

Briefing Note

Anticipatory Action: An innovative tool at the intersection of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response



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Citation: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2024). Briefing Note: Anticipatory Action – An innovative tool at the intersection of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

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Introduction

Anticipatory action (AA) fills a critical niche in disaster risk management. It builds on disaster preparedness and takes place right before a reactive response to a specific disaster. AA exploits the window of opportunity between an early warning for an imminent event and that event materializing.

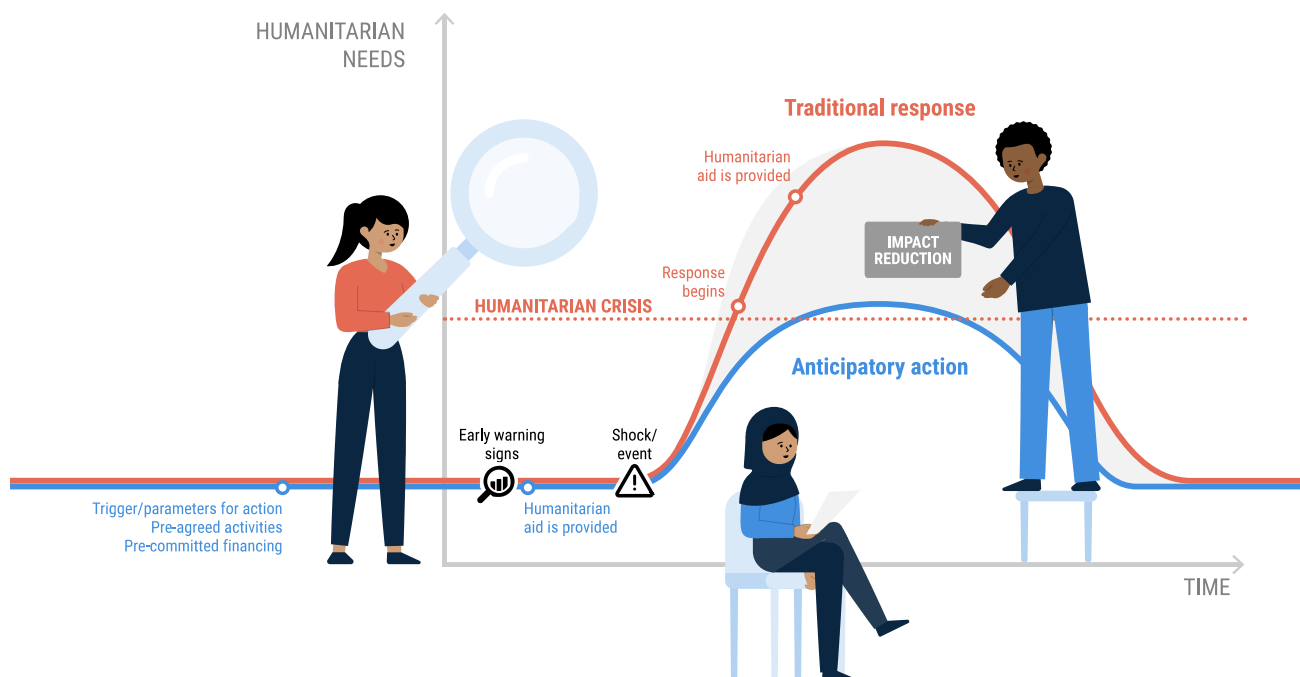
AA can provide fast, dignified and cost-effective support to vulnerable people at risk of imminent disasters in ways that also protect development gains and provide opportunities to accelerate disaster risk reduction.

This note outlines the perspectives of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) on the status of AA, existing collaboration between the organizations and outlooks for scaling up AA going forward.

1. What is anticipatory action?

AA is understood as acting ahead of a predicted hazardous event to prevent or reduce impacts on lives, livelihoods and humanitarian needs before they fully unfold.¹ This works best when activities, triggers and decision-making rules are pre-agreed to guarantee the fast release of anticipatory finance. The role of AA compared with the traditional response in reducing humanitarian needs is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Anticipatory Action situated in the disaster timeline



Source: OCHA, *Anticipatory Action Toolkit*, 10 September 2024.

Available at <https://anticipatory-action-toolkit.unocha.org/first-steps/>.

