

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	03
Background	03
EAP validation assessment in Eswatini	04
Preparation for good community and stakeholder engagement	04
Community engagement methodologies	05
Incorporating community feedback into the EAP	08
Next Steps	10
Recommendations	11

Executive summary

This case study captures learnings from an Early Action Protocol (EAP) validation exercise which was carried out by Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) between June and July 2022 as part of their Finance based Forecasting (FbF) programme. In particular, it explores how BERCS staff and volunteers engaged community members from drought affected communities in the selection of the early actions to reduce suffering caused by drought. They did this through a variety of Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) activities including community consultations and one to one interviews. These activities were designed to ensure that the selected early actions are both relevant for, and accepted by, the communities the programme is designed to support.

Background

Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) initiated an FbF project in 2020 aimed at reducing the impact of drought in the country through anticipatory action. Based on forecast information and risk analysis, FbF releases humanitarian funding for pre-agreed activities designed to reduce the damage and suffering caused by extreme weather events. For early actions to be performed quickly and efficiently before disaster strikes, funds are allocated automatically when a specific threshold is reached. The key to this is the Early Action Protocol (EAP), which clearly defines when and where to act as well as who is doing what.

The development of the EAP is the central activity and output of FbF. The EAP contains information on triggers, early actions and funding allocation, and describes the step-by-step process for the implementation of early actions once a trigger is hit. It defines clearly who takes action when, where, and with what funds. The activation of the protocol is triggered when a forecast reaches a certain impact level that indicates there could be severe negative impacts.

The aim of FbF is to reduce suffering and losses by assisting vulnerable populations to protect themselves and their livelihoods before an extreme event occurs. It is therefore crucial to select feasible early actions that have the highest potential to reduce the identified impacts and are appropriate for different regions and communities. To achieve this objective, BERCS partnered with local institutions such as NDMA, Meteorological Services of Eswatini and the Ministry of Agriculture in an effort to ensure that the selected early actions were usable and relevant for the country.

Drought early actions options were analysed by BERCS in April 2022 through the guidance of the Red Cross Climate Centre and British Red Cross (BRC). This activity started with a general option analysis of the early actions in March 2022. In April, BERCS conducted a more robust exercise of prioritising the early actions and their justification using a prioritisation matrix which considered numerous factors necessary to rank the early actions. These factors included policy fit, evidence of effectiveness, scale, feasibility, social acceptance, capacity, value for money, alignment with organisational mandate and priorities, etc. Each early action was scored against each of these criteria. The selected early actions met the above criteria by at least above 70%.

The selected early actions are as follows:

- Provide multi-purpose cash for food security, conditional & restricted cash for garden fencing material, vegetable seeds/seedlings and animal care kits.
- Procure, transport, and deliver hay bales.
- Procurement of water tanks, transportation and delivery of tanks and treated water to at-risk communities.

These early actions aim to address drought-induced crop failure, death of livestock, water shortages, compromised dietary intake, and loss of livelihoods.

EAP validation assessment in Eswatini

Preparation for good community and stakeholder engagement:

One of the main achievements for the FbF programme between the months March – June 2022 was the validation of drought early actions. In March, the prioritised early actions were validated by the FbF Technical Working Group (TWG). Following this, it was vital for BERCS to get feedback from community members to assess the relevance and feasibility of the proposed early actions. To do this, they conducted community consultation meetings with rural health motivator representatives, disaster relief committees, community leaders, representatives for disability groups and general members of the public in five communities. These five communities were: Phafeni, Etjeni, Lulakeni, Kwaluseni, Ntfutfwakati.

The specific purpose of the consultation meetings was to inform the communities about the prioritised drought early actions that have been designed to reduce their suffering and gather inputs from the communities on the prioritised drought early actions.

The communities were selected based on their vulnerability to drought as well as the drought impacts the communities often faced. In all of the communities the consultation, participants were made of the below. These participants were selected by community leaders in the respective communities.

