

# IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORTING ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN SOMALIA

## The Case for Supporting Anticipatory Action

To date, humanitarian assistance has been largely *reactive*, usually arriving after the effects of a shock have evolved into a full-blown crisis. Yet research suggests that many humanitarian emergencies [are to some extent foreseeable](#), and that by looking and planning ahead, the aid community can save more lives and better protect livelihoods, potentially at a [greatly reduced cost for both donors and the affected population](#). Anticipatory action also may allow for [better targeting](#), enabling implementing actors to take their time to methodically identify communities' specific needs and to tailor assistance accordingly *before* the onset of a crisis.

Given these benefits, **Anticipatory Action** (AA) has become the focus of growing attention among donors and humanitarian actors. Organisations, such as the START Network, IFRC and the Red Cross Climate Centre, along with UN agencies, including FAO, are leading the push for a more proactive humanitarian model. Funding has followed, with the UN CERF funds allocating \$140 million to AA in 12 countries in 2020, and the [G7 countries pledging](#) hundreds of millions of dollars to "scale-up anticipatory action to prevent crises deteriorating further." Most recently in September 2021 at a [high-level convening](#) organized by OCHA, numerous governments, aid agencies, and private sector actors newly committed hundreds of millions of dollars to AA.

**Anticipatory Action** refers to the "actions triggered before a crisis in order to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis, or even avoid crisis altogether" ([Levine et al, 2020](#)). While 'anticipatory action' is usually used by aid actors to refer to their own interventions, the term also includes proactive measures taken by individuals, businesses, service providers, and communities on their own terms, in response to a predicted shock or crisis.

## Emerging Evidence Gaps on Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory Action has the potential to drive a fundamental reimagining of the ways in which humanitarian assistance and livelihood programming are designed and delivered. However, critical questions must first be considered.

### **What options exist for aid actors to support anticipatory action?**

Currently, the modalities of AA-based assistance used by aid actors are limited. In the livelihood domain, most AA projects have given early cash transfers, relying on a general assumption that 'earlier must be better,' without specifically considering what people might need money for at different times during a crisis. In a few exceptions, assistance has been more specifically tailored: for example, to protect a specific hill from landslides before the arrival of heavy rains, or to provide drought-tolerant seeds to farmers before a predicted poor rainy season. If, as aid actors, we had a better understanding of how people live through crises, we might find opportunities for a far greater range of interventions that would help protect livelihoods and mitigate the impacts of crises.

### **What are the Windows of Opportunity for Anticipatory Action?**

An assumption underpinning much of the Anticipatory Action agenda is that *earlier* interventions are inherently more effective at staving off the worst impacts of a crisis. This is not necessarily true. Since emergency resources are always limited, there are instances when it makes sense to wait until a crisis is more certain—unless there is a good reason to believe that a particular AA intervention will be effective. To determine when to intervene, the aid community needs to understand exactly when people face different livelihood constraints and must time their interventions accordingly. For example, support for (agro-)pastoralists to market their animals in anticipation of a forecasted drought may arrive *too early* to be effective if it comes before livestock keepers perceive a risk significant enough to sell their animals. Similarly, some AA interventions may arrive before a crisis, yet still be *too late* to be helpful. Take, for example, an intervention supporting agro-input suppliers to make drought resistant seeds available midway through a poor rainy season. The intervention could be considered 'anticipatory' if it precedes the onset of a crisis, yet if the seeds were to reach farmers after it was

already too late to generate a yield, the intervention would hardly be helpful. Livelihood support must match the livelihood calendar, and specifically the livelihood calendar of crisis. The next stage in the coming age of AA is to build more understanding of these calendars for different people, and to identify clear windows of opportunities for different kinds of AA support.

### ***How can AA programming be designed in the context of multiple shocks and stresses?***

To date, much of the debate around AA has centred on anticipating and mitigating the impacts of specific shock events in isolation (e.g., a drought or flood). However, livelihoods are often hit by several shocks and stresses at the same time. In Somalia for example, the 2021 farming season was disrupted by locusts, increasing risk of crop failure stemming from poor rains. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced remittances and other income, which limited the money that people had to invest in different coping or adaptation strategies. This poses a challenge: how can hazard-focused AA protocols, often linked to measurements of the weather or of vegetation, be adapted so that they are useful in mitigating combinations of shocks?

### **SPARC's Anticipatory Action Learning Approach**

SPARC's approach is to build evidence and theory on AA grounded in the lived experiences of crisis-affected households. The menu of AA interventions available to aid actors depends largely on identifying the opportunities and constraints that households experience when proactively adapting their livelihoods ahead of a forecasted shock. To identify windows of opportunity for AA, it is critical to understand the signs that communities rely on to determine when to act. To reach the potential for AA in the context of compounding livelihood shocks and stresses, aid actors must understand how affected communities perceive different shocks, and how and why they may choose to act in anticipation of one set of problems, but not another.

With the objective of centring affected communities in analysis that begins to fill evidence gaps on AA, SPARC researchers are conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with a panel of 60 (agro-)pastoralist households in three communities in Somalia (Gaalkayo, Burao, and Jowhar). This study was launched in early 2021, amidst forecasts for a below average *deyr* rainfall in Somalia, with more recent forecasts similarly predicting a below average *gu* rainfall this year. This means that the research team will likely be able to follow households' experiences of various livelihood shocks and stresses in real time. By returning to interview the same households 4-5 times over the course of a year, it will be possible to track when and how households are anticipating and responding to specific events, as well as the constraints they may experience to doing so. This in turn will allow SPARC to identify AA programming opportunities and windows of opportunity for AA within the livelihood crisis calendar.

This study will conclude in March 2022, with the publication of a final report and the convening of various stakeholder discussions to identify research implications and applications for programming in Somalia and beyond.

**Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC)** is a five-year FCDO-funded research project focusing on the drylands belt from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa. SPARC aims to generate evidence and address knowledge gaps to build the resilience of millions of pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers in these communities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. We strive to create impact by using research and evidence to develop knowledge that improves how the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), donors, Non-Governmental Organisations, local and national governments, and civil society can empower these communities in the context of climate change.