¹ This definition is based on the Grand Bargain Caucus on Anticipatory Action, and it reflects the same elements used by OCHA and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Recent impact studies and evaluations show that AAs can:

- ✓ **Lead to fast and timely action** in support of vulnerable people.
- ✓ **Reduce negative coping strategies**, such as taking on more household debt or selling assets.
- ✓ **Mitigate humanitarian needs**, such as through households maintaining their levels of food intake and protecting food well-being during a shock.
- ✓ **Be more cost-effective** than traditional response activities.
- ✓ **Protect development gains and livelihoods**, such as through safeguarding long-term resilience building projects or productive investments, which could enhance future income-generating capacity and long-term resilience.

The impacts and benefits of AA vary by country, hazard, activity and timing. Comprehensive resources and detailed findings are available at the Anticipation Hub's Evidence Database.²

2. How does anticipatory action relate to disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action?

AA is an important element for effective disaster risk management. Recognizing this potential, in 2014, the General Assembly urged the United Nations “to prioritize risk management and shift towards an anticipatory approach to humanitarian crises in order to prevent and reduce human suffering and economic losses” (A/RES/69/243). The Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (A/RES/77/289) calls upon States to invest in disaster risk reduction, including by “enhancing financing for early and anticipatory approaches to reduce the impact of disasters, including through the United Nations system and other relevant organizations”. **Effective AA requires anticipatory finance** to be released before the onset of a specific shock event. This can be done based on forecasts or predictive analysis, to fund predefined activities that aim to prevent or reduce acute impacts before they fully unfold.

AA bridges the space between preparedness/contingency planning for disasters in general and reaction to specific disasters after they occur. AA thus straddles the realm of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action.

Figure 2 shows how AA fits within the broader disaster management cycle, building on adaptation, prevention, mitigation and preparedness efforts, and starting once a disaster is forecast to assist vulnerable people and communities facing imminent disaster. AAs thus can also provide life-saving assistance as well as adaptation to future shocks and stresses simultaneously.

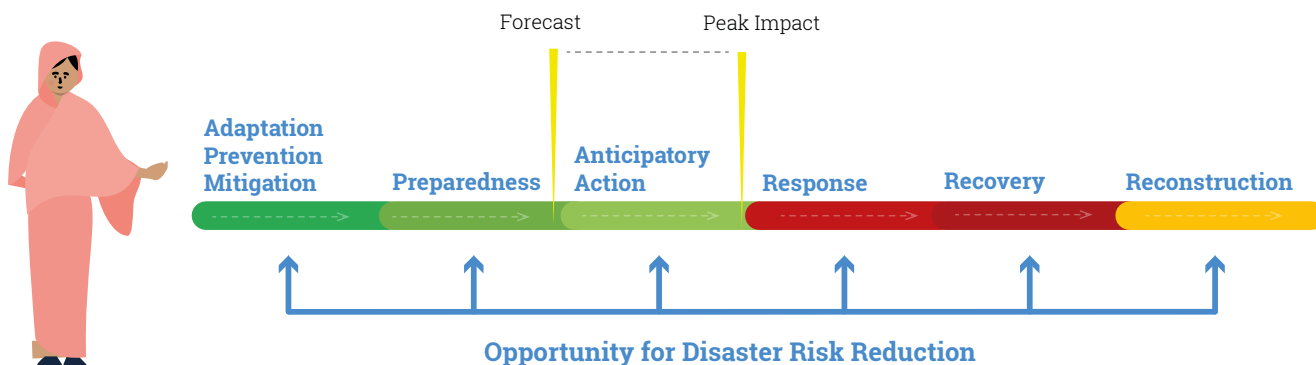
Within the risk management cycle, the window of opportunity for AA sits between the moment forecast information becomes available and before typical emergency response activities begin (i.e. before the shock occurs and humanitarian needs escalate). Such forecasts and alerts come through early warning systems that provide the necessary information to trigger AAs. As such, the Early Warnings for All initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General contributes to the scale-up of AA.

