

from elsewhere in the organisation; they may not be responsible for negotiating with donors, or for the logistics of importing necessary goods. They may depend on others to work with finance and administration departments to design systems which meet the demands of donors (and auditors) but still allow for life-saving response to happen on time. This requires organisational buy-in at a high level.

Helping convince your own organisation, and the other organisations that you depend on, to adopt better ways of working is the most important part of contingency planning. Do they all understand why timely response is so important? Do they know what your deadlines for implementation are and why? Make sure they are on your side. You need to ask others regularly: what do they need from you so that they can act more quickly? Discuss these ideas regularly in your local inter-agency forum and inside your organisation. Everybody means well. A few simple changes in the way people communicate can shorten a timeline by weeks – and that can save thousands of lives.

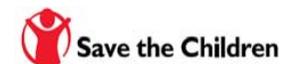
For more information see: www.elmt-relpa.org



CRISIS CALENDAR ANALYSIS

*“How to Make Contingency Planning Useful,
in Just Ten Easy Steps”*

RELPA Guide to Early Response



FOREWORD

This is the second version of the RELPA Guide to Early Response. Following experience with using the first version (the fifteen step guide), the guide has been simplified to make it easier to use in the field. At the same time, its application has been extended. The first version dealt only with slow onset crises in pastoral areas, and focused on supporting livelihoods through these crises. Although this remains one of the most important areas for contingency planning in some countries, it is obviously easier if users can use the same approach for all their contingency planning. Since the practical, ‘down to earth’ approach that this guide proposes has proved useful to planners, we have given examples here from a wider range of sectors and of hazards, including sudden-onset crises.

We hope that this guide will help the users, wherever they work and whatever their role in the field of humanitarian response, to respond better and faster and so to make a contribution to preventing crises from turning into humanitarian disasters.

This guide was the fruit of collaboration between the PACAPS and ELMT components of the RELPA programme, with the funding of USAID based on a conceptual approach developed during a series of workshops in Ethiopia and Kenya in 2008 and 2009. Thanks are due to the PACAPS team particularly Alex Crosskey (FEG) and the ELMT team, particularly Mohammed Abdinoor (SC/UK-ELMT) as well as the workshop participants who contributed ideas and experiences to the process.

The Guide is available at www.elmt-relpa.org Please send any comments or feedback to Simon Levine at simon_levine@yahoo.co.uk

Simon Levine
March 2010

a) Take out your crisis calendar and your plans regularly in your local co-ordination forum and go over them. What changes would you like to make in the scenario? What changes does this imply for your strategies or your interventions? (Do you need to draw up a new response plan?) What changes does this imply for your ‘last decision dates’? Always make sure that you don’t pass your last decision date without making a decision! It is fine to decide not to implement a project – but don’t let the date pass without talking a conscious decision one way or another. Once you have your last decision dates written down, if you have analysed your start-up time lines reasonably accurately, there is no reason why you should not be able to respond on time.

b) You may find that you are not sure exactly how the crisis is developing and so cannot be sure whether or not your predictions about when to intervene in a certain way are correct or not. What information are you missing? Why don’t you have it? Sometimes you need information from outside your area (e.g. district) or even from across a national border. This is particularly important for flood early warning, since flood waters often start in one country before affecting another. Getting information on the conflict situation or the pasture situation in another country might be harder. See if your early warning systems can help you with this information. The job of early warning is to give the right information to those responsible for response so that they can respond on time. If you need certain information in order to plan your responses adequately then it is their job to provide the information, even if it comes from outside the country where they are working!

c) What progress have you made in preparedness (i.e. in shortening the timelines)? Share with other actors in your area what you have done and ask them to share with you – this will help encourage everyone to be prepared. If a crisis response is to be successful, then you will depend on other agencies in your area, so it is in your interest to make sure that they also appreciate the need to be prepared. Make sure that you all update some basic information regularly: the names of the people with various responsibilities. (Personnel change, so make sure you have the right names and contact details);

Stocks can be used or can be replenished. Is your stock list up to date?

