

SLOW-ONSET CRISES

REVIEW OF SURGE PRACTICES

TRANSFORMING SURGE CAPACITY PROJECT START NETWORK



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About the CHS Alliance: The CHS Alliance is a technical partner on the Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The CHS Alliance improves the effectiveness and impact of assistance to crisis-affected and vulnerable people, by working with humanitarian and development actors on quality, accountability and people management initiatives. Formed in 2015 by the merger of HAP International and People In Aid, the Alliance brings together over two decades of experience supporting the sector in applying standards and good practices.

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of the second tracking mechanism on surge practices for slow-onset crises as part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The aim of the mechanism is to track changes to surge practices by examining instances of surge deployment by the 11 operational consortium members ("agencies") in the course of the project. Members of the project's research team, Lois Austin, Sarah Grosso and Glenn O'Neil, compiled this report, with the support of the consortium agencies. The report draws on information derived from desk research, interviews with five people from agencies and an online survey of seven agencies. For each instance tracked, the mechanism envisaged a rapid review focusing on the agencies' practices. In this regard, the report does not aim to cover the full scope of surge practices for slow-onset crises.

KEY FINDINGS

Context

Slow-onset crises, such as droughts and food insecurity, are expected to increase, owing to multiple factors including climate change and rapid urbanisation. Given the slow and inappropriate responses to recent slow-onset crises, agencies have started to develop tools and mechanisms to ensure more efficient responses to slow-onset crises. Timing, funding, political considerations and integration with existing programmes are seen as key.

Deployment and response

All of the agencies surveyed have responded to slow-onset crises in the past two and a half years. Additionally, they have all deployed surge resources (staff, financing, materials) in their responses. Surge resources were most frequently used to respond to slow-onset crises in Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.

The surge response to slow-onset crises was reported mainly as being country-led, carried out in conjunction with regular programmes and in close cooperation with existing local partners. The regional level appeared less involved, while the main role of the international headquarters was to provide support for the response, in particular with fundraising. The most common sectors involved in the responses were management/coordination, food security/livelihoods, human resources and reporting. The materials most commonly used were WASH stocks and cash programming tools.

All the agencies surveyed stressed the difficulty of financing the surge response to slow-onset crises. Most agencies relied on initial funding (for example US \$30,000 – US \$40,000) from global emergency funds or existing country-level programme or contingency budgets. There is a need for agencies to leverage this initial funding in order to secure more substantial, on-going funding for the surge response and follow-up to the slow-onset crises.

Challenges

The first challenge highlighted was funding as mentioned above. Timing was also cited as being of the essence: knowing the right time to trigger an appropriate response. Access was often contingent on the willingness of the government to declare an emergency and could hinder a timely response. The research team also identified occasional challenges in creating and maintaining crucial close collaboration between humanitarian responders and on-going development work carried out by agencies. For slow-onset crises, the team also noted difficulties in finding surge staff with the required skills and expertise, which differed from the skill set required for sudden-onset crises.

BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Best practices, lessons learned and innovations were identified in the fields of deployment, preparedness, collaboration and staff set-up. Recommendations included:

Deployment and response

- Agencies are encouraged to consider how to further develop early-warning approaches and consequent triggers to mobilise surge response to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should make better use of existing assessment tools (such as the Situation and Response Analysis Framework (SRAF)), recognising the importance of assessments, plans and concept notes for securing internal buy-in and funding.
- Agencies' headquarters should build awareness within their organisations to understand that surge resources can be used for responding to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should ensure that their policies make available initial funding for surge response to slow-onset crises.
- Donor governments should be encouraged to recognise the need for funding for surge responses to slow-onset crises.



Staff and set-up

- Agencies should ensure training in emergency response for a core group of national programming staff in countries prone to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should ensure that their key global and/or regional surge staff (such as standing teams) develop their skills in areas especially useful for slow-onset responses, such as transition, needs assessment, donor relations and partner management.

Collaboration

- Agencies should encourage an ongoing dialogue between emergency and development sectors, given the collaboration and cooperation needed in responding to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies in countries prone to slow-onset crises should be encouraged to develop further contacts with government institutions and donors to facilitate their work in an eventual slow-onset response.
- Agencies should be encouraged to participate in and support new initiatives and approaches to tackling slow-onset crises, such as the Start Network's Drought Financing Facility (DFF).

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1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the second tracking mechanism¹ of humanitarian surge response as part of the Start Network Transforming Surge Capacity Project. The focus of the report is on surge practices for slow-onset crises.

The mechanism aims to track changes to surge practices by examining instances of surge deployment by the 11 operational consortium members (“agencies”) in the course of the project.² The report draws on information derived from desk research, interviews and an online survey.

This report focuses on the surge response of these 11 agencies in slow-onset crises while making reference to other key surge actors, such as first responders, civil society, governments, the United Nations (UN) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC).

For each instance tracked, the mechanism envisaged a rapid review focusing on the agencies’ responses. In this regard, the report does not aim to cover all surge responses to slow-onset crises by the humanitarian sector or other actors.

