

INFORMATION IS POWER

CONNECTING LOCAL RESPONDERS TO THE RISK INFORMATION THAT THEY NEED

START NETWORK

POLICY BRIEF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Anticipatory action is drawing global attention, with the number of actors delivering support to at-risk communities before disasters and crises strike growing in number and size. This work requires whole of society collaboration which involves collective understanding of risks, coordinated triggers and plans (including local capacity to execute this), and prepositioned financing to put plans into action. One of the critical elements of anticipatory action which will determine the quality and scale of this work is our ability to connect at-risk people to appropriate and robust forecast information.

Local people have a vested interest in acting early to mitigate disasters and crises, although there is often limited involvement of at-risk communities in early action decision-making processes. At-risk people, as both observers and responders, possess local capacities, expertise, and importantly, the agency to act. However, local responders are often unprepared, lack access to decision-making processes and are disconnected from risk information.

Going forward, enabling communities to act ahead of a potential crisis or disaster will require a focus on *locally-led anticipatory action* that puts at-risk people at the centre of anticipatory action processes and supports the mainstreaming of early action into community-based humanitarian and development projects. Increased participation of at-risk people, together with experiences gained in implementing and mainstreaming anticipatory action, should be capitalised to strengthen public accountability, build political commitment and influence national and international policies in support of an anticipatory approach.

INTRODUCTION:

Anticipatory action allows humanitarians to be better prepared for humanitarian events by analyzing and quantifying risks in advance of crises or disasters, pre-positioning funds, and releasing these funds according to pre-agreed protocols. Since 2016, Start Network has been developing new funding instruments which enable humanitarians to mobilise collaboratively and predictably in order to manage risks rather than react to disasters and crises. To increase Start Network member's ability to undertake anticipatory actions, Start Network has been working to improve

“**THE APPLICATION OF THE BEST FORECASTING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IS WASTED IF THE COMMUNICATION OF RISK INFORMATION IS NOT CLEAR AND ACCESSIBLE TO THE END-USERS**”
INTERVIEWEE

“**RISK INFORMATION HAS NO BENEFIT IF IT IS NOT DISSEMINATED, RELEVANT OR UTILISED BY AT-RISK POPULATIONS TO MAKE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES**”
INTERVIEWEE

forecasting tools, helping members to access quality forecast information, and is developing technical guidance and training resources.

This policy brief draws on [research by Marcus Oxley commissioned by Start Network](#) between March-June 2019. Research was conducted to better understand the extensive array of forecasting tools and platforms used at the global, regional and national levels with a specific focus on Pakistan, Uganda, Sri Lanka, DRC and Bangladesh. One objective of the research study was to help Start Network better understand key opportunities and barriers relating to how humanitarians act on risk information in order to implement anticipatory actions. Information was drawn from key informant interviews with Start Network staff, members, partners, academics, forecast information providers and other early action partners at national and global levels. Interviews were complemented by a short review of Start Network anticipation project reports and other relevant programme documents from global and regional initiatives. The full research report can be found [HERE](#). Recommendations have been developed to influence Start Network, other anticipatory action partners, donors, forecast information providers and national governments.

KEY FINDINGS:



01 Effective anticipatory action requires a system-wide approach that connects those who “observe and generate risk information” with those who “receive and respond” - at the local level information generators and receivers are often the same people. Actions to improve only one aspect of the system (e.g. ensuring high-quality forecast information) will reach a point of diminishing returns in relation to other variables needed. For example, there was consensus amongst respondents that anticipatory action is most effective when there are high levels of community preparedness / readiness. This involves improving end-users ability to self-organise, identify impact triggers, plan early actions, make informed decisions and enhance access to external resources and capabilities.

02 Ensuring information is accessible to local people and local responders where actions are implemented is an integral component of an *end-to-end* risk information system. Despite significant investments in national forecasting agencies, a critical challenge is the two way exchange of information between those who observe hazards with those who *respond* to their impact. In Sri Lanka, an Oxfam assessment found that 75% of at-risk households do not receive timely early warnings. The utility of national forecasting and risk information is a function of its relevance, timeliness and availability to different end-users. Currently in many contexts, there is a lack of capacity, know-how, relationships or appreciation of the need to tailor risk information to the needs of local end-users. Processing information is not sufficient without communication and utilisation by public and private end-users.

03 Future investments in national forecasting services must develop a more customer-focused service involving strategic engagement with end-user groups. Forecast information must be developed with end-users in the driving seat. This provides an opportunity for anticipatory action agencies to develop innovative partnerships with international organisations, and national agencies to reimagine how forecast information can better serve the needs of high-risk people. Particular attention should be given to smaller hazards which are under the radar of formal observation systems.

04 Local organisations working on issues of community preparedness, resilience and adaptation have a strong comparative advantage to support anticipatory action interventions. Creating synergies and unlocking this potential will require mainstreaming guidelines and training resources to support the integration of anticipatory action into relevant projects and programmes. Effective mainstreaming could significantly extend the coverage and awareness of anticipatory action work.

