



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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World Food  
Programme

# Anticipating food crises

Common principles to address challenges  
relating to Anticipatory Action

Outcomes of the Anticipating Food Crises workshop  
Rome, November 2022



Global Network  
Against Food Crises

Integrated  
actions for  
lasting solutions



# Background

## Over the past decade, acute food insecurity has reached extremely alarming levels worldwide.

The *Global Report on Food Crises 2023* reports that acute hunger affected over a quarter of a billion people in 58 food crisis countries/territories in 2022.<sup>1</sup> This marks the fourth consecutive year of rising numbers of acute food insecurity.

There has been an increase in the frequency, intensity and duration of extreme weather events, economic hardships, and human-induced hazards with devastating impacts on lives, livelihoods and food security. The current humanitarian system, designed to address the humanitarian impacts that have already occurred, is struggling to keep pace with growing needs and requires a transformative change in the global aid architecture, recognizing the need to better integrate humanitarian and development programming and financing along the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus.

Anticipatory Action is defined as “acting ahead of predicted hazards to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold. This requires pre-agreed plans that identify partners and activities, reliable early warning information, and pre-agreed financing, released predictably and rapidly when an agreed trigger point is reached”.<sup>2</sup>

Anticipatory Action can play a critical role in disaster prevention efforts and in addressing the root causes of vulnerability to build resilience and help curb and reverse current food insecurity trends. It is an opportunity to find complementarity between humanitarian and development programming and financing under the same objective to protect vulnerable people ahead of predictable shocks. Systematically anticipating food crises at scale is a collective responsibility and can only be achieved through proactive collaboration, as well as seeking and actively promoting multilateral consensus on parameters, standards and best practices.

Starting from these premises, in 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC) convened an Anticipating Food Crises workshop, which facilitated initial technical

and strategic dialogue between several actors engaged in Anticipatory Action, and enabled open exchange on future priorities, main challenges and necessary strategic alignments. Some of the main conclusions that arose include the need to work towards improved coherence and clarity between partners on Anticipatory Action approaches and evidence, and that complementarity needs to exist between anticipatory financing and resources used for structural interventions to address root causes of vulnerability.

In November 2022, actors<sup>1</sup> gathered for a second time to advance discussions and agreements on the principles and criteria of four topics identified as key for scaling up Anticipatory Action in food crises contexts. They include the following examinations:

1. What are the most suitable approaches for analysing the impact of Anticipatory Action on food security to build the necessary evidence on its effectiveness?
2. How can anticipatory actions support the most vulnerable in protracted crises, understood as a situation characterized by recurrent natural hazards and/or conflict, the longevity of food crises and breakdown of livelihoods?
3. How can the use of food security projections be leveraged in Anticipatory Action?
4. How can Anticipatory Action be a catalyst for operationalizing the HDP nexus considering current food insecurity trends?

This outcome document reflects the conclusions reached at the 2022 Anticipating Food Crises workshop and is intended to support the work of policymakers and practitioners in Anticipatory Action, ensuring that theory is put into practice to support those who need it most.

Anticipatory Action has the potential to be effective because it can provide anticipatory assistance to communities that are exposed and vulnerable to risks,

<sup>1</sup> Actors include Anticipation Hub, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission’s Joint Research Centre, Famine Early Warning Systems Network, FAO, German Federal Foreign Office, German Red Cross, Global Food Security Cluster, GNAFC, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Global Support Unit, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Overseas Development Institute, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, Risk-informed Early Action Partnership, Save the Children, Start Network, Tufts University, United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Welthungerhilfe, World Bank and WFP.

# Anticipatory Action can contribute to curbing food insecurity trends



and can thereby help them to better absorb, adapt or transform in the face of those risks and prior to a shock occurring. This can ensure that local food production and economic and physical access to food are maintained despite shocks. Hence, it protects key elements of the food system and the livelihoods that sustain food security. Anticipatory Action protects people’s resilience and development gains, meaningfully bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance, development and peace. Moreover, there is growing evidence that Anticipatory Action can be more cost-effective than traditional humanitarian interventions and can offer a higher return on investment.<sup>ii</sup>

Various studies have already shown that supporting vulnerable communities ahead of shocks has a positive effect on protecting food security and nutrition, and preventing the adoption of negative coping strategies that can lead to destitution and hunger.<sup>iii</sup>

Coordinated Anticipatory Action at scale has the potential to effectively curb rising food insecurity trends in many food crises contexts. This is what was recently observed in Somalia, where an Anticipatory Action investment of USD 181 million helped prevent 500 000 people from sliding into Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 4 between July 2020 and January 2021.<sup>3</sup>

This and other examples show that coordinated Anticipatory Action could be effective in preventing human suffering, yet it remains an area of significant under-investment. Taking Anticipatory Action to scale requires front-loading a significant amount of time, resources and collaboration and ensuring that there is conceptual clarity and consensus, supported by clear standards and procedures to guide all actors.

