Save the Children

BRIEFING NOTE AUGUST 2019

Forecast-based Action at Save the Children

What Does Forecast-based Action Mean?

In the 2011-12 Horn of Africa famine, 250,000 people lost their lives, 52% of which were children under 5. One key study found that half of these deaths occurred before the large scale up in humanitarian support. The delayed response to this emergency sparked conversations around the need for flexible funding and Forecast-based Action, "no regrets" programming. However, in 2015, despite warning signals, the response to the worst drought seen in decades in Ethiopia was again too late.

These are not stand-alone episodes: too often, by the time an emergency situation is identified and assistance is delivered, livelihoods have already been destroyed and lives have been lost.

Save the Children is investing both financially and in technical capacities to ensure that our commitment to Forecast-based Action is realized.

For Save the Children, Forecast-based Action means 'different' and not just earlier. Save the Children strives to implement timely and effective response in every deteriorating situation, however Forecast-based Action means acting before the situation can be described as a crisis. This means taking a proactive approach to emerging risks - acting within the traditional development sphere but with a humanitarian mentality to reduce or mitigate the negative consequences of a predicted crisis. If the situation is already a humanitarian crisis or has reached humanitarian 'trigger points', it is too late for Forecast-based Action and humanitarian response will be required.

Forecast-based Action means proactive no-regrets activities, which mitigate the predicted impacts of identified risks and build the resilience of children, communities and systems.

£

A cost benefit analysis of SC's Forecast-based Action pilot project in 2017 showed that for **every £1 spent on Forecast-based Action, targeted households received £2.58 in social value** (on average) when compared to only a humanitarian response.

Why Act Based on Forecasts?

Forecast-based Action can enable households to avoid negative coping mechanisms during the early stages of deterioration. During slow onset crises, negative coping strategies such as selling unsustainble numbers of productive assets (e.g. depleting livestock herds), removing children from school, or switching to a less nutritious diet, often occur well before emergency thresholds are reached. Therefore, even if Forecast-based Action is not enough to mitigate an emerging crisis, it can be a vital bridge that supports families and their children during early signs of deterioration until humanitarian scale-up is possible. This approach also has a Value for Money aspect as it is well known that humanitarian response is far more costly than investing in preventative measures.

What do we need to act based on forecasts?

To act based on forecasts, having a clear understanding of **when to act** is essential. Some of the key features of a successful Forecast-based Action system are:

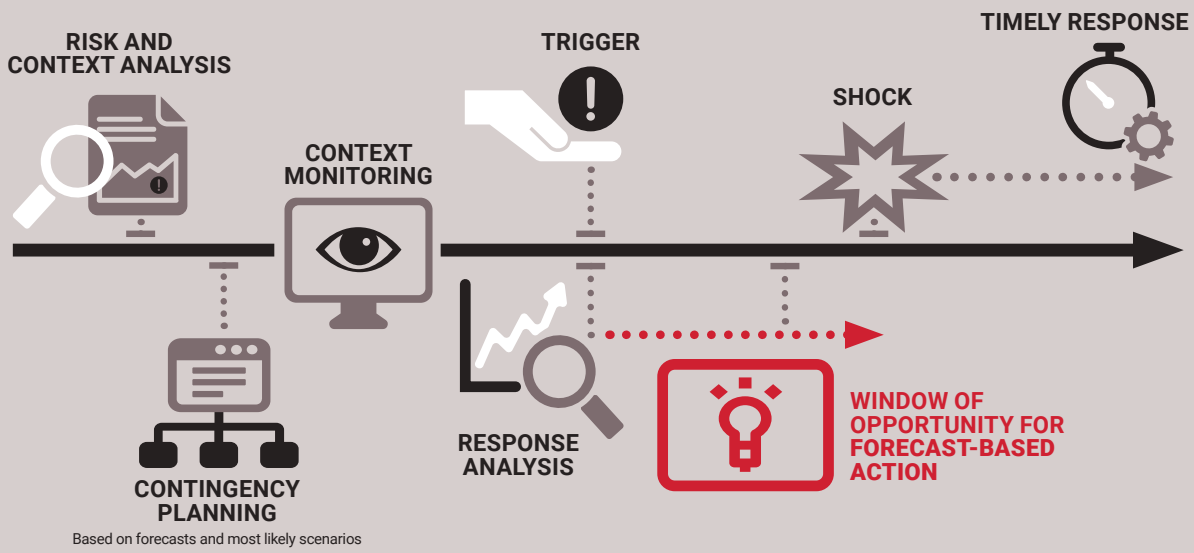
- **Risk analysis:** it is critical to understand the context specific hazards and vulnerabilities, and to assess their potential impacts on the population, as their capacity to respond and cope. This might include a livelihoods baseline (such as a Household Economy Anaysis profile), market analysis, etc.
- **Clearly defined triggers:** a trigger is the decision point for action. Household Economy Analysis (HEA) has proven to be the most effective trigger for Forecast-based Action in SC's pilots in contexts of slow onset food insecurity.
- **Regular context and forecast monitoring:** this means collecting information on pre-defined indicators that measure change in the situation: indicators should be monitored against thresholds to identify the level of deviation from normal. A specific indicator threshold should be defined to trigger Forecast-based Action. Within slow onset contexts, it is also important to regularly monitor rain forecasts, which may change as the season progresses.
- **Understanding the windows of opportunity:** this entails knowing the appropriate moment(s) to act, before households start to feel the impact of a shock. Without this, interventions may arrive too late to achieve the desired effect or become redundant from the time of decision making to implementation on the ground.
- **Agreed upon decision making process:** once Forecast-based Action is triggered, it's important to know who is responsible for doing what, in order to mitigate delays.
- **Funding:** the funding mechanism should be secured during "normal" times, and must be flexible to enable the quick release of funds, linked to pre-agreed triggers and a triggering process.

