

Supporting early warning systems in fragile and conflict-affected settings:

Lessons learned from the WISER Programme in the MENA region

Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre

1. Introduction

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Extreme weather does not stop for conflict. In fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), communities facing displacement, economic hardship, violence and political instability are among those least-served by the early warning systems (EWS) that could help protect them. In FCAS, functional EWS tied to anticipatory actions are not optional, but an urgent need to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events on highly vulnerable communities.

In FCAS, humanitarian organizations have a major role in bridging the gap between the national meteorological and hydrological services (NMHS) that produce warnings and the communities that use EWS to protect themselves. The WISER programme (Weather and Climate Information Services) of the UK Met Office was designed to address this gap, working to strengthen the generation and use of weather and climate information, including impact-based forecasting, between these actors. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), WISER has done this in a highly challenging operational environment (Box 1), in a region that had virtually no formal experience of anticipatory action programming (Peters *et al.*, 2022).

This report uses lessons from WISER MENA to identify how to best design and deliver early warning and anticipatory action programming in FCAS. These complex settings demand adaptations to standard ways of working from both donors and implementing partners. While communities of practice have long called for more flexible funding and programming approaches (ICRC *et al.*, 2022; IFRC *et al.*, 2024; UNDP & Climate Security Mechanism, 2021), practical guidance remains limited. Drawing from experiences across multiple country contexts, this report highlights what worked, what did not, and how WISER MENA can inform more fit-for-purpose EWS programming in FCAS. The analysis is based on interviews with key informants¹, a review of WISER MENA documentation and related insights on humanitarian and climate finance in FCAS.

¹ The authors conducted ten interviews in March 2026, including key informants at the UK Met Office, international organizations, local partners and NMHS who received grants under WISER. We would like to thank all interviewees for their time and the valuable insights and reflections they shared.

Box 1: WISER MENA programme

The [WISER MENA programme](#), funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and managed by the UK Met Office, seeks to improve weather and climate information services in the MENA region. The first phase of WISER MENA lasted from 2022 until early 2026, including an extensive initial scoping study of climate hazards, conflict risks and socioeconomic drivers of vulnerability in the region (Bacon *et al.*, 2022).

Projects implemented under WISER MENA include:

- **Istibak**, delivered by the British Red Cross, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), World Food Programme (WFP) and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, focused on co-producing early warnings with displaced populations and host communities, and on strengthening links between NMHS and humanitarian users. The project was intended to cover Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.
- **The Seasonal Forecasting Across MENA (SeaFoAM) and Seasonal Co-Production & Application in MENA (SeaSCAPE) projects** worked with the Egyptian Meteorological Authority (EMA) and Morocco's General Directorate of Meteorology to enhance seasonal forecasting capacity, including regional training for NMHS and tailored products for agriculture and water management stakeholders.
- **The Agricultural Development Association (PARC)** – a small-grant recipient – supported the development of impact-based alerts for grape farmers in the West Bank, helping them take preventive action against weather-related crop disease.
- **Jahez** – a wider anticipatory action and disaster risk reduction initiative by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) – included support for developing and strengthening EWS in refugee camps in Jordan and for building technical capacity within the Jordan Meteorological Department.

This report additionally draws from the experiences of the **Developing Risk Awareness through Joint Action (DARAJA) service** by Resurgence, which provides early warnings to conflict-affected communities in Sudan. While DARAJA received its funding from WISER Africa, project partners were closely involved in MENA-focused activities as well.

In addition to its clearly delineated projects with different implementation partners, the UK Met Office also provided **technical support** to various NMHS and humanitarian organizations in the region; for instance, by providing forecasts in Yemen in Syria.

Across these engagements, WISER MENA helped to lay early foundations for anticipatory action in a part of the world where such approaches are nascent. A notable achievement was convening the region's first **Anticipatory Action Dialogue Platforms**, which brought together national institutions, humanitarian actors and local organizations in 2024 and 2025.

2. Why flexibility matters: Operational realities in FCAS

2.1 Insecurity and access restrictions

Volatility and insecurity in FCAS create a challenging environment for project implementation, with the risk of rapid and unforeseen changes in the operational context. Managing this volatility necessitates flexible programme designs that allow for adjustments to project planning and implementation strategies at short notice. Box 2 summarizes the experience of WISER MENA, based on several local and regional escalations that occurred throughout the programme's runtime.

Box 2: Conflict developments throughout WISER MENA implementation

The WISER MENA programme illustrates how conflict disrupts project implementation. During WISER MENA's runtime in 2022–2026, the region saw repeated conflict escalations and political upheaval across Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, alongside broader regional tensions, all of which directly affected programme feasibility and partner engagement.

These developments most notably affected the Istibak project. Istibak initially aimed to operate in Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, but Palestine was removed immediately after the project launch in October 2023, followed by Syria in late 2024, after limited progress and subsequent political upheaval. In Yemen, engagement was confined to the south to avoid conflict-affected areas in the north, which saw further escalation throughout the project.

Although Palestine and Syria were excluded from Istibak, local actors in both contexts continued to participate in regional capacity-building activities under WISER MENA, and PARC in Palestine also received a separate small grant for community-based work. Technical support from the UK Met Office to NMHS in Syria and Yemen remained largely uninterrupted, as it was delivered remotely from the UK. Regional activities with the NMHS in Egypt and Morocco also continued, although participation from conflict-affected countries faced logistical constraints.

Access constraints are a defining feature of working in FCAS, limiting the movement of both people and goods and frequently delaying implementation. Checkpoints, curfews, travel bans and visa restrictions often disrupt travel, with one Palestinian partner reporting that a 30-minute journey could take over six hours. Importing equipment poses a related challenge – the delivery of two weather stations to the West Bank was delayed by six months due to restrictive import regimes, complicating PARC's project timeline on an already-short funding cycle.

