



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Linking Anticipatory Action and Social Protection in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: The Case of Haiti

Urbe Secades and Manucheher Shafee¹

October 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Key Features of the Anticipatory Action Activation	6
Key Enabling Factors of the Integration of Anticipatory Action and Social Protection ...	8
Major Challenges	11
Opportunities for the Future	13
Acronyms	15

1 Draft versions of this report went through a peer review process and inputs were gratefully received from Silvia Pieretto, Thomas Debrouwer, Tania Nino, Giulia Baldi, Lore Purroy, Montserrat Barroso, Shirin Merola, Christoph Baade, Rosie Bright, and Vincent Vanhalsema from the WFP Haiti Country Office, Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBP), and Headquarters.

Introduction

This case study provides an overview of how the World Food Programme (WFP) is supporting the integration of social protection and anticipatory action (AA) in Haiti, categorized as a highly fragile and conflict-affected country. It focuses on the country's first-ever AA activation in November 2023, which leveraged the national social protection system to swiftly provide cash assistance and early warning messages to people exposed to flood risk. It summarizes how, despite the challenging context, WFP is supporting the Government of Haiti to build on existing disaster management mechanisms and invest in the nascent social protection infrastructure

to provide more timely and effective support to people exposed to climate shocks. As such, the case study provides valuable insights into how the agenda on better integrating AA and social protection can be advanced, even in the most challenging operational settings.

The outlined initiative aligns with WFP's commitment to the Conference of the Parties (COP) Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace, which calls for more decisive collective action to build climate resilience at the scale and speed required in highly vulnerable countries and communities.

Background

Country Context

For decades, Haiti has grappled with a perpetual cycle of disasters, leading to persistent food insecurity and malnutrition. These issues are exacerbated by several structural vulnerabilities, including political instability, limited government capacity and accountability, high levels of inequality, and high exposure to natural hazards such as floods and cyclones (two of the most frequent weather-related hazards affecting the Caribbean nation).

Between 2000 and 2019, Haiti ranked third on the Global Climate Risk Index, highlighting the country's significant vulnerability to climate change. Haiti faces rising temperatures, decreasing rainfall, prolonged periods of extreme heat, more intense hurricanes, and rising sea levels—all of which are expected to worsen over the next 30 years. The World Bank estimates that up to 96 percent of Haitians are exposed to recurring climate-related shocks, underscoring a general lack of

preparedness and adequate disaster risk reduction mechanisms.² These climate-related challenges are compounded by a deep crisis across Haiti's security, political, economic, and humanitarian dimensions in recent years. Armed groups have gained control of key areas and enacted the most extreme bout of violence the country has ever experienced, damaging essential infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, airports, seaports and capital roadways. This has restricted movement within and between cities, impacting the provision of essential supplies. Further, an estimated 580,000 people have been internally displaced,³ a cholera epidemic is in full swing, and food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels, with almost half of Haiti's population (5 million people) on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC+3) and in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴ The historically complex situation in Haiti, coupled with the country's limited coping capacity, underscores the urgent need for sustainable interventions to enhance resilience against climate risks and improve food security and nutrition.

² World Bank. April 2024. [Context and Overview: The World Bank in Haiti](#)

³ WFP. 2024. [WFP in Haiti | Information Booklet: An overview of WFP Haiti's activities, achievements, and targets \(June 2024\)](#)

⁴ WFP. 2024. [Information from the May to June 2024 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis.](#)

Social Protection Context

While social protection initiatives have been ongoing in Haiti for more than a decade, the adoption of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy (NSPPP) in 2020 marked a major step towards creating a coherent institutional system with increased coverage. Since its adoption, the policy and subsequent Action Plan, developed through WFP's technical assistance and co-authorship, have guided efforts to reduce system fragmentation and provided a strategic framework for the expansion of social protection initiatives.