2. Methodology

The tracking was carried out between July and October 2016, combining three data collection methods. Desk research was carried out to locate and analyse the relevant documentation on surge practices for slow-onset crises. An online survey was created and distributed to the 11 agencies at the global (headquarters) level. Seven agencies responded to the survey.³ In addition, to supplement these research tools, the project research team carried out interviews with five individuals from the agencies (see annex), in particular senior staff deployed for, or managing, slow-onset crises.

3. Context

3.1. Slow-onset crises

Slow-onset crises occur gradually over time when diverse factors converge and turn into a crisis situation. This report uses the following definition (authors’ own):

Slow-onset crisis: a definition

Slow-onset crises take a long time to produce emergency conditions and do not emerge from a single, distinct event. Types of crises can be both man-made and natural and include drought, famine, disease outbreak, economic insecurity, food insecurity, pollution and environmental degradation (for example deforestation and desertification).

¹The first tracking mechanism report was on surge response to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake: http://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Resources/Articles-and-Research/Nepal-Earthquake-2015_Review-of-Surge-Practices.pdf

²The 11 operational agencies are: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, International Medical Corps, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid, Plan International, Save the Children UK, Tearfund.

³Seven responses were received to the survey: ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, International Medical Corps, Plan International and Tearfund.

While sudden-onset crises will continue to demand rapid humanitarian interventions, an increasing number of crises, such as droughts and food insecurity, will evolve over time in response to multiple and interacting factors. The prevalence of this kind of crisis is expected to increase further due to climate change and rapid urbanisation.⁴ Small- and medium-scale disasters make up the bulk of disasters today and many are slow-onset crises that fail to make the global headlines.⁵

3.2. Humanitarian response

The nature of slow-onset crises has prompted a change in the type of humanitarian response, compared to responses for sudden-onset crises.⁶ The delayed and inappropriate responses to recent slow-onset crises, notably the 2010 – 2011 droughts in the Horn of Africa, have given pause for thought.⁷ This has led to calls to break down the divide between development and humanitarian work in order to build resilience and respond to the increasingly prevalent crises. There is a persistent challenge: how to integrate responses to slow-onset crises into regular resilience and development programmes.

Timing is delicate and of the essence in responding to slow-onset crises. Ideally, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the response to a slow-onset crisis should not mirror a surge response to a rapid-onset crisis, with its characteristic sudden influx of resources and a focus on saving lives. Rather than waiting for the situation to become an emergency, an early response can mitigate the impact of the disaster on the vulnerable community.⁸ Agencies have started to develop tools and mechanisms to ensure more timely and appropriate responses to slow-onset crises, such as through the Enhanced Response Capacity Project and the SRAF.⁹ The development of early-warning systems and forecasting has advanced but the ability to turn such alerts into early action remains underdeveloped.¹⁰

Typically, a surge response is triggered as part of an ongoing programme designed to meet a given set of needs; the situation suddenly intensifies, necessitating support for the team already on the ground.¹¹ Surge is used to: provide additional human, financial or material resources (safe water kits, shelter kits, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) kits, food, cash transfers, essential non-food items);¹² assist with coordination; and/or to conduct the initial assessment to establish the needs of the affected population.¹³ In most situations, the surge response reinforces and complements existing long-term programming work in the country. The challenge with slow-onset crises is to identify the point at which the crisis has intensified and necessitated a surge response.

⁴ Oxfam America, 2015

⁵ IFRC Global Tools Review, 2015.

⁶ OCHA, 2011.

⁷ Oxfam America, Save the Children, Planning for the Future, 2015.

⁸ OCHA, 2011.

⁹ E.g., the Enhanced Response Capacity (ERC) Project “works to improve the preparedness of agencies to respond to slow-onset crises and has developed analysis, planning and monitoring to facilitate earlier response to food crises.” (Oxfam America) This project produced a Situation and Response Analysis Framework that “enables practitioners to plan and respond early to slow-onset food crises.” The SRAF was applied by Save the Children in Yemen as part of a project on food security and resilience; by identifying vulnerabilities, the analysis contributed to the planning of longer-term development projects to enable communities to better respond to crises.

¹⁰ Oxfam, 2015.

¹¹ OCHA, 2005.

¹² E.g. Action Aid’s response to the food emergency in Nigeria. Also: CAFOD, Christian Aid, IMC responses to *El Niño*/ Ethiopia food crisis and Christian Aid’s response to drought in Honduras.

¹³ OCHA, 2005

Launching a surge response is often contingent on the political situation in the affected country and this is more prevalent in slow-onset crises. A government's declaration of an emergency may trigger a surge response. However, governments may avoid declaring a disaster for political or other reasons.¹⁴ For example, in Nigeria, two years after the start of Boko Haram-related violence created a humanitarian crisis in Borno State, the government declared a food and nutrition emergency in the region (in July 2016). This gave humanitarian organisations limited access, for the first time since the onset of the crisis, to address the urgent needs for food, water and health services among displaced people in Borno State.¹⁵ Agencies such as Action against Hunger and International Medical Corps (IMC) were able to respond to these emergency needs as part of their broader programming work.¹⁶