<sup>ii</sup> More information on OCHA’s site on Anticipatory Action: [unocha.org/our-work/humanitarian-financing/anticipatory-action](https://www.unocha.org/our-work/humanitarian-financing/anticipatory-action)

<sup>iii</sup> More information on Anticipatory Action:

- FAO emergencies and resilience site: [fao.org/emergencies/our-focus/anticipatory-action/en](https://www.fao.org/emergencies/our-focus/anticipatory-action/en);
- Anticipation Hub’s evidence database: [anticipation-hub.org/experience/evidence-database/evidence-list](https://www.anticipation-hub.org/experience/evidence-database/evidence-list);
- WFP’s evidence base on Anticipatory Action: [wfp.org/publications/evidence-base-anticipatory-action](https://www.wfp.org/publications/evidence-base-anticipatory-action)

# Summary of workshop discussion

## Evidence for Anticipatory Action

While the body of evidence surrounding the effects of Anticipatory Action on preventing food security deterioration is expanding, there are still several gaps to be addressed. More studies are needed to evaluate the medium- to long-term impact of Anticipatory Action, its application in protracted and compound crisis contexts, and the value added/cost-benefit compared to a traditional humanitarian response.

Part of the limitations of evidence is that there is no uniform method by which agencies assess the effectiveness of Anticipatory Action interventions. Currently, 'case and control' analysis is among the preferred methods. However, it is not always applicable given limited resources and a lack of technical capacity. Furthermore, Anticipatory Action is usually compared with a 'no action' counterfactual,<sup>iv</sup> while there is little comparison to traditional humanitarian response. There is still no common agreement of what measures of food security need to be used both for trigger activation (e.g. projected change in IPC levels) or Anticipatory Action impact assessments (food consumption, negative coping strategies, etc.). For this reason, common methodologies using both quantitative and qualitative methods of verification should be widely agreed upon to ensure that Anticipatory Action actors have at least a minimum set of guidelines that hold them up to scrutiny and that impacts are comparable across agencies.

For the sector to develop these common understandings and methods, there needs to be more data and evidence sharing between agencies. Platforms such as the Anticipation Hub are gaining traction and allowing for a centralized repository of evidence on Anticipatory Action.

## Common agreed principles

- Joint specific food security measurements need to be used across agencies to ensure comparability and consistency of outcome indicators. Common indicators need to be agreed upon and further transparency is needed in reporting.
- Agencies need to actively promote and share learning materials on open global platforms so that they are widely accessible to both Anticipatory Action actors and those looking to enter Anticipatory Action programming. While these are available, they are not currently being used effectively by agencies.
- Agencies need to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data within their Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) frameworks. While quantitative data approaches are advocated, including specific measures of food insecurity, triggers, etc. qualitative data can provide crucial insights on the achievements and challenges experienced, thus improving learning mechanisms.
- Actors involved in Anticipatory Action should manage expectations on what can be proved/achieved. Some limitations include humanitarian action at scale being complicated; the data scope needing to be improved; humanitarian actors needing to have methodologies and measurements that are uniform or comparable; and lack of agreement on where Anticipatory Action fits within food security frameworks, where its comparative advantage is best met and its application to protracted crises.

<sup>iv</sup> Many studies have utilized quasi-experimental or experimental methods comparing a beneficiary sample to a control sample (those who do not receive assistance from the implementing agency or any other agency). While this provides an understanding of how receiving support compared to not receiving support may benefit a population, it does not provide clarity in terms of how differing forms of humanitarian activities compare to each other, for example anticipating versus responding to a crisis.