A major component of operationalising the NSPPP has been the strengthening and expansion of the existing Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (known in French as Le Système d'Information du Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail or SIMAST). Originally designed as a programme participant database of the national Kore Lavi cash transfer programme in 2013, the SIMAST has since been transformed into a national social registry comprising 626,000

households (3.1 million people or 26 percent of the total population). This significant expansion of the registry's coverage, in line with the Government's aim to reach 40 percent of the population by 2025, has been achieved through close support from WFP in the form of trainings and other technical assistance.

Another important step towards implementing the NSPPP has been the roll-out of the Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience (ASPIRE) project, which was initiated in 2021 and will continue until 2027. ASPIRE, a shock-responsive social assistance programme funded through a World Bank grant, provides cash transfers to vulnerable groups, covering around 23,000 households (115,000 people) in the Grand'Anse department, including pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG), children under 5, and persons with disabilities. It is being co-implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (Known in French as Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail) and WFP, with WFP supporting the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in designing and operationalising the programme while progressively strengthening its ability to implement it independently.



Anticipatory Action Context

Since 2015, WFP has invested in the development of shock-specific anticipatory action programmes in Haiti. Aiming to mitigate the impacts of floods and cyclones, two of the most frequent hazards affecting the country, WFP has invested in strengthening national early warning systems (EWS) and enhancing national forecasting capabilities while also supporting Government partners with building the capacity required to prepare for and mitigate the impact of such disasters before they fully materialize.

In 2022, following two years marked by escalating socioeconomic challenges, security issues, and the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP's AA-related work in Haiti made a decisive pivot: while previous AA initiatives were primarily focused on implementing smaller-scale pilots, the increasingly complex and fragile situation in the country made clear that reaching scale and sustainability required a more complementary and integrated approach.

Given recent progress in setting up national systems following the 2020 adoption of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy, linking AA to social protection presented an opportunity to not only promote the effectiveness and reach of both programmes but to also strengthen their respective linkages with existing disaster risk management structures and coordination mechanisms. Accordingly, by engaging partners on both programmes simultaneously, WFP moved from a distinct and parallel workstream to an integrated approach. Early indications of the approach's potential already started to emerge the following year.

In 2023, WFP Haiti developed its first Anticipatory Action Plan (AAP) for floods and cyclones. The plan, which was activated based on predictions of heavy rainfall in November 2023, enabled WFP to reach more than half a million people with early warning messages and provide anticipatory cash transfers to 18,700 vulnerable individuals.

From the moment the AAP was activated, cash and early warning information reached people in less than two days. This was made possible by WFP leveraging elements of the Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience (ASPIRE) social protection programme, including its distribution lists and financial transfer mechanisms, to provide a top-up payment to programme participants located in the Grand'Anse department, enabling them to actively prepare for the predicted flood event.

The 2023 implementation of AA through the ASPIRE programme marks a key milestone in linking AA and social protection, illustrating how integration of the two can enhance the speed and scale of humanitarian action.

As of today, AA occupies a pivotal position at the intersection of emergency preparedness and response, climate action, social protection and resilience building in the country. Through continually emphasizing the programme's strengths, WFP managed to secure buy-in from government actors and other important stakeholders. For instance, to successfully activate in November 2023, WFP worked with the Directorate of Civil Protection and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, strengthening their capacity to implement anticipatory action and build trust in the Government to shift towards forward-looking risk management.

Key Features of the Anticipatory Action Activation

“At home, I took precautionary measures, secured important belongings and food in one place, secured my children as well, and prepared a place for the family to take shelter. When we receive the information, we pass the message on to our neighbours, or we give a megaphone to one of the young people to get the message across.”



A Haitian woman who received the early warning messages in November 2023.

In mid-November 2023, as soon as pre-defined rainfall forecast thresholds were reached, WFP activated for the first time its AAP for Haiti, which aimed to safeguard vulnerable people's lives and livelihoods in anticipation of potential flooding.

