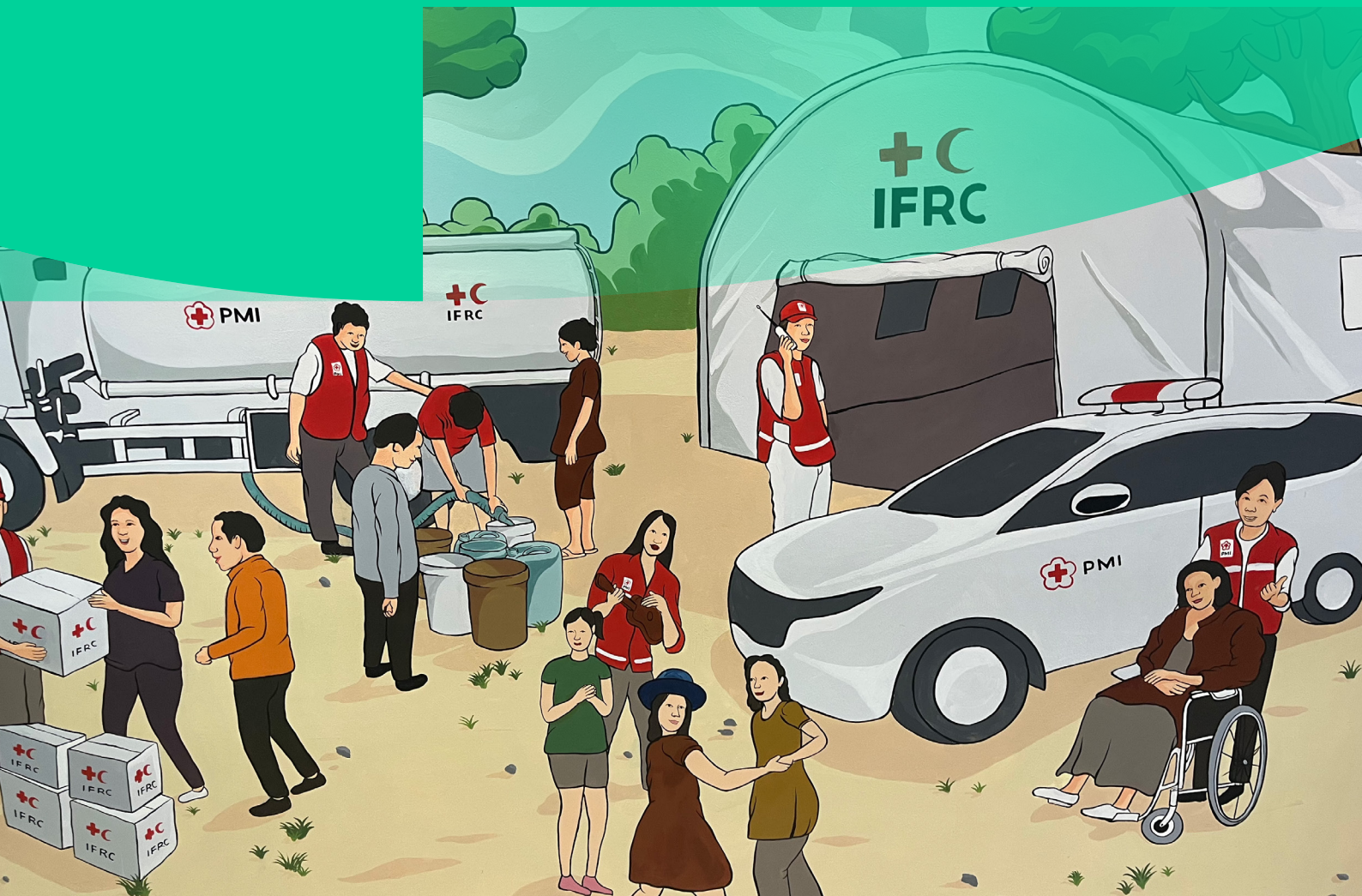


Rooted in local leadership, powered by global solidarity: strengthening anticipatory action across the IFRC Network

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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

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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 report 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.

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.

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.

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.

1. Context and state of play

The IFRC Network is widely considered to be a pioneer of anticipatory action systems globally (Gros, n.d.), from which the Donor Advisory Group (DAG) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) could learn and apply substantive lessons. For the past four years, the IFRC Operational Framework for Anticipatory Action 2021–2025 has aimed to operationalize a “**scale up of ambition**” in anticipatory action and spearheaded significant advancements in its mainstreaming, including dedicating more funding to expand and strengthen local capacities (IFRC, 2022b). This report captures some of the enablers of locally led anticipatory action, and the strengths of the IFRC Network in deploying and harnessing them. In the research conducted for this study (see methodology below), examples of locally led anticipatory action were cited from all over the world: from Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in Africa, to Bangladesh and Indonesia in Asia, and from Honduras in Latin America to Greece in Europe (IFRC, 2024c).

At the same time, a recent internal evaluation of this framework finds that that while “the network’s global footprint and community reach are widely recognized ... full potential is constrained” (Gros, n.d.). This report offers some discussion points and recommendations for better harnessing that potential in relation to **locally led anticipatory action** specifically – for both the IFRC Network and the DAG. It does so with humility – recognizing that, to a significant extent, localized approaches are in the DNA of the network – and strategically, taking note of the broader context of 2025: a moment when the sustainability of anticipatory action strategies depends on their ability to be anticipatory themselves to a wide range of interrelated risks. These risks include:

- Increasing instability and complexity from geopolitical crises, climate change impacts and turbulent economic markets leading to “vast, immediate humanitarian needs at any given moment” (Gros, n.d.)
- An increasingly “noisy” ecosystem of anticipatory actions and actors, enabling opportunities for complementarities but also risks of duplication and fragmentation
- The “humanitarian reset”, underscoring the importance of cost-effective anticipatory action even as budgets become increasingly constrained; this may amplify concerns that limited resources may be “locked up in readiness-like investments” for years – despite such perceptions failing to reflect the reality of how these funds operate in practice (Gros, n.d.).

There is a clear movement within the broader humanitarian community to embrace anticipatory action. In 2024, 154 active anticipatory action frameworks spanned 48 countries and covered more than 13 million people (Anticipation Hub, 2025). The World Bank estimates that if early warning systems and early action capacity were enhanced in all developing countries, an average of 23 000 lives could be saved each year and annual losses of between USD 300 million and 2 billion could be avoided (AATF, 2022).

However, the degree to which it is inclusive and locally led is not well understood, and some stakeholders refer to the adoption of “minimal standards” in local leadership as a missed opportunity to drive a new and more integrated approach. Challenges and barriers exist in relation to governance, financing and funding, and implementation that this report explores. The absence of a clearly articulated and commonly understood

“Despite the critical role that locally led approaches can play in anticipatory action, and disaster risk reduction more broadly, 84 per cent of local actors report not being included in assessing the threats they face, preparing policies and plans, or taking action.”

– Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024

definition and vision for locally led anticipatory action is a prominent gap for both the IFRC Network and the humanitarian community as a whole.

The translation of locally led principles (see Box 2) in the implementation of anticipatory action is arguably least well defined: “sometimes I don’t know exactly what it is supposed to look like ... we talk about local leadership [and] recognition of people ... but concretely, how does it work?” (Mathilde Duchemin, French Red Cross).

Perceived momentum diverges across the IFRC Network, with marked variation between National Societies. But some stakeholders argue that beyond a handful of stellar examples, too few local institutions are entrusted to manage resources, while an emphasis on the roll out of standard protocols and procedures comes at the expense of nurturing platforms that centre local voices in decision-making and design. The extent to which the network’s most local units – its branches and chapters of volunteers – participate in the design of Early Action Protocols (EAPs), for example, is not well tracked or understood.

Nevertheless, the IFRC Network stands at the vanguard of locally led anticipatory action worldwide. It is uniquely positioned because of its distinctive strengths: 191 National Societies that serve as auxiliaries to governments, maintain an enduring presence in communities, and can flex across different layers of governance. The broader anticipatory action community seeks leadership and lessons from the IFRC, even as it calls on the network to define its role relative to theirs, to strengthen communication, coordination and collaboration.

