The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to coordinate the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises. We advocate for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all.

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ANTICIPATORY ACTION FRAMEWORK

MALAWI DRY SPELLS

2021-2022
1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to present the framework for anticipatory action (AA) against dry spells in Malawi, including the trigger (the model), the pre-agreed action plan (the delivery), and the pre-arranged financing (the money).

The objective of the pilot is to mitigate the impact of dry spell events on vulnerable, at-risk individuals and communities in Malawi through collective, cross-sectoral anticipatory action. In this context, dry spells are defined as 14 consecutive days with 0 to 2 millimeters of cumulative rainfall. The pilot focuses on three districts in the country’s southern region, namely: Balaka1, Chikwawa and Nsanje. The three districts are characterized by exposure to dry spells, as well as high vulnerability, making them a top priority for the Government of Malawi (as per the National Resilience Strategy) and the United Nations Country Team. Across the three districts, the pilot has the potential to reach over 185,000 households2.

The model for the 2021/20223 season makes use of a hybrid trigger model, comprising of a predictive (stage I) and observational component (stage II). The two-step trigger works as follows:

- **Stage I**: In mid-November, or mid-December, if the predictive trigger is met for forecasted dry spell events in January or February, respectively, then dedicated funds are released for the commencement of activities by the Protection and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors, prior to the predicted shock. This provides 45 to 75 days of lead time to get ahead of the shock and related humanitarian impacts.

- **Stage II**: Starting in January, if the observational trigger is met, meaning that a dry spell event has occurred in either January and/or February, then dedicated funds are released for the commencement of activities by the Food Security & Livelihoods (FSL) and Nutrition sectors. This supports anticipatory action after the shock, but before peak humanitarian impact.

While closely related, each trigger (Stage I and II) is independent. As such, anticipatory action by the different sectors relies on the respective trigger being met, and in this context, a partial activation of the action plan is possible.

The delivery of anticipatory action is guided by a pre-agreed action plan to be implemented by five UN agencies – FAO, IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WFP - in partnership with NGOs and in close coordination with national and local authorities. The pre-agreed action plan will:

[Predictive component]

- Ensure reliable access to safe water for drinking, personal hygiene, and livelihoods through the timely rehabilitation of non-functional, institutional water schemes and hygiene promotion activities (UNICEF) coupled with the rehabilitation of community, non-functional boreholes and committee trainings on effective water management (IOM).

- Mitigate against GBV and protection risk through PSEA4 and GBV prevention and management trainings for emergency responders and local gatekeepers, the strengthening of monitoring and referral mechanisms, community outreach, and the provision of dignity kits to women and girls (UNFPA).

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1 Balaka experiences dry spells, but to a lesser extent, considering the historical dataset developed by the Center for Humanitarian Data (CHD). Partner reports indicate that the district is exposed to dry spells. It is also a high vulnerability context, ranked among the top priority districts under the National Resilience Strategy.

2 This is an estimate based on the aggregation of the expected caseload reported by each agency for their respective intervention. As such, the final figure will only be known when action is triggered.

3 The framework will be reviewed for the 2022/2023 season to allow for improvements based on learnings from the first year.

4 PSEA - Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse: involvement of humanitarian workers in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse is a grave violation of an organizations responsibility to do no harm and to protect people affected by crises.

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• Safeguard food security and livelihoods against the impacts of dry spell events on vulnerable individuals and communities through the provision of unconditional cash assistance (WFP) as well as agricultural production support, including in-kind and technical assistance (FAO).
• Reduce the risk of malnutrition as well as mortality/morbidity on at-risk children through screenings, referrals, and provision of RUTF for identified cases (by UNICEF), which is supported by individual and group MIYCN counselling sessions and refresher trainings for front-line workers (WFP).

The money for the framework comes from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The 2021/22 pre-arranged financing agreement with CERF commits up to US $7 million for anticipatory action against dry spells. The agreement further stipulates that twenty percent of the total budget ($1.4 million) is dedicated to the predictive component and the remaining eighty percent ($5.6 million) to the observational component. Funding can only be released if and when the respective triggers are met.

2. Introduction

Objectives of anticipatory action

There is broad agreement on the need for the international humanitarian sector to move from a largely responsive approach to an anticipatory approach. An anticipatory approach leads to a more effective, efficient and dignified response. It also protects hard-won development gains.

Today, we can predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and humanitarian impact of certain climate- and weather-related shocks. By leveraging analytical tools to make strategic funding decisions, out-of-the-ordinary weather events can not only be predicted, but their projected impact can proactively be mitigated based on pre-identified anticipatory actions. Building on growing evidence that acting prior to the onset of a predictable hazard is significantly more (cost-)effective than traditional humanitarian response, OCHA has facilitated the setup of multiple Anticipatory Action frameworks.

Each framework comprises three core elements, all of which are underpinned by a clear learning, monitoring and evaluation plan:

• A robust forecasting embedded in a clear decision-making process (the model).
• Pre-agreed action plans that can fundamentally alter the trajectory of the crisis (the delivery).
• Pre-arranged finance (the money).

Collective, anticipatory action is still an innovative space. Thus, in addition to the three core elements, OCHA-facilitated pilots also invest in documenting evidence and learning from each framework underpinned by clear learning, monitoring, and evaluation plans.
Core principles

The following are the core principles that orient the anticipatory action pilot for dry spells in Malawi. These principles are mainstreamed and upheld across the different components and processes of the AA framework.

