START NETWORK

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AT RISK COMMUNITIES IN DISASTER RISK FINANCING (DRF) SYSTEMS

FRESH OPPORTUNITIES WITH DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

APRIL 2021

This paper was commissioned in 2020 as part of a process of improving disaster risk financing programme quality within the Start Network. It was commissioned by Sarah Barr, Learning and Research Advisor for Crisis Anticipation at the Start Network. It was researched and written by Emily Rogers, a humanitarian accountability specialist and expert in evidence generation and utilisation.

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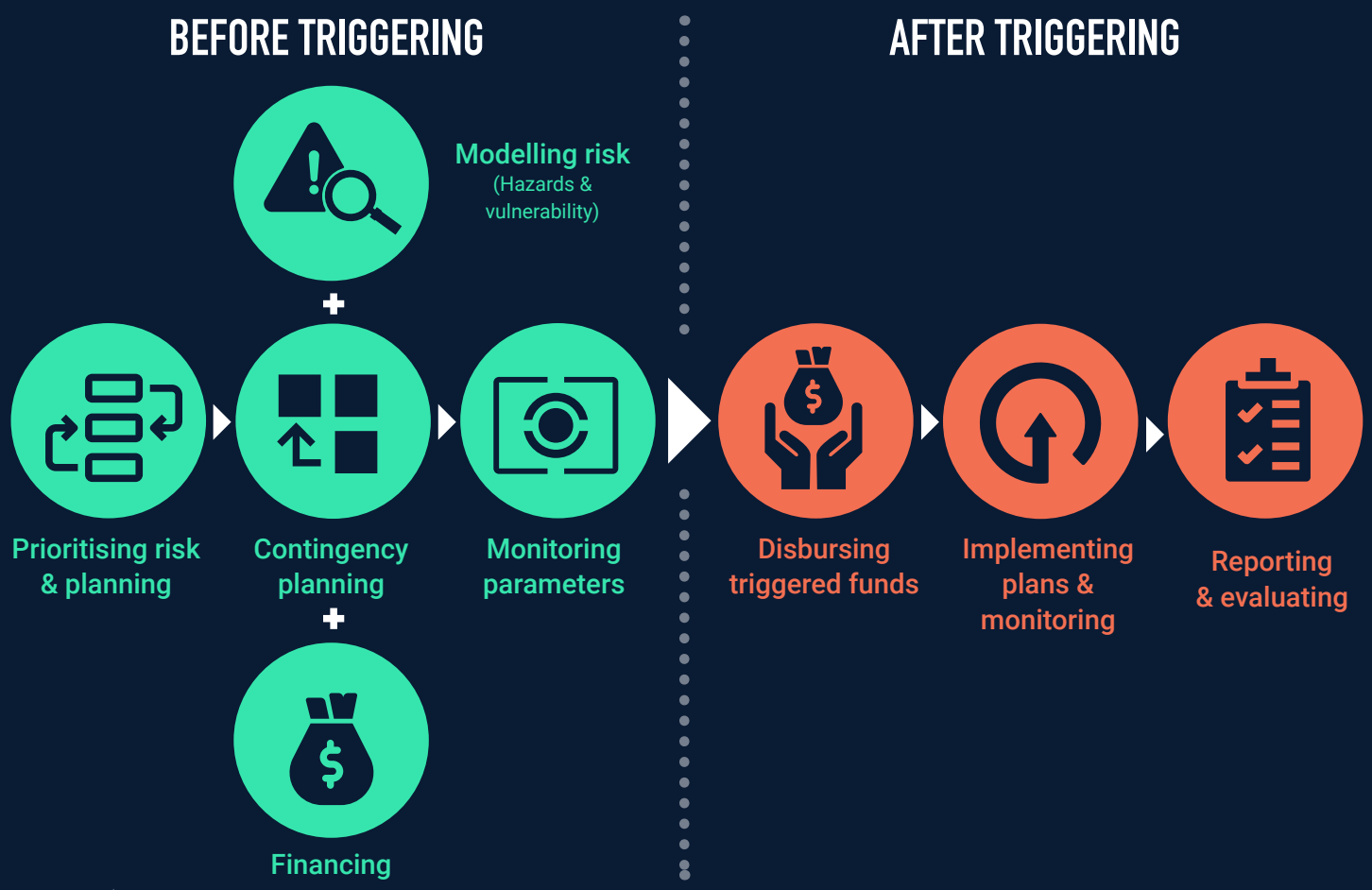
01 INTRODUCTION

Disaster Risk Financing Systems offer exciting possibilities to scale early action. Tying together a model to predict the likelihood of future crises, with early action plans and prepositioned financing, presents an opportunity for timely action that mitigates the humanitarian impact of disasters. The pre-arranged nature of DRF systems, in which decisions are made in advance of crises, opens the possibility for more accountability to at risk populations. This paper explores this idea further.

The START Network (START for short) is gaining experience with NGOs and other stakeholders in designing, developing and running DRF Systems, with experience to date in six countries covering drought, flooding and heatwaves. As part of this, START recognises that thinking on accountability to at risk populations (AAP) is needed and should go hand-in-hand with developing practice on setting up and running DRF Systems.

BOX 1: ENTRY POINTS FOR AAP IN A DISASTER RISK FINANCE SYSTEM



The entry points shown above form some of the key Building Blocks needed to successfully build and implement a DRF System. The Start Network has a guidance manual available which describes how to develop these building blocks in full

THIS PAPER...

This paper explores what accountability to at risk populations means in practice for NGO-led or NGO-supported DRF Systems. It uses the experience from START's DRF work in Senegal, Pakistan, Kenya and Madagascar, which includes slow and rapid on-set hazards and small and large-scale DRF Systems (ranging from city-level to country-wide). Specifically the paper explores:

What are the defining features of Disaster Risk Financing, and what opportunities and challenges do they present for AAP?

What steps should NGOs take to reflect AAP in DRF Systems, and what are some of the practical considerations in realising these?

Key entry points for AAP were considered in answering these questions (see Box 1), including the main components of a DRF System. More emphasis is given in this paper to the entry points up to point of implementation, recognising that these are unique to DRF systems compared to more traditional humanitarian action.

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) provided the initial framework for AAP, with focus given to the CHS commitments that are more pertinent to DRF. Focus was given to operational rather than organisational aspects of the standard. The findings are based on a review of documents (both publicly available reports and internal START documents), and conversations with 20 individuals working for START and for International and Local NGOs.[1]

The thinking presented here is a starting point for prompting discussion and practice, rather than providing 'the answer'. Most START supported DRF systems are in the early stages (with the exception of ARC Replica in Senegal), and few of those interviewed had extensive experience with DRF. As such, findings do not draw on learning from what has been tried and tested, and examples of 'how' AAP could practically be achieved are limited.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTION:

BASED ON THIS PAPER, PRIORITISE AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AND PILOTING TO DEVELOP EXAMPLES OF HOW STRONGER AAP CAN BE REALISED IN PRACTICE IN VARIED DRF SYSTEMS.

THIS COULD INVOLVE DRAWING ON EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE IN ANTICIPATORY ACTION FROM OTHER NGOS/RED CROSS THAT COULD BE APPLIED TO DRF SYSTEMS, AS WELL AS DEVELOPING APPROACHES FOR PILOTING IN START DRF SYSTEMS.

TERMINOLOGY:

DISASTER RISK FINANCING (DRF) IS USED THROUGHOUT, ALTHOUGH MUCH IS APPLICABLE TO TRIGGER-BASED APPROACHES IN GENERAL, INCLUDING DRF SYSTEMS, FORECAST BASED FINANCING (FBF) AND EARLY ACTION PROTOCOLS.

AAP IS USED AS A WIDELY ACCEPTED ACRONYM BUT REFERS TO ACCOUNTABILITY TO AT RISK (AS WELL AS AFFECTED) POPULATIONS.

NGO REFERS TO INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS. WHERE RELEVANT, DISTINCTION IS MADE BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NGOS, WHERE 'LOCAL NGOS' (OR LNGOS) INCLUDES NATIONAL AND LOCAL NGOS.

1 Conversations were held with staff based in: Senegal (3 staff members); Pakistan (5); Madagascar (3); Kenya (2); and START HQ and the Philippines (7).