Those responding to slow-onset crises found raising funds for the response to be a further key challenge. Many crises are small or medium-scale and may be managed by national governments in cooperation with local or national disaster agencies. The disasters may fail to make international headlines, making it much more difficult to appeal to international donors for financial support. Additionally, the funding mechanisms of humanitarian actors are designed to mobilise and disperse funds for sudden-onset crises, meaning that they are not always suited to slow-onset crises. For example, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Emergency Appeal system has proved unsuited for financing responses for slow-onset crises.¹⁷

The Start Network's Drought Financing Facility, a new initiative, recognises these funding challenges. The DFF aims to ensure a timely and sustained humanitarian response to emerging food security and livelihood crises through a new financing mechanism. The DFF is being developed in partnership with GlobalAgRisk and with funding from the Humanitarian Innovation Fund. Plans are currently under way to pilot-test the DFF in Pakistan.¹⁸

4. Surge deployment

This section describes the 11 agencies' surge practices for slow-onset crises. All of the agencies surveyed have responded to slow-onset crises in the past two and a half years (January 2014 – June 2016). Additionally, they have all deployed surge resources (staff, financing, materials) in their responses. Surge resources were most frequently used to respond to slow-onset crises in Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. Four of the agencies that responded to the survey also used surge resources in Western, Eastern and Central Europe and Asia Pacific. In Asia Pacific, for instance, one agency used funds from its Emergency Response Fund to support its response to a slow-onset crisis in Vietnam. Another agency used surge staff to help respond to the drought caused by *El Niño* in Papua New Guinea. Surge was also used to support an agency's response to water logging in Bangladesh.

¹⁴ Oxfam America, 2015

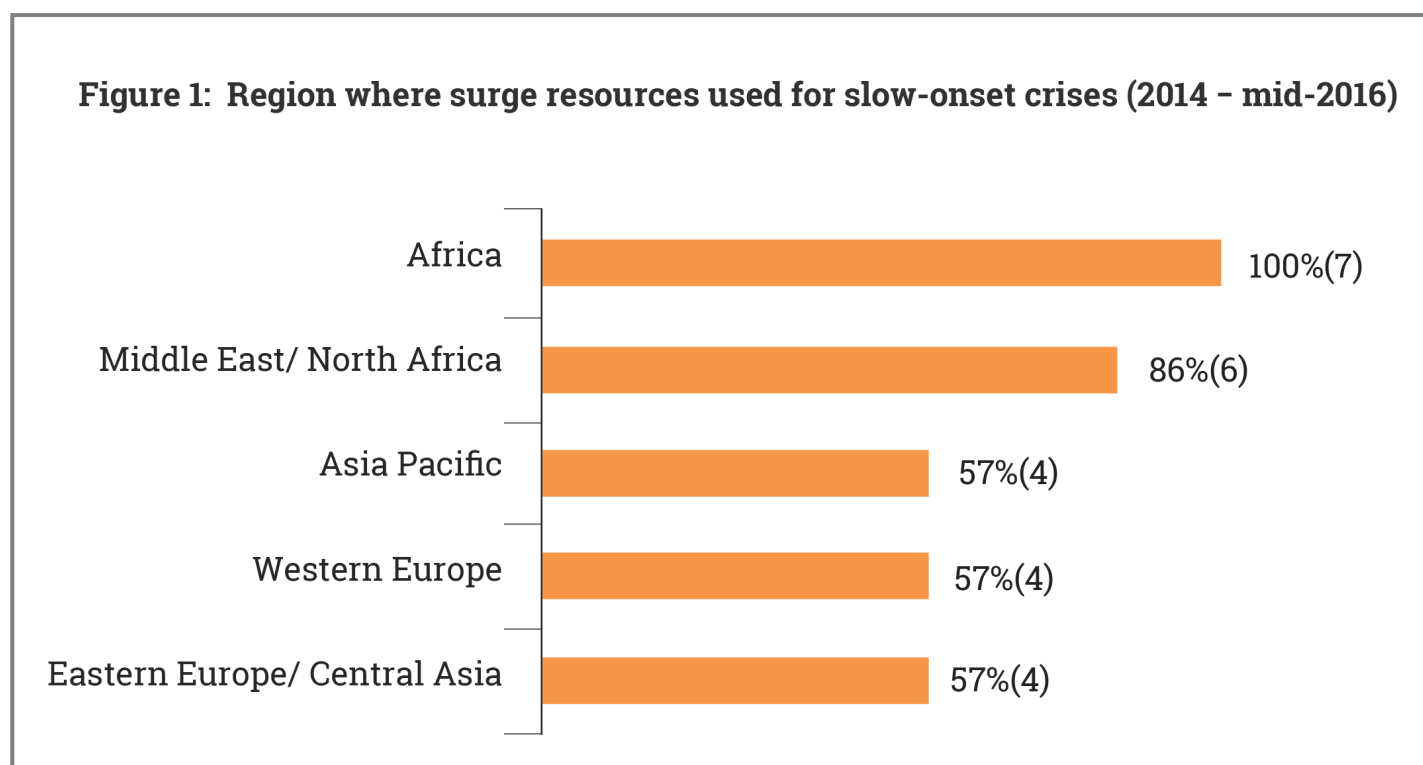
¹⁵ ACF: http://stories.actionagainsthunger.org/emergency-crisis-in-nigeria?_ga=1.241061376.2068151688.1436446759

¹⁶ <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/nigeria-response>

¹⁷ IFRC Global Tools Review, 2015

¹⁸ <https://startnetwork.org/resource/drought-insurance-early-response>

Figure 1 below shows that all seven agencies that completed the survey have responded to slow-onset crises in Africa in the last two years; six have responded to slow-onset crises in the Middle East and North Africa; and four agencies responded in other regions.