- **Pursuing quality programming**: Partners engaged in the implementation of the anticipatory action framework are responsible for pursuing and ensuring quality programming is delivered in line with the context and needs, especially of the most vulnerable.

- **Prioritizing a multi-sectoral approach**: Partners should prioritize multi-sectoral, co-targeted interventions when possible to maximize synergies and to achieve greater impact.

- **Ensuring the centrality of protection**: In line with the IASC centrality of protection policy, and the principle of “leaving no one behind” (2030 Agenda), all partners implementing anticipatory interventions have the responsibility to ensure that their response will not aggravate the exposure of communities to risks of violence, insecurity, extortion, and exploitation. Anticipatory actions must also ensure that they benefit all communities (local communities, displaced communities, returnees, and refugees) based on their needs, with due attention given to obstacles linked to gender, age, disability, or social affiliation.

- **Promoting accountability to affected populations**: Partners engaged in the implementation of the anticipatory action framework are responsible for the integration of accountability to affected populations approaches in their activities. This includes making all efforts to solicit, hear, and act upon the voices and priorities of affected people (including the most marginalized and at-risk women, men, girls and boys) in a coordinated manner, before, during, and after anticipatory action. It also means ensuring that community feedback leads to corrective action in future anticipatory action.

- **Supporting localization**: All partners involved in the implementation of this framework are expected to honor commitments towards localization. Equitable partnerships with local actors building upon their long-term relationships and trust with communities during anticipatory action are crucial.

- **Engaging in partnerships**: Collaboration across humanitarian actors is key to ensuring that all sectors are engaged and that assistance is mobilized according to the anticipatory action framework.

- **Using cash where possible**: OCHA encourages the use of cash as the default assistance modality, where markets and operational contexts permit.

- **Complementing the humanitarian architecture**: Evidence shows that an anticipatory action approach can lead to a faster, more efficient (cheaper), and more dignified response, which can help strengthen and complement the existing humanitarian architecture. Thus, any gains in this respect that are achieved by the pilot participants are to be mainstreamed as much as possible into the in-country humanitarian architecture.

- **Generating development co-benefits**: Pilot participants are encouraged to consider how financing for anticipatory action can complement financing for development by reducing suffering and addressing the root causes of problems. For instance, if the pre-agreed anticipatory action plan includes the repair of boreholes, implementing agencies should ensure that the quality of the repairs will last beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis.

- **Capturing learning**: Monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities are embedded at every phase of the development and implementation of the anticipatory action framework.

- **Striving for integration**: The framework seeks to integrate the anticipatory action activities into the existing humanitarian architecture and to foster linkages with long term programming, including resilience and development initiatives.

**Dry Spells in Malawi**

The focus on dry spells is unique to this anticipatory action framework. Within and beyond the work by OCHA and its partners, there is little focus on dry spells. This innovative shift is intended to promote a more effective and efficient approach, by focusing on specific rainfall anomalies during exact periods of the rainfall period, which have considerable humanitarian impacts to be addressed. Due to climate change, more erratic rainfall patterns are expected, and these type
of rainfall anomalies offer a great learning experience on how to respond to these damaging trends that are due to increase in frequency and intensity.

**Dry Spell Definition**

A dry spell, in the context of this pilot, has been defined as 14 consecutive days with no more than 2 millimeters of cumulative rainfall\(^5\). The focus is on dry spell events within the rainy season (October to April), which result exclusively from a lack of rainfall, not considering other factors, such as temperature or evapotranspiration rates. Depending on when the dry spell occurs in respect to the agricultural season, the assumption is that the dry spell can have a varying impact on crop production, thus, limiting food and incomes. It is particularly damaging if the dry spells occur during the planting (November/December) and flowering periods (January/February). Partners have identified that dry spells in the flowering period, also referred to as mid-season dry spells, are the most damaging, as there is little time for re-planting and safeguarding rain-fed production, as it is too late into the rainy season. Beyond the impact on food and incomes, dry spells have a negative impact on clean water access, sanitation, and protection, especially of women and girls, among other sectors.

**Exposure**

The weather and climate in Malawi are defined largely by the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomena, with the country’s geography creating specific climate zones throughout. However, there are some notable general characteristics. In the North, temperatures are less extreme and the region generally enjoys more regular and plentiful rainfall. Conversely, the South is hotter and drier. This is where historical dry spell occurrence is the highest (for more details see section 3). The districts of Chikwawa and Nsanje have the highest prevalence of historical dry spell events. Other districts in the region are also affected, including Balaka, Blantyre (rural), Chiradzulu, Machinga, Mulanje, Mwanza, Neno, Phalombe, and Thyolo.

**Vulnerability**

Malawi ranks 174 of 189 countries and territories in the Human Development Index. Poverty levels are high by global standards with 50.7% of the Malawi population living below the national poverty line. When using the international poverty line, 69.8% of the population is estimated to be living in poverty. Poverty prevalence is highest in rural areas, especially in the southern region (e.g., Chikwawa 81.6%, Nsanje 81.2%). Most of the rural poor (70%) are subsistence farmers practicing rainfed agriculture, which makes them particularly vulnerable to changes in the weather and climate, including dry spells. With limited incomes and assets, they often have restricted capacities to manage disaster risk and to withstand the impact of shocks.

