

As humanitarian needs continue to increase while global humanitarian funding decreases, the case for Anticipatory Action (AA) has emerged as a way to both ethically and cost-effectively address needs ahead of climate and non-climate induced crises. The humanitarian scope is limited as to what, where and when humanitarians should contribute to the broader anticipatory agenda, given pressed budgets for today's acute needs and respective comparative advantages of development, peace and climate aid.

This brief focuses on Sida's humanitarian approach to AA outlining how Sida will work with partners in support of AA which is principled, complementary, research based and locally led. Priority is given to operational anticipatory action through fuel funding (what) in high severity contexts (where), closer to peak crisis impact (when). While taking a humanitarian departure in this brief, a nexus broad approach is outlined for collective efforts towards improved resilience among the most at-risk and crisis exposed populations around the world.

WHAT IS ANTICIPATORY ACTION?

Climate change is intensifying weather-related extremes, making disasters more frequent and more severe than ever before. In response to the unprecedented threat of climate induced crises, AA is quickly evolving as a risk-informed, time-sensitive, and threat-specific new way of programming ahead of fast-onset and slow onset disasters. Enabled by advances in climate prediction analytics, it is now possible to forecast approximately 35 per cent of shocks.¹ However, one third of the world's people, mainly the most vulnerable, are still not covered by early warning systems as of today, and early warning is not systematically connected to early protective action. Anticipatory action is about protecting people against immediate danger before disasters happen or fully unfold and is part of broader disaster risk management across the Humanitarian, Development, Peace, Climate (HDPC) nexus (early warning, preparedness, anticipatory action, response, recovery). As predictability improves, the traditional reactive, post-disaster "wait-and-see" aid approach is undergoing critical re-evaluation. This shift highlights the ethical imperative to protect lives, livelihoods, and assets proactively, addressing disaster impacts before they occur. As collectively defined among key AA actors in the Grand Bargain:²

Anticipatory action is defined as acting ahead of a predicted hazardous event to prevent or reduce impacts on lives and livelihoods and humanitarian needs before they fully unfold.

This works best when activities as well as triggers or decision-making rules are pre-agreed, and decisions are made to guarantee the fast release of pre-arranged funding.

AA is intended for measures that aim to prevent or reduce a forecasted impact before it fully unfolds, not to respond or compensate for already manifested losses. The objective is to reduce the potential human suffering and impacts on lives and livelihoods of foreseeable hazard(s) while protecting development gains. AA has so far mostly focused on climate-related shocks, especially drought, floods and cyclones, but as multi-hazard forecasts improve anticipatory programming is increasingly possible also for non-climate hazards such as epidemics, conflict and population movements. In order to be successful, AA requires knowing when, where, for whom and how to act proactively, as well as having money available for immediate usage. In other words, AA works best when the following building blocks are in place:

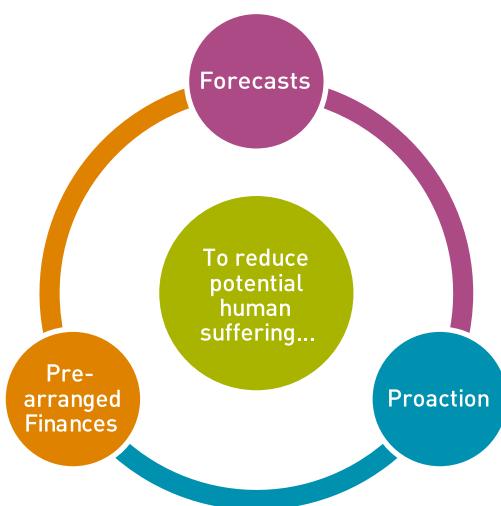
- a)** forecasts or predictive analysis for both hazard and impact;
- b)** pre-agreed anticipatory action plans; and
- c)** pre-arranged or anticipatory finances.

1 Montier, E., Weingärtner, L., & Klassen, S. (2022). The potential for anticipatory action and disaster risk finance: Guiding the setting of humanitarian targets. Start Network & Overseas Development Institute.

2 Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2024). Outcome document: Commitments—Grand Bargain Caucus on scaling up anticipatory action. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Retrieved December 18, 2025

Types of anticipatory finance include a) donor-financed contingency funds, emergency pooled funds b) government contingency budgets and reserve funds, c) parametric insurance.³

Anticipatory action must be initiated neither too early nor too late, striking a fine balance between the timing and accuracy of forecasts and having sufficient time for effective action (the lead time) before the onset of disaster. What distinguishes AA is the associated windows of protective opportunity on the crisis timeline, immediately after a prediction. This means that AA is rather defined by the “when” dimension (timing) than the “what” dimension (types of activities).



