

# Planning and Starting Anticipatory Action

**CWS Technical Unit**  
**June 2023**

## About CWS

Church World Service (CWS) is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. Our vision is a world where all have food, voice, and a safe place to call home.

## Objective

Anticipatory action is gaining traction in the humanitarian sector (including emergency and disaster response), and there is increasing evidence that [early actions can mitigate impact](#) from disasters. Anticipatory action could enhance the quality of CWS's emergency response work as well. However, the key question is how to start. We have developed this guidance note to help our colleagues think about integrating anticipatory action in our work.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) describes anticipatory action in this way: "Anticipatory action is a set of humanitarian interventions triggered once a pre-agreed forecast threshold is crossed. Supported by pre-agreed finance, anticipatory action prevents or mitigates potential disaster impacts before a shock, or before acute impacts are felt. Acting early mitigates the shock impact and reduces humanitarian needs, helping to protect hard-won development gains and enhance resilience. Examples of anticipatory action include early evacuation and protecting key livelihood assets from being damaged or lost from anticipated disasters."<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction to Anticipatory Action

Disaster risk is a mix of exposure to hazard, vulnerability, and capacity of the communities to face shocks and stresses. A hazard is simply a phenomenon (e.g., heavy rain), and if it does not affect our lives or livelihood, we do not call it a disaster. So, there must be a way to ensure hazards do not turn into disasters. "Anticipatory action allows humanitarians and affected communities to make informed decisions ahead of a crisis. This means saving time and money; preventing displacement, disease, loss of livelihood; and preserving the dignity of those affected."<sup>2</sup> The diagram below from OCHA's Anticipatory Action Toolkit represents what the anticipatory action is trying to achieve.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Anticipatory action," PreventionWeb, <https://www.preventionweb.net/understanding-disaster-risk/key-concepts/anticipatory-action>.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Field, "Seven reasons to act early, before a hazard turns into a disaster," PreventionWeb, December 29, 2021, <https://www.preventionweb.net/blog/seven-reasons-act-early-hazard-turns-disaster>.

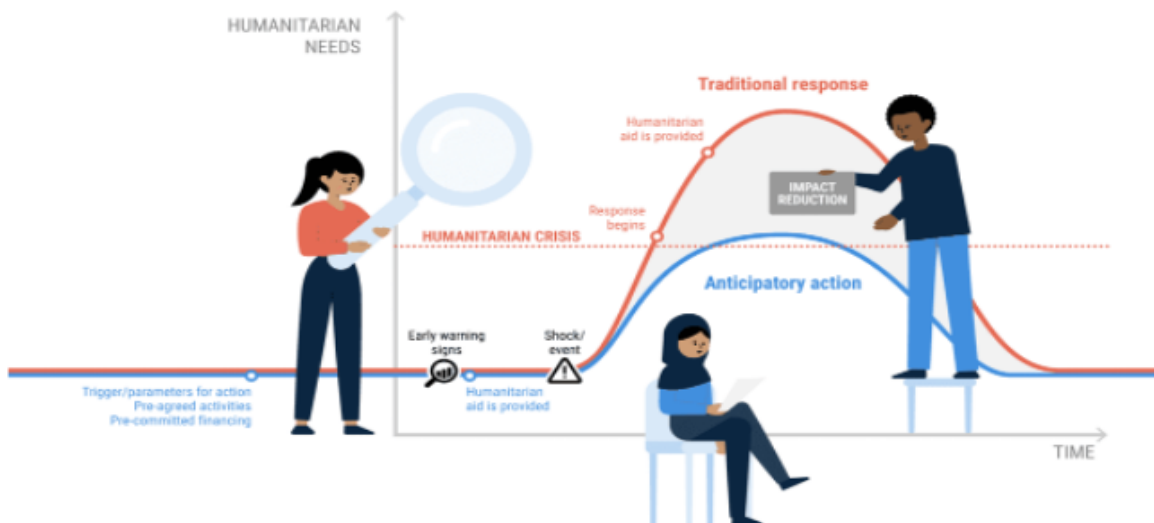
<sup>3</sup>"Anticipatory Action Toolkit," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, <https://anticipatory-action-toolkit.unocha.org/>.