**Humanitarian Impact**

During the 2020/2021 season two dry spell events were experienced. These occurred from the (1) 2\(^{nd}\) week of December to 1\(^{st}\) week of January and (2) from the 3\(^{rd}\) week of January to the 2\(^{nd}\) week of February. Based on April reports by the Nsanje and Chikwawa District Agriculture Offices, 32 to 58 percent of the planted area was affected by dry spells, with some crops being drastically affected even Wilting completely. As a result, IPC phase 2 food security outcomes have unfolded in Nsanje. Projections for later in the year indicate worsening conditions in Nsanje (IPC phase 3) and Chikwawa (IPC phase 2). The food security situation is worsening, as households deplete their below-average food stocks and with limited incomes are unable to secure food through the market.

**Crisis timeline**

Malawi has one rainy season. The season runs from October to April. Land preparations typically start around September. Planting can take place as early as November and run thru to January in the southern region. The main

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\(^5\) This definition was endorsed by the pilot team, following WFP’s proposal.
harvest is collected between March and April. Green harvest of cereals, especially maize and sorghum can be collected in February and March.

Based on the seasonal calendar, the period January to March is critical, as households experience a food gap, as well as other exacerbating circumstances, such as pests and plant diseases, and can be compelled to adopt negative coping strategies. The regular Lean Season Response led by the Government with support of different partners tries to respond to this recurring need, covering the most vulnerable areas affected by food shortages. In the absence of this assistance, the situation only improves after April if the harvest is plentiful and sufficient to meet food needs. In this context, mid-season dry spells in January and February, that undermine crop production and yields, can therefore be a critical factor determining the wellbeing of the rural poor. It can result in a longer and deeper felt lean season, which would be out of the ordinary, necessitating humanitarian assistance.

The following illustration shows the evolution of needs along the seasonal calendar. 0 is indicative of low need and 10 is indicative of high need. The assumption is that the situation below is further exacerbated in the context of dry spells. The impact pathways of how these needs grow to acute levels is described in the section below.

### Impact Pathway

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Pathway</th>
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<td>Nutrition (increase in MAM and SAM rates)</td>
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### Short Term/Immediate Impact

**Further erosion of access to water and sanitation:** In Malawi, there are approximately 9.9 million who do not use basic sanitation and 5.6 million people (30% of the population) who do not have access to safe water sources. With the occurrence of dry spells, the informal sources of water that households rely on dry up, and thus, they are forced to travel farther and, or consume/use inadequate water supplies, also undermining good health and hygiene. **Humanitarian caseload would begin to develop immediately after the dry spell.**

**Rise of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation and abuse:** In relation to dry spells, levels of GBV and other forms of violence based on gender inequality grow, as individuals begin to adopt negative coping mechanisms. Women, and often girls too, are required to travel farther to secure access to water, which exposes them to various forms of protection risk. This further exposes women and girls to HIV and other STIs, unwanted pregnancies, physical assault, and trauma. Furthermore, due to harmful gender norms, stresses caused by food and water insecurity at household level, can result in the adoption of negative behaviors and practices, that further exacerbate the situation of key vulnerable groups, like women, girls, and boys, with key goods and services being denied to them. **Humanitarian caseload would begin to develop immediately after the dry spell.**
Medium Term/ Evolving Impact

Suboptimal food reserves and related nutrition challenges: In Malawi, the agriculture sector is predominantly rainfed-based, at subsistence level, focused on a few select crops, like maize, all of which contribute to the sectors high climate sensitivity. In this context, changes in weather and climate, including dry spells, can greatly impact the food and income security of many. Depending on the severity and timing of the dry spell, households might experience a significant reduction in yields or total loss of the harvest. This translates to poor incomes and food reserves for the year ahead. As food reserves and incomes are depleted, negative coping strategies are adopted, such as reducing the number and quality of meals, selling of household assets for unfair prices, among others. This can cause poor nutritional outcomes, especially for key vulnerable groups, such as children under two, pregnant and lactating women, as well as adolescents. **Humanitarian caseload expected to reach its peak 4-5 months after the dry spell.**

Negative livelihood coping strategies: The Malawi economy heavily relies on the agricultural sector, whereby the sector contributes to 42% of GDP and 81% of export earnings. In this context, subsistence farmers, practicing rainfed agriculture, make up 70% percent of the population. When dry spells occur, agriculture productivity is undermined, directly affecting the incomes and livelihoods of many. As food reserves are consumed, access to cash is key to ensure market-based access to food and other basic goods/services. To try to compensate losses in food and income, households may adopt negative coping strategies that can undermine their future wellbeing, such as the selling of productive assets, pulling children out of school, conducting casual labor, relying on unfavorable loans/credit, and exploiting local resources upon which agricultural productivity relies. **Humanitarian caseload expected to reach its peak 4-5 months after the dry spell.**

3. Forecast and Trigger

Overview

A trigger for anticipatory action is based on a set of criteria to help answer the questions when to act ahead of a shock and its peak impact. It enables automated decision-making for the timely disbursement of funds to support anticipatory action plans, when an out-of-the ordinary (or severe) shock and humanitarian impact is likely to cross the pre-established threshold for the exposed and vulnerable targeted community.

When developing the trigger for dry spells, the following challenges emerged:

- There is no common definition for dry spells. The historical dataset created by the Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD) for this framework revealed that most dry spells in Malawi occur in the Southern region (ADMIN1) and during the months of January and February in that region. The dataset, which includes rainy season onset and cessation dates for every calendar year since 2000, also indicated that the rainy season sometimes began in December; analysis confirmed the presence of dry days or periods in December that were difficult to differentiate from formal dry spells events. For those reasons, the trigger was developed for the Southern region exclusively and focuses on January and February dry spells.
- There are no historical datasets cataloguing past dry spells in Malawi for the definition chosen.
- Empirical data linking impact indicators to dry spells is limited, in particular to individual events.
- There are no publicly available forecasts for dry spells.
- There is a lack of strongly predictive signals of the shock onset.
- Climate indicators (e.g., ENSO, seasonal rainfall) do not strongly correlate with dry spells.
- Dry spells are difficult to confirm around the beginning and end of the rainy season, when dry and rainy days alternate.