## Food security projections for Anticipatory Action

Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) projections provide essential information, allowing different humanitarian actors such as United Nations agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations to anticipate the future needs of vulnerable populations. AFI projections are typically considered inputs to Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and Global Reports on Food Crises and can be an important tool in orienting programme design, including geographic targeting and implementation, and particularly informing the expected magnitude and severity of acute food insecurity in a future period.

Anticipatory Action benefits from such crucial information. In fact, IPC and IPC-compatible projections have been used as a key input in various Anticipatory Action trigger mechanisms as they provide spatial and severity disaggregated data on the expected evolution of acute food insecurity during a future period (short to medium term), indicating the level of impact of forecasted hazards. In the cases of IPC conducted by multi-partners analysis teams, there is an added value coming from a consensus-based analysis drawing from multiple stakeholders' inputs.

Yet, in some countries, the lengths of the IPC processes and frequency of analyses may pose a challenge when aligning with Anticipatory Action windows of opportunity. For this reason, IPC analyses should be accompanied by multi-hazard risk monitoring at country level to ensure its reactivity and usefulness to inform Anticipatory Action programming and to ensure this information can feed IPC analyses updates, which in turn would contribute to Anticipatory Action programming.

IPC projections and early warning can be complementary because of their differences. It should also be noted that several countries are not yet covered by the IPC, and as such early warning information is even more crucial in these contexts.

## Common agreed principles

- AFI projections could be used as a key element in Anticipatory Action trigger systems because it is an impact-based forecasting tool that is evidence-based, consensus-based when conducted by multi-partner analysis teams, trustworthy, and a common currency that enables multiple factor analysis. However, this can be achieved only under certain conditions. AFI projections should be:
  - considered as an added value, not a precondition to act; and
  - combined with other forward-looking indicators such as agricultural observation, climate and economic forecasting information, information regarding conflict/insecurity, and other early warning information to fill in existing gaps.
- AFI projection results could inform the targeting of Anticipatory Action interventions, specifically on geographical targeting, provided that it is context specific. However, AFI projections can inform neither individual targeting nor the typology and timeframe of specific interventions which are context-based and need coordinated multi-sectoral responses, according to the mandate of each Anticipatory Action agency.
- Regular information monitored by Anticipatory Action trigger systems could be used for AFI projection analysis and prompt and inform AFI projection updates. To ensure that joint risk monitoring at country level bridges the gap between early warning and implementation, it is necessary that:
  - a. risk monitoring and data/knowledge-sharing are further coordinated across key stakeholders; and
  - b. coordinated risk monitoring should trigger further discussions between partners at the country level (e.g. within IPC Technical Working Groups and response coordination mechanisms).

## Anticipatory Action in protracted crises

According to the 2017 *State of Food and Nutrition Security in the World* report, protracted crises are “characterized by recurrent natural disasters and/or conflict, longevity of food crises, breakdown of livelihoods and insufficient institutional capacity to react to the crises”.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, to establish that a country is experiencing a protracted crisis, it needs to meet three criteria:

1. longevity of the crisis and request of external assistance for food;
2. levels of humanitarian aid flow to the country; and
3. economic and food security status of the country.<sup>v</sup>

In 2022, 20 countries met the above three criteria: Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Zimbabwe. Of these, 15 have been in this category since 2010. Between 2016 and 2021, on average, 66 percent of the people facing high levels of acute food insecurity – IPC/Cadre Harmonisé (CH) Phase 3 or above or equivalent – across food crises worldwide were in countries experiencing protracted crises.

In protracted crisis contexts, it is undoubtedly critical to protect and sustain people’s livelihoods in the face of new forecast hazards. Yet is there still a need for Anticipatory Action in areas where extensive humanitarian operations are being carried out to respond to a past or ongoing shock? Are the ongoing operations already anticipating risks that have potential to cause a new shock in the future? While defining clear boundaries is challenging, it is important to define some common principles and recommendations to ensure that support to vulnerable people in protracted crises is also informed by forward-looking analyses on potential new risks that may further increase humanitarian needs, and even jeopardize ongoing humanitarian operations.

