Executive Summary

ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN THE MENA REGION

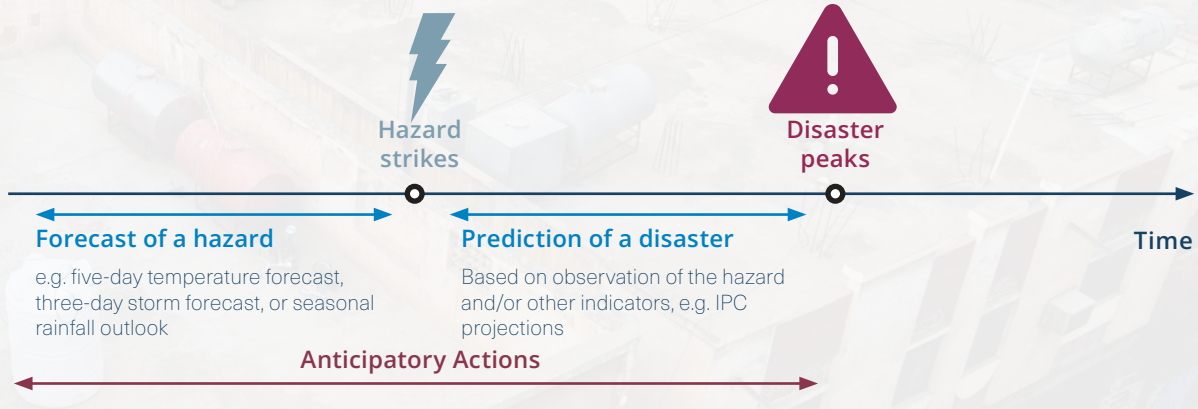
State of Play and Accelerating Action

August 2022

Anticipatory action, or AA, is rapidly gaining momentum. While most disaster response and humanitarian operations are still mobilised after the onset of a crisis, AA refers to actions taken before a disaster to mitigate its most damaging impacts and to speed up recovery. These actions are set in motion and informed by forecasts and other early warning information before a hazard strikes, or before a hazard event develops into a disaster. As such, AA is different from, but complementary to, regular and longer term disaster risk reduction (DRR) and seasonal preparedness activities. Improved early warning systems (EWSs), which build on continued enhancements in forecasts for different types of hazards, combined with vulnerability and risk assessments, make it possible to trigger funding for the implementation of predefined and pre-planned actions during that window of opportunity. The figure below outlines the sequencing of hazards, disasters, and the timing of different types of predictions used to anticipate both.

As global interest in AA increases, governments, UN and humanitarian agencies are becoming more interested in its potential added value for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. However, to date, there has been no concentrated attention paid to the progress and potential for AA across the region, and little documentation of where AA initiatives have been trialled. Evidence from existing AA interventions globally indicates possible benefits and costs of AA, although more analysis is required of the potential for adopting AA at scale in MENA countries.

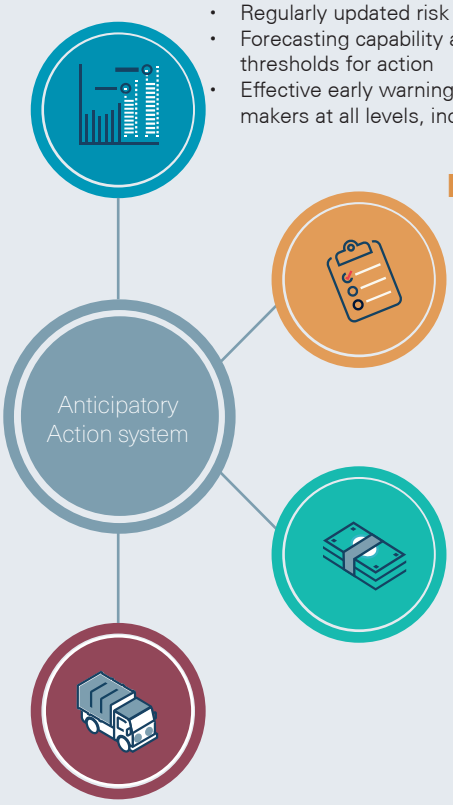
Given the extent of humanitarian action in the region, there is great hope that applying lessons from the global experience, as well as bringing experiences from the MENA region to the fore, will help advance this agenda. This study presents a first attempt to fill that gap by focusing explicitly on AA in the MENA region.



► Taiz, Yemen. Photo: WFP/Micah Albert

The four components of anticipatory action

AA has a number of key components: forecasting and risk information; planning; financing; and delivery. This report summarises the current state of each of these components, as well as on AA more broadly, in eight countries across the MENA region: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.