In line with best practices⁵ from other sudden-onset AA initiatives, the trigger mechanism for the Haiti AAP is designed to follow a two-stage process: as soon as thresholds of a longer-range readiness trigger are reached, WFP and partners initiate the so-called readiness stage, undertaking activities to ensure all stakeholders are ready to implement pre-agreed actions. If the prediction of the initial trigger is subsequently confirmed by the shorter-range activation trigger, WFP and partners implement anticipatory activities on a no-regrets basis ahead of the forecasted flood event.

In the case of the 2023 activation in Haiti, the readiness stage was initiated on 13 November, with WFP and partners taking the necessary steps to be ready for a potential activation.

On 15 November, forecasts were again verified by the Adaptive Social Protection Response Committee, chaired by the Government and formed by different relevant stakeholders, prompting the full implementation of AA. Just two days later, by 17 November, over 500,000 individuals across five departments had received early warning messages and 18,700 vulnerable participants of the ASPIRE shock-responsive social protection programme had received anticipatory cash support in four districts located in the Grand'Anse department.

⁵ In general, as the lead time increases, forecast accuracy tends to decrease. In consideration of that, two-stage trigger systems reduce the risk of spending too many resources in false-alarm scenarios (i.e., scenarios where the initially predicted shock ultimately does not materialize). In cases where the readiness trigger is not confirmed by a subsequent activation trigger, which can reasonably be expected to have a higher accuracy, stakeholders can “stand down” and continue to monitor the situation.

The speed with which WFP was able to transfer funds to people can be attributed to it leveraging the ASPIRE programme's existing cash distribution mechanism (digital transfers through eWallets), which ensured seamless access to cash assistance, minimizing any additional challenges for the recipients compared to alternative modalities. The financial assistance was accompanied by targeted SMS communication that informed recipients of how the cash assistance was intended to support them in anticipation of the impending flood impact. As per the results of the post-distribution monitoring, 99 percent of respondents reported being able to withdraw cash from their digital account, while 97 percent reported spending the received assistance in preparation for the rains.

While the AA activation in November 2023 highlights how Haiti is progressively moving towards a more integrated and forward-looking disaster management system, it is not the only representation of this shift. In December 2023, building on over two years of collaboratively setting up and implementing the system, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Director General of the General Directorate of Civil Protection endorsed and signed the Adaptive Social Protection Operations Manual, which includes information on using the social registry and electronic monetary transfers for anticipatory cash. WFP helped draft the document and provided secretarial support throughout the process as part of a larger effort to assist the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in strengthening the national social protection system to facilitate the transfer of anticipatory cash ahead of predictable climate hazards.



Key Enabling Factors of the Integration of Anticipatory Action and Social Protection

“This is a different way of doing business in Haiti, through government institutions and private sector services. We’re now able to operate in this way as a result of better weather hazard information and better capacity at the government level.”



Jean-Martin Bauer,
Former Country Director, WFP Haiti (2022-2024)

The extent to which integration of AA and Social Protection has been achieved in the Haitian context, as represented by the successful AA activation in November 2023, can be traced back to several key enabling factors, which are summarized in this section.

Long-term investments in social protection system strengthening

By establishing and investing in essential social protection building blocks, as part of WFP’s long-term approach to strengthening Haiti’s social protection system, the groundwork was laid for eventually creating successful linkages to AA. These building blocks include: 1) the adoption of the National Social Protection and Promotion Policy where shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) has been firmly embedded at the normative level, 2) the establishment and progressive expansion of the national social registry (SIMAST) that now covers more than a quarter of the population, and 3) the operational set-up, footprint and reliability of the ASPIRE programme.

Especially in fragile contexts such as Haiti, governments often face serious resource constraints that inhibit their ability to access both domestic and international financing for social protection programmes. In this context, ASPIRE, which is scheduled to run until 2027, serves as a predictable source of funding for social assistance, and has been critical in improving the effectiveness and scalability of both poverty alleviation and shock-responsive capacities nationally, demonstrated in part by the successful AA activation.

