Response Analysis & Contingency Planning

This chapter describes some of the theory & thinking behind the Response Analysis process and provides further reading for those that what to explore the topic in more depth. Subsequent chapters describe the practical steps need to do the Contingency Planning and Response Analysis process in detail – so if you’re pushed for time skip straight to Step A: Scenario Calendars but if you what to learn more, keep reading….

Understanding Current Response Analysis in Practice

Recent research by ODI\(^1\) highlighted; how the range of response options available to deal with food security crises has increased significantly in recent years, the investments that have been made in situation analysis across the sector and the large number of response analysis tools (>20) that are already available. Despite this the research found that in practice there is often very little formal or explicit response analysis conducted by agencies – the process of selecting which interventions an agency will implement is most often an intuitive process. Where response analysis did happen it most often focused on “2\(^{nd}\) Order Response Options” (e.g. the decision whether food, cash or vouchers are more appropriate) rather than the more strategic “1\(^{st}\) Order Response Options” (i.e. determining the overall objectives of an agency’s response). The research recommended that:

- Response Analysis is actually part of emergency preparedness & contingency planning. Labelling it as an activity that fits neatly between needs assessment and program planning is misleading.
- Response Analysis is an on-going process, not a single step as has typically been depicted in the program management cycle (see figure 1).
- A critical part of Response Analysis is the question of how the work of one agency fits into the larger picture of what other agencies, national governments and local communities themselves are doing.
- Improving the analysis of causal factors is essential for evidence-based response analysis. Both improved causal analysis and response analysis are needed.

Principles for Improved Response Analysis

Drawing on the findings of the recent ODI research as well as related studies\(^2\) the Response Analysis process uses the following principles:

1. Focus on contingency planning as the “vehicle” for improving response analysis.
2. Seasonal analysis, based on forecasts, enables an early response.
3. Using a regular & iterative process supports institutionalization
4. Brings together Development & Humanitarian staff to conduct a joint analysis
5. Early Response requires Early Funding
6. The Devil is in the Detail

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1. Use Contingency Planning as the “Vehicle” for Response Analysis

Be prepared; do your analysis in advance

One of the key findings of the recent ODI research into response analysis was that labelling response analysis as an activity that fits neatly between needs assessment and program planning is misleading and that response analysis should actually part of emergency preparedness & contingency planning.

This Response Analysis process therefore uses contingency planning as the key institutional process, or “vehicle”, for improving response analysis. This section therefore starts by taking a step back and looking at some of the theory & learning about contingency planning.

The contingency planning process used in this guidance draws heavily on the 2009 RELPA Contingency Planning guidance developed by Levine & Abdinoor³.

Contingency planning tends to be used interchangeably with other, similar terms, such as emergency preparedness and disaster management. The most important distinction is between contingency planning and emergency preparedness. Emergency preparedness consists of all activities taken in anticipation of a crisis to expedite effective emergency response. This includes contingency planning, but is not limited to it: it also covers stockpiling, the creation and management of stand-by capacities and training staff and partners in emergency response. Contingency planning experts agree that contingency planning is most effective when done in the context of a well-articulated emergency preparedness framework.

Source: Contingency Planning & Humanitarian Action, HPN Network Paper 59 (p.8)

Emergency Preparedness & Contingency Planning

Many International agencies have established Emergency Preparedness Planning (EPP) systems, often with a clear institutional mandate that requires Country Offices to complete and update their EPPs on a regular basis. As described above these EPP’s are necessity broad in their scope, cover a broad range of potential hazards and document key preparedness activities that would be applicable in all or most scenarios. This enviable means that EPPs tend to lack detail when it comes to the specifics of responding to a particular hazard.

Contingency Planning (CP) for slow-onset food security crises, as described in these Guidelines, is therefore seen as a process that is designed to complement broader institutional EPPs in context where there is a high risk of food insecurity – it is certainly not designed as a substitute or alternative to existing EPPs. Contingency Planning and EPP’s are seen as two distinct but inter-dependent process, “whereby preparedness actions are elaborated on a regular basis (e.g. annually), and then, once a specific emerging crisis is identified, a more detailed scenario-based contingency planning phase begins”⁴.

Contingency Planning

Research into Contingency Planning has identified three main types or methods of contingency planning that are used by humanitarian agencies.

1. Scenario planning is the most common type of planning. This involves the development of specific scenarios, which are then used as a basis for developing a response plan.
2. Preparedness planning – sometimes called response planning or response preparedness planning – is becoming more widely used. It involves identifying gaps and challenges to effective emergency response, and then planning and implementing a series of actions to increase response capacity and reduce potential gaps. Simple or generic scenarios are used as a basis for developing preparedness plans.