Forecasting, risk information and early warning systems

- Regularly updated risk information
- Forecasting capability and pre-determined triggers / thresholds for action
- Effective early warning systems reaching decision-makers at all levels, including at risk populations

Planning

- Comprehensive, multi-stakeholder AA planning frameworks, backed by legal and regularly frameworks for enforcement
- AA plans for all major risks as standard practice, and embedded in DRR and preparedness policies and plans

Financing

- Specific sectoral budget lines and core budget allocations for DRR, preparedness and AA system strengthening across all components of AA
- Robust and reliable pre-arranged finance to implement AA, linked to triggers, plans and delivery channels

Delivery

- Highly effective, well trained, professional staff delivering pre-planned interventions utilising the latest science and technology
- Effective disaster management and social protection systems that can deliver timely assistance to at-risk populations

1 Forecasting, risk information and early warning systems

Real-time observation of meteorological and hydrological hazards is improving in most countries in the region, with networks of weather stations and data records in relatively good state in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. Weather and climate forecasting is also maturing overall, even though gaps still exist in the capacity of national hydro-meteorological services that inhibit the use of existing weather and climate forecasts for early warning and AA. This includes insufficient downscaling and customisation of forecasts, as well as a lack of assessments of forecast accuracy, which can be impeded by incomplete historical records of impacts from past events.

At regional and global levels, humanitarian information and EWSs monitor and project information on risks that are not primarily – or not exclusively – related to hydrological or meteorological hazards. While there is some experience using these mechanisms to support AA, e.g. the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in Somalia, they are available in few MENA countries and the infrequency of updates, lack of projection capacity and limited integration within more comprehensive EWSs are making them challenging to apply to AA.

Across all MENA countries included in this study, database maintenance and updates, data sharing and collaboration across institutions and countries is an ongoing challenge. Unclear or overlapping mandates, along with limited exchange of information across institutions within and beyond government, hamper multi-hazard risk analysis and forecasting, in turn undermining the effectiveness of EWSs to enable action.

In the region, as well as globally, efforts towards establishing multi-hazard early warning systems (MHEWSs) have mostly remained focused on different meteorological and hydrological hazards such as floods and droughts, so even if they are 'multi'-hazard, they largely concentrate on a narrow hazard cluster and tend not to include as biological or societal hazards.

Momentum is growing for enhancing the recognition of conflict in AA in the humanitarian community, but conflict analysis is a still a major shortcoming in AA and predicting conflict and its effects remains a challenge.

2 Planning

There are numerous examples of new disaster strategies and policies that help lay the foundations for action on disaster risk management (DRM) as a whole, such as in Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon. Unfortunately, there are also many examples where the implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks has been stalled due to lack of official clearance or ratification by government, such as in Lebanon and Sudan.

AA is often more prevalent in sectoral and hazard-specific plans and strategies, or individual projects, rather than as part of a robust systematic approach to planning for AA across all hazards within a country. In all countries studied in this report, there remain challenges in working across sectors and ministries, which limits the ability to transform hazard-specific actions into a robust multi-hazard AA system.

In some countries, such as Yemen, the complex and changeable political arrangements and sub-national conflict situation are reflected in the complexities of the landscape for disaster risk governance, and present barriers to advancing planning processes. Moreover, across the region, the instigation or escalation of violent and armed conflict within and between countries presents significant challenges to enacting more systematic planning on AA – and can even lead to reversals in progress.

Looking ahead there are possible entry points for improving planning, including in Jordan, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen and Iraq (details in the chapter). There is also potential for applying lessons from AA planning outside the MENA region and in using climate funds to enhance climate and disaster planning processes.

3 Financing

Some MENA countries included in this study have strategies or legislative frameworks that stipulate that government budget must be allocated to DRR and DRM systems, which provides a basis for the implementation of AA. In practice, however, such strategies are not always implemented, nor are the resources they aim to earmark used consistently. Overall, DRM remains largely underfunded in the region.

Government emergency funds at national or sub-national level exist in some countries, though these are largely responsive rather than anticipatory. Most do not have standard budget allocations

► Aden, Yemen. Photo: WFP/Hebatallah Munasser

for risk management and response, while in some cases where contingency funds exist, criteria for the allocation and use of these funds are unclear or not systematically implemented.

AA initiatives implemented by international and development organisations in the region have used dedicated funds, or specified early action windows in larger disaster and crisis response funds, to release resources for implementing AA on the basis of advance warnings for drought and displacement.

At international level, a surge in initiatives linked to financing AA – including the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP), the InsuResilience Global Partnership and the Crisis Lookout Coalition – should provide opportunities for countries in the region to explore financial instruments that might be efficient, timely and sizable enough to support the implementation of AA at scale. Climate finance, including through multilateral climate funds, has already helped progress the individual component parts of AA, for instance funding improvements in weather forecasting and EWSs in Sudan. Overall, public and private climate finance to the region has been concentrated on mitigation rather than adaptation. Nonetheless, the example from Sudan highlights the role climate adaptation finance may be able to play in strengthening the foundations for AA in the future.

4 Delivery

While many countries across the region have well-described institutional structures for DRM, the capacity to deliver on their mandates, or to enact ideas and intentions, is often constrained by lack of technical capacity, sufficient and/or flexible enough financing, and/or mandated authority. This particularly an issue when needing to instruct other sectors or ministries to work collaboratively together, as in Yemen, Egypt and Iraq. Of the numerous barriers that exist to progress AA, the lack of routine and reliable funding particularly impedes the delivery of DRM plans across the MENA region.