Joint decision-making through existing coordination mechanisms

The Shock-Responsive Social Protection Committee, chaired by the Government, with WFP’s technical support, has been a key factor in ensuring successful activation and will remain crucial for the longer-term integration of anticipatory action and social protection in Haiti. The committee, which meets regularly, was urgently convened in mid-November 2023 upon forecasts predicting the imminent arrival of Tropical Depression 22. Within hours, the committee assessed the situation and unanimously decided to activate the AAP.

Focused investments for shock-responsive social protection

Despite significant long-term investments in Disaster Risk Management and Social Protection, these have taken place in a parallel manner and Haiti has faced challenges in coordinating disaster risk management (DRM) and social protection actors.⁶ However, WFP has consistently worked to bridge this gap and foster exchange through the Shock-Responsive Social Protection Committee, and the jointly developed AAP for floods and hurricanes in 2023 ensured the participation of both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Directorate of Civil Protection.

Institutionalizing and advocating for anticipatory action

Through its advocacy efforts, in the form of trainings and awareness-raising activities,⁷ WFP has strengthened understanding of the anticipatory approach among government partners, donors, United Nations agencies, civil society and humanitarian partners. This has generated significant interest and involvement from various institutions, fostering local ownership among both state and non-state actors to support accountable governance. As a result, an AA Community of Practice, comprising approximately ten partners, including United Nations agencies and humanitarian organisations, has been established to facilitate regular technical exchanges and fundraising.

Leveraging existing coordination mechanisms has allowed WFP to capitalize on long-standing relationships, accelerating decision-making, as demonstrated by the Government's trust in WFP's technical advice throughout the AA development and implementation process. National ownership of the system, supported by a multi-stakeholder and consultative validation process for both the triggers and the pay-out, has been a key

factor in the successful activation in 2023. This highlights the importance of continuous capacity strengthening of national actors and institutions.

Testing and scaling up

Ahead of the full AA activation in November 2023, Tropical Storm Franklin, which formed in August that same year, presented an opportunity to test a critical component of the AAP. Based on projections indicating that the tropical storm could make landfall in Haiti, WFP, in partnership with the Directorate of Civil Protection, sent early warning messages via SMS to 84,000 mobile telephone numbers. While Storm Franklin eventually turned North, making landfall on the Dominican Republic's side of the island without causing much damage on Haitian territory, it allowed stakeholders to understand the complexities of AA implementation and make operational adjustments. Further, the learnings from the August implementation informed the decision to expand the beneficiary list, which enabled the system to effectively reach up to 500,000 people with early warning messages in various provinces three months later during the November activation.



⁶ WFP. 2023. [Regional evaluation of WFP's contribution to shock-responsive social protection in Latin America.](#)

⁷ Anticipation Hub. 2023. [Strengthening Haiti's capacity to face floods and hurricanes with anticipatory action.](#)

Applying a people-centred approach

The opportunity to test the early warning component of the AAP in August 2023 made it possible to evaluate participants' experiences using phone-based Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM). This process was instrumental in drawing valuable lessons and ensuring a people-centred approach that addressed participants' information needs as effectively as possible. Based on the results of the PDM of the August activation, 94 percent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the reception of the early warning messages. However, 42 percent of respondents did not have access to weather-related information in the past 12 months, which highlights the need to further strengthen the dissemination and communication of climate and weather information messages. The level of satisfaction with the reception and content of messages indicates that the communities welcomed the alert service.

Another important aspect of people-centred AA implementation is ensuring inclusivity and impartiality. However, in fragile contexts, such as in Haiti, weak infrastructure and ongoing social and political tensions can compromise the fair delivery of essential services, especially in times of crises. By leveraging the SIMAST, with its clear and objective targeting criteria, it was possible to

reach at-risk populations in Haiti days ahead of an impending flood while concurrently maintaining impartiality, avoiding exclusion and strengthening both the capacity and accountability of government actors.