These constraints shape who can travel and under which conditions, requiring partners to find pragmatic workarounds, such as sending staff members who would not require a visa to attend regional training. During WISER MENA, travel restrictions to the Middle East disrupted planned collaboration, including around the Istibak start-up workshop in October 2023. While regional dialogue platforms and joint training events sustained collaboration when country-level activities were disrupted, limited face-to-face engagement made relationship-building more difficult.

Taken together, these access constraints are not incidental disruptions but structural features of operating in conflict-affected settings, and adaptive project management approaches are needed to adjust implementation.

Recommendations:

- Provide a streamlined process for no-cost extensions to account for implementation disruptions in short-term funding.
- Prioritize adaptive management approaches for settings of high volatility and access constraints.
- Organize meeting locations in countries with less demanding visa regimes, given challenges with travel for partners in FCAS. Where meeting in person is not possible, adopt online alternatives.

2.2 Constraints on weather and climate data

“Coordination is really important for actors working on EWS. There is something missing between the humanitarian cluster on one hand, and the hydromet sector on the other.” – Key informant (implementation partner)

The physical infrastructure that supports weather and climate services is highly vulnerable to conflict, and damage to data collection systems often persists long after fighting ends.

Hydrometeorological stations, telecommunications networks and data storage can be degraded or destroyed through direct attacks or indirectly through insecurity that prevents repairs, reducing forecasting capacity and limiting essential climate data. Evidence from conflict-affected settings shows that conflict severely constrains the collection, protection and storage of observations needed for reliable forecasts and warnings (Jaime *et al.*, 2025).

While WISER MENA initiatives did not face data-related disruptions, strengthening hydrometeorological and data infrastructures is a central programme objective. For example, in Palestine, PARC worked with the Palestinian Meteorological Department (PMD) to site two new weather stations in ways that would bolster the country’s limited existing network.

Conflict can cut off an important revenue stream for NMHS. Many NMHS offices that have agency status¹ fund their operations partly through aviation weather services, recovering costs through levies on airlines using their airspace (World Bank, 2017). When conflict intensifies and commercial airlines suspend operations, this revenue disappears, placing NMHS under serious financial strain and undermining staff’s ability to produce and maintain climate information services. Even in peacetime, NMHS budgets and resources are often not prioritized, leaving them vulnerable to gaps when conflict reroutes government budgets to other functions deemed more urgent.

The institutional mechanisms to mobilize hydrometeorological expertise and coordination in conflict settings are underdeveloped. Conflict creates a need to coordinate existing investments into hydrometeorological infrastructure and ensure that forecasts continue to be produced in formats that are intelligible to communities under acute stress. The hydrometeorological sector is not structured to respond as reactively as the humanitarian system, which can leave a coordination gap right when early warnings are most needed. When conflict broke out in Sudan, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) appointed a special coordinator to support the hydrometeorological response, but its onboarding process took more than half a year. In the absence of formal coordination, local partners eventually organized themselves informally, drawing on existing relationships to keep forecasting capacities running and to support NMHS staff who had been displaced to Cairo and Nairobi.

Recommendations:

- Engage communities in the stewardship of hydrometeorological infrastructure, so they are aware of the purpose of weather stations and have an incentive to protect them.
- Develop coordination mechanisms for hydrometeorological response in conflict settings, drawing on the models of rapid coordination mechanisms in humanitarian operations, such as the cluster system.
- Provide direct financial or technical support to NMHS that have been financially impacted by conflict, where feasible, to retain basic forecasting capacity.

¹ Where NMHS are a subdepartment of a larger ministry, funding becomes part of the government budget rather than channelled directly to the agency.

2.3 Stakeholder capacity and collaboration

“The [national] staff of the met agencies, humanitarian organizations, community-based organizations – they are part of the disaster affected community. They are living in trauma and uncertainty too.” – Key informant (implementation partner)

The capacity of local partners to engage with EWS programmes does not exist independently of the conflict around them. Active war affects organizations directly and indirectly, undermining technical and institutional capacities and exposing staff to security and mental health risks. For example, the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent often maintain access in conflict settings where other actors cannot operate, and their core mandate is humanitarian response. When conflicts escalated, National Societies had to prioritize humanitarian response and their capacity for Istibak activities became extremely limited. Local staff also faced significant mental health and security pressures without access to the rest-and-recuperation arrangements available to international personnel, reinforcing the need for project budgets to include appropriate wellbeing and protection measures.

Local civil society organizations may retain more space to support EWS in conflict than humanitarian organizations. WISER MENA’s small grant programme demonstrates how this might work. For instance, PARC was not pulled into the humanitarian response in the same way that the Palestinian Red Crescent Society was. PARC’s work on an EWS for local farmers could, therefore, continue, even as the broader conflict context deteriorated. Similarly, Resurgence found that it was possible to continue supporting EWS even after conflict broke out in Sudan, because community-based organizations and displaced NMHS staff remained motivated to deliver early warnings ahead of the extreme weather season.

For large international organizations managing significant humanitarian operations in FCAS, comparatively small technical projects like those in WISER MENA struggle to compete for attention in FCAS. On the regional level, Istibak partners reported a shift in attention towards escalating crises, with fewer staff available to support grant management and reporting. Compared with other countries, the budget per partner and per country was comparatively low. In countries where organizations are delivering a significant humanitarian response – such as WFP in Yemen – Istibak was less prioritized by in-country leadership due to the small budget envelope. Furthermore, these technical and sectoral projects often fall to the regional office holding the contract, which creates a disincentive for national offices and country teams to lead implementation or leverage their political capital to engage government counterparts.

Staff turnover affects both local and international partners, with consequences for institutional memory and programme continuity. The mental health burdens of local staff working in conflict settings are rarely accounted for in programme design and overheads are not always passed on to local partners, making it difficult to retain technical staff on low budgets (Loquercio *et al.*, 2006). When staff leave, the capacity built through training and programme engagement leaves with them. This staff attrition is part of a broader brain drain trend in FCAS, where technical staff relocate to better-paid opportunities elsewhere. International organizations are not insulated from this either. By the time Istibak concluded, a notable proportion of those involved in the early design phase or in Istibak’s grant management were no longer in post, with working relationships and contextual knowledge lost as a result.

Recommendations:

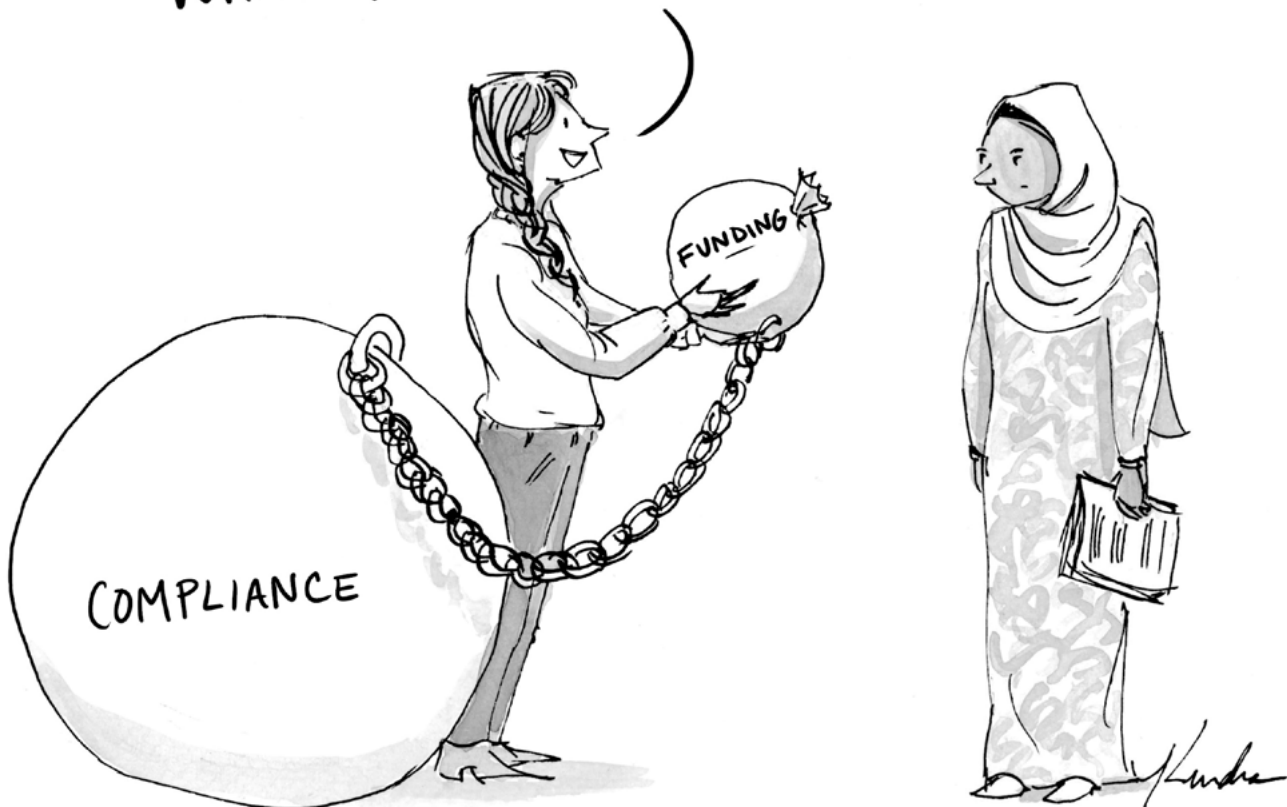
- Build contingency arrangements into project consortia, anticipating that some partners will no longer be able to engage if conflict escalates.

- Diversify the programme's partner base, including a mix of organization types and community-based partners, to increase the options for programming to pivot to other partner organizations when conflict intensifies.
- Review contractual arrangements to incentivise national office engagement for international organizations and project ownership at the level of local implementation. Where regional offices or international partners hold contracts, overstretched country teams have little motivation to prioritize implementation and engage government counterparts.

2.4 Governance and financial systems

EWS programming is often government-facing, with a strong focus on NMHS, which adds a layer of complexity in FCAS settings. National and local agencies hold the mandate to produce and disseminate warnings, yet in conflict-affected settings they are often overstretched, prioritizing immediate response over longer term system strengthening. Efforts to channel funds directly to NMHS are further constrained by fiduciary requirements, such as demonstrating strong financial controls, conducting regular audits or meeting accreditation standards, which are challenging even in stable contexts and often unattainable in FCAS.

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WHAT WE WERE HANDED.



Securing project clearances and approvals can be challenging in contexts with governance gaps, unclear procedures and many competing priorities. Government clearance in various countries involved numerous steps, causing implementation delays. In the case of Syria, implementation delays combined with the regime change in 2024 led to the permanent halt of project activities. For implementing partners, it was at times challenging to find incentives for concerned ministries to buy into the process and to secure clearances. WFP navigated this by partnering with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), which had existing government relationships and could support the efforts to embed climate services.

Donor administrative and compliance requirements can create a disproportionate burden for NMHS and other government institutions that do not typically submit proposals or maintain their own compliance documentation. This is not necessarily a reflection of institutional weakness, but of a mismatch between donor processes and the realities of working with government agencies that operate under different administrative frameworks. In the WISER MENA programme, the EMA – a WMO-accredited institution with an established regional training function – faced a lengthy proposal and contracting process that required documentation it did not hold independently, including risk management and anti-corruption policies that had to be obtained from the relevant ministries. Contract negotiations were further complicated by specific terminology in the funding agreement that would have triggered additional government review processes, requiring adjustments on both sides to find workable language. Key informants indicated that this lengthy process (December 2024 to September 2025) far exceeded the four-month grant term itself. However, they also highlighted that guidance provided by the UK Met Office, including during an in-person visit to Cairo, significantly helped in navigating this process.