Have there been any changes in the prices of any major items that you need to buy in the event of a response? Do you need to change your proposal?

If you have pre-qualified or preferred suppliers, are their quotations still valid? Do they actually have the items in stock, or are there any major changes to the delivery time?

etc.

d) If your responses are going to be dependent on external donors, then share information about how their thinking is developing about the crisis. (Make sure that you know. If you are not based in the capital, then you need help from within your Ministry or organisation with this.) If you need funds from a Government department, then the same principle applies. Who are your allies at ‘the centre’ who can tell you how thinking is moving and can help influence the thinking in the light of what you know is necessary?

10. Share these ideas with those who can make things happen

Whatever kind of organisation you work for, no one individual can ensure early response. The problems lie in many places in each organisation, and in many processes and relationships between different organisations. Problems can only be solved by many people working together. A humanitarian programme manager may be able to programme appropriately and to train their own staff, communities and local Government staff. But they may not be able to organize secondments

Administration and logistics: identify the administrative procedures which cause most delays (e.g. duty exemption at customs clearance); discuss them with the agencies involved (Governments, donors, your own administrators, etc.) to agree the most streamlined procedures which would still be acceptable to all; pre-qualify suppliers for tenders; prepare draft contracts for transport, suppliers, service providers, etc.; discuss these contracts with them in advance to ensure acceptance and understanding; pre-position supplies, where possible (e.g. if they can be used elsewhere or sold later); discuss with other agencies how logistics and transport can be shared. Keep all the above regularly up to date.

Implementation: conduct regular refresher training for any staff who will be involved in a programme (your own staff, local Government or community based workers); make sure coordination systems at local level are working (e.g. District sectoral forums); use longer term (“development”) programmes to support any possible emergency intervention² (e.g. structural support to the livestock marketing sector; support to regular fodder production and marketing, support to local animal health services; etc.); coordinate policy decisions with other agencies, Ministries or local Government about how interventions will be carried out – e.g. what should be given freely and what should be paid for, what role should Government civil servants play, etc.

Be as imaginative as you can about what can be prepared before a crisis. Preparedness doesn't cost much money. If you have correctly identified the most likely crises, it is highly unlikely that the time you invest in preparedness will go to waste. Once you have brought the timelines down, go back and mark the new 'last decision date' on your calendar. Never be satisfied: keep trying to make the timeline shorter. A difference of even one or two days can be lifesaving for many people.

(Two very important kinds of preparedness measures do need considerable expenditure in order to prevent some natural hazard from becoming a crisis. In some cases, emergency stockpiles of items will need to be maintained for rapid response in sudden onset disasters. These stockpiles are usually held at national level, or, for international organisations, sometimes at regional level. Crises can often be prevented by using development funds in appropriate ways. “Disaster risk management” is a critical part of contingency planning. For example, roads should be built so that they remain passable in floods, wells should be deep enough so that they don't dry out, schools and other buildings should be built strong enough to withstand earthquakes or cyclones. Both these kinds of measures are beyond the scope of this simple guide to discuss).

9. Keeping the contingency plan alive

Any contingency plan which is a document sitting on a shelf is unlikely to be very useful in helping you respond at the right time. The plan needs to be discussed regularly, particularly if you see a slow onset crisis evolving.

It is quite unlikely that the crisis will develop exactly as you had described. It may develop more slowly or more quickly and the scale may be wider or narrower than you described. In pastoral areas in particular, there are so many factors that determine how a crisis develops – have animals from outside your area moved in (putting more pressure on grazing)? Has conflict forced animals from your area to return home? Have rains some distance from your area permitted herders to take some animals away from your area, relieving pressure on the rangeland? These things cannot be predicted **but they can be monitored.**

What should you be doing with your crisis calendar each time?