Relying on a trusted and well-established mechanism for cash transfers

In contexts where it is widely accepted and known, the distribution of digital cash typically constitutes the fastest, safest and most effective option to support people in the short window of time before a sudden-onset shock causes impact. However, in countries that are prone to conflict and socioeconomic shocks, a multitude of possible operational challenges can impede the timely release of funds, even in digital form. Challenges range from facing possible restrictions imposed by the central bank to liquidity issues of field agents in charge of distribution. In Haiti, the existence of a nationally owned social protection programme with a proven track record of being a reliable end-to-end solution mitigates some of these challenges. For instance, as part of the implementation of the AAP, available funds were channelled through the existing social protection mechanism, ensuring that programme participants receive anticipatory assistance swiftly and in a way that was familiar.



Major Challenges

Culture of crisis management

Fostering an ‘anticipatory’ culture or, in other words, shifting from a ‘needs-based’ approach to one focused on ‘risk’ is challenging in a context like Haiti, where emergencies are a constant. The country’s complex and recurring crises have fostered a culture centred on response and crisis management, leaving less room for anticipatory approaches. This makes it more challenging to prioritize and implement AA effectively.

Trust in early warning systems

Strengthening trust in early warnings and forecasts is essential to overcome stakeholders’ reluctance to issue alerts, often due to concerns that they are either issued too frequently or that the forecast information is too imprecise. Actions that could be undertaken⁸ to address this lack of trust include strengthening and improving weather and climate forecasting and monitoring to enhance credibility; improving communication channels to disseminate information and avoid confusion; fostering community engagement to ensure relevance and trust from communities;

conducting educational campaigns and feedback mechanisms to increase awareness and understanding of weather advisories.

Doubts on linking AA and social protection

Even among some in-country AA partners, there was limited awareness of the benefits of linking AA with social protection, particularly given the system’s limited reach and scope in Haiti. While the successful activation has eased some of these doubts, continued advocacy is essential to raise awareness among key stakeholders about both the immediate operational benefits and the long-term advantages of strengthening national systems, thus creating the enabling environment for AA implementation at scale.

Fuel funding availability

A general challenge of providing anticipatory cash assistance in sudden onset scenarios is ensuring that money flows without disruption or delay. Given the very short window of time between forecast and potential impact, any interruption

⁸ Llopis Abella, Jimena; Perge, Emilie Bernadette; Afif, Zeina; Soto Orozco, Claudia Ruth; Padilla, Lace M; Hsu, Jessica. 2020. *Using Behavioral Insights to Improve Disaster Preparedness, Early Warning and Response Mechanisms in Haiti (French)*. eMBEd brief Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.



to the flow of money could undermine the anticipatory aim of the assistance provided. For instance, the success of the November 2023 activation in Haiti was attributable to funds being pre-arranged for regular social protection payouts. Based on forecasts indicating a high likelihood of flooding, payments were moved up in time to facilitate the distribution of anticipatory cash. However, especially in light of ambitions to scale up AA activities, relying on funds available through social protection systems will at a certain point no longer be sufficient. To enable a vertical expansion of benefits, including topping up transfer values to current social protection recipients in the face of a forecasted climate hazard, will require the injection of additional funds that can be pre-arranged.

Measuring impact

Assessing the impact of humanitarian programmes, including AA, is particularly challenging in Haiti due to security restrictions. While much of the planning and operational setup for AA can be done remotely – for example, work with financial service providers is entirely online – measuring impact typically requires staff to be on the ground. Security-related travel limitations make it more difficult to gather the necessary evidence from assisted communities, which is essential for learning from participants' experiences and adjusting the programme for greater effectiveness.



