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WFP EVALUATION

Using Impact Evaluations to Optimise WFP's Anticipatory Action Programmes

Extreme weather events pose a serious and growing threat to global food security. Floods, droughts, and tropical cyclones are becoming more frequent, and more intense, hitting regions where they were historically not common.

In 2023, climate shocks were the main driver of hunger for 72 million people in 18 countries.¹ Timely and comprehensive responses are needed to prevent such events from setting back the clock on growth and poverty alleviation.

Acting as timely as possible could result in a better use of limited resources through enhancing preparedness and minimizing losses.



Impact evaluations conducted of WFP supported Anticipatory Action suggest that providing early cash transfers improves food security and psychosocial outcomes, compared to post-shock responses.

Anticipatory action is defined as acting ahead of predicted hazards to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold. This requires pre-agreed plans that identify partners and activities, reliable early warning

information, and pre-agreed financing, released predictably and rapidly when an agreed trigger-point is reached.

¹ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2024 |

These actions can include cash or in-kind support, warning messages, health kits, and other necessary resources.

With funding from United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and other donors, the **World Food Programme's Office of Evaluation (OEV)**, in collaboration with the World Bank, has developed a learning agenda to answer questions related to the **optimal timing** for providing humanitarian responses related to climate shocks, and assessing the overall effectiveness of innovative shock-responsive interventions.

This is an important policy question as there are trade-offs between *speed* and *precision* with these types of interventions. For example, providing assistance in advance of an extreme weather event can result in reduced targeting accuracy.

Evidence from 2 Impact Evaluations



Anticipatory Action reduced the need for negative coping strategies and increased food security and mental health following the floods in Nepal and Bangladesh.

[In Nepal](#), during the 2022 monsoon season, WFP, in coordination with OCHA, was ready to support vulnerable households in response to potential severe flooding across the Karnali basin.

Forecast triggers reached activation in early October, and WFP mobilized to provide cash assistance of 117 USD per household to approximately 12,500 households.

The randomized trial [identified the impacts of receiving early cash transfers in Nepal](#), soon after the flood triggers were activated in October 2022 (Anticipatory Action beneficiaries, blue line) compared to a group of households receiving the same cash transfer amount three to four weeks after the flood peak – in November-December of 2022 (post-flood support beneficiaries, red line).

Findings show that households receiving transfers in the immediate aftermath of the flood consumed more food (especially animal proteins), avoided food insecurity, and had better mental health outcomes.

The percentage of households with acceptable food security increased 8 percentage points (Figure 1) in the anticipatory action group compared to the post-flood group, and anticipatory action transfers led to higher subjective wellbeing, improving recipients' life satisfaction (Figure 2). Moreover, anticipatory action households were less likely to engage in negative coping strategies: 13% fewer households relied on less preferred food, 14% fewer households borrowed food from others, and 15% fewer households reduced meal portions, compared to post-shock households during the first round of the survey.

While the post-flood group catches up after receiving their transfers, they do not surpass the early recipients in any measured outcomes – highlighting the added value of anticipatory action and the net benefits of acting early.

Figure 1: Impacts on food security in Nepal

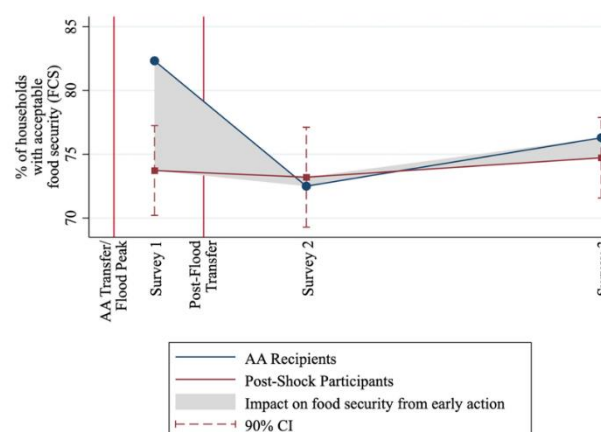
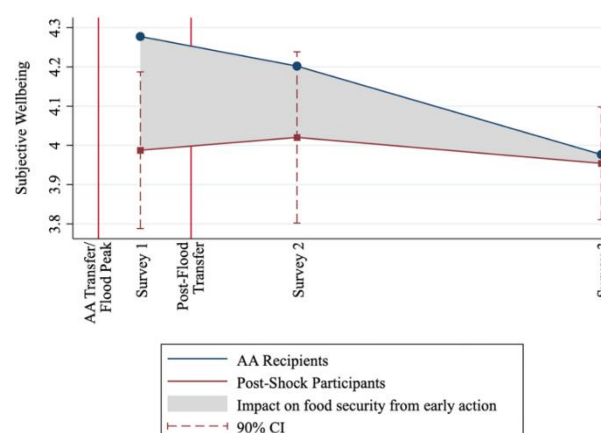