1.1 A note on the approach, definitions and distinctions

The analysis combined a desk review with targeted stakeholder engagement to examine the political and institutional factors shaping locally led anticipatory action. A total of 43 documents spanning the humanitarian, climate and development domains were identified through a structured search and consultation with the project advisory board to ensure a balance of perspectives. Of these, 38 were systematically analysed to identify enablers of and barriers to locally led anticipatory action.

To complement the desk review, the authors conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with 18 stakeholders, including National Societies, Partner National Societies, donors, UN agencies, NGOs and technical experts. The interviews explored how authority, finance and accountability are distributed within the anticipatory action system, and how local leadership can be strengthened. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. A focus-group discussion with six representatives of Francophone National Societies and participation in the IFRC-DAG field visit to Indonesia broadened the geographical scope of the analysis.

For the purposes of this study, the authors adopt the definition of locally led anticipatory action articulated in Box 1.²

BOX 1. LOCALLY LED ANTICIPATORY ACTION

“Approaches that are driven and led by communities and local-level actors” (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024) “acting ahead of a predicted hazardous event to prevent or reduce impacts on lives, livelihoods, and humanitarian needs before they fully unfold” (IASC, 2024)

Local-level actors are considered – as articulated in Resolution 34/IC/24/R4 – as “local and national State and non-State actors that undertake principled humanitarian action” (IFRC, 2024a)

However, it is worth noting that there are disparate definitions of locally led adaptation in literature, policy and practice, as well as different conceptualizations of it. For example:

- **Who is local?** Some actors apply the term spatially – and restrictively – to refer only to communities and the organizations and authorities operating at that level (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; OCHA, 2023; Oxfam, 2024), whereas the IFRC (among others) classify National Societies – and other State and non-state actors up to the national scale – as local actors too.³ Others also define “local” in relation to proximity to a hazard or risk (“by local actors I mean people living in affected area or context” (Mathilde Duchemin, French Red Cross) or “those on the frontlines... experiencing the effects of issues that are being addressed” (anonymous interviewee)), their administrative affiliation (e.g. all those not staff members of international organizations), or as contextually relevant (given the scale of the hazard).
- **What counts as anticipatory?** While formal definitions exist, there remains a perceived lack of conceptual clarity in practice, if not on paper – with anticipatory action frequently conflated with early warning, early action and contingency planning – both within the IFRC Network and beyond.⁴

The authors also distinguish between different approaches to anticipatory action: ranging from those that only arguably represent a localization of action to those that recognize and harness “the potential of local leadership for trusted, coordinated, timely and sustainable anticipatory action” (Oxfam, 2024). This distinction is not binary but rather represents a continuum, consistent with ODI’s analytical framework, which conceptualizes localization as a journey towards the end goal of locally led practice (Baguios et al., 2021). It also echoes ALNAP’s finding that these two approaches offer

² One participant in this study attributed formal definitions of locally led anticipatory action to a western, colonial framing, and expressed the need to hear how local actors themselves conceive localization and locally led approaches.

³ The resolution on “enabling local leadership, capacity and delivery in principled humanitarian action and strengthening resilience” explicitly notes the application of the Red Cross and Red Crescent model law with its “emphasis on recognizing and formalizing the special role of National Societies as principled and effective local actors” (IFRC, 2024a).

⁴ Note that the term hazard or hazardous event is also evolving and expanding over time, to include not only extreme events but also slow-onset, compounding and conflict-based risks (for example).

“The term ‘localization’, popularized by the Grand Bargain, is an approach taken by the formal international (humanitarian) system that aims to strengthen international investment and respect for the role of local actors, with the goal of reducing costs and increasing the reach of humanitarian action. Meanwhile, ‘locally led action’ is a term used to denote approaches where programmes are conceived, shaped and delivered closer to the affected communities, highlighting the power and agency of affected people and local actors in humanitarian action.”

– IFRC (2024)

“meaningfully different starting points” for assessing local leadership in humanitarian action – from “making existing international systems more inclusive of local actors” to “a fundamental transformation of the system to adapt to diverse local realities” (Robillard et al., 2021 quoted in: Viswanathan, n.d.).

To assess the degree of localized action, the studies above suggest examining key dimensions (resources, agency, ways of being) alongside the levers that shape them (decision-making, priorities, knowledge, relationships, delivery) (Baguios et al., 2021). When this framework is applied to the attributes of localized or locally led anticipatory action identified in the literature, the authors suggest that the following continuum can be drawn:

A **localized** approach to anticipatory action may involve:

- Centring the knowledge, perspectives and ideas of local actors in anticipatory action
- Assuring the equitable engagement and participation of local actors through processes of co-development and alignment with local and national structures and policies
- Ensuring actions reflect local realities and priorities and draw on local data and trigger models
- Making funding accessible to first responders at the local level

Whereas a **locally led** approach to anticipatory action may entail (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; Ainte et al., 2024; Wagner et al., 2024; IFRC, 2024; Oxfam, 2024; Belger et al., 2024):

- Empowering and equipping local actors to autonomously lead, conceive, shape and deliver early actions and anticipatory programmes.
- Recognizing, upholding and enhancing ownership of anticipatory action by those within, or with first-hand knowledge of, affected communities’ needs, priorities and capacities.
- Recognizing the existing anticipatory actions of local actors (however informal or not so defined) and their capacity to act.
- Challenging global-local power dynamics and shifting agency and decision-making from the top down to bottom up. Supporting marginalized groups to adopt leadership roles.
- Positioning funding and resourcing at a local level, disbursed and allocated by local actors.

Readers may find the principles for locally led anticipatory action articulated by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (2024) instructive in further defining the concept (see Box 2).

“Localization of the international aid system isn’t the same thing as supporting locally led action. Both strategies are important, and they may overlap in some areas, but they require different approaches and learning agendas. It’s essential to differentiate between them”

– Stakeholder from a global humanitarian network

BOX 2. PRINCIPLES OF LOCALLY LED ANTICIPATORY ACTION

See the Locally Led Anticipatory Action Guide and Toolkit, developed by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe and implemented by the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction.

1. Devolving decision making to the most appropriate community-specific level
2. Addressing structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, older persons, persons with disability, persons living in displacement, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized ethnic groups, as well as through socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity
3. Providing patient and predictable pre-arranged or flexible funding that can be accessed more easily (i.e. on the basis of a forecast)
4. Investing in local technical and operational capabilities to leave an institutional legacy
5. Building robust understanding of climate and other forecastable and predictable risk and uncertainty
6. Flexible programming (pre-defined plans, or a predictive analysis and approval mechanism) and learning
7. Ensuring transparency and accountability
8. Collaborative action and investment

2. Enablers to build on; barriers to overcome

There are many ways to assess the enablers and barriers of locally led anticipatory action across the humanitarian community, and specifically the relative strengths of the IFRC Network and the challenges it faces. This report explores these questions through three lenses: governance, financing and funding, and implementation.

2.1 Governance enablers of locally led anticipatory action: what do we know works?

The ways that institutions and actors design, manage, implement and monitor anticipatory action determines the extent to which anticipatory action can be locally led.

The **participatory governance** of anticipatory action can foster inclusive and empowering approaches that are grounded in local needs and meaningfully engage local and marginalized groups (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024; Mojaki & Poole, n.d.; Oxfam, 2024; AATF, 2022; International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024).

Lessons should be drawn from existing practices of participatory governance, such as the collaboration between the IFRC and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation to strengthen the leadership of women in natural disaster

emergency response (cited in interviews for this study). Recognizing and harnessing local actors' deep understandings of local contexts, and their ability to mobilize local structures and capabilities, is foundational (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024). Such governance models can be developed through co-designed processes, including participatory scenario planning and the people-first impact method (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024; Chaudhury et al., 2023; Schneider, 2024) (see Annex 1 for examples from Niger, Ethiopia and Malawi). However, catalysing true locally led anticipatory action requires a more deliberative **transformational approach** – “a shift that enables power, autonomy, and dignity to lie with the people most affected, rather than dictated and decided by international actors” (Oxfam, 2024).

An enabling environment for locally led anticipatory action also requires **political and donor commitment** – perceived to be growing among stakeholders, in the sense of moving from awareness to action (despite geographic disparities) – and supporting institutional structures, policies and procedures (Schneider, 2024; AATF, 2021). Equally crucial to the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of locally led anticipatory action is its **integration** and **coherence** with existing local, national and international structures and processes (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; GNDR, 2023; Schneider, 2024), despite potential trade-offs to consider (a loss of local nuance within the pursuit for coherence with policies at higher governance scales, for example).

