
FROM EARLY WARNING TO EARLY ACTION IN SOMALIA

What can we learn to support early action to mitigate humanitarian crises?

More than three years after it was initiated in the aftermath of the 2011 famine, the early-warning, early-action trigger mechanism for Somalia remains a work in progress. This paper looks at how the mechanism has functioned during the 2016/7 drought crisis response, uncovers a widespread consensus about the value of the tool, and explores the challenges involved in developing the dashboard, generating support and putting in place an accountability framework. It looks for learning around the effectiveness of such tools, which could potentially support similar models in other countries. This paper also highlights suggestions from a range of stakeholders regarding actions that might support greater buy-in to the dashboard and broader collaboration at all levels, helping ensure the mechanism meets its aim of facilitating decision making for early action, thereby better protecting the people of Somalia.

Oxfam Discussion Papers

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ACRONYMS

AWD	Acute Watery Diarrhoea
BRCiS	Building Resilient Communities in Somalia: a consortium formed in 2013 by Cooperazione e Sviluppo, Concern Worldwide, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children International to address the long-term exposure of communities in Somalia to recurrent disasters.
CHIRPS	Climate Hazards Group Infrared Precipitation with Station data
DFID	Department for International Development, Government of the United Kingdom
ECHO	European Union Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
ERP	Emergency Response Preparedness
EWEA	Early-Warning/Early-Action
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FbF	Forecast-based Financing: providing funding on the basis of pre-agreed triggers so that funding arrives early, enabling prevention and mitigation measures to be taken. Developed by the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and Climate Centre.
FCC-EMPRES	Food Chain Crisis Emergency Prevention System
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network: provider of early warning and analysis on food insecurity created by USAID in 1985 to help decision makers plan for humanitarian crises.
FOREWARN	Forecast-Based Warning Analysis and Response Network. Convened by the START Network.
FSNAU	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit, FAO Somalia: provider of evidence-based analysis of Somali food, nutrition and livelihood security to enable both short-term emergency responses and long-term strategic planning to promote food and livelihood security for Somali people.
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition: a measurement of the nutritional status of a population; one of the indicators for assessing the severity of a humanitarian crisis.
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team: a strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum established and led by the Humanitarian Coordinator. The HCT includes representatives of the UN, IOM, international NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and is responsible for agreeing common strategic issues related to humanitarian action.
HDX	Humanitarian Data Exchange

IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact: body set up to scrutinize official UK aid spending.
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group: ensures a coherent strategy and operational response across all sectors, and plays a critical role in facilitating the development of the strategic response plan.
ICWG	Inter-Cluster Working Group
IRF	Internal Risk Facility
INFORM	Index for Risk Management
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
NDVI	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition: a life-threatening condition requiring urgent treatment, defined by a very low weight for height, visible severe wasting or the presence of nutritional oedema.
SomRep	Somalia Resilience Programme: a consortium of seven international agencies (Oxfam, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Action Against Hunger, the Danish Refugee Council, Care, Cooperazione Internazionale and World Vision International) aimed at building resilience across Somalia.
SRAF	Situation and Response Analysis Framework
SWALIM	Somalia Water and Land Information Management, FAO Somalia: an information management unit serving Somali administrations, NGOs, development agencies and UN organizations engaged in assisting Somali communities whose lives depend directly on water and land resources.
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	UN World Health Organization

SUMMARY

The problem of late humanitarian response to forecast crises, particularly drought, is well understood. It was discussed and analysed in much depth after the 2010–11 famine in Somalia, when a slow response to early warnings of a drought crisis was deemed a system-wide failure.

A number of innovative initiatives have emerged since then. In Somalia, a ‘trigger mechanism’, instigated and supported by the Department for International Development (DFID), has been developed since 2014 by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with the clusters, donors, UN agencies and NGOs. The mechanism consists of two elements: an Early-Warning, Early-Action (EWEA) **dashboard**, which provides data on a broad range of key early-warning indicators, and an **accountability framework**, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of key actors in the humanitarian community in ensuring the mechanism tightens the links between early warnings and response.

This discussion paper brings together the views of a number of key stakeholders on where the trigger mechanism shows promise and where further work is needed. A total of 23 stakeholders were interviewed in July 2017. By providing an insight into how the dashboard works and examining whether it can meet its objective, the paper aims to stimulate further discussion and debate.

What is the early-action trigger mechanism?

The EWEA Dashboard (see the figure below) shows district-level, monthly data on five sets of indicators across Somalia, including Somaliland and Puntland: climate, markets, health, nutrition and population movements. Values for all indicators are colour-coded: green for normal, yellow for alert and red for alarm, according to agreed thresholds. The dashboard is available to the humanitarian community online, and therefore serves to provide data on key, multi-sector, early-warning indicators for use on an ongoing basis.

Snapshot of the EWEA Dashboard, June 2017

Filter Preferences		0 indicators in 0 regions		Jun-2017		Type to search ...									
Regions	Districts	Rainfall	Vegetation cover (NDVI)	Price of water	Sorghum prices	Maize prices	Red Rice prices	Local goat prices	Wage labor	TOT (goat to cereals)	TOT (wage to cereals)	Cost of Minimum Basket (CMB)	New Admissions (GAM)	Measles Cases	AWD/cases
Awdal	Borama	0.62	0.23	4500	3500	4500	4500	430000	63000	96	14	1099862.5		35	702
Awdal	Baki	0.62	0.14												
Awdal	Lughaye	0.51	0.08		5000		70000	340000		68					
Awdal	Zeylac	0.1	0.1	5000	6000	6000	8000	430000	85000	54	11				
Woqooyi Galbeed	Hargeysa	2.4	0	12000	5000	5000	5000	415000	50000	83	10	1319075		164	86
Woqooyi Galbeed	Berbera	0.01	0.11											81	
Woqooyi Galbeed	Gebiley	2.18	0.2	10000	3500	3500	6000	402500	75000	67	13			13	
Togdheer	Burco	0.05	0.24	7000	4500	4500	5000	288750	40000	58	8	1274875		94	3002
Togdheer	Buuhoodle	0	0.31												42
Togdheer	Owdweyne	1.09	0.21												
Togdheer	Sheikh	0	0.22											1	

Source: FSNAU Triggers Dashboard: <http://dashboard.fsnau.org/dashboard/index/01-Jun-2017> [Login required]

According to the accountability framework, the agencies providing data for each month should do so within the first 10 days of the following month. FSNAU has until the middle of the month to produce summary information, which should be discussed at a meeting of the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). The ICCG should make recommendations based on the information by the third week of every month, and these should be presented to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) by the final week of the month. The HCT has until the end of the month to make a decision on those recommendations.

How did the mechanism work in the recent drought?

During the 2016–17 drought crisis in Somalia, the two components of the trigger mechanism have worked with varying levels of success. The accountability framework had not been institutionalized before the crisis began, and thus did not achieve its potential. Monthly reports were not submitted to the ICCG and its recommendations were not discussed at HCT monthly meetings – this only happened very sporadically.

The dashboard appears to have been more successful in terms of providing information on early-warning indicators for use on an ongoing basis. Struggles with ensuring the timely submission of data left it lagging somewhat as the crisis spiralled, but it did help to flag that the situation was deteriorating, providing support for donors' decisions to fund the response.

Areas for refinement

Clarify the objective – early warning or timely response? – Achieving consensus around the objective is critical to its success. Is it intended to support genuinely early action – taken ahead of an impending shock to reduce its impact, based on forecasts/predicted needs – or simply a faster, more timely humanitarian response based on actual needs? While some argue that it can and should do both, this lack of clarity may lie behind some of the dissatisfaction with elements of the mechanism expressed by stakeholders, including a questioning of just how 'early' its warnings are. Until this is tackled, it is not possible to see a clear way forward.

Developing the right indicators and thresholds – Most users have concerns about all indicators being weighted equally. The use of a single threshold across such localized contexts is also seen as problematic, and there are strong calls for indicators to show variance/rates of change. The most fundamental challenge is that the indicators must be predictive if they are to inform decisions on early action.

Ensuring accurate and timely data – Late submission has led to problems with the timeliness of the information in the dashboard, while recent initiatives using satellite imaging, geo-tagging and call centres have highlighted issues with the accuracy of the data and its level of detail, particularly in remote areas. For this reason, there is general agreement on the need for triangulation (validating the data through cross-verification from two or more sources).

Making the data more accessible and better understood – While the dashboard is perfectly functional, many users would like a more dynamic, interactive interface. More fundamentally, there is a need for an informed analysis to accompany the monthly report, based on an understanding of trends, local contexts, cumulative impacts and forecast events; this is critical if the tool is to support decision making.

Increasing buy-in from relevant actors – While the trigger mechanism is slowly gaining traction, there are calls for clearer leadership to raise awareness, and greater engagement of stakeholders; in particular, the Somali authorities and other local actors, who must play a bigger role if the mechanism is to be sustainable. Clarifying the link with FEWS NET is also important.

Getting the shift to action – While there is broad support for the accountability framework in principle, there is some scepticism as to whether the process is workable in practice. There is

definitely a need for more clarity on what action the mechanism should trigger on the part of relief agencies and donors, and whether this should be hardwired to funding.

Gender-blind? – The data in the dashboard is not currently gender-disaggregated, though this should be possible for some of the indicators. A gender analysis of the dashboard's findings could help to support more gender-sensitive humanitarian activities; this analysis should include weighting indicators to ensure those most relevant to vulnerable groups such as women and girls are prioritized.

Can the mechanism meet its objective?

There is a striking consensus among those interviewed in the course of this brief study that there is real value in the EWEA Dashboard as an initiative, and that – while far from perfect – it represents a real step in the right direction. It has not yet succeeded in addressing the fundamental structural challenges within the humanitarian system that have had such devastating consequences in the past, but it offers a great deal of potential. With the climate in East Africa becoming drier and the frequency of droughts in the region increasing with climate change, the trigger mechanism could be an increasingly important tool in future.

However, what emerges is that the trigger mechanism needs a more clearly defined aim, whether that is to support early action to mitigate the impacts of a forecast shock, or to facilitate more timely humanitarian response. For timely response, the mechanism needs to be more frequently updated, more dynamic in terms of showing change, more sensitive in terms of how indicators are weighted, and better communicated in terms of cumulative impacts and likely implications. If its objective is to support early action, decision makers need an informed analysis of the probability of the impacts suggested by the data, underpinned by an analytical framework and a clear understanding of the risks that need to be addressed, based on the modelling of different scenarios.

The paper includes many suggestions for refinements – these include:

- The working group set up by OCHA to ensure the relevance of indicators and thresholds doing much to explore and resolve the question around its aims, as well as securing the support of key stakeholders, but its success will depend on conducting broad-based consultations in a collaborative process.
- Migrating the dashboard to an open platform which enables a wider range of partners to contribute data in an automated way might serve both to improve the quality and quantity of information it presents, and enable users to access the data in a more interactive, dynamic way. It would also free up FSNAU to focus on analysis, perhaps working with FEWS NET and other organizations, to develop outcome predictions that could inform discussions within the ICCG and HCT.
- Undertaking a 'verification analysis' of the dashboard's reliability would be helpful to either prove the dashboard's foundations are sound, or bring to light problems that need to be resolved; either outcome would be useful in refining the mechanism and achieving stronger buy-in from stakeholders. Continual revision, iteration and feedback loops are likely to be essential if the dashboard is to continue evolving with the context.

It is hoped this discussion paper will stimulate further dialogue, around both the trigger mechanism itself and early response more broadly, and by doing so, support the building of momentum behind the early-action agenda. The case for change is beyond dispute, and developments in Somalia hold much promise in helping to shape a humanitarian system that is fit for purpose.