02 WHAT ARE THE DEFINING FEATURES OF DISASTER RISK FINANCING, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES DO THEY PRESENT FOR AAP?

DRF Systems can present opportunities for greater transparency and overall accountability, in particular when compared with more conventional humanitarian responses. For this to be reflected in practice, opportunities need to be actively seized and the new challenges that DRF Systems present need to be navigated. This section sets out the defining features of DRF Systems, and the associated opportunities and challenges for AAP.[2]

DRF IS NEW AND INNOVATIVE

The idea of early action and in particular DRF (with clear thresholds as the basis for decision making, supported by advanced planning and pre-positioned funding) is an easy one to sell. The rationale and approach for DRF Systems speaks to common challenges that humanitarian stakeholders are familiar with. However, DRF is a longer game (larger events take place only every 7-10 years) and so may be at odds with the commonly found humanitarian culture of 'now, now, now'.

With innovation comes the pressure to prove it works, with the desire to roll out pilots, test concepts and demonstrate value. This pressure may negate opportunities presented by DRF systems for stronger accountability, namely the opportunity of having more time to 'do it right'. Conversely iterative pilots and testing (if planned as such) may provide an opportunity for more stakeholders to be brought on board through practical experience. This allows a building of understanding of the DRF system over time.

Finally, the newness of DRF in the humanitarian world presents an opportunity to get it right from the get-go, to be exemplary and reflect strong practice in accountability as standard practice. Further, with international, national and local humanitarian NGOs starting from a similar level of understanding around DRF systems, there is an opportunity to engage different NGOs equally to maintain this level playing field.

DRF FOCUSES ON SINGLE RISKS

At present the starting point for each DRF system is a single hazard (and in some cases a single cause for a single hazard). As with single sector needs assessments, this means looking at communities through a narrow lens rather than considering communities from a holistic perspective. The starting point for discussions is the hazard, rather than the community as a whole, which may leave communities feeling those leading discussions are not really interested in listening to communities.

DRF IS GROUNDED IN SCIENCE-BASED MODELLING

The use of models as the basis for decision making is a defining feature of DRF, in theory improving the speed, objectivity, and transparency of decision-making. However, the selection of hazard is limited to those where

2 This builds on discussions with Sophia Swithern as part of the writing of: Swithern, S. (2021) 'Accountability in disaster risk financing', working paper, Centre for Disaster Protection, London.

historical data is available to enable a model which gives a window for early action. Hazards prioritised by stakeholders may not lend themselves to modelling.

The complexity and novelty of modelling requires NGO staff (as well as other stakeholders) to invest time to understand technical concepts, to shape the model to meet their needs. Importantly, a degree of understanding is a pre-requisite for engaging other stakeholders, including communities, in conversations around the basis for deciding when to respond. There may be a sense that science-based models are too complex to allow for wide engagement, and a risk that the complexity of models excludes certain stakeholders. A real challenge is the volume of technical information and detail that needs to be communicated to stakeholders for them to be able to use model outputs or understand the system.

There is wide recognition that "all models are wrong, but some are useful"[3]. In other words, models contain errors (basis risk). A key strategy for reducing model error is seeking inputs from at-risk communities to align, verify and triangulate models with situations on the ground. However, given the novelty and technicality of models, there is less familiarity or recognition of what forms of community input may be beneficial and when. On top of this, those developing the models (scientists or modellers) have different data expectations. with more value placed on large quantitative data sets as opposed to 'messy' community-level data. Going forward, it will be important to unpack which decisions community input will shape as part of model development and refinement, and which sorts of data are implicitly valued by whom. START's guide: "Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners" provides further pointers on how to so this.[4]

ACTION IS AGREED UP-FRONT

In theory, DRF provides more time for deeper planning and engagement with stakeholders (including down to community level) before the need to act. Likewise, communities are more likely to have the time and space themselves to participate in discussions before rather than during a crisis. The existence of funds to set up the DRF System should also provide the financial support needed for community engagement. There may be opportunity to reimburse community representatives for their time, especially where they are representing a geographical zone rather than communities for future interventions. Further, the existence of funding at known levels for early action should provide impetus for better quality planning, with the guarantee that should the situation need it the funds will be there to respond.

There may be challenges with engaging people before a disaster is imminent, or its impact is felt. Discussions around a future hazard may not reflect current priorities faced by stakeholders, potentially limiting engagement and giving the impression that those leading discussions are not listening to communities. When prioritising hazards with stakeholders there is a risk of recent bias; prioritising more recent hazards rather than infrequent hazards with potentially greater impact. Future events may not mirror past events, with climate change and compounded emergencies causing more extreme hazards and humanitarian impact.

It is good practice to demonstrate how community input/feedback is being used, letting communities know the outcomes of time spent discussing with NGOs or others. This may be more challenging for DRF Systems with long return periods, where there are long lag times between input and action. Finally, there is no guarantee that those engaged in developing the system will be targeted by early action once the model is triggered. NGO staff expressed concern about how to manage expectations of future support following community consultation. With DRF Systems, it may help to conceptualise community consultation as akin to paying for insurance – in so much as payers of insurance are prepared to pay because they know that one day they may need it themselves.

As with any pre-planning, the reality on the ground at the point of acting may look quite different. Confounding emergencies may exacerbate vulnerabilities and reduce coping thresholds; successive years of challenges may

3 Box, G. E. P. (1976), "Science and statistics" (PDF), Journal of the American Statistical Association, 71 (356): 791–799
4 Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners. Harris, C., Haldane, R. and Rees, E. (START), 2021

have eroded coping strategies in place when the plan was developed; or other challenges at the point of triggering may be more of a priority than the hazard from the DRF system.

There is a tension between the pre-agreed elements of a DRF System (and the advantages these bring) and the need to adapt to the situation as faced at community level. In theory, pre-agreed plans improve the transparency and accountability of action, but the need for adaptive implementation means these may change if needed once the system is triggered. The pre-agreed funds allow for difficult discussions about targeting to be had in advance (given the numbers that can be targeted based on the financial package per household), but a combination of disasters may demand a larger financial package per household in order to mitigate the impact of the DRF System hazard.

Periodical re-planning may help to address changing vulnerabilities and coping thresholds. However, for DRF systems with long return periods there is the question of how to sustain the engagement of a range of stakeholders (from NGO staff, to authorities, to community representatives) over time, in the absence of triggered early action.

Finally, anticipatory action occurs before a hazard has occurred and therefore possibly before people have seen or felt the effect of the hazard. Unlike humanitarian action after an event, where the needs of communities and response activities are (in theory) aligned, anticipatory action demands people understand more about the impending hazard and purpose of assistance. It also implies greater trust is needed between communities and NGOs.

DRF INVOLVES NEW COLLABORATIONS

DRF systems bring together new stakeholders: scientists, modellers, different government departments (e.g. meteorological departments), NGOs and more. There are opportunities with engaging new stakeholders, recognising the new skills and perspectives they bring, as well as the challenge of ensuring meaningful collaboration between each (overcoming technical language barriers). The different priorities of varied stakeholders need to be recognised, as does the varied viewpoints of how best to build a system that responds to needs on the ground.

There is a risk that more technical modellers de facto drive decision-making if NGOs (and other stakeholders) do not understand the technicalities of the system or if the modellers are not able to translate their concepts for NGOs. This raises the question of who is accountable or responsible for what part of the DRF System – on paper and in practice. There is a risk of accountability falling between stakeholders, and the DRF system, in particular the model and basis for decision making, becoming a nebulous 'thing' that is not owned by stakeholders in country.

DRF Systems may also require closer collaboration between NGOs and government authorities. Greater levels of expertise may sit within government departments and engaging with them may improve disaster prediction and subsequent timeliness of early action. Developing such collaborations requires time, and potentially bringing together Government Departments that do not normally work together. There are also risks of the politicisation of the DRF system, with pressures to inflate or deflate numbers depending on the context.

03 WHAT STEPS CAN NGOS TAKE TO REFLECT AAP THROUGHOUT DRF SYSTEMS?

The defining features of a Disaster Risk Financing system, and the associated opportunities and challenges for AAP, are focused 'upstream' of implementation Particularly in setting up a DRF System and preparing for implementation if needed. This section focuses on the actions NGOs can take to reflect AAP in DRF Systems, up to the point of implementation (where the steps for reflecting AAP in practice mirror those NGOs are familiar with as part of more traditional humanitarian response work). The actions for AAP are presented under selected entry points as presented in Box 1.