Anticipatory action is synonymous with early action. There are seven reasons why such anticipatory/early action prevents a hazard from becoming a disaster<sup>4</sup>:

1. Better information leads to better decisions
2. Saving time means saving lives and livelihoods
3. Preparing communities can reduce displacement
4. Early intervention keeps more people healthy
5. Protecting livelihoods strengthens resilience
6. Preserving dignity reduces dependence and disruption
7. Saving money, to reach more people

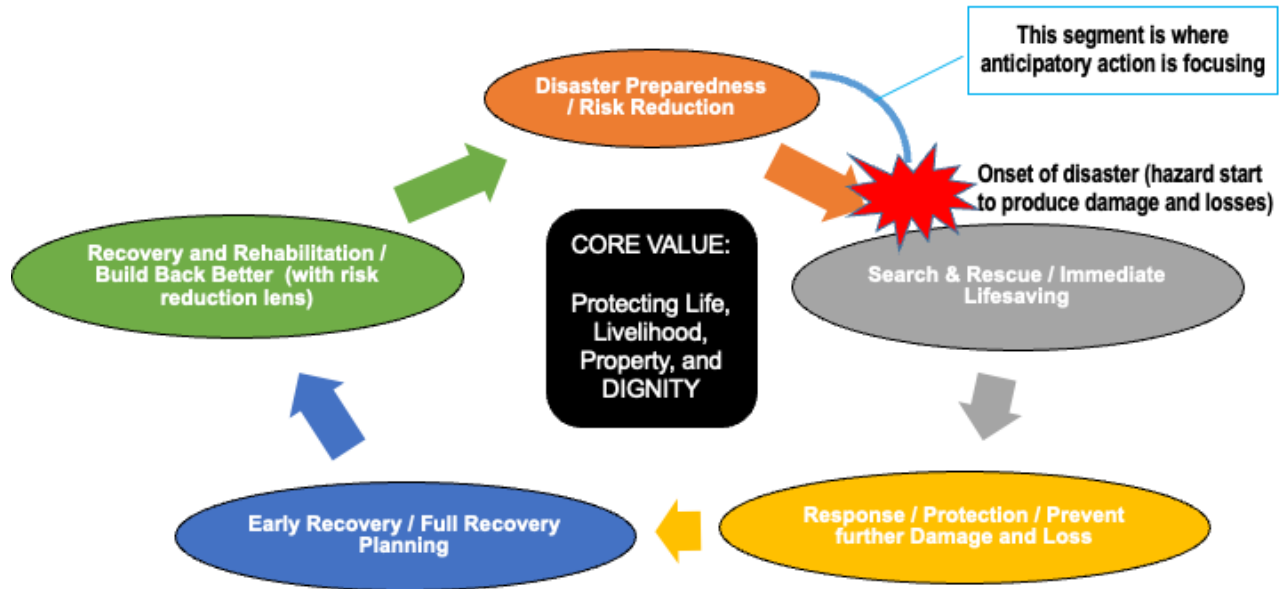
Further details are available at [Preventionweb.net](http://Preventionweb.net).

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) practitioners may more easily understand anticipatory action by identifying where it sits within the DRR cycle.



<sup>4</sup>Martin Field, "Seven reasons to act early, before a hazard turns into a disaster."

# Disaster cycle with anticipatory action



The [Anticipation Hub](#) provides examples of anticipatory action, including:

- Early evacuation of humans and livestock, including how to handle the evacuation period with care.
- Preparation of safe evacuation sites and routes, including cooling areas in case of heat wave.
- Cash assistance to ensure each community affected by a disaster can purchase priority items. There is a recent case from Ethiopia illustrating this point.<sup>5</sup>
- Management of livestock numbers in case of forecasted drought.
- Protecting key farming assets and early harvesting to reduce the losses.
- Prioritizing health, protection, and hygiene knowledge to prevent secondary disasters, such as serious illnesses.
- Strengthening shelter to withstand forthcoming wind and rain.
- Stocking lifesaving food and non-food items.

