

A short overview of anticipatory action



What is anticipatory action?

Anticipatory action refers to actions taken to reduce the humanitarian impacts of a forecast hazard before it occurs, or before its most acute impacts are felt. The decision to take action is based on a forecast or collective risk analysis of when, where and how the event will unfold (IFRC 2020). The goal at the core of anticipatory action is humanitarian: saving lives and livelihoods and reducing losses and suffering.

Anticipatory action takes different forms and happens on a range of scales, depending on the mandate of the organizations involved, the context in which people live, the type of shock they are facing and the available forecasts and data for that hazard. Depending on the type of hazard and forecasts available, anticipatory action can be carried out well ahead of the shock (for slower onset events) or just ahead of the impacts fully taking hold for more rapid onset events. Most organizations agree on the following parameters:

- The objective is to empower communities and humanitarians to act earlier and thus prevent or at least mitigate acute and imminent humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold.
- The decision to implement actions is based on forecasts or predictive analyses of when and where a hazard will occur.
- Actions are implemented before the hazard's impact, or before a shock's most acute humanitarian impacts are felt with a view to reduce these impacts.

Anticipatory action works best if the following core components are pre-agreed by stakeholders:

- the actions to be taken and the specific roles of each stakeholder; actions include providing cash, sanitation and hygiene kits and shelter toolkits but also safeguarding livelihood measures such as evacuations of livestock or supplying drought-resistant agricultural inputs.
- the threshold levels that are used to release the funds and 'trigger' the actions; these usually combine forecasts with data on impacts of past events, exposure and vulnerability.
- financing, with the amount, source and disbursement pre-arranged to allow the actions to be implemented immediately once the triggers are met and before hazard impacts unfold.

Case 1: Anticipatory action in Honduras and Guatemala

On 8 October 2022, the Guatemalan Red Cross and the Honduran Red Cross both activated their Early Action Protocols (EAPs) for Floods Associated with Tropical Storms, after forecasts predicted that Hurricane Julia was about to hit these countries. The two National Societies used funds from the Anticipatory Pillar of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) to instigate anticipatory action, alleviating some of the expected impacts in the areas forecast to be worst affected. In the Sula Valley, Honduras, more than 1,600 families received water and sanitation kits, and around 600 were given cash to spend on their most urgent needs. In Guatemala's Izabal and Alta Verapaz departments, these figures were around 1,300 and 700 families, respectively. In both regions, water levels were already high due to a heavy rainy season prior to Hurricane Julia. Many families lived along the banks of rivers, streams and embankments, putting them at high risk from floods. Furthermore, most had few resources, making it difficult to relocate or seek shelter elsewhere. The actions undertaken provided the support they needed to survive the floods and recover more quickly once the effects had subsided.



Cash and voucher distribution in Honduras.

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Case 2: Coordinated anticipatory action in Niger


In Niger, following observations of below-average rainfall, the anticipatory action framework for drought was activated in August 2022. CERF funds were used by seven UN agencies, in close collaboration with over 15 national and international NGOs and the government, to mitigate the immediate impacts, with anticipatory assistance provided across the food security, health, nutrition, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors. Among the actions implemented, WFP supported 48,000 smallholder farmers to scale up water-harvesting activities in 90,000 small catchments (covering 1,700 hectares), while the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supplied drought-resistant agricultural inputs to the same farmers. WFP also provided cash to 6,000 households and disseminated climate information and advice through in-person training, mobile phones and community radio programmes. These actions helped people to avoid adopting negative coping strategies such as selling their harvests too early (which usually commands a lower price).

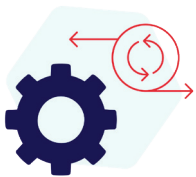


What is the link between anticipatory action and preparedness?

Preparedness is generally understood as “the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organizations, communities and people to effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters” (UNDRR). Preparedness involves a wide range of activities, such as risk assessments, developing early warning systems, training and capacity-building, creating contingency plans, and stockpiling resources. Efforts to develop anticipatory action plans and establish mechanisms for their implementation complement, and are part of, preparedness, focusing particularly on the operational capacity to act ahead of a specific extreme event to minimize impacts on at-risk populations; and, by intervening before a shock’s impacts are acutely felt, anticipatory actions themselves strengthen capacities of communities, authorities, and organizations to manage a crisis and to safeguard their livelihoods, thereby contributing to their preparedness levels. Conversely, high levels of existing preparedness facilitate more rapid development and implementation of anticipatory action plans. Not all preparedness measures can be considered as anticipatory action. This will depend on whether they are carried out in anticipation of and before a specific predicted shock with the aim of reducing the shock’s impact before it fully unfolds.

Contingency planning is an important part of preparedness: preparing communities, authorities, and organizations to effectively act before, during, and after, an emergency event. Anticipatory action focuses specifically on the ‘before’, and goes beyond theoretical planning by setting up financing mechanisms to activate the plans and enable action before the event. Thus, whenever possible, anticipatory action should be integrated into contingency planning, while any effort of contingency planning should also include measures in anticipation of a hazard.

For more information about anticipatory action, please visit [the Anticipation Hub](#) .



How does anticipatory action relate to disaster risk reduction?

Anticipatory action is part of the disaster risk management cycle. Anticipatory action clearly contributes to the objectives of disaster risk reduction (DRR), which are outlined in the Sendai Framework as “preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk.” More traditional, long-term DRR programmes build structures, strengthen policies and governance, and prepare people in at-risk areas through assessments, trainings, awareness-raising, and mitigation measures for future extreme events, yet they often have limitations as to how much early action can be supported when an event is imminent. Anticipatory action complements longer-term DRR by enabling shorter-term measures, implemented based on concrete warnings, supporting those living in areas where forecasts indicate high probability of an imminent extreme event. Many DRR actions, especially those that aim to address underlying vulnerabilities, cannot be implemented within the often short lead times of anticipatory action, but anticipatory action can help to reduce or manage residual risks. When well implemented, anticipatory action bridges the gap between longer-term disaster risk reduction efforts and (reactive) humanitarian response.

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