The challenges in forecasting dry spells are partly attributable to poor forecast skill for such low rainfall amounts, to the inadequacy of using long-range forecasts to predict local events below the regional (admin 1) level, and to the chosen dry spell definition being quite restrictive, resulting in only a small subset of extreme dry spells meeting the criterion.

With poor forecast skill, a solely predictive-based trigger model would have resulted in false activations, where an event that is forecasted does not materialize. The hybrid option offers a way to minimize the financial and reputational risks associated with the use of forecasts for dry spells. The hybrid option is also desirable as stakeholder consultation has shown that humanitarian impacts emerge at various points, affording two windows of anticipatory action. The first window would be for no regrets action for humanitarian impacts that materializes immediately after the dry spell, which refers to activities
under the WASH and protection sectors. The second window would be to address humanitarian impacts that take longer to evolve, before peak impact, and pertain to the food security and livelihoods and nutrition sectors.

The following are the measures taken to overcome the challenges identified:

- Selection of a partner-derived definition of dry spells that was endorsed by the pilot team.
- Creation of a historical data set using the endorsed definition.
- Monitoring of dry spell limited to a restricted period, specifically January and February.
- Development of the trigger for the southern region exclusively.
- Adoption of a hybrid model consisting of a predictive and observational component to accommodate two opportunities for anticipatory action.

In this context, the hybrid trigger model for the 2021/2022 season, comprising of a predictive (Stage I) and observational component (Stage II), works as follows:

- **Stage I**: In mid-November, or mid-December, if the probabilistic trigger is met for forecasted dry spell events in January or February, respectively, then dedicated funds are released for the commencement of activities by the Protection and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sectors, prior to the predicted shock. This provides 45 to 75 days of lead time to get ahead of the shock and related humanitarian impacts.

- **Stage II**: Starting in January, if the observational trigger is met for confirmed dry spell events in January and February, then dedicated funds are released for the commencement of activities by the Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) and Nutrition sectors. This supports action after the shock, but before peak humanitarian impact.

While closely related, each trigger (Stage I and II) is independent. As such, anticipatory action by the sectors relies on the respective trigger being met, and in this context, a partial activation of the action plan is possible.

**Trigger definition**

**Temporal and spatial scope**

The historical dataset created by the Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD) for this framework revealed that most dry spells in Malawi occur in the southern region (ADMIN1) and during the months of January and February in that region. The dataset, which includes rainy season onset and cessation dates for every calendar year since 2000, also indicated that the rainy season sometimes began in December; analysis confirmed the presence of dry days or periods in December that were difficult to differentiate from formal dry spells events. For those reasons, the trigger was developed for the southern region exclusively and focused on January and February dry spells.

**Predictive trigger**

The predictive trigger makes use of ECMWF’s probabilistic long-range forecast which predicts monthly total rainfall. Its threshold is met when the forecast predicts a 50% probability of ≤ 210 millimeters across the Southern region. (The forecast should not be used to make predictions at a more granular spatial level, that is for a smaller geographical area.) The trigger is expected to be met on average every other year. The forecast-based trigger is evaluated at two points in time: mid-November (for the month of January), and mid-December (for February). Note that the forecasts are published mid-month every month. If the trigger is met in mid-November, then funding is released for the WASH and protection sectors and respective agencies (IOM, UNICEF, and UNFPA). If the trigger is not met in mid-November and funding is not released, then the mid-December trigger will be evaluated, and if it is met, then funding will be disbursed at this time for the specified sectors/agencies. This provides 45 to 75 days of lead time to get ahead of the shock and related humanitarian impacts.

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6 The dataset was made publicly available in the Humanitarian Data Exchange: https://data.humdata.org/dataset/historical-dry-spells-in-malawi

7 The framework will be reviewed for the 2022/23 season to allow for improvements based on learnings from the first year.
75 days of lead time to get ahead of the forecasted shock. Up to 20 percent ($1.4 million USD) of the pre-agreed finance ($7 million USD) can be disbursed based on this trigger.

Observational trigger

The trigger is based on observational rainfall data and confirms the occurrence of a shock in time for mitigating action to take place ahead of peak humanitarian impact. The Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD) will monitor the trigger. Once the observational trigger is met, the CHD will alert the AA rollout team by email. If/when an additional dry spell is observed in a district of the southern region, after the observational trigger has already been met, the CHD will once again notify the AA rollout team to inform implementation.

The data is sourced from NOAA’s observed precipitation dataset ARC2, a combination of satellite and gauge data. It covers the African continent and is updated daily, with a typical lag of 2 days. This short delay was the primary reason for the selection of ARC2 as the data source.

The occurrence of dry spells will be determined for each district (ADMIN2) in the southern region. Dry spells that occur in January or February will be reported as long as at least 7 days of the shock fall during those months. Therefore, dry spells starting as early as 24 December and starting as late as 21 February will be captured (note that it is assumed that the rainy season has begun by 24 December).

The observational trigger is met when three districts (ADMIN2) within the southern region (ADMIN1) have experienced a dry spell over the monitoring period. The dry spells do not need to overlap in time. The 3-district requirement reflects a 1 in 4-year event.