PRIORITISATION OF RISK AND PLANNING FOR AAP IN DRF DEVELOPMENT

ALIGN THE DRF SYSTEM TO THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND DECISION-MAKERS. WORK WITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES TO UNDERSTAND THE BIGGEST RISKS FACED BY MORE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THESE.

"THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS ARE FIRST TO FOCUS ON THE REAL NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITIES – LOOK AT THE REAL OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT INSTEAD OF THE AGENCY PRIORITY"

NGO STAFF, MADAGASCAR

Decisions are made from the onset that set the focus for the whole DRF system. It is not automatic that DRF Systems will be orientated to protect the poorest households. In the planning stage who is informed and involved in decision-making and who ultimately makes the decisions are critical for prioritising risks that affect poorer households. For example, in designing START's Pakistan drought model the modellers originally wanted to monitor the most productive regions that contribute to national food-security and economy. For START, however, the priority was monitoring the poorest, subsistence farming areas where the impact of drought would be most felt.

The following questions shape the system during planning. Further guidance on early decision making can be found in START's guide: *"Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners"*[5].

Prioritisation of risk – Who are the more vulnerable and what are the biggest risk they face? Should the DRF System focus on disasters that happen once every couple of years or those that happen once every decade? Which risk should be the focus for the DRF System and which should be left to other disaster management instruments? What are the aims for the DRF early action and therefore what forms of data are needed for decision making?

Others have highlighted the importance of data providing insight into who is likely impacted, and ideally level of impact. There needs to be a clear connection ('line-of-sight') between the data, planned early action and associated financing as laid out in the contingency plans, and subsequent action that respond to needs.

5 Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners. Harris, C., Haldane, R. and Rees, E. (START), 2021

Deciding how narrow the DRF will be – For the prioritized risk, will the system focus on one underlying cause or several, and what are the implications for this? Will the DRF System use a combination of hard and soft triggers, or only hard triggers? At present, START's experience has found there is a risk of giving more emphasis to hazard data.

What else is out there - How will the proposed DRF system connect with and build on existing systems? What are the gaps/challenges in existing systems? At this stage it is decided, intentionally or unintentionally, whether the DRF System will be standalone or will seek to complement existing systems and instruments within country.

EXAMPLES OF UNDERLYING CAUSES BEHIND DIFFERENT DRF SYSTEMS

START's Pakistan flood DRF focuses on flooding caused by a fluvial flood system in the Indus basin. Other flooding may occur (e.g. flash floods) but these are outside the scope of the system. Similarly, START's drought DRF systems, aim to mitigate food insecurity caused by drought, but not food insecurity caused by other factors (e.g. price increases, locusts etc).

Data from Kenya show that crop farmers face crop loss due to drought and other factors. Figures from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries indicate that up to 40 percent of losses in maize, the main staple crop, stem from pests and diseases. In 2014, the government prepared the implementation of a national level crop insurance programme, with the aim of protecting farmers holistically against the risk of crop failure. Previous experience in-country had used weather index insurance (WII) to target crop farmers affected by drought (typically using rainfall levels to trigger payments to farmers). However, to cover crop failure holistically the government opted for a different approach, based on an area yield trigger, that based payout decisions on average area yield. Looking at output (crop yield) rather than input (rainfall) ensured that all potential reasons for poor harvests were covered, including crop diseases.[6]

PLAN FOR ACCOUNTABILITY TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS FROM THE OUTSET. THIS INCLUDES DEFINING THE PURPOSE AND APPROACH FOR COMMUNITY (AS WELL AS OTHER STAKEHOLDER) ENGAGEMENT AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THE DRF SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT.

"THE LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT NEEDS TO BE SYSTEMATIC WHEN DEALING WITH DRF PROJECTS. . . ..THE ENTIRE PROCESS OF DRF NEEDS TO INCLUDE THE COMMUNITY AT EVERY STEP. FROM THE CONCEPTION"

NGO STAFF, MADAGASCAR

DRF Systems are diverse. **The type of disaster (slow vs rapid onset) and the geographical coverage of the DRF System have the biggest influence on approaches for realising AAP**. Other variables such as source of funding affect the flexibility in the system, and ability to respond to community input and unpredicted scenarios.

6 Lung, F. (2020) 'Being timely: creating good triggers and plans in disaster risk financing', guidance note, Centre for Disaster Protection, London.

The variation between DRF Systems poses a challenge with forming hard and fast rules for how AAP can be reflected in DRF Systems. Something that will work for one, may be unfeasible for another.

As such each DRF System needs to plan for AAP from the outset, deciding on the purpose, who, what, when and how for AAP. This is particularly key for community (and other stakeholder) engagement, participation, and communication. As part of planning, resources need to be allocated to realise this. The following questions may guide thinking:

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AAP AND COMMUNITY (AS WELL AS OTHER STAKEHOLDER) ENGAGEMENT IN THE DRF SYSTEM?

There are different purposes for engaging stakeholders, including:

Informing so that stakeholders are aware and can provide feedback.
Seeking input to improve the accuracy of the DRF System (and so outcomes from this)
Creating buy-in so that stakeholders are onboard.
Building ownership so that stakeholders are part of the system and can take the lead.

At a minimum, across all types of DRF Systems, representative input should be sought to allow for the DRF System to be adapted to the needs of at-risk communities. This can take different forms, recognising that co-creation and co-design are the gold-standard compared to more extractive methods of participation that gather data. Beyond this, building buy-in and ownership requires sustained, more intensive engagement. For DRF Systems with a large geographical coverage this may not be feasible down to community level. In contrast, it should be more feasible to foster local buy-in and ownership with smaller-scale DRF Systems.

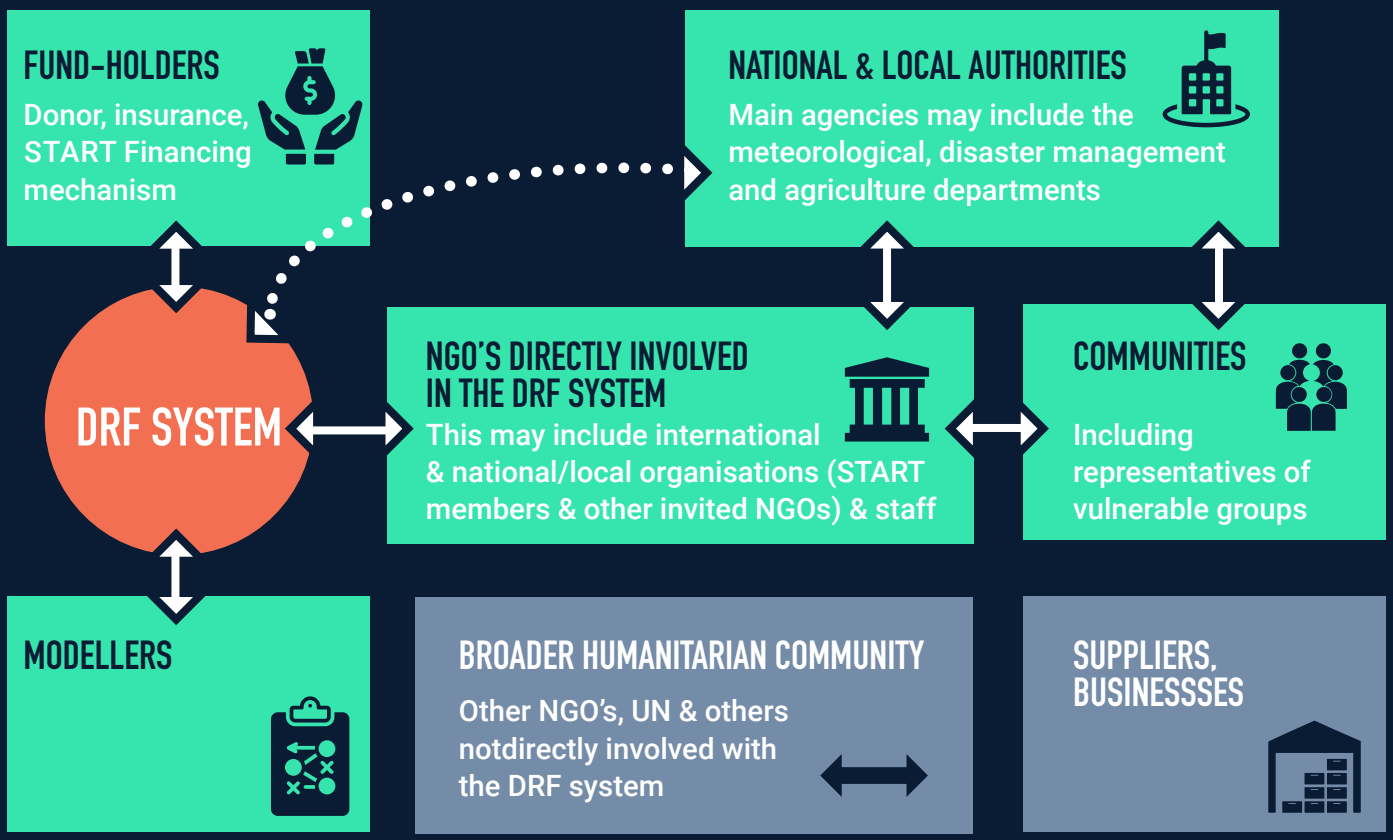
It is important that the aims of community (and other stakeholder) engagement are understood by all involved. Selecting representative communities to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of the DRF System is different from working with communities to build buy-in and ownership. Where it is not feasible to build community buy-in and ownership during system design, organisations should consider how communities need to be engaged at a later stage to compensate for this. Representative input needs to factor in geographical coverage (e.g. communities across different climatic and livelihood zones), as well as coverage of different vulnerable groups (with different social markers for exclusion).

