Community engagement in Anticipatory Action
Snapshot of experiences and good practices from focus countries

Introduction

In the framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ (FAO’s) project, entitled “Capturing emerging and good practices to improve community engagement in Anticipatory Action”, funded by the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance of the United States Agency for International Development, the Organization has developed a compendium of experiences and good practices. The aim is to share knowledge to move towards more context-specific, conflict-sensitive, inclusive and accountable Anticipatory Action (AA) programming.

Anticipatory Action (AA) refers to short-term disaster risk management interventions that are implemented during the critical time window between an early warning trigger (point in time when it is known that a shock is likely to occur in the near future) and the actual occurrence of the shock, or when its impacts are felt by local communities. The trigger systems that underpin AA are based on forecasts, seasonal observations and vulnerability information of at-risk groups within those communities. AA recognizes vulnerable people as leaders and agents of change in their own lives and communities. However, people’s ability to cope with and recover from disasters, and to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives, depends on multiple factors. There is growing acknowledgement of the need to strengthen the active and systematic inclusion of at-risk and potentially affected communities into AA approaches and frameworks.

Community engagement is a foundational process for working with traditional, community, civil society, government, and opinion groups and leaders in addressing issues that affect their lives. Community engagement can be conceptualized as a range of possible approaches to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower communities and their members. A lack of community engagement may undermine understanding, trust of, and support for any form of external assistance – including confidence in AA systems at the frontline of disaster and crisis risk management. Community engagement must be better leveraged across AA to improve relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and, not least, accountability. Figure 1 presents the purpose of engaging with at-risk communities and people of concern within each AA programming step.
Figure 1. Community engagement across the Anticipatory Action (AA) system

**Step 1**
Prioritizing risks

**Purpose**
To assess collectively the extent to which specific groups within the community could be affected by identified hazards.

**Step 2.1**
Identifying early warning information

**Purpose**
To identify early warning information.

**Step 2.2**
Identifying anticipatory actions

**Purpose**
To prioritize time- and context-sensitive anticipatory actions to be taken at community level, before a climate- or human-induced disaster strikes.

**Step 3**
Setting up an early warning system

**Purpose**
To expand the capacity to gather and analyse early warning information and to alert the population when a disaster is imminent, in order to minimize its impacts.

**INFORM**
Purpose
To appropriately deliver and assess the quality and effectiveness of anticipatory actions, as well as the performance of the early warning systems they relied on.

**CONSULT**
Purpose
To exchange data and knowledge with communities about phenomena under surveillance, and to ensure proper dissemination of actionable information.

**INVOLVE**
Purpose
To assess collectively the extent to which specific groups within the community could be affected by identified hazards.

**EMPOWER**
Purpose
To appropriately deliver and assess the quality and effectiveness of anticipatory actions, as well as the performance of the early warning systems they relied on.

**COLLABORATE**
Purpose
To identify early warning information.

**Step 4**
Implementing and analysing the impact of anticipatory actions

**Purpose**
To appropriately deliver and assess the quality and effectiveness of anticipatory actions, as well as the performance of the early warning systems they relied on.

Compendium: key points

The Compendium identifies and unpacks some of the current practices and approaches to community engagement. It presents opportunities to enhance AA programming, within the perspective of a broader disaster risk and emergency response management process.

It builds on an extensive desk review and on the outcomes of national-level, multistakeholder roundtables conducted to collect experiences and practices in the four focus countries. It is intended for stakeholders involved in AA, from the local to national and global levels.

The roundtables gathered inputs from male and female representatives across focus countries: Bangladesh, Guatemala, Niger and Zimbabwe.

Participants reflected on approaches to enhance the engagement of at-risk and affected communities, leading to the identification of 125 community engagement practices, 70 specifically relevant to AA programming, and 34 prioritized for uptake.

Criteria applied to identify good practices, and select the 34 good practices featured in the Compendium:

1. Inclusive and sensitive to different needs, priorities and capacities.
2. The result of a participatory process.
3. Replicable and adaptable in other contexts.
4. Does not create or exacerbate risks and vulnerabilities.
Example good practices from the focus countries

**Vulnerability mapping**

To draw a comprehensive analysis of a population’s vulnerabilities and how they are distributed within the community – creating an opportunity to address them through early warning systems and anticipatory actions. Vulnerability parameters are structured against disaggregated gender, age and other diversity and inclusion/marginalization markers, and span across multiple types of hazards, shocks and stresses. Attention must be paid to creating safe spaces for participants with specific protection requirements.

**Hazard assessment and risk mapping**

This practice relies on an inclusive identification and assessment process to understand the hazards prevailing in a specific area. It also maps risks that may affect exposed communities and the systems on which they rely for their well-being and safety. By linking this with vulnerability and capacity assessment practices, AA can focus on areas where communities can be empowered throughout the disaster risk management cycle, for example to act as “first responders” to the hazards identified.

**Context and conflict analysis**

To gain an understanding of local conflict dynamics as a basis for conflict-sensitive interventions, offering opportunities for AA to contribute to local peace. It helps ensure that AA does not overlook, or unintentionally contribute to, divisions, disputes or violent conflict. The analyses contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between natural hazards and conflict, and can also strengthen the longer-term benefits of AA in fragile and conflict-prone/conflict-affected contexts, by preventing the need for additional humanitarian assistance.

**Seasonal calendar**

To visualize variations over relevant periods of time and to plan for change and possible adaptations. With this practice, AA can establish seasonal forecasts and define alert triggers and thresholds that reflect the community’s experience of various events and changes, constituting locally relevant early warning information. This practice values local knowledge and allows the identification of a broader range of indicators for early warning, in line with the community’s specific concerns.