Multi-stakeholder, interdisciplinary **partnerships** between local, national, regional and international actors are also enablers – helping to strengthen coordination and alignment of otherwise dispersed initiatives, leverage and share resources, build relationships and trust, and create shared understandings of needs, risks and opportunities for anticipatory action (Ame, 2023; Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; IASC, 2024; Schneider, 2024). For example, the Mauritanian Red Crescent's early action protocol for floods was developed with technical support from the Climate Centre, the IFRC, local authorities and the British Met Office, as well as through community consultations and regional workshops that helped to identify and validate priority high-risk areas, respectively (cited in the focus group for this study). **Intermediary actors** can play critical roles, harnessing their resources, knowledge and partnerships to facilitate and coordinate the bridging of actors across scales (Ayers et al., 2024; Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024) and the engagement of local actors specifically, particularly in contexts where local capacity is so low as to render local leadership impossible⁵ (Ame, 2023; OCHA, 2023).

⁵ Note that assessments of capacity and leadership are actor and context specific – if they are perceived in relation to the requirements and expectations set by donors, and those expectations shift, so may perceived local capacities and opportunities for leadership by local actors.

“[The IFRC Network is] really designed to support communities to have their own resilience in their hands.”

– Anonymous interviewee

Strengths of the Network

The IFRC Network is considered uniquely well-positioned to mainstream and advance locally led anticipatory action – a result of its mandate, structure, statutes and principles – and build on the progress it has achieved so far in both policy⁶ and practice.

With over 16 million volunteers (IFRC, 2025a), and a presence in almost every country on Earth, the most notable strength of the IFRC Network in relation to locally led anticipatory action is its **chapters, branches and volunteers**. These provide the network with a global-to-local reach through which it can support and then scale locally led anticipatory action initiatives and gain a deep understanding of local contexts, needs and structures (Gros, n.d.; Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024).

In addition, the mandated **auxiliary role** of National Societies to national governments helps foster an enabling environment for locally led anticipatory action and the integration of local needs and actions in national laws, policies and strategies (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024) – particularly if National Societies have dedicated teams for anticipatory action. As such, National Societies are often well-trusted and accepted among communities and governments alike.

The IFRC is spearheading “locally owned” processes through the development of **Early Action Protocols (EAPs)** and **Simplified Early Action Protocols (sEAPs)**, through which National Societies, in collaboration with other local stakeholders, agree upon triggers and actions to access pre-agreed funds from the IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) when thresholds are reached (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024). EAPs are developed by National Societies (local actors), informed by and in accordance with local needs, risk analyses, priorities and capacities. Efforts are also under way to explore how initiatives can be more distinctly steered by National Societies (Gros, n.d.), with possible lessons from Kenya, Timor Leste, Fiji, Vanuatu (all cited in interviews or the literature review for this study) where local actors have really driven the design of proposals for early action at their own pace. The development of sEAPs is one such example of the evolution of anticipatory action by the IFRC to make it more attuned to National Societies’ own capacities and thus more accessible at the local scale (IFRC, 2024c).

“[The volunteer network] is a treasure for international responses because they have the ears and the eyes right where the emergency is happening”

– Anonymous interviewee

In the broader humanitarian community, the IFRC Network is perceived as a centre of excellence in locally led anticipatory action, well-placed to share their lessons and advocate for a more harmonized and coordinated approach that leverages expertise and resources from across the humanitarian-climate-development nexus.

⁶ Notable examples include several resolutions to advance locally led anticipatory action (Gros, n.d.; IFRC, 2024a; IFRC, 2022b) and commitment to National Society Development (IFRC, 2022b; British Red Cross, IFRC and International Committee of the Red Cross, 2025).

2.2 Governance barriers to locally led anticipatory action: what is holding us back?

Despite progress, challenges persist that limit the extent to which anticipatory action is governed and designed by local actors. Rapid and high-pressure **project timelines** and short **funding cycles** are perceived to limit and disincentivize meaningful and long-term engagement with local actors (Easton-Calabria et al., 2024; Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023). These constraints particularly inhibit locally led (vis a vis localized) anticipatory action, where decision-making processes are required to move to a new locale (Bleck et al., 2023).

Coordination between anticipatory action initiatives across the broader humanitarian system and efforts to **monitor, evaluate and learn** from them are also appraised as weak and unsystematic, promoting fragmented, slow, duplicated and misaligned efforts at the local scale (Gros, n.d.; Mojaki & Poole, n.d.). Moreover, the lack of a robust **evidence base** or comprehensive understanding of the state-of-play of locally led anticipatory action (contextually or holistically) exacerbates ambiguity in its conceptualization (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023), limits its scale up and replication, and continues to place the “burden of proof” on local actors to justify its merits and argue for its sufficient resourcing (stakeholder from global humanitarian network). The IFRC could harness its local-to-global network to collate and highlight evidence from the ground.

The feasibility of local leadership can be further constrained by contextual factors, including **political dynamics** that limit the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making (Chaudhury et al., 2023) and/or the development of long-term, sustainable relationships given high turnover in government. Instability in this regard can impede the successful implementation of anticipatory action.

Challenges facing the Network

In addition to these broader challenges, the IFRC Network faces specific constraints. Decision-making processes remain **top-down and centralized**, resulting in a misalignment between who makes decisions on the design and funding of anticipatory action protocols (e.g. National Society headquarters staff and the IFRC respectively) and who implements them once activated (e.g. National Society branches and volunteers (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023)) – a trend identified across anticipatory action projects globally (Easton-Calabria et al., 2024).⁷ When combined with the expectations of donors and the time constraints posed by project models, this risks a **siloed** and **compartmental** approach that limits meaningful engagement with, and leadership and ownership by, local actors (Easton-Calabria et al., 2024; Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023). Top-down decision making can also limit the effectiveness of the anticipatory action in practice (Bleck et al., 2023), because it risks overlooking potential synergies with existing programmes and partnerships (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023), particularly if implementers lack a comprehensive understanding of the funding and its intended purpose (Easton-Calabria et al., 2024). It also creates unnecessary

⁷ Localizing decision-making can, however, create additional bottlenecks (Gros, n.d.), and potentially transfer security risks to local actors in conflict-affected settings (Barbelet et al., 2021).

“State actors need to understand that there is a need to change paradigms so that we do not wait for disasters to happen and then look for funds and intervene.”

– Matthieu Kiansumba, Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (translated from French)

bureaucracy and inefficiencies for local actors when accessing and utilizing available resources. The custodian approach to EAP development trialled by Welthungerhilfe in Kenya, Madagascar and Zimbabwe may offer useful insights for localizing a standardized approach to protocol development; Madagascar – and Pakistan – may also be sources of best practice on integrating locally led decision making in anticipatory action (see Annex 1).

Stakeholders consulted for this study also stressed the continued need for actors across the IFRC Network to grapple with **institutional inertia** beyond the IFRC Network and the relative segregation of the anticipatory action agenda within it. It is crucial the IFRC Network continues to use its position to advocate for and highlight the added-value and complementarities of anticipatory action with development cooperation, climate change adaptation and disaster risk management more broadly, and its own efforts in these areas.⁸

2.3 Financial enablers of locally led anticipatory action: what do we know works?

Scaling and delivering locally led anticipatory action depend on both adequate funding and supportive financing mechanisms.⁹ It is considered crucial for funding to be flexible, predictable and long-term (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024). It should also be sufficient to both create the enabling environment for (i.e. through “build money”) and activate (i.e. through “fuel money”) anticipatory action (IASC, 2024; IFRC, 2022b;¹⁰ Oxfam, 2024); and accessed and managed by local actors and those most at risk (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; Oxfam, 2024).

Useful lessons on this last point may be gleaned from Oxfam’s Emergency Response Fund in Asia and Central America and/or Nexus Platform Anticipatory and Emergency Response Fund in Somalia, or the development of a Local Response Pooled Fund in South Sudan (see Annex 1). The latter was conceived to provide local and national actors with greater access to funding and decision-making power in both humanitarian response and anticipatory action (Lei, 2023; Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024). Despite initial reluctance and risk aversion among donors, with the technical support and advocacy of Save the Children, the fund secured investments, shared risks and safeguarded the leadership roles of local actors. Save the Children worked with the Local Response Pooled Fund to improve its governance and administration, while acting as a credible partner and financial guarantor and advisor (Lei, 2023).