## Common agreed principles

- Anticipatory actions have a role in protracted crises. However, it was recognized that the value added of Anticipatory Action in protracted crises would be to mitigate the impact of new hazards and shocks, rather than addressing pre-existing humanitarian needs and underlying vulnerabilities.
- In protracted crises, Anticipatory Action can play a role both in preventing vulnerable communities at lower phases of acute food insecurity from slipping into higher levels of acute food insecurity, and in preventing further deterioration of food security outcomes within areas already classified as facing higher phases of acute food insecurity.
- The implementation of anticipatory actions in protracted crises often proved difficult. Anticipatory Action is not integrated in the humanitarian response framework, and is frequently perceived as competing for the same resources. In this regard, more efforts should be placed to ensure coordination and integration of Anticipatory Action within the overall humanitarian architecture and plans as a key complement to response. Further integration would also allow for more predictable and accessible sources of funding for Anticipatory Action.
- Development actors should be further engaged in discussions around Anticipatory Action. In fact, Anticipatory Action can protect the development gains achieved by development investments in protracted crises.

<sup>v</sup> The specific parameters are: 1) the country is a low-income food-deficit country, as defined by FAO; 2) the country has faced a shock – either natural or human-induced – for four consecutive years between 2018 and 2021, or for eight of ten years between 2012 and 2021, and is reported in the list of countries requiring external assistance for food; and 3) the country received more than 10 percent of total official development assistance (ODA) in the form of humanitarian assistance between 2011 and 2019.

## Anticipatory Action and the HDP nexus

An HDP nexus approach – which involves efforts to improve the coherence and complementarity between humanitarian action, longer-term development approaches and contributions to build and sustain peace – is absolutely critical in anticipating the increasingly long-lasting, recurring, complex and interdependent crises the world is currently facing. The HDP nexus can be a critical enabling approach for the successful scale-up and implementation of anticipatory actions and vice versa. The emphasis on joint analysis, risk-informed, joined-up planning processes and the use of more appropriate financing strategies and instruments can play a key role in implementing anticipatory actions to minimize the impact of anticipated shocks. In addition, the emphasis placed by the HDP nexus approach on localized responses, capacities and leadership can ensure that anticipatory actions are integrated into national systems, including national disaster management planning and other key institutions.

In particular, an HDP nexus approach promotes the development of ‘collective outcomes’ that identify how and when humanitarian, development and peace programming can contribute to an agreed outcome, including the targeted reduction of crisis risks and addressing peoples’ vulnerability. This includes boosting societal resilience to risks and stressors by strengthening national and community capacities to absorb, adapt or transform in the face of crisis risks. As such, there is a significant opportunity to ensure that collective outcomes processes incorporate Anticipatory Action as an integrated component of such a joined-up planning approach.

## Common agreed principles

- Development actors are present in crisis contexts before, during and after a crisis hits. As such they have a vital role in ensuring that shared or joint analysis informs the actions of multiple stakeholders across humanitarian, development and peace spheres and drives consensus on critical risks, stressors and vulnerabilities to influence the identification/pre-selection, targeting and sequencing of anticipatory actions.
- Joined-up programme planning, including collective outcomes processes, represents an opportunity to incorporate anticipatory actions as a key component of addressing risks and vulnerabilities at a national, sub-national or community level as well as an opportunity to broaden the number of actors involved in Anticipatory Action.
- The success of an HDP nexus approach, both in terms of its contribution to scaling up and facilitating anticipatory actions and the way in which Anticipatory Action can incentivize and enhance more coherent and complementary HDP action is dependent on an effective accountability mechanism between diverse actors. This is to ensure that mutually reinforcing humanitarian, development and peace programming is implemented at the right time, in the right manner, for the right people, and by the right actors to lessen the impact of anticipated shocks.
- Different types of financing instruments and financing flows need to be used by different actors at the right time. There needs to be a comprehensive understanding of where the financing gaps lie and where the opportunities are to match the most appropriate financing to specific actions. This is especially vital for Anticipatory Action; the recognition that it is not the sole responsibility of humanitarian actors is crucial to bring more clarity on the sources and financing processes for these types of actions

# Recommendations

## Evidence for Anticipatory Action

- **Agreements need to be made on minimum standards of evidence**, considering budgetary and technical constraints.
- **Anticipatory Action stakeholders need to proactively engage in data sharing and information sharing regarding Anticipatory Action evidence and learning.** Open global platforms need to be used more effectively to widen access to such knowledge.
- **Agencies need to agree on a set of questions that cannot yet be answered with the current basis of evidence on Anticipatory Action.** For instance, more studies are needed to assess medium- to longer-term effects of Anticipatory Action, its application in protracted crisis contexts, and its impact on resilience, among others.

