

The benefits and importance of locally led anticipatory action


This briefing provides examples of the benefits of locally led anticipatory action and explains its importance. It draws on evidence from existing projects, as collected by organizations that work closely with local actors and the communities who are leading and implementing anticipatory action. It also sets out the steps needed for this approach to become fully embedded across anticipatory action practice, rather than being seen as a parallel process to, or an add-on or 'tick box' for, existing projects. These steps include: (1) building partnerships across different levels; (2) ensuring that local actors are accessing, influencing and contributing to information-sharing (e.g., early warnings and forecasts); (3) ensuring that the actions taken are based on trust; and (4) ensuring that these steps are part of broader efforts towards greater localization across the humanitarian, development and climate change sectors.

Currently, data on the scale of locally led anticipatory action is not available. Nevertheless, it is clear that a growing number of international, national and local civil society organizations, and their associated national and international networks, recognize the importance of local actors leading anticipatory approaches, and are working to support this. Actors actively supporting this approach include (but are not limited to) non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), civil-society and NGO networks and their members, including Start Network and the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR). Their support for locally led anticipatory action is evident in, among other efforts, supporting stronger collaborations between local actors and mandated actors (such as governments, United Nations agencies, National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, academic institutes, technical institutes, hydrometeorological agencies and donors).



Practical Action worked with communities in Peru to set up monitoring stations to measure temperature, soil moisture and rainfall conditions, which are needed to forecast *huaycos*. © Practical Action

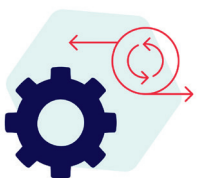
At its core, this approach can include:

- autonomous anticipatory action, which means that local people act independently and are not reliant on external support³
- actions that take place in a self-defined or administratively defined community, or collection of communities
- anticipatory action that works through local structures and local actors with a permanent presence in a region,⁴ as well as community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs and community groups ([GNDR and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe 2023](#) )


Locally led anticipatory action can include greater local control of this approach, including through co-design processes that involve both local and external actors. It can also include facilitating and enabling the exchange of information and knowledge between communities and technical experts; for example, with hydrometeorological agencies to ensure the timely use of forecasts to enable locally led actions ahead of a hazard. Other processes that involve local actors include advocacy efforts to ensure financing for locally led anticipatory action.

Why is locally led anticipatory action important?

Local actors are usually the first people to act ahead of a crisis, based on the risks they perceive. The role of local actors and communities in



What does locally led anticipatory action involve?

Locally led anticipatory action refers to approaches¹ that are driven and led by communities and local-level actors.² To date, external actors engaging with communities and local actors on locally led anticipatory action have been guided by the principles of locally led adaptation ([WRI nd](#) )

¹ For a definition of anticipatory action, see [shorturl.at/dBEH7](#)


² Locally led anticipatory action is a relatively new concept and, as such, its definition is continuously being refined. This represents the current definition used by many of the people and organizations working on this theme.

³ However, this does not also mean that external support is automatically excluded or rejected.



⁴ For example, local authorities, local actors with a structure in the area (e.g., National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies) and local civil society organizations.

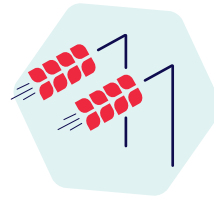
anticipatory action is therefore essential: they ensure that early warnings result in anticipatory actions that are effective at the local level. Locally led approaches are also needed to scale up, mainstream and sustain current good practices in anticipatory action, thus helping to ensure that effective anticipatory action becomes the norm in all parts of society.

Alongside other actors, local actors in anticipatory action can ensure a range of positive impacts. For example, they can:


- ensure that the actions taken are truly appropriate to the local context, rather than being decided elsewhere and then asking target communities to confirm the appropriateness
- increase the use of local practices and indigenous knowledge, which commonly differ from Western methods and approaches
- increase the speed at which actions happen after the trigger threshold for a hazard is reached, for example by supporting those who are expected to be affected first to take pre-emptive action
- provide greater granularity in forecast data (i.e., a higher level of local detail) or in the ground-truthing and triangulation of hazard alerts
- identify and communicate gaps and weaknesses in early warning systems, as well as in planning and coordination mechanisms for hazards and disasters
- establish or increase local acceptance of anticipatory action as an approach, and of the actions being taken
- sustain initiatives by institutionalizing anticipatory action frameworks within local plans and policies ([REAP 2023](#) .


