



World Food
Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Anticipatory Action through Social Protection

Lessons from Saint Lucia

The Caribbean is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. Climate hazards such as hurricanes, pose significant risks to lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, and the well-being of people, especially those with limited coping capacity. These heightened risks facing Small Island Development States (SIDS) require innovative approaches to support the most vulnerable to be better prepared for and manage the impacts of disasters.

Two entry points, when integrated, that can result in an effective framework for response are anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection. Anticipatory action is a proactive approach that enables early interventions based on forecasts and pre-identified triggers, which aim to reduce the humanitarian and economic impacts of disasters. Shock-responsive social protection refers to utilizing and adapting existing social protection data, delivery

October 2025

and financing systems to provide support when disasters and shocks occur to support people impacted. Every government in the Caribbean turned to social protection to respond to COVID-19¹ and more recently those impacted by Hurricane Beryl in 2024.

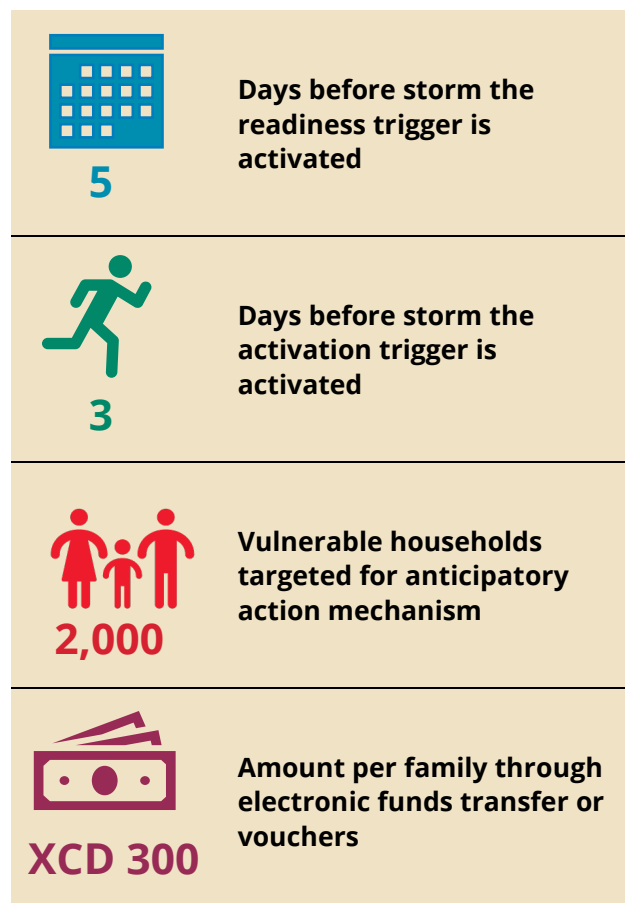
Recognizing the need for proactive disaster risk management, the Government of Saint Lucia, with technical support from the World Food Programme (WFP), has developed and tested an anticipatory action mechanism for hurricanes embedded within its national social protection system. By acting before a shock occurs, anticipatory action can help to minimize losses, reduce response costs, and preserve the dignity of affected populations.

In the first example of its kind, a simulation was conducted in Saint Lucia to test anticipatory action processes in a fictional hurricane scenario – enabling the Government to identify and refine any potential challenges prior to the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season. This initiative represents a pioneering effort in the Caribbean to deliver timely, dignified assistance to vulnerable populations before a disaster strikes.

ANTICIPATORY ACTION MECHANISM DESIGN

Given that anticipatory action spans forecasting, early warning, programmatic delivery and financing, establishing an anticipatory action plan involves cross-sectoral engagement. Through a series of consultations and workshops based on an analysis of existing systems and risks, an anticipatory action mechanism was designed to provide cash or voucher assistance to 2,000 pre-identified vulnerable households (5,800 individuals) ahead of a forecasted Category 1 or above hurricane, using predefined triggers and standard operating procedures. The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice and Empowerment (Ministry of Equity) leads implementation, in

coordination with the Ministry of Finance, the Saint Lucia Meteorological Service, Massy Supermarket stores, and WFP.



