Step 2: Prioritize impacts

Once you have developed a comprehensive list of impacts, you must decide which you can and should focus on. The choice of how to prioritize will depend upon your context and needs. It is important to acknowledge that while FbF is a system that can contribute to preventing or reducing some disaster risks (that have not been reduced or managed via long-term disaster risk reduction), FbF cannot address all potential disaster impacts. . Therefore, the prioritization of likely disaster impacts is essential to developing realistic and effective Early Action Protocols.

For example, you may prioritize an impact based upon suffering caused to vulnerable populations, overall economic impact, stakeholder priorities (disaster manager priorities, NS priorities, community priorities, etc.), organizational capacity and expertise, and/or after considering the selection criteria for early actions presented in Step 4. As each of these methods yield opportunities, trade-offs, and challenges (see Practical Advice 7 & 8), a combination is likely most appropriate. The following previously explained methods can support your team's disaster impact prioritization:

- Method A: Review of historical (and current) data
- Method B: Literature review
- Method C: Semi-structured, key informant interviews
- Method D: Focus group discussions
- Method E: (Post disaster) Community visits
- Method F: Stakeholder workshops

Method G: Surveys (such as knowledge, attitudes, and practices)

Unlike qualitative interviews and focus groups, surveys can allow your team to obtain quantifiable data and reach a larger number of respondents. This can be useful when asking people to prioritize impacts and early actions to be addressed by your EAP. For example, this stakeholder survey was conducted in Mozambique to prioritize the impacts of floods and cyclones.

Practical Guidance 5: Qualitative (Interviews of Focus Groups) vs Quantitative (Surveys) Primary data

Primary data is data you collect for yourself rather than from existing sources or databases. When deciding between data collection methods or tools, it is essential to consider what kind of information is needed and why, as well as the best source for obtaining such data. For example, while it may be tempting to quantify the impacts of past disasters using a survey, asking people to recall the consequences of past events is unlikely to yield reliable quantitative information, unless it

is done immediately following an event.

Furthermore, depending on the scale of your proposed intervention, it may be extremely time and resource intensive to collect survey data from a representative sample. In such cases, qualitative data about past impacts will likely yield more detailed information regarding how and why disasters cause problems for communities. People are more likely to remember what they did and how they experienced an event than exactly how many acres of crops they lost. Government statistics (a secondary source) may then be able to provide quantitative data to support these qualitative accounts.

Depending upon the audience and sampling required, surveys can, however, be useful for ranking or for reaching a larger sample. The team in Vietnam, for example, used a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey to understand how vulnerable populations experienced heat waves. Because they were working in a limited area (certain neighborhoods in Hanoi), it was possible for them to collect a large quantity of relevant data in a short time.

Thinking about the level of detail you need (including information on causality), from whom (scale), and how reliable that information is likely to be (can people to be expected to remember what you are asking?) can help you to establish which methods are most appropriate in your context.

It is well known that disaster losses and damages datasets of governments and institutions should be improved. Advocacy and technical support to government agencies and other institutions responsible for capturing detailed disaster impact information is essential to improve the capacity to identify effective early actions, as well as to develop better triggers (see Trigger section for more details).

Practical Guidance 6: Challenges in Prioritizing Impacts – Verifying and Weighing Stakeholder Perceptions

While key informants have valuable insight into their contexts, people may also have beliefs based upon misinformation, or make assumptions about cause/effect relationships and the severity of impacts that are not supported by systematic data. A lack of data does not automatically mean these observations are wrong, but it is always best to critically examine stakeholder assumptions using secondary data when possible.

For example, many humanitarian organizations and disaster managers will prioritize reducing loss of life over all other impacts. However, it may be that overall the event in question causes very few deaths on average. Early warning messages alone may be successful in reducing mortality, and it may be difficult to predict and prevent remaining fatalities. In such cases, the decision to focus early action financing on preventing immediate loss of life may still make sense, but the decision to do so should at least be informed by critical evaluation of actual mortality rates and the likelihood

of making a difference rather than emotional or political aversions to loss of life alone. Data on who dies and how will allow for a more informed decision as to whether it is possible to effectively target this impact using early action.

In another example, stakeholders may believe that flooding leads to an increase in cases in diseases (such as cholera), leading to additional hardships such as loss of income or time out from school.

National health statistics, however, may reveal that overall case loads and mortality rates remain the same or are more closely related to other factors. It could of course be the case that these data are incomplete; however, they should be presented to stakeholders and considered along with stakeholder perceptions when determining which impacts to address and early actions to take.

If stakeholder priorities are contradicted by evidence, it may be appropriate to try to influence those priorities, but when contradictory data does not exist, is not seen as reliable or is not readily available, it may be necessary to rely more heavily on qualitative data and stakeholder perceptions.