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Enabling Anticipatory Action at Scale Policy Brief for Donor Governments

By the Anticipatory Action Task Force (AATF)

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The Anticipatory Action Task Force (AATF) brings together the key agencies implementing anticipatory action on the ground. The AATF draws on a wealth of experience from implementing anticipatory action initiatives in over 60 countries. The mission of the AATF is to promote the use of anticipatory humanitarian action to risks¹. The taskforce also supports evidence-based policies that make anticipatory action possible. The AATF consists of: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Start Network, The UN's World Food Programme (WFP), The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The key policy asks below are based on their extensive collective experience of what is needed to unleash the full potential of anticipatory action. This policy brief is considered a working document and will be updated as new evidence and learning emerges.

Background

Due to the climate crisis, the intensity and frequency of natural hazards is increasing. This is leading to a rise in humanitarian needs as is the number of people displaced by conflict, which is now the highest on record, since the Second World War. The impacts of COVID-19 are also significantly exacerbating these trends.

These trends can be limited, and even reversed by anticipating predictable disasters and acting early to protect the most vulnerable from their impacts. For that reason, anticipatory action is increasingly becoming embedded within the humanitarian system and disaster risk management plans. Shifting the focus from response to protecting people ahead of shocks, and relying on pre-agreed plans and finance, is a faster, more dignified and more cost-effective approach to disasters and crises.

While interest and investments in anticipatory action have been increasing, efforts now need to be scaled up. A system-wide shift towards a more proactive approach to humanitarian crises requires a concerted effort of all relevant actors.

Donor governments have a key role to play in encouraging the collaborations and policies that are needed to make anticipatory action an integral part of disaster management and preparedness plans. As emphasised in the World Disasters Report 2020², scaling up the use of anticipatory action will allow it to reach its full potential as a source of stability and resilience in the lives of those most vulnerable to disasters and crises, by boosting their ability to withstand shocks.

There is a growing bank of evidence supporting the anticipatory action approach. In Mongolia in 2018 for example, livestock keepers who received animal care kits and cash before severe winter cold saw fewer of their animals die. And for every 1 USD invested in the project, families counted benefits worth 7 USD³. This meant they were able to protect their livelihoods and did not suffer hunger throughout the winter based on a survey

¹ Anticipatory Action Task Force (AATF) Terms of Reference https://www.anticipation-hub.org/Documents/Other/Anticipatory_Action_Task_Force_ToR_JAN_2021.pdf

² IFRC (2020) World Disasters Report 2020. Come Heat or High Water. Tackling the Humanitarian Impacts of the Climate Crisis Together. Chapter 4: Reducing Risks and Building Resilience. <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/world-disaster-report-2020/>

³ FAO. (2018) *Mongolia: Impact of early warning early action. Protecting the livelihoods of herders from a dzud winter.* <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/1161388/>

conducted by the Mongolian Red Cross Society⁴. A WFP forecast-based financing project in Nepal showed that for each dollar invested, US \$34,39 is saved⁵. In Bangladesh, a CERF-funded anticipatory intervention reached more people with assistance at half the cost compared to previous years. In Senegal in 2019, the number of households reporting going a whole day without eating reduced by 19% during a six-month anticipatory project⁶. The World Bank estimates upgrading early warning and early action capacity in all developing countries can save an average of 23,000 lives per year and avoid losses worth between USD 300 million and USD 2 billion per year.⁷ Figures like these speak for the value of investing in anticipating predictable hazards and they provide a glimpse into what would be possible if this way of working became a larger, more integrated, and regular part of managing disasters and crises.

Key policy ask #1: Expand flexible, coordinated and predictable financing for anticipatory action

Donor governments should consider: i) allowing existing and new humanitarian funding to be used in a flexible and anticipatory manner; ii) supporting greater coordination of anticipatory financing and other disaster risk financing instruments, iii) providing increased funding to existing humanitarian pooled funds; and iv) increasing funding to local and national responders.

An essential prerequisite for successful anticipatory action is sufficient, predictable, and flexible financing. While more and more disasters and crises are predictable, less than one percent of humanitarian funding is currently available for anticipatory humanitarian action⁸. When funding is available, it is most often limited to single-agency, small-scale projects. The collective experience of the AATF has demonstrated that anticipatory action at scale is possible and is faster, cheaper, and more dignified compared to solely relying on traditional response.

