

Key messages and recommendations from the report *Rooted in Local Leadership, Powered by Global Solidarity: Strengthening Anticipatory Action across the IFRC Network*

SEI brief
November 2025

Katy Harris
Kate Williamson
Richard J.T. Klein

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for initiating and funding this project.

This document presents the report's key messages and recommendations, prepared for distribution at the IFRC-DAG high-level meeting in Stockholm, 24–25 November 2025. The full report is available online at <https://www.sei.org/publications/local-leadership-global-solidarity-anticipatory-action-ifrc>.

Key messages

Over the past decade, the humanitarian community has made significant progress in localizing anticipatory action. Across its global network of National Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has played a leading role in extending the reach and institutionalization of anticipatory approaches. Commitment to locally led approaches has given rise to organizational strategies, targeted funding, technical collaboration and peer learning. Yet as anticipatory action expands around the world, it has become clear that it faces challenges that are as political as they are technical.

This paper distils insights from a desk review, interviews, a focus-group discussion and a field visit into four overarching messages. Together, they explain why progress towards locally led anticipatory action has been uneven; they also highlight the structural trade-offs the IFRC Network¹ must navigate and point to the opportunity to re-examine how anticipatory action is organized and governed.

1. Scaling locally led anticipatory action creates structural trade-offs.

For the IFRC to achieve its ambition to scale anticipatory action through a global network, there is a need for simplicity, standardization and coordination, which inevitably constrain local autonomy and diversity. Diversity in what is done is easier to embrace than diversity in how it is done. These tensions need to be recognized and discussed more openly. Several National Societies are already pioneering ways to reconcile global consistency with local agency, offering valuable lessons for others. The Donor Advisory Group provides an important space to convene and advance such exchanges.



Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) Emergency Operation Center, Jakarta, Indonesia. Image: Katy Harris

¹ For the purposes of this document, the IFRC refers to a global secretariat that supports the humanitarian activities of its membership, the 191 National Societies. The IFRC Network refers to the IFRC together with its 191 National Societies.

2. The barriers to locally led anticipatory action are political as well as technical.

Findings from the analysis converge on a single reality: progress towards locally led anticipatory action is constrained less by technical capacity than by political factors. While localization has gained institutional traction, local leadership remains narrowly defined and externally controlled. These constraints stem from the trade-offs between local leadership and other attributes donors prioritize, such as accountability, efficiency and scalability. These politically sensitive trade-offs reflect donors' legal and institutional limits on risk tolerance.

3. Locally led anticipatory action needs a more enabling and inclusive operating model.

As the IFRC defines its strategy for anticipatory action beyond 2025, there is a clear opportunity for the network and its partners to build on progress made, strengthen the foundations of local leadership, and ensure that coordination, governance and financing mechanisms enable rather than prescribe how anticipatory action is designed and implemented. Rooted in local leadership, powered by global solidarity, and equipped for the challenges that lie ahead, the IFRC Network can consolidate and extend the progress achieved so far.

Wall art at the Headquarters of the Indonesian Red Cross Society – Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) – which coordinates locally led anticipatory action across Indonesia.



Photo: Katy Harris



Photo: Katy Harris

4. Locally led anticipatory action still faces a set of systemic challenges.

Despite clear progress and commitment, the shift to locally led anticipatory action remains incomplete. Implementation has advanced faster than governance, and the systems that define, validate and fund anticipatory action still reflect international design and control. Realizing the ambition of local leadership will require addressing five interrelated challenges that are institutional as much as political:

- **Design and decision-making.** Federation-wide systems and donor requirements continue to shape how anticipatory action is defined, validated and financed, even as implementation becomes increasingly decentralized. While many National Societies now design and activate their own early action protocols, global guidance and approval processes prioritize simplicity, standardization and coordination, which can unintentionally work against local leadership and innovation.
- **Funding and trust.** The challenge is not primarily a lack of money but a reluctance to devolve discretion. While resources exist in the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) and other pooled funds, access and control remain centralized. Predictable, flexible and risk-tolerant finance depends on genuine confidence in the capacity of National Societies and other local actors, and on accountability systems developed jointly rather than imposed from the top. At the same time, anticipatory action sits at the intersection of the humanitarian, development and climate agendas, but this nexus is not yet being harnessed to unlock new funding and align mandates across sectors.

- **Evidence and learning.** Donors often require proof that locally led anticipatory action works before supporting its expansion, yet such evidence cannot exist without devolved pilots and investment in monitoring, evaluation and learning. This “burden of proof” traps local actors in dependency and slows reform. Evidence must be treated as a shared responsibility, built through implementation rather than demanded in advance.
- **Knowledge and authority.** Local and Indigenous knowledge provides insights that science-based models may miss. The persistent hierarchy that privileges formal, model-based forecasting over experiential and community knowledge limits inclusion and operational effectiveness. It is essential to combine multiple knowledge systems and recognize existing practices that are anticipatory in all but name.
- **Hierarchy and inertia.** The IFRC Network’s global reach and community presence remain its greatest strength, yet its own hierarchies can reproduce the top-down dynamics it seeks to overcome. Even where anticipatory action is embedded in disaster risk management systems and policies, decision-making power and finance rarely extend to municipal or community levels, where most implementation occurs. The challenge is to reform decision chains and financing within the network and across national governments, giving local actors genuine authority to anticipate and act.

PMI Banten province regional warehouse.



Photo: Katy Harris

3. Strengthen institutional support and capacities.

Establish a permanent operational support mechanism that formalizes how National Societies access technical expertise and validation assistance. Convene more dialogues and peer-to-peer learning exchanges on anticipatory action and locally led approaches that harness the IFRC Network's institutional knowledge.