1. INTRODUCTION

Droughts and excessive rainfall often come with months of warning, providing enough time to prepare for and mitigate the impacts. While the collective response is improving, too often it still scales up after the peak of the crisis, not before. This fuels three costs: human suffering, humanitarian response costs and the squandering of development gains. This is not a new problem. It is well understood by humanitarian actors, and was discussed and analysed in much depth after the ‘needless haemorrhage of human lives’¹ in the Horn of Africa in 2011, as a result of the slow response to early warnings of a drought crisis, which was deemed to be a ‘system-wide failure’.²

Since then, there have been improvements in a range of areas. Forecasting skill is improving, both for long-term climate conditions made several months in advance, and for more immediate weather events and their impacts.³ In addition, a growing number of organizations are piloting innovative schemes. This includes:

- The World Food Programme (WFP), the German Red Cross and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre are piloting Forecast-based Financing (FbF), funded by Germany’s Federal Foreign Office;
- After pioneering work by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), several donors are now using crisis modifiers to quickly inject emergency funds during crises into existing development programmes;
- The Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned research into the returns-on-investment of preparedness, multi-annual programming and cash-based programming;
- There has been increased investment in flexible, shock-responsive safety nets, such as the Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya.

In the wake of the 2011 Horn of Africa crisis, Oxfam and Save the Children exposed the need for systemic change to ensure earlier action, in the paper ‘A Dangerous Delay’.⁴ Oxfam continues to follow developments in early action closely, for example through its involvement in the creation of inter-agency standard operating procedures for predictable, slow-onset weather events. Oxfam is also a member of the START Network, which has set up a fund to enable NGOs to respond quickly to low-profile emergencies. The fund has a ‘Crisis Anticipation Window’ that enables member agencies to analyse forecasting information, collectively assess risks, and access flexible funding to respond early and reduce suffering.

With a drought crisis ravaging millions of lives in the Horn of Africa in 2017, this discussion paper aims to contribute to learning about how early warning can trigger early action, by examining the development of the Early-Warning/Early-Action (EWEA) Dashboard – a new system for Somalia that is currently undergoing its first real test. While by no means an evaluation of the mechanism, the paper brings together the views of a number of key stakeholders, including donors, UN agencies, NGOs and technical agencies, on where the dashboard shows promise and where further work is needed. By providing an insight into how the dashboard works and examining whether it can meet its objective of strengthening the link between early warning and early action in order to save lives and prevent suffering, the paper aims to stimulate further discussion and debate, around both the dashboard itself and early action more broadly.

Interviews were undertaken in July 2017, during the humanitarian response to the crisis in Somalia (see Annex 4 for a list of people interviewed). While the paper briefly considers the response in order to understand the role the EWEA Dashboard has played, it does not seek to evaluate it in any way. This is neither the paper’s ambition nor an appropriate role for Oxfam. Equally, the paper does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of developments in the field of early action and how the dashboard fits within them, or an in-depth scoping of whether it

might be rolled out in other contexts. Some thoughts on these issues are included, primarily to highlight areas where further research might be of benefit. The strong interest in this small study from interviewees suggests there is a demand for further dialogue around early response and improvements to current systems.

2. WHY AN EARLY-ACTION TRIGGER MECHANISM?

*'We needed a system that was more granular; that would offer the Humanitarian Country Team a means to filter the data; a way of understanding it and prioritizing.'*¹⁵

'So much information is being generated by so many people; we need to facilitate decision making in a way that's easier to understand for non-technical people.'

The need for some kind of early-action trigger mechanism to facilitate decision making for humanitarian response was thrown into sharp relief by the 2010–11 famine in Somalia. From August 2010, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) issued 16 increasingly dire warnings about a growing drought crisis.⁶ However, it wasn't until famine was declared in July 2011 that a significant scale-up of the humanitarian response in Somalia began.⁷ In total, nearly 260,000 people died, half of them children under five.⁸

A damning evaluation by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) found that responsibility for the failings in Somalia during the 2010–11 famine must be shared in part by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the body responsible for agreeing on common strategic issues related to humanitarian action, which includes representatives of the UN, international NGOs, the International Organization for Migration and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement. While early warning across the region had been 'accurate and timely', it said, 'the HCT's misreading of the crisis led to insufficient urgency, an inappropriate strategy and a late response'.⁹

The evaluation also flagged the over-reliance by the humanitarian community on FSNAU data. The annual Humanitarian Response Plans for Somalia and their mid-year revisions are based primarily on the FSNAU-led, Somalia-wide, food security and nutrition assessments that are conducted twice a year towards the end of the two main rainy seasons in Somalia - the *Gu* (April to June) and *Deyr* (October to December). The results are used to project humanitarian needs for the following five to six months, with the aim of facilitating timely and even early response (for example, livelihood protection activities). However, while FSNAU conducts follow-up assessments where necessary and has begun issuing updates more regularly, food security can deteriorate very quickly, highlighting the need for ongoing, systematic monitoring of key early-warning indicators to complement existing FSNAU/FEWS NET monitoring and analysis.

A 2012 review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) of the performance of DFID during the 2010–11 crisis recommended that DFID 'should work towards a cohesive early-warning system, with triggers for action pre-agreed with other key organizations and governments'.¹⁰ One staff member describes DFID feeling 'aggrieved with itself' for not having processes that could enable it to take a lead in 2011, expressing frustration at the time taken by having to put forward a business case for funding and wait for it to be approved by a minister. DFID instigated and supported the development of an early-action trigger mechanism in direct response to the ICAI recommendations.¹¹

3. HOW WAS THE MECHANISM DEVELOPED?

'Nothing is perfect from the first version.'

DFID duly embarked on a campaign to convince other actors of the need for a trigger system that would enable them to speed up the process of obtaining funds when early-warning alarm bells start ringing. Despite widespread consensus around this need in the wake of the 2010–11 famine, reaching agreement on how it should be done and by whom took over two years. DFID presented a discussion paper on triggers for emergency response to the HCT in January 2014, outlining the process and immediate next steps for establishing the mechanism, and suggesting indicators for possible triggers.

OCHA bought into the idea, and in April 2014 was entrusted by the HCT with facilitating the process of establishing the mechanism with the participation of the ICCG, donors, UN agencies and NGOs¹² (though DFID continued to provide 'muscle and momentum'). It was subsequently decided that FSNAU, with its Somalia-wide data collection and technical expertise, should lead the development of the EWEA Dashboard, but it remains a joint project, with OCHA taking the lead on linking the mechanism with existing humanitarian infrastructure.

In May–June 2014, the ICCG convened a number of technical meetings with support from FSNAU to identify and define the dashboard's indicators and thresholds. Participants included representatives of the UN (OCHA, WHO, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR); donors (DFID, ECHO); the clusters (food security, WASH, nutrition); technical partners (FSNAU, SWALIM [Somalia Water and Land Information Management], FEWS NET/USAID); and NGOs. These included Save the Children and three NGO consortia: Strengthening Nutrition Security in South-Central Somalia, Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) and the Somalia Resilience Programme (SomRep).¹³

Establishing thresholds for some of the indicators took significant discussion, and a draft concept note went through several iterations before the key indicators and thresholds for the dashboard, along with the accountability framework, were agreed (see Annexes 1 and 2).¹⁴ The final concept note was presented to the HCT in February 2015 and unanimously endorsed.

However, FSNAU struggled to make the EWEA Dashboard a priority because of a lack of resources. The arrival of a new FAO Somalia Country Representative marked a turning point, with FSNAU receiving dedicated funding to develop the dashboard in November 2015. The prototype was produced a few months later. In March–April 2016, the pilot was presented to the clusters. The concept and objectives of the dashboard were explained, and partners' cooperation requested in terms of providing both data and feedback. At an HCT retreat in September 2016, it was agreed that the EWEA Dashboard would be used alongside other preparedness initiatives.

A month later, in October 2016, Jubaland became the first Somali regional authority to issue a drought appeal, as the cumulative impacts of failed rains began to bite.

4. WHAT IS THE EARLY-ACTION TRIGGER MECHANISM?

'If WHO is focused on cholera, UNICEF is focused on children and UNHCR is focused on displacement, here you have an opportunity to see it all together and see the links, for example in areas where there are large numbers of children.'

The dashboard

A note on the FSNAU's Dashboard website makes clear that it is a work in progress that continues to be improved and refined, based on user feedback.¹⁵ In its current form, it shows district-level, monthly data on five sets of indicators across Somalia, including Somaliland and Puntland:

- **climate:** rainfall, vegetation coverage/NDVI, floods/river levels and the price of water;
- **markets:** cereal prices – maize, sorghum and rice; goat prices; wage labour; terms of trade – goat to cereal and wage to cereal; and cost of minimum basket;
- **health:** cholera/Acute Watery Diarrhoea [AWD] cases, cholera/AWD deaths, measles cases and malaria cases;
- **nutrition:** new Global Acute Malnutrition [GAM] admissions; and
- **population movements:** arrivals and departures.

Values for all indicators are colour-coded: green for normal, yellow for alert and red for alarm, according to agreed thresholds. For example, a 5–10 percent increase in the price of water over the five-year average will show yellow as an 'alert', while an increase of over 10 percent will be coded red as an 'alarm.' (See Figure 1, which shows a partial view of the dashboard.) The dashboard is publicly available online, but currently users must register to obtain login details.

FSNAU; UNHCR; the food security, health and nutrition clusters; the Inter-Cluster Working Group (ICWG) and other partners are all charged with providing the data for each month. FSNAU then consolidates the data and produces district-level summary information.

Figure 1: Snapshot of the EWEA Dashboard, June 2017

Regions	Districts	Rainfall	Vegetation cover (NDVI)	Price of water	Sorghum prices	Maize prices	Red Rice prices	Local goat prices	Wage labor	TOT (goat to cereals)	TOT (wage to cereals)	Cost of Minimum Basket (CMB)	New Admissions (GAM)	Measles Cases	AWD/cases
Awdal	Borama	0.62	0.23	4500	3500	4500	4500	430000	63000	96	14	1099862.5		35	702
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Togdheer	Burco	0.05	0.24	7000	4500	4500	5000	288750	40000	58	8	1274875		94	3002
Togdheer	Buhoodle	0	0.31												42
Togdheer	Owdweyne	1.09	0.21												
Togdheer	Sheikh	0	0.22											1	

Source: FSNAU Triggers Dashboard: <http://dashboard.fsnau.org/dashboard/index/01-Jun-2017> [Login required]

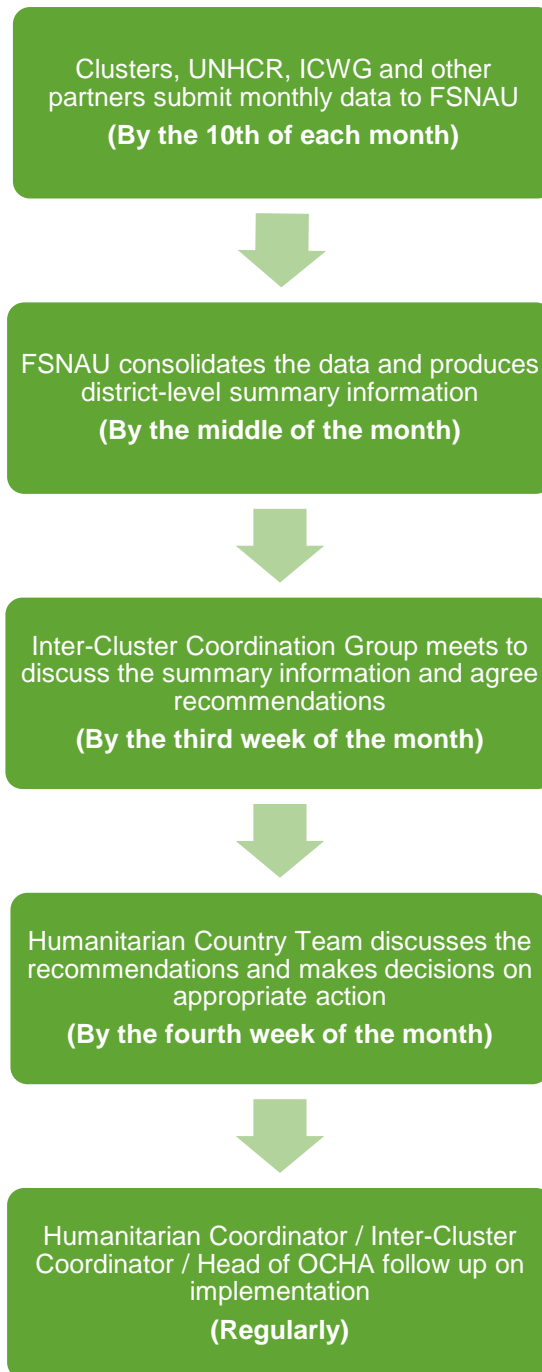
The accountability framework

An accountability framework (see Annex 2, and simplified in Figure 2 below) drawn up to accompany the EWEA Dashboard sets out the roles and responsibilities of the key actors in the humanitarian community in ensuring that the platform meets its stated aim.

