

# Scaling up locally led anticipatory action - so that no one is left behind

**A call to action between civil society organisations towards national governments and disaster management agencies, EU member states and donors, and technical agencies**

## Background

GNDR is a network of over 1,500 civil society organisations across 129 countries working together to strengthen the resilience of communities most at risk of disasters. This call to action has been developed with the members below, who are engaging in locally led anticipatory action in Southern Africa.

- [Ecumenical Committee for Social Development \(CEDES\)](#), Mozambique
- [Churches Action in Relief and Development \(CARD\)](#), Malawi
- [SAF/FKJM](#), Madagascar
- [Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe \(DKH\)](#), Germany

The messages and actions called for are based on evidence from their work with communities at risk and shared experiences of and learning on locally led anticipatory action. This intervention applied participatory contingency planning integrating planning for anticipatory action, mechanisms for community planning and the provision of community micro-grants (group cash transfers)<sup>1</sup>, and the establishment of an anticipatory action mechanism for local actors.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.calpnetwork.org/publication/group-cash-transfers-guidance-and-tools/>

## Global context

Risk drivers including climate change are affecting the global nature of risk, with hazards and threats becoming more frequent, intense and complex. Across the world, we are struggling to address the systemic nature of risk, and witnessing the multiplier effect of shocks and stresses, from the continued global impact of COVID-19 to devastating floods in Pakistan and Nigeria and drought and hunger in the Horn of Africa, to deadly heatwaves across Europe, flash floods in Brazil, Hurricane Julia in Honduras and the global impact of food insecurity from Russia's war in Ukraine. Across the world, we are increasingly seeing compounding risks and impacts.<sup>2</sup>

Locally led planning by governments and humanitarian organisations, access to finance and risk data, and local actors' operational readiness are all essential preconditions to ensure the effective implementation of anticipatory action at the local level. Despite the critical role of civil society organisations, local government and community leaders in managing disasters, 84% of local actors report not being included in assessing threats, preparing policies and plans, and taking action to reduce threats.<sup>3</sup> Women in particular often lack access to risk information and are not meaningfully engaged in decision making, resulting in their gender specific views being excluded. When disaster strikes, women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die.<sup>4</sup> However, women have the knowledge and skills needed to plan appropriate actions to be taken in advance of hazards striking.

GNDR asked 39,241 people living at risk of disaster in 50 countries what the greatest risks they face are. The majority stated that flooding and extreme weather events wreak havoc in their lives. The consequences, losses and damage on their lives are devastating. Those living on the frontline of the climate crisis are often not the ones who have caused it, yet they bear the brunt of its burden, and continue to be excluded from efforts to deal with it.

## Southern Africa regional context

The Southern African region faces multiple complex and compounding risks, starting with the annual cyclones that are increasing in intensity. They destroy infrastructure, housing and livelihoods, and lead to flooding affecting hundreds of thousands. Four storm systems - Ana, Batsirai, Dumaki and Emnati - hit the region over a 40 day period alone, between late January and early March 2022. This situation calls for both the need for investment in disaster risk reduction, but also investment in improved forecasting models which account for

---

<sup>2</sup> IPCC Report: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

<sup>3</sup> Views from the Frontline 2019 Report - Why are people still losing their lives and livelihoods to disasters? GNDR and its members asked over 100,000 local actors about their perspectives of risk and resilience across 42 countries. <https://global-report.vfi.world/>

<sup>4</sup> UNDP: <https://www.undp.org/blog/women-are-hit-hardest-disasters-so-why-are-responses-too-often-gender-blind>

compounding risks to determine those events for which anticipatory action needs to be activated.

Storms and flooding combined with ongoing drought conditions and unpredictable seasonal rain patterns create conditions that pivot from one extreme to another. For example, in Madagascar, despite ongoing humanitarian intervention, food insecurity remains high with over 1.6 million people classified in 'crisis' or in 'emergency'. This number is set to increase in 2023 as the persisting food and nutrition crisis is exacerbated by prolonged drought, conflict and insecurity and the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

Climate impacts also have cascading effects on health risks. Following intense rainfall in Malawi, for example, contributed to the outbreak of Cholera which resulted in a declaration of Public Emergency. Over 30,000 people are fighting the disease with nearly 1000 deaths in recent months.<sup>6</sup>

Added to the risks associated with cyclones, intense rainfalls and periods of drought, Mozambique also is facing conflict in the Cabo Delgado region, threatening stability, compromising peace, and making the impacts of the climate crisis even more challenging to address.<sup>7</sup>

Whether globally or in the Southern Africa region, climate risk is cascading with other risk factors, increasing vulnerability and causing those at risk to reel from one hazard event to the next, barely able to recover, or perhaps not at all. These recurring events keep people in poverty, and the goal of - leaving no one behind - is getting further away.

## Call to action

Locally led approaches are needed to scale up current best practice in anticipatory action. Utilising the expertise of communities and local actors on the frontlines of disasters and crises, and those most vulnerable to their impacts is a critical element to ensure that effective early warning and early action becomes the norm in all parts of society. The effectiveness of enabling locally led anticipatory action with rapid disbursement of financing to the local level is becoming particularly evident in terms of more proactive self-mobilisation by local structures, and increased community ownership of interventions.

Investing in local structures and providing essential technical and financial support for anticipatory action at the local level will enable appropriate action ahead of disasters and crises, save lives and protect livelihoods. This approach also contributes to capacities for risk

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2018-000141-mdg>

<sup>6</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/ep-2022-000298-mwi>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/east-and-southern-africa/mozambique>

reduction and strengthens communities' resilience. This investment will also contribute to collaborative and coherent action towards achieving the Sendai Framework<sup>8</sup>, Paris Agreement<sup>9</sup>, 2030 Agenda<sup>10</sup>, and international agreements on 'Early Warning for All'<sup>11</sup>. We call on decision makers to amend national and international systems to:

## 1. Strengthen partnerships & collaboration with local actors and structures

Local actors have a critical role in realising the system shift to anticipatory action. Local actors working with communities bring specific added value to anticipatory action in terms of having a permanent presence on the ground, in-depth contextual understanding, and have established relationships with local structures and groups. Establishing meaningful partnerships and strengthened collaboration with local actors and their associated civil society networks in anticipatory action approaches provides an opportunity to ensure that local actors are effectively empowered to engage.

Actions by decision makers:

- International agencies to foster close coordination with local actors and their associated civil society networks on existing and upcoming anticipatory action initiatives, and ensure a minimum representation of local civil society actors in the design and management of these initiatives.
- Clarify understanding on terminologies, and the similarities and differences of concepts and approaches applied by different agencies and actors in the area of early warning - early action / anticipatory action.
- Establish memoranda of understanding between national disaster management authorities, forecasting agencies and local actors to facilitate the provision of technical support to the local level, and increased coherence in planning anticipatory action through the establishment of linkages to connect local and national level planning.
- Establish memoranda of understanding between forecasting agencies and CSOs to provide access to the forecasting data and technical support needed to be able to establish effective early warning systems at the local level.

## 2. Invest resources and financing for early action at the local level

Local structures need to be actively engaged in shaping financing and resource allocation for anticipatory action. Decision making around how this finance is spent needs to be informed by

---

<sup>8</sup> Especially Sendai Priority 4, <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

<sup>9</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>10</sup> Referencing especially SDG 13: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

<sup>11</sup> For example 'Early Warning for All' (<https://public.wmo.int/en/earlywarningsforall>), Risk-informed Early Action Partnership targets (<https://www.early-action-reap.org/who-we-are>)

local knowledge and expertise on vulnerabilities, risks, and available capacities. Ensuring local actors' involvement in shaping financing and resource allocation contributes towards ensuring transparency and accountability.

Actions by decision makers:

- National governments need to specify legal settings and clarify institutional responsibility for anticipatory action and the disbursement of funds which enable local actors to implement anticipatory action.
- National governments with support from international donors, to invest in expanding early warning infrastructure and capacities to monitor and authenticate early warning signs at the local level and connect communities with national level multi-hazard early warning systems.
- Donors to include flexibility in their financing arrangements for local actors by providing funding through existing financing mechanisms which can be utilised for anticipatory action, including for the operational readiness of local actors.
- Donors to define policies which set targets for the percentage of funding to be directed to anticipatory action and more specifically the percentage of financing to actors at the local level.
- National governments with support from international donors, to address the financing gap in locally managed 'contingency' funds, by providing funds for community structures to implement their own anticipatory actions.

### **3. Ensure inclusive locally led coordination**

Anticipatory action at the local level is achieved by setting out well coordinated plans and protocols for early action, and closing coordination gaps which hinder effective communication. A crucial role of civil society organisations is to facilitate inclusion and convene all stakeholders to ensure effective locally led decision making. Local actors are also best placed to make decisions on who should do what and when once a risk has materialised or a trigger has been activated and are able to rapidly mobilise local structures. Locally led coordination needs to be 'area based' and connected to national structures so that planning and coordination systems are engaged within national disaster management systems and risk governance processes.