4.1. Staff and set-up

The surge response to slow-onset crises was reported mainly as being country-led, carried out in conjunction with regular programmes and in close cooperation with existing local partners.

For several agencies, responding to the escalation of a crisis involved using staff already on the ground whose roles changed to respond to the emergency. For example, in Zimbabwe, ActionAid found it unnecessary to surge in staff as it already had three staff members in the country who were trained in emergency response (for the Emergency Fast Action Support Team). In India, Christian Aid surged in one local member of staff from its New Delhi office to the area affected by the 2013 drought; an additional staff member, surged in from the region (Bangladesh), had the advantage of bringing awareness and sensitivity to the cultural context of the disaster.

This was the only example evoked in interview of a regional response to surge. In other instances, agencies have found it challenging to surge in regional staff owing to the difficulty in obtaining visas for certain nationalities. The regional level appeared less involved in surge for slow-onset crises. This confirms the pattern identified in previous research of surge practice, and agencies commented that this could change as they were working to develop the regional dimension of their humanitarian response.¹⁹ CARE brought in three people from its Rapid Response Team, as well as doubling the size of its country office during its response to El Niño in Papua New Guinea. The difficulty in obtaining visas for regional staff was a strong incentive to use staff from international (rather than regional) rosters. One agency surveyed mentioned that it could be easier to surge in staff from international rosters, given that slow-onset crises allowed more time to prepare the response compared to sudden-onset crises.

¹⁹ cf Baseline study

Examples provided by agencies indicated that the management of the surge response to slow-onset crises was mainly country-led. Surge staff (or local staff taking on an emergency role) worked closely with country-office programme staff to integrate the response into ongoing programming work and ensure its coherence.

In some instances, the management and organisation of the response benefited from international headquarter-level support. Overall, it seems that the most solid involvement at the international headquarters level was to provide support for the response, in particular via fundraising with institutional or international donors. This was the case for Christian Aid's response to the droughts in India in 2013, when the international network played a crucial role in raising funds from private donors in the United Kingdom.

Agencies also highlighted the importance of having staff with the right experience and profile. For instance, the presence of well-trained staff in ActionAid's response to the El Niño-triggered drought in Zimbabwe proved pivotal in securing funding for the continuation of the response and related programming (see highlight box below).

ActionAid's response to El Niño-related drought in Zimbabwe

ActionAid has been working to assist and support populations affected by the prevailing El Niño-related drought in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa since early 2015.

Following early warnings of the crisis, ActionAid encouraged countries to work on preparedness, concept notes and response plans and to allocate some contingency funds from national budgets. Although the agency sensed some reticence to holding money in such funds, ultimately the countries acknowledged the importance of making funds available in the event of an emergency. In turn, the concept notes produced through such funding enabled ActionAid to begin a discussion with donors. ActionAid's Zimbabwe team then conducted rapid needs assessments, combined with the training of partners, communities and the government to carry out such assessments.

Identifying spikes in the crisis was a key challenge. Drawing on lessons learned from their response to the 2010 – 2011 drought, ActionAid began to act as soon as they identified signs of stress across different communities, rather than waiting for people or animals to start dying. However, in 2010 – 2011, images of malnourished people and dying animals had helped secure funding. Consequently, an initially poor donor response had posed a challenge. As such, one of the lessons learned was the importance of using available funds strategically and being in a position to respond to donor calls for proposals.

The Disaster Preparedness Response Fund supplemented funds from the country office. It was important to use these funds strategically to scale up or leverage further funding. Zimbabwe did this by using this money to pilot cash transfer programmes, which would appeal to donors, such as the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who are active in the country. After identifying beneficiaries, Zimbabwe worked with Vodafone to transfer the money via the beneficiaries' mobile telephones, focussing on women, who are usually disproportionately affected by disasters. The cash transfers reached 21,400 beneficiaries, and were unconditional so as to allow communities to set their own priorities in terms of needs. At the same time, ActionAid supported the rehabilitation of water infrastructure by providing pipes, cement and other equipment. In addition, the agency distributed seeds and promoted vegetable gardening to help improve nutrition.

At the international and regional levels, the Head of Programmes and Emergencies and the Humanitarian Manager for Africa supported the response. International and national communications departments worked together to produce communication materials. Nationally, there was support from finance and monitoring and evaluation departments and from the Emergencies Coordinator. At the field level, the Local Rights programme manager worked with local partners, including the Disaster Management Authority and the Rural Women's Network.