Currency instability, sanctions regimes and disrupted banking systems in FCAS can make the basic task of moving money into a country very difficult. One way to navigate these constraints is to work through international institutions such as United Nations agencies or the IFRC, which have established systems for getting finance into countries, even in highly restrictive financial and banking environments. Even in contexts that fall outside a strict definition of fragility, financial transfer processes can be cumbersome. In the WISER MENA programme, funds transferred to EMA passed through multiple currency exchanges – from Great British pounds (GBP) to United States dollars (USD) to Egyptian pounds (EGP) – each subject to fluctuating exchange rates, making it more cumbersome to meet financial monitoring and reporting requirements.

In Yemen and Palestine, project funds could not be channelled to public authorities due to fiduciary limitations on who can receive finance. In these cases, WISER partners worked with trusted local organizations. For instance, in Yemen, WISER was unable to directly transfer to the Yemen Meteorological Service under the Civil Aviation and Meteorology Authority to help it improve its weather and climate services. To overcome the challenge, WFP worked through a long-standing local partner, Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief, which was able to procure a weather station and hand it over to the Yemen Meteorological Service. Similarly, in Palestine, PARC – as a civil society organization – could receive finance directly; while PMD benefited indirectly through the participation of its staff in regional training.

Recommendations:

- Provide dedicated administrative support to partners navigating complex compliance processes and consider how flexible contracting and due diligence processes can be.
- Account for the risk of governance-related delays, particularly if government permits are required, by including buffers in programme timelines and identifying clear decision points on when to scale back activities.
- Ensure implementing partners have pre-existing channels for coordination with relevant ministries and government counterparts, and that project activities are discussed with key ministries in the proposal and project refinement stages.
- Work with international institutions as intermediaries in restrictive banking environments. Where sanctions, meeting accreditation standards and currency instability make direct financial transfers impossible, partnering through UN agencies can reduce friction.

3. Flexibility in project development

3.1 Project design and proposal development

“There is a different team that designs a project [than the team that implements]. Often, the proposal is more written for donors than for the country institutions. There needs to be a lot of refinement to make sure its relevant and contextualized to the situation here.” – Key informant (international organization)

Large-scale projects in FCAS require careful project development and coordination among the envisioned consortium members, especially if they cover several conflict-affected countries.

Within WISER MENA, this primarily related to the Istibak project, based on a 1.4 million GBP grant that was planned to cover four countries (Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Yemen). In WISER MENA, these challenges were pronounced in the Istibak proposal, which was developed under significant time pressure for a four-country programme. The consortium included large international organizations with extensive administrative systems, which slowed coordination and made it difficult to incorporate input from country teams. Budget structures and organizational overheads further constrained genuine codesign. While these issues are not unique to FCAS, the added volatility of conflict settings underscores the need for longer proposal windows and early engagement with national counterparts.

Local organizations’ trusted relationships and deep community networks positioned them to advance EWS work even when conflict disrupted international operations, underscoring the importance of integrating them into project design from the outset.

Given their contextual knowledge and access, in-country partners played an important role in the Istibak project, particularly in facilitating communication with government agencies, including NMHS, and in supporting local implementation. However, key informants noted that these partners were not involved in the project design and proposal development phase due to the short turnaround time and the standard internal coordination processes required for large international organizations to consult with country teams and established partners. One informant also highlighted that the proposal window coincided with Ramadan, which naturally slowed operations in the region. As a result, in-country partners were not fully briefed on the project and did not develop a strong sense of ownership over Istibak.

Integrating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) considerations from the outset proved essential for shaping inclusive project design.

This prompts partners to assess which groups might be included or excluded and to use structured tools such as minimum standards and step-based inclusion frameworks to guide this analysis. However, partners’ varying levels of GESI capacity meant that the depth and quality of framing differed significantly, and assumptions about their ability to conduct context analyses or engage marginalized groups were sometimes overly optimistic. Targeted support strengthened context-specific analysis and enabled partners to operationalize inclusion approaches more effectively. Because access constraints, cultural norms and institutional capacities in FCAS limit what is feasible, achieving GESI outcomes required flexible, adaptive approaches rather than fixed targets, with programmes benefitting from progressive goals and locally appropriate pathways which recognize that meaningful inclusion often needs to be built incrementally over time.

Recommendations:

- Calibrate time windows for proposal development and submission to the grant size, expected consortium size and operational context. For programmes with a regional focus, take note of significant cultural holidays.
- Co-design project proposals with local partners wherever possible. Bringing local partners into the design phase increases the local relevance of project objectives, builds ownership among local partners and can shorten project refinement periods later on.

- Support local partners that take on security risk in FCAS by providing budgets that include finance for necessary security protocols, contingency budget lines in case of crisis, and mental health support to protect staff against burn out.
- Retain spaces for local partners even if engagement in the specific country is currently not possible, e.g., by involving them in regional capacity building.

3.2 Risk assessment and conflict sensitivity

“When we talk about how to work in fragile, conflict-affected and violent settings, it’s not just about designing a project that accommodates conflict dynamics at the local level. It’s about how would you reimagine the entire consortium structure and project goals when a whole programme is so badly impacted by war breaking out.” – Key informant (international organization)

A comprehensive risk assessment during project design is a vital foundation of any programming in FCAS. This assessment needs to identify conflict-related and other risks, and their potential impacts on project partners, activities and target populations. Crucially, risk assessment cannot be a one-off exercise at this point in the project lifecycle, continuous risk monitoring is required to inform operational risk management and potential adjustments to project activities (IFRC *et al.*, 2024).