Actions by decision makers:

- Strengthen and maintain linkages between the provincial government and local level structures to ensure that investments in early action are sustained.

- Develop clear governance mechanisms and plans for early warning systems which specify who does what, when, and how to ensure that forecasts and early warning lead to action at the local level.
- Ensure that gender equality, age, and disability inclusion policies are in place which clearly define who needs to be involved and how and ensure that these policies are applied in practice by actors responsible for maximising inclusion.
- In fragile states where formal disaster management structures coordinating agencies need to actively engage informal structures and groups considering conflict sensitivity.
- Support the uptake of triggers and planning of early actions by community structures through the engagement of community focal point representatives in anticipatory action planning processes.
- Forecasting agencies to coordinate with local actors to ensure that risk and early warning information is collected and validated, and understandable advisories are communicated which enable timely action at the local level.
- Engage local structures in conducting analysis in conflict settings to determine appropriate actions to be integrated into anticipatory action plans.

#### 4. Invest in strengthening existing local capacity and collective learning

Localised approaches for anticipatory action will only be achieved through collective learning and knowledge transfer. Local actors have established can provide access to local data for increased granularity of risk and vulnerability and indigenous knowledge on early warning systems. They are also able to facilitate feedback on local factors affecting the reliability of forecasting models and the effectiveness of established mechanisms and interventions. Locally driven demand-led capacity strengthening processes are required to effectively engage with these capacities.

Actions by decision makers:

- Create opportunities for information sharing on the capacities that exist at local level, and how these capacities can best be utilised through exchanges between representatives of existing informal and formal local structures and national agencies - to inform more coherent capacity strengthening planning at the national level.
- Technical agencies to provide anticipatory action training with donor support specifically tailored to CSOs ways of working, including on the use open-source risk information platforms.
- Technical agencies to engage in dialogue with local actors to review and define triggers on a consensus basis which account for local realities of vulnerabilities and risks, and which account for local variabilities and compound risks.

- Make provisions for organisational capacity strengthening of CSOs and local structures engaging in anticipatory action, including grassroots volunteers, local associations, and other community groups.
- Champion the role that women and marginalised groups play by providing space in AXC VBN/ national dialogue to communicate their knowledge on how to reduce the impact of disasters.
- Technical agencies to review the comparative cost efficiency and effectiveness of funding local structures to implement anticipatory action through the provision of innovative financing mechanisms, such as the use of micro-grants (group cash transfers).

## 5. Include local actors in all anticipatory action policy decision making

Meaningful change will only take place by ensuring that the voice of local actors and civil society groups is represented and meaningfully included in all policy decision-making spaces and processes to mainstream anticipatory action. Whilst recognising that this has started, it needs to be scaled up. All entities, including different levels of local and national government, regional and international platforms need to have effective consultative and decision-making processes regarding priorities, policies, collaboration, and investment. The voice of local communities should not be forgotten within national systems, nor at the international level when global frameworks are being negotiated.

Actions by decision makers:

- Expert agencies engaged in anticipatory action to actively ensure wider inclusion of representatives of CSO network in dialogue and monitoring of frameworks and roadmaps for realising anticipatory action at scale.
- Agencies and networks with technical expertise to meaningfully engage with CSOs early on in processes for conducting and communicating research into emerging aspects of anticipatory action.
- Agencies and networks with technical expertise to facilitate opportunities for CSOs to raise the voice of the communities on the topic of anticipatory action in regional and international platforms and discussions with decision makers in the fields of humanitarian action, development, and climate change.

## Ways forward

The actions required by decision makers outlined within this paper have been developed based on local actors' own experiences of what is required to effectively enable the scale up of anticipatory action. Effectively engaging with local actors is essential in strengthen the

systems needed to mainstream and realise scaled up anticipatory action at the local level - to ensure no one is left behind.

This call to action emphasises actions for systems strengthening also related to other disaster risk management approaches. We therefore welcome humanitarian, climate change and development actors working in related fields to join with us in strengthening systems which empower communities and civil society organisations to realise this change.

This call to action has been developed as part of the '[Local Leadership for Global Impact](#)' project, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). All content is the sole responsibility of GNDR and does not necessarily reflect the views of the BMZ. For more information, please contact - Elise Belcher, Project Coordinator at GNDR - [elise.belcher@gn-dr.org](mailto:elise.belcher@gn-dr.org), or Chris Ball, DRR & Climate Change Advisor at Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe - [chrisball@bbresilience.com](mailto:chrisball@bbresilience.com).