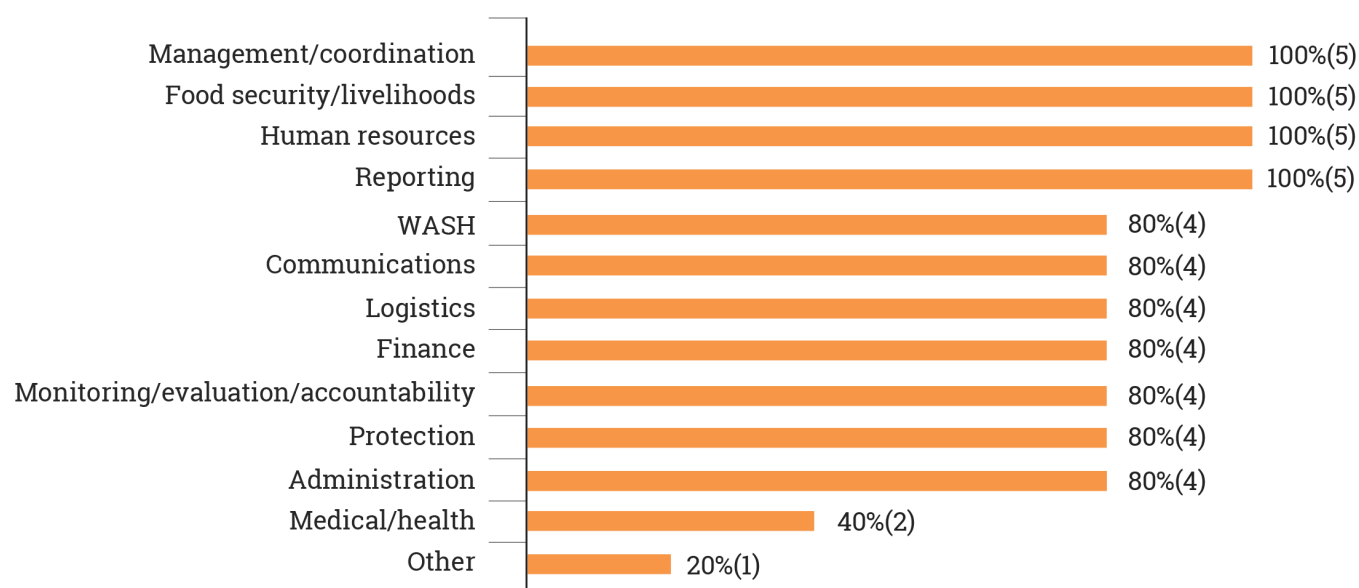
It was unnecessary to surge in additional staff, as ActionAid Zimbabwe had three members of staff who were trained in emergencies (for the Emergency Fast Action Support Team). The presence of trained staff on the ground proved to be a vital part of preparedness. In this instance, the trained staff were able to design a well-thought-out programme using very little funds, and to use the Disaster Preparedness Response Fund to successfully leverage alternative funds, including a successful proposal for US \$3.6 million from UNDP.

The crisis underlined for ActionAid the importance of early preparedness, heeding early warnings and developing plans, and of the availability of contingency funding. Regular programmes were encouraged to explore the impact of the drought and adopt an approach centred on climate resilience. The UNDP funding made it possible to start a major resilience programme.

4.2. Sectoral approaches

Surge response of the agencies has encompassed a broad range of sectors when used in relation to slow-onset crises as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Active sectors in surge response for slow onset (2014 – mid-2016)



The most common sectors involved in the responses were management/coordination, food security/livelihoods, human resources and reporting (five agencies). This follows the pattern of staff profiles that were involved in surge. According to interviewees, the most common surge staff profile for slow-onset crises was a humanitarian manager/team leader capable of carrying out the initial needs assessments and coordinating a response with existing programmes and partners, as well as drawing on this information to advocate with donors. Staff also played a supportive role to local partners carrying out development work, who risked becoming overwhelmed by managing the crisis in addition to their existing work.

The agencies selected specific sectors of intervention with the aim of complementing existing programming, and in order to respond to the needs identified through initial assessments. For ActionAid and Christian Aid, this involved WASH, which corresponded to their existing work and expertise in Zimbabwe and India respectively. The use of cash programming was also popular and included applying innovative approaches (such as partnership with a mobile phone company to carry out the money transfers via mobile phones, see highlight box above).

Christian Aid's surge response to drought in India (2013)

In 2013, two of the biggest farming states in India, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, were hit by the worst drought in four decades.²⁰ The drought impacted public health; local residents lacked drinking water and contemplated migration. Agricultural production, on which the substantial farming population depends, was devastated by the third consecutive year of inadequate rain. The state government provided some relief in the form of cash for work and used tanker trucks to distribute water.

Christian Aid's attention was drawn to the crisis both by its local partners and via other local humanitarian organisations that ensured that the crisis was reported in the media.

Christian Aid focussed its efforts in Andhra Pradesh, the state that had been worst affected. Christian Aid has a long-standing presence in this state, working with five local partners, and could connect the humanitarian response with their development programmes. The agency's existing relationships with its local partners facilitated the response. As its staff already worked in the country and region, they already had a good understanding of the local context and culture.

Christian Aid-India joined its local partners to carry out an assessment to determine how best to intervene. Funded through project work, two Christian Aid staff members were surged in to provide support. One staff member from the New Delhi office was deployed to the state capital for two months to provide support for local partners as they struggled to cope with the crisis while continuing to carry out their usual development work. A humanitarian manager from the Bangladesh office came for one month to carry out a general needs assessment and an Emergency Market Mapping Analysis to establish which sectors had been hardest hit and determine the fastest path to recovery. Two key areas of intervention were identified: water supply and transportation for agricultural produce and supplies.

Finding adequate funding for the humanitarian work was a key challenge. The crisis did not appeal to international donors since it had failed to attract attention in the global media and because, wishing to remain in control of the emergency response, the national government had refrained from declaring an emergency or seeking international funding.

While Christian Aid managed its response to the crisis locally and regionally, it received international support to find the necessary budget. The agency managed to secure funding by reaching out to private donors in the UK.

Building on its existing WASH programme work, Christian Aid provided emergency relief materials to help resolve the water and sanitation problems (hygiene kits for WASH and easy-to-use water purification kits to make it unnecessary to transport water across long distances). Christian Aid also helped train households on how to use these kits. Additionally, it linked livelihood programmes to cash for work. Linking humanitarian and development work motivated the intervention and ensured a follow-up and continuation of this work into the future.

²⁰ <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/for-ndias-drought-hit-states-on-track-monsoon-may-be-too-late-520061>

4.3. Resources

Finance

All the agencies surveyed stressed the difficulty of financing the surge response to slow-onset crises.

At the outset, most agencies have relied on global emergency funds (for example CARE and ActionAid) or funding available at the country office level either through contingency funds or through existing programme budgets (for instance Christian Aid). The first amount of funding released could be low (US \$30,000 – US \$40,000 was cited); this could provide just enough funds to surge in one humanitarian manager to begin the response. It was necessary for agencies to leverage the small amount of funding released in this way to secure more substantial, on-going funding for the surge response and for follow-up to the slow-onset crisis.

Efforts to secure funding from external sources included attempts to reallocate existing development resources (staff and budgets), something that was possible thanks to the capacity to anticipate the crisis. In all cases, however, advocacy with government and donors was found to be essential.

While they underscored the unpredictable nature of funding and the difficulty in gaining access to it, agencies often succeeded in securing funding for slow-onset crises that allowed the surge response to continue beyond the initial stage. For Christian Aid, this came from support from its international network that attracted funding from private donors in the UK. ActionAid and CARE highlighted the significant role played by experienced surge staff on the ground. These were humanitarian responders who knew, not only how to work on the ground, but also understood how to leverage the substantial financing needed to sustain the crisis response.

Assessments proved essential in opening the possibility for further financing and served as an advocacy tool. For instance, once CARE had completed its assessments in Papua New Guinea while preparing its response to the drought caused by El Niño, it was able to use this data to attract a further US \$3 million in funding from ECHO, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and UN agencies. This enabled CARE to prolong its surge response (see highlight box below).

CARE's surge response to El Niño in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea was the country worst affected by El Niño and the resulting drought in the Asia Pacific region. After closely monitoring the impact of El Niño via its programme work and country office, CARE alerted its international network about the pending crisis and prepared to respond.²¹

In Papua New Guinea, CARE's goal was to mitigate the effects of the drought through existing development projects, which also gave the agency an in-depth knowledge of the context. The response included a significant disaster-recovery and resilience component. The slow-onset nature of the crisis facilitated coordination between humanitarian and development programme work by favouring continued dialogue between the emergency and development teams.

For this response, CARE drew on its Rapid Response Team (approximately 25 people) that forms part of its global surge team. Three staff were surged in: a team-leader, a logistics manager and a WASH expert. Although strong humanitarian expertise is available in Southern Asia, regional deployments are not used often owing to the difficulties in obtaining visas for these staff. CARE-Australia, which manages CARE in Papua New Guinea, provided additional human resources (communications, temporary team leader). CARE International also provided support remotely in terms of designing and coordinating the response.

²¹ CARE responded to this crisis in six countries in the region, including Papua New Guinea.

Although pre-positioned materials were available in Dubai, they were not used for this response; a smaller number of items were provided via the country office instead. The World Food Programme, a major component of this response, supplied food.

Conscious of the impending emergency, CARE reallocated some development resources and advocated with the government and donors. CARE approached donors who supported existing development projects and asked to use funds to mitigate the effects of the drought. CARE-Papua New Guinea was able to draw on unallocated funding at the global level that is made available for country offices in the event of emergencies. This enabled it to fund the team leader position for four months; the team leader was pivotal in launching the assessment and playing a strong advocacy role to leverage more funds.

The assessments helped acquire funding from ECHO, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and UN agencies (US \$3 million). With funding in place, further staff were surged in for three months (logistics, WASH and a new team leader) to launch and plan operations and to coach country staff. The surge team leader was later transitioned to a national position. Consequently, the surge response involved both international and national staff; during the surge phase the team and portfolio size of the country office doubled compared to its regular operations.

The surge staff worked closely with the existing CARE staff in the country office. To ensure a link with the existing team and programmes, the surge team leader reported to the Deputy Country Director for Programmes. Surge staff also collaborated with the emergency management team that consisted of existing country staff who changed roles to serve as part of the emergency response.