Data should be provided by the various partners for each month within the first 10 days of the following month. FSNAU has until the middle of the month to consolidate the data and produce district-level summary information, which should be discussed at a meeting of the ICCG convened by OCHA's Inter-Cluster Coordinator. The ICCG should make recommendations based on the information by the third week of every month, and these should be presented to the HCT by the Inter-Cluster Coordinator, with FSNAU's support, by the final week of the month. The HCT has until the end of the month to make a decision on those recommendations (see Figure 2 below).

This framework represents an impressive attempt to instil accountability, with the HCT compelled to make a decision each month on the recommendations it is presented with by the ICCG. Minutes are taken at both the ICCG and HCT meetings, enabling participants to be held to account for the decisions they make.

Figure 2: The process set out in the EWEA accountability framework



5. HOW HAS THE MECHANISM WORKED DURING THE CURRENT CRISIS?

'This is a brand-new protocol; for us to demonstrate its value in a year like this is very difficult.'

'It felt like [the 2017 crisis in] Somaliland really snuck up on us; the dashboard could and should have been showing that.'

The early action mechanism has, in principle, two functions: the dashboard serves to provide data on key, multi-sector indicators for use by the humanitarian community on an ongoing basis; and the accountability framework serves to trigger early action, through a monthly report on the dashboard's findings to the HCT. These components have worked with varying levels of success during the current crisis.

The development of the 2016/7 drought crisis

The April–June 2016 *Gu* rains were poor across the eastern Horn of Africa, and in October, the desperately needed *Deyr* rains too began to fail. By November, FEWS NET was warning that vegetation conditions in many areas were the worst on record¹⁶, and Somalia's federal government and many state authorities issued drought alerts. On 30 November 2016, the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 was published, warning that five million people were in need, and calling for \$864m to meet requirements for the year.¹⁷ On 2 December 2016, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia gave a briefing on the deteriorating context, calling on the international community for urgent support.¹⁸

The briefing by the Humanitarian Coordinator was the first public outing for the Dashboard, a report from which was shared, presenting data from October. To make the results more intuitive, FSNAU produced a map of Somalia (see Figure 3 below) along with the table of indicators, on which six key indicators were combined to reflect the severity and intensity of the situation. These indicators were: rainfall, vegetation cover (NDVI), wage labour and livestock terms of trade against cereals, GAM, and the number of measles cases. While the focus of concern between mid-2014 and late 2016 had been the north of Somalia, the map highlighted the depth of the crisis in parts of the south, with some districts showing five of the six indicators at 'alarm'. However, it failed to show the severity of the drought in east Somaliland, which – it became apparent later – was already quite far advanced.

As is the case each year, preparation of the UN's 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan had started in September 2016. However, the results of an assessment conducted in December 2016 showed that the plan was out of date before 2017 had even begun, with needs more severe than expected. This being the case, FSNAU and FEWS NET used the occasion of the launch of the 2017 plan, 17 January in Mogadishu, to issue a joint alert, warning of the possibility of famine in Somalia in 2017.¹⁹

The map that had been prepared with October data from the EWEA Dashboard was shared again at the launch of the Humanitarian Response Plan in January 2017, in the hope that it would help donors prioritize funding. There is some doubt about how successful it was in this objective; at least one interviewee felt the lack of data on GAM and mortality rates was a key gap (the dashboard currently only includes figures on GAM admissions). FSNAU's own presentation drew attention to the map's limitations: that the six indicators used to create it were not weighted but treated equally; that most of the indicators do not reflect cumulative effects/impacts; and that many of the districts do not have data on all of the indicators used to develop the map (see sections on indicators and data below).²⁰

The FSNAU-FEWS NET Food Security Alert in January,²¹ which warned of the possibility of famine, was a key development, particularly in gaining the attention of donors, who seemed to step up a gear in response. DFID says it was using the EWEA Dashboard in the run-up to the January warning; FAO was taking snapshots from the mechanism, showing an increasing number of indicators turning red, and sharing them with DFID. It's not clear how widely these snapshots were shared across the humanitarian system, but ECHO says it also used data from the dashboard to advocate for funding from headquarters.

January's pre-famine alert was followed by an FSNAU/FEWS NET technical release in early February, warning that nearly three million people faced Integrated Phase Classification (IPC)²² Phases 3 and 4, and that the risk of famine was increasing.²³ Later that month, an 'Operational Plan for Pre-Famine Scale-Up of Humanitarian Assistance' was launched to guide donor funding as humanitarian assistance was rapidly scaled up; this plan called for \$825m for the six months from January to June 2017.²⁴ In February, the UN Secretary-General flagged the crisis in Somalia during a speech that raised for the first time the prospect of four potential famines.²⁵ In March, 1.7 million people in Somalia were assisted with improved access to food, 67 percent more than in February.²⁶

The EWEA Dashboard was not taken to the HCT until 28 March 2017. FSNAU presented data from February which was 'nearly complete', and produced another map, this time showing 10 of the dashboard indicators. Almost the entire country had at least one indicator in alarm phase; Baidoa in Bay region had nine. During a discussion at the meeting, it was agreed that – while the existing indicators would continue to be monitored – a review of the indicators and thresholds would be planned, in order to define the 'critical indicators' such as mortality and admission rates, to 'enable effective tracking of the response'. The action points from the meeting were that clusters should submit data and information to FSNAU in a timely manner, and that FSNAU should issue dashboards on a monthly basis, with the February dashboard made available by the first week of April.

Despite this commitment, and despite OCHA repeatedly tabling the dashboard for discussion at both ICCG and HCT meetings, FSNAU has not presented another monthly report since. At the time of writing (end of July 2017), the agency was working on a report based on data for June, but was still waiting for some of the information.

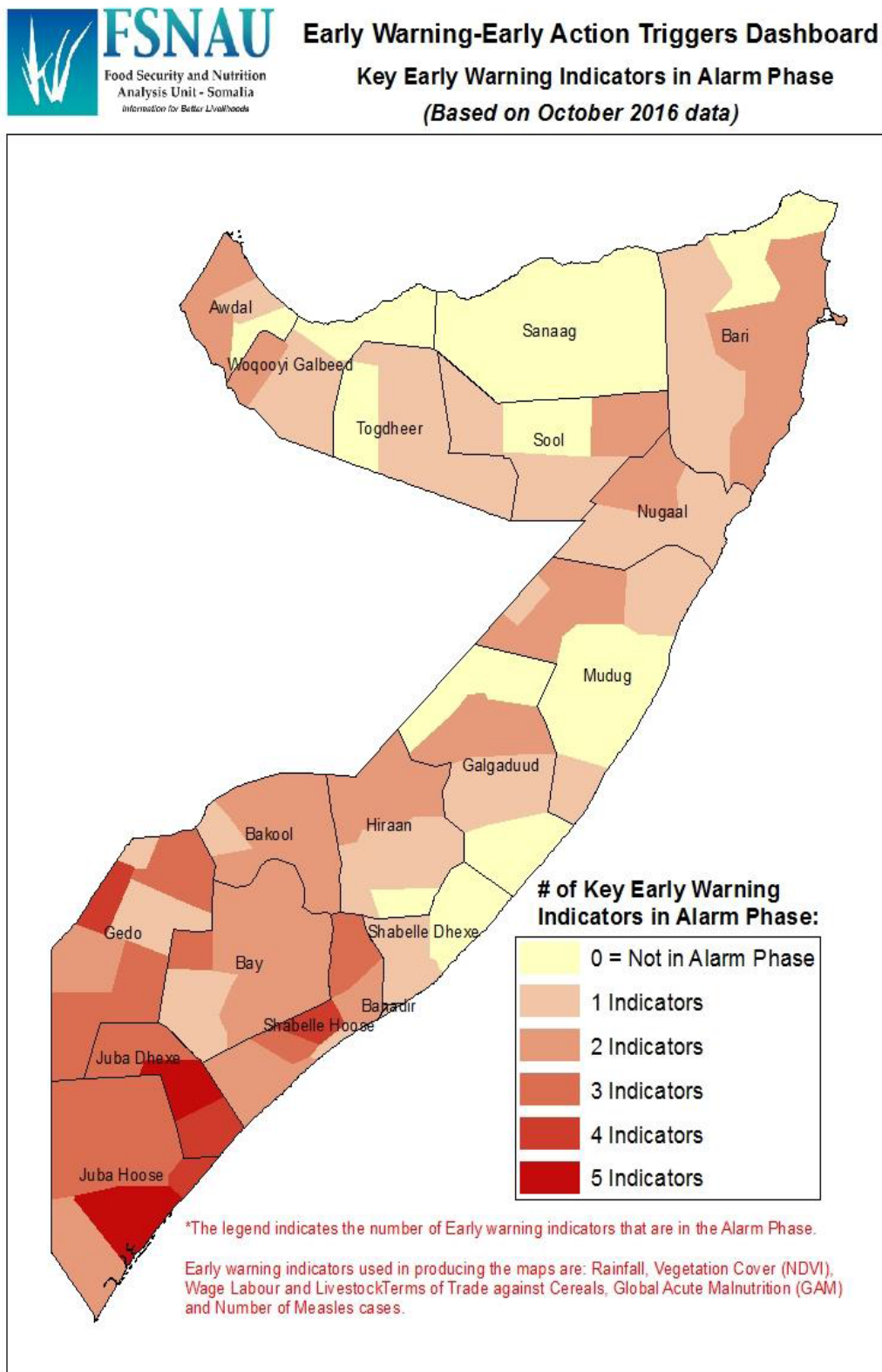
In the meantime, a massive scale-up of the response in Somalia occurred; by July 2017, humanitarian actors were reaching more than three million people per month.²⁷ But with the below-normal performance of the third consecutive rains (the 2017 April–June *Gu*) FSNAU and FEWS NET have warned that while aid has greatly mitigated food consumption gaps, the risk of famine remains in parts of Somalia. Furthermore, an estimated 2.5–3 million people will remain in need of emergency humanitarian assistance through to the end of 2017.²⁸

Reaction to this crisis has occurred much earlier than in 2011, with the humanitarian community rapidly mounting a large-scale response after the pre-famine alert in January. Donors mobilized \$767m in the first six months of the year²⁹ – unprecedented for a humanitarian response in Somalia.

The impact of the EWEA Mechanism

Opinions differ as to how useful the trigger mechanism has been during the 2016/7 drought crisis, and therefore whether it can be said to have helped prevent suffering or loss of life among those impacted. It clearly hasn't yet begun to function as set out in the accountability framework, as the monthly report has only been presented to the HCT once. But it would appear to have been more successful in terms of providing data on early-warning indicators for use on an ongoing basis by the humanitarian community.

Figure 3: Map developed by FSNAU from the EWEA Dashboard – October 2016



Source: FSNAU and FAO Somalia. (2016, 14 December). *A Dash-board for Linking Early Warning to Early Action in Somalia*. Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/dashboard-linking-early-warning-early-action-somalia-fsnaufao-somalia-december-2016>

FSNAU estimates that 80–100 people have been issued with login details and are now able to access the dashboard. Among the more technical interviewees for this paper, there was a view that – when the data is timely – the dashboard does serve as a valuable tool that can help agencies adjust their priorities, including between different geographical areas. WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping team, for example, has apparently used the dashboard for several months in 2017.