³ Levine & Abdinoor (2009), The RELPA Guide to Early Response to Slow-onset crises or “How to make contingency planning useful, in just fifteen easy steps”
⁴ Contingency Planning & Humanitarian Action, HPN Network Paper 59
3. **All-hazards emergency planning**, common among government emergency management agencies, establishes clear roles, responsibilities and chains of command, and uses standard procedures most often formalized in checklists to guide emergency response.

This Response Analysis process was designed specifically for slow-onset food security crisis. Since we are dealing with a situation, typically drought, where a specific threat or emerging crisis exists the Response Analysis process uses scenario-based contingency planning. Some of the strengths & weaknesses of scenario-based planning are described briefly in the next section, but it may be useful to first review the differences between the three approaches, which are described in table 1 below.

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Common types of contingency planning</th>
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<td><strong>Scenario-based contingency planning</strong></td>
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<td>Focus: Specific scenarios are developed, with a plan focused on responding to these scenarios</td>
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<td>Best used... - When specific and detailed planning is needed - When a specific threat or emerging crisis exists</td>
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<td>Pitfalls... - Can be too detailed and prone to the scenario trap (see Box 16, p. 21) - Scenarios are often wide of the mark</td>
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<td>Who... Most common form of contingency planning among humanitarian actors. Used by donors, NGOs, UN agencies, national governments and NGOs</td>
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Scenario-based Contingency Planning

Scenarios are descriptions of situations that could occur: they are sets of informed assumptions about a situation that may require humanitarian action. There are different ways to develop scenarios, this Response Analysis process uses what is known as “projection against a baseline” ⁶, but what is most important to highlight is that in practice, many contingency planning exercises become bogged down in scenario development as people try to disentangle the inevitable uncertainties inherent in predicting the future. Ultimately, this can lead to a counterproductive process, where little real planning is conducted and an overly complicated set of scenarios is developed to satisfy the opinions of different planners. This problem is often referred to as the “scenario trap”

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**The Scenario Trap**

_A common challenge faced in contingency planning is the scenario trap. This occurs when planners cannot define or prioritise their scenarios and fail to move on to developing actual plans. The results of the scenario trap are evident in the many contingency plans which contain summaries of scenarios – and nothing else. Especially when groups plan for complex situations, such as conflicts, or in circumstances where there is little information, it is difficult to agree on variables, such as what might happen and how many people will be affected. Numbers are often particularly contentious. This leads to long-drawn-out discussions in an attempt to reach a consensus. In many cases this consensus is never achieved, and time pressure ends the process before any real planning has occurred._

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⁵ Source: Contingency Planning & Humanitarian Action, HPN Network Paper 59

⁶ Other methods include: expert opinion, historical analogy & field assessment
The Response Analysis process is designed to minimize the risk of falling into the “Scenario Trap” by using HEA Outcome Analysis to quickly develop detailed quantified scenarios. In the standard three-day workshop the process of developing the scenarios should take no more than one day – allowing 2 days for the actually response analysis and contingency planning.

2.

Seasonal Analysis – based on forecasts

Early Analysis enables Early Response

It is important to note that in this Response Analysis process the development of the scenarios, and therefore the whole Response Analysis process itself, is based on a forecast and therefore differs from both broader Emergency Preparedness Planning processes (which tend to be based on a retrospective / historical review of hazards) and the standard representation of Response Analysis in which the actual Response Analysis does not happen until after both the actual shock and a subsequent Needs Assessment or Situation Analysis (see figures 1 & 2).

The practical implications of this are significant. In a context such as Northern Kenya you will not know if the short rains have failed (i.e. if there has been a shock) until December – the standard Short Rains Assessments will typically take place in January and the findings themselves will only be available in February. Reliable forecasts for the Short Rains would usually be available in late September / early October. Inverting the traditional process and starting with the Response Analysis, rather than waiting till you have a Situation Analysis, gives you a 4 month head-start! Crucially many of the early livelihoods protection interventions in this context would need to start in January – so simply by waiting for confirmation that a shock has occurred (i.e. the December rains have been poor) you will automatically be too late to implement early livelihoods protection interventions. This is particularly important in pastoral livelihoods where recovery periods are 2 or 3 years, compared to 1 year in agricultural livelihoods.