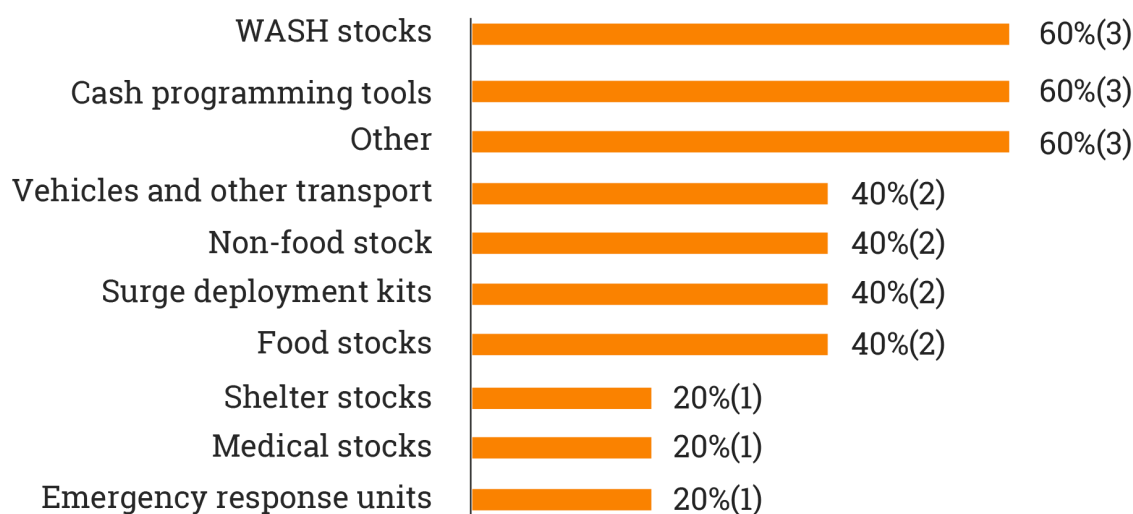
While CARE succeeded in securing funds in this instance, the unpredictability of funding severely challenged its response to slow-onset crises; CARE was compelled to secure enough funds to respond to the peak of the crisis (early 2016). Predicting the evolution of the crisis itself was a related challenge. Additionally, global surge staff normally have a lot of experience with rapid-onset, protracted crises or armed conflicts; for their part, slow-onset crises require a different skill set; it was vital to have knowledge and understanding of the context and pre-existing vulnerabilities of the communities. While adopting a 'no regrets' approach, CARE nonetheless found it necessary to provide indicators to show that it was taking a calculated risk. The team leader played a pivotal role in producing the data necessary to secure further funds and providing a link to support the integration of the emergency response into CARE's regular programme work in the country.

Materials and equipment

According to the tracking survey, the materials most commonly used in the surge response to slow-onset crises were WASH stocks (three agencies) and cash programming tools (three agencies). Agencies who responded "Other" mentioned sexual reproductive health and dignity kits, locally procured nutritional supplies and seeds. Christian Aid, who focused on providing clean water in their response to the Indian drought, distributed water purification and hygiene kits to households. They also drew on materials such as handbooks (for example CASH handbook, assessment handbook) that were given to local partners.

CARE mentioned the involvement of other institutional actors (World Food Programme) who catered for the food component of the drought response in Papua New Guinea; CARE did not bring in any of its own pre-positioned surge materials (located in Dubai) for this response, although it did use some items already in the country.

Figure 3 : Materials and equipment used by agencies in surge response for slow-onset (2014 – mid-2016)



5. Challenges

5.1. Resource management

Funding:

One of the key challenges raised by the agencies was that of mobilising funds to finance the response to the slow-onset crisis. This type of crisis was described as being less attractive to donors, particularly because it competed for attention with rapid-onset crises and armed conflicts. As one agency staff member commented:

„In 2010/2011 in the Horn of Africa, it was only when animals started dying and there were images of malnourished people that donors started paying attention“.

According to the agencies, even in cases where local representatives of a donor organisation were convinced of the need to intervene, they faced difficulty in persuading their headquarters to provide funding. The inability to attract donors was also frequently linked to the absence of media coverage, especially failure by the international press to shine a light on these crises. It often proved difficult, therefore, to replenish resources taken from an agency's emergency response fund. The unpredictable nature of funding (not knowing whether emergency funds would be replenished or not) greatly increased the risk of initiating a surge response to a slow-onset crisis. This situation makes it especially difficult for smaller agencies to surge and scale-up in response to these crises.

5.2. Policies and systems

Timing:

It was difficult for agencies to know the right time to trigger a surge response to a slow-onset crisis and to do so in a timely manner. The media again played a role in alerting agencies to the presence of a slow-onset crisis. The local community and local partners also played a key role in sounding the alarm.