²ICRC has produced ideas on how to do this as part of a comprehensive 'tracking strategy'.

THE 10 STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL EARLY RESPONSE:

1. Identify the likely hazards	4
2. Describe the 'normal' seasonal calendar	4
3. Draw up your 'scenario calendar'	5
4. Decide what support you want to give at each stage of the crisis	6
5. Work out the 'start-up time-line' for each intervention	7
6. Plot the start-up time-line back onto calendar	7
7. Check that your activities can realistically be on time	8
8. Be prepared: shorten start-up time-lines for all interventions	8
9. Keeping the contingency plan alive	9
10. Share these ideas with those who can make things happen	11

1. Identify the likely hazards

You can't plan for everything. Fortunately, you don't need to. The number of hazards which you are likely to face is usually quite small, and if you prepare well for one hazard, you are likely to be prepared for most other hazards as well.

Start by choosing the most likely hazard that you face right now. When you have time, you can plan for more eventualities. But just start: don't let your worry about many hazards delay your preparation for the first.

Keep it simple and realistic. Choose the most likely level of hazard according to the best predictions you have. Where you have hazards which occur periodically, such as droughts or floods, it's more useful to prepare for the kind of hazard that is likely to occur, than for one so serious it only occurs every twenty years. For most hazards you can get some kind of prediction about how severe they are likely to be. (The severity of some possible hazards, like earthquakes and volcanoes, can't be predicted, but fortunately these are very rare. In contingency planning, it's always best to concentrate on what is common rather than what is rare).

2. Describe the 'normal' seasonal calendar

During any crisis, we often see food prices rise, or water in shallow pans drying up or people moving in to towns to find work. However, every year, there are seasonal movements in prices, in the availability of water sources and in many places seasonal migration for labour is common. We can only use these observations to understand the development and the severity of a crisis if we know how different what we are seeing is from what happens every year. For example, if we know that the fall in livestock prices is larger than usual, or that the seasonal migration is happening earlier than usual, then this tells us something about whether or not people are coping with their problems.

Draw up a seasonal calendar for a normal year in your area. (Don't worry too much about defining 'normal'. It just means 'the kind of year in which there wasn't a crisis. ') What should you put on the calendar? This depends on you. If you are working in the health sector, then put down everything that affects people's health: the malaria season, the different water sources people use in different months, when water borne diseases are most prevalent, when people have more or less money to pay for health care, when infants are most likely to be well fed or worse fed, etc. If there are months when drugs are normally in short supply, then add this too. If you are concerned about food security, then you need to describe the things which are important for people's livelihoods. This will vary from place to place. In pastoral areas, you may need to include:

- Rainfall
- Normal seasonal variations in pasture condition
- Water availability (quantity, location – and maybe cost)?
- Normal migration patterns – who goes where with which animals, and the impact on household livelihood (e.g. milk supply)?
- Market conditions (supply and demand? which animals are being sold? prices? Where do the traders come from? etc).
- Peak calving periods and milk availability from different species.
- Normal seasonal variations in the price of basic food items.

You cannot have a start up timeline which is longer than the time that you will actually have. For rapid onset crises, this may be very short. People may need shelter and safe water within a day or two after an earthquake or flood. Is it possible to get a timeline so short? In some ways, the situation is almost as hard for slow onset crises, because you often need to start your intervention before it is sure that the crisis will ever be very serious. It is very hard to get people to accept this. (For example, the best time to market livestock in a drought is before their condition deteriorates too much – often just when pastoralists, Governments and donors are all praying that it will rain so they won't have to do it!)

It is critical to shorten the start-up time-lines for every planned intervention.

For rapid onset interventions, unless your start-up is very short, lives may be in great danger.

For slow-onset interventions, even if you can see a crisis coming, you may not get a green light (internally or from a donor) until it is clear that there is crisis, i.e. until very late.