“**OVERALL, INTERVIEWEES CONSIDERED OFFICIAL SOURCES OF RISK INFORMATION TO BE OVERLY TECHNICAL, NOT SPECIFIC ENOUGH AND TOO SLOW AND/OR RISK ADVERSE WHEN ISSUING WARNINGS TO INFORM LOCAL ACTION**”
INTERVIEWEE

“**WORK IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS TO AT-RISK GROUPS - RELEVANT INFORMATION MUST BE TAKEN DOWN TO THE LOCAL LEVEL TO BUILD AWARENESS AND OWNERSHIP OF ACTION**”
INTERVIEWEE

TO SUPPORT AN END-TO-END RISK INFORMATION SYSTEM, THREE DISTINCT BUT CONNECTED LINES OF ACTION ARE REQUIRED:

01 BRINGING NATIONAL FORECASTS TO THE LOCAL LEVEL

Disseminate and tailor national risk information to the needs and priorities of at-risk people, including impact-based forecasting. Anticipatory action requires an understanding of context-specific impacts of potential hazards on the lives and assets of at-risk people. The development of impact-based tools would enable populations at risk to better understand when and where to take appropriate early action, as well as support more effective targeting of high-risk groups.



02 DECENTRALISE THE PROCESS

Develop decentralised community-managed forecast tools and methodologies that empower local responders and utilise local institutional capacities and agency of at-risk people. These must connect with national-level structures and processes. Global technical support should be provided when appropriate.



03 MAINSTREAMING EARLY ACTION

Mainstream early action into existing humanitarian and development programs: Extending outreach and integrating early action into relevant emergency response and longer-term local adaptation and resilience initiatives in hazard-prone areas.



IN SUPPORT OF THESE WORK-STREAMS THE STUDY IDENTIFIED SEVERAL KEY ENABLERS:

- INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES:**



Increased anticipation finance is only as good as the local delivery channel. Scaling-up anticipatory action will require increased engagement across key anticipatory action agencies together with an extended network of local partners and community-based organisations who can monitor and share data, map community needs, request support, plan and implement early actions. Collaborating with local NGOs and community-based groups working on relevant longer-term development climate-related projects in high-risk areas could provide a means to extend the coverage of forecast-based action.
- FUNDING:**



Access to funding was identified as a critical issue, although some respondents felt too much emphasis was being placed on the financial aspect of anticipatory action. Bringing early action to scale will require leveraging relevant national and international finance mechanisms.
- POLITICAL COMMITMENT:**



Financial resources for early action are an indicator of political commitment. The study identified the need for greater political support within the leadership of INGOs, UN agencies and national governments. The ability to work collaboratively across traditional boundaries to advance anticipatory action also requires political commitment and leadership.

ALTHOUGH THERE IS STRONG INTEREST AT THE LOCAL LEVEL THERE IS NOT A LOT OF POLITICAL SUPPORT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

START NETWORK MEMBER
- PARTNERSHIPS & ALLIANCES:**



Taking anticipatory action to scale will require bringing together various actors to craft systems, highlight opportunities for collaboration, develop consensus and foster innovative private – public partnerships for joint action across traditional boundaries. Partnerships which look to build national forecast capabilities and better connect climate risk information services to end-user groups should be prioritised. Closer working with national NGO networks could support the integration of anticipatory action into community-based adaptation and resilience programmes. Building alliances for public education campaigns and joint advocacy actions can serve to influence national and international policies.

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“TRANSITIONING TO AN ANTICIPATORY SYSTEM WILL REQUIRE A MORE BALANCED APPROACH THAT SHIFTS POWER TO THOSE AT THE FRONT LINE TO GENERATE MORE EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSES FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISES”

INTERVIEWEE

RECOMMENDATIONS:



The following recommendations have been developed to ensure local communities have the risk information that they need:

- FOR FORECAST INFORMATION PROVIDERS.**


 - Develop forecast information with at-risk people in the driving seat
 - Tailor and disseminate risk information to the needs and priorities of at-risk people. Focus on impact-based forecasting
 - Blend local / indigenous and external scientific knowledge when possible. Ensure that forecast information is available in local languages and tailor risk information so that it is more user-friendly
- FOR START NETWORK AND OTHER EARLY ACTION AGENCIES**


 - Prioritise connecting local at-risk people to forecasting information and focus on impact based forecasting
 - Enable decentralised, inclusive and participatory planning and decision-making processes for anticipatory action
 - Specifically:
 - Involve at-risk people in mapping of impacts, defining triggers & early actions
 - Involve at-risk people in identifying vulnerable groups
 - Support at-risk people to self-determine needs and define acceptable levels of risk (danger level)
 - Develop country inventories of national and locally-led forecasting tools and risk information platforms with clear terminology and metrics
- FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:**


 - Strengthen collaboration and connections between first responders and national forecast & resource providers
 - Provide political commitment and/or financial and human resources to communicate and contextualise risk information to make it accessible to at-risk people
- FOR DONORS:**


 - Prioritise partnerships which seek to build national forecast capabilities and better connect climate risk information services to at-risk groups
- FOR ALL ACTORS:**


 - Advocate for end-to-end risk information systems. Implement advocacy actions to influence institutional policies and plans towards a more supportive environment for locally-led anticipatory action