Upon confirmation of a dry spell event in a third district, funding can be disbursed for agencies to work on Food Security, Livelihoods, and Nutrition interventions (WFP, FAO, UNICEF). Kindly note that the evaluation of the trigger will continue until data for 7 March are available, so as to inform partners if additional dry spells are observed. The remaining 80% ($5.6 million USD) of the overall budget can be disbursed under this trigger.

Roles and responsibilities in monitoring the trigger

The Centre for Humanitarian Data (CHD) will monitor both triggers (observational and predictive). Once the predictive or observational trigger is met, the CHD will alert the pilot team by email. If the predictive trigger is met again mid-December, the CHD will notify the pilot team although no additional disbursements are planned. If/when an additional dry spell is observed in a district of the southern region after the observational trigger has already been met, the CHD will notify the pilot team to inform implementation (no additional disbursement).
Activation protocol

Pre-defining an activation protocol is critical to avoid delays when a trigger threshold is reached. The activation protocol outlines the specific steps to take as soon as any of the triggers are reached. The activation protocol differs between the predictive and observational components.

As soon as the predictive trigger is reached, the following actions will be taken:

- CHD will notify the RCO (RC, head of RCO, and RCO technical focal point) and the OCHA pilot team (HFSA, CERF, and ROSEA) via email that the trigger has been reached.
- The Head of the RCO will send a pre-drafted email on behalf of the RC to the heads of participating agencies and their respective technical focal points to inform them about the activation of the framework. The email will clarify which trigger was reached, which sectors are activated and which agencies are required to take action.
- The CERF secretariat will send approval letters for projects and budgets that were pre-approved ahead of the trigger activation to agency headquarters for their countersignature (as per usual process), initiating the funds disbursement process.8
- Agencies will implement as soon as approval letters from CERF are sent out.

As soon as the observational trigger is reached, the following actions will be taken:

- CHD will notify the RCO (RC, head of RCO, and RCO technical focal point) and the OCHA pilot team (HFSA, CERF, and ROSEA) via email that the trigger has been reached.
- The Head of the RCO will send a pre-drafted email to heads of participating agencies and their respective technical focal points to inform them about the activation of the framework. The email will clarify which trigger was reached, which sectors are activated and which agencies are required to take action.
- The CERF programme unit, with support from HFSA, will work with the agency focal points and the RCO to adjust the pre-submitted project proposals and budgets, ensuring, for example, that information on the location of dry spells, is reflected in the geographical targeting.9
- Upon finalizing the proposals, the CERF secretariat will send approval letters to agency headquarters for their countersignature (as per usual process), initiating the funds disbursement process.
- Agencies will implement as soon as approval letters from CERF are sent out.

4. Anticipatory Action Plan

Selection criteria

Anticipatory actions aim to mitigate the humanitarian impacts of a severe dry spell, thus interrupting the pathways outlined in the crisis timeline section above.

The following criteria were applied to select actions:

1. **Anticipatory character**: Is the action effective in preventing or reducing the humanitarian impact of the shock?

2. **Ability to deliver within the window of opportunity**: Is it possible to carry out the action effectively with the available forecast lead time, i.e., in the window of opportunity?

3. **Operational capacity**: Do the agency and its IPs have the institutional capacity (thematic, logistic, administrative, financial, human resources) to implement the action effectively given the lead time and scale?

4. **No regrets approach**: In the case of a false alarm, will the proposed actions benefit rather than negatively the targeted population?

---

8 For activities that are initiated based on the predictive component, the aim is to pre-approve CERF projects and budgets ahead of the first potential trigger activation in mid-November. This will ensure that funding for time-critical activities is disbursed as swiftly as possible, without administrative delays.

9 For activities that are initiated based on the observational component, the aim is to prepare project documents as much as possible ahead of a first potential activation in early February. However, certain details of the project proposals such as geographical targeting will have to be updated based on information provided by the observational trigger.
Priority interventions

The pre-agreed actions will focus on the following core objectives:

[Predictive component]

- Ensure reliable access to safe water for drinking, personal hygiene, and livelihoods through the timely rehabilitation of non-functional, institutional water schemes and hygiene promotion activities (UNICEF) coupled with the rehabilitation of community, non-functional boreholes and committee trainings on effective water management (IOM).
- Mitigate against GBV and protection risk through PSEA and GBV prevention and management quick re-orientation trainings for emergency responders and local gatekeepers, the strengthening of monitoring and referral mechanisms, community outreach, and the provision of dignity kits to women and girls (UNFPA).

[Observational component]

- Safeguard food security and livelihoods against the impacts of dry spell events on vulnerable individuals and communities through the provision of unconditional cash assistance (WFP) as well as agricultural production support, including in-kind and technical assistance (FAO).
- Reduce the risk of malnutrition as well as mortality/morbidity on at-risk children through screenings, referrals, and provision of RUTF for identified cases (by UNICEF), which is supported by individual and group MIYCN counselling sessions and refresher trainings for front-line workers (WFP).

This summary table provides a snapshot of each agency’s activities. Further details can be found in CERF application documents.

