

Anticipatory humanitarian action

TAKING ACTION BEFORE A DISASTER OCCURS: HOW ANTICIPATORY HUMANITARIAN ACTION SAVES LIVES AND LOWERS COSTS



People in Peru receive relief supplied in anticipation of an upcoming cold wave. © Cruz Roja Peruana

The main reasons why the need for humanitarian assistance has been steadily rising for years are armed conflicts, climate change and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to United Nations estimates, one in every 29 people is reliant on humanitarian assistance in 2022. At the same time, the resources available are shrinking. One instrument which can be used to counter this trend, to make the assistance more efficient and to ensure that it is provided in good time is anticipatory humanitarian action.

Anticipatory humanitarian action is founded on scientific data and forecasts. On this basis, targeted measures can be taken in good time before disasters, for instance heavy rains, droughts or cold waves, cause major damage. Projects in more than 60 countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach.

For many years now, the German Government has been leading the way when it comes to developing and funding anticipatory humanitarian action – in close cooperation with other donors and relief organisations. This continues to be one of the priorities of Germany's G7 Presidency.

Bangladesh, June 2020 – one example of how anticipatory humanitarian action works

20 June 2020. We find ourselves in the Brahmaputra river basin in Bangladesh. It has been pouring for days on end. The water levels are rising inexorably. People here are used to heavy rains and seasonal flooding. The situation becomes dangerous when the volume of water reaches catastrophic dimensions, as it did in 2020. But this time the population is prepared.

25 June. Members of the Bangladesh Red Crescent establish that there is a 50% probability of flooding on a scale only seen once every ten years. If action is not taken now, human lives,



A local woman receiving money to take herself, her family and her property to safety before any damage is done. © WFP/Mehedi Rahman



A member of the Bangladesh Red Crescent carrying a tin roof onto an evacuation boat together with volunteers and villagers. © WFP/Mehedi Rahman

animals and property are at risk. Some 3300 families were identified as being in immediate danger in the anticipatory planning. These families now receive the equivalent of 50 euro via a team of volunteers: that is enough to transport people, livestock and essential property to safety on boats.

After a few weeks, the water levels fall and people can return home. The flooding has left its mark. But without the measures taken immediately before the flooding – anticipatory humanitarian action – the damage would have been much worse. And most importantly, nobody drowned!

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF ANTICIPATORY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN BANGLADESH IN 2020 IN NUMBERS*:

	Respondents who received anticipatory humanitarian assistance	Comparison group which did not receive anticipatory humanitarian assistance
Were able to evacuate themselves or family members	27%	11%
Loss of livestock	9%	22%
Damage to tools	51%	72%
Had to borrow money to deal with the aftermath of the flooding	44%	56%
Had to sell household belongings to deal with the aftermath of the flooding	0%	12%

*The data stems from an evaluation carried out by the Bangladesh Red Crescent in spring 2021. People who received anticipatory humanitarian assistance and others who did not receive it were surveyed.

How do you define anticipatory humanitarian action?

Anticipatory humanitarian action is part of humanitarian disaster prevention. The aim is to reduce the humanitarian impact of disasters. This is achieved by local stakeholders and humanitarian organisations taking early action when a disaster can be forecast with a high degree of probability on the basis of data – but it has not yet occurred or it has not yet unleashed its full force. This makes it possible to save lives and prevent damage before it occurs.

Anticipatory humanitarian action pays off

According to various calculations, anticipatory humanitarian action is two to seven times more effective than if the same amount of money were to be spent after the disaster. Around 20% of all disasters can be accurately predicted. That means that anticipatory humanitarian action has great potential when it comes to using donors’ money more effectively and helping more people. In a report of May 2022, for example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) calculated that approx. 230 million

US dollars were spent in the Horn of Africa in 2021/2 on preventing locust infestation, while the damage caused would have amounted to approx. 1.7 billion US dollars.

Anticipatory humanitarian action strengthens people's ability to act on the ground

Careful planning, clear task-setting and targeted support with information and financial resources ahead of the adverse weather event helps people on the ground to help themselves. It also fosters initiatives to take suitable structural measures at an early stage in order to prevent humanitarian crises.