The anticipatory action mechanism builds on existing national social assistance infrastructure, particularly the Public Assistance Programme and the national vulnerability database (SL-Net 3.0) to identify and reach households most at risk, and utilize already established delivery mechanisms. Beneficiaries are selected based on vulnerability scores and geographic exposure to hurricane hazards. A two-stage trigger system – one for *readiness* (initiating the mechanism) and one for *action* (executing the payments) – was developed after discussing different models and balancing the need for sufficient lead time for government

¹ See WFP (2021) [Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Caribbean Handbook](#) for a comprehensive overview.

processes with the accuracy of forecasts in a small island context.

Once activated, assistance is delivered through electronic funds transfers (EFT) for banked individuals and supermarket vouchers for those without banking access and special needs, so that they can take immediate preparedness actions. In order to enable the EFT payments, which are faster and more reliable than the manual bank transfers used previously, the Ministry of Equity verified the banking information of beneficiaries using digital data collection and management tools, with technical support from WFP.

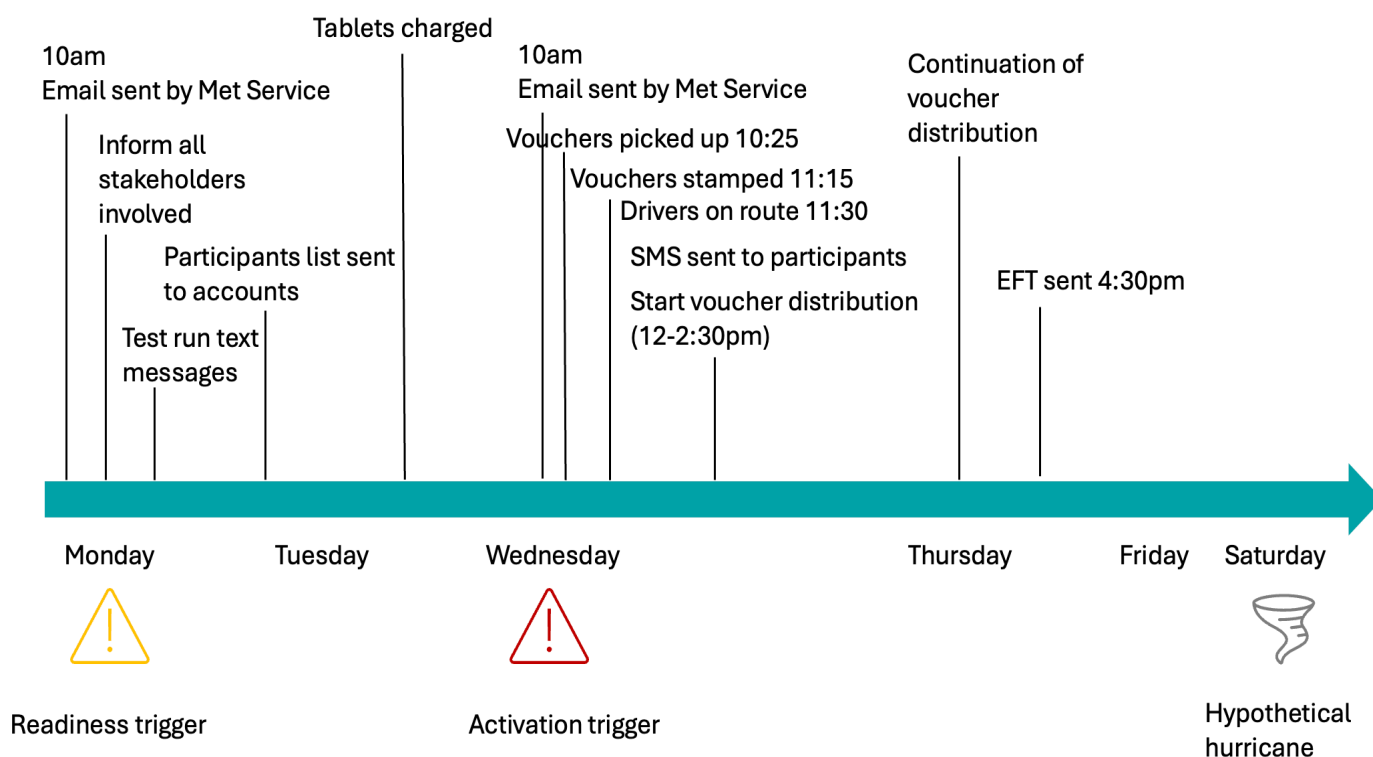
SIMULATION

In May 2025, the Government of Saint Lucia and WFP conducted the region's first full-scale simulation of the anticipatory action mechanism, offering a valuable opportunity to identify operational gaps and refine the standard operating procedures for future activations. The exercise tested the anticipatory action mechanism, including the activation protocol, coordination across ministries

and departments, beneficiary communication, payment processes, logistics for voucher distribution, and field-level monitoring using Kobo data collection tools.

Fictional forecasts of an approaching hurricane (120h and 72h before 'impact') issued by the Saint Lucia Meteorological Service triggered preparatory activities and real-time delivery of assistance to 500 pre-selected vulnerable households. This assistance was in the form of electronic fund transfers through banks and credit unions, as well as the distribution of Massy Supermarket vouchers at seven distribution sites across the island. Monitoring teams used Kobo Toolbox to collect real-time data on the experience of beneficiaries' feedback and assess operational performance.

The simulation demonstrated strong national ownership and effective coordination across multiple stakeholders. Beneficiaries received assistance within minutes of arriving at distribution sites, with 92% reporting receipt within 30 minutes. Most of the beneficiaries were women, and over a third had a household member with a disability.



