Save the Children

Report

ACHIEVING TRUE EARLY ACTION

A Summary of Save the Children's Learning from 3 Pilot Projects to Mitigate Slow Onset Food and Nutrition Crises (2014 – 2017)

Early Warning, Early Action Report

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Acronyms:

CFW – Cash-for-Work
CM – Crisis Modifier
CO – Country Office
DfID – Department for International Development (UK)
DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction
EAF – Early Action Fund
ECHO – European Civil and Protection Aid Operations
FSL – Food Security and Livelihoods
HEA – Household Economy Approach
ME(AL) – Monitoring, Evaluation, (Accountability and Learning)
IPC – Integrated Phase Classification
OA – Outcome Analysis
UCT – Unconditional Cash Transfers
SC (UK)/ (I) – Save the Children (UK)/ (International)
SMT – Senior Management Team
SRAF – Situation and Response Analysis Framework
TA – Technical Advisor
VFM – Value for Money
WASH – Water Sanitation and Hygiene

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Early Warning, Early Action Report

SUMMARY

In many countries, resilience and development gains continue to be undermined by recurrent, predictable slow onset food and nutrition crises. Despite early warning signals, the humanitarian response to such crises is often too late: by the time action is taken, livelihoods and lives have been lost. In answer to this, since 2013 Save the Children UK (SCUK) has been investing internal financial and technical resources to work towards our commitment to achieving and promoting systematic early action. Early action means acting based on forecasts and before the situation can be described as a crisis: for Save the Children, early action means proactive no-regrets activities, which mitigate the predicted impacts of identified risks and build the resilience of children, communities, and systems. Early action is different from a timely response in that it is based on projections and designed to mitigate the impact of a specific forecasted shock, whereas timely response comprises actions implemented in response to a shock, based on actual needs.[1]

Early action is *"proactive no-regrets activities that mitigate the predicted impacts of identified risks and build the resilience of children, communities and systems"*

This document draws on the findings of an external evaluation and internal reviews and analysis to consolidate the learning of three Early Warning/Early Action (EWEA) pilot projects that have been implemented by Save the Children (SCUK) in Yemen (2014), Ethiopia (2015), and Ethiopia, Kenya, and Niger (2017). The report is for both technical and non-technical personnel, across NGOs, donors and governments who would like to learn how the humanitarian community can move forward with institutionalizing early action in countries prone to slow onset crises. The report focuses on operational aspects of early action such as monitoring and triggering and decision making, as well as advocacy and communication. It provides an overview of the three pilot projects, exploring the evolution of SCUK's early action approach, the outcomes and lessons learned; followed by recommendations. Although its focus is on internal Save the Children pilots, the learning and recommendations are relevant to all partners' systems and processes.

[1] See SC's "What is the difference between EA and timely response?" communications document for additional details.

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KEY MESSAGES

What have we learned?

1. **It is indeed possible to act earlier.** Acting based on forecasts and achieving true "early action" is possible when the appropriate mechanism is in place. (Additional details on mechanisms are described below.) All pilots demonstrate that it is possible to act earlier, before a situation is declared a crisis, and the 2017 pilot in Ethiopia shows that achieving true proactive early action is feasible.
2. **Acting earlier has positive impacts on beneficiaries' livelihoods and lives and is appreciated by local governments and communities.** Evaluations in Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017 have demonstrated that acting earlier can enable households to protect their livelihoods throughout the duration of the shock (2015, 2017) and smooth food consumption (2017). Internal monitoring of the 2017 interventions in Ethiopia show that households were able to increase their (HEA) resilience scores. Beneficiaries and the government have expressed their appreciation of earlier action.
3. **Acting early represents better Value for Money as compared to humanitarian response.** By capturing a broader sense of 'value' and appreciating the impact on beneficiaries' social (rather than solely economic) outcomes, VfM analysis conducted in Ethiopia in 2017, shows that providing intervention early, before crisis, effectively and efficiently defends beneficiaries from the worst and most damaging effects of drought (or similar shocks). For every £1 spent on the EAF, target HHs received £2.58 in social value[2] (on average) when compared to only a humanitarian response.
4. **Identifying appropriate triggers and indicators is critical for achieving early action; the use of the forecasting Outcome Analysis tools of the Household Economy Approach (HEA)[3] in triggering appears to be the most effective method for achieving early action. An effort should be made to increase the use of HEA in targeted countries.** In Yemen, Ethiopia (2017) and Niger, HEA analyses enabled timely or early actions, and quantified needs which facilitated response analysis. However, there is a need to invest more in building capacity to be able to carry out regular (seasonal-based) HEA analyses.
5. **Continuity in staffing is crucial for achieving success and institutionalizing the approach.** As demonstrated in Ethiopia between 2015 and 2017, continued investment in staff capacity building and system development is critical to ensuring effective early action. Although the project team was able to implement a timely response in 2015, in 2017, with capacity building and prior experience, the same team were able to implement true early action.
6. **Existing staff capacity and operational systems have greatly contributed to achieving earlier action.** All of SCUK's pilots have been implemented in areas with ongoing programming and have benefitted from the existing staff's expertise and engagement with communities, as well as existing systems (such as a cash transfer mechanism) and ongoing programmes' stocks/supplies. The feasibility of implementing early action in non-operational areas needs to be further explored.
7. **Internal and external protocols with detailed timeframes must be defined in advance to facilitate early action.** This includes operational and decision-making procedures within each Country Office (CO), as well as procedures for the application, approval, and release of funds within COs and with governments and donors.

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[2] Social Value refers to wider financial and non-financial impacts of programmes, organisations and interventions, including the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital and the environment

[3] Refer to page 9 for additional details.

What needs to be done?

1. **Increase funding for early action activities and systems and build confidence of actors to implement no regrets actions.**[4] Ensure increased budget is available for early action activities and that partners understand that 'no regrets' actions will be regarded as a good investment, whether or not a crisis unfolds as predicted; Support not only the activities themselves, but also the systems which enable them to happen, including multi-year investment in HEA (capacity building and baseline development), monitoring and analysis systems and tools, and evidence generation and dissemination.
2. **Continue to build technical capacity in setting appropriate triggers and carrying out HEA analyses.** The number of triggers used within each country office and ideally national early action system should be limited (maximum three), and HEA predicted livelihood protection or survival deficits should be prioritized as a main trigger. All partners should explore ways to increase investment in HEA to build country-level capacity to carry out seasonal HEA analyses.
3. **Invest in regular context monitoring and regular seasonal response analysis exercises.**[5] NGOs and government are recommended to identify the required financial and technical resources to carry out regular (monthly) context monitoring; Response analysis exercises, ideally based on the HEA and the Situation and Response Analysis Framework (SRAF)[6] should be carried out systematically when meteorological forecasts are available in order to identify if and when early actions are required. This information resulting from these seasonal exercises should be systematically requested by decision makers for action.
4. **Define detailed internal and external decision-making protocols.** Country offices should identify specific internal time-bound tasks which are clearly assigned and understood and agree upon steps for the application and release of funds with donors.
5. **Carry out preparedness measures to improve efficiency of early action.** This may include ensuring the cash transfer mechanism assessment is up-to-date, establishing preferred supplier contracts, identifying ongoing programmes' stocks that could be used for early actions, etc.
6. **Better engage existing community early warning and preparedness structures and systems.** This is not only a critical element for sustainability. Engaging local capacities can facilitate access to localized information that could contribute to scenario development and context monitoring that might otherwise be missed. In addition, if existing programmes are able to work with communities to plan for crises, and if information is shared in a timely way, communities themselves are in a far better position to act before negative coping strategies (such as removing children from school or selling productive livestock) are needed.
7. **Continue to prioritize the generation of evidence.** Further evidence on the impact of acting early on households and children must be generated. This includes quantitative data on impact and cost effectiveness.
8. **Increase advocacy initiatives, targeting internal and external stakeholders, to establish a common understanding and buy-in of forecast-based actions.** A stakeholder analysis within each country should be carried out to identify specific target audiences. A particular focus should be put on advocating to donors and senior level management for increased investment in early action funding mechanisms and to increase the understanding and acceptance of early action as implementing forecast-based actions, which entails acting based on a certain degree of uncertainty.

[4] Early action activities are considered 'no regrets' as it is understood that in the scenario that the projections are incorrect, and no shock occurs, the activities undertaken will still have a positive impact on communities. More information is provided on p7-8.
[5] Response analysis exercises comprise the process by which the choice of the most appropriate activities to effectively support target populations are made through analysing situational and baseline information and assessing capacities and other organisational constraints or enablers.
[6] Refer to page 10 for additional details.

BACKGROUND

In many countries, resilience and development gains continue to be undermined by recurrent, predictable slow onset food and nutrition crises. Such crises usually occur in contexts of chronic or seasonal food insecurity, are caused by known hazard factors such as drought or global price rises, and develop slowly until an emergency level of acute food insecurity or malnutrition is reached. As witnessed by the drought responses in the Horn of Africa famine in 2011 and in Ethiopia in 2015, the international humanitarian response to such crises has often been late or inadequate. Although some efforts have been made to act sooner, as seen in Somalia in 2017[7], despite decades of rhetoric on the importance of linking relief and development, these links remain weak in practice, hindering capacity to act in a timely manner. If the situation is already a humanitarian crisis or has reached humanitarian *'trigger points'*, it is too late for early action, and humanitarian response will be required.

In response to this, Save the Children (SCUK) continues to invest both financially and in technical capacities to ensure that our commitment to early action is realized. Early action means acting before the situation can be described as a crisis: for SCUK, early action means proactive no-regrets activities, which mitigate the predicted impacts of identified risks and build the resilience of children, communities and systems. As outlined in the table below, **Early action is different from a timely response in that it is based on projections and designed to mitigate the impact of a specific forecasted shock, whereas timely response comprises actions implemented in response to a shock, based on actual needs** (see annex 2 for further information).

Early Action	Forecast-based 'no regrets' actions implemented to mitigate the impact of a specific projected shocks, before the situation can be called a crisis. Examples of early, 'no regrets' activities include - Cash distributions for livelihoods protection, Livestock vaccinations, Fodder distribution, Support to traders to maintain supplies, Short-term income generation opportunities, Rehabilitation of water sources etc.
Timely Response	Actions implemented once the situation has deteriorated into a crisis (at the beginning stages of a crisis), based on real time needs. Examples of 'timely response' activities include - Cash and food distributions to meet immediate food needs, Commercial and/ or slaughter destocking, Water trucking, Nutrition treatment etc.
Crisis Modifier	A mechanism, with funding, built into an existing programme designed to achieve timely response in the face of an impending shock. Has traditionally been used to achieve timely response but can also be used for early action.

Early action can enable households to avoid negative coping mechanisms during the early stages of slow onset crises.[8] As a situation starts to deteriorate, to meet their basic needs, households are often forced to engage in strategies such as selling productive assets (e.g. livestock), removing children from school, or switching to a less nutritious diet, well before emergency thresholds are reached or a crisis is declared. Therefore, even if early action is not enough to mitigate an emerging crisis, it can be a vital bridge that supports families and their children during these early signs of deterioration until humanitarian scale-up is possible. Early action activities are considered 'no regrets' as it is understood that in the scenario that the projections are incorrect, and no shock occurs, the activities undertaken will still have a positive impact on communities. It is felt that this approach should encourage actors to work better with the uncertainty inherent in using forecast or projections to trigger action.