- **Recommended action:** For technical support, use existing regional learning platforms or establish new mechanisms where there are gaps.

4. Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

Introduce a network-wide MEL framework for anticipatory action with target outcomes and shared indicators for local leadership and inclusion, supported by mechanisms for gathering community feedback.

- **Recommended action:** Integrate relevant indicators into existing IFRC monitoring and evaluation systems. Convene participatory reflection sessions with National Societies and other local actors to ensure that progress on local leadership is accurately captured and shared.

For the Donor Advisory Group (DAG) and donors:

5. Adopt longer-term, risk-tolerant, flexible funding models.

Move beyond short project cycles by supporting multi-year, flexible and predictable funding, overcoming existing institutional barriers to do so. This includes leveraging existing IFRC mechanisms such as the DREF, and expanding complementary country-level or multi-donor instruments that extend support over longer timeframes.

- **Recommended action:** Review compliance requirements and pilot risk-based payouts and multi-year funding that include a flexible component responsive to locally determined needs.

6. Increase and remove barriers to funding.

Scale up contributions to the DREF and explore complementary mechanisms, such as guarantees, crisis modifiers and catastrophe bonds. Encourage a cultural shift among donors to embrace the risk inherent in locally led anticipatory action.

- **Recommended action:** Invest in the DAG's capacity to evaluate and analyse different financing mechanisms for feasibility and effectiveness, to inform the evolution of existing mechanisms. Where needed, develop new mechanisms that enhance the financial autonomy of National Societies.

Agustina Lubis, PMI volunteer, holds anticipatory action protocol.



Photo: Katy Harris

7. Diversify and localize funding.

Support the creation of country-based and locally led pooled funds that can directly and flexibly finance anticipatory action. Channel more resources directly to local actors by setting targets for local funding and providing predictable core support to strengthen their institutional capacities. Enhance coordination between mechanisms for financing disaster risk. Explore opportunities for risk-sharing with the private sector as well as risk-based financing through international development banks.

- **Recommended action:** Co-finance “build” and “fuel” funds with National Societies and governments, and clarify eligibility within the nexus of humanitarian, development and climate action to unlock new sources of finance. Strengthen collaboration and coherent approaches among respective budget holders.

8. Champion a shared evidence and advocacy agenda.

Build on existing research partnerships and platforms (e.g. the Anticipation Hub and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre) to co-create actionable evidence on locally led anticipatory action and ensure that insights from communities and Indigenous Peoples inform governments and donors. Support joint efforts to develop a shared harmonized understanding and vocabulary of relevant values and concepts.

- **Recommended action:** Commission periodic syntheses of lessons and evidence from across the IFRC Network and its partners, and maintain an accessible, collaborative platform for sharing insights, informing donor priorities and strengthening global learning and advocacy.

For National Societies:

9. Strengthen leadership and institutional capacity at all levels.

Invest in long-term organizational development, peer-to-peer learning and collaboration on anticipatory action beyond the IFRC Network. Develop localized anticipatory action funds, ensuring that branches in at-risk areas are adequately resourced and their existing capacities and practices are recognized and used.

- **Recommended action:** Develop capacity-strengthening plans and link funding tranches to demonstrable outcomes rather than activities.

10. Foster inclusion, participation and accountability.

Link anticipatory action closely with existing community-based disaster risk reduction and resilience initiatives, ensuring that established structures such as Community Disaster Response Teams and Community Early Warning Systems are used to plan and implement early actions.

- **Recommended action:** Strengthen these community mechanisms by actively engaging women, youth and marginalized groups, and by building on local and Indigenous knowledge to enhance trust, legitimacy and local ownership.

11. Institutionalize anticipatory action within national systems.

Leverage the auxiliary role of National Societies to advocate for dedicated budget lines and national systems for anticipatory action. Coordinate with meteorological and sectoral agencies. Align early-action protocols with national disaster risk management frameworks, financing strategies and legislative environments.

- **Recommended action:** Establish formal agreements with governments that define roles, triggers, actions, finance and reporting.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for initiating and funding this project.

They also thank the following individuals and organizations for their valuable contributions and support throughout the project: Alice Chautard (Stockholm Environment Institute) for facilitating the focus group discussion; Christina Bennett (Start Network) for supporting our stakeholder engagement and outreach; Jenna Young (DFAT) for sharing Australia's pioneering innovations; and Simon Meldrum (IFRC) for his technical advice and input.

Further thanks go to the representatives of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Red Cross, the Indonesian Red Cross and the IFRC Secretariat who served on the project's Advisory Board for their timely and insightful advice, as well as to the organizers and participants of the field visit to Indonesia and to all stakeholders who took part in the interviews and focus-group discussion.

Published by

Stockholm Environment Institute
Visiting address: Textilgatan 43
Post and deliveries: Virkesvägen 1A
120 30 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 8 30 80 44

Copyright © 2025 Stockholm Environment Institute. This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

To view a copy of the licence, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

Author contact

katy.harris@sei.org

Editor

Tom Gill

Layout

Tyler Kemp-Benedict

Media contact

ulrika.lamberth@sei.org

Visit us: sei.org

X: [@SEIresearch](https://twitter.com/SEIresearch)

Stockholm Environment Institute is an international non-profit research institute that tackles climate, environment and sustainable development challenges.

We empower partners to meet these challenges through cutting-edge research, knowledge, tools and capacity building. Through SEI's HQ and seven centres around the world, we engage with policy, practice and development action for a sustainable, prosperous future for all.