> AA interventions design must pay attention to the generation of new information, experiences and learning for and with communities, in ways that motivate and value their participation.

Participant in the Guatemala roundtable
Local knowledge and the learning acquired by farmers from experience, for example patterns of fruiting and birds sounds, are useful for early warning, and should be formalized in AA protocols.

Participant in the Zimbabwe roundtable

Technical agroclimatic committees

These committees offer a space for dialogue between scientists, technicians, representatives of the public and private sectors, local authorities, smallholder farmers and food producer organizations. They issue a bulletin on climate predictions and possible impacts on crops, alongside recommendations for each productive system. Community representatives play an active role as promoters of the warning issued in the bulletins, act as relays when the thresholds and triggers are met, and promote anticipatory actions adapted under the foreseen circumstances.

Contextualization of early warning messages

Connecting the receivers and developers of early warning messages is essential for an effective and efficient early warning system. Communities are consulted to make sure messages are tailored to the vulnerabilities and risks identified. The messages should use a language that is unequivocal and suited to the local norms, cultural codes and practices. The language or format should also be mindful of varying literacy levels and dialect differences.

Local knowledge and the learning acquired by farmers from experience, for example patterns of fruiting and birds sounds, are useful for early warning, and should be formalized in AA protocols.

Participant in the Zimbabwe roundtable

Capacity assessment

To provide a comprehensive understanding, analysis and mapping of capacities available within the community, be they technical skills, knowledge, know-how, assets, etc. It helps ensure AA programming leverages opportunities for the community to function as autonomously as possible in the prevention and mitigation of disaster risks. It contributes to an enabling environment for a resilient community, where populations play a central role in the identification and delivery of anticipatory actions.

Contextualization of early warning messages

Connecting the receivers and developers of early warning messages is essential for an effective and efficient early warning system. Communities are consulted to make sure messages are tailored to the vulnerabilities and risks identified. The messages should use a language that is unequivocal and suited to the local norms, cultural codes and practices. The language or format should also be mindful of varying literacy levels and dialect differences.

Participant in the Zimbabwe roundtable

Community mobilization

In the context of AA, the community is in the driver’s seat to implement all decisions regarding the planning, coordination and communication related to early warning systems. This contributes to strengthening local leadership and the use of local strategies. Mobilization uses a range of communication technologies and happens in a variety of formats: public meetings, digital platforms, social networks, door-to-door, etc.

Participatory community planning

To result in a contextualized and actionable plan that supports the delivery of longer-term priorities, while articulating the contributions and partnerships between local communities and a range of relevant stakeholders. It can constitute a reference point for the identification and formulation of disaster risk management and resilience programmes, and for assessing the contributions of AA to local objectives.
Example good practices in action

BANGLADESH
Communication with communities

The Shongjog multistakeholder platform is a communication with communities mechanism made up of more than 30 entities from government, international and national non-governmental organizations and volunteer-based organizations across Bangladesh. Its aim is to ensure communities receive credible information, including tailored and contextualized messages for use during both disaster preparedness and response phases, and to promote trust between communities and the disaster response sector.

© FAO/Luis Tato

THE NIGER
Community early warning and emergency response systems

In the Niger, community early warning and emergency response systems (SCAP-RU) operate as a community-level link within the national system for the prevention and management of disasters and food crises. They support the transmission of information and help ensure that the needs of communities are taken into account in decision-making at higher levels. In remote areas, SCAP-RU can provide an initial, localized emergency response to a shock.

© FAO/Luis Tato

GUATEMALA
Free, prior and informed consent

Free, prior and informed consent is a requirement in Guatemala for all interventions that may be affecting Indigenous Peoples, or their lands, territories and resources. For AA programming, this means ensuring that Indigenous Peoples can identify the potential risks and impacts of anticipatory actions and wider disaster risk management interventions, and developing appropriate corrective measures to preserve and enhance their well-being.

© FAO/Luis Tato

ZIMBABWE
Indigenous knowledge for early warning systems

Marondera University of Sciences and Technology in Zimbabwe undertook research on the role of indigenous knowledge for early warning systems, demonstrating that if such knowledge had been formally recognized and valued, some communities might have been forewarned of Cyclone Idai. The importance of community engagement emerges as critical to ensure that early warning systems are tailored to existing knowledge, so that at-risk communities can act on the right information, through the right intermediaries.

© FAO/Luis Tato

“It is important to acknowledge capacity-sharing approaches that already exist in every given context.”

Participant in the Niger roundtable
**Key learning**

Community engagement

- **can be better leveraged across AA** through a large portfolio of practices to improve the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of programming;

- **is a foundational process for expanding collective or group roles** and enabling everyone to participate equally in addressing issues that affect their lives;

- **contributes to gaining trust and establishing strong relationships with communities**, based on a set of concrete activities, outputs, and dedicated resources as part of every project or intervention implemented; and

- **should be considered beyond the limited, time-bound scope of AA** – as part of a more forward-looking, integrated and more localized programme approach.

**Next steps**

The next phase of the project includes a training, piloting and learning component to generate evidence on some of the tangible practicalities and benefits of community engagement in AA. It will also reflect community voices and perceptions regarding some of the practices and principles outlined in the Compendium.

---

**Contact**

Office of Emergencies and Resilience  
Anticipatory-Action@fao.org  
KORE@fao.org  
www.fao.org/in-action/kore

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Rome, Italy

This product was made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this product are the sole responsibility of FAO and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States of America Government.

© FAO, 2024  
CO21091EN.U00.24  
Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Rome, Italy

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE