Anticipatory Action (AA) has emerged relatively recently as an innovative approach to dealing with disasters and humanitarian emergencies. Switching from reactive (and costly) humanitarian responses during and after emergencies, to acting ahead of predictable hazards and crises with pre-arranged funding, holds great promise for protecting lives and livelihoods, reducing suffering, and paving the way for development. AA holds even greater potential for a community’s resilience if all its members can access and benefit from it inclusively and equitably. To unlock this potential, it is critical to understand the different ways in which different segments of the population are at risk of disasters and other crises, and how individuals have different needs and face different barriers to addressing them. Accurate disaggregated data by disability, gender, and age can help shine a light on who are the most at-risk, where they are located, and provide a foundation to deliver informed AA programming that meets various needs. This does not go without challenges. Yet, given concerning projections of growing humanitarian needs due to conflicts, climate emergencies, and other drivers, acting early while leaving no one behind is needed more than ever.

DATA DISAGGREGATION: CONCEPT, RATIONALE, AND CHALLENGES

Anticipatory Action is a set of pre-identified interventions carried out ahead of an imminent hazard aiming at mitigating the impact on people and assets. They are informed by impact-based forecasting models and comprehensive risk assessments that help determine where the hazard would occur, danger levels, and triggers to act based on how vulnerable communities would be affected. Disaggregated data sets are critical to inform the latter, isolate specific subgroups and at-risk individuals, and subsequently design relevant AA interventions that meet the needs of community members in their diversity.

Disaggregating data means breaking down information into specific categories to better understand and address disparities within a population. It can help identify marginalised lives and livelihoods, reducing suffering, and paving the way for development. AA holds even greater potential for a community’s resilience if all its members can access and benefit from it inclusively and equitably. To unlock this potential, it is critical to understand the different ways in which different segments of the population are at risk of disasters and other crises, and how individuals have different needs and face different barriers to addressing them. Accurate disaggregated data by disability, gender, and age can help shine a light on who are the most at-risk, where they are located, and provide a foundation to deliver informed AA programming that meets various needs. This does not go without challenges. Yet, given concerning projections of growing humanitarian needs due to conflicts, climate emergencies, and other drivers, acting early while leaving no one behind is needed more than ever.

Yet, despite increasing efforts in recent years, data disaggregation is still not implemented at the scale required, whether in traditional humanitarian response or in AA programming. A short global survey conducted by Humanity & Inclusion (HI) in 2023 with a sample of AA practitioners showed that 92% of respondents consider of persons with disabilities in their risk assessments. Moreover, 48% were not aware of the WGQ. Common challenges reported by practitioners include technical, logistical, and financial barriers. Another limitation observed is that when disaggregated data is collected, it is generally not done in a harmonised fashion across stakeholders. The lack of uniform methods prevents the collection and use of comparable and high-quality data across locations. Moreover, oftentimes the data collected is not adequately analysed and used to inform action. Finally, a tendency to over-collect quantitative over qualitative data is also noted, which prevents a more granular understanding of most vulnerable people’s realities. Overall, these challenges are driving the invisibility of certain groups and can jeopardise the potential of AA to reach impact at scale.

“Disaggregating data by Disability, Gender, and Age (DGA) at the minimum is now a core principle in many humanitarian frameworks, along with the need to consider the intersectionality of these dimensions.”

Including Everyone in Anticipatory Action: The Critical Role of Collecting and Using Disaggregated Data
Disasters and other crises impact people differently and can aggravate exclusion

A “blanket” approach to collecting data and addressing vulnerability would fail to acknowledge that in situations of disaster, marginalised and socially excluded individuals are disproportionately affected and exposed to heightened risks. Social exclusion is driven by a complex interplay between various individual characteristics and prevailing perceptions, beliefs, and power relations in a given context. Disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnic origin, religion, and political opinion can generate discrimination and inequality, and shape a person’s vulnerability. They also interact with one another, compounding vulnerability and exclusion. The critical ways in which social exclusion manifests itself include limited access to services, information, economic opportunities, and social support systems, due to multiple attitudinal, institutional, physical, and communication barriers. Naturally, disasters and humanitarian crises exacerbate these pre-existing vulnerabilities for marginalised groups, which can lead to higher risks of death, injury, abuse, deprivation, and further exclusion. Weaknesses in the humanitarian response in terms of capacity to reach the most vulnerable with the assistance, protection, and services they need can also further aggravate vulnerability and risk.

Anticipatory Action offers a unique opportunity to protect vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups before the worst impacts of a crisis are felt. Planning ahead in “peacetime”, as opposed to reacting to shocks, provides the time and conditions for more qualitative programming that tackles persisting inclusion and equity gaps. Data disaggregation is a key instrument to reach such a goal.

Fostering inclusive anticipatory action through disaggregated data: Good practices and recommendations

Anticipatory Action is structured around several building blocks, mainly risk analysis, impact-based forecasting, trigger development, and design of AA plans or Early Action Protocols (EAPs). While each stage of the AA project cycle provides entry points for the collection and
Enhancing the collection and use of disaggregated data in AA is a collective responsibility. Practitioners are encouraged to build their capacity and systematically implement it while handling the data with care to avoid placing already vulnerable people at further risk.

To help address inclusion gaps and scale up good practice for people-centered AA, HI designed the I2A project, a 3-year intervention currently implemented in Haiti, Madagascar, and the Philippines, with funding from the German Federal Foreign Office and Aktion Deutschland Hilft. I2A works to develop and test inclusive and locally-led Early Action Protocols, informed by robust impact-based forecasting models. Activities are informed by disaggregated data and the meaningful participation of a range of stakeholders. The project also aims at building capacities of various stakeholders on AA and inclusion and strengthening local coordination mechanisms.

“Enhancing the collection and use of disaggregated data in AA is a collective responsibility. Practitioners are encouraged to build their capacity and systematically implement it while handling the data with care to avoid placing already vulnerable people at further risk.”

Jennifer M’Vouama,
Policy and Development Lead, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation

Louise Bonnet,
Inclusive Anticipatory Action Project Coordinator
Humanity & Inclusion (HI)