[7] See "From Early Warning to Early Action in Somalia: What can we learn to support early action to mitigate humanitarian crises?", Oxfam, October 2017.
[8] A "slow onset crisis" such as drought, gradually unfolds over time, often months. This is different from a rapid onset crisis such as a hurricane, which causes high levels of destruction through immediate physical impacts. Because of the gradual nature of slow onset crises, they can be predicted further in advance.

Since 2013, SCUK has piloted approaches with the objective to establish a cost effective, replicable and sustainable framework that enables earlier actions that can be taken to scale in countries prone to slow onset shocks. Throughout the pilots, SCUK's definition of early action has evolved: initial pilots focused on the use of crisis modifiers to enable a timely response. Crisis modifiers (CM) are pre-agreed plans, including funding mechanisms, traditionally used to achieve a timely emergency response in the face of an impending shock. As our thinking evolved, so did our programming: subsequent pilots focused on achieving even earlier action, based on forecasts.

While forecast based actions can be applied in varying contexts, SCUK's focus has been on slow onset food security contexts (drought, rising food prices, etc.).

PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This document consolidates the lessons learned from three of SCUK's crisis modifier and early action pilot projects: a crisis modifier in Yemen (2013-2015); early action in Ethiopia (2015); and early action in Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger (2016-2017). Although the recommendations were originally geared towards SCUK's internal operational platform, it is felt that this learning can also usefully inform the work of donors, INGOs, governments and other partners in their future early action programming. It is also hoped that this learning paper will stimulate further dialogue around the triggering and funding components of early action within the wider humanitarian community, leading to increased buy-in and support of early action.

The report is primarily for technical and non-technical (operational, managerial, advocacy) personnel who would like to learn how the humanitarian and development community could move forward with institutionalizing early action in countries prone to slow onset crises. The report focuses on the operational aspects of early action such as monitoring and decision making, as well as advocacy and communication.

Section C of the report provides an overview of SCUK's pilots including: the evolution of SC's approach to early action; Section D consolidates the main outcomes of the approach, including value for money considerations, and captures what worked well; as well as challenges and weaknesses encountered. Section E provides recommendations for future programming for technical, operational, advocacy and senior level management within NGOs, as well as providing recommendations to donors.

Details of each pilot are provided in Annex 3, including: the context within which the early action mechanism was designed, the funding mechanism, the triggering approach and activities implemented.

The report does not provide a full assessment of the impact of each of SCUK's early action pilots; please refer to the "Additional reading" section in the annexed case studies to be directed to specific impact evaluations.

EVOLUTION OF SAVE THE CHILDREN'S EARLY ACTION PILOTS

As detailed above, during the previous few years, SCUK's approach to acting early has evolved significantly, particularly in terms of: **i)** the desired timing of actions (from a timely emergency response to forecast-based early actions), and **ii)** the types of indicators used to trigger action (from consequence to forecast-based triggers).

Establishing Triggers for Early Action

A trigger is a deviation from normal that is measured through indicators that have pre-defined thresholds for action. Depending on the indicator used, a trigger can indicate varying situations as follows: a) Forecast or Projected indicators, project a deteriorating situation 3-6 months (and sometimes longer) in advance, and can be used to trigger early action e.g. use of the Outcome Analysis tools of the Household Economy Approach to identify projected deficits against the livelihoods protection or survival thresholds; b) Predictive or Productive indicators, which highlight a deteriorating situation 1-2 months in advance and can be used to confirm triggering of early action, or can be used to trigger timely response e.g. data related to the onset of rains or pasture availability; c) Consequence indicators, which identify a situation that has already deteriorated. These indicators cannot be used to trigger early action but can be used to trigger emergency response e.g. Food Consumption Score[9].

Further details of different types of indicators are presented in **Annex 1.**

What is the "Household Economy Approach" (HEA)?

The HEA is a livelihoods framework that determines how households access food and income, and whether it is enough for them to survive and prosper. Knowing whether households have "enough" resources to meet their needs requires establishing quantifiable thresholds against which their access can be compared. HEA defines household access against two thresholds:

- The **'survival threshold'**: access to enough kilocalories to meet their food needs, enough cash to meet their basic survival needs;
- The **'livelihoods protection threshold'**: survival needs, plus the income necessary to cover basic household expenditures, cash required to meet a locally acceptable standard of living.

If households fall below either one or both of these thresholds, it indicates that some kind of intervention is necessary to save lives and/or protect livelihoods.

HEA combines baseline and forecast information, including data on households' key food and income sources such as food prices, labour wage rates, agriculture and livestock production, etc., to project and quantify how future or predicted shocks may affect a given population. This is called Outcome Analysis (OA) and identifies – a) whether families are able to meet their food needs (the survival threshold) and protect their livelihoods (the livelihoods protection threshold); b) What types of coping strategies (if any) will poorer and better off households use to mitigate the shock; v) How many people will need assistance to meet their needs; and e) What type of support would best to support the food security and livelihoods of the poorest households.

Because the OA projects and quantifies the impact of a shock, it is extremely useful in triggering the need for early action. (Refer to http://www.heawebsite.org/assesments-trainings/hea-e-learning-modules for online training opportunities.)

[9] The FCS is a WFP-developed tool; it is a composite score based on dietary diversity, food frequency (number of days during the past seven days) and the relative nutritional importance of different food groups.). It provides information linked to the access to caloric intake. https://www.wfp.org/content/technical-guidance-sheet-food-consumption-analysis-calculation-and-use-food-consumption-score-food-s

SCUK has piloted different (sets of) indicators that have enabled varying levels of "early" action, as detailed in Table 1 below. Establishing appropriate indicators and thresholds can be challenging. The success of an early action indicator to trigger early action depends upon the amount of warning time it can provide to implement actions before households start to feel the impacts of a shock. Therefore, it is important to note that the timing of the data collection and analysis of any indicator is critical; for no matter what type of indicator, if data is collected too late, it will not provide the required warning time to act early. This highlights the importance of having robust monitoring and analysis systems in place.

Table 1: Triggers and Indicators used in SCUK pilots

Country	Year	Donor	Trigger Indicators	Achievements
Yemen	**2014**	**DfID**	*Projected and Consequence indicators: HEA plus FSL indicators* • Substantial predicted HEA livelihoods protection (LHP) deficit or small survival deficit (equivalent of IPC Phase 3[10]) to target project beneficiaries • Substantial predicted survival deficit (equivalent of IPC Phase 4) to target all affected households in project area • Coping Strategy Index and Dietary Diversity Score (IPC Phase 3)	Triggered timely response (during the same month that households began feeling the impact of the shock)
Ethiopia	**2015**	**SCUK**	*Productive and Consequence indicators - FSL, nutrition and WASH-based real-time indicators, including:* • Water and pasture availability • Nutrition and health rates • Indicators triggered at (almost) crisis phase (IPC Phase 2-3)	Triggered timely response, which was several months earlier than other actors (within a couple of months of households feeling impact of shock, and a month or two before the peak of the shock), leading to successful fundraising of $US 11 million and praise from the local government
Niger	**2017**	**SCUK**	*Projected indicator and Predictive/ Productive indicators: HEA, FSL real time indicator:* • Survival deficit to target as many affected households in targeted area as budget permits • Staple food prices	Triggered timely response (during the period households felt impact of the shock)
Ethiopia	**2017**	**SCUK**	*Projected Indicator: HEA* • Survival deficit to target as many affected households in targeted area as budget permits	Triggered early action, before households were projected to feel impact of the shock

The Situation and Response Analysis Framework (SRAF)

In 2013, following the 2011 Horn of Africa famine and with the goal to improve capacity to respond earlier to slow onset shocks, SCUK with Concern and Oxfam developed the SRAF with ECHO funding. Through analysing detailed baseline data, the SRAF framework outlines a process by which forecasts, local knowledge, good coordination and communication can help agencies predict, plan for, and deliver appropriate and timely responses. The SRAF is unique in that it inverts the traditional humanitarian analytical process by carrying out response analysis before the shock takes place, as opposed to carrying out a situation or needs analysis post-shock and is based on utilising the HEA.

[10] For more information on the Integrated Phase Classification please see http://www.ipcinfo.org/

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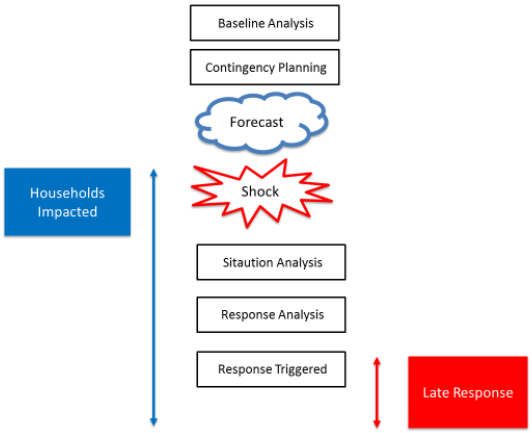
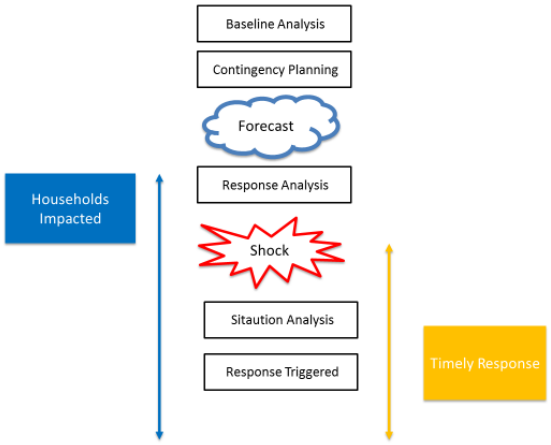
The SRAF improves upon traditional contingency planning as it:

- Uses HEA baseline information and outcome analysis to predict hazard impacts, giving a strong basis for relevant activity planning;
- Includes response analysis (choice of most appropriate activities) in the contingency plan and does this before the shock;
- Identifies response objectives and start-up times (e.g. beneficiary numbers, logistics considerations etc) to ensure activities are feasible and response is not too late;
- Represents a simple, low-cost solution which is easily replicable.

Traditional Contingency Planning



SRAF in 2013

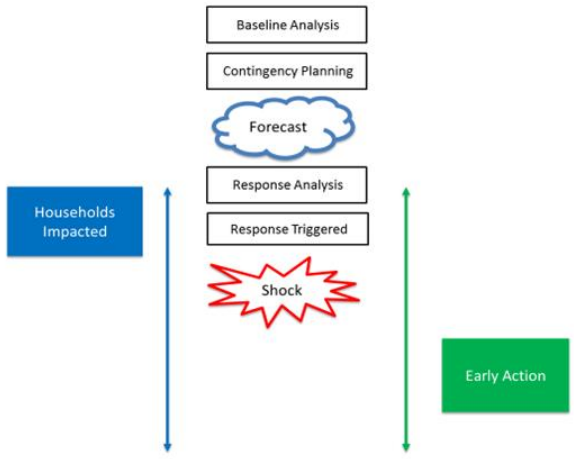


SCUK piloted the use of the SRAF as part of a crisis modifier process in a 2014 DFID-funded project in Yemen.