Go through all the list of everything you had to do in order to get a project off the ground. Make sure that you break each step into as many possible steps as possible. (For example, 'recruitment' may mean: drafting a job description, getting it approved, sending it to HR Dept. for grading, drafting a job announcement, getting that approved, sending it to a newspaper...)

Now look at all the steps that could be done NOW before there is a crisis. If you think creatively, you will find that you can do the vast majority of steps in advance. The only steps which you may not be able to do are those which involve spending money. So, for example, though you can't recruit staff in advance of needing them, you can write a job description, you can have it approved (in principle), and graded, you can have newspaper announcements drafted and approved (in principle) and so on. You can't submit a proposal to a donor until you have decided to run a project, but you can (and should) share your ideas with the donor in advance, you can hear from them what they would want in a proposal, you could show them a draft proposal and ask if this is 'the kind of thing that in principle they might accept', and so on. You should make sure that you have drafts in the formats of more than one donor, so that you don't start your search with a second donor only after being rejected by the first¹. All of this will shorten the time that it will take in order to get approval of a proposal from them.

What is actually possible will depend on individual circumstances, but the kinds of thing to think about are:

Staffing: identify staffing needs, prepare draft job descriptions, prepare draft contracts, prepare recruitment procedures, identify possible candidates within the organisation for secondment and prepare the secondments, discuss the possibility of secondments with other agencies, prepare the induction. Keep all of this regularly up to date.

Financing: find out how different donors view likely crises and appropriate responses, and know what money they might have for proposals such as yours; prepare a draft concept note and share it with potential donors; prepare draft project proposals according to the format of the most likely donors; share these with the donors, and incorporate any feedback; look at the process of bank transfers from donor to field office; try and establish contingency funds which can be spent either with discretion or at least with quick approval procedures. Keep all the above regularly up to date.

¹As long as you don't actually take money from two donors for the same expenditure, it's perfectly OK to submit a proposal to two donors. Either tell each one what you are doing, or, if both accept, just inform one that you no longer need the money.

can come for many reasons. Staff can be away at meetings, because of sickness or on holiday. Your Ministry or organisation may be dealing with a large scale emergency in the country, involving several programmes being launched in different areas at once. Don't forget the time it takes for local level coordination. Just calling and holding a meeting to get local approval for a proposal or assessment findings may take a week. If you need to train local people, whether from local Government or communities, you need agreement from everyone about how this should happen e.g. around work norms, any allowances to be paid, community contributions etc.

Don't be surprised if your start-up time-line is a few months. For many kinds of project, if it is less than a couple of months, you've probably forgotten many stages – or you are very well prepared indeed!

6. Plot the start-up time-line back onto calendar

Work backwards from the date when your proposed activity should start and count out the weeks or months that your start-up is expected to take. This will give you your 'last decision date', the latest date by which you will have to take a decision to implement the intervention if it is to start at the appropriate time.

Suppose you are expecting shallow wells to run dry by 1st September. Boreholes need to be repaired by 31st August at the latest. repairing all the boreholes will take two months, so the programme must begin on 1st July. But if your start-up period will take you three months, then your last decision date is 1st April. If you don't decide to start the project by 1st April, then some people won't have a functioning borehole when their shallow well runs dry.

Remember that the whole crisis calendar may need to be modified as things develop. This also means that the 'final decision date' that you decide today may also need to be modified – it could be earlier if the crisis develops faster than you anticipated, or later if the crisis develops more slowly. (You may also find that you don't need to decide to implement the project if the crisis doesn't arrive or it doesn't become as serious as you had planned for.) This is discussed in step 9.

7. Check that your activities can realistically be done on time

If you are planning for crisis that is already coming, then you may find that you have already missed the last decision date for an activity that you wanted to run. Even if you have pressure to run the activity it is best to admit that you cannot implement it on time and so any activities that you do undertake will not be useful. This way, you can spend your time and resources preparing for activities that will be useful.