⁸ A recent IFRC report highlights the added value of anticipatory action for governments and the unique role of National Societies in supporting the integration of anticipatory action into existing national frameworks (IFRC, 2025b). It showcases seven cases where national disaster risk management laws and policies have been revised to account for anticipatory action (IFRC, 2025b).

⁹ Funding and financing mechanisms are distinguished here, despite often being used interchangeably. Funding can be defined as the “income stream” from contributors to recipients (i.e. the flow of money and resources to implement activities), and financing as the “resources and mechanisms that make the capital available” (Simon Meldrum, IFRC).

¹⁰ Australia and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are exploring the use of OCHA’s Asia-Pacific regional pooled fund to both ‘build’ and ‘fuel’ anticipatory action (from development and humanitarian budgets respectively) and assessing the potential for OCHA to preposition funds for local organizations for peak risk periods (e.g. cyclone season), then cycling unspent or replenished funds back into the pool to offset risks from other seasonal hazards (e.g. drought) (cited in field visit for this study).

Funding for locally led anticipatory action can be harnessed from, channelled through, and enabled by a range of sources and mechanisms, including:

“Decolonial and locally led anticipatory action increases direct funding to communities and local actors on the frontline of disasters, including through locally led pooled funding mechanisms.”

– Oxfam, 2024

- **Pooled funding mechanisms**, which are considered reliable and predictable (IFRC, 2022b) and are recognized for aiding more coordinated anticipatory action, equitable resource allocation for local actors (IASC, 2024) and, in turn, locally led decision-making processes and community ownership (IFRC & British Red Cross, 2024). Notable examples include the IFRC-DREF and OCHA’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), as well as the Start Network’s Start Ready and at a national scale South Sudan’s Local Response Pooled Fund. The latter two provide direct funding to local actors through locally led pooled funds (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024; Oxfam, 2024). These funds primarily provide “fuel money” – releasing resources at activation – but can also act as “build money” if used to strengthen local systems, capacities, and preparedness.
- **Multilateral, bilateral, and programme-supported funding mechanisms**, such as the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems initiative (Gros, n.d.; Resolution: Enabling Local Leadership, Capacity and Delivery in Principled Humanitarian Action and Strengthening Resilience, 2024), which can provide money for both build and fuel functions depending on use (see above).
- **Government contingency budgets and reserve funds**, which can be accessed in anticipation of crises (UNDRR, 2024). Although few government contingency budgets and funds currently cover anticipatory action – with legal and public financial management reform required in some contexts – there are examples of progress in this regard (UNDRR, 2024). Such funds can support both build and fuel functions.
- **Financing instruments**, including insurance schemes, which can offer “localized financial protection” to empower local actors to develop and undertake anticipatory action (Scherer & Shumba, 2025). Insurance schemes connect both build and fuel functions through a pre-arranged structure.
- **Community microgrants and cash transfers**, which can enable local actors to tailor anticipatory actions to their needs and priorities – either as a pre-agreed use of, or as complementary to, other funds (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024; OCHA, 2023). See Annex 1 for a case study on the use and benefits of microgrants in locally led anticipatory action in Southern Africa by Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe. Microgrants and cash transfers can also support build and fuel functions.
- **Crisis modifiers** are a flexible financing mechanism used to protect development gains from disaster risks – potentially most valuable for organizations (like the IFRC Network) that have dual humanitarian and development mandates – that emerging research indicates can empower local partners (Harrity, 2020). Crisis modifiers support fuel functions. The extent to which these enable locally led anticipatory action depend to a significant degree on the specific conditionalities and compliance criteria in each case.

“In Nepal, the crisis modifier included within a resilience project was activated to support both anticipatory actions and early response efforts, following a formal request from the Nepal Red Cross Society. The timely activation of the crisis modifier significantly reduced the loss of assets and livelihoods at the project area.”

– Finnish Red Cross

“Finance is the glue for proper planning and preparedness. But if all you’re doing is playing with finance, you’re just playing around with glue and getting messy fingers. What you need is something to stick together, which is the plan and the decision process. That’s where the real magic lies.”

– Daniel Clarke, Centre for Disaster Protection

In the face of shrinking humanitarian budgets, many are also looking to the role that development and climate finance could play in supporting locally led anticipatory action (AATF, 2022; Gros, n.d.). Australia has demonstrated that it is possible – under the terms specified by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) – for anticipatory action for climate-related disasters to fully meet the requirements for classification as “climate adaptation”, opening up the possibilities of funding anticipatory action from climate finance rather than humanitarian budget lines only. The same may well be the case with Loss and Damage finance modalities (Anticipation Hub, 2025). This blending of agendas also happens in practice: EAP activation in Zimbabwe, for example, has been supported by a Climate Smart Resilience Project, which provides technical, operational and human resourcing support to the activation (cited in interviews for this study). However, to harness such potential requires donors to the IFRC to overcome their own internal siloes and have stronger collaboration, coordination and policy coherence, often across different teams.

Australia is also supporting Pacific countries align their disaster risk financing instruments – their insurance schemes, or Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Options (Cat DDOs), for example – to fund or replenish their own national anticipatory action frameworks (cited in the field visit for this study). However, as with other budgetary instruments, risk-retention strategies and guarantees proposed as potential enablers of anticipatory action, their capacity to strengthen local leadership warrants further exploration. Only with the right plans, policies and procedures in place, can increased funding be an enabler, supporter and facilitator of locally led anticipatory action.

Strengths of the Network

The IFRC plays a key role in funding localized anticipatory action through the IFRC-DREF, which provides 191 National Societies with direct access to pre-arranged financing to respond to forecasted hazards and risks based on pre-agreed EAPs or sEAPs (IFRC, 2024a). With National Societies and their networks of volunteers being the direct recipients, the fund can reach and support the needs and capacities of other local actors and communities (IFRC, 2022a; Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024). National Societies have reported that using the DREF has improved their leadership capabilities (IFRC & British Red Cross, 2024). The IFRC-DREF has been designed to increase the efficiency with which locally led anticipatory action is implemented, through quick approvals, light reporting mechanisms and a simplified approach (IFRC & British Red Cross, 2024; IFRC, 2024c). It is also covered by the IFRC-DREF insurance mechanism which is considered to aid the speed and certainty with which the IFRC can fund anticipatory action.

2.4 Financial barriers to locally led anticipatory action: what is holding us back?

A critical challenge remains the availability of funding for anticipatory action generally, thus including that for locally led approaches. As of 2021, less than one percent of humanitarian funding was available for anticipatory action, and this was further limited to “single-agency, small-scale projects” (AATF, 2021), directed through international entities with access to existing pooled-fund instruments (Oxfam, 2024). One of the reasons for this may be the relatively low risk appetites of donors given their need for robust public financial management. Several attributes of anticipatory action are challenging in this regard: the pre-emptive nature of the investment; the uncertain nature of climate risk; low confidence in the accountability and financial management of (relatively) unfamiliar local actors, especially given the high levels of due diligence and compliance required; and the potential redundancy of inactivated funds.¹¹ As such, the pre-positioning of funds for anticipatory action – as opposed to response – was perceived as frequently lacking at government level.

Funding available for strengthening the systems, capacities, and partnerships that enable the development of anticipatory action frameworks, i.e. build money (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024) is often perceived as easier to obtain than funding for their activation (i.e. fuel money) – which, as of 2024, was estimated to be around 0.2% of overall humanitarian funding (Sida, 2024). Moreover, only 12% of funding available to active anticipatory action frameworks in 2022 and 2023 was said to involve local and national actors, and mostly as implementing partners (Oxfam, 2024). Barriers also persist around accessing available funding for locally led anticipatory action – particularly for national and local actors (Anticipation Hub, 2025). A 2021 survey of 117 000 people, spanning 49 countries, found that most community members were unable to access or had extremely limited access to funds for risk reduction activities at the local level (GNDR, 2019; Oxfam, 2024).

Challenges facing the Network

Despite the growing utilization of the anticipatory action pillar of the IFRC-DREF, challenges remain regarding its governance and operation. The anticipatory pillar of the DREF’s application, approval and disbursement processes have been characterized by some as time consuming, slow, bureaucratic and opaque (Gros, n.d.). Specific challenges include language barriers (IFRC & British Red Cross, 2024), the perceived subjectivity (Gros, n.d.) or delay of decisions by the Validation Committee and perceived limited trust from donors in local actors (e.g. at community or branch level) to manage and utilize funding effectively. The misalignment between top-down expectations and bottom-up needs, as defined by donors and National Societies, respectively, can also further impede National Societies’ access to the IFRC-DREF (IFRC & British Red Cross, 2024) – particularly, if there is no consensus on how these can be effectively bridged.

¹¹ Australia is exploring how to reduce this and at the same time increase the efficiency of EAP development and response times. One approach is a dual framework EAP – using a protocol for both anticipation and early response. This model combines a parametric trigger with a manual trigger, and allows for multi-hazard use. The anticipatory action fund is replenished by resources that would otherwise have been spent on immediate response (cited in field visit for this study).

Lastly, while the compartmental structure (i.e. two pillars) of the IFRC-DREF helps safeguard funds for anticipatory action, it can give rise to the impression that inactivated funds are redundant; thus potentially discouraging broader investment from donors. Addressing these challenges will require greater donor openness and enhanced staff capabilities to assess and innovate financing mechanisms, which are sometimes seen as lacking.

The IFRC's current model of anticipatory action has also been characterized as overly dependent on both donor-driven and internal funding sources, with "limited progress in diversifying or localising finance" (Gros, n.d.). However, efforts to do so require navigating the idea of locally led, owned or managed funds – the feasibility and viability of which is regarded by some as uncertain and debated for the reasons cited above. Efforts to diversify and localize funds are further hampered by challenges associated with localizing triggers and the low awareness of, and access to, external funding opportunities by local actors. Examples of localized anticipatory action funds exist, but are not yet extensively used (Gros, n.d.). Finally, the implementation of locally led anticipatory action is perceived to be constrained by donors' reluctance to commit funds beyond their own annual budget cycles; in addition to the reduced funding flows and increased efficiency measures resulting from the humanitarian reset more broadly. Without long-term, multi-year commitments, capacity strengthening efforts are undermined, alongside the sustained empowerment of (and shift of power towards) local actors.

“If you want local actors to have responsibilities, then you need to give them space and you need to give them a commitment that you're going to keep funding these projects.”

– Simon Meldrum, IFRC

2.5 Implementation enablers of locally led anticipatory action: what do we know works?

Both necessary conditions and enabling drivers have been identified for the locally led implementation of anticipatory action. Enhancing the availability, accessibility and uptake of **local data** for forecasting, modelling and defining triggers can ensure anticipatory action is more receptive to local contexts and needs. It can increase the quality, usefulness and timeliness of early warnings (Ame, 2023); supplement gaps or limited coverage in existing forecasting models (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024); and increase local actors' understanding of, and design of actions upon, scientific information – particularly if they are engaged in data collection and trigger design (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024). Lessons from projects in the Philippines and Timor Leste, which incorporated locally led trigger development and traditional knowledge, could be drawn on and shared (see Annex 1).

Beyond mere data, it is considered crucial to integrate tacit, implicit and **Indigenous knowledge** and regular **feedback** from local actors with science-based information throughout the design and implementation of anticipatory action (Chaudhury et al., 2023; Oxfam, 2024). This should be done in all cases, but particularly when available data is deemed insufficiently local or granular (Oxfam, 2024). Doing so has a range of benefits, including ensuring anticipatory actions are attuned to local risks, needs, priorities and capacities – as defined by local actors – and thus be effective in local contexts, and enhance local ownership and trust in, uptake of, and access to, anticipatory actions (Sida, 2024; International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024; Oxfam, 2024; Schneider, 2024).

“We have to go into the field, we have to meet with the community, we have to have the history of the area, and we also have to develop mechanisms and systems with them. They are the ones who guide us, they are the ones who really lead us to harmonize.”

– Anonymous interviewee

“There are things that only those who work closely on the ground can understand... they know practical actions that are not documented or will never be documented because their traditions and cultures are just passed on by stories and ways of living... these undocumented things will always help us curate the actions”

– Anonymous interviewee

Such approaches can be fostered through **exchange and collective learning** among and between local actors and practitioners, scientists and policymakers (GNDR, 2023; OCHA, 2023). Sharing lessons, innovations and good practices promotes transparency (IASC, 2024), supports more effective and timely action (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024) and enables the scaling up of anticipatory action more broadly (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024).

With local actors defined as “the centre of successful anticipatory action” (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024, p. 5), it is critical to strengthen and harness their existing capacities as leaders of anticipatory action initiatives (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024). This includes investing in their core funding and operational readiness, resourcing the provision of training and associated infrastructure and materials (Ame, 2023; OCHA, 2023), and fostering on-the-ground learning opportunities, such as interpreting and assessing forecasts (Jensen et al., 2025; Chaudhury et al., 2023; IFRC, 2024b).

It is also imperative to leverage, strengthen and build on existing community systems and resources – particularly those already governed and led by community members – rather than developing new and parallel systems (Jensen et al., 2025; Oxfam, 2024).

Strengths of the Network

The IFRC Network is developing and harnessing many of the enablers outlined above. Most notably, it is investing in strengthening the **institutional capacities** of National Society staff and volunteers, as well as other local actors, as the “foundation for achieving effective locally led action” (IFRC, 2024a). National Society Development is further strengthening capacities – particularly at branch level – to deliver anticipatory action more effectively and efficiently (British Red Cross, the IFRC and International Committee of the Red Cross, 2025).

Complementing such efforts is the IFRC Network’s commitment to learning – driven by the **Anticipation Hub**. The hub is a global platform initiated and governed by the German Red Cross, the IFRC and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre to promote knowledge exchange on anticipatory action both across and beyond the Network (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024). Interested National Societies are provided with access to technical resources, support and peer-to-peer learning opportunities (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2024). Efforts such as these have culminated in close to 90 National Societies “actively engaged” in anticipatory action in 2025, with over 90 EAPs developed, activated, and closed (Gros, n.d.).

The IFRC Network’s access to data and standardized tools, such as the Enhanced Vulnerability Capacity Assessments (ECVA), are also considered useful entry points for advancing community engagement and locally led anticipatory action, as well as the convening of national communities of practice. Lessons can be drawn from Zimbabwe:

“Zimbabwe Red Cross has had a leading role in the anticipatory action community of practice ... ensuring good coordination between the National Society, NGOs and government stakeholders ... it is a good example of local actors spearheading anticipatory action that can be enhanced in future”

– Finnish Red Cross

The Finnish Red Cross proposes expanding ECVAs and aligning them with EAPs to become a more long-term and strategic tool that helps bridge National Societies and local communities and enable locally led anticipatory action without ties to funding.

2.6 Implementation barriers to locally led anticipatory action: what is holding us back?

Implementation of locally led anticipatory action frameworks is hampered by an array of challenges and complexities. The accuracy and usefulness of highly technical forecasts, models and triggers are under threat from the uncertainty and complexity of climate change. Moreover, despite the need to be relevant to local contexts, **local data** is often considered lacking (Ame, 2023) or insufficient to be of use or value to communities (Oxfam, 2024), and/or inappropriate for validation to catalyse the release of international funds. This is thought to be exacerbated by the ownership and development of trigger models and thresholds by external actors who may lack understanding of, or trust in, local knowledge.

Efforts to localize data are impeded by an overreliance on national and global data, insufficient local resources and expertise, and the proliferation of models and forecasts, which risk unintentionally overwhelming local actors. If data is perceived as too local – e.g. the use of flora or fauna to indicate or predict localized weather patterns (see the Timor Leste case study in Annex 1) – it may be dismissed as too difficult to scale and apply across contexts (Oxfam, 2024). Similarly, the explicit integration of **local and traditional knowledge** into anticipatory action frameworks has been found to be rare despite its professed value (Schneider, 2024). The SUFAL II project (2021–2024) in Bangladesh (see Annex 1) may offer useful insights on successfully combining impact-based forecasting with community-based indicators to develop localized early warning systems.