Advancing locally led anticipatory action can demonstrate the existing capacity of local communities and actors to implement their own anticipatory actions. It can contribute to making local structures for disaster risk reduction more proactive, which in turn increases communities' overall resilience. Furthermore, investments in locally led anticipatory action contribute towards achieving targets in, among other global ambitions, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (and its central goal that no one is left behind), the Grand Bargain, and the Early Warnings for All initiative.

Despite the critical role that locally led approaches can play in anticipatory action, and disaster risk reduction more broadly, 84 per cent of local actors report not being included in assessing the threats they face, preparing policies and plans, or taking action ([GNDR 2021](#) ).⁵ Women and marginalized groups in particular lack access to risk information and are not meaningfully engaged in decision-making processes. Without their inputs, the consequences, losses and damage to local communities are often devastating ([GNDR 2023](#) .



Locally developed early action protocols: humanitarian partners as custodians

To create an entry point for local humanitarian partners in anticipatory action, Welthungerhilfe (WHH) piloted its EAP custodianship⁶ approach during its Forecast-based Action Programme, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office ([WHH nd](#) ). This aimed to proactively address drought-induced food insecurity in Kenya, Madagascar and Zimbabwe.

Through this approach, a custodian – the local humanitarian partner – is at the forefront of developing the EAP and contributes its unique skills and knowledge to the process. The custodian engages with actors at all levels, from community members and committees through to local and national governments and agencies. During research and consultations to select suitable anticipatory actions for each hazard and region, communities evaluate the impacts of past hazards, their anticipated needs, potential risk factors, and the measures that would help to mitigate the anticipated losses and damages. In this way, communities decide which anticipatory actions are feasible, and their specific execution and composition, in consultation with local institutional stakeholders ([WHH 2022](#) .

In Zimbabwe, TSURO Trust, a local CBO, jointly with WHH, acted as a custodian in Chimanimani. It drew on its experience in supporting local income-generating activities and applied this to the process of identifying anticipatory actions for an EAP for drought-induced food insecurity. The project used a collaborative, participatory process to identify the priorities of communities and institutional stakeholders and, through this, jointly decided to distribute cash as an anticipatory action.



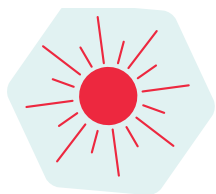
Communities actively participate in the EAP development process in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. © WHH/Julia Burakowski

⁵ Based on 100,000 community members, civil society organizations and local government representatives in 44 countries at risk of disasters ([GNDR 2021](#)).



⁶ Early action protocols (EAPs) are documents that set out how anticipatory action is implemented before a specific hazard and in a specific country or region. They set out the financing in place, the thresholds (triggers) that will be used for that hazard, and the actions to be taken once the trigger is reached, including details of exactly who will do what.

To maximize the impact, communities created small groups to receive further income-generating support in the form of broiler-production starter kits. Government stakeholders provided training in topics identified as priorities by the community, which included financial literacy, broiler production and preventing gender-based violence. The community also played an active role in identifying the households to be targeted by the project. Community members from different wards jointly decided on vulnerability criteria and identified the most food-insecure households, through a community-ranking process that was moderated and facilitated by local government stakeholders.

This approach helps to ensure that anticipatory actions are meaningful to the target populations (i.e., that people understand their roles and responsibilities), appropriate to the local context, and gain high rates of acceptance and buy-in from people at all levels. Ultimately, this makes the process more sustainable and relevant to the needs of people at risk from hazards.



Localized activation and implementation: anticipatory action ahead of heat waves in Pakistan

In June 2021, Bright Star Development Society Balochistan (known as Bright Star) received direct funding from Start Network to lead anticipatory action ahead of a forecast heat wave in Sibi, Pakistan. Bright Star used this to set up cooling facilities, which have shaded areas, seating and clean, cool drinking water; the funding was also used to provide communities with messages on heat waves and heatstroke ([Guyatt 2022](#) ; [Guyatt 2023](#) .

An evaluation of this intervention showed that the cooling facilities were largely possible because of Bright Star’s status as a local actor. For example, one government official noted that international NGOs often set up and implement activities and then leave without engaging with the government; by contrast, Bright Star coordinated closely with local administrators throughout. During interviews, a bus driver and a fruit cart owner noted that Bright Star first consulted with traders and shopkeepers to identify and secure locations for the cooling facilities. These were then set up at bus stations to target travellers, a group at particular risk from heat waves.