More can be found in the Anticipation Hub's [early action database](#).

There are elements that determine whether the anticipatory action is effective or not. First, it is extremely important to plan anticipatory action and DRR activities with communities so that community members understand the risks, the risk drivers, potential impact mitigation actions, and planning required to enact them. Without involving communities, no amount of money you pre-finance will produce effective anticipatory action. The Anticipation Hub also has a list of [lessons learned](#) from the anticipatory action community.

Second, there needs to be a balance of the communities' spontaneous efforts (self-help and mutual help) and external assistance. If the community thinks there will be an outside cash infusion with every abnormal weather condition, this will produce dependency, not resilience.

Lastly, work with local champions who are enthusiastic about collective safety against disasters, some of whom show remarkable leadership skills. These are the people you want to work with and invest in.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations World Food Programme, Anticipatory Cash Transfers and Early Warning Information Ahead of Drought in Ethiopia (Rome: UNWFP, 2022), [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000145564/download/?\\_ga=2.134890737.1883615871.1672315693-1070305082.1662361499](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000145564/download/?_ga=2.134890737.1883615871.1672315693-1070305082.1662361499).

## Five Guiding Questions to Start Planning Anticipatory Actions

It is critical to understand how we start planning and implementing anticipatory actions with communities. Here are the five guiding questions to help you kickstart the thinking process:

1. What are the anticipated recurring disasters in your target area?
2. What have the common losses been, and can early action prevent or mitigate them?
3. What are mitigation actions that can be considered anticipatory actions?
4. Would early resourcing/financing help the community take early mitigation actions?
5. Is there forecasting information available to help think through the triggers?

The key in start-up phase focuses on understanding the risk context of the communities you are going to work with, and position anticipatory action strategically in disaster management mechanism that may already exist. Therefore, it is advisable to start small first, and capture the impact of anticipation action with the communities, then start integrating them into your emergency response programs. It will enhance the quality of emergency response work too.

## Key Building Blocks of Anticipatory Action

The ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management<sup>6</sup> sets out three essential building blocks that can be globally applied to establish an effective anticipatory action system:

1. Risk information, forecasting, and early warning systems
2. Planning, operations, and delivery
3. Pre-arranged finance



Belgrade, Serbia 2023

<sup>6</sup>ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management Jakarta, ASEAN Secretariat, June 2022. [1070305082.1662361499](https://doi.org/10.7030/05082.1662361499).

# Insights from the Anticipatory Action Technical Working Group

This note summarizes the key insights from the Anticipatory Action Technical Working Group (TWG) (via excerpts from its technical standards document draft ) and their relevance to the work of CWS and partners.

## 1. Risk information, forecasting and early warning systems

### • Forecasts

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Accurate forecasts are essential for anticipatory action, including knowing when and where a hazard will strike or intensify.	Knowing what forecasts are available, as well as their limitations, is essential.
Forecasts must be assessed and monitored for accuracy to ensure that anticipatory action will be triggered at the right time as much as possible. Forecasts cannot always correctly predict the future, but they need to be sufficiently reliable to build a case for anticipatory action that protects communities at risk.	Forecasts by meteorological agencies tend to be broad in their coverage and, depending on the availability of weather monitoring posts (if too few), there must be a local effort to monitor and record local level rainfall patterns.
Forecasts get more accurate closer to the hazard event, but this needs to be balanced with incorporating sufficient time for the anticipatory activities.	When examining key disasters in the target area, we must consider which disaster can be mitigated with anticipatory action.