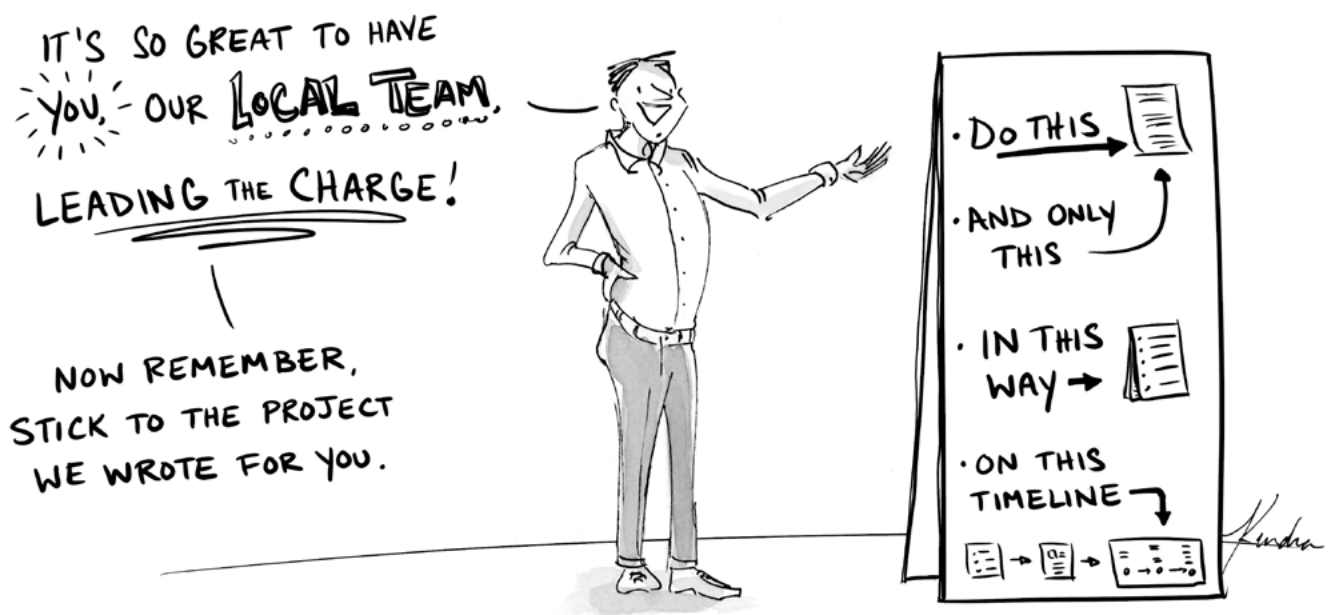
Within WISER MENA, key informants shared concerns about the business-as-usual risk assessments included in the project proposal, which did not prompt a more strategic rethink of how the consortium would work if conflict escalated significantly. The Istibak proposal included a mandatory section on risk management that mentioned potential concerns related to political contexts, security and access, but offered few reflections on the actual implications of conflict escalation (despite classifying it as a medium-to-high likelihood). As a result, project partners were caught off-guard when the war in Gaza broke out, a mere week after the official start of the project in October 2023. Building on these experiences, one key informant at an international organization indicated that their risk assessment and management processes have since been strengthened to more explicitly consider potential impacts on local partners, in-country teams, project implementation and grant management.

Regional and local knowledge is essential to understanding the risk landscape and the limitations or opportunities for programming. One key informant highlighted the important role played by the programme’s regional coordinator, who is from and based in Lebanon and brought a grounded understanding of the day-to-day impacts of conflict escalation to the programme. These insights enabled a more informed assessment of whether certain conflict shocks or escalating situations required adjustments to project activities.

At the project level, conflict sensitivity requires going beyond broad risk assessments to analyse local conflict dynamics in detail, ensuring that tools, approaches and partners avoid causing harm. Under the Jahez project in Jordan, local partners facilitated a thorough context review of historical, current and likely conflicts within and between refugee–host communities at all implementation sites. This review fed into an appraisal of Jahez tools and approaches, to provide recommendations for embedding conflict sensitivity across the initiative. At programme level, more analysis will be needed to understand the interactions between WISER MENA and the broader conflict environment of the MENA region.

Recommendations:

- Require a comprehensive (conflict) risk assessment for large-scale projects in FCAS, taking into account the possible implications on project activities and the capacity of implementation partners.
- Include local partners in risk assessment processes, drawing from their local insights and expert knowledge of the local context.
- Use locally led conflict analysis to appraise and revise project tools and approaches, embedding conflict sensitivity across the programme.
- Build in periodic review and revision of risk assessment and management approaches within projects, and link this to project implementation plans.



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3.3 Access to funding for local actors

"We try to give a lot of autonomy [to local partners] but maintain robust quality assurance and oversight systems. We co-design concept notes and activities and have minimum standards for technical areas. As long as local partners meet minimum standards, they can innovate and go outside of that."

- Key informant (international organization)

Many local actors in FCAS are locked out of international climate finance not by lack of capacity to deliver, but by the administrative demands of accessing it. Extensive accreditation requirements, proposal submissions and contracting procedures linked to many international climate finance instruments are barriers for local actors in FCAS. The significant pre-award time investment needed to access such funds puts them out of reach for many government and non-government actors with limited institutional capacity and budgets (Mercy Corps, 2025). A recent workshop on EWS in FCAS under the EW4All initiative in Nairobi additionally highlighted the struggle to develop 'bankable' EWS proposals for international donors as one of the primary barriers limiting funding for EWS in FCAS (UNDRR *et al.*, 2025).

WISER MENA's small grants initiative was designed to reduce such barriers and enable the participation of local actors in FCAS. Grantees were selected through a two-step process, in which the initial submission was a short verbal pitch rather than a written proposal. Selected ideas then received support from the UK Met Office to develop a full proposal and navigate any required due diligence processes. This simplified process, alongside the moderate size of the small grants (up to 50,000 GBP), provided a relatively low-stakes opportunity to get to know local organizations as project partners and test the waters in politically complex settings. Based on the success of their initial projects, some small grant recipients will receive larger grants for more substantial projects in the next phase of WISER MENA.

