

A LIGHT IN THE DARK



How media and communication
can support anticipatory action to
prevent humanitarian emergencies

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international charity. We support the independent media essential to democracy and development. We reach millions of people facing insecurity, inequality and poverty with information they can trust – to protect health and our planet, bridge divides and challenge prejudice. We share stories and spark conversations that save and change lives.

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INTRODUCTION

People are facing increasing risks from climate change and armed conflict, so innovative, impactful, cost-effective and locally-led humanitarian solutions are more important than ever. These humanitarian needs are increasing at a time when financial resources are limited. The 2023 Global Humanitarian Assistance report found that more humanitarian needs went unmet in 2022 than ever before.¹

In May 2022 the G7 recommitted to making the “*humanitarian system as anticipatory as possible*”. Also in 2022 the UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the Early Warnings For All initiative to ensure that every person has access to early warning systems within five years.

Further efforts to ensure access to information and communication demonstrate the value the humanitarian sector places on the role of communication, such as the joint initiative to ensure that all major refugee hosting areas have available and affordable connectivity by 2030.²

Trusted media and communication can be a valuable tool in supporting essential humanitarian solutions, but its potential is under-used. Additionally, media and journalists can be equally affected by crises, therefore limiting their ability to support solutions. BBC Media Action and its partners believe that reaching previously excluded and hard-to-reach communities with relevant and actionable media and communication is a major gap that can, and must, be filled.

While the role of media and communication in disaster risk reduction, early warning systems and traditional humanitarian interventions is well established, it remains less explored within approaches to anticipatory action.

“ We do not make media about the person affected. We make media for the person affected. We do not talk about the problem – mostly, we talk about the solutions.”

Journalist responding to the 2015 earthquake in Nepal

Media and communication has a specific role to play that has not yet been clearly articulated – taking learning from the humanitarian and early warning sectors and applying it to anticipatory action.

This policy note explores the roles that media and communication can play in anticipatory action planning, organisational anticipatory action, and supporting communities to take action ahead of crises. It draws on insights from research evidence from a number of BBC Media Action interventions, as well as humanitarian partners and experts, to indicate how media and

¹ Development Initiatives (2023) [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023](#)

² UNHCR et al (2023) [Connectivity for Refugees: The Foundations of a 21st Century Humanitarian Response](#)

communication can enable people to take action before a humanitarian crisis hits – and how the humanitarian sector can support this.³ It demonstrates the importance of fully integrating media and communication into anticipatory action systems – preparing the media and communication ecosystem to play this vital role is itself an anticipatory action.

Finally, this document outlines three overarching recommendations on how the humanitarian sector can use media and communication to enable people to protect themselves, their loved ones and their communities and avert crises:

- 1. Strengthen the media and communication ecosystems** – by involving local media practitioners and including them in the design and preparation of anticipatory action plans, for the resilience of populations and the media
- 2. Listen to local media audiences** – and use audience insights to inform and adjust anticipatory action
- 3. Communicate with people at risk of crises through local media** – in ways that are relevant, accessible and inclusive for the target audience, to (a) build people's readiness to act, (b) prompt people to take their own actions and (c) catalyse dialogue across society to support change

³ BBC Media Action (n.d.) [Communication in Emergencies: Research and reflections](#)

DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS POLICY NOTE

Anticipatory action “*is defined as acting ahead of predicted hazardous events to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold*”,ⁱ whether before it occurs or before the most acute impacts are felt.ⁱⁱ This policy note also considers more informal approaches where action is taken in anticipation of a crisis or disaster on the basis of a forecast, without an established mechanism for incorporating triggers, financing and activities in advance.ⁱⁱⁱ

This document uses “anticipatory action” in relation to actions taken in relation to a sudden-onset crisis, rather than the longer term development of broader systems and mechanisms.

Communication refers to a process of exchanging information and opinions among individuals, groups and institutions. It can involve listening, sharing information, discussing, and more.

Media refers to print, broadcast and digital media forms. Public interest media can provide audiences with information, knowledge, inspiration, motivation, and a platform to express their needs and interests, and be heard.

Warnings/early warnings are those that take place only in relation to a specific forecasted event, which may or may not be in relation to an early warning system.

ⁱ Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) (2022) [Glossary of Early Action definitions](#)

ⁱⁱ Anticipation Hub (2023) [A short overview of anticipatory action](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ REAP Glossary



1. STRENGTHEN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEMS

There is compelling evidence that media and communication can make a considerable contribution to humanitarian response and resilience to shocks.⁴ Media and communication interventions have a demonstrable ability to reach people with information (including risk and preparedness information), develop understanding, and drive discussion and action. Local media outlets are often already trusted sources of information in the community, so can support the delivery of assistance. Investing in strong communication as early as possible can also build trust with communities.