Because scenarios are developed using a forecast the system is designed around the principle that the scenario must be good enough to guide the contingency planning & response analysis scenarios – but they do not have to be perfect. Because the scenarios can never be perfect it is critical that agency regularly monitor the context and conduct additional assessment in order to confirm & adjust the scenarios (Stage 2 of the Response Analysis Process).
3. A Regular & Iterative Process supports Institutionalization

The barriers to translating Early Warning into Early Action are primarily Institutional rather than Technical

Many of the steps in the Response Analysis process will be familiar to field staff and food security project managers – there is very little new in this Response Analysis process. In fact one of the design principles when developing the process was to use existing tools whenever possible. There are some tips & tricks that help the process go more smoothly – but in essence this is something that people in a field office should be able to lead themselves with little external support, once the system is established. The real benefit of the process comes not from the analytical tool as much as from the process itself. The key challenge is not therefore how to do the analysis but rather how to ensure that the analysis is done. For the process to work it is essential that it is done on time and with the competing demands of donor grants and institutional bureaucracies it is all to easy for a process such as this Response Analysis not be prioritized – especially if it is not a deliverable in a grant. Ensuring improved response analysis, and ultimately translating early warning into early action, is therefore primarily an institutional rather than a technical challenge.

From pilots conducted during the development of this Response Analysis process agencies often came to the conclusion that in order to ensure that the Response Analysis process was institutionalized it was best to make it the responsibility of Area Managers (i.e. Operations Staff) rather than Technical Food Security staff (i.e. A Food Security Project Manager or Technical Coordinator). The technical staff would clearly provide vital inputs into the process – but it was the responsibility of the area manager to ensure that the process took place.

There are a number of potential benefits to running the Response Analysis as a regular activity regardless of the severity of the forecast (much like an Annual Work-plan or Staff Review should always conducted every year):

- Field staff become familiar with the process and have the capacity to lead it themselves.
- There is no need to search for “Technical Assistance” when faced with forecasts for a serious food security crisis.
- It becomes easier to identify and fill gaps in our understanding of local livelihoods & markets. It will seldom be the case that we have all the information we need to run a complete Response Analysis; there will always be gaps in our knowledge & understanding. However by running the Response Analysis as a regular process it becomes easier to identify and fill these gaps. The process in effect becomes a Data Collection & Response Analysis Process.

The alternative is to only run the Response Analysis when there is a forecast of an imminent food security and / or livelihoods crisis. In some cases this will be appropriate – and while there may be immediate cost savings to adopting this approach it is likely to require more support and therefore availability of technical assistance.
4.

**Early Response requires Early Funding**

*Contingency Funds are Essential*

Piloting the response analysis process in the Horn of Africa has highlighted that slow-onset food security crises require a rapid response and the term slow-onset itself may be unhelpful because it does not convey the urgency with which responses need to be designed, funded and implemented.

The “window of opportunity” for many responses to drought in bi-modal rainfall areas, such as the Horn of Africa, is very limited. As a result decision will often have to be made to respond before a situation analysis can be conducted. The term slow-onset conveys a lack of urgency that is not reflected in reality.

A critical component in enabling early, and therefore appropriate, responses is the start-up times required for specific interventions – and in particular the time required to secure funding. Early interventions will often be required almost immediately after the rains fail – which can be as little as 2 months after forecasts become available. Start-up times will vary according to different agencies level of preparedness – and capacity to implement specific interventions – but will often be at least a month. This only leaves 4 weeks to secure funding for an early response. In many cases it will not be possible to secure a donor commitment for new funding in this time period – even if agencies are well prepared.

In many cases an early response will therefore be dependent on have pre-approval for early livelihood responses. One of the most common approaches to this is the use of contingency funds, or crisis modifiers, within longer-term development programs.

At heart Response Analysis and the Early Response it is designed to generate is a Development, as much as a Humanitarian, imperative

5.

**The Devil is in the Detail**

*You need specifics to plan around*

If you only remember one thing from reading this chapter remember this; that the Response Analysis process works best / will only really work if you take the time and effort to go into the details. This applies at every step of the process; from the scenario calendars, through the scenarios themselves and the selection of interventions & objectives. A little extra time invested in understanding the details, particularly at the early stages of the process, will pay back great rewards in terms of the quality of the final contingency plan. It is very difficult to make specific plans for interventions that “improve resilience” because it’s not clear whom it targets or why - and when it should start & end. It is on the other hand much more feasible to plan for “commercial goat de-stocking for 8,000 poor households between January – February”.

Field staff will more often that not already know these details of local livelihoods intimately – so it will not take a lot more time & effort to understand and document them you will just need to stop and ask yourself whether you are being specific at each and every step of the process. Doing this above all else will help you get a practical and useful contingency plan that can actually inform your subsequent programming.