While the small grants approach lowered the initial barrier to access funding, significant administrative work was still required by grant recipients prior to the official project start-up, albeit with support from the UK Met Office. EMA's previously mentioned experience (Section 2.4) of spending more time on proposal development, due diligence, contracting and ministry approval processes than on the actual small grant project implementation illustrates this point.

Recommendations:

- Scale WISER's small grants approach, offering low-threshold initial submissions of interest for grant opportunities and providing support to shortlisted local organizations to submit full proposals and navigate due diligence requirements.
- Review due diligence and contracting requirements to minimize the pre-award administrative burden to local organizations.
- Provide minimum technical standards for local partners but allow them autonomy to co-design and implement in ways best adapted to their context.

3.4 Project inception phase

"We work in a challenging institutional context, and enabling time to co-design allows a better understanding of how different agencies, ministries and institutions work together."

– Key informant (international organization)

The cascade model of public climate finance, in which international partners lead project design while local organizations take on implementation, presents inherent challenges from the outset. International partners typically have more experience navigating donor requirements and securing funding pipelines, whereas local organizations contribute essential contextual knowledge about operational feasibility and institutional realities. This division of labour can result in proposal concepts that do not fully align with on-the-ground conditions, creating implementation risks once activities begin. This dynamic emerged consistently in discussions around WISER MENA and in broader work on early warning and early action. The inclusion of local institutions with established networks, such as EMA's regional training centre and PARC's community relationships, played an important role in facilitating participation and aligning project activities with ongoing local initiatives.

Allowing for a structured inception period can help close this gap. Early in implementation, partners can jointly review how meteorological information is generated, disseminated and used; assess operational constraints; and update context analyses with input from local implementers. This also provides space to secure buy-in, clarify roles and strengthen ownership among local partners who were not fully engaged during proposal development. Experience from the Jahez project illustrates the value of this process.

Incoming team members received dedicated orientation; updated the context review and technical approach; and mapped stakeholders to ensure alignment with other EWS initiatives. Where geographic overlap existed, partners coordinated with local authorities to align efforts and maximize impact.

Structured approaches to inclusion, such as GESI frameworks, can further strengthen project refinement processes by supporting more systematic context analysis. In WISER MENA, these approaches helped partners identify local power dynamics, participation barriers and the specific needs of marginalized groups, particularly in locally led anticipatory action projects. This type of analysis complements technical assessments by ensuring that project approaches are not only operationally feasible, but also socially inclusive and contextually grounded.

Recommendations:

- Plan for a formal project refinement period at the start of the implementation period, to assess operational feasibility and update context analysis with local implementation partners.
- Prioritize opportunities for face-to-face meetings to build relationships across programme partners and set up informal communication networks from the outset.
- Undertake a stakeholder and landscape mapping exercise early in implementation to identify overlaps, avoid duplication and create opportunities for coordination. This is particularly important in EWS programming, where multiple initiatives often operate in the same geographic space.

4. Flexibility in programme management and implementation

4.1 Adaptive programme management

“Embedding conflict sensitivity is good adaptive management. It should not be isolated from having good learning and monitoring systems, being flexible and having points of reflection to review and refine strategies.” – Key informant (international organization)

Adaptive programme management is essential in FCAS, where rapidly shifting conflict dynamics require programmes to pivot quickly and remain flexible in their use of resources.

Across WISER MENA, partners frequently adapted activities as local conditions changed, supported by scenario planning and a donor that was open to revisions provided projects stayed aligned with overall outcomes. Table 1 summarizes enablers and barriers to adaptive management in more detail.

Adaptive programme management based on scenario planning and up-to-date conflict analyses is essential in FCAS, allowing pivots between programming types as the feasibility of various activities shifts. Across WISER MENA, the diversity of initiatives translated into varying levels of exposure to operational risks linked to fragility and conflict dynamics (see Box 2). Adaptive management requires using project goals as a compass while enabling flexibility in how the budget is used and the types of activities that might help the project reach those objectives (IFRC *et al.*, 2024; Valters, 2015). Key informants highlighted the value of scenario planning so that, if one activity became unfeasible, resources could quickly shift to another. They also noted that adaptive management was only possible because donors, including FCDO, were broadly supportive of revisions as long as the programme remained aligned with its intended outcomes. Simplicity in project planning, including in logframes and theories of change, helps retain space for adjustments and ensure that the focus remains on project implementation rather than administration.

Hard limits to adaptive management emerge when implementation changes require cumbersome contract adjustments. These administrative processes were slower than the pace of events on the ground. For example, although it became clear early on that Palestine could not be included in Istibak after October 2023, the redesign and budget reallocation took several months; adjustments following Syria’s withdrawal in 2024 moved faster but still required multiple approval steps. Informants suggested that a formal mid-term review would have been useful to reflect on changes in programming following the various escalations in the region and create a structured space for decisions on how to reallocate funds and responsibilities among partners.

While local actors are generally more agile in FCAS, donors and international implementation partners need to ensure that, through adapting approaches, risks are not transferred to local partners. As conflict escalated, local partners were often the first to resume activities, highlighting the need to avoid unintentionally shifting operational or security risks onto them and to provide resources that support safe and sustainable engagement.

Table 1: Enablers and barriers to adaptive management, based on Dempster & Herbert (2023).