Today early warning and AA is increasingly being incorporated by crisis-prone countries within regional and national frameworks, embedded into adaptive and shock-responsive social protection, climate services, agriculture, water services, disaster management, civil protection, disaster risk financing and risk management and climate change adaptation. Aid actors, in support of national efforts, are making significant AA investments. At highest UN policy level the Secretary General launched the Early Warnings for All initiative (EW4All) aiming for everyone on the planet to be covered by multi-hazard early warning systems in five years, and to be protected through early action. Many humanitarian and multi-mandated actors support the EW4ALL initiative and also have own ambitious anticipation targets.

While global investments in early warning systems are on the rise, funding remains both insufficient and unevenly distributed between so called “build money” and “fuel money”. Fuel funding is funding released at the moment a specific trigger is reached to support the actions to be implemented before a hazardous event occurs, or before the most acute impacts are felt, also called operational anticipation. “Build money”

³ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2024). Anticipatory finance: An introductory guide. Retrieved December 19, 2025

is for strengthening anticipatory systems including producing early action protocols, early warning, climate services, and institutionalization across ministries. Build money has proven more easily funded than “fuel money”, creating a divide between early warning and early action. Early warning must be followed by early protective action but today there is only very scarce funding available for operational anticipation.⁴

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WHY ANTICIPATORY ACTION?

To the extent predictions are accurate, anticipatory action holds the promise of aid that is more dignified, timely and cost-effective. Echoing the old adage, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” AA not only prevents unnecessary humanitarian suffering and safeguards development gains but also conserves limited finances. It does not prevent a shock from materializing but could mitigate its impacts.

Similar to disaster risk reduction, resilience programming and preventative development aid in general, AA could help shrink humanitarian needs through cheaper proaction instead of costlier reaction with savings leveraged to save additional lives. Systems that warn people of impending storms, floods or droughts can produce significant returns on investments.⁵ Also, as AA happens before hazard induced devastations, broader programming options are available compared to in post-disaster response such as cash based interventions, benefiting from still functioning markets. Efficiency gains in disaster management are also achieved by focusing on specific rather than general hazard threats.



⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2024). Outcome document: Commitments—Grand Bargain Caucus on scaling up anticipatory action. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Retrieved December 18, 2025

⁵ United Nations. (2024). Early warnings for all. Retrieved December 19, 2025

SIDA'S HUMANITARIAN APPROACH TO AA

Sida is committed to strengthening AA in the face of imminent danger in full respect of humanitarian impartiality and based on Swedish leadership in flexible funding. Sida will, through its Central Operational Partnerships, support AA that is, as far as possible, principled, complementary, research-informed and locally led.



Principled: With the backdrop of finite lifesaving resources, Sida aims to become as climate-hazard protective as other lifesaving priorities permit. Sida will work with partners to address the most urgent and severe humanitarian needs first, in line with the impartiality principle, carefully balancing this humanitarian imperative while seizing anticipatory windows and protecting at-risk populations. Anticipatory action has the potential to reduce humanitarian needs by facilitating more protective and cost-effective interventions. However, this approach should not result in neglecting the immediate, critical needs of individuals today and it is essential to ensure that these groups are not overlooked within broader systemic cost-benefit analyses. As organizations implement AA strategies, they must have a dual focus and strike a careful balance, harnessing the efficiencies of proactive measures while still prioritizing and addressing the urgent requirements of those who are suffering now, guaranteeing impartial and rights-based support.

Complementary: The notion of complementarity in this brief refers to support to national and local leadership for AA as well as coordinated, collective and synergetic AA programming across the HDPC nexus. In times when humanitarians are asked to do more with less, Sida aims to work closely with operational partners for a nexus-wide scale-up of AA in support of national and local ownership and as complementary to development, climate and humanitarian financing. Complementary aid requires a more strategic division of responsibility and labour in AA between aid flows. This is in line with the Swedish government reform request for increased synergies between aid flows

(HDPC nexus) with calls for development-financed AA and for resilience building in crisis contexts.^{6 7}

AA encompasses a broad set of programme tools, some more suitable for humanitarian investments than others. The basic entry point for humanitarian anticipation is that humanitarians should do what development and climate aid cannot within early warning and anticipatory action, based on comparative advantages, its role as life-saving agent of last resort and respective shares of overall aid finances. The scope is limited as to what, where and when humanitarians should prioritize AA, given pressed budgets, competing post-disaster acute needs and comparative advantages along the crisis time line and in the HDPC nexus. The humanitarian system is ideally activated only where national anticipatory systems are overwhelmed and short of development resources; a more likely scenario in the case of sudden and large scale imminent crisis than in the case of regular and seasonal small-medium scale shocks (informing the what, where and when). Partners are therefore encouraged to match, layer and sequence AA funding in area-based nexus programs, especially in slow onset where multi-mandated organizations could use both development, climate and humanitarian funding for anticipation.