Summary table

Objective of the AA Framework: Reduce the impact of a severe dry spell event on vulnerable, at-risk individuals and communities in the districts of Balaka, Chikwawa and Nsanje through collective, cross-sectoral anticipatory action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Proposed activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Vulnerable people, especially women and girls, benefit from mitigated GBV and protection risk | Protection | UNFPA | • Distribution of dignity kits to women and girls  
• Quick re-orientation of PSEA and GBV prevention and management standards for emergency responders  
• Strengthening of monitoring and referral mechanisms  
• Community outreach |
| Vulnerable people in targeted communities have improved access to water for drinking, sanitation and personal hygiene and benefit from improved water management | WASH | IOM | • Reparation and/or maintenance of communal water schemes  
• Training of water point committees |
| Vulnerable people in targeted communities have improved access to water for drinking, sanitation and personal hygiene and benefit from improved water management | WASH | UNICEF | • Rehabilitation and upgrading of non-functional water schemes in selected institutions (including technical training for maintenance)  
• Implementation of hygiene promotion campaign (including training for water committees) |
| The livelihoods and food security of vulnerable people in targeted communities is safeguarded against the impact of dry spells | FSL | FAO | • Input & technical support for winter farming  
• Timely unconditional cash assistance |
| Vulnerable people, especially children under 5, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescents, benefit from reduced malnutrition | Nutrition | UNICEF | • Screenings and referrals of children under 5  
• Timely provision of RUTF to at risk children  
• Refresher trainings to frontline workers  
• Individual and group counselling on MIYCN |
Implementation timeline

The implementation timeline is summarized below for the predictive and observational components of the action plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Trigger and fund disbursement</th>
<th>Lead Time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>Mid- November OR Mid-December</td>
<td>45-75 days</td>
<td>4 months starting when trigger is reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS&amp;L</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>January, February, OR March</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6 months starting when trigger is reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 months from May to July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>January, February, OR March</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3 months starting when trigger is reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targeting

The targeting approaches to be applied are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic</th>
<th>Predictive</th>
<th>Observational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nsanje TAs: Tengani, Mlolo and Mbenje</td>
<td>Nsanje, Chikwawa, and Balaka districts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chikwawa TAs: Chapananga, Lundu and Ngabu</td>
<td>TAs to be confirmed using observational data¹⁰</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balaka TAs: Msamala, Kalemba and Chanthunya.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Predictive**

WASH: Institutions/communities with non-functional waterpoints as identified by Government District Water Development Officers in the targeted districts

Protection: Service providers, local community leaders, local community level actors already part of local mechanisms for GBV/PSEA. HHs and individuals within the reach of these networks. Focus on women and girls.

**Observational**

FS&L: Households pre-identified through the UBR and verified by community consultations, with a focus on the most socio-economic vulnerable. FAO may do further consultations/assessments to ensure suitability of the agricultural package of support and irrigation/residual moisture availability.

Nutrition: Same as above. In addition, those identified by the local monitoring and referral mechanisms. Focus on vulnerable groups such as children under 5, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescents.

¹⁰CHD will produce a map of rainfall patterns for all TAs (ADMIN3) in the Southern region. It could report rainfall received during the dates of each of the 3 dry spells, and/or since 1 January (cumulative rainfall to date). The map would provide a comparison of relative precipitation amounts (which areas received more vs less) to inform geographical targeting for implementation.
Beneficiary registration

The beneficiary registration practices of the different agencies are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Beneficiary Registration Practices</th>
<th>Estimated # of beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREDICTIVE</td>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Registration conducted at the water point committee level and digitized using kobo</td>
<td>96,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>Registration conducted at Institutions/districts and submitted to UNICEF through reporting</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Monitoring and referral systems can be leveraged to identify/track beneficiaries</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBSERVATIONAL</td>
<td>FS&amp;L</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>SCOPE platform, supported by the UBR</td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>UNICEF Monitoring and referral systems can be leveraged to identify/track beneficiaries</td>
<td>65,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>SCOPE platform, supported by the UBR</td>
<td>311,390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ensuring readiness for a timely implementation

In preparation for this pilot, agencies have submitted detailed planning documents outlining key considerations related to their proposed activities. These intervention sheets, which have been reviewed by OCHA and RCO, and subsequently revised by agencies on multiple occasions, contain the following information:

- A description of anticipatory interventions, including objectives and expected outputs;
- A synopsis of the anticipatory scope of activities (i.e., their effectiveness in mitigating anticipated needs);
- Inputs on the timing of activities, including information on the sector-specific window of opportunity, necessary lead time to deliver assistance, and the ideal implementation duration; and
- Inputs on agencies' operational readiness, including information on operational presence in the targeted area, procurement arrangements, contractual agreements and implementing partners.

Upon endorsement of the AA Framework by the RC and ERC, inputs from the intervention sheets are used to develop the CERF application package, comprising an application chapeau, agency-specific project proposals, and agency-specific budgets. The aim is to complete the CERF application as much as possible ahead of the first possible activation. This is to minimize lag time between the trigger activation and the onset of time-critical, anticipatory activities.

Readiness by agency under each of the sectors is summarized in the table below.