It is also important to understand that while AA focuses on providing aid to people before the shock to increase their ability to cope, emergency response preparedness focuses on ensuring the system's collective operational readiness is in place to increase the speed, volume, predictability and effectiveness of aid delivered as part of AAs or after the onset of a crisis.³

² Anticipation Hub, “Evidence database”, Evidence Database. Available at <https://www.anticipation-hub.org/experience/evidence-database/evidence-list> (accessed on 10 September 2024).

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience, *Emergency Response Preparedness* (2015). Available at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2019-02/iasc_emergency_response_preparedness_guidelines_july_2015_draft_for_field_testing.pdf.

Figure 2. Anticipatory Action within the disaster management cycle



Source: Adapted from UNDRR, *Anticipatory Finance: An Introductory Guide* (2024), p. 10.

Available at <https://www.undrr.org/publication/anticipatory-finance-introductory-guide>

Many governments and organizations undertake a range of activities in advance of forecasted shocks to mitigate impacts, such as evacuations or opening shelters, but they may not have used the term AA, or they may not have institutionalized the approach, especially through prearranging and pre-identifying reliable funding to support fast and impactful actions before it is too late.

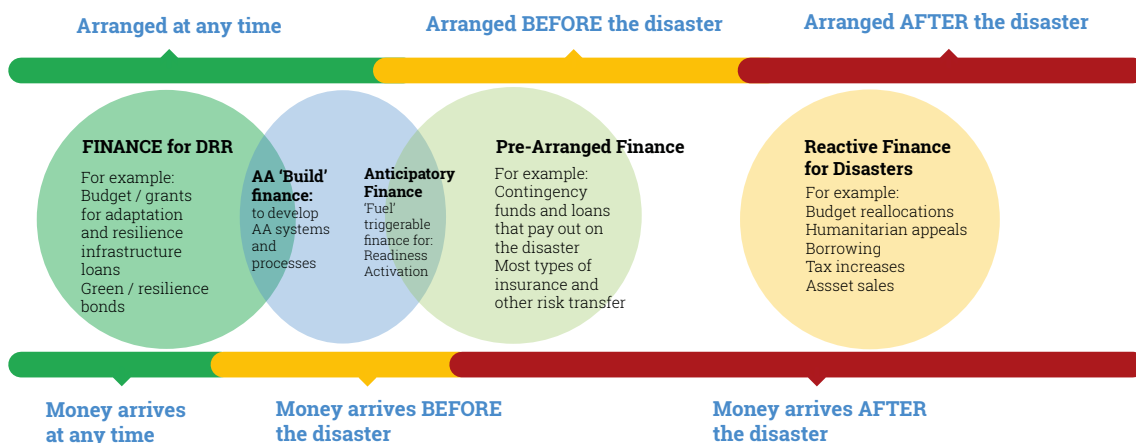
Recent examples have shown that AA has the potential to be integrated into adaptive social safety net systems and applied across many sectors, including food security, water and sanitation, education and health, supporting vulnerable people more holistically when facing an imminent crisis.

Collaborating on coordinated AA does not only mean readying a response in advance of an alert. AA can also be used as a tool by governments and other disaster risk management actors to make sure capacities and resources are in place, as well as to be agile and effective once a disaster warning is received.

While the activity or approach can be tailored to a particular situation, it should lead to increased coping capacity of governments and people. At its core, AA strengthens the resilience of communities and helps avert, minimize, and address losses and damages.

Financing for disaster risk management is outlined in **Figure 3**, showing how different types of financing is provided for different disaster risk management activities at different times. Anticipatory finance is often categorized as either triggerable “fuel” finance and “build” finance, which pays for activities required to set the AA frameworks in place.

Figure 3. Types of finance across the disaster management cycle.



Source: Adapted from UNDRR, *Anticipatory Finance: An Introductory Guide* (2024), p.18.

3. How the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction work together on anticipatory action

OCHA and UNDRR are collaborating to further facilitate the coordinated development, scale-up, mainstreaming and financing of anticipatory approaches. This includes supporting Member States as well as regional, international and national partners to apply AA to increase adaptation and resilience.