In 2020 and 2021, the FAO – with German support – implemented a very successful desert locust control campaign at the Horn of Africa, saving food worth 1.77 billion US Dollar. © FAO

For instance, FAO provided funding in 2018/19 for community farms in Mindanao in the Philippines to enable people to rear their livestock despite the threat posed by the El Niño phenomenon. At the same time, the farms functioned as a training centre where men and women learned to make crop and livestock farming more resistant to drought. Preparation through anticipatory humanitarian action thus always helps to strengthen the resilience of the relevant sections of society.

Anticipatory humanitarian action fosters innovation

Forecasts are key to gaining an ever greater understanding of potential risks and improving early warning. Thanks to the technical developments of recent years, they are increasingly accurate. They provide information, available both locally and globally, on the occurrence, strength and progress of natural events.

The close connections at global level among the stakeholders involved and the wide-ranging dialogue with scientists and other partners, such as the Global Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action, which is supported annually by

the German Government, makes it possible to further develop innovative approaches on an ongoing and dynamic basis. The system is continually developed and fine-tuned by reviewing the selected approaches and thresholds.

How does anticipatory humanitarian action work?

For every disaster scenario there is an **Early Action Protocol**, which sets out in detail which trigger leads to which concrete measures. They provide information on who does what when and thus make it possible to respond quickly to any forecasts that turn out to be accurate.

Triggers define a certain threshold, for example a meteorological forecast. When this threshold is reached, concrete measures are triggered. How the threshold is defined in concrete terms depends on the nature of the possible disaster and on its potential impact on the population.

The choice of concrete **early actions** is based on a model known as impact-based forecasting. This model combines data from the forecast with risk maps. This combination of data is used to determine where and when early actions should be implemented. This ensures that those exposed to the greatest risk receive support.

Funding is disbursed when the threshold is reached. As the funding is already available ahead of the disaster, it can be distributed quickly to those at risk.

In addition to the trigger-based type of anticipatory humanitarian action, it can be also be granted in individual cases ad hoc – without specific triggers.

In some individual cases, anticipatory action can also be implemented based on an ad hoc decision, rather than triggers. This is especially useful when a major threat is looming but no Early Action Protocol or alike is in place. This applied to the example in the Horn of Africa already mentioned. The FAO issued a disaster appeal when huge swarms of locusts threatened to destroy food for millions of people. Germany and other donors responded promptly by providing the necessary funding. These early and targeted measures to tackle the locusts made it possible to save grain and dairy products worth 1.77 billion US dollars.

How the Federal Foreign Office funds anticipatory humanitarian action

The Federal Foreign Office has been supporting the strategic development and piloting of anticipatory

SIDE GLANCE:
ANTICIPATORY
HUMANITARIAN ACTION
IN MONGOLIA



humanitarian action since 2014. Germany is thus a pioneer in this field.

What is more, from the outset the Federal Foreign Office has been calling in international forums for this approach to be expanded. Following several years of working to get others on board, anticipatory humanitarian action is now anchored in the three pillars of the humanitarian system: the United Nations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs (e.g. via the Start Network). These efforts have

paid off: in 2020, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) became involved in funding anticipatory humanitarian action, among other places in Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, anticipatory humanitarian action still plays a marginal role in humanitarian assistance as a whole. It is therefore all the more important that we now further develop its full potential, thus enabling us to offer effective protection to more people. Germany has pledged to increase the share of anticipatory humanitarian action in its overall humanitarian budget to 5% by 2023.

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G7 ADOPT STATEMENT ON ANTICIPATORY HUMANITARIAN ACTION DURING GERMANY'S PRESIDENCY

In keeping with the existing commitment and in line with other G7 work processes on the impact of climate change and on food security, Germany made anticipatory humanitarian action one of the priorities of its G7 Presidency in 2022. Due to their key contribution to the global humanitarian assistance budget, the G7 states have significant influence when it comes to shaping humanitarian assistance and setting priorities. In their joint statement at the meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers, they committed to expanding anticipatory measures and systematically anchoring them in the humanitarian system.

Extract from the G7 statement on anticipatory humanitarian assistance:

“While traditional humanitarian assistance remains essential in conflict and disasters, anticipatory approaches allow us to act before disaster strikes and crises fully unfold, before lives and livelihoods are lost. We, the G7, therefore reaffirm our commitment to advocate for, scale up and systematically mainstream anticipatory action into the humanitarian system.”

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