

FOLLOW THE FORECAST: ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

THE ISSUE

ANTICIPATORY ACTION: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE



Shaibu Mohammed rolls his irrigation pipes in his farm located in Dasin Hausa community, Fufiore LGA, Adamawa State Nigeria. After receiving cash, he also purchased a generator-driven water-pump for irrigation and pipes for his dry-season farming.
©Photo: Taiwo Aina/ International Rescue Committee

The climate crisis demands proactive humanitarian responses in fragile settings. From drought in [central-southern South America](#) to prolonged drought and sudden onset flooding in East Africa, the increasing frequency and severity of climate disasters in fragile settings are devastating already vulnerable peoples. In the last three years, [44% of all individuals](#) affected by natural disasters resided in just 16 conflict-affected states, which represent 10% of the global population. Their businesses and homes are often damaged or destroyed, livelihoods lost or damaged, lives uprooted, and they are forced to find ways to secure enough food. Based on parametric triggers and early warning systems, at least half of humanitarian crises are foreseeable and more than 20% of disasters highly predictable. If we know where and when shocks are highly likely to occur, why not act now? As evidenced in the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) research, donors should Follow the Forecast and fund Anticipatory Action (AA) in fragile settings.

IRC found that anticipatory cash in fragile settings empowers vulnerable households' resilience and mitigates the damaging impacts of a climate shock. AA refers to interventions like transferring cash or providing in-kind support to vulnerable households before

the peak impacts of a disaster hit. Despite the impact, today [only 1% of ODA](#) goes to AA. Vulnerable populations in fragile and conflict settings are least resilient to climate shocks when they occur. Climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected communities contribute the least to climate change, bear its worst impacts, and yet have been consistently left out of the business-as-usual approach to climate action focused on stable settings.

IRC'S ANTICIPATORY CASH PILOT - COMPARING PRE- TO POST-SHOCK TRANSFERS

IRC's research is the [first experimental evidence](#) from a randomised controlled trial (RCT) in a conflict-affected environment demonstrating how anticipatory cash compares to post-shock cash transfers. [From 2021 to 2023](#), IRC worked with Google, International Food Policy Research Institute, Center for Disaster Protection, and local hydrometeorological agencies such as the Nigerian Meteorological Agency to measure the impacts of cash distribution among agro-pastoralist communities in rural Northeast Nigeria which has high exposure to natural hazards and conflict.

“Based on parametric triggers and early warning systems, at least half of humanitarian crises are foreseeable and more than 20% of disasters highly predictable.”

Many households living in flood-prone areas lack access to effective systems and technologies that disseminate real-time current information about climate shocks and risks. The IRC created a flood-risk monitoring platform with local partners that incorporated indigenous knowledge, hydrological data, meteorological data, and satellite information to set forecast-based thresholds and provide evidence on hydrological and meteorology parameters for triggering anticipatory cash payments. The data from this forecast would then be shared with community members and local stakeholders through a network of community-based early warning workers. In the 2022 flood season, the IRC delivered lump sum cash payments of the equivalent of just under 400 EUR—195,000 in Naira—to 1,450 households randomly assigned. Of these, 725 households received cash in advance when triggered by the flood monitoring platform’s risk thresholds. The remaining 725 households received the same cash payment following the flood.

ANTICIPATORY CASH BUILDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

IRC found that anticipatory cash helps build resilience in people living in fragile settings. Both sets of households saw improvements in food security because of the cash transfer, but the households who received the pre-shock transfers saw additional benefits.

The pilot found that anticipatory cash helped households not only reduce coping mechanisms for food security, but also protect their livelihoods, make productive investments, and reduce their vulnerability to climatic shocks. In the case of floods, the anticipatory cash transfers reduced households’ negative coping strategies for securing enough food and protecting their livelihoods compared to households that received cash after the flood. For example, they were less likely to reduce the number of meals or portion sizes and were less likely to sell off livestock and assets or take on debt and spend their savings to meet their basic needs.

The cash transfer had a significant impact on the number of pre-emptive actions taken by households to protect economic livelihoods in anticipation of flood shocks, such as harvesting crops early, stockpiling food, and evacuating households. Importantly, the anticipatory cash transfer increased productive investments, including agricultural assets and productive livestock, on average, relative to the group that received the cash transfers afterwards. Since productive investments could increase a household’s future income-generating capacity and reduce its vulnerability to future shocks, anticipatory cash may help build long-term resilience to climate shocks.

“The pilot found that anticipatory cash helped households not only reduce coping mechanisms for food security, but also protect their livelihoods, make productive investments, and reduce their vulnerability to climatic shocks.”

