Developing Behaviourally Smart Anticipatory Actions

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Jameel Observatory stocktaking webinar on overcoming and mitigating risks and their impacts on pastoralist livelihoods in the Horn of Africa, 27 January 2026



Preparing for shocks

From Warning to action



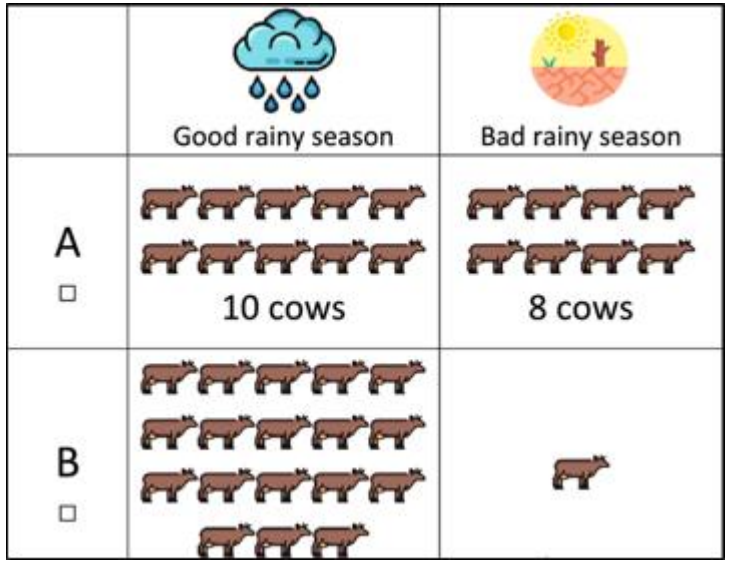
The Challenge

- People don’t prepare for drought because:
  - They don’t have information (early warning) drought is coming
  - They don’t have the resources to prepare
- Evidence suggesting other drivers of non-preparedness even in high-income contexts (Tan et al., 2024; Volkengoed and Steg 2019; Paton , 2019)
- Cognitive factors :
  - underestimating risk, being overly optimistic, social norms etc.
- Behavioural factors :
  - risk aversion, intertemporal choice and time preferences, loss aversion, ambiguity aversion etc.



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Testing risk aversion/tolerance



Low return low risk

High return high risk

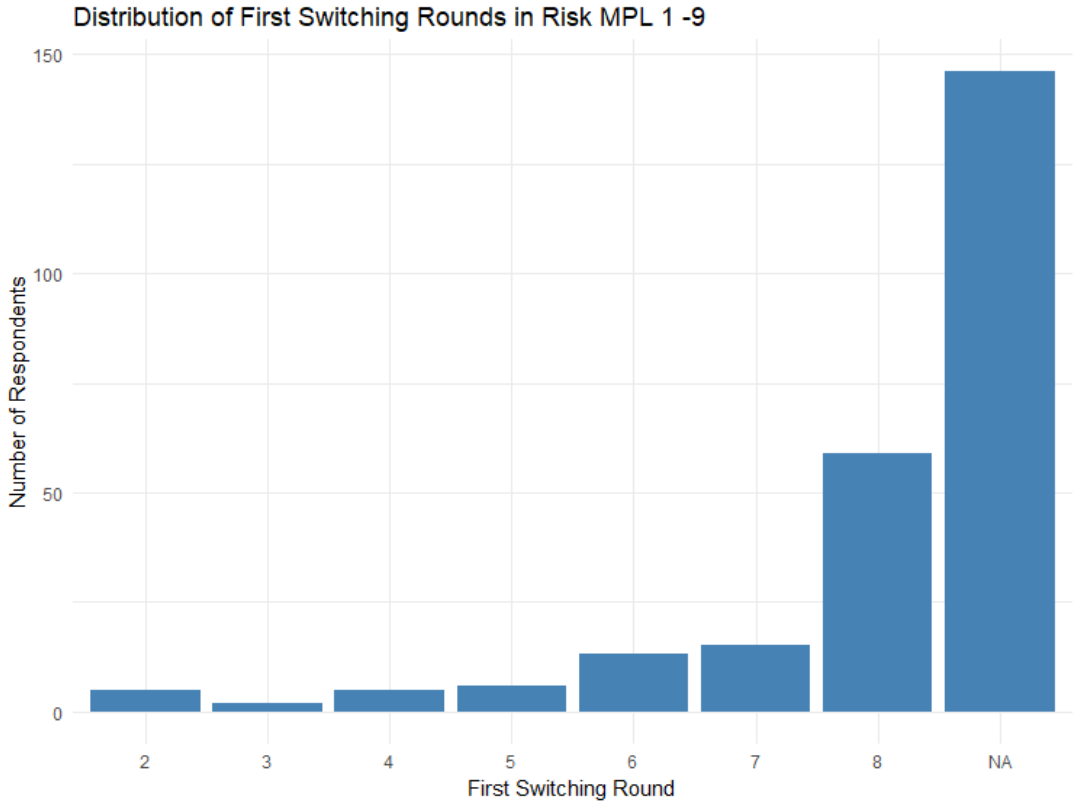
- Drought probability is low
- If decision-maker only cares about the return (are risk neutral) should always choose Option B