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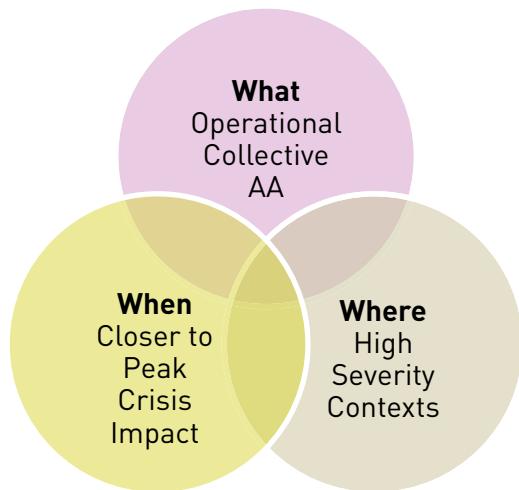
What. Sida will work with partners to prearrange fuel money, to trigger early action based on pre-agreed plans. Protective action against multi-hazards will be increased, including for prepositioning of stocks. Globally pooled funds have known advantages for anticipatory programming, allowing for sharing of hazard risks. Limited funds are stretched further compared to funds covering a smaller geographical area and there is less risk of freezing-in funds and unspent balances by the end of the year. Given the benefits of geographically pooled funds Sida will prioritize global or multi-country pooled options for its AA scale up (agency or inter-agency level).

The notion of complementary AA calls for effective coordination and collective multi-hazard frameworks based on harmonised triggers. Sida supported AA should aim towards joined up approaches, for example

⁶ Government of Sweden. (2023). Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth. Retrieved December 19, 2025

⁷ The Government intends to work to build resilience, not least in protracted humanitarian crises, through development-funded climate adaptation in vulnerable communities"..."The Government intends to strengthen efforts so that development finance can be increasingly used for anticipatory action in climate-related humanitarian crises".

as outlined in Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans. AA should be implemented in support of local and national endeavours, avoiding fragmentation and duplications, with full respect for humanitarian principles and targeting people most at risk.



Where. From the humanitarian envelope, Sida will work with partners who primarily prioritize operational AA in high severity contexts.⁸ Activities are then more easily motivated even in the absence of the forecasted shock as acute needs overlap with high risk, aligning with the impartiality principle and lowering trade-offs between present and future needs. Moreover, humanitarian actors have a comparative advantage especially in sudden-onset disasters, based on extensive experience of time-critical, fast life-saving action making humanitarians well suited to operate in complex crisis environments and within shorter lead times.

When. Lead times in anticipatory action vary significantly between slow and fast onset hazards. Fast onset hazards include floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes. These hazards develop quickly, often with little warning, and require rapid action often within a few hours to days. In many such crisis humanitarian actors can act fast to prevent imminent suffering based on impact based predictions. Even here, humanitarian aid should not be the default answer to such hazards but step in only when there are no adaptive government owned systems or risk-informed development arrangements available to respond in due time.

In slow-onset disasters, such as drought, it is more important to assess HDPC nexus roles within AA. Sida will work with humanitarian partners closer to the peak impact of disasters, loosely defined as the last

⁸ Targeted to people with already severe humanitarian needs (within severity 4). On a more exceptional basis Sida can also approve applications for populations currently in severity level 3, i.e. with lower vulnerability, but facing extreme risks. Possible severity sources IPC, HNO/JIAF, MSNA

four months of the disaster crisis time line. The time window is characterized by higher certainty and more readily available impact based predictions. Acting then reduces risk for false alarms and situates anticipatory humanitarianism as the very last protective window ahead of imminent danger, following earlier national and development-funded AA investments.

Research based: Partners are encouraged to draw upon and build evidence around nationally and locally led, multi-hazard, collective and HDPC nexus-broad pre-disaster programming. AA is a new type of humanitarian aid which merits dedicated analysis and research, not the least because, the success of AA depends on accurate predictive analytics and finite resources being optimally allocated between present and future needs. Sida will encourage partners to be highly analytical in AA rollouts and undertake studies focused on prediction accuracy, principled AA, integrated global risk-needs severity scoring, ethical dilemmas, and high value for money AA. Prediction accuracy is crucial in AA, yet false alarm rates are rarely available in AA reports. Proper analysis of false alarm ratios is important as this could help improve forecasting and assess opportunity costs between AA and response. Sida will work with AA partners who systematically report on prediction accuracy.