### • Types of Hazards

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Organizations operating in Asia report using anticipatory action for a wide range of hazards, including typhoon, river flooding, drought, volcanic eruptions, dzud (severe winter frosts in Mongolia), and heatwaves.	When examining key disasters in the target area, we must consider which disaster can be mitigated with anticipatory action.
Anticipatory action is not appropriate for some hazards, because they cannot be forecast with sufficient accuracy far enough in advance to implement meaningful mitigation actions.	One example could be earthquakes. However, if a tsunami is expected after an earthquake, depending on lead time, early action (such as evacuation) is always useful.

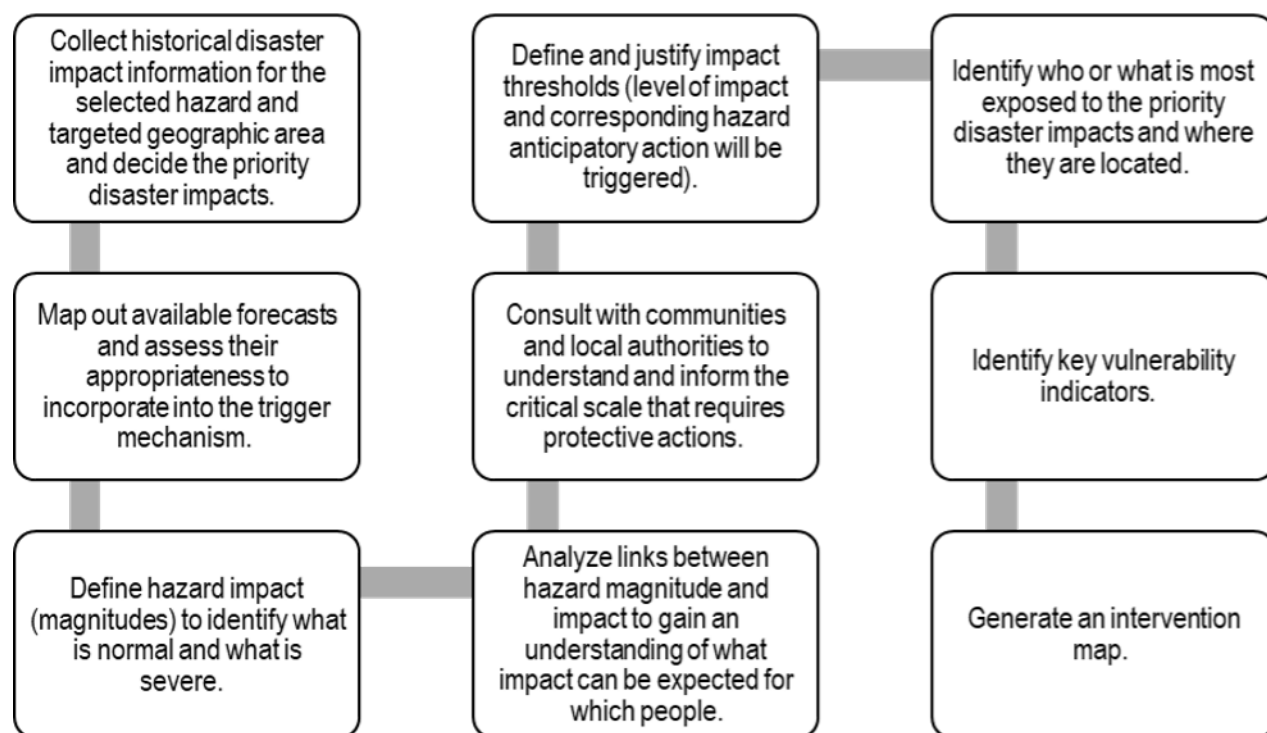
### • Triggers

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
One of the differences between anticipatory action and other types of disaster preparedness and response is that anticipatory action activities and finance are automatically initiated based on pre-agreed criterion, known as triggers.	As a matter of principle, it is always important to note that triggers are context-specific for each setting. For example, 100 millimeters of rain per day does not automatically mean there will be a flood. Different rainfall patterns lead to different results, depending on location and other factors.