Following this initial pilot, SCUK updated the SRAF in 2015 to highlight that to be effective, early action should also be initiated prior to the shock.

This means triggering early action based on forecasts and not waiting for situation analysis to be completed post shock. If needed, early action can then act to provide a bridge to humanitarian response. This ensures households do not need to employ negative coping mechanisms in the run-up to a crisis.[11]

SRAF in 2015



[11] For further information on the SRAF process and trainings please contact Save the Children UK FSL Teams

The Early Action Fund (EAF)

Following the success of the initial 2014 SRAF-based crisis modifier pilot in Yemen, and with the continued ambition to act even earlier to slow onset food crises, Save the Children UK utilised internal 'Breakthrough Funds' to establish an Early Action Fund (a standing fund of £100,000) in 2015.

This Early Action Fund enabled SCUK to apply lessons learned through the Yemen experience to further pilot approaches for, and build capacity in, acting earlier. In particular the updated SRAF was rolled out with trainings in Ethiopia, Kenya and Niger and incorporated into the Early Action processes adopted in these 3 countries.

The fund was made available to SC's teams in Ethiopia and Kenya with Ethiopia triggering the fund in July 2015 (detailed below). SCUK secured additional funding to continue the pilot from 2016-2018, which included expansion to Niger. 2016 was dedicated to building capacity and establishing monitoring and triggering systems; and in 2017, in addition to continued capacity building and an emphasis on evidence generation, another pot of £100,000 was made available to the three countries for early action. Both Niger and Ethiopia triggered the Fund in the first half of 2017 (detailed below).

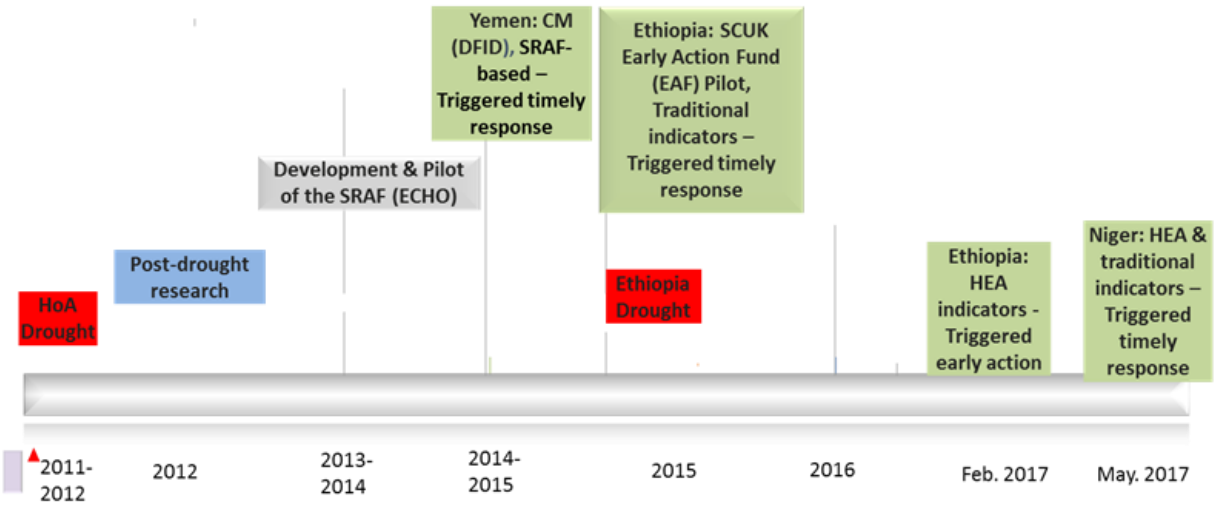


Figure 1: Evolution of the early action approach in Save the Children

Overview of timing of SCUK's Early Action Work

As SC's use of indicators, and process for early action has evolved, so too has the timeliness of the actions. The diagrams below provide a timeline for the early action pilots in Yemen (2014), Ethiopia (2015, 2017) and Niger (2017). In 2014 and 2015, teams in Yemen and Ethiopia triggered timely responses to support households within about a month of feeling the impact of the shock. In 2017, the Niger team triggered a timely response, while the Ethiopia team built upon their experiences in 2015, and in 2017 successfully implemented forecast-based actions, before households had started to feel the impact of the projected shock.

YEMEN

The team began cash-based interventions in December, following the triggering of their HEA-based Crisis Modifier (CM) in November. Households felt the impact of the shock from December. Although not early action, the CM enabled the implementation of a timely intervention. Challenges with monitoring in September prevented earlier action, highlighting the need for effective monitoring and analysis systems.

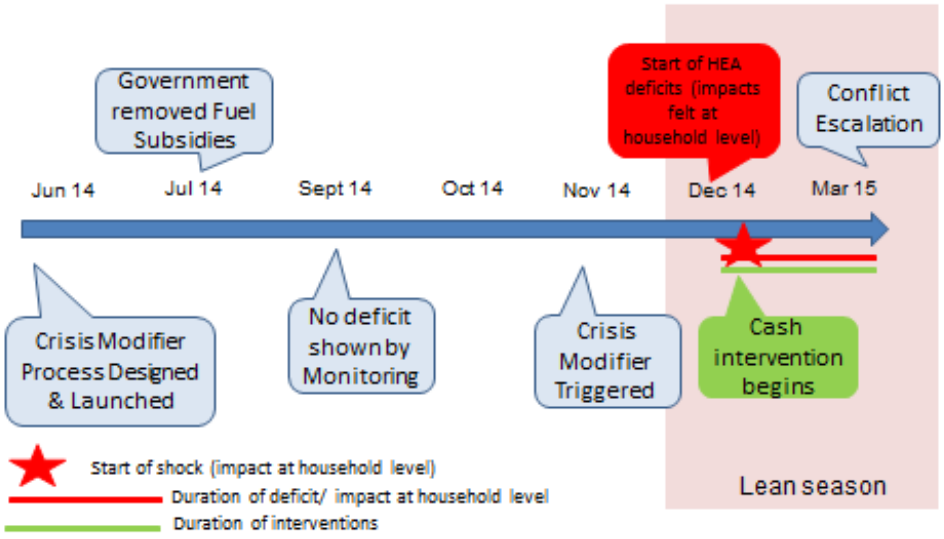


Figure 2: Timeline of Yemen EA Pilot, 2014

ETHIOPIA

The team began the implementation of varying FSL, nutrition and WASH activities in July. Households felt the impact of the shock since around April, highlighting the need for triggers that could signal a deteriorating situation earlier. Nonetheless, the EAF enabled SC to be one of the first agencies to act, leading to recognition from donors and local government.

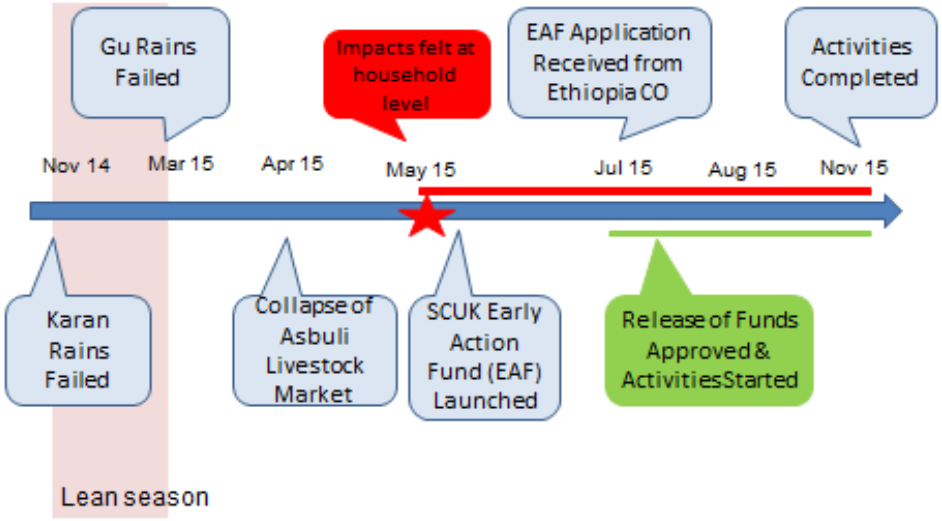


Figure 3: Timeline of Ethiopia EA Pilot, 2015

NIGER

The team began implementation of FSL activities in June, when households were expected to feel the impact of the shock. The team achieved a timely emergency response; however, the pilot highlights the need for timely data analysis and decision making (particularly when multiple indicators are used). This also shows the effectiveness of HEA-based triggers which highlighted the situation in February.

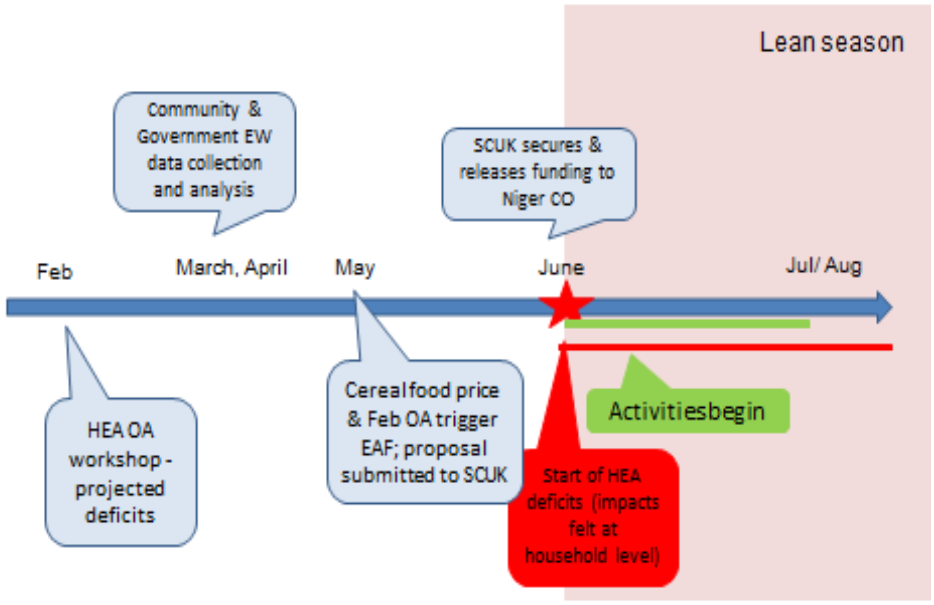


Figure 4 : Timeline of the Early Action Fund in Niger, 2017

ETHIOPIA

The team began implementation of FSL and WASH activities in March, before households were expected to feel the impact of the shock (from May). Results from the impact evaluation highlights that households were able to protect livestock and smooth food consumption throughout the shock (until end of July). The team was able to act much earlier than in 2015 suggesting the importance of continued investment in capacity and systems building.