Yet the ability of media to play this role can be taken for granted. Humanitarian actors may assume that local media will be there for audiences before and during crises. Yet local media practitioners are subject to the same shocks and stresses that other community members face, which can prevent them from continuing to deliver the same level of service as a crisis hits.

Communication is aid, so supporting communication delivery systems before a crisis, and ideally before disseminating early warnings, is essential.

In order to harness this potential the media and communication ecosystem should be strengthened through:

- a) Supporting media and communication actors (particularly local media) to be active participants in anticipatory action
- b) Preparing the anticipatory action sector to communicate before a crisis
- c) Boosting media actors' readiness to meet audience needs through research and insights

⁴ BBC Media Action (n.d.) *Communication in Emergencies*

A. SUPPORTING MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION ACTORS TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN ANTICIPATORY ACTION

The best way to enable media actors to be active in anticipatory action is to **provide specific resources for media and communication in anticipatory action plans**, and to clearly define the role of media and communication in anticipatory action.

If media outlets that people already trust are immediately able to provide life-saving information (before or at the onset of a hazard), that can immediately enhance the reach and impact of humanitarian efforts. This early media and communication involvement can also help humanitarian actors to start developing relationships with communities straight away.

For example, funding a media organisation to prepare and implement business continuity plans could ensure uninterrupted communication services during a crisis. And including local media organisations in anticipatory action plans could increase their understanding of how their communication can best support appropriate action.

Partnership building, and capacity strengthening with and between humanitarian and media practitioners, scientists, community members and other experts before a crisis, could lead to faster and more efficient anticipatory action. Evidence suggests that building confidence, relationships and access to communication resources are key elements that support humanitarian and media practitioners' preparedness to communicate with affected communities.⁵ This might involve capacity strengthening or pre-positioning connections between the media and humanitarian experts, including preparing key communication and information materials to provide people with easy-to-understand, relevant and practical advice before, or as soon as, a crisis emerges.

CASE STUDY: 2015 NEPAL EARTHQUAKE

BBC Media Action delivered training to 75 media, government, humanitarian and telecommunications practitioners, and collaborated with 30 media and humanitarian relief providers, to build relationships and prepare to respond swiftly with critical communication in the event of an earthquake.

BBC Media Action and the BBC Nepali Service started broadcasting Lifeline information within a few hours of the earthquake in daily news bulletins. The day after the earthquake, a special Lifeline programme was broadcast in the time slot of the long-running radio debate show *Sajha Sawal* (Common Questions). This provided potentially life-saving information via 270 radio stations through the BBC Nepali Service and the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.



⁵ BBC Media Action (n.d.) [Preparing to Communicate in an Emergency](#).

In addition, there is a strong need to build media practitioners' thematic expertise to improve the accuracy of their content and the way these practitioners engage with expert contributors. This might involve increasing their understanding of key concepts, how humanitarian actors work, identifying experts to feature, and developing interviewing skills to ensure contributions are useful to audiences. While training supports this, continuous learning and engagement requires ongoing partnership building and collaboration.

It is vital to **plan for building and maintaining key telecommunication or other infrastructure to keep people connected at critical times**. This requires longer-term preparedness activities and engagement with mobile network operators (MNOs), national emergency telecommunication plans (which outline telecom-supported activities in times of crisis),⁶ supporting media organisations' access to power sources, raw materials and transport, and where possible overcoming barriers to reach communities who are less media-connected.

Successful media and communication to support anticipatory action needs to be **based on a clear understanding of target populations' needs, barriers and motivators to take action**, alongside knowledge of the local context, and insights into target audiences' media consumption habits and preferences. Insights into communities' understanding of risk and probability, their trust in forecasts and their previous experience in responding to forecasts is required to understand how to build those relationships and to clarify the role of media and communication in anticipatory action. Different people will trust and have access to different types of media content, if they access media at all.



GETTY

Example activities to support the role of media in anticipatory action

- Resource a rapid assessment of the local media and communication ecosystem in the target or affected area
- Engage local media outlets in early action plans, to inform the best ways to communicate with audiences
- Provide resources so that media and journalists can continue operating during a crisis
- Deliver resources for telecommunication/infrastructure companies to keep people connected during a crisis, by reinforcing systems or planning alternatives
- Support media and humanitarian professionals to strengthen their capacity and build relationships to improve anticipatory action and communication, and include local media in emergency response planning and alerts

⁶ GSMA (2021) *National Emergency Telecommunications Plans: Enablers and Safeguards A brief evaluation guide for policy practitioners*

Research to understand existing community mechanisms for sharing information, which groups might be excluded or be particularly disconnected from these systems – and how to reach them – is vital to produce effective, engaging and impactful media and communication. While longer-term efforts to support inclusive information access are needed,⁷ considering the current local communication ecosystem and its limitations, including the role of key influencers and gatekeepers, is vital to support anticipatory action.