WHO ARE THE MAIN 'STAKEHOLDERS' THAT NEED TO BE ENGAGED IN THE DRF SYSTEM?

The diagram below (Box 3) summarises the main groupings of stakeholders. There is need to consider which stakeholders are key for:

Having critical expert knowledge - e.g. the technical expertise needed to shape the DRF System may sit across different stakeholders, including community-level stakeholders.
Facilitating access – e.g. access to government held data needed for modelling. In some contexts government authorities need to declare a situation before NGOs can act. Ensuring governmental decision makers (at national or local level) are on board with and understand the DRF System may be key for rapid action once the model has triggered.
Identifying existing systems or mechanisms in country - e.g. in order to identify synergies with other initiatives.
The longer-term vision for the system – e.g. who will be the ultimate custodian of the DRF System?

BOX 3: MAIN STAKEHOLDER GROUPINGS



- DRF SYSTEM
- KEY FOR STRONG AAP IN THE DRF SYSTEM
- OTHER STAKEHOLDERS (THESE WILL VARY)
- RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

Notes on the diagram:

The DRF System (green) is 'held' by an organisation (be it the START Network or an NGO member), with one or two individual staff members as the conduits between the system and humanitarian actors in country. The National (and local) authorities may have direct links to the system (for example in cases where it is co-owned or co-developed) or may be one of the stakeholders engaged. As shown in the diagram, NGOs directly involved in the DRF System are critical to facilitating community level input.

WHAT ARE THE KEY DECISIONS OR PROCESSES WHERE COMMUNITY (AND OTHER STAKEHOLDER) INPUT IS NEEDED?

Identifying the decisions that communities need to take, and the types of data needed for these, will provide focus to when and how community engagement should happen. Processes and decisions that community input can shape include:

Trigger and threshold setting - e.g. understanding when a situation is 'bad' enough for different vulnerable groups that external assistance is needed; understanding at what point community coping mechanisms are overwhelmed.
Ground truthing - e.g. checking and testing the model by comparing model outputs with historical events for different vulnerable groups.
Contingency planning - e.g. identify early action options based on household and community coping mechanisms, and specific vulnerabilities.
Triangulating model readings with the situation on the ground – e.g. is there a need for action that the model is not showing?
Refining plans before implementation and hearing feedback based on activities – e.g. does the scenario in the contingency plan and associated activities match the actual situation and current needs?
Assessing the impact of activities post-trigger – e.g. to what extent was the early action timely? Did activities meet needs and mitigate the impact of the hazard?

HOW TO ENGAGE DOWN TO COMMUNITY LEVEL?

START DRF Systems have commonly engaged NGOs (international and local) to represent the voices of communities. It is assumed these NGOs are consulting with communities as needed to feed into the DRF system and/or can represent communities. As such, community engagement is not uniformly planned for. There is a need, however, to reflect if the views of different vulnerable groups are adequately understood and represented through these channels and find means to engage with community representatives directly in the design of DRF Systems. There should also be caution of over-estimating the geographical knowledge and experience of NGOs. For example, the diversity in Pakistan means an NGO working in one region, will not necessarily have sufficient knowledge of community dynamics and factors at play in a neighbouring region.

There is opportunity to use existing relationships and points of contacts that NGOs have with communities and other stakeholders. Where new communities/groups are being engaged it should be recognised that it takes time to build trust (in the absence of which interactions will have limitations). As such, engaging organisations already working in targeted geographical areas will facilitate community engagement.

The process of engaging down to community level across large areas can be a significant undertaking, and potentially costly. While community input is needed for different stages of the DRF System, these conversations can be combined.

PLAN FOR ITERATIVE DRF SYSTEM MODEL DEVELOPMENT. ALLOW KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO USE THE PROCESS OF TRYING AND TESTING THE DRF SYSTEM AS A LEARNING EXERCISE, TO IMPROVE THE SYSTEM AND TO INCREASE INDIVIDUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE MODEL AND WIDER SYSTEM.

"NGOS WERE NOT INTERESTED IN THE DRF SYSTEM, BUT THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION THEY REALISED IT WAS VERY DIFFERENT TO WHAT THEY HAD DONE BEFORE"

NGO STAFF, MADAGASCAR

DRF systems should be viewed as dynamic rather than static. As contexts evolve models need to be revisited and contingency plans revised. Further DRF systems may not be 'fully developed packages' before being

'launched'. START's experience in Pakistan with Heatwave and Flooding saw action triggered before the DRF systems were 'finalised' (either the model or contingency plans). This was actually seen as advantageous, allowing staff to 'experience' the system themselves, developing a greater understanding and learning from this.

In planning the process of developing a DRF System an action learning component should be elaborated. Ongoing iterations as part of system development can be used as the basis for engaging key stakeholders (from NGO staff to government officials to community representatives). Triggering the system or using simulations provide opportunities for stakeholders to learn and engage based on experience rather than theoretical discussions. Allowing the DRF system to be strengthened based on experience and building understanding among key stakeholders, which should lead to more active in-depth engagement over time.

IDENTIFY STRATEGIES THAT ENCOURAGE AND ENABLE LOCAL NGOS TO PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN SYSTEM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION.

Planning is the time to consider how to encourage and facilitate LNGO participation throughout all stages of DRF System design and development. If LNGO are not at the table, the divide between INGOs and LNGOs grows. There is, however, opportunity to start with national and local NGOs being part of the system rather than needing to 'localise' later.

The 'cost' of participating in meetings is often higher for smaller LNGOs with fewer staff or LNGOs based outside the central coordinating hub. Cost, barriers and benefits for LNGO participation should be considered during planning in order to support LNGO involvement. For example, in Pakistan interviewees felt there was a risk of LNGO participation declining as it became clear participation may not lead to funding. It should also be recognised that demands for input are likely to be higher at specific points in time during the DRF System development.

The need to consider localisation extends beyond the role of LNGOs and should be reflected across all stakeholders. For example, local scientists will often have access to data and relevant research that will be valuable in developing the model. In Pakistan, START found the use of external modellers using external global data sets led to a negative perception among stakeholders in Pakistan that Pakistani data sets were considered secondary by the modellers.

EXAMPLES OF ENGAGING LNGOS IN START DRF SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

In Pakistan each START DRF System has a Technical Working Group (TWG) comprising 15-20 organisations that provides technical input that shapes the System. TWG members include START Members (INGOs + LNGOs), other Local NGOs, and a government representative from the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). To encourage the participation of LNGOs, TWGs restrict INGO participation to 30%, and either the chair or co-chair must be from a LNGO. Conversely, it was noted by an NGO in Pakistan "The current DRF System is not inclusive. The call for DRF contingency plans was only shared with START members, which limits LNGO involvement." In Senegal, all INGO Members needed to identify a LNGO partner for implementing early action, but there was no requirement that LNGO partners were part of DRF System decisions or trainings.