Opportunities for the Future

Scalability

WFP continues to enhance linkages between AA and social protection, creating a mutually reinforcing system that can be implemented effectively across the entire crisis timeline. This effort includes ongoing support for the geographical expansion of the national social registry (SIMAST), aligning with the Government's goal to cover 40 percent of the population by 2025. By doing so, a progressively larger portion of the vulnerable population will gain access to social protection and anticipatory action. Moreover, the successful activation in November 2023 sparked interest from the wider humanitarian community, ultimately leading to the creation of an AA Framework facilitated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and funded by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) that unites various UN agencies to jointly implement anticipatory actions across multiple sectors ahead of cyclones. The framework, which replicates and adopts key elements of WFP's AA approach, was endorsed in August 2024.

Inclusion

Strengthening the linkages between AA and social protection should lead to more integrated systems capable of responding more effectively to varying types and levels of vulnerabilities. This includes improving the gender-sensitivity of the social protection system, particularly by enhancing the SIMAST's ability to capture 'structural' and gender-based vulnerabilities. It also involves efforts to sensitize women to social protection and anticipatory action, as well as addressing structural barriers that limit their access.

Government ownership of the AA programme and accountable institutionalization

Haiti's nascent but developing social protection system provides a foundation to conceptualize and implement AA and social protection programmes in a coherent and complementary way. Key components of both programmes – such as scientific forecast triggers and targeting mechanisms – were co-developed by WFP, government stakeholders, and other partners. These components offer strong frameworks that institutions can rely on as they progressively take ownership of the programmes in a responsible and accountable manner. The November activation, for instance, created an opportunity to introduce AA into both the DRM and social protection policy landscapes. The national manual on Shock Responsive Social Protection, approved in December 2023, establishes a framework for acting both before and after shocks and includes provisions for remote data collection and monitoring. This approach not only mitigates challenges but also ensures the generation of solid evidence to support future scale-ups. The manual outlines priority actions for emergency response through social protection mechanisms, such as the use of the social registry, and electronic monetary transfers, and AA, creating an opportunity to strengthen and mainstream early warning systems ahead of extreme weather events. Likewise, Haiti's Directorate of Civil Protection has started integrating AA into its contingency plans. This support to the further institutionalization of AA is particularly crucial in a context of instability and high staff turnover, helping to safeguard the significant progress already made.

Continuation of long-term support

As the climate crisis, economic challenges and conflict continue to exacerbate humanitarian needs in Haiti, the integration of social protection systems and anticipatory action has become essential for protecting the most vulnerable populations from foreseeable climate-related risks and further deprivation. Achieving this integration will require a dynamic, collective and multi-stakeholder long-term effort to ensure an inclusive social protection system and implement anticipatory actions, including activities such as strengthening early warning systems and delivery mechanisms. WFP will continue to promote a people-centred approach in collaboration with the Government and other key partners to prevent weather-related hazards from turning into full-scale disasters and to safeguard hard-earned development gains, while also fostering knowledge sharing across countries for the expansion and adaptation of such successful approaches.



Acronyms

AA	Anticipatory action
AAP	Anticipatory Action Plan
ASPIRE	Adaptive Social Protection for Increased Resilience
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EWS	Early warning systems
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NSPPP	National Social Protection and Promotion Policy
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
PBWG	Pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls
SIMAST	Information System of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
SMS	Short Message Service
SP	Social Protection
SRSP	Shock-Responsive Social Protection
UN	United Nations
WFP	World Food Programme

Photo Credits

Cover photo: WFP/Luc Junior Segur

Page 4: WFP/Luc Junior Segur

Page 6: WFP/Silvia Pieretto

Page 7: WFP/Tanya Birkbeck

Page 8: WFP/Tanya Birkbeck

Page 9: WFP/Tanya Birkbeck

Page 10: WFP/Gabrielle Menezes

Page 11: WFP/Luc Junior Segur

Page 12: WFP/Johnson Bazalais

Page 14: WFP/Luc Junior Segur



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

wfp.org/anticipatory-actions

wfp.org/social-protection