	Enablers to adaptive management	Barriers to adaptive management
People and teams	Dynamic and collaborative teams, leadership support, personal interest in continuous improvement	Frontline staff uncomfortable with telling leadership something is not working
Organizational culture	Strong communication and responsive decision-making and action between implementers and funders, streamlining approval processes for requests to change activities or budgets	Top-down management styles, not having the relationships necessary to ask permission for change
Learning	Data collection is oriented towards learning and reflective analysis. Conflict analysis is considered a dynamic process that informs decision-making	Logframes designed without an expectation that they would change, data collection does not support decision-making, few opportunities for teams to reflect collectively on what is not working
Resources	Agile operations that enable rapid changes in interventions and budgets, providing for contingency budget	Small budgets that need to be spent in arbitrary or short timeframes, no inception period, no contingency budget
Partnerships	Trusting and flexible partnerships, open communication	Communication limited to formal reporting requirements, internal processes that are overly administrative

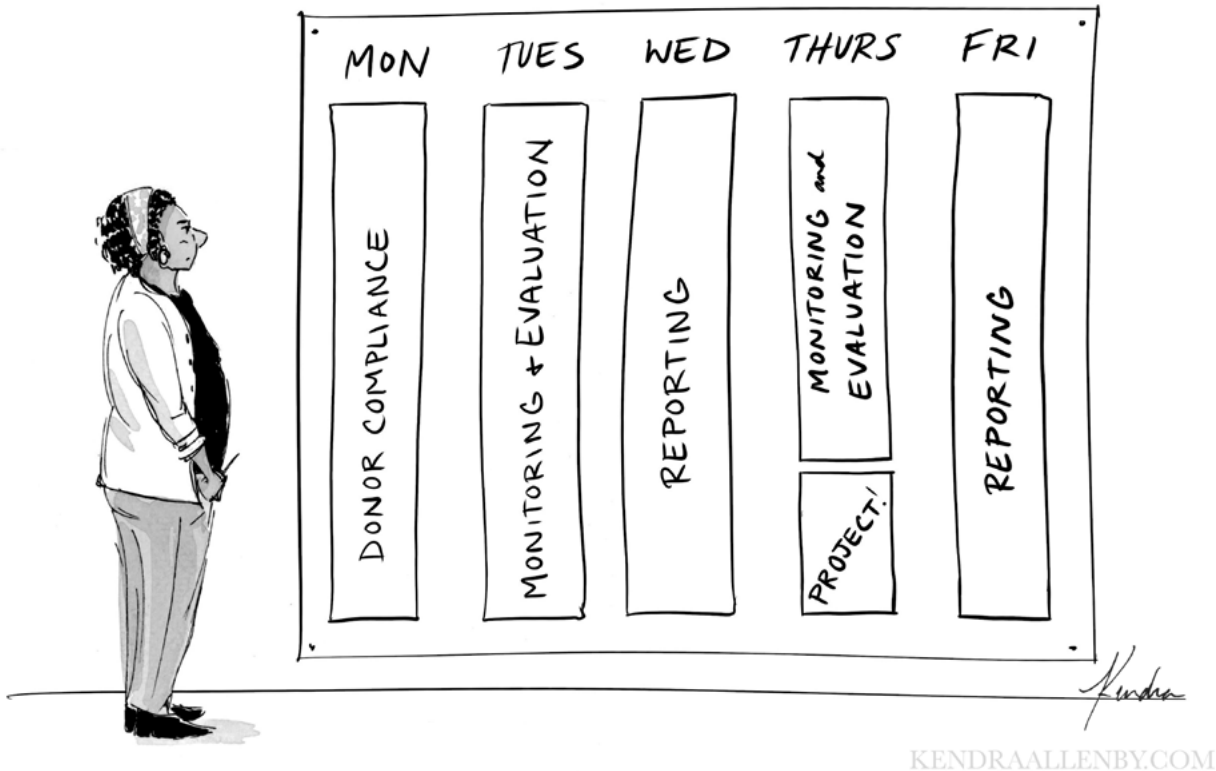
Effective adaptation also depended on timely insights from local partners. In the PARC small-grant project, for instance, the siting of two weather stations was revised multiple times with local authorities and communities to ensure safety and fill gaps in the station network. This iterative approach kept the project on track but exceeded the available budget for site preparation, requiring local municipalities to cover additional costs due to limited contingency funds. This resolved the immediate issue but placed an unplanned financial burden on local stakeholders.

Implementation experience further showed that short communication lines between in-country teams were essential for adaptive management, as indirect or hierarchical information flows created delays that limited the programme's ability to adjust quickly to evolving conflict dynamics. Informal channels such as WhatsApp groups proved more effective than formal reporting lines, enabling rapid troubleshooting and quicker adaptation to shifting operational environments.

Recommendations:

- Simplify requirements for the theories of change, logframes and similar planning frameworks, and allow grant recipients to use their expert judgement on the implementation of specific activities considering the local circumstances.
- Concentrate on fewer activities rather than overpromising, recognizing that evolving circumstances will require adaptations and potentially constrain delivery.
- Allow for time to conduct a mid-term review of project planning and budget allocations with all project partners, where substantial project adjustments are needed.
- Include contingency funds in project budgets for local partners, to ensure additional expenses related to necessary project adjustments do not need to be covered by local actors in FCAS.
- Decentralize decision-making to local partners and foster trust-based relationships with them, so they are empowered to use their knowledge and networks in the most effective ways.

4.2 Grant management and reporting



Grant management in FCAS requires balancing accountability with flexibility, as rigid reporting systems can undermine implementation in volatile environments. The need to maintain accountability to donors and manage financial risk, particularly the risk of underspending when conflict disrupts activities, must be balanced against the need for flexibility and proportionality in reporting requirements. Several key informants in WISER MENA emphasized that this balance is difficult to strike and that the management approach and experience of individual staff assigned to a project can significantly impact the efficiency of administrative processes in practice. Furthermore, several consortium arrangements required complex legal and administrative workarounds, linked to administrative issues highlighted in Sections 2 and 3, demonstrating how organizational systems can slow down grant management even when all actors are supportive.

Honest communication and trust between project partners are central to managing this balance well. Partners needed to feel able to raise the risks of delayed spending without fear of losing funds, yet some noted that highlighting underspending could be perceived negatively, creating a disincentive for transparent communication at precisely the moment when it is needed most. Direct communication with the UK Met Office helped mitigate this concern and enabled quicker, more adaptive decision-making.