MODELLING RISK AND SELECTING COMPLEMENTARY EARLY RISK INDICATORS

BUILD MODELLERS UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES, SO THESE CAN BE REFLECTED IN THEIR WORK.

DRF systems bring together different stakeholders that do not 'speak the same language': humanitarians, authorities and government agencies, modellers, analysts, scientists, and financial institutions. It requires new understanding on all sides and the ability to communicate technical concepts for meaningful collaboration. Further, those developing the models (and broader system) need to understand humanitarian principles. This is important for the process of development and the final DRF system to be in line with humanitarian principles and responds to the most vulnerable people.

Modellers are rarely exposed to humanitarian NGOs or at-risk communities. They may be skilled at hazard modelling, but not have a good understanding of the factors that affect vulnerability to a hazard or the value of 'messy' community-level data. Training and knowledge exchange are key. There needs to be investment in developing scientists' understanding of the realities of mounting action on the ground.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

IDENTIFY STAFF OR INDIVIDUALS WHO 'SPAN BOTH WORLDS', WHO CAN HELP TRANSLATE CONCEPTS AND GATHER INPUT FROM OTHER NGO STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS FOR REFINING THE MODEL. FOR EXAMPLE, INDIVIDUALS WITH BOTH A SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND OR METEOROLOGICAL SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERIENCE WITH NGOS.

REFLECT HUMANITARIAN AIMS IN MODEL TENDERS AND THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR MODELLERS. INCLUDE REQUIREMENTS IN CONTRACTS FOR TESTING AND ALIGNING MODELS WITH OPERATIONAL DECISION MAKING AND REFINING THEM WITH COMMUNITY INPUT.

PLAN FOR TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FOR MODELLERS, WITH SUFFICIENT INVESTMENT IN DEVELOPING MODELLERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE REALITIES OF MOUNTING ACTION ON THE GROUND. CONSIDER IF THE MODELLERS SHOULD BE DIRECTLY EXPOSED TO IN-COUNTRY STAKEHOLDERS (COMMUNITIES, AUTHORITIES, NGOS) TO UNDERSTAND CHALLENGES AND EXPLORE HOW MODELS CAN BE MORE CLOSELY LINKED TO COMMUNITY INPUTS.

BUILD KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES OF STAFF, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, SO THEY CAN ENGAGE WITH, SHAPE AND IMPLEMENT DRF SYSTEMS. IT IS KEY THAT DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS CAN COMMUNICATE AND COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY TO SHAPE THE DRF SYSTEM.

"IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE THE PROJECT SIMPLY TO THE COMMUNITY, THEY [NGO STAFF] WOULD EVEN NEED SUPPORT. IT'S NOT ALL STAFF WHO CAN COMMUNICATE FORECAST BASED FINANCING."

NGO STAFF, MADAGASCAR

In many places DRF Systems are new for NGOs, and the focusing on anticipatory action is a 'paradigm shift' for NGO staff. DRF Systems introduce new ideas and decision-making processes and requiring new skills and knowledge to be able to engage with the technical aspects of the systems.

HUMANITARIAN STAKEHOLDERS (NOTABLY NGO STAFF) NEED A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF RISK ANALYTICS TO:

a. **Interrogate and tailor the model to meet their (and community needs) and understand the implications of certain decisions or 'model settings'**
b. **as a prerequisite for facilitating community input and engagement into the process. Insufficient understanding risks the DRF system is shaped more by external modellers than NGOs and risks staff (and other stakeholders) lack ownership of the system, eroding trust over time. Stakeholders may perceive the system as 'failing' to trigger when they see community level need, if they do not understand enough about the basis for decision making.**

The level of knowledge needed by staff and other stakeholders about the system is relatively detailed and technical. For example, this includes the DRF System aims and limitations; the data used, their quality, how they are analysed, how thresholds are set and what these are, and the decisions that flow from these; levels of model uncertainty and error; the level of flexibility in the system (to adapt to other forms of data outside the model); as well as details of contingency plans and financing.[7]

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

PLAN FOR A MULTI-PRONGED ON-GOING APPROACH TO BUILD STAFF AND OTHER STAKEHOLDER UNDERSTANDING. ENGAGE NOVEL APPROACHES TO BE COMMUNICATE SPECIFICS OF DRF SYSTEMS AND MODELLING TO HUMANITARIAN ACTORS, TO COMPLEMENT MORE STANDARD APPROACHES SUCH AS: WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS, ACTION LEARNING DURING DRF SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT, AND SIMULATIONS. IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO EMPLOY PEOPLE WITH SCIENCE COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

WHERE LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG NGOS (AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS) PREVENT MEANINGFUL INPUT INTO MODEL AND DRF SYSTEM, CONSIDER WHAT ADDITIONAL CHECKS AND BALANCES ARE NEEDED TO ENSURE THE MODEL MEETS THE NEEDS OF RESPONDERS AND COMMUNITIES.

Building this knowledge and capacity requires an investment in training and methods of communication as well as time from humanitarian staff. START has found technical experts may need support to tailor training so that it speaks to humanitarian staff. Further, it cannot be assumed that humanitarian staff will be interested (at least initially) in understanding modelling and the technical aspects of the DRF system. Where there has been good meeting attendance, levels of input during meetings suggests it will take time for NGO staff to build understanding of the more technical aspects.

For those involved in model building, there may be a trade-off between model complexity (and goodness of fit) and ease of understanding for the 'lay' stakeholder. Complex models risk decision making becoming opaque and

7 Harris, C. and Cardenes, I. (2020) 'Basis risk in disaster risk financing for humanitarian action: Potential approaches to measuring, monitoring, and managing it.' Centre for Disaster Protection Insight paper, Centre for Disaster Protection, London.

at worse 'black box'. It may be preferable to develop simpler models that perform less well if these allow for greater stakeholders engagement. Additional measures, such as strong comparative monitors based on community-level data, can then be put in place to counteract issues of model error.

GROUND MODELS IN COMMUNITY REALITIES, ENSURING THEY ARE SENSITIVE TO THE EXPERIENCES OF MORE VULNERABLE GROUPS.

In DRF, statistical models are used to forecast the likelihood of an event of a specific severity. Hazard models look to predict a single hazard, although do not always correlate with the impact felt on the ground. Impact models look to take a physical event and identify its likely impact on people. Impact models couple hazard data with numbers of people that would be exposed, and potentially vulnerability data.

START's guide: "Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners"[8] outlines eight checkpoints model developers and users should go through in developing models, including where communities should play a role. Closely linked to this, START's experience to date has highlighted the following:

Understand the possible bias of vulnerability and hazard impact data (used in the development of models) - For example, there may be political pressure to under or over-inflate population numbers for certain regions or deflate numbers of people affected by past events. Similarly, data indicating relative levels of vulnerability (e.g. number of people receiving social security per area) may exclude numbers of extremely vulnerable. Reports on the past impact of disasters may not disaggregate the impact of the disaster on different vulnerable groups (or at minimum by men vs women).

Identify what modelling decisions are being made that need community input - There is broad agreement, among those involved in START DRF Systems, that community input in developing and refining models is important. This includes understanding the impact of historical events on communities and different vulnerable groups; testing and 'ground-truthing' the model; and setting trigger thresholds based on the vulnerabilities of different groups to hazard severities. However, there is less clarity on what this might look like in practice, in particularly in the process of model development.

EXAMPLE OF COMBINING HAZARD, EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY DATA

The START Pakistan flood model indicates the probability of people being affected by river flooding within the Indus basin 0-10 days ahead. The model combines hazard data with district-level population data to define the number of people potentially exposed to flood water above 0m, 0.2, and 0.5 metres. There are plans to introduce vulnerability measures into the DRF system, by weighing districts (for example using the multidimensional poverty index or similar) to develop different threshold levels that reflect differing vulnerability people living in each district.