However, many people feel that because the EWEA Dashboard had not been institutionalized before the current crisis began, it was somewhat sidelined, with the lack of timely data leaving it lagging behind as the pace of the crisis quickened. It was therefore unable to meet its objective of facilitating decision making. ‘It wasn’t the dashboard that got people to move; it was the pre-famine alert in mid-January, followed by the assessment results in early February,’ says one interviewee. Another described the dashboard as ‘partly successful’ in meeting its objectives, in that it had helped to flag that the situation was deteriorating, and provide the justification for donors to spend money, and in this way had supported timely response.

Certainly the response to this crisis was swifter than in 2011, so if not the dashboard, what has made a difference this time around? Most respondents point to donor leadership – with DFID repeatedly singled out for special mention – and a general fear of failing again; the scars from 2011 run extremely deep. With drought conditions persisting throughout much of 2014–16, there was also greater consensus around the severity of the crisis, supported by a number of OCHA-led, inter-agency assessments conducted throughout 2016.

‘Credit mainly goes to donors’ flexibility in making available large amounts of money in advance. Their support made an aggressive scale-up possible,’ says one interviewee. ‘One of the lessons discussed at the HCT was not waiting for a [famine] declaration – there was definitely a will to get ahead of it,’ says another.

While it is heartening that there was a powerful need to prevent a repeat of the 2010–11 crisis, it is clearly not sustainable to rely on the experience of people who were around during the last famine. In addition, action taken at the start of 2017 cannot be described as ‘early’ and preventative; the drought crisis was already under way, so at best this was a timely response. The question remains as to whether an early-warning, early-action trigger mechanism, fully developed and embedded within the humanitarian system, could help to facilitate action taken earlier to reduce the impact of a crisis before it hits.

6. DOES THE TRIGGER MECHANISM LINK EARLY WARNING TO EARLY ACTION?

'We were trying to address everything that's wrong with the aid system with one approach.'

The development of the EWEA Dashboard represents a highly commendable attempt to address some of the disincentives for translating early warnings into early response. These challenges include:

- A 'status quo bias'. Developments in behavioural science show that decisions are often not made rationally, based on a clear analysis of the evidence and the risks.³⁰ They are the result of less deliberative, linear, and controlled processes than we would like to believe, subject to anchoring and framing effects and a range of biases.³¹ For drought response, probably the most important is status quo bias, where change is resisted unless the benefits very clearly and categorically outweigh the risks. Moving away from the status quo (of inaction) requires a high burden of proof.
- An accountability disincentive. Decision-makers from all sides do not feel accountable and are not held accountable for *preventing* crises; there are no serious consequences or repercussions for failing to prevent crises, nor will they receive any political or career-enhancing credit for prevention. By contrast, they feel that they will be held accountable for wasting money if early action is taken and the expected event does not occur – for 'crying wolf.'
- Donor mandate issues. While early action is very much within the scope of humanitarian actors, humanitarian donors prioritise on the basis of need, which leads to a focus on acute crises rather than chronic/tomorrow's crises.

This section of the paper will consider to what extent the trigger mechanism for Somalia in its current form is able to meet its aim of facilitating decision making for early action and/or timely response, and where further refinement is needed.

1. Defining the objective

The EWEA Dashboard was developed to fill the gap identified in the wake of the 2011 famine, by serving as a platform for accessing data on a broad range of key early-warning indicators to facilitate monitoring, prioritization, consensus building and 'coherent decision-making'. However, it is not clear whether its aim is to support genuinely early action or simply a faster, more timely humanitarian response. It is important to understand the difference between these two:

- The objective of **early action** is to reduce the impact of an impending shock. Activities are not just taken *earlier*, but are *different* to those of timely response, because they are designed to reduce a specific, imminent risk (risk reduction), or enable humanitarian agencies to respond faster and more effectively when disaster strikes (preparedness for response). Early action is taken on the basis of **forecasts** that an anticipated shock will have impacts that go beyond a community's capacity to absorb. To be 'early', it must be taken before the shock actually occurs.
- By contrast, **timely response**, is efficient and effective action taken once a situation has become a crisis, and is based on **assessed needs**.³²

The EWEA Dashboard does not make this distinction, beyond a small note in parentheses in the February 2015 concept note, which states one of the advantages of the mechanism will be 'help in improving a stronger linkage between early warning and early action (**faster response**)'

(emphasis added).³³ The implication is that the developers of the dashboard see its primary aim as facilitating timely response on the basis of needs assessments.

In fact, FSNAU believes the context in Somalia requires a combination of both early action and timely response activities, which they see as forming a spectrum.

'The principal function of early warning is to trigger an early action that could mitigate the impact of an impending disaster or shock. However, early warning can also facilitate timely response by highlighting areas and populations that are already experiencing a deteriorating situation,' says FSNAU's chief technical adviser Daniel Molla.

This lack of clarity around the mechanism's objective, with different organizations having different perceptions, is likely to be behind some of the current dissatisfaction with the mechanism. This is because the indicators and thresholds needed to support decision making around early action are different to those required to ensure timely response, as are the timeframes and the analytical framework (e.g. the Disaster Risk Management Cycle, or the Situation and Response Analysis Framework³⁴) that should underpin the mechanism.

Many interviewees feel the objective of the mechanism should be mitigate impact, pointing to the far higher value for money it offers when compared with emergency response, not to mention the savings in terms of human lives. If the EWEA Dashboard presents enough data to see rates of change at the district level, and an analysis of how previous crises have played out, humanitarian actors could shift programming into areas where communities appear vulnerable until they stabilize. This would protect the gains made in areas where projects are ongoing, and prevent both unnecessary suffering and the need for a much more expensive humanitarian response.

FAO Somalia's preparedness response to early warnings of the 2015–16 El Niño took just this kind of approach, and had 'phenomenal returns'. Its response involved a combination of repairs to river banks, issuing flood warnings, and providing bags and tarpaulin sheets to protect seeds and grain. Thousands of acres of cropland were spared flooding as a result, preventing the loss of an estimated \$6.5m worth of maize, and farmers were protected from losing their livelihoods.³⁵ Similarly, a value-for-money analysis of river embankment strengthening by the BRCiS consortium in preparation for El Niño found that for every \$1 spent supplying communities with river embankment strengthening supplies, \$28.44 was saved in aid money that did not need to be dispersed to displaced households, and \$91.03 was saved in future profits from farm hectares that were not destroyed.³⁶

2. Developing the right indicators and thresholds

'Early warning indicators to inform early action should be predictive; people are more likely to take action if you give them the predicted impact.'

The five sets of indicators that make up the dashboard (see Annex 1), and the thresholds at which they turn from normal to alert to alarm, were developed and agreed at a number of technical meetings in 2014 that included representatives from across the humanitarian community. The challenge was trying to select the most relevant indicators while ensuring that it would be possible to get data on all indicators for all districts. Those who went through this somewhat arduous process are – perhaps understandably - reluctant to open it up again, but many new members of the humanitarian community, and others who were not consulted, would like their views taken on board. There is also a feeling that the choice of indicators would benefit from the involvement of experts in early action and disaster risk reduction, who did not participate in the 2014 meetings.

The minutes of the HCT meeting in March 2017, which refer to plans for a review of the indicators and thresholds, make it clear that there is some way to go before consensus is reached on this aspect of the mechanism. FSNAU itself, acknowledging that the dashboard is a

work in progress, is open to feedback on the choice of indicators and thresholds and says it will continue to refine these over time. There have already been several iterations; for example, initially the dashboard reported only *cases* of AWD/cholera. But in response to the massive outbreak of the disease in 2017 and the improved availability of data, *deaths* from the disease are now also reported.

There are calls for local communities to be involved in the selection of indicators and thresholds, given their complex understanding of the gradual, multidimensional descent into acute food insecurity and famine (e.g. the deterioration of social structures).

To reach a consensus, it is essential that the trigger mechanism has a clear aim, as the indicators and thresholds must be agreed with this in mind. Some of the key factors are described below.

Choice of indicators: There are, perhaps inevitably, disagreements about which indicators should have been included but weren't, and vice versa. For example:

- The lack of information on clan affiliation is felt by some to be a major gap, as the majority of the victims of the 2011 famine were from marginalized clans.³⁷ However, others are wary of trying to include something so politically sensitive.
- Conflict, represented only by population movements, is a key factor in food insecurity that does not currently feature strongly.
- Vegetation cover (NDVI) is included but can be misleading, because livestock are not able to eat everything that appears green on the index (for example, the spiny, drought-resistant *prosopis*), but can eat some vegetation that does not appear green.

Weighting: The sheer number of indicators – there are 19 in total – is seen as problematic by some stakeholders, who found the volume of information overwhelming and confusing. For others, the number of indicators is less of an issue than the fact that they are all weighted equally; so an alarm for a price hike is the same as that for low rainfall or a case of polio, with no distinction made between them. There might be lessons here from the group behind the INFORM Index for Risk Management, which is reportedly working on taking a multi-disciplinary, statistically informed approach to setting weights and phases of classification.³⁸

Identifying key indicators: There is also a widespread feeling among interviewees that the dashboard should place more emphasis on a few 'key' indicators most relevant to decision making, identified during scenario modelling. By understanding which factors combined are likely to result in a crisis, and by monitoring those variables, it is possible to estimate the probability of other negative consequences. As one interviewee says, 'Four things equal famine: rains failing twice in a row; vulnerable clans; and failed access to aid and markets, for example as a result of conflict.'

Similarly, a number of interviewees mentioned the importance of being able to see how a community's resilience is being eroded, by capturing the aggregated impacts of factors such as poor rains, price rises and displacement, perhaps in a kind of cumulative stress index.

Setting the thresholds: Scenario modelling can be used to understand the probability of a crisis occurring and identifying the sweet spot for early action. This requires a detailed historical impact analysis in order to understand what the key risks are, and which indicators to monitor over time. The threshold, or trigger, should then be set at the point at which that probability reaches a level high enough to warrant early action.

Concern Worldwide's BRCiS programme has developed a formula to help judge when this point has been reached: if the cost of early action, divided by the cost of humanitarian response, is less than the probability of a disaster occurring, early action has a higher value for money than response.³⁹ 'Responding quickly to mitigate the likely impacts of a disaster in a way which is proportionate to the probability that the disaster will occur, is highly cost-effective over the long

term,' says Dustin Caniglia, Resilience Programme Manager at Concern. In a context of spiralling humanitarian needs around the globe, this may be a crucial argument in persuading donors faced with urgent crises today to take action to mitigate tomorrow's crises.

Some interviewees were sceptical about how a single threshold can be relevant to localized contexts, and suggest that different triggers should be set for each district. For example, a rainfall deficit compared to the average can have different implications depending on whether the district relies predominantly on crops or on livestock, and on whether the area usually receives a lot of rainfall (e.g. southern Somalia) or less rainfall (e.g. northeast Somalia).

Variance/rates of change: A 2016 review of DFID's Internal Risk Facility (IRF), which also looked at the EWEA Dashboard, recommended that indicators should show variance/rates of change in order to better track the scale and pace of impending emergencies.⁴⁰ However, as of September 2017 this has yet to be implemented. Users can check how an indicator has changed on the dashboard by looking at data from previous months and comparing it, but this obviously takes considerable time and effort. If FSNAU does not currently have the capacity to use the data to create indicators showing rates of change, this could perhaps be done by information management staff at OCHA, or automated as part of the creation of a more dynamic interface (see section on presentation below), but there seems little doubt about the value it would add.

Backward or forward-looking indicators: Perhaps the most significant concern about the indicators, however, is that they are the wrong *kind* of indicators. Many of them are consequence or outcome indicators which show what has already happened, rather than process indicators which show how something is working, or predictive or probabilistic indicators which show projected impacts over the coming weeks and months (for example, on a hazard impact curve). Such indicators are particularly vital if the action triggered is to meet the definition of 'early'.