- Chiefdom counsellor
- Red Cross lead volunteer/Red Cross Unit committee member (volunteer)
- 1 or 2 Chiefdom Inner councils
- 1 or 2 rural health motivators
- 1 or 2 relief committee members
- 1 or 2 representatives for disability groups

“It is important to ensure that you get the right pool of community members who are going to give you the right information that you need.” Coli Ndzabandzaba (FbF Coordinator)

In addition to the 5 communities, it was then decided that the KaLiba chiefdom should also be included in this list of communities. This decision was made because Red Cross has a clinic at KaLiba hence it would be proper to pilot this approach in a community that has a Red Cross Clinic, as per the prioritised early actions. The validation of the early actions at KaLiba took place on the 12th of July 2022.

Community engagement methodologies:

The community consultation meetings were facilitated by the FbF team with assistance from the Safe and Inclusion Officer as well as BRC’s FbF Programme Manager for Southern Africa. The consultation meetings began with an introduction and description of FbF, including translations of all early actions. This was done to ensure a common understanding of the early actions. This was followed by an explanation of the theory of change including its importance. The theory of change was introduced to the participants in order for them to understand what needs to be done to achieve the goals, i.e., reduce drought risk in their community.

“We explained what FbF is using a presentation. We also had flyers as well as banners to try and illustrate what FbF is. We were mostly trying to explain to them that FbF is about early actions rather than response. We were making them understand that FbF is not a long term intervention but rather a short term intervention before the disaster actually occurs.” Sebenzile Tsela (Disaster Management Officer)

There was then a discussion of each early action in which participants were asked to prioritise the proposed early actions. The discussions involved community participants being asked what they would do to ensure that they are responsible and committed if FbF be piloted in their community.

Some answers to this included spending money sparingly, ensuring they have a committee to monitor expenditure of funds or impacts and reporting feedback to BERCS via community leadership structures. The community consultations were supplemented with one-to-one interviews which allowed BERCS to get more in-depth feedback from individual community members.

The guiding questions for the discussions were as follows:

- Are there any priority groups?
- How best can they be accommodated?
- Is each impact and EA relevant to your context?
- Do you think this EA will reduce suffering from the impacts?
- If not, which of these EAs require improvement, and how can they be improved?
- Can we rank the EAs according to your potential needs to address drought impacts based on the past drought incidences?
- Are there any EAs that could be added to this list of prioritised EAs?



Figure 1: shows a section of Etjeni community members during the discussions.

“When we got to the community, we first explained what the project was. I think that was very, very important because anticipatory action is a new approach, so communities are acquainted with the old ways of doing things. It’s also important to explain what FbF is all about because some of the community members proposed interventions that do not fall within or cannot be classified as an anticipatory action... So, I would say it's very important to inform them what exactly FbF is all about. If you do this, you will definitely get good input from the community.” Coli Ndzabandzaba (FbF Coordinator)

Carrying out Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) activities to validate early actions, such as community consultations, is such an important step in the FbF process as it ensures the community has a solid understanding of the activities. As they are the ones that will be enacting the actions, this understanding is crucial to the success of the programme. It also provides communities with an opportunity to contribute to the direction of the FbF programme. Not only does this ensure that the wealth of knowledge and experience possessed by the community, who have navigated extreme weather conditions in the past and understand how their community works, is incorporated into the EAP but also ensures there is community buy-in and ownership.

“It gives communities some sort of ownership because once they understand everything, then they start owning whatever activity is going to take place in their communities instead of feeling it’s just a Red Cross programme. This ownership means community members are more likely to give the programme their full support. Once they get the information and they understand everything, they start participating fully and giving the hundred percent support that is needed from them.” Samson Dlamini (Nhlangano branch Field Officer)

CEA is also necessary to ensure that the community is able to hold the Red Cross accountable for their actions. All community members should be informed about what actions are being implemented in their communities and how it will affect them. If they have questions or concerns they should feel able to raise them and have appropriate communication channels to do so.

“What I like about CEA is that it holds you accountable to the community. We communicate with everyone in the community and make sure that we disseminate information properly from the community leaders to everyone else in the community. There's no one in the community that shouldn't know what's implemented in their community.” Sebenzile Tsela (Disaster Management Officer)

The gathering of community feedback should not be a one-off activity. Rather, communities should continually be engaged with to ensure any questions they have are answered and any concerns they have are addressed. This involves setting up a feedback mechanism.