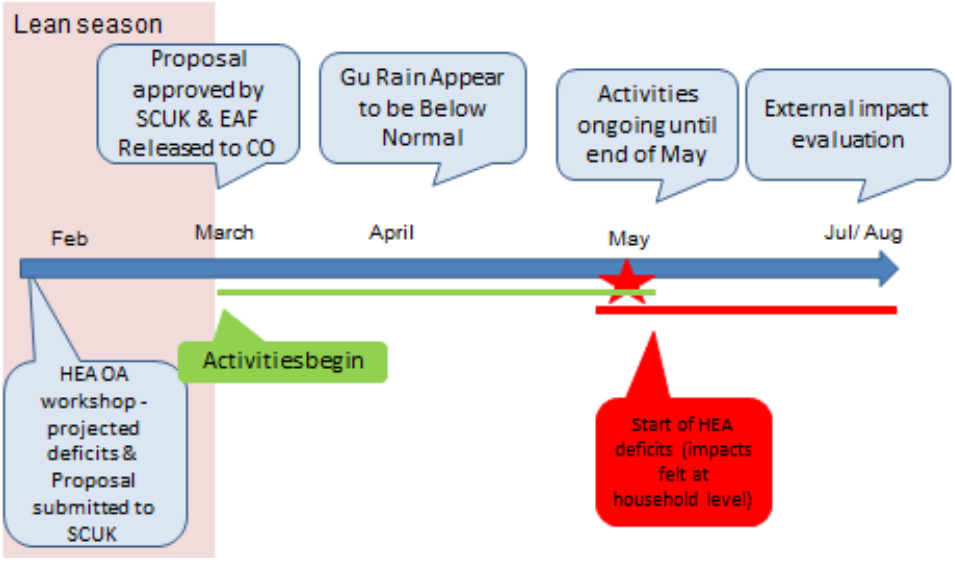


Figure 5: Time of the Early Action Fund in Ethiopia, 2017

LESSONS LEARNED

Outcomes of Acting Earlier

Generating evidence on the outcomes for households and their children due to acting early has proved challenging and the methodologies employed in doing so have evolved over time. For the Yemen crisis modifier example, no evaluation was possible, as immediately after implementation of the planned activities, conflict escalation prevented access to the field sites. For Ethiopia in 2015 an internal evaluation was conducted, including a desk review, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

In 2016 the evaluation process was reviewed to ensure improved capture of evidence for future pilots. As a result of the 2016 evaluation review, 3 changes were made to the evaluation process – a) the internal evaluation included a control group and focused on quantitative data e.g. Food Consumption Score; b) a Value for Money component was added; c) an external evaluation was included, utilising the Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol (Quip) approach to collect qualitative data.[12] This evaluation model was utilised for the 2017 pilot in Ethiopia. In Niger 2017, due to the short timeframe and limited scope of the project a full evaluation was not completed.

The pilots for which data was gathered (Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017) demonstrated that acting earlier enabled households to better cope with the shock. Furthermore, the (earlier) timing of the actions was highly appreciated by donors and local governments and was deemed to represent better value for money than humanitarian response.

I. ***Acting earlier (than others and in previous similar scenarios) enabled households to better cope with the shock.***

- Internal monitoring of the Ethiopia 2017 EAF showed that the interventions increased the resilience of households. The HEA resilience measurement[13] calculated that the EAF interventions enabled the beneficiaries to cope with the below-normal rains significantly better than without the interventions. Poor and middle households were able to absorb the shock, maintaining acceptable levels of food security and livelihoods assets throughout the duration of the shock. Please refer to Annex 3 (Case Study 3, i.) for further details on the HEA resilience scores.
- Likewise, the results of the 2017 EAF impact evaluation in Ethiopia show that during the project implementation and shock periods, households increased income; reduced expenditure (on water, livestock feed, etc.); reported improved access to food and water; maintained food consumption and child nutrition levels, and saw increased health of their livestock – all of which suggests that the interventions enabled them to cope in very difficult circumstances.
- In Ethiopia in 2015, beneficiaries reported that the livestock feed they received enabled them to feed their animals until pasture regenerated, likely preventing some sales and/or deaths.

II. ***Acting earlier than others positioned SC for rapid humanitarian scale up.***

- In Ethiopia in 2015, acting before others meant that SC was well positioned to rapidly respond when humanitarian response was required (in this scenario early action activities were not able to mitigate the impact of successive rain failure). This ultimately led to successful fundraising initiatives of around US$11 million for the subsequent humanitarian response enabling timely scale-up of response.

[12] For information on the quip approach please see - http://www.bath.ac.uk/cds/projects-activities/qualitative-impact-assessment-protocol-QUIPS11/index.html
[13] The HEA resilience score measures the absorptive capacity of resilience by analysing whether households have enough income following a locally relevant shock to a) cover their immediate essential food and non-food needs and b) recover quickly so that they can maximise income in the next non-hazard year. For further details on the HEA resilience score, please visit: http://foodeconomy.com/applications-of-hea/hea-and-resilience/

III. ***Acting earlier (than others and in previous similar scenarios) was appreciated by local government and beneficiaries, contributing to our acceptance in communities.***

- In Ethiopia in 2015, SC received an award of recognition from the Erer Woreda, to show their appreciation of the timing of our actions – a clear indicator that SC did indeed act earlier than other actors, and before the general scale up of the international humanitarian response. In addition, an internal operational review of the Ethiopia 2017 EAF revealed that local government, community elders and beneficiaries appreciated the timing of the activities. Village elders and beneficiaries highlighted that they greatly appreciated the nature of activities which sought to protect their livestock, as opposed to in previous years when external support came after the rains had failed and their animals had died.

IV. ***Acting earlier was found to represent better Value for Money than humanitarian response.***

- A Social Cost Benefit Analysis[14] conducted for the 2017 Ethiopian Early Action Fund provides strong evidence that acting early has delivered, and will continue to deliver, good value for money. For every £1 spent on the EAF, target HHs receive £2.58 in social value (on average) when compared to only a humanitarian response. By capturing a broader sense of 'value' and appreciating the impact on beneficiaries' social (rather than solely economic) outcomes, the analysis shows that providing intervention early, before crisis, effectively and efficiently defends beneficiaries from the worst and most damaging effects of drought (or similar shocks).
- Through modelling alternative scenarios, it was found that even if the predicted crisis had not transpired, acting early would have delivered a positive return on investment of £1.61 for every £1 spent on the EAF. This highlights the fact that such interventions can be considered 'no regrets' as the actions represent an improvement in beneficiaries' status and effective investment for donors even if forecasts prove to be wrong and no crises emerges (See Annex 4 for further information).[15]

What worked well?

Throughout the evolution of SCUK's pilots, several aspects have contributed to SC achieving early and/or timely action:

I. **Detailed contingency plans based on forecasts-built donor confidence and enabled quick implementation:**

- ***Creating detailed scenarios with proposed activities and budgets-built donor confidence.*** In Yemen, DfID was confident to allow SC to manage a flexible budget line because of the detailed scenarios and contingency plans that the CO developed during a "normal" (non-shock) period. These plans were based on the HEA and included the quantified impact of the projected shocks in cash value; number of beneficiaries likely to be affected; selection criteria of households likely to be affected; and the timing of support that would likely be required. All of these details are provided by the OA.
- ***Having a detailed contingency plan facilitated quick implementation.*** Given the details described above, the Yemen CO knew exactly what and when to implement which quickened decision making and implementation

II. **Existing flexible funding mechanisms, with clear internal and external protocols for use/release of funds, were critical for acting early.**

[14] Social cost-benefit analysis is a systematic and cohesive economic tool(method) to survey all the impacts caused by a project. It comprises not just the financial effects (maintained income etc), but all the social effects (cost to GDP of children out of school).
[15] For more information on the Social Cost Benefit Analysis methodology or to access the full SCBA report for the Early Action Fund, please contact Save the Children UK FSL Teams

- ***Having a readily available fund enabled us to act earlier than others.*** In Ethiopia in 2015, the EAF enabled SC to start implementation of activities several months before standard humanitarian support including crisis modifiers deployed by some existing programmes. This demonstrates that an easy-to-access funding pot enables earlier action.
- ***Having a flexible fund and pre-agreed procedures made approval for the release of funds fast.*** In Yemen, as with internal procedures and sign-off, having clear procedures, which included specific roles and responsibilities and timeframes for SC and DfID ensured that the funds were quickly and efficiently available to the team, which contributed to the timeliness of interventions.
- ***A clear understanding of the crisis modifier's trigger points and different people's roles within the CO made internal procedures fast.*** To ensure timely action, decision making and varying processes need to be efficient. In Yemen, the SMT's engagement in and understanding of the project – including the trigger points – ensured their quick approval of release of funds and procurement.

III. Working with existing local structures facilitated the integration of early action into the EW system and facilitated community buy-in, while providing a platform for sustainability.

- ***Building upon the existing decentralized EW system facilitated data collection and analysis.*** In Niger, the CO worked directly with the community level EW systems to identify context appropriate triggers and to regularly collect and analyse data. This ensured the efficient and systematic collection of data, as well as buy-in from the communities of the early action concept. Moreover, it will contribute to the sustainability of an early action system.
- ***Positive Relationships with Local, Regional and National governments enabled quick action.*** In Ethiopia in 2017 regular coordination meetings across the programme team, partners and government supported positive teamwork and collaboration. Early action was quickly understood to be proactive support which is separate from humanitarian response, and as such gained quick government endorsement to proceed.

IV. Building on the internal systems, stocks and staff of ongoing programmes contributed to the timeliness of implementation.

- ***Having a presence in and contextual understanding of the region facilitated the triggering of the "abnormal" situation.*** In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, SC's team's familiarity and understanding of the local context enabled them to identify a situation that was likely to further deteriorate, which supported their monitoring systems and enabled the triggering of the EAF before the situation had been declared an emergency.
- ***The team's experience implementing activities – and ability to prioritize the EAF - enabled a quick start up of activities.*** In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, selecting (appropriate) interventions that the team was comfortable with contributed to the timeliness of the actions. Moreover, the team was able to prioritize the early action interventions as they could see the value in supporting their long-term goals, despite other ongoing, longer-term projects.
- ***The existing team's experiences and relationships with the villages enabled a fast and efficient implementation.*** In all three countries, the existing teams' knowledge of the communities facilitated a quick selection of households.
- ***Using existing stocks for ongoing programmes contributed to the timeliness of interventions.*** In Ethiopia in 2017, to avoid implementation delays caused by standard internal procurement processes, the team used existing stocks of WASH materials (intended for ongoing development projects, subsequently replacing these upon their procurement) to implement WASH activities.
- ***A functional cash transfer mechanism ensured quick payments to beneficiaries.*** In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, and in Niger in 2017, the existing cash transfer mechanism that was in place for ongoing programming (EU funded Cash for Work activities in Ethiopia, ECHO funded seasonal safety nets in

Niger) enabled quick implementation through the efficient transfer of cash to beneficiaries; however the mechanism in Ethiopia does not have capacity to scale up beyond the targeted number of beneficiaries.