FSNAU argues that the indicators included in the dashboard are indeed predictive. For example, the first admissions of acutely malnourished children to feeding and treatment centres is clearly a late indicator for the children concerned, but could be seen as an early-warning predictive indicator of a worsening situation. In addition, the combination of indicators can itself be seen as predictive, because it highlights which districts are being affected by multiple shocks and can therefore be expected to suffer the worst impacts.

Interviewees suggest FSNAU could use the wealth of data it has collected over the past 20 years to develop more predictive approaches. For example, they could analyse what is likely to happen when a livestock system is subjected to certain conditions, in order to project livestock losses. This predictive indicator could trigger humanitarian actors to tell pastoralist communities when to start destocking. Projected rates of GAM or Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM), or food security gaps, could also trigger specific early actions.

FEWS NET – with whom FSNAU already works closely on other outputs – conducts projection analyses based on informed assumptions, and could potentially use FSNAU's data to do the same for all of the dashboard's indicators. (This raises a further question, discussed below, about how the EWEA Dashboard fits with the work of FEWS NET.) By looking back at how communities responded in good, normal and bad years, it should be possible to make projections for the six months ahead. This would enable donors to compare mitigation and response options and take early action based on value for money, as well as ethical considerations.

Analysis: A final, fundamental concern about the indicators (widespread, but expressed by donors in particular) is that indicators alone cannot predict complex problems – only analysis of those indicators can do this. This analysis should include setting information against seasonal trends to demonstrate variance from normal, for example, as well as assessing the impact of aid on the data. Without this analysis, it will not be possible to interpret the indicators and reach an

appropriate decision about action. This issue is considered in the section on 'Presentation', below.

3. Ensuring accurate and timely data

'If the dashboard doesn't correlate with what people are seeing on the ground, they should feed that back in. We need everyone to share and collaborate in order to get a better appraisal; what is the counter-offer?'

'The dashboard is as good as the data in it.'

The EWEA Dashboard combines district-level data from a range of different sources: FEWS NET and FSNAU itself for the markets data; FSNAU, FEWS NET and SWALIM for the climate data; the nutrition cluster and its partners for the nutrition data; WHO/the health cluster and its partners for the health data; and UNHCR for the data on population movements. The data is described by FSNAU as 'the best available', and many interviewees acknowledge that huge strides have been made in data collection in Somalia over recent years. However, if the trigger mechanism is to meet its aim of facilitating decision making for early action, it must be based on data that is high-quality, timely, detailed and triangulated in order to present an accurate picture. Here, it seems, there is still some way to go.

In the same way that further consultation is needed on the dashboard's indicators and thresholds, one stakeholder suggests that greater discussion is required of who should collect which data and with what frequency. The aim, he suggests, should be to harmonize not just data collection but analysis tools and systems across the sector, in order to address issues of quality, value for money, and the presentation and sharing of the data.

Timeliness: According to the dashboard's accountability framework, the sources above will send their data for any given month to FSNAU within the first 10 days of the following month, to allow time for consolidation, analysis and presentation, and to enable the HCT to make a decision on any action required before the end of that following month. Timeliness is essential, particularly if the action taken is to be 'early' – i.e. taken *before* a crisis has occurred.

However, the prompt submission of data continues to be a significant challenge. In part, this appears to be because the agencies in question don't necessarily need the data themselves within the 10-day deadline, and have not sufficiently bought into the trigger mechanism to comply with the process. They all have a template in which to put their information, but are able to tweak this if needed. The larger agencies can provide data 'in any form they like'. To speed up the process, FSNAU will accept 'raw' data from agencies, before it has been cleaned and verified, on the understanding that it can subsequently be changed if errors or anomalies are found. This is the arrangement with UNHCR, for example, and also the nutrition cluster. The data sourced from SWALIM is taken directly from its server.

One NGO representative expressed concern that the dashboard is yet another channel to which data must be supplied, in yet another form. For smaller organizations – particularly those working in remote, rural areas, whose data is invaluable – this can be a real burden. Others argue that in the past, FSNAU has relied too heavily on its own partners' assessments, and has only recently become more open to supplementing the findings with data from the many surveys being conducted by other agencies.

The late submission of data has apparently improved somewhat in recent months, following discussion of the issue at the HCT meeting in March and a subsequent email sent by OCHA to cluster coordinators. The issue may be symptomatic of a broader problem, discussed later in this paper: a lack of buy-in to the dashboard on the part of some stakeholders, which means agencies still view the dashboard as something they are obliged to do, rather than something which it is in their interests to do, because it supports them to make a case for funding. The

clusters could perhaps play a stronger role, with donors funding dynamic cluster coordinators able to take a lead in reviewing and disseminating data.

In one notable development, Save the Children is adopting FSNAU's market monitoring tool and adjusting its indicators to fit with what FSNAU is doing. The NGO has offered to share the data it collects, so that FSNAU will not have to survey the same markets, and says it could do the same with the data collected through its SMART surveys of nutrition in children under five. The willingness of Save the Children to adjust its data to FSNAU's needs – provided it is satisfied the dashboard serves a useful purpose – is likely to be shared by other NGOs. It may be worth FSNAU considering how it can take advantage of this positive attitude, by making it easier for a broader range of humanitarian actors to contribute data to the dashboard. This is discussed in the section on presentation below.

Accuracy/quality: Besides the need for data on Somalia to be regularly updated, there are huge, historical issues around accountability. For over 20 years, much humanitarian programming in Somalia has been overseen by senior managers in Nairobi. Since 2010, large areas of the country have been inaccessible as a result of insecurity, or under the control of Al-Shabaab, making it difficult or impossible to verify the data received from partners. Such data has been taken on trust and used as the basis for programming. Recent initiatives using satellite imaging, geo-tagging and call centres have produced information showing a significant disparity with the humanitarian trends suggested by some partners' data, and will play an important role in improving data accuracy in future. In the meantime, FSNAU could build confidence by including details of where exactly data comes from, and how it has followed up on any outlier data.

There are also concerns about the level of detail in the data. This is a serious issue in remote areas of Somalia where there are few rain gauges or monitoring stations. For example, as highlighted above, the October dashboard report showed no alert for the Sanaag region in east Somaliland, despite the fact that the drought was already quite far advanced in the area.⁴¹

Triangulation: The view that the data in the dashboard must be triangulated is fairly unanimous, with a widespread acknowledgement that the humanitarian community is over-reliant on data from FSNAU and would benefit from considering counter-narratives. Opinions differ as to the best way to do this, but FSNAU could adopt the approach it takes to the IPC, in which multiple data sources are encouraged. Alternatively, the data could go to cluster leads for checking, on the basis that they will have access to other information with which results can be compared, but there are concerns about the impact of this process on timeliness. Equally, there are calls for increased participation by local communities, who can provide a more agile form of data collection by sending information via their mobile phones.

Initiatives such as satellite imaging, geo-tagging and call centres – in addition to the increased involvement of NGOs and others – offer a growing wealth of options. Concern, for example, increasingly uses satellite imaging to check what surveys and colleagues on the ground are telling him, including data from the Africa Flood and Drought Monitor, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Climate Hazards Group InfraRed Precipitation with Station (CHIRPS). Dustin Caniglia will be working with Columbia University to look at how monitoring and evaluation staff with NGOs can better read remote sensing tools, such as those developed by CHIRPS, in order to judge the performance of a season in a given spatial area.

Call centres such as the one set up by DFID – currently contacting around 900 people a day – could offer another means of triangulating the data captured through surveys. DFID is also keen to see a standardized, digitized reporting system for therapeutic feeding centres in Somalia, so that admissions of young children can be monitored. To this end, it has supported a new website set up by UNICEF and WFP, and launched by the nutrition cluster in July. The site features an interactive map, and aims to feature real-time reporting before the end of 2017, with all data geo-tagged. Samson Desie, the nutrition specialist with UNICEF who has overseen its creation, says FSNAU will have access to all of the information being sent by partners.

4. Improving accessibility of the data

‘The Somalia map shows red for years – people see it as business as usual.’

If the EWEA Dashboard is to meet its objective of facilitating ‘monitoring, prioritization, consensus building and coherent decision making’, it seems fundamental that decision makers – as well as local and international NGOs, communities and others – are able to use and understand it. However, in its current form, many interviewees feel that this is simply not the case. There are two aspects to this: the way the information is presented, and the need for analysis.

Presentation of information: The dashboard currently offers the data in table form, with a column for each indicator and a row for each district. Indicators can also be viewed on a map, which shows one month’s data at a time. Each is coloured green, yellow or red, giving an immediate sense of how many districts are showing ‘alarm’ and in how many indicators. The red alarms highlight where timely response is needed, while the transition from green to yellow ‘alerts’ could be used to flag where early action may be needed to avert an impending crisis.

The red-amber-green rating is intuitive but somewhat crude, and does not take into account the sensitivities around communicating uncertainty. This is a real issue if the dashboard is to present probabilities of predicted impacts, rather than outcomes, in order to support early action. Consulting users on how best to do this is key to establishing trust and a shared understanding of what a prediction means, in terms of the level of certainty. It may be that stakeholders would prefer a verbal briefing to a visual output, in order to reduce liability on one side and time pressures on the other. Evaluating how an impending shock is communicated, and refining the means of presentation as appropriate, is likely to lead to improved iterations.

In addition, many interviewees feel that a more interactive, user-friendly dashboard that enables a dynamic visualization of the data might get more traction. OCHA’s new **cash database**, cited by many as a strong example, features a map of Somalia alongside a range of statistics, charts and graphs.⁴² If you select a district or a number of districts, the visuals update immediately, spinning and sliding to show the relevant data for the area. This data includes how many people are being reached with cash, through which clusters and with how much money, as well as how the transfers are being carried out, whether they are conditional or restricted, and full details on each partner’s activities.

One option for the EWEA Dashboard might be to put it on OCHA’s **Humanitarian Data Exchange** (HDX), where the cash database is located.⁴³ This is an open platform, which makes it easy for users to submit data. Having the dashboard hosted by HDX might also assist with some of the issues discussed in the section on data above, including timely submission of information and expanding the dashboard to include data from a broader range of sources.

Need for analysis: This highlights the other, more fundamental issue with the current presentation of the dashboard: the lack of analysis. Without an informed analysis, based on an understanding of trends, local contexts, cumulative impacts and forecast events, the EWEA Dashboard is not a tool to support decision making; it’s ‘just a long list of raw data’. While the traffic light colour-coding of the map and the dashboard make them intuitive to look at in one sense, the equal weighting of all indicators can leave the user feeling baffled as to where the crisis is likely to be most severe, or which needs are most acute – particularly when many of the myriad indicators in the table are flashing red.

Currently, the monthly report produced by FSNAU, which is available online, consists of a table showing all indicators for all districts, and a composite map based on selected indicators. Creating the map is in itself a form of analysis, because FSNAU chooses which indicators should be displayed. FSNAU says this is challenging to do in a transparent way, because it involves a lot of assumptions. It must also avoid simply duplicating the widely-used IPC maps.

To serve its purpose with the ICCG and the HCT, the trigger mechanism – having consolidated data on all indicators for all districts – must then highlight the areas of greatest need at the local level that are most relevant to early action, in order to inform recommendations as to what that action might be. And for the EWEA Dashboard to support genuinely early action rather than simply timely response, the monthly summary of information to the ICCG needs to include an outcome analysis to show predictive impacts – preferably one that spreads the outcome impact, so that decision makers can understand what is likely to happen, and when.

In the trigger mechanism's current incarnation this would appear too much of a stretch; particularly if (as discussed above) the analysis of the data is also to involve a process of triangulation to ensure it accurately represents what is happening on the ground. (For example, through follow-up calls to sites where the data appears to show something exceptional.) Ideally, each month's analysis would also consider the previous month's actions, looking at what progress had been made as a result, in a dynamic process of continuous monitoring and updates. Whether FSNAU in its current form has the capacity to conduct this process on a monthly basis is a matter of some doubt. Even if the data arrives on schedule, FSNAU has only three days to analyse it before it goes to the ICCG.