Bright Star’s presence in the Sibi region meant that it could actively observe the situation using local meteorological data and weather information, and then alert Start Network to the coming heat wave. This was critical: the standard forecast model for heat waves does not work in the region because it is too mountainous, and so the trigger for these anticipatory actions was based on Bright Star’s observations.



The cooling facility on Allah Abad Road in Sibi. This was provided by Bright Star during a heat wave in the region. © GLOW Consultants



“We, Bright Star, were keeping a close eye on the evolving heat wave situation in Sibi. Activities under this project were based on our previous learning, as well as consultation with the key stakeholders. The offering of water or milk to the general public on certain religious occasions is part of our cultural and religious values... It was this sense of civic service which became the source of this idea.”

- Naseer Ahmed Channa, chief executive officer, Bright Star



This example demonstrates how locally led anticipatory action is different to processes led by outside agencies (which is more commonly the case). The added value of local organizations derives from their existing and continuous presence in a community. This allows for a better understanding of when and how to act, based on their relationships with communities and other stakeholders, and a deeper understanding of local and cultural contexts. Overall, this ensures more relevant anticipatory assistance for communities at risk from hazards and other crises.


Box 1. Citizens as hazard forecasters

A growing number of examples show how citizens can play a role in forecasting hazards, which often involves working closely with hydrometeorological agencies.

- The Ecuadorian Red Cross and Ecuador's national Geophysical Institute trained citizen observers to take readings from 151 meters installed to monitor volcanic ash levels. The citizens reported back ashfall measurements and other data to inform on possible eruptions of the Sangay volcano. This was particularly helpful, as Sangay is in a remote region where there was previously a lack of measurements ([Clatworthy 2022](#) .
- In Peru, Practical Action worked with communities to set up monitoring stations that measure temperature, soil moisture and rainfall conditions to forecast *huaycos*⁷ ([Practical Action 2020](#) .
- In Bangladesh, several actors⁸ collaborated to set up rain gauges in six communities vulnerable to landslides, and to

train volunteers to use the readings to calibrate the accuracy of 10-day rainfall forecasts. A two-way platform was created to share forecast information and rain-gauge readings, and to gather feedback on the rainfall thresholds for landslides.

- In Namibia, community elders have used indigenous knowledge of insect numbers to determine if a drought is coming; this type of knowledge could be used to design anticipatory actions tailored to highly localized contexts ([Anticipation Hub 2022](#) .
- In Zimbabwe, WHH worked with communities to calibrate the data used for forecast models, including crop assessments and feedback from farmers and communities. These helped to triangulate and verify the information used for its crop-development monitoring model ([Anticipation Hub 2023](#) .

The benefits of involving citizens in collecting data to predict hazards – often referred to as citizen science – extend beyond the generation of new data. It can, among other benefits, provide citizens with a better understanding of scientific information, while greater ownership of such data can empower people to act upon it ([Benyei, Skartlatidou, Argyriou et al. 2023](#) .



Modalities for financing locally led anticipatory action

National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies are among the few local-level actors that currently have direct access to international funding mechanisms, which enables them to implement locally led anticipatory action in their respective countries. In the Red Cross Red Crescent system, developing an EAP is a locally owned process, with the National Society working in coordination with other local stakeholders. Part of this process is to agree the triggers for a hazard and, once these are reached, funding from the Anticipatory Pillar of the IFRC's Disaster Response Emergency Fund is transferred directly to the National Societies, which then manage and account for these funds. Through their networks of volunteers, National Societies have the advantage of being present, as active members of communities, throughout a country, which enables them to use this financing effectively. This modality for financing locally led anticipatory action is open to all countries with a National Society.

In South Sudan, the Local Response Pooled Fund⁹ has supported local actors to implement community-level anticipatory action. This fund was established to increase localization in South Sudan by giving national

NGOs greater direct access to donor funds, as well as increasing their involvement in decision-making about funds. In this case, Save The Children contributed to the Local Response Pooled Fund and also facilitated local-level access to institutional funding from the Danish International Development Agency. This approach – financing locally led anticipatory action through intermediaries – is also applied in Niger and Somalia, and offers another promising modality for providing funds for locally led anticipatory action.

