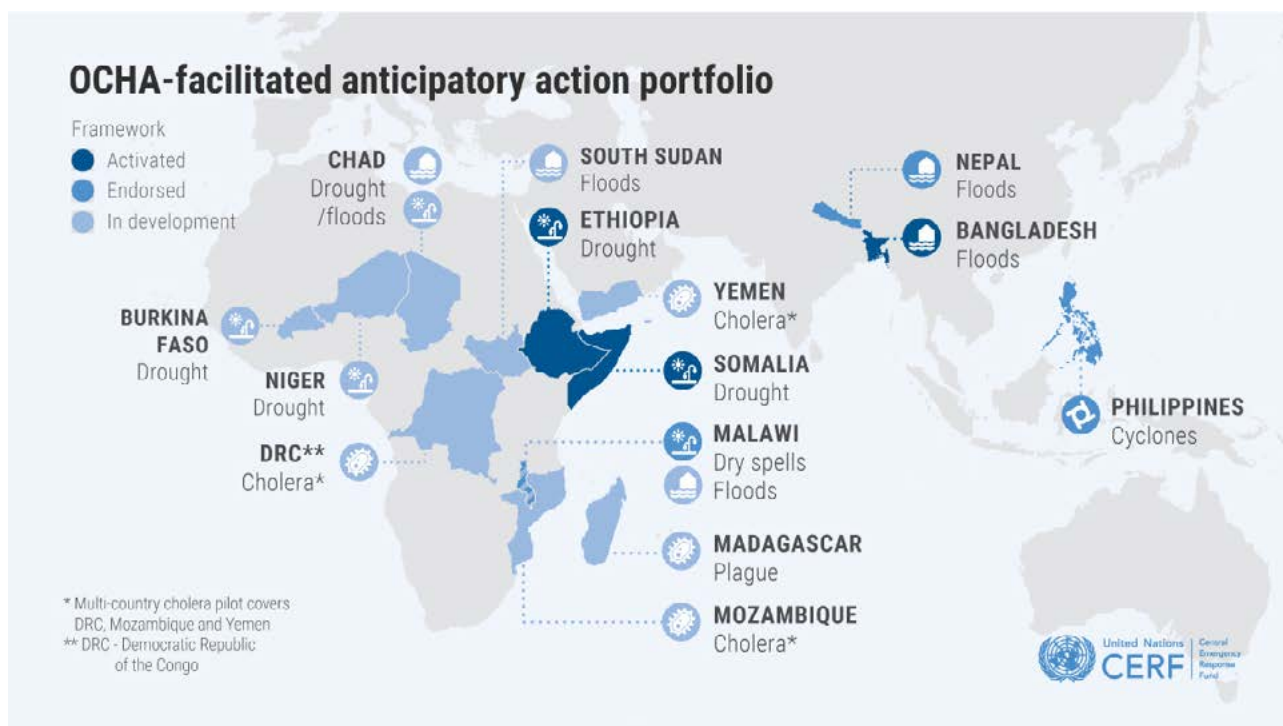
Overview of Current Pilots

After successfully developing and activating three anticipatory action pilots in 2020, OCHA and CERF have further expanded their portfolio in anticipatory action in the year 2021. Having previously endorsed the development of anticipatory action frameworks in five countries (Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Somalia) and one thematic area (cholera), in February 2021, ERC Mark Lowcock selected and endorsed the development of potential pilots in six additional countries, setting aside up to US\$ 140 million (including \$ 33.4 million disbursed in 2020) from CERF over the total portfolio comprising a two-year life cycle of each pilot.

The ERC's selection of additional pilot countries was informed by a close evaluation of potential contexts that would help generate additional learning and demonstrate further proof-of-concept. Contexts with exposure to predictable shocks that would support learning and with necessary predictive capabilities and implementation capacities in-country were identified in close consultation with donors and partners at country, regional and headquarter levels.

Based on the process outlined above, the ERC selected the following countries to complement the existing portfolio of anticipatory action frameworks:

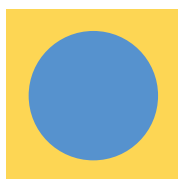
In Asia, Nepal and the Philippines were chosen as new pilot countries. The framework in Nepal, which was endorsed by the ERC in September 2021, is intended to mitigate the impact of a severe flooding event. The framework in the Philippines, which was endorsed in October 2021, was set up to enable anticipatory action in advance of destructive typhoons.