Across the humanitarian community, challenges also arise in efforts to strengthen **local-level and organizational capacities**, which are often considered lacking (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023). Despite the need for capacity strengthening, it is underfunded (IFRC, 2024) and there are often few local resources to maintain capacity over the long-term (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023). Moreover, capacity strengthening is often viewed as a “one-way transfer of capacity from international to local actors” (IFRC, 2024, p. 5), with a requirement for local actors to demonstrate their readiness to access resources, adhere to humanitarian principles, satisfy donor requirements, and participate in prescribed decision-making processes (Barbelet et al., 2021; IFRC, 2024). A failure to recognize and harness the existing capacities of local actors can negatively influence the allocation of funding, roles and responsibilities in the design and implementation of anticipatory action (Barbelet et al., 2021; Bleck et al., 2023).

Implementation and capacity strengthening efforts can also be hampered by **communication** barriers; namely, the use of complex and technical jargon by partners and funders and the ambiguous and interchangeable use of the term anticipatory action with similar or connected terms – both of which can conflict with local cultures, contexts and languages (Oxfam, 2024). Without being addressed, these barriers can impede engagement with local actors, reduce trust in and uptake of anticipatory actions (Ayers et al., 2024), and discount or underestimate progress in locally led

anticipatory action. The relaying of forecasts to communities is also reported as limited in some contexts due to centralization and bureaucracy.

Finally, broader political, economic and social conditions can pose **logistical barriers** (e.g. poor or insufficient infrastructure, long distances between National Society resources and at-risk communities, and limited warehouse capacities) and affect the effectiveness and feasibility of implementing locally led initiatives (Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023).

Challenges facing the Network

The IFRC Network also faces specific barriers to address and overcome. The IFRC's capacity strengthening efforts, despite gleaming significant results, have not yet resulted in **evenly distributed and robust capacities** among National Societies to implement and invest in the development of anticipatory action triggers and plans and maintain sustainable resources. Capacity strengthening is also perceived as limited to the EAP model and the provision of technical guidance and intermediary support in this regard (Gros, n.d.). There are concerns that the use of **intermediaries** and **complex terminologies** – often provided solely in English – may create inefficiencies and undermine the empowerment and capacity strengthening of National Societies and other local actors (Gros, n.d.).

3. Discussion

The benefits of adopting a locally led approach to anticipatory action are clear and demonstrate a powerful case for action. These include (but are not limited to):

- higher trust, acceptance and uptake of anticipatory action
- greater awareness and appreciation of local capacities and structures of anticipatory action
- enhanced local ownership, dignity, autonomy and long-term sustainability of anticipatory actions
- more creative, innovative and contextual anticipatory approaches
- increasingly effective and efficient anticipatory actions and responses (e.g. through the integration of more accurate local information or quicker action by first responders leading to reduced casualties), and
- the opportunity for stronger coherence and collaboration: aligning capabilities and actions across scales, challenging dynamics and hierarchies between actors, and strengthening local empowerment, transparency and accountability.

Indeed, scaling up locally led anticipatory approaches and engaging at-risk communities is perceived as a prerequisite for strengthening the efficacy, mainstreaming and sustainability of anticipatory approaches (Ame, 2023; Anticipation Hub, 2025; Bleck et al., 2023; Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024; GNDR, 2023; Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024; Rehman, 2024; Schneider, 2024; IFRC, 2024c; Tozier de la Poterie et al., 2023).

However, as Easton-Calabria et al. (2024) caution, it is important to recognize that trade-offs can arise between locally led action and other “desirable attributes” of anticipatory approaches – if not intrinsically, then evidenced in practice. Reconciling these tensions, or strengthening support for locally led anticipatory action *in spite* of the trade-offs, is a necessary step. But they first must be acknowledged and discussed so positions can be coherently and consistently adopted.¹² We therefore propose the following topics for reflection and discussion by members of the DAG:

Below are four questions related to the trade-offs between locally led action and other “desirable” attributes of anticipatory approaches, which aim to determine where on the continuum (between encouraging more localized anticipatory actions, and enabling more locally led approaches) donors are comfortable aiming, and to encourage continuity and coherence in approach.

1. Within the ecosystem of actors and structures comprising the IFRC Network, who do you consider a local actor to be? And what role do you see local actors playing? Decision-makers, planners, implementers, or some other role?
2. Aligned with your answers to question 1, what is your preferred approach, on a continuum between systemic and adaptive approaches?
 - **Systemic:** Placing the emphasis on simplicity, standardization, consistency and comparability at a global level (i.e. in defining a common process), while allowing for localized and contextualized substantive development of triggers, protocols and actions. Such an approach may facilitate coordination, oversight, rapid scale up and mainstreaming.
 - **Adaptive:** Placing the emphasis on “letting a thousand flowers bloom”; encouraging and enabling a diversity of processes and approaches to match the diversity of contexts and capabilities; striving, e.g., for mutual indicators rather than shared protocols. Such an approach may better harness local leadership and the efficacy, creativity, contextualization, self-determination and sustainability this brings.

As levels of local autonomy rise, strong coordination and oversight of increasingly diverse and disparate approaches and activities become increasingly challenging.

3. Aligned with your answers to questions 1 and 2, what is your level of risk appetite? For example:
 - In relation to data: high quality and resolution of forecasts and historical and globally verifiable data (often argued as necessary to liberate internationally held funds) or localized forecasts and data that integrate local and traditional knowledge (in some cases, better understood, accepted and acted upon at the local level)?
 - In relation to funding: granting to global organizations with robust public financial management or to smaller, local organizations to grant them more financial autonomy?

¹² E.g. Australia is working with Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to build anticipatory approaches through dual pathways to “meet in the middle” of bottom-up and top-down approaches. The effort aims to minimize the trade-offs associated with a unilateral approach, and involves strengthening national integration of anticipatory action (recognizing the need for a unifying coordinating system) while trialling community-level interventions with localized triggers, building on existing development and disaster risk reduction programs.

4. Does the preferred approach to questions 2 and 3 change in different contexts (for example, in fragile and conflict-affected settings)? Can or should differing approaches be more explicit?

Four questions related to the DAG's capacities to encourage and enable locally led anticipatory action more broadly:

1. What are your priorities (given cuts in funding) for supporting the IFRC Network to strengthen locally led anticipatory action? Deepening engagement, expanding or reprioritizing geographic coverage, focusing on vulnerable/fragile contexts, or something else?
2. As donors, is there a role you can play in strengthening the enablers – in governance and implementation – of locally led anticipatory action that this report demonstrates? And how can you minimize the barriers?
3. On funding locally led anticipatory action:
 - How can you work together, as the DAG, to increase the volume of funds to locally led anticipatory action? E.g. explore clarifying the eligibility of anticipatory action to unlock funds from the humanitarian-development-climate nexus, or offering a guarantee mechanism to National Societies if multiple thresholds are breached?
 - As the DAG, what channels do you want to prioritize? For example:
 - strengthening the DREF
 - supporting the DREF to evolve to support stronger locally led anticipatory action
 - supporting the Network to further diversify or localize finance, e.g. for National Societies to develop their own anticipatory action funds from domestic resources
 - assessing mechanisms to directly fund / strengthen the core funding of local actors
 - investing in the development of coherent national anticipatory action frameworks (so EAPs are supported by a wider ecosystem that avoids siloed and short-term projects).
 - How can you go a step further in loosening conditionality to give local actors what they need? Specifically: more flexibility, predictability, long-term and multi-year funding.
4. What does it look like for the DAG to yield power, transfer authority and responsibility, and decentralize decision-making? How can you better promote the centrality of local actors in defining, developing and delivering anticipatory action systems, frameworks and protocols and their leadership in the identification of priorities for scale-up?

“If you try to impose a consistency of mechanism to allow you that global comparison, you would then actually [lose] something valuable at the community level.”

– Oenone Chadburn,
independent consultant

“I think locally led brings into play that relinquishing of control, of power, by certain players who, when they hold it, can drive, can put time frames on things, can demand that certain things happen, can throw resources at things for things to be achieved. But you really have to question how sustainable they are, or how much they are really embedded in the DNA of the organisations they were theoretically there to support. What is the ultimate outcome – if something takes longer or follows a slightly less linear pathway but has longer durability and greater sustainability?”

– Anonymous interviewee

4. Recommendations

For the IFRC:

1. Reimagine the operating model for anticipatory action beyond 2025.

Develop a shared vision and strategy that defines what locally led anticipatory action means in practice, and ensures that local actors, including marginalized groups, can lead in all stages of anticipatory action. To move away from technocratic, project-based delivery towards a system-wide, locally led approach, National Societies should be placed at the centre of design and decision-making, not only for early action protocols but also for the broader architecture and orchestration of anticipatory action.