5.3. General

Access:

Access was often contingent on the political context in the affected country and the willingness of the government to declare an emergency. In this regard, it was not always easy to gain access to be able to respond to slow-onset crises. National governments could prove unwilling to declare an emergency making it difficult or impossible to respond. Visa issues could also make it difficult to surge in qualified, experienced staff, a matter also identified for sudden-onset crises.²²

Perception of slow-onset:

One agency commented that responding to slow-onset crises was not yet well integrated into the “thinking” of their agency – and that the agency faced challenges in responding to sudden-onset, and to a greater extent, to slow-onset crises. This was confirmed by other agencies that had challenges in mobilising the necessary buy-in internally to mobilise for slow-onset crises.

5.4. Collaboration

Internal:

The response to slow-onset crises entailed close collaboration between humanitarian responders and on-going development work within the agencies, which at times proved challenging. The development work may be the responsibility of a different team within the same agency, or that of the agency’s local partners. As such, the surge response needed to build on these pre-existing relationships. In some cases, the surge response was initiated to ensure that the slow-onset crisis did not overwhelm the local partners, who also had to carry on with their regular work. One example was Christian Aid’s response to the drought in India. Christian Aid chose to intervene in two areas where it was already active. For its part, ActionAid assessed the effect of the drought on its existing programmes in Zimbabwe with a view to reorienting them to include climate resilience (see highlight box above).

External:

Collaboration with other actors, such as UN agencies and donors was also essential in implementing the responses and in securing the necessary funding. At times, it was challenging for agencies to anticipate these needs and maintain the necessary relationships.

5.5. Staff and set-up

Agencies mentioned difficulties in finding the appropriate surge staff with the required skills and expertise (language and context knowledge, experience of humanitarian response rather than development work). They also stressed the need for responders to have in-depth knowledge of the local context and understand the vulnerabilities of local communities. Skill-sets required included understanding the transition from emergency to development work (and vice-versa), needs assessment, donor relations and partner management, which were not always readily available among existing surge staff. Interviewees noted that surge response teams were already overstretched and tended to prioritise rapid-onset crises, thus delegating slow-onset crises to second place.

²² cf Baseline study

6. Best practices and lessons learned

The tracking mechanism was able to identify the following examples of good practice and lessons learned:

- Making use of existing partner networks to support surge response to slow-onset crises, such as facilitating access to authorities and existing information/analysis;
- Using evidence-based needs assessments to mobilise internal buy-in and securing donor funding;
- Using data from early-warning systems to try and ensure timely response to slow-onset disasters;
- Determining a point when to trigger a surge response to slow-onset crises;
- Encouraging preparedness by training national programming staff in emergency response even if it is not part of their regular duties;
- Ensuring that preparedness and contingency plans are in place at the country level;
- Making sure that funding is available by putting in place policies that permit the use of existing emergency funding for slow-onset crises, particularly at the national level;
- Ensuring that the transition between development and emergency programming is recognised as key; equally important is the collaboration between these two sectors;
- Focusing on a surge response that builds on the agencies' existing in-country expertise.
- Building awareness within agencies that surge resources can be used effectively to respond to slow-onset crises.

7. Recommendations

The following key recommendations are drawn from the findings of this report:

7.1. Deployment and response

- Agencies are encouraged to consider how to further develop early-warning approaches and consequent triggers to mobilise surge response to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should make better use of existing assessment tools (such as SRAF), recognising the importance of assessments, plans and concept notes for securing internal buy-in and funding.
- Agencies' headquarters should build awareness within their organisations to understand that surge resources can be used for responding to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should ensure that their policies make available initial funding for surge response to slow-onset crises.
- Donor governments should be encouraged to recognise the need for funding for surge responses to slow-onset crises.

7.2. Staff and set-up

- Agencies should ensure training in emergency response for a core group of national programming staff in countries prone to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies should ensure that their key global and/or regional surge staff (such as standing teams) develop their skills in areas especially useful for slow-onset responses, such as transition, needs assessment, donor relations and partner management.

7.3. Collaboration

- Agencies should encourage an ongoing dialogue between emergency and development sectors, given the collaboration and cooperation needed in responding to slow-onset crises.
- Agencies in countries prone to slow-onset crises should be encouraged to develop further contacts with government institutions and donors to facilitate their work in an eventual slow-onset response.
- Agencies should be encouraged to participate in and support new initiatives and approaches to tackling slow-onset crises, such as the Start Network's DFF.

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Examples of agency response to slow-onset crisis

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http://www.christianaid.org.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/october_2015/christian-aid-helps-fund-emergency-food-for-drought-victims-in-honduras.aspx

All linked documents accessed on 20 September 2016.

List of interviewees and survey respondents

Organisation	Survey response	Interview
ActionAid International	✓	✓
CAFOD	✓	
CARE International	✓	✓
Christian Aid	✓	✓
IMC		✓
Islamic Relief		✓
Plan International	✓	
Tearfund	✓	

Persons interviewed

Organisation	Name	Position
ActionAid	John Abuya	International Programme Manager, Africa
CARE International	Emmanuel Lan Chun Yang	Regional Emergency Coordinator, Asia Pacific
Christian Aid	Ram Kishan	Regional Emergency Manager, New Delhi
IMC	Chris Skopec	Senior Director, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Washington
Islamic Relief	Umair Hasan	Regional Humanitarian Manager, Asia