There are a number of ways this could be resolved. The most obvious is to provide FSNAU with increased resources. Equally, more of the agency's time could be freed up for analysis if it was no longer responsible for chasing and uploading the data. This could be done by contributors via a platform such as HDX, or undertaken by OCHA's information management team.

Another option is that FSNAU could collaborate with others to undertake the analysis, in the same way that it could seek to broaden its network of data sources. One suggestion is that there should be a standing group similar in function to a military planning cell, with subject-matter experts – for example, from satellite mapping organizations, public health bodies or academic institutions – drafted in from different organizations for specific discussions. (The START Network hopes its FOREWARN group will play this role, conducting multi-stakeholder context analysis, modelling scenarios and so on.) FEWS NET, as an early-warning system, could also be more involved, given its modelling tools and expertise in predicting outcome impacts.

However, there are also voices calling for the analysis to be conducted by an independent agency, in order to mitigate the risk of relying so heavily on FSNAU and FEWS NET, as the humanitarian sector in Somalia does. This carries the possibility of a certain 'thought culture' or bias exerting an influence. If the analysis was conducted by a research group unconnected to either the UN or NGOs, it would provide another means of triangulation.

The analysis of what a month's data shows, highlighting the areas and sectors of greatest need, predicting the impacts over the coming months, and making recommendations for a range of early actions by sector, should be the key output shared with the ICCG and HCT on a regular basis, and made publicly available. This, more than the dashboard itself or the consolidated map, would have the power to act as a trigger mechanism. It would enable decision makers to understand an impending emergency and take appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts, but would also – if publicly available – compel them to explain why they had not acted if faced with a predicted crisis.

5. Getting buy-in from relevant actors

'We need to have a coalition of the willing to get behind it in terms of sharing data and talking about it.'

'We need to just get it up and running now [...] We need to start getting people used to what it is.'

When FSNAU first issued its concept note for the EWEA Dashboard, it was unanimously endorsed, and support for the project – in principle at least – remains high. FSNAU estimates that around 80–100 logins to the dashboard have now been issued, though it is not able to provide information on what kind of roles those users hold. However, when contacted in the process of researching this paper, many people working on humanitarian response in Somalia knew little or nothing about the mechanism, while many more expressed reservations about how it is working – or not – in practice. There is clearly work to be done to secure more widespread backing for the dashboard if it is to meet its aims.

Leadership: Part of the problem appears to be a lack of clear leadership to spur the trigger mechanism forward and undertake the political manoeuvring needed to unite donors, UN agencies and the NGO community. While the initial impetus came from DFID, and DFID support remains strong, momentum seems to have faltered over the past year or so. No one suggests it is sustainable for the donor community to lead on the mechanism, but there are suggestions that donors could swing their weight behind it by imposing a requirement on partners to reference the EWEA Dashboard, conduct contingency planning based on likely scenarios, and where relevant, explain why their actions are not in line with its analysis. Donors could even link crisis modifiers specifically to the mechanism.

As to which agency should now be in the driving seat, opinion is divided. Some feel that FSNAU, with its Somalia-wide technical capacity, is the only one able to take it on. Others see OCHA as the natural home for a multi-sectoral mechanism, potentially hosting a dashboard secretariat. There are concerns among some parties about ‘putting everything in the FSNAU basket’, and a general feeling that it would be healthy if the agency is not the sole holder of the information, though FSNAU points out that the data is made publicly available on its website. Perhaps the best way forward would be a functional analysis to identify potential partners, including non-traditional actors.

Engaging stakeholders: There is clearly more to be done to engage stakeholders on all sides. One issue has been the long, drawn-out and challenging rollout process, combined with a high turnover of staff. Many of those who were involved at the initial planning stages have now left, and their replacements need to be persuaded of the mechanism’s merits, including how it can support them to deliver on their own mandates.

A concerted drive seems to be needed to raise awareness and push the dashboard up the agenda. Most parties feel this is a role that requires OCHA’s skills and efforts. To date, it has been trapped in something of a vicious circle. Without a regular monthly report to promote, OCHA has felt unable to really get behind it, but without OCHA’s clout, FSNAU has struggled to get the support it needs to produce the reports, particularly from data providers.

As a first step, OCHA could convene a forward-looking meeting of all stakeholders to discuss the way forward, including clarifying and agreeing on the trigger mechanism’s objectives, function and scope. Several interviewees felt a stronger role for the clusters is essential, and suggested the dashboard needs to be presented to them again – perhaps with a mock-up, using past data, of what it would show before an area deteriorates to IPC Phase 3, in order to demonstrate the value of the mechanism in supporting humanitarian actors to understand an impending crisis. A similar presentation could be made to the HCT, where buy-in is also currently lacking and which some feel should be doing more to lead on the mechanism, with the support of the ICCG.

Another way to embed buy-in might be to set up a bi-monthly steering group for the dashboard which includes representatives of key UN agencies and NGOs; ideally both local and international. In the medium to long term, making the dashboard available on an open platform might help to secure greater collaboration.

Engaging Somali authorities: The lack of engagement with the Somali authorities is another well-identified gap. The dashboard was shared with the federal government, but with frequent

changes in staff, low capacity and the fact that much of the mechanism's information is generated in Nairobi (in English), the uptake is understood to be low. It seems little has been done to change this.

All sides recognize that the Somali authorities must play a bigger role in the future, but one interviewee suggests that the mechanism must be agreed by stakeholders across the humanitarian sector before being presented to the nascent institutions in Somalia. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management in particular should take a leading role in the future, but ideally the trigger mechanism would also have champions in the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Water and the Environment, all of which would benefit from being able to track the indicators. Plans to establish FSNAU units within the government would no doubt support this, and with phase seven of the agency (2013–17) coming to an end, there is speculation about how much of its work could begin to be done in Somalia through the government.

Working with FEWS NET: There is also a clear need to get the USAID-funded FEWS NET on board. Despite being the key early-warning agency for food security in Somalia, and a close collaborator with FSNAU on other products, it has not yet really engaged with the trigger mechanism. FEWS NET's own role is to provide evidence-based analysis on acute food insecurity to help governments and relief agencies plan for and respond to humanitarian crises – a role close enough to the aims of the EWEA Dashboard to raise concern about the risk of duplication. While FSNAU is quite clear that the dashboard is not intended to replace its own or FEWS NET's assessment, monitoring and analysis work, more could be done to clarify how the two can complement and enhance each other. The agencies are reportedly holding discussions on how to work together in FSNAU's next phase, and it is hoped that harnessing FEWS NET's technical expertise in support of the EWEA Dashboard will be part of this.

Once the mechanism is fully up and running, an annual review could be conducted to assess the indicators and thresholds, and illustrate the impact on humanitarian response and programming. Importantly, this could include cost effectiveness; the amount of money saved on humanitarian response by spending a much smaller amount on genuinely early action. This will continue to be a key argument to increase buy-in among donors beyond the dashboard's champion, DFID.

6. Getting the shift to action

'I hope that if this presents the kind of information we envision, we'll be able to say to London, Brussels and so on, "Look! This is what's happening."'

'The system we have is not guiding the response; you can't pump money in just because you see some red flags.'

While the online dashboard enables the humanitarian community to constantly monitor key early-warning indicators, it is the accompanying accountability framework that should act as the trigger mechanism for early action. By setting out the roles and responsibilities of the 'principal actors' (see Annex 2), it aims to tackle the problem perceived to have plagued the humanitarian response in 2011: the failure of the HCT to act on early warnings in an appropriate way. By stipulating that the ICCG should make recommendations to the HCT on the basis of dashboard information, and that these recommendations must be discussed by the HCT each month and a decision taken on an appropriate course of action, the mechanism – in theory at least – makes it possible to hold the humanitarian community accountable. This would be easier if the minutes of the ICCG and HCT meetings were shared publicly.

As discussed in the course of this paper, most of the roles and responsibilities prescribed in the accountability framework are not currently being met. This is partly the result of a domino effect. As one of the earliest stages (the timely submission of monthly data to FSNAU) is not being achieved, many of the subsequent steps cannot be upheld either. These steps range from

FSNAU submitting a monthly report to the ICCG, right through to a decision being taken by the HCT on the recommendations made (see Figure 2).

Processes: In terms of processes, there is broad support for the way the accountability framework is set out on paper, but some scepticism as to whether it can work in practice. There is also still some doubt about how responsive the humanitarian community can be.

In particular, there is a concern that having the monthly report from the EWEA Dashboard as a standing item on the agenda of the HCT monthly meeting – which lasts just an hour and a half – is not realistic. One alternative proposed is that the data and analysis should go to the ICCG every month, as the framework sets out, and that group could tweak the response strategy itself (for example, in terms of shifting resources), only passing the information on to the HCT with recommendations if they felt a more significant change was needed. Alternatively, the HCT could discuss the dashboard at its quarterly meetings with the ICCG.

However, there is some concern within the humanitarian community about the weakness of the cluster system for Somalia, and doubts as to whether the ICCG has capacity for the analysis required. Additionally, any slip in the frequency of reviews of the data might be seen as counter to the dashboard's aim of supporting the humanitarian community to get ahead of a crisis, in order to mitigate its impacts, and the need to address the key challenge in Somalia of the long gap between FSNAU assessments, on which the community has traditionally depended.

Action: How prescriptive should the trigger mechanism be? There appears to be no real consensus. At the moment, a single polio case is a red flag and a trigger for action, but with most indicators the reaction is less clear cut. There is a concern that if red lights flash too often it might lead to 'trigger fatigue', devaluing the mechanism. In this context, it is notable that FbF systems have very well-developed Standard Operating Procedures for early action and preparedness, which are developed in advance.

There is certainly widespread agreement that the alarms raised should trigger the HCT to take some form of action, even if it is simply an investigative assessment when the impact of an early warning isn't clear, to clarify findings and help refine the system.

Funding: What is more contentious is whether the mechanism should also automatically trigger funding. Looking to the model of FbF, once the threshold is reached, the funding is automatically released. DFID says that it would like to tie its rapid-response bilateral financing mechanism (the Internal Risk Facility, through which all of its emergency response to the current crisis has gone) as much as possible to the dashboard. But it sees decisions on IRF allocations as separate to the HCT discussion, which should be about prioritizing interventions.

Some interviewees feel it is vital that donors commit to provide funding if triggers are met, and to ensure that resources go through the ICCG and the HCT. But there is also some resistance to the idea of a standardized response, due to the complexity of the context and the wide variety of possible scenarios. A solution might be to have a 'compact' that commits donors to respond to early warnings, without specifying precisely what that action should be but allowing a flexibility in response.

Whether through prescribed response or some kind of compact, it is clear is that the trigger mechanism must ensure that decision makers on all sides both *feel* accountable and can be *held* accountable for preventing crises, if it is to meet its objective of linking early warning to early action in order to prevent suffering and save lives.

7. WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE MECHANISM ON GENDER JUSTICE?

Currently, none of the data in the EWEA Dashboard is gender disaggregated. For nutrition, health, displacement and even some of the market indicators, it could be gender disaggregated. Gender disparities could be revealed in data on both wage labour and terms of trade and this could provide valuable insights.

The lack of gender-disaggregated data would be a problem anywhere, but Somalia is a context in which gender inequalities are particularly stark. Research has shown the links between gender inequality and violent conflict. Extreme and systematic gender inequality is correlated with political violence,⁴⁴ and there is a strong argument to be made that addressing gender inequality could contribute to more stable societies.

From a practical perspective, given that FSNAU is struggling to collect the existing data in a timely manner, and that the huge number of indicators already creates a sense of information overload, gender disaggregation would be a considerable challenge in the mechanism's current incarnation. IPC data is not gender disaggregated for the same reason, and there is a clear need for increased capacity to address this issue if programming is not to continue to be gender-blind.

While the pressing need for more gender sensitivity is not in dispute, in both Somalia and Nairobi, the humanitarian community continues to be dominated by men; interviewees felt that this has direct implications for who is reached by programming and the manner in which it is done. Social exclusion is also an under-addressed issue, with few representatives of marginalized groups among humanitarian staff, and an information gap on how many people being reached are from vulnerable communities. Safely recruiting both women and people from marginalized groups to support humanitarian response will be a key step to ensuring assistance reaches the most vulnerable.