## • Triggers

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Hard triggers use objective, quantitative forecast and data anticipatory action risk information that automatically activate a response once thresholds are reached.	The main indicator for this is rainfall data. Rain causes flooding as well as landslides, and we need to monitor how much rain and what rainfall patterns cause disasters in our target area.
Soft triggers combine objective data with expert judgement or decision-making processes that combine to activate the anticipatory action.	If elderly people and people with disabilities in the target area require more time to evacuate, then the trigger to start such an evacuation needs to be early.
Impact Based Forecasting (IBF) models use historical damage data that are correlated with hazard magnitude data to determine impact thresholds. Examples include the number of houses destroyed at a particular wind speed, or the percentage of crops affected by a certain flood water level.	Analyzing each individual disaster is recommended. In every case, there are reasons why a hazard has become a disaster. Capturing such lessons will enable forecasting exercises.

## • Steps to develop triggers and thresholds



Further detailed guidance is available in a Red Cross Red Crescent [online manual](#).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>International Red Cross and Red Crescent, "4.1: Set the Trigger," in Forecast-based Financing Practitioners Manual (2022), <https://manual.forecast-based-financing.org/en/chapter/set-the-trigger/>.

## 2. Planning, operations, and delivery

### • Activities

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
There is a wide range of activities that can be undertaken prior to a disaster. The government can take anticipatory action but may not formally label it as such – linking an Early Warning System with evacuations, for example. While these actions are technically anticipatory action, the specific term may not exist in their language.	If protecting lives is at the core of anticipatory action planning, then early evacuation should always be at the center of planning.
Humanitarian agencies distributing cash and goods to households prior to the disaster, including food, dignity kits, fodder, and waterproof storage drums.	Creating dependency on external stakeholders should be avoided. Therefore, even if aid distribution is the main activity, it should always aim to strengthen risk governance at the local level.

### • Focus

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Actions should have a protective and mitigating effect. The focus of anticipatory action is on reducing the impacts of an impending, specific disaster – not just generally supporting preparedness or response.	While we unpack why a hazard can turn into a disaster in a specific area, we will then need to understand how action right before a disaster can mitigate such damage and loss. That, briefly, becomes an anticipatory action plan.
Actions should be designed specifically for the anticipatory phase, not just typical response activities done earlier.	Well-planned and executed anticipatory action will lead to a more efficient and effective response, as mitigation actions are already taking place with local leadership (any further response can build on them).

### • Timescale

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Actions must be appropriate for the timescale. It must be operationally feasible to fully implement the activities in the time available. This is most challenging for rapid-onset shocks. For example, work on protecting infrastructure is not feasible in a 3–5-day timeline.	If a community wants to build an evacuation center for its livestock, it needs to do that well in advance as part of preparedness activities. Anticipatory action can then focus on a rapid and effective evacuation process for the livestock.
The organization implementing anticipatory action must be able to get goods into place and distribute them in the lead-time available.	This is one reason cash assistance is recommended, so that community members can make rapid purchases in the critical anticipation time window.
Furthermore, actions should be appropriate for the timescale they are being provided in. For example, distributing drought-resistant seeds well after the planting season has finished will limit the effectiveness of the support.	We should always be mindful of farming practices and local timelines and invite local farming-related experts to participate in our planning.

## • Justification

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Actions should be undertaken with a 'no regrets' approach. Because there is always a risk that the forecasted hazard may not develop as expected, anticipatory action should benefit the community, even if the hazard event does not occur.	Always review with local communities what they have done well, and what actions can be taken for next time. Celebrating small achievements in the process is one way of maintaining enthusiasm.
Actions should be justifiable in terms of why they need to be taken before a crisis, and how they will minimize impacts.	Such understanding and processes need to be embedded in the local disaster management planning process.
Developing a theory of change has been a useful exercise for some organizations when designing anticipatory action.	Explain this so that everyone understands what sort of impact we intend to produce through anticipatory action.