V. HEA and the SRAF facilitated appropriate and timely early actions.

- ***Using HEA and the SRAF enabled a timely triggering and selection of interventions before the situation had deteriorated.*** In Ethiopia in 2017, an HEA OA and SRAF exercise was conducted in February, immediately triggering the EAF. Deficits were projected in the coming months, which provided ample time to implement early action. Moreover, the OA projections were almost completely accurate: a review of the EAF in August 2017 indicated that the situation had evolved as projected. Note that the team has since added two indicators as a means to complement or "verify" the OA results: livestock body condition and staple food prices. In Niger, the OA in March projected that households would face deficits from June; although the triggering was delayed for varying reasons described in this report, the OA accurately projected the situation, indicating the potential for HEA to be used as an effective trigger in the future.
- ***The response analysis exercise permitted the selection of truly no regrets actions.*** The 2017 Ethiopia exercise brought together CO and government staff, and enabled a lively discussion about types of interventions, and prevented the selection of activities that are not deemed to be no regrets (i.e: commercial destocking of livestock – this activity would not have been appropriate as the early action interventions prevented the need for households to sell livestock.)
- ***HEA quantified needs for response planning.*** In Yemen, Ethiopia (2017) and in Niger, HEA exercises enabled the teams to quickly and precisely quantify needs, which facilitated response planning and implementation.

Challenges and weaknesses

As outlined above, SCUK's pilots have evolved over time, and achieved significant successes. However, several challenges have been encountered and weaknesses observed, all of which will continue to contribute to the evolvement of SC's early action commitment:

I. HEA requires significant technical capacity and resources, which are not present in all countries.

- ***HEA baselines do not exist for all project areas.*** While HEA OA proved to be an effective tool to trigger a timely response, baselines are prerequisites to carrying out OA. This highlights the need to establish wide coverage of HEA baselines, especially in areas prone to slow onset crises. Where HEA-based triggers are not possible, set non-HEA triggers to "Stressed levels" (equivalent of IPC Phase 2[16]) to ensure action can be taken before the situation is in a "Crisis level".[17] In the ideal scenario HEA should be supplemented by 1-2 predictive or productive indicators (see Annex 1) which can complement and conform HEA data.
- ***Some COs had no previous experience in developing scenarios and carrying out HEA analyses and therefore required extensive capacity building and technical support.*** To effectively and sustainably implement an HEA-based early action framework, COs and local partners need to have the capacity to carry out HEA analyses. This will require some level of support from internal and/or external experts; HEA tools that have been developed to simplify HEA (by SC and partners), should be further exploited such as the HEA dashboard[18], the new HEA software[19] (currently being developed),

[16] For more information on the Integrated Phase Classification please see - http://www.ipcinfo.org/
[17] Refer to SC's "Developing Triggers for Early Action Guidance Document" for details and examples.
[18] The HEA Dashboard, simplified analysis spreadsheet, was developed as part of the SRAF process in 2014 to simply HEA OA.
[19] SCUK is currently developing a software that will simplify HEA analyses. The software is scheduled to be released in the second half of 2018.

and online trainings.[20] Furthermore, capacity building needs to be budgeted into grants and accepted by donors, and SC should commit sufficient financial and human resources to increase FSL teams' capacity in HEA.

- ***In Niger, the HEA OA was conducted outside of the EA pilot, which contributed to delays in triggering.*** Although HEA OA exercises are carried out twice per year in Niger (as part of a wider national and regional early warning system, the Cadre Harmonise), the results were not known by the SC project team. This highlights the need to ensure effective communication and use of government HEA systems where existing, to support EA.

II. Setting appropriate triggers and ensuring a clear understanding of the triggering process has been challenging.

- ***In Yemen, Ethiopia in 2015 and Niger, indicators and triggers did not enable early enough action.*** To achieve early action, triggers need to enable action before the situation deteriorates to a situation where malnutrition rates have increased, and livelihoods have been lost. Therefore "consequence" indicators linked to malnutrition and health rates are not appropriate for enabling early action. Those linked to livelihoods (such as livestock body and pasture conditions, and staple food prices) should be set to "Stressed" phase (equivalent of IPC/ Cadre Harmonise Level 2[21]) to permit action before the situation deteriorates to "Crisis" phase (equivalent of IPC/ Cadre Harmonise Level 3). For this reason, in Ethiopia in 2015, the nutrition activities the team implemented were life-saving (treatment of malnutrition) and not early action (prevention of malnutrition).
- ***In Niger, having multiple indicators may have contributed to the delay in triggering the EAF.*** In addition to not having triggering thresholds aligned with IPC Level 2 'stressed' values (to allow for action before crisis levels), having multiple indicators may have complicated the data analysis. Specifically, data for different indicators were not available (and analysed) at the same time, which delayed the triggering process.
- ***The triggering process was not clear to the technical team in Kenya.*** For this reason, once the technical FSL team carried out the HEA OA in December 2016, the results were not communicated to SMT or SCUK, and despite projected HEA deficits in the coming months, the EAF was not triggered.

III. An effective EWEA system requires effective monitoring and analysis tools.

- ***In Yemen and Niger, the analysis of monitoring data (to be fed into HEA OA in Yemen, and for complementary indicators in Niger)*** was inaccurate due to problems with the analysis tools (Yemen) or delays with receiving data (Niger), which delayed triggering. There is a need to invest sufficient resources in training programme and MEAL staff in data collection and analysis, including the development of easy-to-use data analysis tools.

IV. Integrating with community DRR and/or EW systems is desirable - but not systematic or easy.

- ***In some countries, the early action mechanism lacked integration with community DRR systems, which could have significantly contributed to scenario development and response analysis, and allowed communities to adapt early preventative coping measures.*** In Yemen and Ethiopia, SC should build upon existing local early warning or DRR systems where they exist. As seen in Niger, local expertise is critical for informing accurate scenario development and response analysis; and existing systems could potentially contribute to context monitoring. Furthermore, working with local systems will contribute to sustainability. To achieve this integration, a certain degree of capacity building of

[20] Three online courses are available in French and English (Introduction, Baseline and OA Refresher): http://www.heawebsite.org/assesments-trainings/hea-e-learning-modules
[21] http://www.ipcinfo.org/, http://www.agrhymet.ne/

local structures will be required, and specific areas for synergy (such as data collection systems) identified. In Ethiopia in 2017, communities were not made aware of the forecasted situation (by SC or other partners) to enable them to adopt early preventative coping measures.

V. Teams and Donors must become more confident to implement no regrets actions.

- ***In some countries, staff are not yet comfortable implementing "no regrets" activities which delayed the triggering of the EAF as they feared forecasts could have been wrong.*** In Ethiopia in 2015, although the team highlighted a deteriorating situation in May, the EAF wasn't triggered until July when the negative impact on households could already be seen. Likewise, in Niger, in February the HEA OA projected a deteriorating situation, but the EAF was not triggered until May, once the team had collected and analysed complementary data. Efforts must be made to ensure teams – including senior management - are comfortable working with uncertainty. Stronger reassurance that forecast-based 'no-regrets' actions will not be termed as a waste of resource by donors or fund managers is also needed.

VI. Operational processes may not be conducive to implementing early action.

- ***Rigorous operational procedures may have hindered early action***. In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, financial, procurement and logistic procedures may not be completely suitable for quick implementation, hence hindering the full potential of early action. Specifically, in 2015, the procurement of drugs (human and animal) and animal feed required significant time that contributed to some delays in implementation. It could be appropriate to ask that humanitarian logistics procedures be applied to early action projects to avoid this in future.
- ***Payments to CFW beneficiaries were delayed due to limitations of the cash transfer mechanism.*** In Ethiopia in 2015, although the Field Office had prior experience implementing CFW which enabled an initial quick disbursement of cash to a limited number of beneficiaries, the mechanism was not well prepared to handle the required increase in payments (beneficiaries) and was not accustomed to the time pressures of early action. This highlights the importance of cash preparedness and investing in scalable transfer mechanisms.

VII. Staff capacities and planning may not be conducive to implementing early action.

- ***Existing staff's limited capacity in humanitarian programming may have hindered programme design and implementation.*** In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, the FSL team's experience is in livelihoods development programming and they therefore "stuck to what they knew" for the EAF – which likely facilitated implementation of activities for which they had experience implementing, but could, in the future, hinder the selection of more appropriate activities geared at preventing losses. This highlights the need to better engage humanitarian teams in the design and implementation of early action interventions, and/or to build implementing teams' capacity in humanitarian programming.
- ***In Ethiopia in 2017, the WASH team was not available to immediately begin implementation.*** The WASH activities were slightly delayed because the team was not available until the final half of the project due to ongoing project commitments; this highlights the need to develop early action implementation plans with all relevant sector (and operational) teams.

VIII. The need for improved internal and external communication about Early Action.

- ***There remains some confusion about the definition and objectives of early action, which contributed to some delays in submitting the proposal for the release of funds.*** Given the severe food insecurity and malnutrition caused by rain failures in other parts of Ethiopia in early 2017, senior management were initially hesitant to support the implementation of early action interventions in the Somali region, which was not yet as badly impacted. The team underlined the rational for the early action interventions and highlighted that humanitarian funding mechanisms are more appropriate for emergency situations. This communication was effective but led to short delays in the decision-making process. This highlights the need to better communicate the objectives of early action (and the differences between early action and humanitarian programming funding streams, objectives, and activities) during normal times to prevent implementation delays once triggers are set off;
- ***Similarly, externally there remains some confusion about the definition and objectives of early action, which contributed to some delays in submitting the proposal for the release of funds.*** In Ethiopia in 2017 local government authorities were initially hesitant to support the early action activities, partly because the situation was not yet deemed a crisis, and partly because they preferred that SC target IDPs and households with children with malnutrition. To avoid these types of delays, it is important to effectively communicate to the government that early actions are preventative measures, as well as the differences between early action and humanitarian programming funding streams, objectives, and activities. It also highlights the need to ensure regular coordination with partners (including government) on the ground. There is a need for SC and partners to explore how to best meet urgent humanitarian needs while simultaneously implementing early actions (in a context such as the Somali region, where displacement and acute malnutrition are ongoing).

IX. Adequate Budget for Early Action is needed for maximum effectiveness of the approach.

- ***Budgets, as expected in the EAF pilot, have been inadequate to meet all needs.*** In Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017, the EAF (made up of £100,000) was not enough to reach all households that required assistance in SC's intervention area (in 2015, some activities covered only about 5-10% of households in the affected areas; in 2017, activities covered 48-92% of targeted (poor and middle) households). Similarly, the funds allocated to Niger were insufficient compared to the identified needs. This is likely to often be the case, which highlights the need to better advocate to partners and donors to "fill the gap". In addition, this would allow for more holistic multi-sector support.
- ***A single, multi-region EAF may not be appropriate.*** The Niger CO triggered the EAF in May 2017, after the Ethiopia CO had been allocated the funds in February. Due to differences in seasonality (and the likely periods that households would require early action) between West and East Africa, and the fact that the EAF runs from January to December, it is possible that countries in East Africa (with traditional lean seasons from January-March) will always trigger the fund before countries in West Africa (with traditional lean seasons from June-September). It may therefore be appropriate to have a dedicated early action funds for each region.