8. Be prepared: shorten start-up time-lines for all interventions

Being prepared means that you can start implementing an activity very quickly after seeing that it is necessary. Now, you can actually measure your preparedness: it is the time that your start-up time line will take.

- Other seasonal income e.g. firewood/charcoal, casual labour in towns.
- Other seasonal food sources, e.g. wild foods, hunting or fishing.

For farming communities, you will probably know their agricultural calendar quite well. However, don't just indicate a single 'harvest season', think of the different crops that people grow, when each one is harvested and how long people eat the harvest for. When do people start normally buying food? What are there other seasonal sources of income or food?

There are many ways to get the information you need for this step. If you have been working in the area for a long time, you may simply know it yourself. If not, you can work with local communities to fill it in. If the contingency planning is urgent, then it may be better to do it quickly by talking to a few 'key informants' (i.e. anyone who you think knows the answers to your questions). When you have time, you should go to the communities to get better information so you can adapt and improve your calendar. (A contingency plan should ALWAYS be updated and improved regularly).

3. Draw up your 'scenario calendar'

You can't plan very effectively if you are just thinking about 'floods' or 'a drought'. You can plan well if you are planning for a specific disaster. This means that you need to have in mind exactly what you think might happen. Don't worry that you might not be exactly right in your predictions – changing your predictions is part of step 9. Just start with a detailed scenario, and make it as good as you can. For each hazard, describe the crisis for what is the most likely scale that you want to prepare for; describe how many people will be affected; describe as many of the direct and indirect impacts as possible; and describe when you expect each one to occur.

If you are worried about floods, then think about when the flooding will start, how far it will spread as time passes, which roads may become impassable when, which villages may need to be evacuated when, and so on. Think about indirect impacts of the flooding too. Would you expect some human or animal diseases to be a problem? When would the problem start? Where? When would it become serious? When do you predict that it might end?

As you think of the details of the scenario you will realise new things that you may need to consider in your planning. For example, if roads flood and some areas become impassable, what is likely to happen to food prices in these areas? What are the implications of possible restrictions on livestock movement? If you are planning for a livestock epidemic, don't only think about animal health and production. It may mean that quarantine restrictions are imposed: what would be the effects on market prices? If borders are closed, how would this affect the seasonal migration patterns of those animals which are not directly affected by the disease? If the rangeland is depleted and livestock have to move, will there be any impact on conflict in the area where people will try to move to? When do you expect this conflict to surface?

No hazard will ever have a uniform impact over a large area. Different places will always be affected differently, for many reasons. You're bound to miss one or two things which will happen in reality. The important thing is to write down exactly the scenario you are describing, and write down why you made your predictions as you did, so that you can easily make necessary changes when the time comes. (That is what early warning information is for).

How can you predict the future? This is not as difficult as it sounds. What has happened in the past should be a good guide, though you do need to be aware of any major changes in the overall context. If no-one in your area has any experience of the kind of scenario that you are describing, then you are probably describing a very unlikely scenario! Local people from the affected populations and local officials who have worked in the area for some years should be able to describe in good detail how a crisis is likely to develop.

Draw your predictions on a calendar. Go through the list of parameters that were included in the normal seasonal calendar (step 2). Describe the changes in each parameter over the two or three years – at some periods, you will need to describe the changes month by month and at other periods changes may only be seen over a few months. Then, think of any parameters that you didn't include in the normal calendar that you think would be important.

Describe what is happening in as precise a way as you can – quantified where relevant. (When is pasture condition 'poor', when is it insufficient for a particular species, when does it disappear altogether)?

No hazard will affect everywhere in a uniform way. Describe the scenario for the most common context in the area where you work, and write down the other 'variables' that will be important in determining how the crisis is different in different areas – e.g. the density of livestock, the different security situation in different places, where market access is much better or worse, where there are pockets of more fertile land or perennial springs etc.