	Option A		Option B	
	Good rains	Drought	Good rains	Drought
R1	10	8	12	1
R2	10	8	12	2
R3	10	8	12	3
R4	10	8	12	4
R5	10	8	12	5
R6	10	8	12	6
R7	10	8	12	7
R8	10	8	12	8

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Results: most people extremely risk averse

	Option A		Option B	
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R2	10	8	12	2
R3	10	8	12	3
R4	10	8	12	4
R5	10	8	12	5
R6	10	8	12	6
R7	10	8	12	7
R8	10	8	12	8



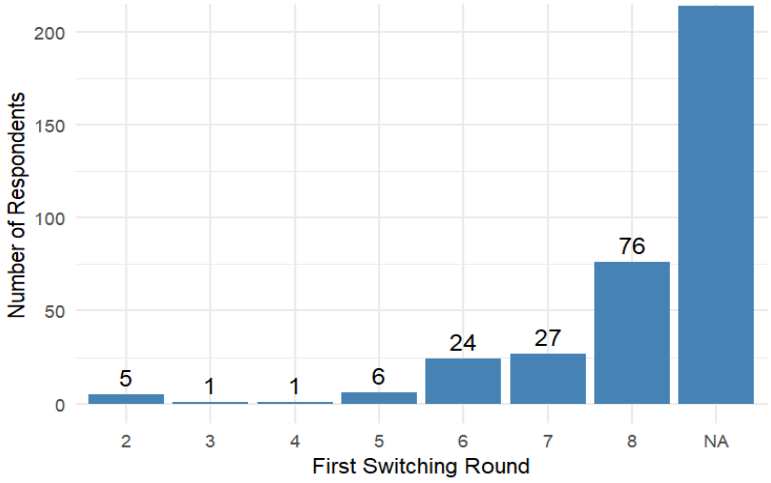
Discussion question: What is the role of EW on behaviour when people are already always expecting drought?

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More money now or more money later

	Option A in USD		Option B	
Rounds	In 1 month USD	In 3 months USD	In 1 month USD	In 3 months USD
1	100	90	120	0
2	100	90	120	10
3	100	90	120	20
4	100	90	120	30
5	100	90	120	40
6	100	90	120	50
7	100	90	120	60
8	100	9	120	70

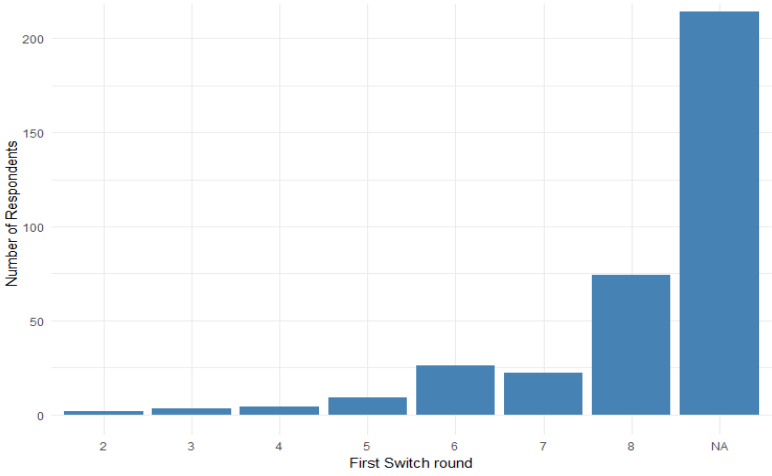
Very low likelihood of drought



"Knowing or not knowing the coming of drought is the same as the chance of getting more in future is quite consoling"

"Option A there is stability and security"

Certain drought predicted in 3 months



"I would not know how much the drought will affect my family so I would rather get something before and during the drought"

Implications for AA practitioners

- For AA practitioners
  - Invest more in understanding individual preferences & decision-making under risk
  - Go beyond information and cash: Reduce barriers to preparedness and create additional incentives – leveraging behavioural insights in AA design e.g. bundling
  - Multiple tranches of distributions in cash AA likely preferred to one-off
  - Work with those providing continuous support (stability/predictability)
- Policy makers
  - Meeting basic needs e.g. through social protection: likely that preferences on money experiment was driven by worries about meeting basic needs too
- Researchers
  - Are there different was to design EW for people facing repeated shocks?
  - Investigate role of other behavioural factors interacting with preparedness decisions in drought AA

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The Jameel Observatory for Food Security Early Action is an international partnership led by the University of Edinburgh collaborating with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Save the Children UK, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Community Jameel.

Based at ILRI in Nairobi, Kenya, we combine the local knowledge and concerns of communities facing on-the-ground threats of hunger with innovations in data science and humanitarian action; teaming up to devise solutions that can predict, prepare for, and overcome climate-related food security and malnutrition challenges in dryland areas.
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