Locally Led: Anticipatory action should be complementary to local and national efforts. The success of AA draws on communities' and local actors' capacities to implement their own early actions. Sida will cross-fertilize its AA portfolio with its investments for a locally led humanitarian response, placing people at the centre of anticipation. Community-led engagement is key to high-quality anticipatory action and sustained resilience, with local knowledge as a mechanism for effective and fast anticipatory action. Anticipatory action should be informed by the specific risks, needs, priorities and capacities of risk-exposed communities themselves, defined by local women, men, young people, older people, minority groups, internally displaced people and people with disabilities.

NEXUS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Anticipatory action should be a collective effort shared between humanitarian, development, peace and climate stakeholders in the HDPC nexus. Necessary scale up of prevention is only possible if all aid flows become more risk informed focused on the most at-risk populations. It is known that humanitarian aid is overstretched with an unprecedented funding-needs gap and with only 10-20per cent of overall Overseas Development Aid (ODA).⁹ It is known that climate and development finance fail to reach the most crisis prone

⁹ Development Initiatives. (2023). Global humanitarian assistance report 2023. Retrieved December 19, 2025.

countries. Today, people living in extremely fragile states receive a fraction of support, with up to 80 times less of climate finance compared to those in non-fragile states. This calls for a broader nexus engagement and clearer division of labour in AA, echoing the OECD nexus guidelines; “prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action when necessary” and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of “Leaving Nobody Behind”.^{10 11}

Especially, slow-onset disasters such as drought allow for development investments and nexus complementarities in AA investments. Anticipatory investments across the nexus should be organized as per comparative advantages within the HDPC nexus as well as per shares of overall aid finances. A clear division of labour helps in building a streamlined and effective protective risk informed system. Development and climate actors could increasingly fund operational AA both in slow onset disasters and ahead of sudden onset crisis, for example through anticipatory social protection and insurance schemes (fuel money).

Anticipatory investments	Development, Peace & Climate	Humanitarian
Build	More investment and comparative advantage	Less investment and comparative advantage
Fuel	All crisis especially slow-onset	All crisis, especially fast-onset

Development and climate actors are key to supporting government-led institutionalization of anticipatory disaster management with multi-hazard harmonised AA frameworks across civil protection, ministries of health, social protection, agriculture, water etc (build money).

As for policy endorsements, on the humanitarian side, AA is part of the Strategy for Sweden’s humanitarian assistance provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

10 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2024). Anticipatory finance: An introductory guide. Retrieved December 19, 2025

11 As per UNDRR (2024) there is potential for development partners (including international financial institutions) and climate funds to provide anticipatory finance as AA fits within a broader continuum of work on development, climate resilience and adaptation.

2025–2029¹² As a means towards greater effectiveness in the implementation of humanitarian assistance, operations are tasked to developing the approach on anticipatory action within the humanitarian mandate’s responsibility to save lives.

Sweden also endorsed the Grand Bargain Caucus on scaling up anticipatory action in 2024 with commitments to substantially increase funding for anticipatory action, especially fuel funding, track fuel and build funding and improve coordination. As per the Outcome document, donors are encouraged to strive for a target of at least 5 per cent of humanitarian funding for anticipatory action, ideally by 2026 or earlier. Where humanitarian funding alone cannot achieve the target, the investment can be supplemented by additional sources of financing, such as climate or development finance.¹³

On the development side, the new aid policy of the Swedish Government “Development Assistance for a New Era - Freedom, Empowerment And Sustainable Growth”, speaks about AA under the thematic priority of Climate Aid: *“The Government intends to strengthen efforts so that development finance can be increasingly used for anticipatory action in climate-related humanitarian crises”*.

In addition, Sweden has endorsed high-level policies which promote AA. Firstly, the Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace which calls for *“Investing in the design, piloting, delivery and scaling up of climate adaptation programming that is informed by the most vulnerable and hard to reach populations and communities, including through preparedness and prevention, early warning and anticipatory and early action, and disaster risk finance mechanisms....”*. Secondly, the ‘Getting Ahead of Disasters’ Charter, which calls for pre-arranged funding similarly states that; *“anticipatory action – acting on forecasts in order to provide finance and assistance to people before disaster impacts – is a risk-informed approach that we will scale up and mainstream across humanitarian, development and climate sectors”*.¹⁴

12 Swedish Government (2025) Strategy for Sweden’s humanitarian assistance provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2025–2029. Retrieved December 18, 2025

13 Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2024). Outcome document: Commitments—Grand Bargain Caucus on scaling up anticipatory action. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Retrieved December 18, 2025

14 United Nations COP28. (n.d.). COP28 declaration on climate, relief, recovery and peace. Retrieved December 19, 2025. Risk-informed Early Action Partnership. (n.d.). Getting ahead of disasters. Retrieved December 19, 2025