4. Decide what support you want to give at each stage of the crisis

Before each department or agency decides how it will intervene to support people, you need to have a common understanding of what needs to be done when. It is very important to get agreement for a coordinated strategy. For example, in the face of a drought in pastoralist area, is it best to bring in fodder to keep some animals alive, to truck water in order to open up new rangeland that is unavailable because of lack of water, to encourage animals to stay away from the area as long as they can possibly find pasture elsewhere or to support the movement of remaining animals to pasture elsewhere (e.g. by supporting transportation directly or by conflict prevention work)? A common decision is necessary. Without a common strategy, in many cases, interventions might not have much impact. In this example, they would even undermine each other. (It is also harder to attract donor support when contradictory proposals are coming out of the same area). **This problem is very common.**

How support is given also needs to be agreed. For example, if the overall policy or strategy is to channel some kinds of aid (food, seeds and tools, shelter material, animal health services, borehole repair, etc.) through the private sector in order to build up a long term, economically sustainable marketing system for certain goods or services, then if one agency or department starts handing things out free, this might undermine everyone else's long term work. **This problem is also very common.**

In many countries, there are forums chaired by local Government where NGOs and other relevant actors participate together. In some cases each sector has its own meeting. These are ideal forums for discussing strategies together. Each department or agency can then plan their own intervention within this common broad strategy.

Once you have decided what the broad strategy and objectives should be, you need to think about your role at each stage of the crisis. This will depend in part on the situation, and in part on your organisation – what your mandate is, what your specialist skills are, what your capacity is, etc.

Different interventions will make sense in different circumstances, and that also means at different stages of a crisis. If you are thinking about any particular intervention, decide exactly when it would make sense on your scenario calendar (from step 3). Some interventions may be appropriate over several months; others will only make sense if they are targeted at very specific stages in the evolution of a crisis. An obvious example: any support you want to give to the next planting season must be completed before the next planting season! If you are preparing for floods and are afraid of increased malaria or water based diseases, then you also need to think when access roads may become impassable. You need to make sure any work (pre-positioning drugs, community sensitisation, immunisations, etc.) is completed before the roads are flooded.

It is essential to be as accurate as you can about placing each intervention in the 'scenario calendar'. You can't possibly have timely intervention until you know what you are aiming for. Do not worry that your scenario calendar might not turn out to be exact – that is normal. The way to handle that is by being very exact about timing on the scenario calendar in this step, and you make sure later that your scenario calendar is constantly adjusted by monitoring how things actually develop (see step 9).

For the moment, just consider when you need to start each activity in the field. Don't worry at this stage about all the preparation work you need to do for each activity. That will be taken care of in steps 5 and 6. For step 4, on each scenario calendar, simply write in for each month which interventions you would like to see happening on the ground.

5. Work out the 'start-up time-line' for each intervention

For each intervention that you propose, write down all the different tasks which your organisation will have to accomplish before it can begin actual implementation.

You will probably need to talk to colleagues in other departments, e.g. finance, logistics, administration, human resources, to get the details on all the steps involved and the time it may take for recruitment, for ordering vehicles or supplies, bringing in goods through customs, etc. Whether you are in Government, a UN organisation or in an NGO, you may also need to include time for having your proposals approved by your superiors. If you don't already have money available within your organisation for your proposed projects, then you need to consider the time it takes to write up a proposal for donors and to get this approved. This may also entail some assessment and beneficiary identification.

Some activities can take place at the same time, but others can't start until a previous stage is completed. Work out the shortest possible pathway through all the steps: this will give you the shortest possible time from deciding you to implement a programme to it actually starting. (This is called a Gantt chart. They are quite simple to draw, but if you find you need help, just enter 'Gantt chart' on an internet search engine).

Be realistic in estimating how many steps are involved in some simple processes. Purchasing may mean writing a tender advertisement, getting it approved, getting the accounts department to approve the payment for the advertisement, putting it in a newspaper, waiting for replies.... Delays