X. The generation of evidence has not been adequately prioritized.

- ***Evidence on value-for-money (VfM) and the impact of acting early should be better captured.*** Due to access constraints caused by conflict, in Yemen, VfM and impact analyses could not be carried out; in Ethiopia in 2015 and Niger, although project evaluations were carried out, adequate resources were not prioritized for VfM analysis. In Ethiopia in 2017, VfM analysis was completed. In addition, resources were dedicated to an external impact evaluation, but while providing some interesting findings, it was found that the methodology employed was not the most appropriate to capture the impact of acting early. More investment in impact analysis is needed to further strengthen our findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the Yemen pilot in 2014, SC has significantly evolved its approach to acting early, which is partially attributed to the many lessons that have been learned in successive pilots.

Four critical overarching learnings from this process are:

1. **It is indeed possible to act earlier.** Acting based on forecasts and achieving true "early action" is possible when the appropriate mechanism is in place. All pilots demonstrate that it is possible to act earlier, before a situation is declared a crisis, and the 2017 pilot in Ethiopia shows that achieving true early action is feasible.
2. **Acting earlier has positive impacts on beneficiaries' livelihoods and lives and is appreciated by local governments and communities.** Evaluations in Ethiopia in 2015 and 2017 have demonstrated that acting earlier can enable households to protect their livelihoods throughout the duration of the shock (2015, 2017) and smooth food consumption (2017). Internal monitoring of the 2017 interventions in Ethiopia show that acting early enabled households to increase their (HEA) resilience scores. Both beneficiaries and government have expressed their appreciation of earlier action.
3. **Continuity is crucial for achieving success and institutionalizing the approach.** As demonstrated in Ethiopia, continued investment in capacity building and system development is critical to ensuring effective early action. Although the CO was able to implement a timely response in 2015, in 2017 they were able to implement true early action.
4. **Acting early represents better Value for Money as compared to humanitarian response.** By capturing a broader sense of 'value' and appreciating the impact on beneficiaries' social (rather than solely economic) outcomes, VfM analysis conducted in Ethiopia in 2017, shows that providing intervention early, before a crisis, effectively and efficiently defends beneficiaries from the worst and most damaging effects of drought (or similar shocks). For every £1 spent on the EAF, target HHs receive £2.58 in social value (on average) when compared to only a humanitarian response.

Based on our experience of implementing successive early action, several suggestions for moving forward have been identified for NGO based technical, advocacy and operations teams, as well as for donors and external decision makers as detailed below.

Donors

1. ***Invest in the scaling up early action:*** Ensure increased budget is dedicated to and ring-fenced for early action and that partners understand that 'no regrets' actions will be regarded as a good investment, whether or not a crisis unfolds as predicted.
2. ***Provide multi-year funding to support early action systems:*** Support not only the activities themselves, but also the systems which enable them to happen, including investment in HEA (capacity building and baseline development), monitoring and analysis systems and tools, and evidence generation and dissemination.
3. ***Ensure appropriate and pre-agreed funding mechanisms for early action:*** The funding mechanism must be flexible and enable a quick release of funds, linked to pre-agreed triggers and triggering process.
4. ***Promote early action at appropriate forums:*** Promote the wider uptake of early action within the humanitarian and development community. Encourage partners to include early action in projects.

Decision Makers: Government Officials and NGO Senior Management

1. ***Invest in HEA:*** In budget processes prioritize HEA capacity building, targeting technical staff in countries prone to slow onset crises.
2. ***Systematically ask for and review early warning data at identified key seasonal moments:*** Identify points in the year when meteorological forecasts are available and ensure the most likely scenarios developed by teams including HEA Outcome Analysis results are systematically reviewed at these times. This will identify if, and when early actions are required, and whether there is a need for advocacy (if there is no access to early action funds).
3. ***Promote early action at appropriate forums:*** With support from advocacy and technical colleagues, become familiarized with the advantages of acting early, and promote the wider uptake of early action within the humanitarian community.
4. ***Contribute to the development and correct implementation of decision-making protocols:*** To ensure efficient release of funds and implementation, decision makers need to be part of setting country-level decision making protocols to trigger early action.

Advocacy and Communications Teams

1. ***External communications and advocacy:***
    - Carry out stakeholder analyses to identify partners and champions at global, regional and country level for advocacy and implementation.
    - Support the wide dissemination of learning and best practices at national and global levels.
    - Develop a communications and advocacy strategy that targets various stakeholders (government, other NGOs, donors, etc.) to promote the acceptance and uptake of early action. Vary the communication approach depending on the target audience.

Technical Teams

1. ***Setting triggers:*** Where HEA baselines exist, promote use of HEA-based triggers (projected survival or livelihoods protection deficits). Where HEA-based triggers are not possible, set non-HEA triggers to "Stressed levels" (equivalent of IPC Phase 2) to ensure action can be taken before the situation is in a "Crisis level". If combining HEA and non-HEA indicators, ensure any non-HEA indicators are available at the same time as the HEA OA results, and that there is adequate capacity to analyse multiple indicators. Keep indicators simple and have no more than three (HEA + two non-HEA indicators).
2. ***Use of HEA:*** Prioritize and promote the use of HEA as the basis of national early action frameworks, and work with governments and partners to have a unified system:
    - Budget for HEA capacity building and exercises (baseline, OA) in projects and planning for government and partners staff.
    - Expand HEA baseline coverage in countries prone to slow onset crises. Include funding for HEA baselines in project proposals.
3. ***Context monitoring:*** Work with others, as possible, to carry out regular context monitoring of pre-established trigger indicators (e.g. HEA key parameters and other selected IPC indicators). This requires mapping of "normal year" indictor values on seasonal calendars. Include early warning monitoring and context analysis in job descriptions.
    - Reinforce the monitoring and triggering system through the regular verification of HEA OA results and other monitoring data. (An experienced HEA practitioner should review all HEA OA to verify if triggering thresholds have been reached.)
4. ***HEA-based response analysis and contingency planning:*** Conduct seasonal HEA OA and carry out response analysis (using the SRAF), including the development of detailed scenarios and contingency plans based on forecasts and HEA OA results. Include relevant partners in this process as possible. Share scenarios and plans with donors and partners well before the forecasted shocks to build consensus.

5. ***MEAL framework and evidence generation:*** Develop a rigorous MEAL framework, including a VfM analysis, that complements existing evidence and that captures the impact of early action on children. Ensure adequate budgets are allocated to learning and evidence generation, and work with advocacy colleagues to develop key messages for dissemination.
6. ***Capacity building:*** Ensure that existing implementing teams are adequately trained in humanitarian programming.
7. ***Engaging local structures:*** With Resilience colleagues, assess the feasibility of working with existing DRR and community structures to promote the sustainable uptake of early action.

Operations Team

1. ***Preparedness measures:*** Carry out preparedness actions including the identification of suppliers for key inputs, (such as livestock feed), and carry out a cash preparedness assessment to establish a scalable and efficient cash transfer mechanism. Identify ongoing programmes' stocks that could be used for early actions.
2. ***Internal and external decision-making protocols:***
    - Develop internal decision-making protocols, with dedicated and clear roles and responsibilities, for efficient and timely triggering of early action.
    - Develop clear decision-making protocols that include detailed timings with donors as soon as early action financing is secured.
3. ***Internal funding mechanisms:*** Establish regional early action funding pots in accordance with seasonality.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Triggers and indicators – further details on types

(adapted from the IFRC-led "Early Warning Early Action in East Africa: mechanisms for rapid decision making", available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Early%20Warning%20Early%20Action%20Report%20Final%20-%20July%202014.pdf)

	Types of indicators:				
	Forecast	**Projected**	**Predictive**	**Productive**	**Consequence**
Examples	-Long range weather forecasts	-Projected HEA survival and livelihoods protection thresholds	-Short term weather forecasts -Onset of rains -Quantity, distribution, duration of rains	-Germination rate -Water availability -Pasture availability/ quality -Milk production	-Actual yield -MUAC rates -Livestock status -Disease outbreaks
Characteristics	-Low levels of geographic specificity -Moderate predictive accuracy	-High levels of predictive accuracy -Quantifies impact of shock -Highly geographically specific -Can take time to collect and analyse required data (and requires a trained HEA practitioner)	-High levels of predictive accuracy -Highly geographically specific -Often available remotely	-Geographically specific -Can take time collect, analyse, report -Real time data	-Geographically specific -Real time data
Warning time	3-6 months	3-6 month (or up to 9, depending on seasonality)	2-4 months	1-2 months (or more)	Lagging indicator

Annex 2. What is the difference between Early Action and a timely response?

(Taken from SCUK's one-pager guidance note)

	Early Action	Timely Humanitarian Response
Planning	Proactive: activities planned before the crisis emerges, based on *forecasts and projections*	Reactive: activities usually planned after the crisis emerges, based on the *real-time situation*
Funding	Funding is secured *during normal times* and established as a flexible mechanism to be accessible based upon pre-agreed trigger points; the funding mechanism is pre-agreed with the donor	Funding is usually sought once crisis has been declared
Timing	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	"No regrets" activities designed to protect livelihoods and lives, for example: • Cash distributions for livelihoods protection • Livestock vaccinations • Fodder distribution • Support to traders to maintain supplies • Short-term income generation opportunities • Rehabilitation of water sources • Cash distributions to traders to maintain stocks	Activities designed to save lives and to prevent further deterioration of livelihoods, for example: • Cash and food distributions to meet immediate food needs • Commercial and/ or slaughter destocking • Water trucking • Nutrition treatment • Cash transfers or support to access credit to traders to keep businesses open
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.	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.

Annex 3. Details of Pilots

(For additional readings, please contact Laura Swift: *l.swift@savethechildren.org.uk*)

CASE STUDY 1

YEMEN, 2014

An HEA & SRAF-based Crisis Modifier for a timely emergency response

Overview of the project: SCUK implemented a two-year DfID grant (August 2013-2015) to improve food security and resilience in the Lahj and Taiz Governorates of Yemen. Output 6 of the project was "Strengthened community resilience through DRR, Community Based Early Warning and contingency planning" and incorporated a £550,000 crisis modifier budget line (about 5% of the overall budget). At the time of implementation, the intervention areas were prone to multiple and frequent hazards, including drought, rising food prices and conflict.

The crisis modifier was designed on the HEA and the SRAF. The team carried out monthly OA and in November 2014, the crisis modifier was triggered as a result of rising food prices and conflict. DfID approved the use of the crisis modifier budget line during a phone call with SC about two weeks after the OA exercise was completed and complementary data had been collected, and the team implemented a timely response of unconditional cash transfers and Cash-for-Work.