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11 Refers to individuals, not households. For estimates at the household level, divide by 5, which is the average household size. Kindly note that this is an estimate of the potential reach. Also, this does not account for unique beneficiaries. Beneficiaries may access different packages of support. The real beneficiary figures will be known when action is triggered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Readiness Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>IOM has experience working on the rehabilitation of boreholes in Nsanje and Chikwawa and will re-engage past contractors to support AA implementation, working closely with District Water Development Officers (and other relevant authorities) to prioritize communities of high-risk/need, leveraging existing data, as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td></td>
<td>In terms of rehabilitation of water supply services, UNICEF has long term agreements in place with several private contractors that can be deployed for rehabilitation works through call-down arrangements. Mobilization time is about two weeks and completion of works of each water scheme is generally from 4 to 6 weeks. In terms of hygiene promotion and support in WASH supplies distribution, UNICEF has also contingency partnership agreements in place with several NGO with dedicated expertise in humanitarian response (distribution of WASH NFIs, hygiene promotion, community mobilization) that can be deployed within ten to fourteen days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>UNFPA has experience in building the capacity of service providers and related mechanisms in the southern region of Malawi (Machinga, Dowa, Ntchisi, Nsanje, Nkhatabay and Mzimba) under the Spotlight Initiative, which the AA interventions will leverage. This will help expedite AA interventions ensuring interventions can be rapidly undertaken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS&amp;L</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Currently FAO is implementing a multi-year resilience programme in Chikwawa and Balaka, which has been supporting the adoption of the Farmer Field Schools approach in both districts. The approach enhances the capacity of the DAESS (District Agriculture Extension Services System) to efficiently adapt to the needs of farmers and facilitate a cascaded provision of agriculture extension messages. This will be leveraged to facilitate the resumption of agriculture activities right after the dry spell shock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td></td>
<td>WFP will deliver the cash using the Financial Services Providers (FSP), with whom it has standing contracts. This includes security companies (cash in envelopes) and Standard Bank (e-payment) payment using mobile phone platforms that are implementing CBT activities for WFP’s regular Food Assistance for Assets programme and Lean Season Response (LSR).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>To ensure timely emergency response, UNICEF has pre-approved contingency program agreements which are activated at the trigger of an emergency. Currently, UNICEF has two relevant contingency program documents. One is with the Malawi Red Cross for implementation of the Maternal Infant and Young Child and Adolescent Nutrition (MIYCAN) component. The other is with the Story Workshop (SWET) for rolling out social and behavior change communication (SBCC) activities. UNICEF has been working with these partners for many years with great results for children. Both partners also have great presence in the target districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td></td>
<td>To ensure timely emergency response, WFP will work on pre-approved contingency program agreements which can be activated at the trigger of the shock. This project will be implemented within the existing CMAM programme structure and community platforms where lifesaving treatment has been prioritized under the leadership of the Ministry of Health (MOH) through the Department of Nutrition HIV and AIDS (DNHA).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accountability to Affected Populations**

Anticipatory action involves thinking and acting ahead of predictable problems. Therefore, anticipatory action offers a prime opportunity to proactively engage local communities, not as recipients of post-disaster emergency assistance, but as partners in the definition of mitigating interventions that are appropriate in their context. OCHA, therefore, commissioned a local research team in Malawi (Research Insight Learning) to study and learn from the experience of families struck by floods and dry spells, including:

- Whether they rely on information to “know” in advance if and when these hazards will occur;
- If there are decisions and actions they take to get ready that might reduce their suffering;
- If they find support in their communities and from local and national authorities to prepare, endure and recover from these shocks;
• If there are decisions and actions they would like but are constrained to take (i.e., lack the resources and capacity); and
• what kind of warning and help they would prefer to receive, how and when, to fare better in the face of these risks.

The objectives of the study were to:
• Incorporate the knowledge and expectations of vulnerable households from the outset of the pilot.
• Improve the pertinence, quality, and timing of the anticipatory action framework that the United Nations Country Team is developing to predict floods and dry spells and trigger the release of funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund for the implementation of a pre-agreed plan (anticipatory action framework).
• Pre-target the locations and beneficiaries which will result in time gains once the anticipatory action framework and lead to better outcomes (i.e., helping the most vulnerable and risk-exposed).

Key findings on dry spells:
• Dry spells have varying durations. Three weeks is the most cited duration. The perceived frequency of dry spell events is increasing. Dry spells can take place more than once within a single rainfall season. The period from December to March is when dry spells take place, especially in the month of February, followed by January. The impact of a dry spell can be felt for 3 to 5 months on average, or even longer.
• Most act after the shock and after considerable damage has occurred. With prior knowledge of the event’s occurrence, respondents noted willingness and capacity to change their agricultural practices. Most commonly respondents noted shifting to drought-tolerant crop varieties and short cycle varieties. However, there is a noticeable gap for early warning messaging on dry spells. To fill this gap, respondents wish for messaging to be accompanied by practical and actionable advisories.
• The most common coping strategies applied in the context of dry spells include turning to casual, wage labor and a reduction in consumption (quantity and frequency of meals). Coping strategies are typically applied after the shock and the type of coping strategies has remained the same in the past years. Notably, there is a considerable number of people taking action before the shock, especially when compared to other hazards, like floods. It seems that ongoing efforts on climate change adaptation may be driving this. Livestock was noted as the most useful asset for coping with dry spells, followed by seeds.
• In terms of assistance, the majority comes after the event, but a close second came before the event. This may be coming through resilience and climate change adaptation interventions. Respondents are asking for assistance before a shock, but also during. There is a big ask for cash-based assistance. While local structures also play a big role in the response to dry spells, it seems there are more external actors involved. In addition, there was a call for more coordination among those providing assistance.

Key recommendations:

General
• Strengthen early warning system’s reach and impact by integrating practical advisories and channeling these through radio and local community structures.
• Prioritize the use of cash-based modalities, enabling more choice and freedom of use by the beneficiaries.
• Enhance access to strategic NFIs that help meet specific needs within the anticipatory action window, such as replanting in the case of poor rains.
• Seek to align and channel support through local structures to enhance their capacities in assisting community members.
• Make sure to prioritize the most vulnerable children, the elderly, and pregnant and lactating mothers (in that order).
• Promote activities that protect and promote the role of livestock in risk management by local communities.