“We need to make it a priority to keep on checking on community members during the implementation exercise, going back to them to find out if they have any questions and setting up a feedback mechanism to hear from them how their project is going, if it's going according to plan or if anything needs to be improved. We need to keep working together with the community so that they don't feel left out of the project.” Sebenzile Tsela (Disaster Management Officer)

Incorporating community feedback into the EAP:

All community feedback presented during the the community consultation sessions was documented by the facilitating officers. Each of the early actions were carefully interrogated by the community members and there were agreements across the communities on what were the most suitable and feasible actions. They felt comfortable with most of the proposed early actions however there were a few exceptions. For instance, they found one or two of the early actions inappropriate as they potentially required additional costs or effort. One of these early actions was the reallocation of the cattle to grazing land which has not yet been degraded. They thought that the relocation of cattle might be costly for them as they may have to pay to keep their cattle on that land. There was also resistance to the temporary relocation of livestock as they had concerns about being away from their livestock. This feedback was incorporated into the EAP.

“I don’t think it is good that our cattle be taken away to the ranches. Why don’t we partition the rangelands so that when the livestock are grazing from one side, the other side would be improving.” Etjeni community member



Figure 2: shows a section of Ntuthwakazi community members during a group discussion led by BERCS staff

Due to miscommunication caused by translation issues, community members raised another interesting concern. They understood that BERCS were suggesting they grow crops that can withstand drought and rightly flagged that no such crops exist. In fact, BERCS were referring to drought tolerant crops.

“We were talking about drought tolerant crops, and I think the translation was not appropriate and it was more like we are talking about crops that can withstand drought conditions. Yet we were talking about crops that can tolerate drought conditions. So, I think that was very interesting because they could pick it up. Perhaps we might want to change the wording there.”
Coli Ndzabandzaba (FbF Coordinator)

Communities also shared the indigenous methods that they have already been using to minimise the impact of drought on their livelihoods. These included using butterflies to predict if it's going to be a drought year. For example, if they see butterflies flying from the East to the West, they know that it's going to be a drought year. They are also able to tell when there will be plenty of rain by looking at the moon.

“Things like the shaping of the moon can also predict the weather. For example, if the quarter moon is slanting, they could tell that they will be having some rain. We were insisting that it would be good to have this knowledge documented and that information shared with the younger generation because you find that information with the elderly.” Samson Dlamini (Nhlangano branch Field Officer)

Next steps

Since humanitarian work demands that what we reflect on the needs of the people who are at the heart of our intervention, BERCS will continue to engage community members in the development and implementation of future EAP documents. When the EAP thresholds have been reached, communities will be included in the interpretation of the forecast and provide actionable guidance on what to do. Communities will be engaged from when the forecast is issued up until the implementation of the early actions. The interpretation of the weather forecast to communities will be combined with the traditional community weather forecast in order to ensure that community trust is earned in the meteorological forecast.

Recommendations

Based off this EAP validation process, BERCS staff have provided the following learnings and recommendations to support others to carry out EAP validation assessments with community members:

- When selecting participants for interviews and community consultations, ensure that you get a diverse range of community members so that the programme is relevant to the needs and preferences of the whole community (not just a particular group).
- It is important to explain to the community what FbF is so that they are able to give informed feedback and make relevant suggestions that are within the scope of the programme.
- All translations should be carefully checked to ensure that they are correct to reduce ambiguity.

- Prioritise checking in on community members during the implementation exercise, going back to them to find out if they have any questions.
- Keep working together with the community so that they do not feel left out of the project.
- Ensure that you manage the community's expectations about the purpose and scope of the programme and your visits. For example, if you are conducting a needs assessment, you need to be clear that you have come to assess not implement. If this is not done effectively, there will be a lot of disappointment on their side.
- Set up a feedback mechanism to hear from the community if the programme's going according to plan and if anything needs to be improved.
- It is important to provide volunteers with CEA training because they are the first point of contact in communities. Having trained volunteers makes it easier to disseminate and gather information, as well as monitor the success of the programme and facilitate feedback gathering.

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