Household Economy Analysis (HEA)[1] is an effective tool for triggering Forecast-based Action. HEA is a livelihoods framework developed by Save the Children that details the inner workings of household economy. Combined with population data, the analysis allows for an estimate of the number of people that will need assistance to protect livelihoods and/or prevent extreme hunger, and the total food or cash equivalent required and of the months when it will be needed.

HEA differs from other approaches because it **projects and quantifies households' access to food and income.** This allows us to act before households face food and income gaps. It can also be used at scale, and for a wide range of shocks. Ultimately, it provides direct information to inform our Forecast-based Actions (how many, how much, who, where and when) over a wide geographical area and in varying contexts.

> This year, the help came right before the rainy season – this protected our animals, it saved their body condition. Usually the help comes after the rains have failed and the animals are in poor condition.
>
> **A PROJECT BENEFICIARY IN DINDLE KEBELE, SOMALI REGION, ETHIOPIA; 2017.**

The Timeline for Forecast-based Action



1 Refer to **heacod.org** for additional details on HEA.

Climate Change

Climate science shows that even in a 1.5°C scenario of temperature rise – which is the objective set by the Paris Agreement, climate-induced catastrophic events such as droughts will increase in intensity and frequency, and their occurrence will be less and less predictable and derail from the usual predictable global weather cycle. Better anticipatory capacity and flexibility in our action will become key ingredient to mitigate climate change unpredictability. Forecast-based Action is one solution, and is now globally considered as a key way forward to mitigate impacts of climate change by many international actors.

> Before [in previous drought years] we received food [from humanitarian agencies] so we could eat to save our lives, when we were already hungry and our animals [livestock] were dead. This year, we got support for our animals *and* for ourselves, before we were hungry and our animals were suffering. It is better this way!
>
> **A VILLAGE ELDER IN SEDETA KEBELE, SOMALI REGION, ETHIOPIA; 2017.**

What does Forecast-based Action look like?

And how does it differ from preparedness and timely response?

	PREPAREDNESS	FORECAST-BASED ACTION	TIMELY HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE
OBJECTIVE	To strengthen Save the Children's own response capability (including our partners')	To protect livelihoods and lives, reduce the projected impact of forecasted shocks	To save lives and prevent further deterioration of livelihoods
PLANNING	**Proactive:** activities planned before the crisis emerges, based on most ***common hazards***	**Proactive:** activities planned before the crisis emerges, based on ***forecasts and projections*** (and most likely scenarios)	**Reactive:** activities usually planned after the crisis emerges, based on the ***real-time situation***
FUNDING	Funding is secured ***during normal times***	Funding is secured ***during normal times*** & is accessed based upon pre-agreed trigger points	Funding is sought once crisis has been declared
TIMING	Intervention is implemented ***before*** a crisis emerges, based on most common hazards	Intervention is implemented ***before*** a crisis emerges, based on projections and forecasts	Intervention is implemented ***after*** a crisis emerges, based on real-time events
ACTIVITIES	**Examples:** • Cash feasbility assessment • Pre-positioning stocks • Capacity building (for example: humanitarian principles and standards, protection considerations, child safeguarding, etc)	**"No regrets" activities, for example:** • Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) • Livestock vaccinations • Fodder distribution • Support to traders and service providers to ensure business continuity • Short-term income generation opportunities • Water source rehabilitation	**Examples:** • CVA and food distributions to meet immediate food needs • Commercial and/ or slaughter destocking • Water trucking • Nutrition treatment
CERTAINTY	Some uncertainty of the severity of the situation and needs, as all planning is informed by forecasts/ projections: ***no-regrets actions***; Situation not "declared" an emergency by the UN, government, etc.	Some uncertainty of the severity of the situation and needs, as all planning is informed by forecasts/ projections. Situation not "declared" an emergency by the UN, government, etc.	Certainty of the severity of the situation and needs, as planning is based on real-time situation; Situation is often "declared" an emergency by the UN, government, etc.

What have we achieved so far?

SCUK tested approaches to Forecast-based Action through a "Forecast-based Action Fund" pilot project in Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger between 2014-2018[2]. The project demonstrated that it is indeed possible to act earlier, and more importantly that acting early enabled households to protect their livelihoods and smooth their food consumption during the shock period. For example, in Ethiopia, poor and middle-income households were able to absorb the shock, maintaining acceptable levels of food security and livelihoods assets throughout the duration of the shock.

Building on this success, in 2018 SCI established a Forecast-based Action Fund, a standing fund which Country Offices can access if they trigger the need to act early. This provides an excellent and unique opportunity for Save the Children to quickly act at the first indication of a future shock.

Accuracy and No regrets

Predictions and anticipation are never 100% accurate. Because Forecast-based Action is based on forecasts and predictions, there is some possibility that the foreseen shock does not happen, or does not happen the way it was forecasted, which could raise questions on the credibility and efficiency of Forecast-based Action. While a reliable prediction is important, if the prediction does not materialize, a "no regrets" approach ensures that Forecast-based Actions are beneficial to communities and families.

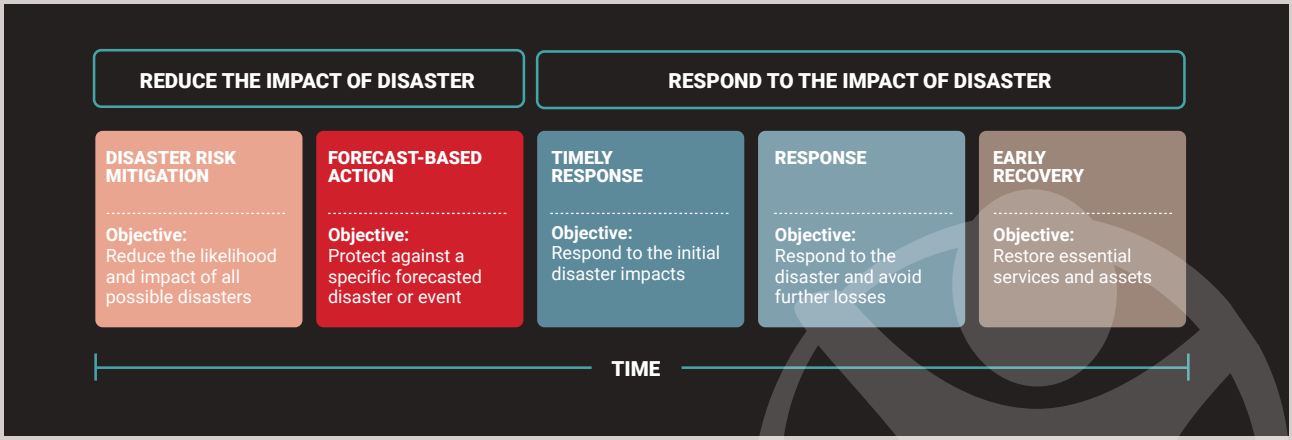
By reducing vulnerability of communities to the anticipated shocks and ensuring continuity of essential services to children, a "no regrets" action will contribute to longer term objectives such as poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation, savings for future shocks, etc. Therefore, even if the anticipated shock doesn't happen, a "no regrets" action has positive outcomes for families and their children, for example, preventing malnutrition and maintaining access to health care and education, and is beneficial for local development.

How to learn more?

Contact

- Laura Swift: l.swift@savethechildren.org.uk or
- Christophe Belperron: christophe.belperron@savethechildren.org

Annex Forecast-based Action: linking DRR and response[3]



For many years, efforts to reduce the impact of disasters were conducted via Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities (i.e: activities that aimed to reduce risks and help prepare communities and households); and via humanitarian response once a shock occurred. The disconnect between the two types of interventions, often implemented by different stakeholders with different expertise, was a significant obstacle to effective management of disasters. Forecast-based Action bridges this gap and enables the continuum between DRR and response, as shown in the above graphic. The result is a more fluid intervention process, that helps communities and families at all phases of a disaster.

2 Refer to SC's Early Action Lessons Learned report for additional details. **https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/achieving-early-action-sc-2018.pdf**

3 Adapted from the graphic in "Disaster Risk & Forecast-based Financing – a guide to using HEA", **https://startnetwork.org/resource/disaster-risk-forecast-based-financing-guide-using-household-economy-analysis**