8 Scientific due diligence for humanitarian disaster risk financing: a guide for data scientists and humanitarian practitioners. Harris, C., Haldane, R. and Rees, E. (START), 2021

Different stakeholders will value different data, which may affect how opportunities to engage communities in model development are created. What counts as acceptable data? Which forms of data are being prioritised by who? There is a risk during model development that greater emphasis is given to 'big data', with modellers involved in the modelling process less familiar with the forms and importance of community-level data and as such little space is given to considering how this could be collected and used.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

IDENTIFY PEOPLE LIVING IN AT RISK COMMUNITIES WHO ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS, AND WHO CAN BE ENGAGED CONSISTENTLY OVER TIME FROM: ALIGNING THE DRF SYSTEM, TO MODEL DEVELOPMENT, TO CONTINGENCY PLANNING, TO FEEDING BACK ON THE ACTUAL SITUATION ON THE GROUND. CONSIDER PROVIDING FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR THEIR TIME GIVEN THEIR ROLE AS EXPERTS IN SHAPING THE DRF SYSTEM (AS PART OF MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND BEYOND), THE LEVELS OF TIME NEEDED FROM THEM, AND THAT ANY EARLY ACTION LINKED TO THE DRF SYSTEM MAY NOT BE IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

TO HELP WITH THINKING COLLECT AND DEVELOP EXAMPLES OF:

HOW COMMUNITIES CAN BE INVOLVED (OR THEIR INPUT USED) IN MODEL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING WHAT DECISIONS THEIR INPUT HAS SHAPED.
THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF COMPARATIVE MONITORS, WHICH INCLUDE COMMUNITY LEVEL DATA FROM DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS.

IDENTIFY COMPLEMENTARY EARLY RISK DATA AND INDICATORS, ALONG WITH DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORKS FOR USING THESE, THAT WILL ALLOW THE SITUATION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL TO ALSO GUIDE DECISION-MAKING.

It is widely recognised that models come with limitations and errors, and alone may not accurately align to the situation on the ground. Many factors may contribute to a misalignment: disasters are increasingly complex with compounding events adding to the severity of situations beyond what can be modelled; there may be issues with data accuracy, or data collection tools may fail; the model may not be sensitive enough to pick-up localised issues.

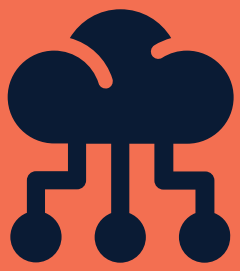
Comparative monitors are an opportunity to use a combination of data to complement model triggers. They should allow the realities of different vulnerable groups to be heard through one or more forms of data. Allowing comparative monitors to differ from the primary model data, rather than looking for data sources that meet the same specification, will open options for identifying a suite of complementary soft and hard indicators. This will move away from DRF systems a scientific model alone determines the point at which early action is triggered, as opposed by what is happening on the ground.

A decision-making framework as part of the comparative monitor can outline when, who and how comparative data will be used. Thus, minimising slow or indecisive decision-making (that DRF Systems aim to avoid) and bring a level of rigour to decision-making. This should also allow 'messier' data from vulnerable groups (soft indicators) to be used alongside the model and, depending on the flexibility in the financing, allow for soft triggers based on realities on the ground, as part of the DRF System. The decision-making framework may include:

- Agreed thresholds or signs that complementary indicators are flagging cause for concern will help maintain the swiftness of action (even if this action is the need to review the situation with decision makers). For example, FAO's FSNAU Early Warning Early Action programme in Somalia assembles a monthly mix of 19 ground-collected and remotely sensed indicators from different actors (eg. linked to climate, prices, nutrition, health and population movements). For most of these indicators the humanitarian community has agreed on hard 'alarm' and 'alert' thresholds.[9]

- Who will make decisions and how. This could take the form of a panel of experts to review soft trigger data brings objectivity and independence of decision making. For example, START's crisis anticipation work for unmodeled risks has established a FOREWARN group to aid decision making. A group of forecasting experts (mostly academic) provide extra information to inform them anticipation decision making. This is then reviewed by a panel of humanitarian decision makers alongside the alert note (produced by a member) and a 3rd party briefing note (produced by ACAPS).

Again, among those engaged with START DRF Systems there is broad agreement that having comparative monitors to complement the model is important, but there is less clarity on what this might look like. To date, where flexibility in financing has allowed it, decision-making has been based on two ends of the spectrum: formal decision-making based on model outputs and human decision-making based on reports from community level (in the case of flooding via the TWG and the START National Steering Committee). Comparative monitors should provide a middle ground, allowing for pre-agreed complementary hard and soft indicators to be considered alongside model outputs guided by a pre-agreed decision-making framework.



THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIONS ON POSSIBLE COMPARATIVE MONITORS FROM ARC-REPLICA, SENEGAL

The emphasis on third party verifiable data as the basis for modelling hazards, risks only similar forms of data are considered for the comparative monitor rather than also bringing in community-level data that reflects the realities of different vulnerable groups.

Different forms of comparative monitor data may provide different windows of opportunity for action, which needs to inform the scope of contingency plans. For example, the Africa Risk View (ARV) model uses rainfall data to predict risk early in the growing season. The Cadre Harmonise which provides a country-wide indication of the food insecurity situation based on the current situation (with a projection to the next lean season) is only available late in the season.

Alternative sources of data may indicate a humanitarian situation but not the cause of this. For example, the Cadre Harmonise in Senegal may show high levels of food insecurity which could be caused by drought, pests, conflict, or floods. What does this mean for single-cause DRF System that focuses on food insecurity caused by drought?

9 Hillier 2017

CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND DEVELOPING EARLY ACTION PROTOCOLS

ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPING RESPONSE OPTIONS, BASED ON AN UNDERSTANDING OF NEEDS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF THE COMMUNITY AND DIFFERENT VULNERABLE GROUPS.

"SOMETIMES WE SNATCH THE DIGNITY FROM PEOPLE BY GIVING THINGS TO THEM. WE DON'T RECOGNISE THEY CAN DO THINGS AND HAVE BEEN DOING SO FOR GENERATIONS."

NGO STAFF, PAKISTAN

Early action activities may look different from more conventional post-event humanitarian response activities. The normal menu of activities that humanitarian organisations and staff are familiar with will not necessary be appropriate. The time available ahead of the shock occurring, coupled with known levels of funding should it be needed, present an opportunity for better quality planning. This includes understand community needs, existing coping strategies, and factors that may hinder or contribute towards an effective response. There is also opportunity to engage communities in reviewing contingency plans designed to support them, and to make difficult decisions with stakeholders in advance. For example, deciding around how communities and households will be prioritised for support.

The levels of advanced planning needed as part of the contingency planning process will depend on the type of hazard and geographical scale of DRF System. Rapid-onset emergencies, with limited time between triggering and the need for action, demand greater levels of advanced planning to inform the response. Certain hazards, such as drought, need a greater understanding of community dynamics to inform early action options, especially where coping mechanisms have been eroded over successive years of reduced harvests. Where the community has a critical role to save lives and mitigate impact in early action, it will also be important to have greater levels of community ownership and more localised contingency plans. This merges into community disaster preparedness programming, which demands a more intensive and sustained period of engagement (potentially coupled with capacity strengthening and community resources). Finally, there is a need to match the level of planning to the geographical reach of the DRF System. Detailed planning down to small administrative levels allows plans to be tailored to localised contexts, and may feel more relevant for local stakeholders, but is more costly to develop and update as needed.

"IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE AGREEMENTS, PLANNING, DESIGNING IS NOT ONLY HAPPENING AT HIGHER LEVEL BUT ALSO NEEDS TO HAPPEN WITH AGREEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY. IT IS ABOUT THEM AND NOT JUST FOR THEM. EARLY ACTION NEEDS TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE AFFECTED POPULATION."

NGO STAFF, KENYA

START is still gaining experience of contingency planning for DRF systems. Stakeholders in Pakistan noted in at least one instance the deadlines given for contingency planning were quite tight. This may preclude options for community engagement. NGOs engaged in the flood DRF System were each developing their own contingency plans. It was unclear, however, what level of agreement there was on how community input should be sought in forming these.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

AGREE BASED ON THE SPECIFIC DRF SYSTEM THE PURPOSE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL NEEDED FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR CONTINGENCY PLANNING. ENSURE PROCESSES AND TEMPLATES MATCH THIS. ENSURE THOSE REVIEWING CONTINGENCY PLANS ARE INSISTING ON EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION / INPUT IN PLANNING ACTIVITIES.