- **Recommended action:** Co-develop a post-2025 strategy with National Societies that builds on locally defined priorities for strengthening local leadership, pilots devolved validation and financing mechanisms, and moves beyond reliance on a single predefined model by supporting a diversity of locally led anticipatory approaches and financial instruments.

2. Continue to decentralize and integrate systems to strengthen local ownership.

Reduce procedural complexity within the IFRC Network and support a more coherent and collaborative approach across the humanitarian community. Facilitate integration with government frameworks for anticipatory action and early warning and response systems, ensuring actions reflect local contexts and capacities.

- **Recommended action:** Review outcomes of ongoing pilots (e.g. those supported through the DREF and National Societies) to inform streamlined planning and approval processes and best practices for local integration.

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.

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.

Annex 1: Case studies from the literature

In-depth case studies of locally led anticipatory action in different national contexts are available (Rehman, 2024). This annex provides illustrative examples from the literature only.

| Within/beyond IFRC Network | Where | When | What |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Within (IFRC, 2024c) | Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar | 2023 | Life-saving measures in advance of Cyclone Freddy – evacuations, early warnings and the equipping of shelters. |
| | Honduras | 2023 | Distribution (through volunteer networks) of water purification kits and cash for at-risk people ahead of forecast droughts and heatwaves. |
| | Zimbabwe | 2023–2024 | Support to 500 households ahead of drought through early warnings, the distribution of drought-tolerant seeds and the dosing of livestock, with further cash assistance during a later declared state of emergency. |
| | Bangladesh | 2024 | Support to 123 700 people ahead of a forecast heatwave – early warnings, water distribution, cooling stations and cash assistance. |
| | Greece | 2024 | Support to 2000 people to cope with scorching heat – distributing water and food and checking on people in vulnerable situations. |
| Beyond (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024) (Schneider, 2024) (Ame, 2023) | Kenya, Madagascar, Zimbabwe | 2021–2022 | To create an entry point for local actors in anticipatory action, Welthungerhilfe (WHH) piloted an “EAP custodianship approach” in advance of drought-induced food insecurity as part of its Forecast-based Action Programme. A community-based organization – TSURO Trust – acted as a custodian to design anticipatory actions with WHH, and through a participatory process, worked directly with affected communities to identify target households and distil local priorities. Actions included cash transfers, income-generating support, and community training on topics (such as financial literacy) identified by the community as priorities. |
| | Pakistan and Bangladesh | 2021–2024 | In 2021, direct funds from the Start Network to a local actor in Pakistan – Bright Star – ahead of forecast heatwaves, allowed them to establish community communications and cooling facilities, with the latter “largely possible because of Bright Star’s status as a local actor” and their coordination with local administrations and community members (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024). Between 2021 and 2024, the Scaling up Forecast-based Action and Learning in Bangladesh (SUFAL II) project engaged and empowered local stakeholders to develop localized early warning systems – combining impact-based forecasting with community-based indicators – and strengthened their capacity to take proactive measures. |
| | Southern Africa | 2023 | Through a pre-agreement with Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe ahead of an intensive cyclone season, local organizations provided communities with microgrants based on locally developed anticipatory action mechanisms; these provided essential services at refuges and housing protection assistance, implemented by volunteer networks, local civil-protection groups and self-organized community groups. |
| Beyond: locally led decision making | Madagascar | 2023–2024 | The Local Leadership for Global Impact (LLGI) initiative by NGO SAF/FJKM promotes community-led anticipatory action and local actors’ involvement in decision-making processes (Belger et al., 2024) |
| Within and beyond: locally led development of proposals, plans and protocols | Pakistan and Kenya | 2022 and 2021 | READY Pakistan – a locally led leadership hub – develops anticipatory action plans and pre-positions funds under its disaster risk financing programme, triggered (for example) five times in 2021 for heatwaves and drought (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, 2024). Local actors in Kenya were supported by the IFRC and the Kenya Red Cross Society to develop proposals for early action to mitigate predicted electoral violence in 2022. |
| Beyond: locally led trigger development | The Philippines and Timor Leste | 2021–2023 | A local NGO, the People’s Disaster Risk Reduction Network, launched the project Strengthening Preparedness Capacity of Vulnerable Communities through Early Warning Early Action and Rapid Response – a 2021 project in the Philippines that developed a locally led trigger model for pre-emptive cash transfers designed entirely by local actors. It involved a participatory process including leaders of community-based organizations, women, persons with disabilities and older persons, among others, and wider community feedback (Schneider, 2024). The Disaster Ready project in Timor Leste translated traditional indicators into readiness triggers for anticipatory actions, including protection of assets, food, belongings and livestock (Oxfam, 2024). |

| Within/beyond IFRC Network | Where | When | What |
|---|---|-------------|---|
| Beyond: Locally led forecasting and participatory scenario planning (PSP) | Niger, Ethiopia and Malawi | 2018– 2023 | The Hamzari project in Niger used PSP workshops to support women (representing 77% of food producers) and young people (representing 34% of food producers) to use climate information, disseminate early warnings, and implement risk-reduction measures to climate change. |
| | | 2017 on | In Ethiopia, Strengthening PSNP4 Institutions and Resilience (SPIR), led by World Vision in a consortium with CARE and ORDA, adopted a highly inclusive PSP approach to harmonize and integrate indigenous and scientific knowledge, and co-produce downscaled climate information and early warning advisories, creating “a platform for women, especially those with indigenous skills of forecasting, to come to the forefront”. |
| | | 2019–2024/5 | In Malawi, the Titukulane project adopted the PSP approach for multistakeholder collaboration on the 2020–2021 seasonal forecast, engaging District members, including Councils, women and community traditional forecasters (Chaudhury, M., Deering, K., & Nguyen, T., 2023) |
| Beyond: Locally led management of funding | Asia, Central America and South Sudan and Indonesia | 2014–2020 | Oxfam has enabled the development of multiple locally led funding mechanisms, such as the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in Asia and Central America that aims to empower local actors to be first responders, or the Nexus Platform Anticipatory and Emergency Response Fund in Somalia which was locally managed by June 2020 (Oxfam, 2024). |
| | | Launch 2021 | Other case studies include a Local Response Pooled Fund in South Sudan (Locally Led Anticipatory Action Working Group, 2024) and lessons that could be drawn from value- and faith-based organizations in Indonesia, who play a crucial role in the provision of funding sources for anticipatory action (Belger et al., 2024). |

Annex 2: Case study of locally led anticipatory action – Indonesia

Indonesia ranks second in the World Risk Index for disaster risk. The country faces earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, tsunamis, landslides and health emergencies, with climate change intensifying many of these hazards. Indonesia's people have been taking effective action to anticipate disasters for generations. Locally led anticipatory action is identified as a long-term need in the IFRC network's country plan for 2025–2027. There are few places in the world better positioned to offer lessons on what locally led anticipatory action can look like in practice.

The Indonesian Red Cross Society – *Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI)* – operates across the archipelago. It has 34 provinces, 496 National Society branches and 1 156 788 volunteers. It is there before, during and after each disaster. It has embraced and stands at the forefront of forecast-based financing and anticipatory action.

Key stakeholders involved in Indonesia's anticipatory action include:

- **The Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs (Kemenko PMK)** leads and coordinates ministries and governmental bodies, aligning national policies, program and stakeholders to strengthen anticipatory action and disaster preparedness across sectors.
- **The National Meteorological Agency (BMKG)** monitors real-time hazards, with data provision; hosts the Impact-based Forecast (IBF) Signature platform for accessible meteorological forecasts, using historical data to predict risks for anticipatory action.
- **The National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB)** has district agencies at the sub-national level. Adopts the role of an overarching coordinating body.
- **National Ministries (Ministry of Social Affairs, Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration, Ministry of Internal Affairs)** provide an enabling environment through policy development.
- **The Indonesian Red Cross Society** advances localization, decentralization and branch-level capacity strengthening, through actions taken at national, provincial and district levels.
- **The IFRC** supports strategic and operational coordination, National Society development and cross-cutting accountability. It has also supported PMI through a number of DREF and Emergency Appeal operations and supports anticipatory action coordination and community engagement through partnership-building nationally and globally. Together, PMI and the IFRC host national dialogue platforms on anticipatory action and facilitate knowledge sharing between civil society organizations from different regions of Indonesia.
- **Participating National Societies** (including the American and Australian Red Cross Societies) work together on several anticipatory actions, climate change and response preparedness projects.