Greater coordination is needed between disaster risk financing instruments at global, regional and country levels for an integrated risk management approach that can support anticipatory action⁹. Sharing of data, coordinating trigger development and promoting joint planning across instruments (e.g: insurance and sovereign risk pools) will further promote anticipatory approaches. Finally, to increase sustainability and to strengthen the resilience of at-risk people who have the greatest vested interest in acting early, funding should be allocated with the aim to strengthen locally-led humanitarian action¹⁰.

⁴ Gros, C. et. al (2020), The effectiveness of forecast-based humanitarian assistance in anticipation of extreme winters: Evidence from an intervention for vulnerable herders in Mongolia <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/disa.12467>

⁵ WFP (2019). 'Forecast-based Financing in Nepal A Return on Investment Study' <https://www.wfp.org/publications/forecast-based-financing-nepal-return-investment-study>

⁶ Start Network, 2020, 'ARC Replica Payout, Senegal 2020, Internal Evaluation' <https://startnetwork.org/resource/arc-replica-payout-senegal-2020-internal-evaluation>

⁷ Hallegatte, S. (2012) *A Cost-Effective Solution to Reduce Disaster Losses in Developing Countries: Hydro-Meteorological Services, Early Warning and Evacuation*. © World Bank <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/1813-9450-6058>

⁸ Weingärtner, L and Spencer, A (2019) *Paper 2: Analysing gaps in the humanitarian and disaster risk financing landscape*. ODI and START Network. <https://startnetwork.org/resource/financial-flows-mapping-paper-2>

⁹ START Network (2019) *Disaster Risk Financing in Concert: How coordinated disaster risk financing can save more lives*. <https://startnetwork.org/resource/disaster-risk-financing-concerthow-co-ordinated-disaster-risk-financing-can-save-more-lives>

¹⁰ Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, 2020, 'Exploring the feasibility of SEADRIF in the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies'; <https://www.anticipation-hub.org/Documents/Reports/SEADRIF-Feasibility-Study-Philippines-and-Myanmar-RC-March2020.pdf>

Key policy ask #2: Invest in early warning and preparedness capacities, especially at local level

Donor governments should consider: i) investing in early warning systems and capacities to support anticipatory action; ii) investing in local capacities to disseminate and act on early warnings at the community level; iii) investing in preparedness capacities to ensure actors are able to rapidly implement anticipatory actions.

A meaningful shift towards anticipating disaster impacts is not possible without investments in the factors which enable it: weather forecasts, impact based forecasting, predictive analytics, risk analysis and early warning systems (EWS) and understanding compound risk. These tools are vital to the ability to trigger timely and well targeted anticipatory actions within the crucial window between a forecast shock and its impact.

However, this information has no benefit unless it is understandable, actionable and disseminated in a timely manner to at-risk populations. One-third of every 100,000 people is still not covered by early warnings¹¹. Further work through political commitment, financial resources, and partnerships is required to better connect and tailor risk information to the needs of at-risk people and to invest in enhancing countries' capacities when it comes to communication and dissemination of early warnings.

Lastly, preparedness is a crucial enabler of anticipatory action. As with emergency response, pre-agreed plans and adequate operational capacities and processes are all essential to effective implementation of anticipatory action initiatives. Local responders and at-risk people should be actively engaged in preparedness planning and connected with risk-information to ensure locally-led anticipatory action¹².

Key policy ask #3: Make anticipatory action applicable to a wider variety of hazards

Donor governments should consider: i) advocating for and funding anticipatory approaches for all types of humanitarian crises caused by both natural or human induced hazards; ii) encouraging partners to further explore how human induced hazards can be anticipated.

To date, anticipatory action has mostly been developed and tested for natural hazards given that the science of forecasting weather events has progressed to a point where a wide range of climate hazards have become increasingly predictable. However, today, most of the world's humanitarian needs are located in countries affected by complex crises that include at least one human-induced factor. The COVID-19 emergency and the complex interaction of the secondary effects of the pandemic with pre-existing drivers of humanitarian needs is just one example of the need to expand this approach beyond climate-related hazards and to better understand the complex ways in which shocks impact at-risk people.

