

Anticipatory Action: Using forecasts to prevent hazards from becoming disasters

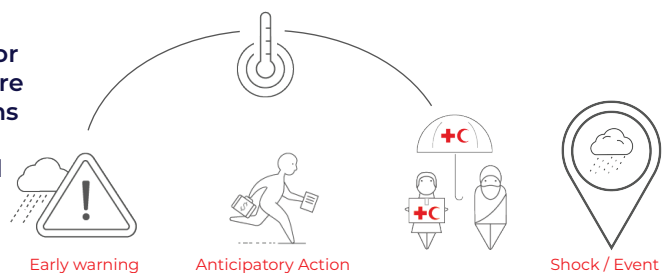
What Is Anticipatory Action?

Traditionally, humanitarian agencies responded to crises after they began. However, this approach can take time: agencies must assess needs, then draw up response plans and source the necessary funds. Meanwhile lives and livelihoods are lost due to the unfolding crisis and the significant time lag between the onset of the shock and the delivery of urgent assistance.

Yet scientific progress over recent decades means that we can now make **increasingly precise predictions about when and where hurricanes, drought, floods and other shocks are likely to occur, and what their likely impacts on people will be.** These advances in forecasting make anticipatory action possible.

The Concept

Anticipatory action refers to **actions taken before a crisis hits to prevent or reduce potential disaster impacts prior to a shock or before acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out based on forecasts or predictions of how the event will unfold.** The types of actions are varied and depend on the hazard and context and can range from evacuation, the reinforcement of homes and the distribution of health protection kits to mobile cooling centres and cash distribution.

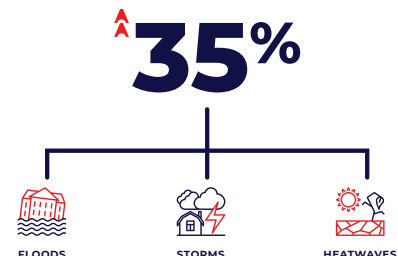


Implementing anticipatory action requires developing pre-agreed action plans for response, setting out what early actions will be taken, based on what triggers, and tying that to pre-agreed and reliable financial resources.

Why Is It Important?

The frequency and severity of extreme weather events have increased and will continue to do so. The number of disasters such as floods, storms and heatwaves, has been increasing since the 1960s and has risen almost 35% since the 1990s.

The impacts of these disasters can include deaths, large-scale forced displacement, food insecurity, disease outbreaks, and loss of livelihoods. The World Bank estimates that upgrading early warning and early action capacity in all developing countries could save some 23,000 lives and avert the destruction of between US\$300 million and \$2 billion in assets every year.



We know that acting before a hazard turns into a crisis saves lives and livelihoods and reduces human suffering. We also know that anticipatory action is a faster, more effective and dignified way of providing support. If we evacuate people before a flood, we do not need to rescue them and support them afterwards. If we help farmers find alternative livelihood options ahead of a drought, they won't need food aid when the harvest fails.

Anticipatory action is a no-regrets approach: it can reduce the burden of emergency response and make it more effective, even if the crisis doesn't turn into an extreme event.

Anticipatory Action within The Red Cross & Red Crescent Network

Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are well placed to mobilise anticipatory action to help communities act ahead of disasters. Leveraging their presence in communities and role as auxiliary to their governments, they can ensure early warning reaches last mile communities and that anticipatory action is taken accordingly. The Red Cross and Red Crescent network began implementing anticipatory action projects in 2014. **As of early 2022 National Societies were implementing anticipatory action projects in nearly 40 countries.**



In Mongolia, anticipatory action helped to reduce the number of vulnerable herder households having to sell valuable assets to cope with particularly cold winter, reducing the selling of assets by 17-43%.

In Bangladesh, cash grants were provided to vulnerable people up to 7 days before the floods, improving their access to food, reducing high-interest debt, and reducing psychosocial stress during and after the flood period.



The Process



How Can Anticipatory Action Be Funded?

Traditionally, early warning did not systematically lead to early action due to a lack of funding. In 2018, IFRC launched the Forecast-based Action by the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (FbA by the DREF), a funding mechanism to enable Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies with approved and pre-agreed plans to implement early actions. In addition, as part of the DREF strategic ambition 2020-2025, IFRC is expanding the use of DREF for anticipatory action. Beyond IFRC's funding tools, some National Societies have also explored social protection systems and innovative financing mechanisms to fund anticipatory action. Since 2020, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has also supported the set-up and financing of anticipatory action pilot initiatives.

Making Anticipatory Action The New Normal

To keep up with rising risks and to reduce their harmful effects, anticipatory action needs to become the new normal. It should be scaled up to more countries, covering more people and a wider range of hazards, with better coordination and more funding that is flexible and predictable. As part of its Operational Framework for Scaling up Anticipatory Action, IFRC has set a target for 80 National Societies to implement anticipatory action by 2025, targeting 4.5 million people. Given the short window of opportunity to act between a forecast and the impact of certain hazards, it is crucial that investments actively engage local responders and at-risk communities in the design and timely implementation of locally led anticipatory action in close collaboration with national authorities.



The cash transfer before the flood saved us. Otherwise, we would have had to sell our livestock, our income source for the future!

Male focus group participant who received an anticipatory cash transfer, Bhandarbari (Bangladesh)

Because we received some money, we were able to manage during the flood. Without it, we would have to take some loan which is very costly to us.

Female focus group participant in Kamalpur (Bangladesh)



For more information, visit:

<https://www.ifrc.org/forecast-based-action> | <https://www.anticipation-hub.org/>
<https://www.ifrc.org/early-warning-early-action>