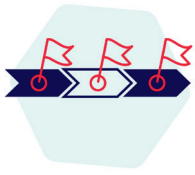
Another modality is community 'microgrants', which are being piloted as part of a community-led action and learning approach.¹⁰ These are used to finance anticipatory actions developed and led by community groups with the support of local NGOs. For example, ahead of the intensive 2023–2024 cyclone season in southern Africa, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe pre-agreed the use of the funds by local partners to provide communities with microgrants of up to 5,000 euros. These funds were released, based on locally developed anticipatory action mechanisms, up to five days before communities were hit by the cyclones and associated flooding. The microgrants funded actions including the protection of housing and services at refuges, which were implemented by local partners' volunteer networks, local civil-protection groups and self-organized community groups.

⁷ A Quechua word used for mudslides and flash floods caused by heavy rainfall.


⁸ Start Network, FOREWARN Bangladesh, and two Start Fund Bangladesh members, Caritas and Catholic Relief Services.

⁹ See shorturl.at/ehpz1

¹⁰ Community microgrants are one component of a wider approach developed by Local to Global Protection called survivor and community-led crisis response ([Local to Global Protection nd](#)). The microgrants component has been adapted into what is now called group cash transfers ([Tønning and Kabeta 2021](#)).



Conclusions and recommendations

It is essential that locally led anticipatory action is understood as an inclusive path to more adequate, proactive and decentralized anticipatory action – and not as an add-on to projects, or an alternative way to carry out anticipatory action. Instead, ensuring that local actors take the lead in anticipatory action – and so making it “as local as possible and as international as necessary” ([UN 2016](#) ) – should happen in all projects and for all types of hazard.

There is not one format for locally led anticipatory action, nor a set process to follow. The course it takes will differ depending on the hazard and the location. This should be recognized as a strength of this approach, rather than a downside; it means that the triggers, anticipatory actions and financing selected are informed by, and therefore appropriate to, the specific context, needs, knowledge base and expertise of local people.

Despite these advantages, mainstreaming this approach is an ongoing process and one that may not be achieved in the short term. However, it is a goal that the anticipatory action sector must work towards. Further documentation, which identifies lessons for scaling up locally led anticipatory action, will support this shift.

The organizations that contributed to this briefing have identified several ways in which policy-makers, donors, national governments, technical agencies, scientific and academic institutes, NGOs and international NGOs can support locally led anticipatory action, based on their experiences.

Recognize the value of local actors in anticipatory action.

International organizations should:

- highlight local actors' existing involvement in anticipatory action
- build the evidence base to demonstrate the effectiveness of locally led anticipatory action, ensuring that local actors' perspectives and priorities are highlighted within this
- ensure harmonization between external and localized approaches to anticipatory action
- support the shifting of power and decision-making to the local level.

Ensure that local actors are actively involved in, and able to lead, all stages of the anticipatory action process.

Facilitating organizations and agencies can achieve this in a number of ways, including activities to:

- ensure that local voices are central to decision-making processes
- ensure that local actors are present when other agencies are developing anticipatory action frameworks and protocols

- ensure that local actors lead in the identification of areas where locally led anticipatory action needs to be scaled up
- undertake capacity-sharing with local institutions and structures through the exchange of knowledge and experiences; this could involve, for example, developing registries of beneficiaries and building local capacity to manage these
- work with local stakeholders to advocate for increased funding dedicated to locally led anticipatory action, in addition to local emergency funds.

Invest in existing systems that strengthen the operational capacity of local actors to lead anticipatory action, or invest in establishing these.

There are several ways that donors, policy-makers and technical agencies can facilitate this, for example:

- create opportunities for greater collaboration between local actors and national governments, subnational actors, hydrometeorological services and civil society actors; this could be, for example, by allowing access to risk data and models, or jointly developing triggers for anticipatory action
- to support local capacity and operational readiness to act ahead of a hazard, ensure that there are established links between local actors and international and national-level organizations; this could be by ensuring that coordination mechanisms for activating and implementing an anticipatory action framework are accessible to everyone, including local actors
- reduce the barriers that local actors face in accessing financing to develop anticipatory action initiatives, and financing for the actions themselves; this includes allocating more funding to local actors and increasing access to these funds (e.g., local government contingency funds).

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