## • Cash

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Cash can be an effective mode of anticipatory action. There are lots of examples of cash transfers being used for anticipatory action, with some studies showing a positive impact. Some examples can be found <a href="#">here</a> .	Cash and voucher programming is gaining momentum and has become a mainstream method in some countries where CWS and partners work. If you would like to learn more about such cases, please contact the Technical Unit.
Overall, the purpose of anticipatory action cash transfers should be to fill at-risk households' liquidity needs ahead of the disaster.	Understanding key liquidity challenges of target households at the time of imminent disaster is a starting point to plan for this.
All cash and voucher assistance activities should include gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation to adhere to the do-no-harm approach.	Cash can benefit people, but it can also cause harm. Primarily, it may put the recipients more at risk, and risks for females tend to be greater than males.

## • Links to DRR

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
There is value in positioning anticipatory action within existing disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster risk management (DRM) initiatives and systems.	We should not consider anticipatory action as a stand-alone component, but rather embed it in the disaster management cycles of target communities.
The ASEAN framework has made the case for aligning DRM policies and processes with anticipatory action, yet pilots have often been run as stand-alone projects, which has resulted in anticipatory action often becoming siloed.	To prevent anticipatory action from becoming siloed, it should be incorporated with DRM policies from the conceptualization phase, to maintain effectiveness and sustainability.
However, some organizations have found there is greater community and agency buy-in and understanding if anticipatory action is attached to an existing risk reduction or risk management initiative.	Anticipatory action needs to be led by the local risk governance structures (communities and local governments at the center). We must uphold this as a key principle in our planning.



Honduras, 2023

- **Operationalization**

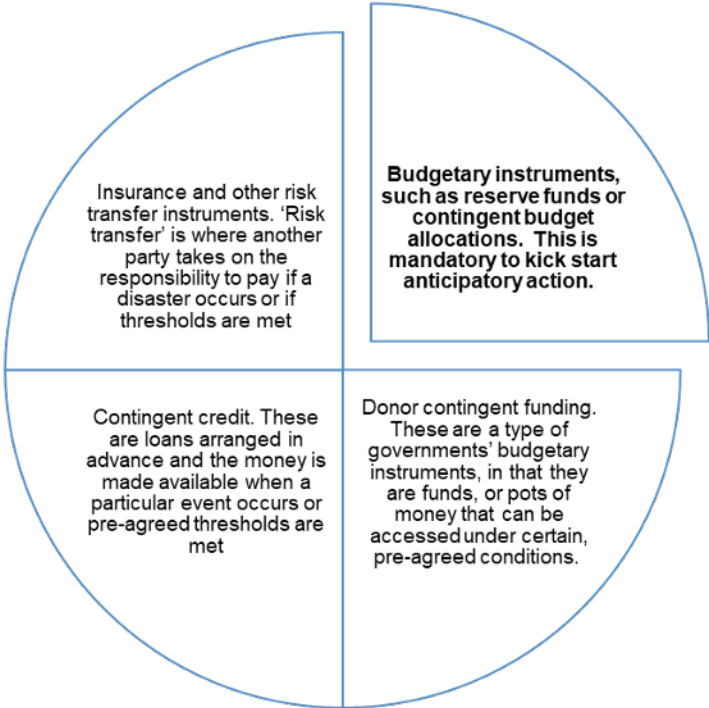
Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Anticipatory action is normally conducted in two phases: readiness and activation. Readiness activities are triggered first, to prepare for full activation. Continuous routine activities are also needed to support anticipatory action such as training local staff, conducting simulations, and monitoring triggers.	If early evacuation to save lives is the objective, evacuation planning (including identifying vulnerable people who may require more assistance than others) needs to be done during readiness, and when risks become imminent, the plan needs to be put into action.
Conducting simulations is good practice and brings many benefits, as they can provide vital insights into practical obstacles that need to be overcome, and to check the feasibility of activities.	While conducting simulations, one needs to understand what needs to be done when, by whom, and how. Usually, those details are not fully elaborated in the plan, so simulations offer a chance to discover these practicalities while putting the plan into action.
Ensure Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is integrated into the anticipatory action, to help with generating evidence of impact and to ensure improvements can be made over time.	It is always good to do a review and capture lessons learned after each activation. Every disaster situation offers a unique lesson for the communities and stakeholders.