In large multi-partner consortia, financial reporting processes should be agreed between partners at the outset, based on each partner's capacity to deliver. For donors, financing multi-partner consortia in FCAS may require adjusting to less frequent reporting cycles. Monthly financial reporting for Istibak proved misaligned with the systems of large international organizations, which were not equipped to produce detailed updates for what was, in relative terms, a small grant. Over time, this mismatch created frustration on both the donor and implementer sides and contributed to a perception that reporting processes were not fully reflective of operational realities. The denial of a no-cost extension for the programme also led to a perception of a disconnect between the reporting process, which had highlighted challenges and required project adjustments, and decision-making on the extension request.

Local organizations who had received small-scale grants appreciated the direct communication and support provided by the UK Met Office on reporting, while also highlighting the substantial administrative burden placed on them. Reporting requirements differed between small-grant projects, with some requiring bi-monthly narrative reports alongside a more substantial full report at the end of the project, while shorter projects submitted a final report only. One small-grant recipient recounted that the administrative effort felt disproportionate considering the short duration of the actual project and required significant local staff capacity, while another cautioned that the reporting burden imposed on local partners could severely limit the number of local actors actually able to engage in WISER MENA. A local implementation partner who had received funding from WISER as well as from other donors for various projects reflected that, compared to other government donors, reporting requirements set by the UK Met Office were quite high. However, the WISER programme also offered more budget flexibility than other donors, indicating the need to strike a balance between the two.

Several practical lessons emerged from WISER MENA on how reporting requirements can be made more proportionate. Simplifying reporting formats, allowing partners to use their own frameworks rather than imposing a single template, and exploring alternatives to written reports, such as allowing narrative updates to be submitted as voice notes, were all identified as potentially valuable adjustments. The UK Met Office expressed a preference for allowing international intermediaries to pass on this kind of flexibility to local partners, though this was not consistently taken up in practice. More broadly, the WISER MENA experience shows that reporting systems designed for accountability purposes can, if poorly calibrated, actively undermine the trust and communication that make grant management work in complex and volatile settings.

Recommendations:

- Share minimum reporting requirements with delivery partners at the outset of a project, and co-design the reporting processes that will be used to meet these requirements, based on the context in which they operate and the size of their organization.
- Calibrate reporting frequency to the grant size and operational context. In complex humanitarian settings, partners are often used to quarterly reporting and, in some cases, monthly financial reporting is too burdensome.
- Simplify reporting and other administrative tasks for small grants, acknowledging that even if programme-level support is available, local organizations may not have the required administrative capacity available.
- Ensure that fund, programme and project managers are familiar with the challenges of implementing projects in FCAS, ideally based on prior experience in navigating grant management and reporting for projects in such complex operational environments.

5. Conclusion

“Our experience has been that it is possible to strengthen EWS in conflict. It requires ingenuity and determination, but it is possible to make an impact and measure the results.”

– Key informant (local implementation partner)

Flexibility in funding, programme management and implementation are vital to enabling effective EWS programmes in FCAS and strengthening the capacity and resilience of NMHS.

Experiences from the WISER MENA programme highlighted various success stories, challenges and spaces for innovative approaches, centred on the importance of local partners. As conflict escalations and other changes in the operational environment affect the feasibility of various project components, adaptive management approaches are necessary to reprioritize activities and find new ways to achieve programme objectives. Where in-country implementation was not feasible due to conflict escalation, regional activities provided a practical way to maintain engagement and preserve technical capacities among national partners. Small-grant projects led by NMHS and local civil society emerged as the most impactful modality in WISER MENA, achieving significant impact for local communities with very limited resources.

Expectations around the impact of EWS programming need to be based on local realities, including technical and institutional capacities of key stakeholders. Most countries in the MENA region are still in the early stages of developing strong anticipatory action programmes and constrained by the impacts of fragility and conflict on domestic hydrometeorological infrastructure, weather and climate data availability, and local staff members. In this context, the technical implementation and institutionalization of EWS and anticipatory action is hampered. As a result, WISER MENA's successes focus primarily on capacity-building among NMHS and other local stakeholders, and the localized impacts of small-grant projects.

The practical experiences and recommendations offered in this brief encourage reflections on established grant management processes and room for innovation to make programme design more flexible and thereby more fit for purpose in FCAS like the MENA region. By incorporating these recommendations into their grants and programmes, donors like FCDO and fund managers like the UK Met Office will be able to more effectively contribute to strengthening forecasting capacities and EWS in settings affected by fragility and conflict.

Box 3: Exploring further lessons from WISER MENA and other EWS programmes in FCAS

This report was developed based on a rapid engagement with WISER MENA project partners. In addition to the experiences and recommendations shared in this report, other questions emerged throughout the analysis that could inform future work on EWS and anticipatory action in the MENA region and other FCAS. Suggestions for future lines of inquiry include:

Approaches to monitoring and learning: Which monitoring approaches and methodologies are most appropriate in settings where physical access is constrained? Which tools (e.g., remote surveys, community-based monitoring) could be feasible for post-activity reflection across diverse contexts and timeframes?

Integrating conflict sensitivity: How can conflict-sensitive approaches be more systematically incorporated into activity design, participant selection and facilitation processes? What considerations should guide communication and dissemination of early warnings to ensure that they are context-appropriate and do not inadvertently exacerbate tensions?

Partner expertise and composition: How can partners with various types of expertise, including technical, social and conflict analysis, strengthen project consortia, particularly on the integration of climate–conflict perspectives into EWS design? Could EWS programming benefit from further engaging ‘non-traditional’ or community-focused organizations alongside hydrometeorological actors to broaden perspectives and capacities?

Operational contributions during escalations: In what ways could future programming strengthen its ability to provide relevant services, products or support during periods of heightened conflict or volatility? Which mechanisms could help ensure continuity or adaptability of EWS-related outputs in rapidly changing operational environments?

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