A recent gender review of DFID's Multi-Year Humanitarian Programme in Somalia (2013–2017) highlights some of the challenges for the humanitarian community as a whole. These include: a lack of national female staff in humanitarian planning, implementation and coordination; a failure to meet targets for numbers of female participants in programming; assessment methodologies that are often not explicit about how the needs of different gender groups were accounted for; and indications by local staff and communities that sexual favours are exchanged for humanitarian assistance.⁴⁵

The establishment of call centres to contact target communities offers potential for improving the collection of gender-sensitive data. Some interviewees suggest women are more comfortable discussing issues around decision making, exclusion and gender-based violence by phone than they are in face-to-face interviews; it is essential that confidentiality and ethical safety precautions are integrated.

The added value of the EWEA Dashboard in improving the gender sensitivity of early action and humanitarian response in Somalia could be as much in the analysis of the indicators as in the data. The need for an informed analysis, based on an understanding of trends, local contexts, cumulative impacts and forecast events, was discussed above. This analysis must also be done with a clear gender lens, including when it comes to weighting indicators, to ensure the people who are most vulnerable or at risk in a given context are prioritized, including in some cases women and girls.

8. HOW DOES THE MECHANISM FIT WITH OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN EWEA?

'We've got much better at early action – there is a world of difference since 2011.'

Many humanitarian actors are exploring the possibilities for linking early warning and early action, and there are a range of different initiatives. This section touches on some of them, and attempts to draw out a few lessons for the early action mechanism.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the impetus for the Somalia trigger mechanism came from DFID, in response to a review of its actions during the 2010–11 drought crisis. In addition to initiating the development of the dashboard, in 2013 DFID set up the 'Internal Risk Facility' (the **IRF**) to fund early response, with the ambitious aim of changing the behaviour of the humanitarian system. The IRF is used to support early, preventative actions among its existing implementing partners, with funding decisions based 'on the trigger mechanism as it has evolved as well as other data and information available to DFID at the time.'⁴⁶

A 2016 review of the IRF found there was clear evidence that it had been successful in addressing key humanitarian needs at the output level, and indications of longer-term positive outcomes and impact as well. The report found that 'the process from proposal to fund disbursement takes less than a few weeks in most cases, being far more efficient than other comparable financing mechanisms.'⁴⁷

DFID's entire emergency response during the current crisis in Somalia – some £170m (\$225m) by August 2017 – has been channelled through the IRF directly to implementing partners, and the approach is now being built into multi-year funding programmes in other contexts, such as South Sudan. The facility is not designed to smooth funding flows but to deal with unexpected crises, with resources ideally used within four to six months. The drawback is that the IRF can only be used to fund programmes implemented by established partners.

During the retreat of September 2016, the HCT endorsed a proposal to use the IASC **Emergency Response Preparedness** (ERP) approach to risk analysis and prioritization. Based on a review of relief operations over the past decade, the ERP aims to increase the speed and volume of life-saving assistance delivered in the first four to six weeks of an emergency, by identifying and prioritizing preparedness actions that will ensure the humanitarian community can respond effectively. The HCT agreed that the ERP should be used at field level in Somalia to begin with, before being brought up through the clusters to the national level and linked to the Humanitarian Response Plan. The HCT also committed to work on a methodology based on both the ERP and the EWEA Dashboard. It will be interesting to see the results of this when they emerge.

FAO has been very active in EWEA. The 2015–16 El Niño highlighted challenges around prompting preparedness and early action in response to forecast events, and the agency now develops a quarterly Global Early Warning-Early Action report on food security and agriculture.⁴⁸ The report collates data from a number of sources, including the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), the Food Chain Crisis Emergency Prevention System (FCC-EMPRES), and the IPC. It presents a one-page summary for each country that includes a risk overview, potential impacts, and recommended early actions for governments and donors. The process of compiling the report may offer some learning for the Somalia dashboard, as it has reportedly been based on a strong and successful consultation process with the clusters at country level.

NGOs too have been making strides in early response in Somalia. The DFID-funded **BRCiS consortium** claims its ‘no regrets’ approach to early warning has enabled it to provide support to communities months before conventional humanitarian actors, reducing the impact of the current drought and enabling a faster and more effective humanitarian response. The consortium combines seasonal data from weather satellite reports with information on factors such as access to water resources or markets, vulnerability to conflict and levels of political and cultural inequality. This approach enables it to identify areas of growing vulnerability – ‘red flags’ – and deliver pre-emptive responses ‘months prior to conventional responses’.⁴⁹

BRCiS says that by early June 2016, climate monitoring data was already raising red flags. It began cash transfers to the poorest households in villages in Gedo the same month, increasing the number targeted and the amounts transferred in November, after the *Deyr* rains started late, and increasing the size of monthly payments again in January after the rains had proved to be well below normal throughout the season. It also piloted an emergency scale-up of fodder production in red-flagged villages in November 2016, to prolong the productivity of household milk animals. While it is difficult to measure the impact of these activities, a report in February 2017 found that while a drought of this scale would usually have displaced large numbers of people from the target villages, not only had this not happened, but the villages were receiving and hosting IDPs from neighbouring areas.⁵⁰

This is by no means a comprehensive summary of EWEA work, but could offer some lessons for the Dashboard. These might include: the need to consider vulnerability to conflict and levels of political and cultural inequality as indicators, collecting information drawn at least in part from long-term relationships with communities; and the necessity of encouraging decision makers to act on the basis of probabilities, striking a balance between gathering sufficient data to understand a situation and responding as quickly as possible to people’s needs.

Many of those interviewed in the process of producing this paper flagged the humanitarian community’s moves towards building a **safety-net approach** in Somalia. DFID estimates that half the population has been biometrically registered over the past six months, with cash transfers a significant part of the emergency response. The rollout of safety nets would see the most vulnerable people targeted for cash transfers, and a rapid scale-up to additional households during times of crisis. The EWEA Dashboard is something that could support the triggering of such action.

The proliferation of mobile phones; the use of cash; urbanization; the growing involvement of the private sector; insurance schemes; localization; the increased scrutiny of aid and value for money; all of these are factors likely to shape the early-action agenda over the coming months and years. In the meantime, there is an urgent need for more evidence on the impacts of early, mitigating actions in Somalia. As the 2016 review of DFID’s IRF said, ‘investing in preventive actions raises difficult choices about a humanitarian context where actual needs are not being met’.⁵¹ One interviewee suggests the EWEA Dashboard should be used in conjunction with an investment tracker, to reveal how aid investments are working and to support more informed, iterative decision making going forward.

9. COULD THE MECHANISM BE ROLLED OUT TO OTHER CONTEXTS?

'If we could get this right for Somalia, it could be applied elsewhere.'

All countries need some kind of early-warning system to trigger action in response to impending crises. It is outside the scope of this paper to review other early-warning systems – although a mention must be made of INFORM, which is a global, open-source, risk-assessment tool for humanitarian crises and disasters. The brief discussion here will be limited to whether the mechanism developed for Somalia might be used elsewhere.

Somalia is a unique context for many reasons; one of them being the existence of FSNAU, a unit with a field team of enumerators and analysts across Somalia that is independent of the government and has collected and analysed data over the past 25 years. FSNAU was behind the development of the IPC scale, a tool for improving food-security analysis and decision making, which was designed for use in Somalia during the 2004 drought in the Sool region and has since been adopted globally as a standardized scale.

Whether the EWEA Dashboard developed for Somalia could – and should – be rolled out and adapted to other countries in the way that the IPC has is open to question. In more stable contexts, governments are likely to be already tracking early-warning indicators, and there may not be the same need for a dashboard of this kind. Meanwhile, contexts that are fragile and vulnerable to frequent weather events currently lack the resources and capacity to collect and analyse data.

In South Sudan, for example, the humanitarian community currently relies on the IPC assessments, which are conducted twice a year. The dearth of information – many of the indicators used in the famine declaration earlier this year were proxy indicators – means great strides would have to be made in terms of data collection and flow if a trigger mechanism was to be developed. This is certainly where the international community should be aiming, and recent experience suggests that quarterly IPC assessments should be undertaken to ensure that seasonal, displacement and conflict dynamics are captured and reflected. It would be interesting to look into how DFID is making decisions on releasing funds from its IRF for South Sudan in the absence of the dashboard, to see whether lessons can be drawn.

If there is an early warning hierarchy, then one interviewee puts the dashboard at a rung above IPC assessments, with the scalable safety-nets and FbF at the top of the ladder. The Hunger Safety Net Programme in Kenya is particularly powerful, because it is triggered automatically when conditions start to deteriorate, and can scale up in terms of both size of payments and number of recipients.

Weather index insurance, would presumably also have a place on the top rung, as long as there was a clear distribution mechanism to ensure that payouts went swiftly to those in need, and might be more straightforward to implement in contexts without Somalia's wealth of data. Equally, a dashboard might be used to support FbF in some contexts if funding could be secured, by complementing weather and climate data. One thing seems clear – the development of the dashboard and trigger mechanism for Somalia offers much in terms of learning for early-warning, early-action systems elsewhere.

10. CONCLUSIONS

'The trigger mechanism should not die a death. It holds the promise of integration and decision making, and we mustn't give up on that.'

'Over time, the dashboard will mature; the IPC was born here, and it didn't happen overnight.'

There is a striking consensus among those interviewed in the course of this brief study that there is real value in the EWEA Dashboard as an initiative, and that – while far from perfect – it represents a real step in the right direction. It has not yet succeeded in addressing the fundamental structural challenges within the humanitarian system that have had such devastating consequences in the past, but it offers a great deal of potential. With the climate in East Africa becoming drier and the frequency of droughts in the region increasing with climate change, the trigger mechanism could be an increasingly important tool in future.⁵²

This paper has presented a number of suggestions as to how the EWEA Dashboard could be refined to increase its effectiveness, beginning with the development of a clearer, shared understanding of its purpose, in terms of early action and/or timely response; what exactly should be triggered in terms of action, by which indicators; and who is accountable at each stage.

The working group set up by OCHA to ensure the relevance of indicators and thresholds could do much to secure the support of key stakeholders, but its success will depend on conducting broad-based consultations in a genuinely collaborative process. The trigger mechanism would benefit from having the full weight of OCHA behind it, with all that implies in terms of communications, marketing and information management.

Migrating the dashboard to an open platform which enables a wider range of partners – particularly NGOs, if they have capacity – to contribute data in an automated way might serve both to improve the quality and quantity of information it presents, and enable users to access the data in a more interactive, dynamic way. It would also free up FSNAU to focus on analysis, perhaps working with FEWS NET and other organizations to develop outcome predictions that could inform discussions within the ICCG and HCT.

It would be worth conducting a 'verification analysis' of the dashboard's reliability by looking at monthly data from early in 2016 to see how clearly and how far in advance it forecast the probability of the current drought crisis, and whether it is equally accurate in all districts and all seasons. The same might be done by populating it with data collected in 2010, ahead of the 2011 famine. These analyses may prove the dashboard's foundations are sound, or bring to light problems that need to be resolved; either outcome would be useful in refining the mechanism and achieving stronger buy-in from stakeholders. Continual revision, iteration and feedback loops are likely to be essential if the dashboard is to continue evolving with the context.

The arguments presented in this paper suggest that, in order to link early warnings to early action, decision makers need access to an informed analysis of what the data shows, based on an analytical framework and a clear understanding of the risks under different scenarios. A dashboard alone, no matter how dynamic, well-designed or well-populated, will not have the power to trigger early action. Instead, an understanding of the predicted outcomes, whether in the form of predictive indicators or a separate analysis, is essential if humanitarian actors are to take appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts of an impending emergency.

It is hoped this short discussion of the EWEA Dashboard will stimulate further dialogue, around both the trigger mechanism itself and early response more broadly, and by doing so, support the growing momentum behind the early-action agenda. The case for change is beyond dispute, and developments in Somalia hold much promise in helping to shape a humanitarian system that is fit for purpose.