OCHA and UNDRR are collaborating on and committed to:

● At country level:

- **Data-sharing:** Data-sharing includes promoting more standardized and interoperable disaster risk data ecosystems that underpin improving AA. This includes sharing historical hazard, vulnerability, exposure and impact data as well as preparedness data.
- **Risk analytics:** Improved analysis of hazard-specific and multidimensional risk for more effective coordinated humanitarian planning.
- **Strategic planning:** Better integrating AA into the humanitarian programme cycle and capacity-building of humanitarian, development and climate actors for risk-informed planning, including through the application of the checklist on scaling up DRR.⁴
- **Coordinated AA frameworks:** Build on each other's comparative advantages in the disaster management cycle to co-facilitate coordinated AA frameworks where possible.
- **Policy development:** Working with national governments to integrate anticipatory approaches in national disaster risk management plans and instruments.

● At regional level:

- **Coordination and knowledge-sharing:** Facilitating and/or participating in regional knowledge-sharing mechanisms and forums on AA.
- **Capacity-building and awareness-raising:** Providing technical support to regional and national organizations and partners, including the United Nations system, on the role of AA in humanitarian response and disaster risk management.

● At global level:

- **Studies and advocacy:** Make learning and evidence generation around risk understanding and foresight a key component of anticipatory approaches. Collaborate on joint studies and advocacy on the use, effectiveness and improvement of AA.
- **Coordinated engagement in AA-related processes:** Coordination of engagement in key international forums such as: the Grand Bargain political caucus to scale up AA; the Anticipation Hub; the four pillars of the Early Warning for All initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General; and key climate change adaptation-related events, including the twenty-ninth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- **Financial arrangements:** Establishment of good practice and well-defined processes that governments can follow to identify cost-effective opportunities for anticipatory activities and source anticipatory finance.

⁴ UNDRR, *Checklist 2.0: Scaling Up Disaster Risk Reduction in Humanitarian Action* (2021). Available at <https://www.undrr.org/publication/scaling-disaster-risk-reduction-humanitarian-action>.

Analysis supports humanitarian response in Somalia

In 2023, the UNDRR and the OCHA collaborated to develop an in-depth, evidence-based and multidimensional risk analysis for the Humanitarian Needs Overview: Somalia.⁵ Building on this, OCHA updated a robust risk analysis within the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Somalia, integrating anticipatory action and rapid response preparedness ahead of the yearly recurring Gu rains, for which US\$3 million was immediately allocated from the OCHA-managed Somalia Humanitarian Fund.⁶

Reducing impacts of cyclones in the Pacific

Co-led by OCHA and UNDRR, the United Nations in Fiji, in close collaboration with the Government and other partners, launched in 2023 an Anticipatory Action Framework for Fiji Tropical Cyclones.⁷ The groundbreaking project aims to provide assistance to people before cyclones make landfall and thus prevent, mitigate or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold for the Fijian communities caught on the front lines of the climate crisis. Once the framework is triggered, the United Nations would release some US\$3.8 million of prearranged finance for anticipatory actions, including some US\$2.4 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).



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⁵ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Somalia 2023* (2023). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-february-2023>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ United Nations and the Government of Fiji, *Anticipatory Action Framework: Fiji Tropical Cyclones – 2023* (2023). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/8f5dec36-3634-4d99-a651-62da93b6e8bb/Fiji%20Tropical%20Cyclones%20-%202023%20Anticipatory%20Action%20Framework.pdf>.

4. What is needed to scale up anticipatory action?

AA is rapidly evolving. Scaling up approaches will require enhanced analysis and forecasting, support systems and finance, as well as continuous learning and enhancement at global, regional, national and local levels. While the scaling up of AA will require the involvement of multiple actors, some key considerations from the perspective of UNDRR and OCHA are provided below.

A. Better analytics and forecasting

At the global level, investments in better risk knowledge for better analytics and forecasting, including expanding AA to more hazards and contexts are key.

This can serve as the base for more granular national and subnational assessments reducing the current digital divide in countries that have the least access to quality analytics and lack forecasting capabilities. This should build on existing national solutions and global initiatives including the Humanitarian Data Exchange and DesInventar.

Scaling up the application of rapid and low-cost impact-based forecasting assessments can help planners estimate future impacts,

set and test appropriate triggers, and put in place systems ahead of shocks and extreme hazards. Increasingly, United Nations humanitarian planning processes should better integrate risk information, emergency response preparedness and AA.