Dry Spells-specific
• Focus on the period from December to March which is when dry spells take place, especially in the month of February, followed by January.
• Take advantage that the window of opportunity for AA is broader than the immediate shock event, typically 3 to 5 months on average [before peak impact].
• Ensure closer coordination across different initiatives, especially humanitarian action to dry spells vis-à-vis efforts on climate adaptation and resilience.
Gender

- Promote cash-based interventions, as requested by women, and enable household choice in its use to best meet their needs.
- Protect and promote livelihoods to delimit the need for outmigration and exposure to GBV risk for women, as well as their families left behind.
- Conduct community sensitization to reduce GBV and protection risk in the context of natural disasters.
- Strengthen GBV and protection risk surveillance and reporting systems, including case management.

5. Pre-agreed Financing

CERF

The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) committed up to $140 million from the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support a series of anticipatory activities/actions. As of 04 October 2021, CERF has disbursed $63 million for anticipatory action pilots in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Somalia and Nepal.

For the anticipatory action pilot in Malawi, specifically the 2021/2022 season, the ERC has committed up to $7 million from the CERF for a full activation of the dry spells framework (i.e. a situation where both components of the hybrid trigger are activated). In case of a partial activation, where only one component of the trigger is activated, the ERC has agreed to commit $1.4 million for activities related to the predictive component and $5.6 million for activities related to the observational component of the trigger. Further details can be found in the CERF application documents.

CERF will disburse funds on a no-regrets basis as soon as a trigger is reached. If a trigger does not meet its pre-agreed threshold, CERF will not disburse funding. Each trigger component is evaluated independently. The amount of funding for activities is clearly defined in the CERF project proposals and budgets.

All funds for this pilot will be disbursed through CERF’s Rapid Response window; CERF has not created a separate “Anticipatory Action” window.

CERF will disburse funds once three conditions are met:

- Endorsement by the Resident Coordinator of the Malawi Anticipatory Action framework and the CERF application package comprising an application chapeau, agency-specific project proposals and agency-specific budgets; and
- Endorsement by the Emergency Relief Coordinator of the Malawi Anticipatory Action framework and the CERF application package comprising an application chapeau, agency-specific project proposals and agency-specific budgets (this can be a pre-agreed endorsement); and
- Activation of the pre-agreed pilot trigger, within the 2021/22 rainy season, in line with the defined trigger thresholds and activation protocol (see section 3).

6. Learning

Collective, anticipatory action is still an innovative space. Thus, OCHA-facilitated pilots also invest in documenting evidence and learning from each framework underpinned by a clear learning, monitoring, and evaluation plan. Each pilot is evaluated to assess if 1) collective anticipatory humanitarian action at scale works, and whether the anticipatory approach leads to a 2) faster, 3) more efficient (cheaper) and 4) more dignified response.

Learning is organized loosely along three buckets, as shown in the table below.

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Process Learning
Capture qualitative data on the benefits of setting up the pilot, as well as how the process supports high-quality anticipatory action frameworks and effective implementation.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)
Coordinated, agency-specific M&E to collect and track data on implementation progress and outputs achieved with some common, coordinated questions and indicators on timing, output, reach and challenges.

Independent Evaluation
Independent evaluations may include:
A quantitative evaluation of the impact of anticipatory action on household welfare
A qualitative evaluation to assess beneficiary experience
Forecast/trigger evaluation to assess the performance of the predictive model and ways to improve

The pilot has adapted the approach as follows:

- The Malawi Learning Concept Note has been developed to frame learning across the pilot, guided by the Global Anticipatory Action Learning Framework developed by OCHA. This will continue to be expanded upon throughout the pilot lifecycle to capture evolving learning opportunities.
- On agency M&E, a common logframe was been developed, whereby all agencies commit to monitor and report on specific output and outcome indicators that contribute to the common objectives of the sectors and the collective anticipatory action framework. To support this, a minimum set of monitoring and reporting requirements have been defined, and M&E group was established, and each agency designated a technical M&E focal point.
- On process learning, this has been organized around five core themes, which reflect the unique learning opportunities presented by the Malawi pilot. The themes look at: the dual shock framework development, new shock trigger development, civil society engagement and linkages with other systems, the link to development programming, and finally accountability to affected populations.
- On the independent evaluation a quasi-experimental approach is being explored using a regression discontinuity design approach, leveraging the UBR for comparing eligible and just, ineligible beneficiaries. This is pending confirmation of feasibility.
- In addition, the pilot team seeks to leverage the agency M&E and other assessments to perform research around key thematic areas. These thematic areas are still pending confirmation and will likely continue to evolve.

13 Minimum requirements include an endline assessment including a statistically sample of the treatment group alongside a comparison group to measure changes in the outputs and outcomes pre-defined as part of the common logframe. This is in addition to the standard CERF reporting 6 weeks after the start of activities, mid-way, and at the end of implementation.
## Monitoring

Each agency will use its existing monitoring and evaluation systems to collect and track data on implementation progress and outputs achieved. This can be financed through the CERF funds. All findings will be shared.

To allow for maximum learning, each agency M&E should incorporate and report on a set of common questions, including:

- Has the anticipatory action had any impact on the survival or quality of life of the recipients, and if so, what was it?
- Did the timing of the intervention make a difference?
- Comparing results from the anticipatory interventions with similar interventions in the past which occurred after the disaster.
- Are there any multiplier or spillover effects?

The agencies working on this Framework have committed to the common logframe shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall objective: Reduce the impact of dry spell events on vulnerable, at-risk individuals and communities in Chikwawa, Nsanje and Balaka districts through collective, cross-sectoral Anticipatory Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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