ANNEX 1 – KEY INDICATORS AND THRESHOLDS FROM THE EWEA DASHBOARD

Key Indicator Group	Specific EW-EA Indicator	EW-EA Indicator Thresholds		Notes
		Alarm	Alert	
Climate	Rainfall	≥ 60% decrease from LTM	20% – 60% decrease from Long-Term Mean (LTM)	For LTMs (Long Term Mean) lower than 10mm alarms are set to Alert since 10mm rainfall per month is itself not significant
	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI)	Decrease > 0.125 from Standard Deviation (also known as a "Large decrease")	Decrease of 0.05 - 0.125 from Standard Deviation (also known as a "Small decrease")	
	Price of water	≥ 10% increase in price over 5-yr Average	5% - 10% increase in price over 5-year average	
	Floods / River levels	River level reading > bank full value	River level reading > high risk value	
Market	Imported red rice	≥ 10% increase in price over 5-yr Average	5% - 10% increase in price over 5-year average	
	Sorghum prices	≥ 10% increase in price over 5-yr Average	5% - 10% increase in price over 5-year average	
	Local goat prices	≥ 10% increase in price over 5-yr Average	5% - 10% increase in price over 5-year average	
	Wage labor	≥ 10% increase in price over 5-yr Average	5% - 10% increase in price over 5-year average	
	Terms of trade(Wage labor to Cereal)	decrease ≥ 3kg from 5-yr Average	1kg - 2kg decrease from 5-year average	
	Terms of trade(Local quality goat to Cereal)	decrease > 10kg 5-yr Average	decrease 6-10kg from 5-year average	
Nutrition	GAM	≥ 50% increase over 5-yr Average	25% - 50% increase over 5-year average	
Health	Measles	1 case	≥ 2 cases	
	AWD outbreak			Thresholds not yet established
	Polio	1 case		This indicator is inactive because Somalia has been declared Polio free by WHO (2015)
	Malaria			Thresholds not yet established
Population Movement	Number of people displaced			Thresholds not yet established

Source: FSNAU and FAO Somalia. (2016, 14 December). *A Dashboard for Linking Early Warning to Early Action in Somalia*. Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/dashboard-linking-early-warning-early-action-somalia-fsnaufao-somalia-december-2016>

ANNEX 2 – ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRINCIPAL ACTORS

Tasks	Responsibility	Suggested Timeline
Development, management and continued refinement of EW-EA database and dashboard	FSNAU (for an initial period of 12 months); Towards the end of the initial period, HCT to make decision on long-term responsibility for continuing this task	Continuous
Monitoring of key selected sets of indicators on a regular basis	FSNAU, Food Security, Health and Nutrition Clusters, UNHCR and other partners	Regularly (at least on a monthly basis)
On a monthly basis, ensuring timely flow of data on key indicators to the central database	FSNAU, Food Security, Health and Nutrition Clusters, UNHCR and ICWG	Data for the previous month to be sent to FSNAU within the first 10 days of every month
Producing district level summary information from the EW-EA dashboard for review at the ICWG meeting	FSNAU	Middle of every month (based on data for previous month)
Convening Inter-Cluster Coordination Group meeting on a monthly basis to review to review the technical information	OCHA Inter-Cluster Coordinator	Regularly every month
Making recommendations to HCT on appropriate course of follow up action	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group	Third week of every month (based on data and analysis for previous month)
Presentation of recommendations to HCT on appropriate course of follow up action (including gap analysis if timely available)	OCHA Inter-Cluster Coordinator (supported by FSNAU)	Fourth week of every month (based on data and analysis for previous month)
Final decision on recommendations from the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group	Humanitarian Country Team	Fourth week of every month (based on data and analysis for previous month)
Follow up on implementation of HCT recommendations (including follow up on additional gap analysis if required)	Humanitarian Coordinator (at Heads of Agencies/Donor level) Inter-Cluster Coordinator/Head of OCHA (at Cluster/implementation level)	Regularly
Communication and advocacy using information from the EW-EA dashboard	HC, Cluster Coordinators, OCHA, Heads of Agencies, Donors, etc (as appropriate)	Regularly

Source: FSNAU and FAO Somalia. (2016, 14 December). *A Dashboard for Linking Early Warning to Early Action in Somalia*.

Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/dashboard-linking-early-warning-early-action-somalia-fsnaufao-somalia-december-2016>

ANNEX 3 – TIMELINE

July 2011	UN declares famine in Somalia
June 2012	IASC publishes real-time evaluation of the humanitarian response to the Horn of Africa drought crisis
Sept 2012	ICAI publishes review of DFID's humanitarian response in the Horn of Africa
May 2013	FSNAU/FEWS NET publish report estimating that 258,000 Somalis had died as a result of famine and severe food insecurity between October 2010 and April 2012
Jan 2014	DFID presents discussion paper on triggers for emergency response to the HCT, outlining the process and immediate next steps for establishing a trigger mechanism and suggesting indicators for possible triggers
April 2014	OCHA is entrusted with facilitating process of establishing an EWEA mechanism, with the participation of the ICCG, donors, UN agencies and NGOs
May/June 2014	ICCG with support from FSNAU convenes technical meetings, culminating in the identification and definition of key indicators and thresholds
Jan 2015	Organization of Islamic Cooperation joins HCT
Feb 2015	HCT unanimously endorses FSNAU/DFID/OCHA concept note on linking early warning to early action in Somalia
Nov 2015	FSNAU receives dedicated funding to design the humanitarian dashboard and recruits staff
14 Dec 2015	Final concept note for the dashboard presented to the HCT
Feb 2016	FSNAU launches prototype of the dashboard
2 March 2016	FSNAU presents pilot dashboard to the food security cluster
26 April 2016	FSNAU presents pilot dashboard to the nutrition cluster
Sept 2016	HCT retreat identifies seasonal readiness and monitoring as a pivotal initiative to bring predictability to managing responses; says dashboard will be employed Context analysis based on seasonal trends is presented to the resilience working group; suggests emergency programming must be triggered earlier than usual if Deyr rains late/weak, as this is likely to be a breaking point for many communities
2 Oct 2016	Jubaland authority issues drought appeal
5 Oct 2016	Puntland authority issues drought appeal
11 Oct 2016	FEWS NET/FSNAU issue Somalia food security outlook predicting 1.3 million people will be in IPC Phase 3 or above between January and May 2017

11 Nov 2016	FEWS NET issues alert for Somalia after failed rains in October, warning that IPC Phase 4 outcomes are possible during the January–March 2017 lean season
12 Nov 2016	Federal Government of Somalia issues appeal for support to drought-affected Somalis
14 Nov 2016	Minutes of HCT meeting mentions HCT retreat of September at which it was agreed to employ the EWEA Dashboard
17 Nov 2016	Somaliland authority issues drought appeal
24 Nov 2016	Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017 is launched
30 Nov 2016	Galmudug authority issues drought appeal
2 Dec 2016	Somalia Humanitarian Coordinator briefs donors on the drought crisis; uses map created from the dashboard using data on October
13 Dec 2016	FSNAU/FAO Somalia publish presentation on a dashboard for linking early warning to early action in Somalia
21 Dec 2016	Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan 2017 is launched, accompanied by map created from the dashboard using data on October
16 Jan 2017	FEWS NET/FSNAU issue food security alert for Somalia, suggesting famine is possible in 2017
2 Feb 2017	FSNAU/FEWS NET issue a technical release warning that nearly three million people face IPC Phases 3 and 4, and that the risk of famine is increasing
13 Feb 2017	Operational plan for pre-famine scale-up of humanitarian assistance (January–June 2017) is launched
28 Mar 2017	FSNAU presents data from February to the HCT, along with a map showing 10 of the dashboard indicators
9 May 2017	FSNAU/FEWS NET issue food security alert; post-Jilaal assessment indicates elevated risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) persists in parts of Somalia
10 May 2017	Revised Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia is published; number of people facing IPC Phases 3 and 4 rises to 3.2 million
11 May 2017	UN Secretary-General highlights the humanitarian crisis during the London conference on Somalia
30 June 2017	FEWS NET/FSNAU issue food security outlook for Somalia; widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4) expected after third consecutive very poor season

ANNEX 4 – INTERVIEWEES

- Abdullahi Khalif, Senior Regional Food Security Adviser, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (now Senior International Food Security Adviser, FEWS NET)
- Abdurahman Sharif, Director, Somalia NGO Consortium
- Adrian Denyer, WASH Cluster Coordinator, Field Support Team, UNICEF
- Amin Malik, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, FAO Somalia
- Daniel Barnhardt, Emergency and Rehabilitation Officer, FAO Somalia
- Daniel Molla, Chief Technical Adviser, FSNAU
- Daniele Donati, acting Somalia Country Representative, FAO Somalia
- Delphine Dechaux, Deputy Head of Programme, WFP Somalia
- Dorian LaGuardia, Transtec
- Dustin Caniglia, Resilience Programme Manager, Concern/BRCiS
- Emily Gish, Regional Adviser, USAID/OFDA
- Flavian Muthusi, Hydrologist, SWALIM
- Harrie Oostingh, Acting Country Director, Oxfam Somalia
- Heather Blackwell, Technical Assistant, ECHO
- Mohamud Hassan Hersi, National VAM officer, WFP Somalia
- Mulugeta Shibru, Food Security Cluster Co-coordinator, FAO Somalia
- Patrick Laurent, WASH Cluster Coordinator, UNICEF
- Samson Desie, Nutrition Specialist, UNICEF
- Sebastian Fouquet, Team Leader for Humanitarian Resilience and Health, DFID
- Sofie Thomle, Deputy Head of Office, OCHA
- Stephen Mutiso, Head of Food Security and Livelihoods, Save the Children
- Waleed Mahdi, Chief Technical Officer, SWALIM
- Will Helyar, former Humanitarian Adviser for Somalia, DFID

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- 31 Anchoring effect – the tendency to be influenced by the presentation of a random number.
Availability bias – the tendency to rely on readily available information in making judgments and decisions, not the information you actually need.
Substitution bias – the tendency to substitute a difficult question with a simpler one.
Optimistic bias – the tendency to fail to take into account complexity, understand the world as small and necessarily unrepresentative set of observations, and not account for the role of chance and therefore falsely assumes that a future event will mirror a past event.
Framing – where decision making is influenced by the way the situation is framed.
Confirmation bias – the tendency to make up our minds quickly and then in the analysis phase only select information that confirms our initial view.
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This paper was written and researched by Emma Feeny. The author and Oxfam would like to thank Dustin Caniglia (Concern Worldwide), Adrian Denyer (UNICEF), Daniel Molla (FSNAU) and Sofie Thomle (OCHA), who shared their thoughts and provided feedback on an earlier draft of the paper. We would also like to thank Mark Agoya (DFID), Luke Caley (START Network), James Firebrace (James Firebrace Consulting) and Catalina Jaime (Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre) for their comments.

We would like to thank the following people for sharing their thoughts: Daniel Barnhardt (FAO Somalia), Heather Blackwell (ECHO), Delphine Dechaux (WFP Somalia), Samson Desie (UNICEF), Daniele Donati (FAO Somalia), Sebastian Fouquet (DFID), Emily Gish (USAID/OFDA), Will Helyar (DFID), Mohamud Hassan Hersi (WFP Somalia), Abdullahi Khalif (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), Dorian LaGuardia (Transtec), Patrick Laurent (UNICEF), Waleed Mahdi (SWALIM), Amin Malik (FAO Somalia), Flavian Muthusi (SWALIM), Stephen Mutiso (Save the Children), Harrie Oostingh (Oxfam Somalia), Abdurahman Sharif (Somalia NGO Consortium) and Mulugeta Shibru (FAO Somalia).

We would also like to thank Debbie Hillier in particular and the following other Oxfam staff for their comments on the paper: Julie Lafrenière, John Magrath, Lorena Auladell Marin and Larissa Pelham.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78748-083-4 in October 2017.

DOI: 10.21201/2017.0834

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

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