

Virtual Climate Summit | Climate:RED

High Level Panel “Scaling Up Anticipatory Action: More. Better. Together.”
Draft Opening Remarks of acting Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy
Emergency Relief Coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham

Thursday, 10 September

As delivered

Jagan and Thomas, thank you.

It is an honour to participate in the first virtual Climate RED summit alongside the International Federation of the Red Cross and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Let me start with a few words on the extraordinary situation we find ourselves in.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the biggest international crisis in more than 50 years.

Some countries are plotting pathways to cautious recovery. Others teeter on the brink of disaster, with the worst still to come.

In July, we released the third update of our COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan. It seeks US \$10.3 billion to help meet the immediate humanitarian needs of 250 million people.

The biggest single appeal we’ve ever made. Worryingly it’s only 24 per cent funded so far.

While the humanitarian, protection, economic and social impacts of the pandemic escalate, vulnerable countries will inevitably endure other disasters – a second consecutive drought period, record-strength cyclones, unprecedented flooding.

Fortunately we can now predict many of these events more accurately. We can use the evidence of risk – instead of suffering – to act. We can take anticipatory action.

Given our ability to predict and the unprecedented scale of current global crises, it is our practical and moral duty to rapidly scale up this anticipatory approach.

OCHA is committed to doing this, working with all of you.

In June, we triggered the Anticipatory Action Framework in Somalia as the number of severely food-insecure people was forecast to triple to 3.5 million during the lean season.

The previous year we had mapped out the response model with the Humanitarian Country Team, the World Bank and the Early Action Task Force.

The ERC released \$15 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to the FAO, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO to cover health, food security, water and sanitation, nutrition and protection assistance.

This year in Bangladesh we scaled up the anticipatory action mechanism put in place by the Bangladesh Government, the Red Cross and WFP.

So when a high probability of severe flooding was forecast along the Jamuna River, it triggered an immediate release of \$5.2 million from the CERF to help communities prepare and protect themselves. This is the first time the CERF has been used for anticipatory action in a sudden onset emergency and the fastest CERF funding release in history – within four hours of the trigger being activated.

These successes show we can bring anticipatory action to scale, using strong partnerships and under the effective leadership of RC/HCs. We need to learn from them, so they become the default rather than the exception.

I would like to highlight four lessons that will help us get there.

First, we need to move from a linear understanding of needs to one that takes into account the dynamic, evolving impacts of shock. A crisis timeline, like the one that was developed for Somalia, can be an enormously useful tool.

Second, we need to improve our skill in humanitarian modelling. We need models that are technically validated and grounded in humanitarian principles.

Third, decision-making based on these models, triggers and action plans must be embedded into existing country-level – and in some cases global - processes and structures, such as national disaster risk management systems or the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

Fourth, we need to convene humanitarians and development organizations around crisis risk. This approach involves recognizing the comparative advantages of each organization and collaborating with new partners like the World Bank.

Taking bold, new approaches to a mass scale by working together is the only way we can stem mass future suffering and protect development gains, amid ever-tighter financial constraints.

Let us all seize the opportunity to make it a success.

Thank you.