Indonesia has established a national anticipatory action working group which, alongside PMI, involves several governmental actors such as the Kemenko PMK, BMKG and BNPB. It also includes UN Agencies such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs (OCHA) and the World Food Programme (WFP), and civil society organizations (local and international). PMI initiated the provincial anticipatory action working group and will establish a future anticipatory action working group at district level.

PMI's strategy includes:

- forecast-based financing and early warning systems
- community-based preparedness
- institutional engagement in the anticipatory action working group
- climate strategy, smart climate practices, nature-based solutions and resilience-building.

PMI is part of the IFRC's Global Climate Resilience Programme, a multi-year initiative aimed at delivering "an unprecedented scale-up" of locally led action in the most marginalized and least supported communities. Its first operational pillar centres on climate-smart disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action and preparedness.

PMI has also developed a five-year flood Early Action Protocol (EAP), launched in 2025. The EAP targets 10 000 people. Through a series of planned operations, it aims to reduce:

- loss of life and injury (including through early warning systems, evacuation planning, first aid and community feedback mechanisms)
- livelihood damage (through unconditional cash transfers to affected households), and
- water contamination and disease outbreaks.

Identified enabling approaches include coordination and partnerships, secretariat services and National Society strengthening. The DREF has approved a total of CHF 517 485 for the implementation of the EAP (CHF 316 873 for readiness and repositioning and CHF 200 612 for the implementation of early actions).

PMI's development of the EAP involves coordination with the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB), Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysical Agency (BMKG), the river basin management authority (BBWS), and the National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas), as well as the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), Community-based Disaster Preparedness volunteers (SIBAT) and village-level government. Together, they ensure readiness for, and timely activation of, pre-agreed early actions – in line with existing local capacities – when defined trigger thresholds are reached. Each actor has a clearly defined role in the EAP. Various methods were used to develop the EAP, including workshops (to assess past flood impacts and identify early actions) and online surveys to other districts/branches to capture their experiences.

District-level representatives of PMI conceptualized the early actions based on their assessed impact, feasibility (lead time and capacity) and risk (if the projected impacts failed to materialize), with a focus on strengthening community capacity. Such no-regret actions were planned to provide benefits to communities even if the flood risk did not materialize, including strengthening communication networks and coordination mechanisms, household preparedness practices, household financial capacity, and hygiene and health practices.

Localization in Lombok

In West Lombok, there have been 143 disasters so far in 2025 – mostly floods and landslides. There are 10 sub-districts, each with a Red Cross chapter or branch. Eight villages have community-based disaster preparedness volunteers (totalling 250) and three are engaged in anticipatory action and have devised early warning systems. Anticipatory action is socialized with all stakeholders (from women’s groups to local government). PMI then invites the community to create a standard operating protocol (SOP). The SOP must be declared a decree of the village (a form of regulation, that ensures it is sustainable and provides PMI with an exit strategy) and self-funded (i.e. guaranteed by the village financially): “*we want societies strong on their own*” (Sumaidi, Secretary of PMI West Lombok branch). This helps communities increase trust in their own knowledge. The SOP captures what kinds of warnings can be seen by the local communities for them to conduct anticipatory action, and when the triggers and thresholds are met. Then an early warning system is created (with water flow from the river as the trigger). Cash transfers are pre-positioned; they are activated by the head of the village and distributed by the post office. Inexpensive modern technology (e.g. apps) and conventional warning systems (e.g. traditional sirens) are utilized. Risk mapping is also conducted (e.g. how many areas and people could be impacted by the flood) and a simulation held every two years. Data is collected on the most vulnerable groups to account for during evacuations.

PMI advocates for stakeholders to form a working group (one was started in 2024) and a corporation to manage their funds that will be resilient to disaster risks. There is strong coordination between the working group and the community; a preparedness team in the village distribute information to everyone. PMI also supports the development of business plans through anticipatory action – educating communities on the co-benefits they could harness, from strengthening their financial resilience through ecotourism to improving their children’s health. This is also the case for volunteers: PMI supports localized capacity building of volunteers in ways that increase their economic resilience and livelihood security, recognizing their volunteers cannot help anyone else if they are not resilient themselves. Caritas, Oxfam and DFAT are among the international donors. Many local activities are supported by village funds. In the future they want to expand anticipatory action to include early provision of water, asset protection and safe fishing advisories.

“We try to understand what the community wants, not force our will to the community; I want to see our volunteers as good listeners first.”

– Sumaidi, Secretary of PMI West Lombok branch

Broader anticipatory actions in Lombok depend on the type of disaster, but generally aim to protect the security of communities. Anticipatory action forms part of disaster preparedness – starting with early warnings, for example – but also connects to post-disaster response. Anticipatory action is supported by all levels of government. Research is conducted; documents are prepared; early warning systems are built and activated in collaboration with village-level volunteers; press releases are issued; information is disseminated online; and coordination occurs with stakeholders on logistics, infrastructure and preparedness (e.g. the army, police and village focal points for resilience). Needs assessments are conducted, supplies distributed and people supported to evacuate. During the critical emergency stage, the health department treat people in-situ at shelters and trauma sessions aid swifter recovery. The EAP complements these broader activities, coordinated under the anticipatory action working group and through associated statements and plans. A local control centre helps to manage data and generate recommendations to communities.

Some lessons drawn

Stakeholders involved in this study emphasized the following lessons:

- **National integration.** The integration of anticipatory action within national plans and strategies occurred early on. Anticipatory action has recently been termed Early Warning Response Action (AMPD), giving it an institutional home at the national level, supported by the development of a roadmap and pooled fund. A range of anticipatory action agreements and regulations are explicitly recognized – globally, regionally, nationally and provincially. The national government sets policies, standards and incentive mechanisms, while provincial and district/municipal governments facilitate cross-jurisdictional program alignment, provide technical assistance, and strengthen subnational budgeting to support delivery at the village level.
- **Local mandate.** Importantly, the legal mandate for action lies with the local level, and allocations within regional and local authority budgets for village-level implementation have been key. Because such allocations cannot be mandated by national government (they are deliberated on by each community), local advocacy has been vital to encourage adequate resourcing (including the involvement of the private sector and civil society), although creative financing mechanisms are needed to sustain programmes. PMI has sought to mainstream anticipatory action through a community-based approach – centred on nature-based solutions and ecosystem management – that builds community resilience upstream to downstream.
- **Advocacy and education.** Focus on changing mindsets and behaviours (from response to anticipation) cascaded across all levels, with the ambition to leave no one behind. The AMPD mainstreams and promotes resilience education at all school levels, including universities.
- **Local representation and iteration.** Community-based representation within the national anticipatory action working group has been highly effective – a recognition that anticipatory action requires the translation of knowledge across levels; the digital format of the AMPD facilitated rapid updates based on changing risks and capacities at the community level.
- **Alignment.** Donors can impose restrictive conditions (e.g. for the anticipatory action to take place in a certain location) that may not reflect the acutest need or align with the priorities of local partners. Alignment with existing activities and contingency plans reduces siloes and policy incoherence, vertically and horizontally.
- **Learning and knowledge sharing.** Drawing lessons from the frequent hydro-meteorological disasters in West Lombok, concrete activities are now being developed to strengthen forecast monitoring, enhance coordination and communication across the watershed, and build upstream–downstream synergies. Lessons from such programmes are also planned to be replicated in other villages and urban areas.

“We found a story better than we expected on how initial anticipatory action investment have been integrated into local governance systems, enabled and sustainably financed by the provincial government going forward.”

– Jenna Young, DFAT

This case study draws on the following sources of information:

- The World Risk Report (IFHV, 2023)
- Indonesia: the 2025-2027 IFRC network country plan (IFRC and PMI, 2025)
- Multiple Resilience: Community empowerment and livelihood strengthening of Indonesian Red Cross of West Lombok Regency to build disaster resilience (PMI, 2025)
- Indonesian Red Cross Society Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy (PMI, 2023)
- The Early Action Protocol – Indonesia – Floods (IFRC, 2025)
- Unpublished briefs and maps relating to the Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia) and West Lombok district compiled by PMI (2025)

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