MORE ANTICIPATORY ACTION AND RESEARCH REQUIRED IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT SETTINGS

Of course, AA should not be the only response to the climate crisis in fragile settings. As outlined in [IRC’s COP28 position paper](#), global leaders need to centre conflict-affected communities, make climate financing more equitable and accessible, and invest in adaptation measures. On average, conflict-affected communities receive just [one-third](#) of the adaptation funding that people in stable settings receive per capita. That said, AA is a promising tool to mitigate the compounding effects of climate shocks in already vulnerable communities. The UN’s FAO [calculated benefit-cost ratios](#) for AA and found that in their Ethiopia and Mongolia AA interventions, investing 1 USD in AA led to over 7 USD in prevented losses and added benefits for beneficiaries. Humanitarians need more research on how to best implement AA in fragile settings. Anticipatory Action models tested to date face challenges in effectively identifying where and when to act, whom to pay, and how to quickly disseminate effective early warning messages and deliver cash to widespread geographies before floods hit. The IRC is implementing several pilots to answer those questions.

“The UN’s FAO calculated benefit-cost ratios for AA and found that in their Ethiopia and Mongolia AA interventions, investing 1 USD in AA led to over 7 USD in prevented losses and added benefits for beneficiaries.”

We are conducting a follow-up, expanded pilot in north-east rural Nigeria with Google.org and local partners. This model combines forecasting strategies, early warning systems, and digital infrastructure to target, enrol, and pay vulnerable people remotely and accurately. The pilot targets 3,000 households to leverage machine learning to identify and fill in household knowledge gaps on climate-resilient actions, and partners with telecommunications to deploy targeted early warning messages. The IRC is also developing anticipatory cash pilots in Kenya and two other countries on AA, to evaluate cost-efficiency and differential impacts of anticipatory cash transfers by primary livelihood activity and gender.



Portrait of Salihu Yahaya (42); a livestock farmer and his family in front of his house located in Dasin Hausa community, Fufoire LGA, Adamawa State Nigeria. Salihu Yahaya is a beneficiary of the Google climate resiliency project. According to Salihu, he would have absconded and abandoned his family, in search of a means of earning if not for IRC’s climate shock-reducing cash intervention. After receiving the cash from IRC, he was able to engage in dry-season farming and solve the immediate needs of the family.

©Photo: Taiwo Aina/ International Rescue Committee

More research needs to evaluate what can be done in urban settings, too. Through a partnership with DG ECHO, the IRC is piloting and testing an operational model that combines AA and disaster risk reduction in urban areas, in particular flooding in Yola, Adawama state, Nigeria. The model has been adapted to urban areas by building on learnings from IRC’s implementation of the urban-focused ‘Response to Resilience’ project in Maiduguri, which was also funded by ECHO.

The model asks communities to build on their strengths such as associations, institutions, culture, physical and natural assets, and economic opportunities to develop a Flood Early Warning System, establish AA protocols, and implement short and longer-term anticipatory actions through a community-led approach.

Building on the first pilot’s findings, IRC is developing further evidence to guide AA implementation for communities in fragile settings. By improving their resilience, households can anticipate weather forecasted climatic shocks more effectively and rely on less aid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If we are to truly get ahead of increasing climate disasters, proactive measures like AA in fragile settings should be supported to help communities more effectively prepare. This means that donors should:

1. Commit at least 5% of humanitarian budgets towards AA, with a strategy for further expansion. It is good news that the German Federal Foreign Office committed 5% of its budget towards AA and the United Kingdom is now scoping out a [fund of up to 15%](#) of its humanitarian budget towards better disaster preparedness in fragile and conflict settings. European donors should lead the way, too.
2. Prioritise climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected states, where needs are greatest, when scaling up AA programmes.
3. Dedicate more funding towards innovation and evidence generation on proactive interventions like AA so organisations can respond to the evolving needs of humanitarian populations.
4. Link multi-year funding to forecasted, parametric triggers through more agile, accommodating financing mechanisms.
5. Encourage local governments and agencies to develop early warning systems with local partners and experienced NGOs, in addition to collaborating with private sector actors who have been driving innovations in this space.

Humanitarian leaders need to Follow the Forecast and fund Anticipatory Action. We should help the most vulnerable people beforehand, instead of spending money only after a shock to build back community livelihoods.

Kazim Habib,
Senior Officer, Board and Innovation

Clare Clingain,
Researcher, Economic Recovery and Development
International Rescue Committee