In the Sahel region, in addition to the pilot in Chad, pilots are being developed for drought in Burkina Faso and Niger, in an attempt to take advantage of similarities between the three country contexts.

Madagascar and South Sudan were further chosen as pilot countries for anticipatory action. In South Sudan, anticipatory action is aimed at dealing with the recurrent problems of flooding and repeated famine warnings based on a repeated dry-wet season cycle. In contrast, the pilot in Madagascar will focus on anticipating and containing outbreaks of the plague before they spread across regional or international borders.

After finalization and approval by the ERC and relevant in-country stakeholders, each anticipatory action framework is active for a period of up to two years, meaning that CERF finance can be released over this period, depending on whether the respective trigger threshold for anticipatory action is met in each country context.



Conclusion

Significant progress has been made towards scaling up anticipatory action and, by extension, moving the broader humanitarian system from traditionally responsive to anticipatory approaches.

Building on growing evidence that acting before the onset of a predictable hazard can significantly reduce the impact and costs of a humanitarian emergency, CERF has played a crucial role in advancing the anticipatory action agenda.


Moving beyond project-based, single-agency anticipatory initiatives, with its allocations to Bangladesh, Somalia and Ethiopia, CERF has helped to provide proof that multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral anticipatory action works, significantly increasing the scale at which anticipatory action can be done.

Building on three successful pilot activations, all of which have yielded compelling evidence that the anticipatory approach works, CERF is expanding its engagement in anticipatory action moving forward. Having increased its involvement in developing anticipatory action from one pilot in 2019 to three pilots in 2020, to 12 pilots in 2021, OCHA and CERF are gradually moving from the proof-of-concept stage toward testing anticipatory action in different contexts and for different hazards.

Going forward, further mainstreaming anticipatory action into CERF's Rapid Response function and exploring options for sustaining and expanding the approach in the pilot countries, including with the support of other funding mechanisms, will be priorities.

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ANNEX: Clarification of Terms

Given that anticipatory action constitutes a relatively new mode of acting and thinking, the language around it can be confusing. In the absence of standard definitions, this annex lists a limited number of key terms noting how they are understood in relation to the anticipatory action work by CERF.

The terms below are based on the CERF Life-Saving Criteria and definitions presented in existing research.

Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory action aims to prevent or mitigate predictable humanitarian impacts before a specific shock or before acute humanitarian needs manifest. OCHA's approach uses high-probability forecasts for out of the ordinary impacts to release pre-arranged financing to prompt pre-agreed humanitarian actions mitigating the impact of the shock.

Anticipatory Action Framework

OCHA collaborates with partners to set up a framework document for each anticipatory action pilot. Each of the OCHA-facilitated frameworks combines three elements: 1) a trigger mechanism linked to robust forecasting; (2) a set of pre-agreed actions that can alter the trajectory of a crisis; and (3) pre-arranged funds that can be released immediately to initiate time-critical activities. Each framework also includes a coordinated approach to documenting the learning and evidence of each activated framework. OCHA-facilitated frameworks can be adapted based on emerging data, lessons, and contextual changes.

Disaster risk reduction

Measures to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society, to avoid or limit the adverse impacts of hazards, within the context of sustainable development.

Preparedness

The term 'Preparedness' refers to the knowledge and capacities developed by governments and other stakeholders in the humanitarian system to anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of disasters. The primary distinction with anticipatory action, which takes place in anticipation of a specific, imminent shock, is that preparedness activities are generally taken for as yet unknown threats that are likely to manifest in the future¹. As per its Life-Saving Criteria, CERF generally does not fund preparedness activities.

¹ Pichon, F. 2019. *Anticipatory humanitarian action: What role for the CERF*, p. 10

Rapid Response Window

Funds allocated from CERF's Rapid Response window help UN agencies and partners respond quickly to new humanitarian needs. Rapid Response funds help support life-saving humanitarian activities in the initial stages of a sudden-onset crisis or during slow-onset crises. They may also be used to implement pre-agreed and endorsed anticipatory activities for time-critical requirements and respond to a significant deterioration in an existing emergency.

Trigger

Each anticipatory action pilot involves setting up a trigger mechanism that corresponds directly to the hazard(s) expected to emerge in a given region. The trigger defines a set of conditions and thresholds, which, upon being met, enable the release of pre-arranged funds for the immediate commencement of pre-agreed anticipatory activities.