Additionally, agencies must further explore and learn how anticipatory action can be applied to human-induced hazards such as conflict, conflict-related phenomena such as displacement, and socio economic shocks. Initial guidance on approaching anticipatory action in the context of conflict can support humanitarian agencies in

¹¹ WMO (2020) State of Climate Services: Risk Information and Early Warning Systems. https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10385

¹² Start Network (2021) Information is Power: connecting local responders to the risk information that they need. <https://startnetwork.org/resource/information-power-connecting-local-responders-risk-information-they-need>; FBF Practitioners Manual: <https://manual.forecast-based-financing.org/>

this process¹³. Anticipating human induced hazards cannot be done with models alone, it requires dynamic decision making and expert judgement, as has been pioneered within Start Network's Start Fund. Examples of this work include the Start Fund's anticipation of election-related violence and displacement in Nigeria in 2019, as well as anticipating gender-based violence related to COVID-19 in El Salvador in 2020¹⁴. In 2018, FAO used projections of Venezuelan migrant flows into Colombia's border areas combined with drought forecasts to target rural communities most at risk of food insecurity.¹⁵

Key policy ask #4: Encourage collective learning, coordination, and partnerships

Donor governments should consider: i) strongly encouraging and funding collaborative and coordinated anticipatory action; ii) encouraging and supporting combining expertise through cross-sectoral partnerships and iii) encouraging collective learning and advocacy.

A coordinated approach to anticipatory action is essential. Coordination is key to developing risk thresholds and forecast triggers that will support the wide variety of anticipatory actions undertaken between agencies and stakeholders ahead of a hazard. Donors can be a major catalyst for change by requiring that anticipatory action partners work together on joint risk analysis, impact based forecasting, early warning systems, early action planning, implementation and evaluation. This will ensure that anticipatory action systems are not developing in isolation and that messaging to national governments is unified and clear.

Cross-sectoral partnerships between academia, humanitarian and development organizations and the private sector should be encouraged and supported to enable humanitarians to access the best science available to strengthen forecasts and risk analysis and understand how to enable at-risk populations to use that information. Anticipatory action also represents an important opportunity to put in practice the 'humanitarian-development' nexus and ensure that development investments are protected and are shock responsive.

Collective learning through joint monitoring and impact analysis studies is another top priority with further evidence needed on the effectiveness of anticipatory action in different contexts. It is crucial to support continuous knowledge exchange and evidence-based learning across all organizations enabling anticipatory action through initiatives like the [Anticipation Hub](#) and [Start Network's FOREWARN](#).

¹³ Wagner, M and Jaime, C (2020) An Agenda for Expanding Forecast-Based Action to Situations of Conflict. GPPi and Climate Centre. <https://www.gppi.net/2020/09/22/an-agenda-for-expanding-forecast-based-action-to-situations-of-conflict>

¹⁴ Start Network, 2018, 'Case Study: Anticipating High Stakes Elections in Kenya in 2017' <https://start-network.app.box.com/s/xc8ph6k9ne0hhjn486e22waxljpbbmrz>;

¹⁵ FAO (2019) *Colombia: Impact of early warning early action. Boosting food security and social cohesion on the frontlines of the migration crisis.* <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6818en/ca6818en.pdf>

Key policy ask #5: Mainstream anticipatory action into national disaster management systems (DRM).

Donor governments should consider: i) advocating for and supporting the uptake of anticipatory action approaches by national governments; ii) supporting global efforts which play a central role in the uptake of anticipatory action by governments.

In order for anticipatory action to be truly sustainable, it ultimately needs to be nationally owned and embedded in national and local disaster risk management policies, laws, and processes. This entails supporting national-level capacity building in disaster risk prioritisation, risk analysis, impact based forecasting and trigger setting, the identification of appropriate anticipatory actions, as well as building the most effective financing structures to support all of this. Governments should be encouraged to ensure predictable and specific funding for anticipatory action, possibly within their existing disaster preparedness and/or response funds. Integrating anticipatory action into existing national DRM structures would result in stronger linkages and joint planning between national institutions responsible for weather forecasts, risk analysis, early warning, and those responsible for emergency operations. Investing in disaster risk management systems will ultimately enable more successful anticipatory action and enhance countries' ability to achieve their targets under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Donor governments should also support key global efforts to scale up anticipatory action such as the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) and the InsuResilience Global Partnership. [REAP](#) was established at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit with the goal of making 1 billion people safer from disasters by addressing the need for a massive scale-up in anticipatory approaches. [The InsuResilience Global Partnership](#) aims to promote risk finance and insurance aligned with the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery plans of a given country.