Throughout the region, learning and documentation of lessons on what makes for effective delivery of preparedness and AA is limited. The establishment of a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework for AA would be extremely valuable and go some way toward addressing this gap.

Social protection offers an important avenue to facilitate the delivery of AA in the form of direct assistance to households. National social protection programmes exist in some form across all countries; although not all mention disaster risks and, where they do, they focus primarily on providing support as part of post-disaster response.

There is plenty of potential to adapt existing and emerging social protection mechanisms to advance AA, including through: the reapplication of lessons on the digitisation of social protection mechanisms to a broader range of countries; leveraging existing mechanisms to expand the range of shocks and threats addressed; and bringing support forward (to be more pre-emptive) through the integration with EWSs and greater attention to longer term trends in vulnerabilities and risks.

Key findings

AA represents an important opportunity in the MENA region because of its potential to help avoid and reduce the impacts of disasters, which are expected to become more frequent and intense as a result of climate change and conflict. However AA is still nascent within the region, so there are multiple challenges that need to be navigated. To address the breadth of risks that countries face, there is a need to invest in AA so that it can operate effectively in the context of, and potentially in response to, conflict and economic shocks.

Social protection mechanisms are an important opportunity for AA given their prominence in the region. Such mechanisms could be matured to help bridge the transition from humanitarian to development support, since there is ample scope for them to be adapted to become more shock-responsive and anticipatory. All such changes would align with the regional and global shift to adopting risk-informed approaches to humanitarian and development action, to evolving the risk finance architecture to better reflect current and future risk trajectories, and to take heed of current crises such as Covid-19 to better finance and action risk management for a range of threats.

Building on country-level information and analysis of the component parts of AA, this report makes the following key findings on the state of play of AA in the MENA region:

- Efforts are being made to enhance forecasting and risk information. However limited capacity, coordination and a lack of translating early warning information into early action are evident.
- Important foundations for risk management are not in place in many countries in the region, which presents a challenge for advancing AA.
- Despite the nascent state of AA in the region, a continuum of options are available to help advance AA, ranging from incremental changes to full reform of disaster risk management systems.
- Conflict contexts in the region present additional challenges to advancing AA, particularly as many institutions and systems that provide a critical basis for AA have been significantly weakened by protracted conflict, political change or contestation.Some progress has been made to integrate elements of AA into humanitarian response planning.
- Limited coordination across and beyond government institutions, and insufficient understanding of available capacities, are undermining the operationalisation of AA.
- There are a number of examples across the region of components of AA being enhanced through access and use of climate funds.
- There are existing initiatives and processes, as well as upcoming opportunities, for agencies, regional bodies and donors to engage with and invest in AA advancement in the MENA region.

Recommendations

Recommendations for accelerating AA across the MENA region require action to generate a better understanding of the barriers, opportunities and entry points for AA in conflict contexts. Cross-technical working between DRR, development and humanitarian expertise is required, as is support for national disaster management agencies to further adapt existing systems to incorporate AA. Investment is also required to ensure robust monitoring, evaluation and learning about AA in the region. Ultimately, dedicated funding to prioritise AA in the context of broader efforts to reduce and manage disaster risk, and to enhance preparedness, will be required.

Finally, dedicated political and technical spaces need to be provided at national and regional levels for government and non-government stakeholders to share their experiences of AA and to strategise future work in this area. Advocacy and collaborative learning with national and sub-national institutions about what AA looks like in a particular country will be needed to build a common understanding of AA and its potential value for that country, and a knowledge of how it will operate at a policy level.

About this publication

This executive summary summarizes the findings of a WFP-commissioned project called 'Research on AA in the Arab region: state of play and accelerating action' which provides an overview of opportunities and challenges for AA in the MENA region.

This publication is made possible through the generous contribution of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), under the SDG Climate Facility project. The SDG Climate Facility is a multi-partner initiative focusing on the impacts of climate change on human security in the Arab region, especially in the context of countries in crisis.

The following recommendations build on and aim to address the key findings of this report:

1. Enhancing forecasting and early warning systems to enable timely action is relevant for the MENA region and should be part of an agenda that accelerates and scales up AA.
2. Increasing awareness and a better understanding of the benefits, costs and opportunities of AA will be necessary to integrate it into broader risk management efforts in the region.
3. For AA to be effective, foundational investments in risk management are needed, particularly in relation to policies, planning and coordination of AA to mitigate predictable risks.
4. Specific support is required for capacity building and decision-making processes at national level to strengthen the use of early warning and forecasting systems for AA.
5. Greater emphasis is needed on understanding conflict and economic shocks as key risks in the region, and the potential of AA to help address them.
6. Existing systems that support vulnerable groups (such as social protection and humanitarian safety nets) should be further explored as mechanisms to deliver AA.
7. A mixed financing approach is likely needed for AA. Decision-makers in the region should actively engage in global funding opportunities and negotiations to highlight region-specific requirements and vulnerabilities.
8. Support to governments for enhancing AA capacity at national level must be coordinated and coherent in order to be effective.
9. Processes and systems to support improvement in design and delivery of AA,and to help demonstrate results, will need to be strengthened.

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