Location and Year:

Yemen, Lahj and Tai; 2013-2015

Donor & Budget

DfID, £549,190 (5% of total budget)

Context

- Livelihood zones: Midland labour and livestock (Lahj); Highland labour and agriculture (Tai)
- Most common hazards: Rising food prices and pockets of conflict

Approach

HEA Outcome Analysis and the SRAF to enable timely response

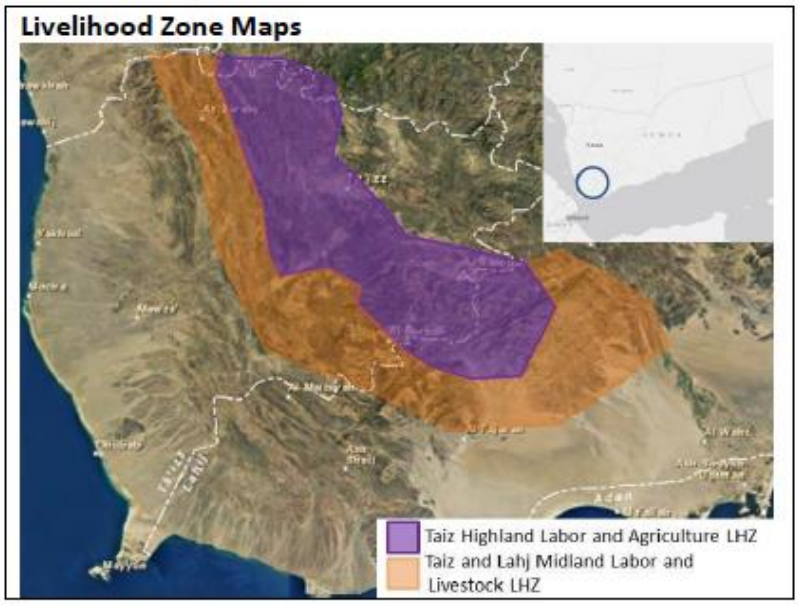
Main Activites

FSL: CFW and UCT

Further Reading

Crisis Modifier Pilot: Yemen. Introduction & Overview (presentation), Operational protocols, scenario development

Map of intervention area in Yemen



CASE STUDY 2

Ethiopia, 2015

FSL, Nutrition and WASH indicators for a timely emergency response

Overview of project: In 2015, SCUK initiated a one-year Early Action Fund (EAF) project to test approaches for early action in Kenya and Ethiopia, two countries that are prone to drought. A fund of £100,000 was made available to whichever of the two countries first triggered the EAF. In the Sitti pastoral zone of the Somali region, following three failed rainy seasons, the Ethiopia CO triggered the EAF in July 2015.

The CO's early action triggers were based on "traditional" FSL, nutrition and WASH indicators including: livestock body condition, nutrition rates, and water and pasture availability. The funds were released to the CO in August 2015, and the team implemented a timely multi-sectoral emergency response. Although the response was not forecast-based as the situation had already considerably deteriorated, SC's interventions were the earliest implemented by international agencies and amongst the first as compared to other local actors. The Regional government gave Save the Children a certificate of appreciation for acting at this time, even though budget for activities was small.

Location and Year:

Ethiopia, Sitti Zone, 2015

Donor & Budget

SCUK Breakthrough Funds, £100,000

Mechanism

Early Action Fund (centralized pot of funding)

Context

Livelihood zone: Shinile Pastoral (SHP)
Most common hazards: Drought

Approach

Variety of trigger indicators (FSL, nutrition, WASH) to enable timely response

Main Activites

FSL: CFW, animal feed distribution, support to animal vaccination campaigns

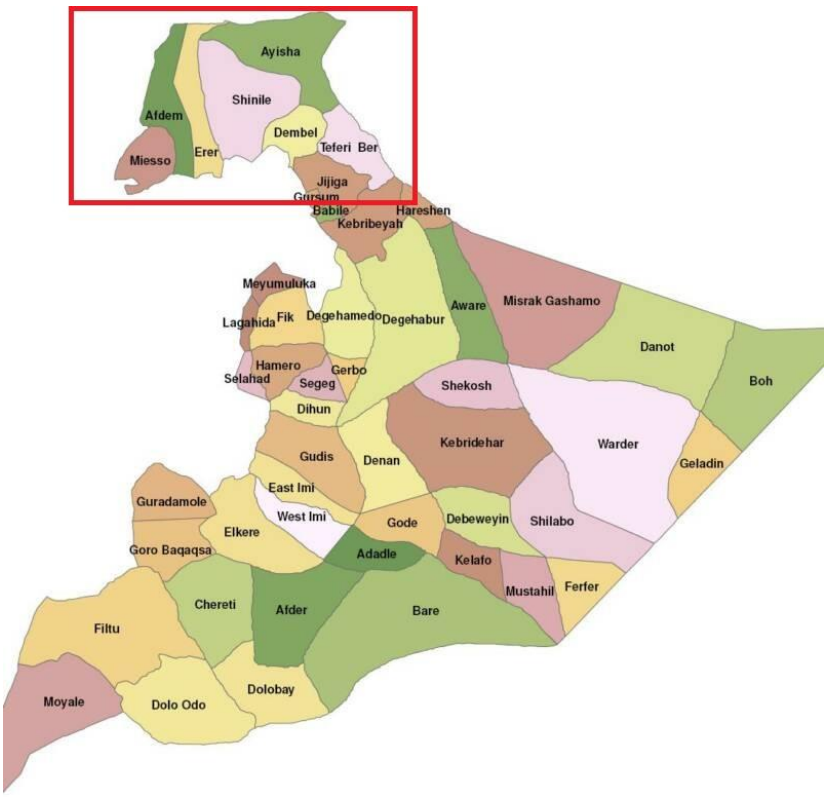
WASH: Rehabilitation of hand-dug wells, distribution of water purification tablets

Health & Nutrition: Support to 3 mobile health and nutrition teams (consultation, vaccination and treatment; Outpatient Therapeutic Programme (OTP) services; health education sessions)

Further Reading

Early Action Fund Evaluation Report, 2015

Map of intervention area in Ethiopia



CASE STUDY 3

The Early Action Fund (EAF) – Ethiopia, Niger, and Kenya, 2016-2017

Ethiopia, 2017

HEA & the SRAF for Early Action

In the Sitti pastoral zone of the Somali region, following forecasts of below-normal rainfall for the Gu season, the Ethiopia CO triggered the EAF in February 2017.

The EAF was triggered by the HEA OA, following an OA and SRAF exercise in early February 2017. The funds were released to the CO in early March, and the team implemented early actions from March to May, before the situation was projected to deteriorate. An internal review identified that the actions were earlier than previous years' responses, and protected livelihoods; however they could have been earlier (see details below).

Location and Year:

Ethiopia, Sitti Zone, 2017

Donor & Budget

SCUK Breakthrough Funds, £100,000

Context

Livelihood zone: Pastoral

Most common hazards: Drought

Approach

HEA Outcome Analysis and the SRAF

Main Activites

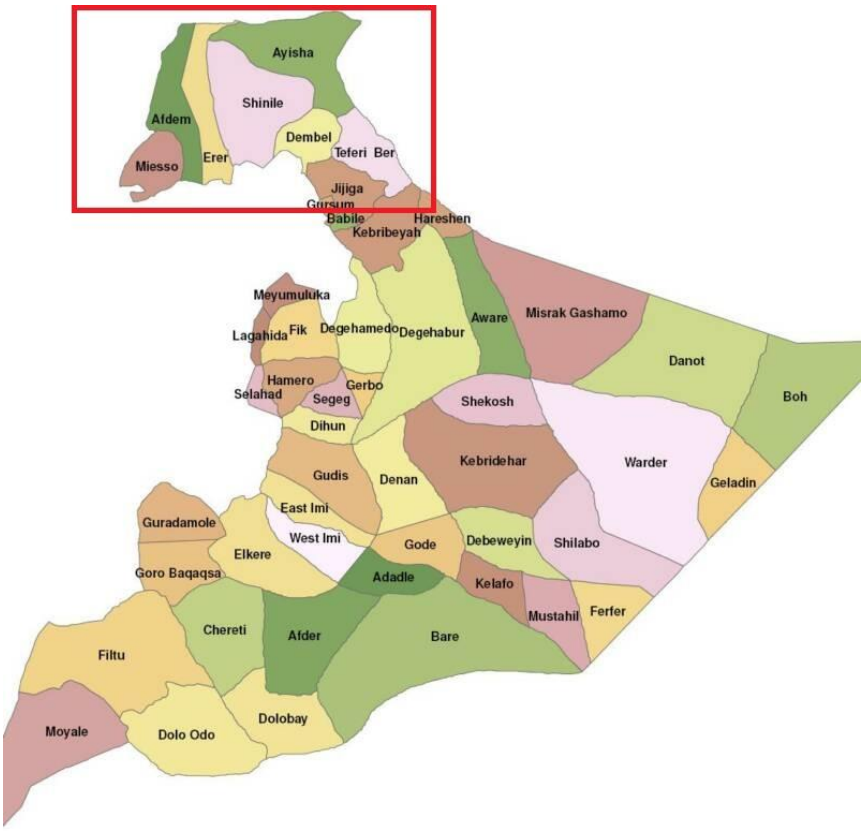
FSL: CFW, animal feed distribution, support to animal vaccination campaigns

WASH: Rehabilitation of water sources, distribution of water purification tablets

Further Reading

Qualitative impact assessment, Internal operational review, and Value-for-money analysis to be available by Q2 of 2017

Map of intervention area in Ethiopia



Details on the HEA resilience score measurement within the 2017 Ethiopia EAF pilot:

The HEA-based resilience measurement was used to assess the impact of the early action interventions on the beneficiaries' ability to absorb the shock. Based on discussions with communities and beneficiaries, and the team's knowledge of the situation, baseline and endline scores were calculated in February and August respectively.

The baseline and endline resilience scores are calculated as follows:

	BASELINE		ENDLINE	
	Full coping	No coping	Full coping	No coping
Poor	0.81	0.71	1,02	0.95
Middle	1.00	0.77	1.16	1.02

Note that the updated OA represents only the beneficiaries' situation, and not the entirety of poor and middle wealth groups: the assumption is that the beneficiaries were better able to absorb the shock because of the early action interventions.

The results suggest that the beneficiaries were significantly better able to cope with the below-normal rains; when full coping is applied (which includes sustainable sales of livestock), poor and middle households were able to cope with the shock and therefore "resilient" (resilience scores above 1). For further details on the HEA resilience score, please visit: http://foodeconomy.com/applications-of-hea/hea-and-resilience/

Kenya 2016

HEA & the SRAF: The CO carried out OA for six livelihood zones in Mandera, Wajir and Marsabit counties in December 2016. Based on the forecasts of below average rains, four zones were projected to face deficits during the coming months. However, the EAF was not triggered due to the challenges detailed below.