Figure 2: Impacts on subjective wellbeing in Nepal



In Bangladesh, anticipatory action triggers were activated in five districts in the Jamuna basin (Bogra, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Jamalpur, and Sirajgonj). WFP Bangladesh reached almost 90,000 households through mobile payments at least one day ahead of the flood, and UN OCHA facilitated the coordination around the response. Villages were randomly allocated to three groups:

- The anticipatory action group (2,250 households) received Tk 5,000 (US\$43) of cash transfers two days before the flood.
- A rapid post-shock group (2,250 households) received the same amount in August 2024 (approximately three weeks after the flood peak), and
- A standard post-shock group (2,250 households) also received Tk 5,000 (US\$43) transfers (approximately eight weeks after the flood peak).

Data was collected in three rounds for all three groups, two weeks after each payment.

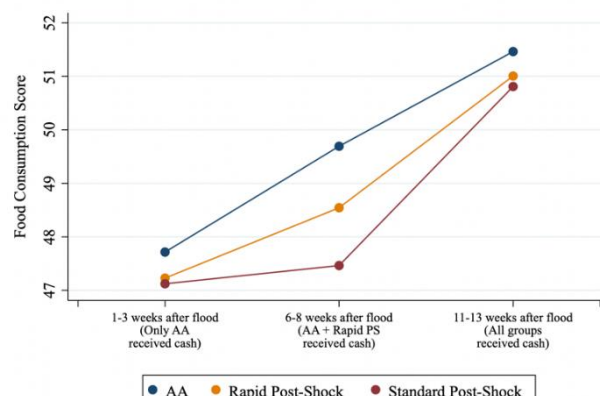


Households receiving anticipatory action support reported less hunger (Figure 3), better mental health (Figure 4), and fewer negative coping strategies such as skipping a meal, when compared to those receiving assistance three or eight weeks after peak flooding.

Impacts in the medium run

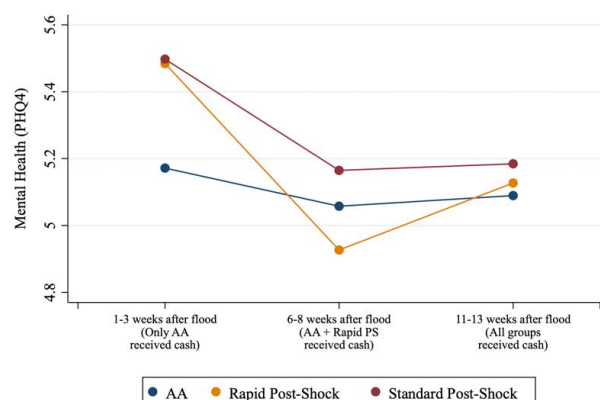
In both Nepal and Bangladesh, anticipatory action delivered clear benefits by helping households meet their needs earlier and more effectively. Although outcomes between the AA and later-response groups converged by the final rounds of data collection - after all groups had received assistance - AA households experienced improved food security, mental health, and reduced reliance on negative coping strategies during the critical early weeks of the flood. In Nepal, these early advantages lasted for up to six weeks, and in Bangladesh for up to 8 weeks to 3 months, depending on the outcome. This demonstrates that providing the same amount of assistance as early as possible before a flood has significant short- and medium-term impacts on well-being.

Figure 3: Impacts on food security in Bangladesh



Source: Household survey 2024. Significance tests against Standard Post-Shock are p-values for a test that the AA or Rapid Post-Shock group are equivalent to Standard Post-Shock.

Figure 4: Impacts on mental health in Bangladesh



Source: Household survey 2024. Significance tests against Standard Post-Shock are p-values for a test that the AA or Rapid Post-Shock group are equivalent to Standard Post-Shock.

In 2024, WFP's anticipatory action programme covered over 6.2 million people across 43 countries. Moreover, WFP reached 1.3 million with anticipatory assistance in 13 activations. These results complement related studies highlighting the benefits of anticipatory action in response to disasters, such as **drought responses in Niger**, **floods in Nigeria** and **Bangladesh**, and storms in Nigeria. Future work can explore cost-effectiveness compared to post-shock responses, improving targeting to reach the most vulnerable, accelerating cash assistance, and pairing cash with other support like livelihood recovery. In 2025, the learning agenda will expand studies to cover other shocks, including typhoons and droughts.

For more information contact:

Jennifer Waidler, WFP Office of Evaluation (jennifer.waidler@wfp.org) and Paul Christian, World Bank (paul.christian@worldbank.org)