### 3. **Pre-arranged finance**

- **Pre-arranged finance**

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Finance for anticipatory action must be arranged in advance.	Embed specific amount in the annual budget, instead of trying to raise the money after a disaster occurs.
Most disaster responses are still funded through budget reallocations or humanitarian appeals, after the crisis has happened. These approaches are slow and unreliable, and do not build on global progress in risk information and forecasting.	The fund for anticipatory action can be pre-arranged, and when the disaster strikes, separate fundraising can start for a more nuanced response that can build on the anticipatory action communities have done.

• **Four different types of pre-arranged financing instruments**



• **Current funding channels**

**Examples of current funding channels**

- Anticipatory Action window within the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) – operated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)
- The Anticipatory Action pilots of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) – operated by UN OCHA
- The Start Fund operated by the Start Network
- Forecast Based Action by the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) – operated by IFRC
- World Food Programme (WFP)'s Anticipatory Action Trust Fund

Access to the funding channels above are limited to members and partners of each agency.

• **Governments' investment**

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
Anticipatory action has been funded primarily by humanitarian agencies and NGOs to date, rather than by governments or development actors.	It is bestfor local governments to incorporate anticipatory action into their budgeting processes.

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
<p>There are a few examples of governments using their own funding, such as in the Philippines, where the government has been making policy and legislative changes to enable local government to access their Quick Response Fund on the declaration of an imminent disaster, i.e., ahead of a shock. In 2021, several local government units in the Philippines used their preparedness funding to procure shelter strengthening kits as part of anticipatory action.</p>	<p>If the benefit (impact) of anticipatory action can be captured (e.g., showing reduced loss as compared to past similar disasters), it can also serve as evidence to encourage governments to exercise more leadership in applying anticipatory action in its disaster management process.</p>
<p>In Mongolia, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will provide cash transfers to households, allowing them to purchase fodder at reduced government rates and ensure their livelihood is protected during dzud. The Minister of Finance authorized the 50% discount on hay and fodder and it will come from the state emergency reserve fund.</p>	<p>When we can create partnerships with governments, it can benefit everybody.</p>

- **Timing**

Insights from TWG	Relevance for CWS and Partners
<p>Organizations should consider how long finance will take to move through their systems and build this into the trigger timescales. For example, if it takes 48 hours for the anticipatory action finance triggers to be activated and for the money to move through different accounts, before it can be released to implementing partners responding to an imminent typhoon, this will drastically reduce the time available for anticipatory activities.</p>	<p>Trying to transfer money in a short time span is often challenging. Therefore, it is advised to apply reimbursement and credit-based disbursements, so that spending can happen first, then get reimbursed. The organization should decide rules on operationalization beforehand.</p>
<p>Anticipatory action is ideally government-led, utilizing national systems and budget, which likely requires prior legislative, procedural and policy change.</p>	<p>Our advocacy needs to have a longer-term perspective, but we can generate evidence each year.</p>



Honduras, 2023

# CWS Technical Program Briefs

Provide a description of global standards and/or best practices related to a particular technical area and establish minimal technical guidance that CWS should consider when designing, implementing, or monitoring a program related to that area.

## Resources:

For more information, the following documents and pages can be useful:

[Asia-Pacific Anticipatory Action, Anticipatory Action in Asia and the Pacific Anticipation Hub provides learning resources](#)

[Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies manual on Forecast Based Financing](#)

## Suggested Citation:

CWS Technical Unit. Technical Guidance Note. Planning and Starting Anticipatory Action, June 2023, Church World Service.

## Contact:

[sfallace@cwsglobal.org](mailto:sfallace@cwsglobal.org)