Location and Year:

Kenya, Mandera, Wajir and Marsabit counties, 2017

Donor & Budget

SCUK Breakthrough Funds, £100,000

Mechanism

Early Action Fund (centralized pot of funding managed by SCUK)

Context

Livelihood zones: Pastoral, Agro-pastoral

Most common hazards: Drought

Approach

HEA Outcome Analysis and the SRAF

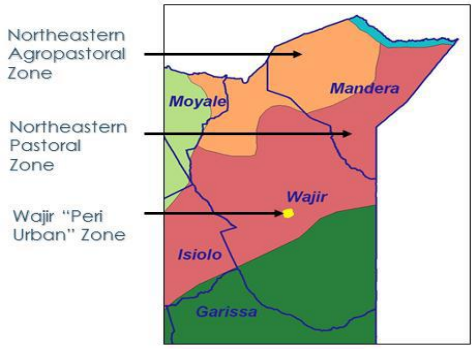
Main activities implemented

N/A – did not trigger the EAF

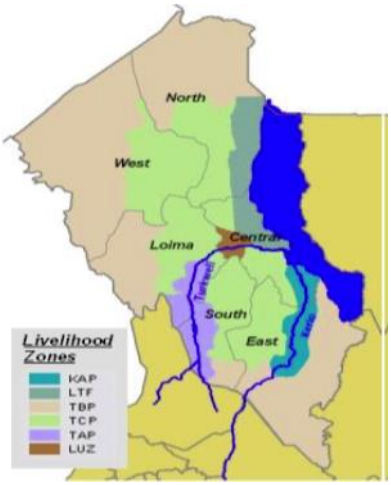
Further Reading

N/A

Map of Mandera and Wajir areas of intervention



Map of Turkana areas of intervention



CASE STUDY 4

Niger 2017

In the Tessouoa agri-pastoral zone, the Niger CO triggered the EAF in May 2017.

The EAF was triggered by a combination of HEA OA and cereal price data. The March 2017 OA projected that households would face a deficit starting from June 2017; and complementary cereal price data triggered the EAF in May 2017. Although the EAF had already been allocated to the Ethiopia CO in February, SCUK was able to provide £27,500 to the Niger team to implement actions starting from June. Although the actions were not implemented before the households were projected to feel the impact of the shock, the team achieved a timely emergency response to meet households' immediate needs. Lessons have been documented in order to support earlier action in the future.

Location and Year:

Niger, Tessouoa, 2017

Donor & Budget

Breakthrough Funds, £27,500

Mechanism

Early Action Fund (centralized pot of funding managed by SCUK)

Context

Livelihood zone: Tessouoa North Agro-pastoral zone (TNO)

Most common hazards: Rising food prices, drought

Approach

HEA Outcome Analysis + complementary FS triggers (staple food prices, migration, likelihood of agriculture pests)

Main activities implemented

FSL: Unconditional cash transfers

Further Reading

N/A

Map of intervention area in Niger:

Annex 4. Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the early Action Fund Report

The following aims to draw out the main points from the SCBA Report which was conducted in 2017. For more information or to access the full report contact Save the Children UK FSL Teams.

To form part of the growing evidence around Early Action, this report evaluated the cost effectiveness of acting early, and specifically the cost effectiveness of acting early versus a traditional humanitarian response. The SCUK Impact, Innovation and Evidence (IIE) Team employed a forecast social cost benefit analysis (SCBA) methodology for this piece of analysis. The following diagram shows the main stages of the methodology.

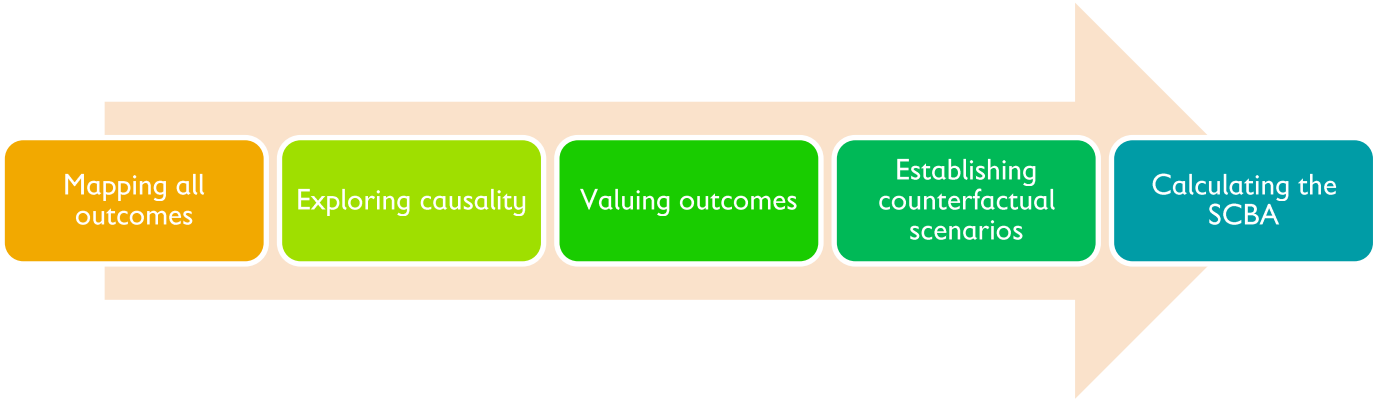


Figure: Steps taken in creating the SCBA model

Stage 1: Mapping all outcomes

The resulting outcomes and target population expressed through project documentation and evidenced in the programme's impact evaluation (which used the "QuIP" methodology – the Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol)[22], as well as quantitative data collected by SC's MEAL team[23], provided the building blocks for this report's analysis.

Stage 2: Exploring causality

The causality of the primary outcomes was explored by the QuIP through its 'drivers of change' analysis. As such, this SCBA took forward these given outcomes and the causality was assumed.

Stage 3: Valuing outcomes

The impacts to be valued in the SCBA model were divided into economic and non-economic. The economic impacts were valued based on market indicators; for example, the price of assets and average incomes recorded in the programme documentation. The non-economic impacts (for example, school attendance) were valued based on proxy valuations from secondary research (for example, for school attendance academic research was found that valued the cost of out of school children in Ethiopia to GDP per capita, which provided a cost per out of school child).

Stage 4: Establishing counterfactual scenarios

In order to develop a true representation of the EAF's impact, it is crucial to establish what would have happened in the absence of that programme – the counterfactual.

As part of the EAF 2017 in Ethiopia, control communities had been identified at the commencement of the project and thus baseline counterfactual data was available for 2017. However, the data provided was only relevant for the particular set of circumstances that occurred in 2017.

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[22] The QuIP methodology focuses on gathering stories of significant change, and what respondents cite as the key drivers of those changes. This enables the reader to understand how closely reported drivers of change correlate with the project's planned Theory of Change (ToC), and therefore to what extent the reported outcomes and impacts are attributable to the intervention.
A key characteristic of the QuIP method is that the interviews are as far as possible 'blindfolded' - the researchers conducting the interviews and the respondents themselves are not aware that this research is connected to EAF or Save the Children. This is important as it reduces pro-project and confirmation bias.

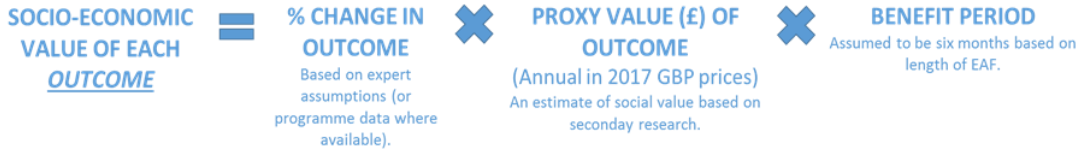
[23] The KoBo Toolbox (data collection tool) was used to collect baseline and end-line data from 200 beneficiary and non-beneficiary households (100 households from project target woredas and 100 households from controlled woredas). The household questionnaire collected information on food security measurements including Individual Dietary Diversity Score (IDDS), Household Food Consumption Score (FCS), and Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI).

To analyse a wider breadth of possible events and counterfactuals, the following scenarios were created (note that within each scenario, three "sub-scenarios" were developed to model the impact of a mild, medium or severe crisis):

- **SCENARIO 1** – Early Action does not take place but a crisis (mild, medium or severe) does occur and a humanitarian response is required.
    - *This scenario is based solely on conservative expert assumptions given in Annex 1 (developed through KIIs as part of the model review process).*
- **SCENARIO 2** – Early Action does take place and a crisis (mild, medium or severe) does occur (a humanitarian response is still required for the medium and severe crisis, although in much smaller scale than in Scenario 1).
    - *Counterfactual data from EAF Ethiopia 2017 was used to inform the 'mild crisis' assumptions for this scenario, as this is the situation that evolved. All other inputs are based on conservative expert assumptions given in Annex 1 (developed through KIIs as part of the model review process).*
- **SCENARIO 3** – Early Action does take place, but a crisis does not occur. This is the "no regrets" scenario[24].
    - *This scenario is based solely on conservative expert assumptions given in Annex 1 (developed through KIIs as part of the model review process).*

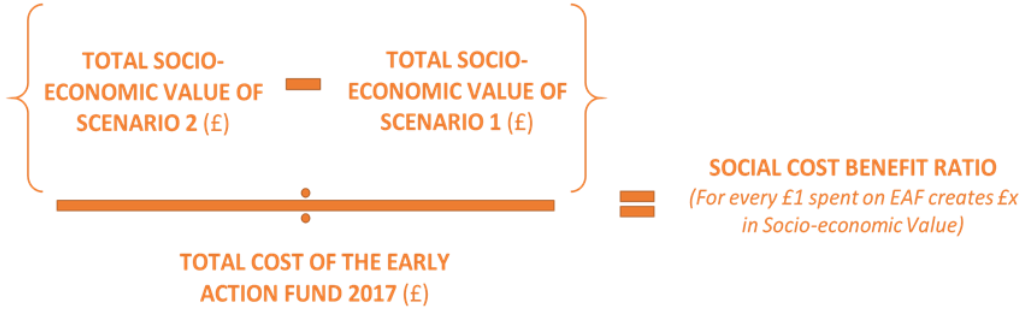
Stage 5: Calculating the Social Cost Benefit Analysis (SCBA)

Step 1 - Calculate the socio-economic value for each outcome under each scenario and sub-scenario.



Step 2 - Calculate the socio-economic value of each scenario.

Step 3 - Calculate the difference in socio-economic value generated by each scenario (i.e. the difference in value of the EAF compared to a humanitarian only response) and then divide this by the total cost of the Early Action Fund.



[24] SC defines "No regrets" actions as those that manage the risk, not the crisis. The notion of "no regrets" in part came from climate scientists and their work with probabilities to predict future events. They use probabilities and predictions to argue that there is a point after which it is better to act than not. What constitutes a "no regrets" action is as important as when it is implemented: we must act with appropriate responses and assist those who really require it. Successful no regrets actions deliver a return whether or not the crisis eventually materializes. (Source: SC's guidance note "What do we mean by Early Action? What is the difference between Early Action and a timely Humanitarian Response?")

Key Findings:

The SCBA of the 2017 Ethiopian Early Action Fund provides strong evidence that it has delivered, and will continue to deliver, good value for money. For every £1 spent on the EAF, target HHs receive £2.58 in social value (on average) when compared to only a humanitarian response.

By capturing a broader sense of 'value' and appreciating the impact on beneficiaries' social (rather than solely economic) outcomes, the analysis shows that providing intervention early, before crisis, effectively and efficiently defends beneficiaries from the worst and most damaging effects of drought (or similar shocks) – and even benefits households if the predicted crisis does not transpire, delivering a positive return on investment of £1.61 for every £1 spent on the EAF.