## AFI projections for Anticipatory Action

**There is a need for a more flexible and frequent update of IPC analyses when the situation evolves from the projected outcomes/forecasts.** This could be achieved by ensuring a direct link between risk monitoring/early warning monitoring with the Anticipatory Action systems and IPC analysis updates which will then – not exclusively – inform the triggering of Anticipatory Action. To this end, stronger linkages and collaboration between IPC and Anticipatory Action processes and teams at country level are crucial.

**To allow for the evolution of risk monitoring and situation follow-up, the IPC can be useful. However, it is of utmost importance that IPC communication products clearly outline and detail the assumptions factored into the projection analysis.** This would allow partners to coordinate the follow-up of the assumptions' evolution in the appropriate forums, which in some cases may need to be identified or established.

These recommendations could be taken up through a progressive testing approach, for instance to start piloting these proposed recommendations in a specific country.

## Anticipatory Action in protracted crises

**There is a need for further integration of Anticipatory Action in the humanitarian project cycle, especially in protracted crisis contexts.** Anticipatory Action should be mainstreamed and integrated in the different phases of the humanitarian project cycle, with a particular focus on strategic planning and resource mobilization. This is done through highlighting, in the HNO and the HRP, where such actions may be necessary and effective, and to ensure there is no competition over resources between the ongoing response and anticipatory actions, but rather to ensure that Anticipatory Action acts as a crucial complement to an ongoing response in terms of curbing further deterioration from new shocks whenever possible.

## Anticipatory Action and HDP nexus

**The Anticipatory Action approach needs to be systematically incorporated into collective outcomes processes** that convene humanitarian, development and peace actors from government, the multilateral system, bilateral actors, the private sector and civil society on the basis of a shared understanding of risks and vulnerabilities. Acting ahead of shocks to prevent acute food insecurity is a collective responsibility.

A nexus approach emphasizes the importance of strengthening local capacities to prevent and respond to crises. This should include **ensuring that local and national disaster management systems are equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to implement anticipatory actions** on the basis of defined and agreed mechanisms, with support from the full range of humanitarian, development and peace actors.

## Finance for Anticipatory Action

Anticipatory Action must be **supported by a financing landscape analysis to highlight funding gaps and to identify the right financing instruments and sources of financing** (public, private, international and domestic) for the timely implementation of anticipatory actions. Identifying and clarifying the full range of resources available can facilitate more effective sequencing and layering of humanitarian, development and peace actions and enable the scaling up of complementary actions at the appropriate time to lessen the impact of shocks.

## Anticipatory Action and partnerships

**Linkages between humanitarian, development and peace coordination structures need to be strengthened** to facilitate a shared understanding of the triggers and actions required to implement and scale up anticipatory actions, based on the comparative advantage of respective stakeholders across the HDP pillars. Where possible and appropriate, this should include strong local and national ownership, including the engagement of government and regional actors.

**Mutual accountability mechanisms should be developed** to ensure that the full range of humanitarian, development and peace actors contribute to mutually reinforcing programme responses in a timely manner and that these actions lead to better outcomes for vulnerable people and communities, including an enhanced capacity to withstand the impact of shocks because of anticipatory actions.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> **Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and GNAFC.** 2023. *Global Report on Food Crises 2023: Joint analysis for better decisions*. Rome. [fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2023-compressed.pdf](https://fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2023-compressed.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.** 2022. *G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Strengthening Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Assistance*. Cited 30 May 2023. <https://bit.ly/3AVbtJd>

<sup>3</sup> **United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).** 2020. *CERF allocation report on the use of funds and achieved results. Somalia anticipatory action against food insecurity 2020*. [https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/20-RR-SOM-44036\\_Somalia\\_CERF\\_Report.pdf](https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/20-RR-SOM-44036_Somalia_CERF_Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> **FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNICEF, WFP & World Health Organization (WHO).** 2017. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security*. Rome. [fao.org/3/a-17695e.pdf](https://fao.org/3/a-17695e.pdf)



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Within the Global Network's approach and framework, FAO and WFP, together with relevant partners, have established a coordinated monitoring system for food security, livelihoods and value chains in order to identify and inform critical anticipatory actions. This publication is part of a series of Global Network's analytical products contributing to generating and sharing consensus and evidence-based information for preventing and addressing food crises.

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