The following is required:

- **Support risk knowledge and data tools to: better track disaster losses; analyse evolving risk, exposure and vulnerability; and develop impact-based forecasts.**
- **Technical and financial support to mainstream preparedness and AA into humanitarian planning processes.**

B. Explore and expand opportunities for anticipatory finance

Anticipatory finance sits within a broader spectrum of financing across the disaster risk financing and management cycle.⁸ Various sources such as governments, donor agencies, development banks, the private sector and other channels provide funds at multiple stages using a range of instruments, spanning government humanitarian, development and climate sectors and actors. At the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, OCHA launched a new Climate Action Account under the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as part of its innovative financing solutions to climate-related emergencies through the expansion of AA to get ahead of crises.⁹ The CERF has committed up to 10 per cent of its funding towards AA, with some US\$98 million already prearranged between 2020 and 2023. Up to US\$142 million has also been disbursed by CERF for AA (constituting

72 per cent of the global AA disbursements), both as part of frameworks and through other ad hoc allocations, including via Country-based Pooled Funds managed by OCHA.¹⁰ As AA fits into the continuum of work on development, climate resilience and adaptation, there is a need for different types of financing to evolve to be able to support AA. Increased coordinated and flexible prearranged financing is needed.

For example, as part of its commitments at the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, OCHA committed to facilitate, mainstream and scale up collective AA, including through a guiding figure of 10 per cent of the annual spending of CERF on AA.¹¹ Already, OCHA is the largest provider of anticipatory finance in the humanitarian space with more than US\$100 million ready to be released against coordinated AA frameworks. Donors, international financial institutions

8 UNDRR, *Anticipatory Finance: An Introductory Guide* (2024). Available at <https://www.undrr.org/publication/anticipatory-finance-introductory-guide>.

9 CERF, *Climate Action Account* (2023). Available at https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/CERF_climate_action_account_EN%20%28002%29.pdf.

10 OCHA, *Country-based Pooled Funds: Global Guidelines* (2022). Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/country-based-pooled-funds-global-guidelines-enar>.

11 UNFCCC, "OCHA Package of Solutions", COP28 UAE. Available at <https://www.cop28.com/en/OCHA-package-of-solutions>, 10 September 2024.

and other organizations should consider making ambitious commitments to invest in AA, backed up by clear pooled fund mechanisms, such as CERF and the Country-based Pooled Funds managed by OCHA as well as prearranged finance.

The global context for AA is rapidly evolving, with opportunities for diversified sources of anticipatory financing growing. Continued support for initiatives such as the Global Shield Against Climate Risks can increase opportunities for anticipatory financing and support government access to funding. AA can benefit from increased use of new and blended finance instruments such as insurance.

C. Sustainable systems and continuous learning

Increased support to governments and local actors to further apply AA, linking to the disaster risk management cycle, is needed.

In systematically considering AA, actors should link activities to other phases of the disaster risk management cycle, in particular prevention, mitigation and preparedness before AA occurs as well as the response that comes afterwards. Investments into early warnings and initiatives (such as the emerging climate change Loss and Damage Fund) and other climate finance providers need to explicitly design systems that enable the application of AA to reduce disaster risks and address humanitarian needs as part of their activities.

The following is required:

- **Support to national Governments to identify and integrate AA into disaster risk reduction financing strategies and disaster risk management plans.**
- **Donor commitments to, and investments in, AA.**
- **Continued dialogue and exploration of the role of new and blended finance for AA.**

AA is still an evolving area with innovation and new instruments evolving. Anticipation actors should commit to documenting the outcomes and impacts of AA as well as the performance of different anticipatory finance instruments through cost-benefit analyses and comparisons with alternative approaches. This will foster global learning, help develop best practices and support much-needed advocacy on the benefits of applying AA approaches.

The following is required:

- **Technical and financial support to national Governments and local actors to identify opportunities for, and apply, AA.**
- **Investments in early warnings as well as loss and damage, linking to AA.**
- **Analysis of the costs and benefits of AA.**

Conclusion

The time is ripe to make the most of the rapid evolution in AA. The uptake by humanitarian actors, international financing institutions and governments of the above recommendations can further amplify the reach and effectiveness of AA. OCHA and UNDRR are committed to work together to scale up AA going forward, for the benefit of communities affected by disasters and climate change.