INCLUDING IN CONTINGENCY PLANS:

HOW THEY WERE DEVELOPED, IN PARTICULAR WHICH STAKEHOLDERS WERE ENGAGED AND HOW. BE CLEAR ON THE LEVEL OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION, AND WHICH VULNERABLE GROUPS WITHIN COMMUNITIES WERE CONSULTED.
BE CLEAR ON WHO IN THE GIVEN CONTEXT IS CONSIDERED A VULNERABLE GROUP, RELEVANT FACTORS AFFECTING THIS, AND THE PRIORITIES OF DIFFERENT GROUPS.
HOW RESPONSE OPTIONS BUILD ON BOTH HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITY-LEVEL COPING STRATEGIES.
COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AT PLAY DURING THE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO A HAZARD, AND WHICH MAY IMPACT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NGO RESPONSE OPTIONS.

AGREE THE EXPECTATIONS FOR RE-VISITING COMMUNITIES IN THE REVISION OF CONTINGENCY PLANS, GIVEN CONTINGENCY PLANS ARE REVISED RELATIVELY REGULARLY (E.G. ARC PLANS ARE EVERY 2 YEARS, IN PAKISTAN THEY ARE REVISED ANNUALLY IN THE RUN-UP TO THE RISK PERIOD).
WHAT FACTORS WOULD MAKE REVISION OF PLANS WITH COMMUNITIES MORE IMPORTANT?

AGREE THE ROLE OF LNGOS (NON-START MEMBERS) IN DEVELOPING AND REVIEWING CONTINGENCY PLANS. CONSIDER HOW CONTINGENCY PLANS CAN PLAN FOR INCREASING LEVELS OF LOCAL NGOS AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP AS PART OF THE DRF SYSTEM AND ANY TRIGGERED EARLY ACTION.

COMMUNICATE WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE CONTINGENCY PLANS, ALLOWING FOR FEEDBACK ON THESE.

In theory, contingency plans provide a degree of predictability, transparency and accountability. They outline what people can expect in cases of disaster, enabling them to prepare more effectively themselves. This requires the content of contingency plans are shared with relevant stakeholders. Further, a good contingency plan has been tested and scrutinised, requiring processes for engaging stakeholders in reviewing plans.

For NGO-led DRF Systems the geographical coverage of contingency plans, the level of detail they include, and the monetary value will all affect who these should be shared with, and the purpose (as well as value) of this. START's experience includes varied the 'levels' of contingency planning, which in theory have different implications for who these are shared with. For example, plans in Senegal linked to ARC were at national level outlining a set of nine possible response options in line with the government plans; in comparison, the drought DRF in Madagascar is developing a contingency plan per region. In the future there may be contingency plans developed by livelihood zones, rather than directly aligned to administrative areas.

When considering how relevant stakeholders should be informed about contingency plans it is important to remember contingency plans themselves are not communication tools. In translating plans into key messages for different stakeholders there is need to ensure they provide information that is useful and usable rather than adding 'background noise'.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

IDENTIFY WHICH STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD REVIEW THE DEVELOPED CONTINGENCY PLANS AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK.

CONSIDER THE VALUE/FEASIBILITY OF COMMUNICATING CONTINGENCY PLANS TO NATIONAL, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, AND COMMUNITIES.

CONVERT CONTINGENCY PLANS INTO A COMMUNICATIONS TOOL. COMMUNICATE THEIR CONTENT AND THE BASIS ON WHICH EARLY ACTION WILL BE TRIGGERED.

WHERE THERE LOCAL-LEVEL CONTINGENCY PLANS, CONSIDER THE VALUE OF DEVELOPING A CONSOLIDATED PLAN FOR COMMUNICATIONS PURPOSES WITH NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS.

PREPARE FOR AAP IN IMPLEMENTATION IN THE TIME BEFORE THE SYSTEM IS TRIGGERED, INCLUDING TAKING STEPS THAT ENABLE LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TO PLAY MORE OF A ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION (AS WELL AS COMMUNICATING AND TRIANGULATING MODEL OUTPUTS).

A pre-requisite for timelier action is being prepared for when the model triggers. Contingency planning offers an opportunity to consider what needs to be in place and what actions need to be taken to strengthen delivery capacity. Common preparedness actions focus on pre-contracting of operational partners; setting up procurement options; and developing standard operational procedures (SOPs). There is also an opportunity, however, to develop plans and capacity for AAP including supporting LNGOs so they can take the lead during the response.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

ENSURE NGO FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS (FCMS) ARE IN PLACE, AND WHERE THERE ARE SEVERAL NGOS OPERATING CONSIDER IF A COLLECTIVE MECHANISM WOULD ADD VALUE. FOR RAPID ON-SET HAZARDS, WHERE THERE IS LESS OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW PLANS BEFORE EARLY ACTION IS NEEDED, FEEDBACK MECHANISMS FROM THE OUTSET (ALONG WITH MONITORING) CAN BE THE MAIN MEANS FOR IDENTIFYING IF ADJUSTMENTS ARE NEEDED BASED ON THE CONTEXT.

DECIDE PROCESSES FOR COMMUNICATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TARGETING AS PART OF EARLY ACTION.

IDENTIFY WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR FACILITATING STRONG AAP WITHIN EACH NGO AND PROVIDE SUPPORT ON AAP SO INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS ARE READY.

ENGAGE RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS (COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES, NATIONAL/LOCAL AUTHORITIES, WIDER NGO COMMUNITY, UN, ETC) DURING THIS TIME TO BUILD THEIR BUY-IN TO THE DRF SYSTEM TO FACILITATE RAPID EARLY ACTION WHEN NEEDED.

IDENTIFY EXISTING CAPACITIES AND PROVIDE SUPPORT TO LNGOS THAT HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO RESPOND, MOVING BEYOND PARTNERING ONLY WITH NGOS THAT ALREADY 'CAN DO' AND ALLOWING THE RESPONSE TO BE AS 'LOCALISED' AS POSSIBLE. CAPACITY SUPPORT MAY TAKE THE FORM OF CAPACITY STRENGTHENING IN ADVANCE (FOCUSED ON TECHNICAL OR ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITIES); LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AT THE POINT OF EARLY ACTION (SUCH AS LOAN OF VEHICLES OR SURGE SUPPORT); AND/OR ACCOMPANIMENT BY ORGANISATIONS WITH MORE EXPERIENCE DURING A RESPONSE.[10]

FINANCING

INFORM RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS WHAT FINANCING IS AVAILABLE, THE SOURCE OF THIS, AND ASSOCIATED RESTRICTIONS/FLEXIBILITY THAT AFFECTS DECISION-MAKING ON THE USE OF THESE FUNDS.

Pre-positioned funds should allow for greater transparency around levels of financing available to cover a particular hazard, and any funding gaps. Different sources of financing[11] have different conditions (and so flexibility) as the basis for releasing or using funds that stakeholders need to be aware of. For example, insurance services provide little flexibility with funding released solely on the model outputs. Humanitarian and development funding and contingency funds may allow for more flexibility, with funding release based on secondary triggers or human decision making. For example, the flood DRF System in Pakistan has set the trigger threshold to 62,400 people. However, flexibility in the funding source also allows for a degree of human decision making. In the event the model predicts close to this number of people are at risk of flooding, the TWG and START members can review if funding should be released.

10 Who defines 'capacity' will determine which capacities are given more importance. International organisations tend to place emphasis on organisational capacity (management, governance, decision-making, donor compliance), while local organisations emphasise operational capacity needed to deliver activities. Communities affected by disaster will have their own views on what capacities are valued. The contents of capacity frameworks are frequently defined by international actors, who in doing so decide what capacity is valued and needed. It should not be assumed that only LNGOs need capacity strengthening.

11 Financing may include: Insurance policies, NGO unrestricted contingency funds, donor funds, and crisis modifiers

MONITORING OF MODEL OUTPUTS AND TRIANGULATING WITH THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

COMMUNICATE MODEL READINGS SO THAT RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS CAN USE THESE – BOTH IN THEIR ROLE WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITY AND TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO THOSE MANAGING THE DRF SYSTEM ON IF THE MODEL READINGS CORRELATE WITH THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND.