While satisfaction rates were high, the exercise was also critical in highlighting challenges and areas for improvement of the mechanism. A one-day post-simulation lessons learned workshop was convened which enabled the review of roles and responsibilities, identified limitations and gaps, as well as provided actionable recommendations to strengthen processes ahead of the 2025 Atlantic hurricane season.

LESSONS

The simulation provided insights into the operational readiness of Saint Lucia's anticipatory action mechanism and offered a realistic stress test of rapid cash transfers and voucher distributions through government systems. It underscored that the short lead time between forecast and potential impact leaves little margin for delays, making planning and coordination in every step essential.

Key lessons from the simulation emphasized the importance of clear institutional roles between different government ministries and departments, streamlined workflows, and robust digital systems. It also showcased that both cash and voucher delivery can be implemented within very short lead times before hurricanes impact the island. Vouchers were ready for distribution within 2-4 hours, EFT payments initiated 30 hours after activation. Recommendations included expanding communication channels beyond SMS, formalizing command structures, enhancing coordination with the Treasury Department within the Ministry of Finance, including pre-populating revised templates for EFT payments to increase the speed of the transfer process, and investing in staff training for data collection and management. Strengthening the SL-Net vulnerability database vis-à-vis data gaps, completeness and coherence, and refining beneficiary outreach mechanisms were also identified as priorities to raise awareness and

"I was happy [to receive the money] because I am currently trying to fix my home before the hurricane season starts, because the place is leaking a lot, so my plan was to block some walls and buy some hurricanes essentials. "

increase voucher delivery rates. The exercise also showed that investments in bank account verification and digital data collection, while resource intensive, facilitated the delivery of faster and more reliable payments, benefiting future response measures and routine social assistance.

Saint Lucia has made substantial progress towards safeguarding vulnerable families by developing the mechanism, testing core processes and contributing to a growing body of regional experience in anticipatory disaster risk management. With climate change driving more frequent and intense storms, testing new models is essential for optimizing risk-layered approaches. Even if a forecasted hazard does not strike, the mechanism still provides a 'no regrets' benefit by equipping vulnerable households with resources to prepare and meet basic needs during hurricane season. Saint Lucia's anticipatory action mechanism and simulation offers a replicable model for other SIDS seeking to reduce disaster impacts through proactive support integrated into national disaster risk management and social protection structures.

Photo page 1: WFP/Carla Alleyne

With the kind support of WFP
Partners



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