There are different reasons for sharing model outputs with different stakeholders:

1. **For transparent and accountable decision-making the basis for deciding if to act needs to be widely shared on an on-going basis, allowing this to be questioned by stakeholders if needed. Sharing model readings allows these to be verified by stakeholders drawing on different sources of information.**
2. **As early warning, allowing local stakeholders to use this information in their decision-making, and as the basis for prompting early action. START's Policy briefing "Information is Power: Connecting Local Respondents to the Risk Information that they need" provides thinking on this.[12]**
3. **To keep stakeholders informed about the DRF System (and model readings) over time, contributing to on-going awareness of its existence and potentially contributes to trust in the system.**

Again, the specifics of the DRF system will determine who the model readings should be shared with, for what purpose and how frequently. Key stakeholders including community representatives need a channel to provide feedback if the model outputs do not correspond to their situation on the ground, to enable accountability. This will need to be factored into the design feedback and complaints mechanisms (at NGO and/or DRF Systems level).

Data needs to be accessible and easy to understand by end users, which may also require a level of understanding of the DRF System. For example, in Pakistan sharing heatwave model triggers with Provincial Disaster Management Agency (PDMA), requires them to have had an orientation on the model. For community level, model outputs need to be translated into a measure that communities understand. For example, hazard warning scales are that are understood by, and ideally designed with, communities. For example, in Bangladesh data from flood models are shared with communities using a colour code system to indicate the severity of the situation. Translating early hazard forecasts into potential losses (and the impact on people's lives) provides additional clarity on the what the hazard potentially means for people. This can make model outputs more understandable.

Practically, there are plans in Pakistan to develop a dashboard to present the data from all three DRF System models, potentially with comparative monitoring data alongside. This will be accessible to all via the START website. In Kenya, there are early plans to share model readings with country drought working groups in targeted areas.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

BUILDING ON THE INITIAL STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AS PART OF PLANNING, DECIDE ON WHO THE MODEL READINGS SHOULD BE SHARED WITH AND THE PURPOSE OF THIS (ALLOWING FOR FEEDBACK ON THE DATA VS EARLY WARNING VS KEEPING INFORMED). BASED ON THIS, IDENTIFY OPTIONS FOR HOW THIS CAN HAPPEN AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE.

IDENTIFY OPTIONS FOR HOW FEEDBACK ON THE ACCURACY OF MODEL READINGS WILL BE MANAGED, AND ACTED ON. THIS MAY INVOLVE EXPANDING EXISTING FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS (AT NGO AND/OR DRF SYSTEMS LEVEL).

12 Information is Power: Connecting Local Responders to the Risk Information that they need.START Network Policy Brief. Klassen, S, drawing on Oxley, M. (2021)

TRIANGULATE MODEL OUTPUTS WITH THE SITUATION IN MORE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES AND FOR MORE VULNERABLE PEOPLE.

Active triangulation between the model outputs and the situation on the ground is key for checking for model errors. Complementary early risk data and indicators identified as part of the DRF System development should include community-level data, however, continuously triangulating the basis for decision making with situation on the ground should minimise missed-situations. There are limited examples of this being done so far as part of START's DRF Systems (with the exception of in Senegal, example below), although recognition of its importance.

EXAMPLE USING SENTINEL SITES TO MONITOR COMMUNITY LEVEL REALITIES IN SENEGAL

As part of ARC Replica in Senegal START established 22 community sentinel sites, across different climatic and livelihood zones. In each, a small committee met every two weeks, providing situation updates to START on livestock, crops access to water, rainfall, and more. Initially a complex survey was designed for each committee to complete. This was later scaled back to a simpler ranking system, and then evolved into open-ended interview questions asked by the M&E officer. Later a comparison of data sources was conducted to identify potential comparative monitors. The experience highlighted the importance of deciding the ultimate use for data to guide the design of community-level data collection and analysis. For example being clear on what decisions the data will shape, and what forms of data decision makers can use. A large volume of qualitative data was collected from across all sites; however, this was not used by decision-makers.

TRIGGERING LEADING TO IMPLEMENTATION AND TO MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE EARLY ACTION

ADJUST PLANS WITH INPUT FROM COMMUNITIES BASED ON THE ACTUAL SITUATION.

Pre-planned response activities may not match the needs of the beneficiary population, and sometimes the trigger may not accurately capture the situation it tries to approximate. Plans developed in advance, cannot easily capture the variety of hazards that communities, in particular more vulnerable groups, may be facing at the time the DRF System triggers. As such, plans should be reviewed with community input to adapt activities to the actual situation.

For example, the 2020 early action drought response in Senegal as part of ARC Replica coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of financial support for households had been pre-determined, based on the window of opportunity for early action to mitigate the increased drought risk. It did not factor in the economic effects households were already facing due to the Covid-19 movement restrictions. As such, the evaluation of the response found the household grants were insufficient to meet the aims of the early action.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTION:

- CONSIDER WHAT CAN BE DONE DURING CONTINGENCY PLANNING TO FACILITATE THE PROCESS (HOWEVER QUICK) OF CHECKING PLANS AGAINST THE SITUATION IN COMMUNITIES.

Better levels of pre-planning with DRF (and coordination between organisations and with different stakeholders as part of this) provide a better chance of NGOs being able to review plans with some level of community input based on the actual situation. Existing community contacts and relationships developed by NGOs, can be used to rapidly seek input and to cross-check the assumptions underpinning the original plans.

COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS (INCLUDING COMMUNITIES AND THOSE TO BE TARGETED BY THE EARLY ACTION ASSISTANCE) WHAT SUPPORT IS COMING AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE.

"THE CHALLENGE OF ANTICIPATION MECHANISMS IS THAT YOU WILL INTERVENE AT A MOMENT WHEN THE COMMUNITY DO NOT REALISE THERE IS A PROBLEM [OR THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM]"

NGO STAFF, MADAGASCAR

In all settings letting communities know as soon as possible what support will be coming for whom will enable households to plan, and potentially prevent negative coping strategies. People need to know the purpose of any support, linked to the predicted or actual risk, so they can decide how best to use the assistance. As highlighted above, it is important risk is communicated in terms that communities understand. If, after the event, the disaster is not as severe as the model predicted (and was communicated), it will be important for future events to account for this to communities.

IMPLEMENT APPROACHES FOR STRONG ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY ACTION, TO THE SAME STANDARD AS FOLLOWING A HUMANITARIAN EVENT.

The standard of AAP that communities should expect from agencies in more convention humanitarian response work, as outlined in the Core Humanitarian Standard, should also be applied to early action implementation phases. This includes:

Having in place a complaints and feedback mechanism, and actively seeking feedback on activities from community members.

Sharing basic information about the organisation, what communities can expect, and how they can provide feedback.

Involving communities and their representatives in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning processes to reflect on activities.

INVOLVE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN REVIEWING THE EFFECTIVENESS, APPROPRIATENESS, AND TIMELINESS OF THE EARLY ACTION. REVIEW THE EXTENT TO WHICH AAP, IN PARTICULAR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, WAS REFLECTED IN THE DESIGN AND ON-GOING MANAGEMENT OF THE DRF SYSTEM.

As with conventional humanitarian response work, communities, including representatives of more vulnerable groups, should be involved in reviewing the effectiveness, appropriateness, and timeliness of the early action, with the specific questions under these criteria adapted to early action.

In addition, it is important to review and learn from how AAP was reflected the design and on-going management of the DRF System as outlined in this paper. In particular, considering how and when communities (and representatives of more vulnerable groups) were engaged and how this informed decisions that shaped the DRF System.

04 FINAL WORD

Accountability to at risk communities (and community engagement as part of this) is integral to DRF Systems. However, there is limited clarity on what this might look like in practice for the more technical aspects such as model development, triangulation of model outputs, and complementary early risk data and indicators. This paper provides a starting point for prompting discussion and practice of AAP in DRF Systems, rather than providing the answer. Most START supported DRF systems are in the early stages (with the exception of ARC Replica in Senegal) and there is opportunity to explore and pilot different approaches for reflecting the steps presented here in practice as part of varied DRF Systems.

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START NETWORK

Start Network is made up of more than 40 aid agencies across five continents, ranging from large international organisations to national NGOs. Together, our aim is to transform humanitarian action through innovation, fast funding, early action, and localisation.

We're tackling what we believe are the biggest systemic problems that the sector faces - problems including slow and reactive funding, centralised decision-making, and an aversion to change, means that people affected by crises around the world, do not receive the best help fast enough, and needless suffering results.

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