⁷ GSMA (2023) [Digital Inclusion in Humanitarian Settings: Lessons from the GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme](#)

CASE STUDY: THE HUMANITARIAN CONNECTIVITY CHARTER

Mobile networks provide a vital lifeline in emergencies, and can deliver early warning messages to support effective preparedness, early action and response. Recognising this, the GSMA launched the [Humanitarian Connectivity Charter](#) (HCC) in 2015.ⁱ This has a clear set of guidelines and best practices that support MNOs to prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency. The HCC is a tool to actively engage the mobile industry in disaster resilience and recovery.

The charter has strong support from the mobile industry around the world and the GSMA engages its members through convenings and bespoke technical assistance, including specific initiatives on early action and early warning systems.

For example, building on experience in Sri Lanka working on [Dialog's Disaster and Emergency Warning Network \(DEWN\)](#)ⁱⁱ, GSMA is currently supporting Digicel in Haiti to operationalise a mobile-enabled early warning system.

In some locations, such as in the Philippines, MNOs have worked with the government to “*preposition aid and supplies in key areas to allow them to best support customers, employees, and the wider community in the immediate aftermath of a disaster*”ⁱⁱⁱ. This advance coordination has supported MNOs to collaborate in times of crisis and ensure communities remain connected (or are reconnected as soon as possible), which in turn supports the wider aid response.

ⁱ GSMA (n.d.) [The Humanitarian Connectivity Charter: Supporting the mobile industry to prepare for, respond to, and recover from sudden onset emergencies](#)

ⁱⁱ Dialog Foundation (n.d.) [Disaster and Emergency Warning Network \(DEWN\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ GSMA (2022) [Typhoon Rai Response: The role of the mobile industry](#)

B. PREPARING THE ANTICIPATORY ACTION SECTOR TO COMMUNICATE BEFORE A CRISIS

The anticipatory action sector will be better able to collaborate with media partners if they build relationships well in advance of crises. This might include mobilising resources, identifying expertise and networking with local media organisations. Overall, timely engagement with media organisations before a crisis will enable communication with communities to be more effective and efficient.

Advance engagement with media organisations may also equip anticipatory action teams with additional predictive tools to support their attempts to anticipate crises through dialogue with communities, which may facilitate a more bottom-up and localised approach.



Effective and timely collaboration with media practitioners and humanitarian sector specialists, could enable vital information to be delivered more efficiently and potentially achieve greater impact. For example, journalists may be able to prepare the kind of information people might need and contact key humanitarian actors for technical support. Ultimately, this could enable crisis-affected and at-risk people to take action, and access any necessary support, as quickly as possible.

CASE STUDY: BBC MEDIA ACTION COX'S BAZAR RESPONSE

In Bangladesh BBC Media Action worked with humanitarian and government actors to support communication on cyclone preparedness to enable communities to take action before cyclones hit.

Having supported community engagement and accountability for the Rohingya refugee response since 2017, BBC Media Action was uniquely placed to support the Bangladesh national preparedness plan and provide specific support for the refugee population. For both outputs, BBC Media Action supported the development of coordinated informative messages to share with communities at specific times before a cyclone hit. As a result, the humanitarian and early warning sectors had agreed clear, consistent and coordinated information.

The Multi-sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) in 2020 found that about 90% of the adult (15+ years) refugee population received the cyclone preparedness information from the coordinated effort before the cyclone season.

BBC Media Action also developed engaging and informative media content to complement these messages and build the capacity of local radio stations and the humanitarian networks of front-line volunteers to disseminate all content. Preparing the humanitarian and media sector to provide the most informative and useful content for their audiences meant that efforts could be relevant, timely and minimise confusion at a difficult time.



2. LISTEN TO MEDIA AUDIENCES TO INFORM AND ADJUST ANTICIPATORY ACTION

The media and communication ecosystem can reflect how people experience the onset of a crisis – their concerns, feeling and beliefs. In turn, this can inform humanitarian actors about the priority challenges that people are facing, how receptive they are to crisis forecasts, and their overall understanding of any early warnings, enabling them to tailor and improve their response.

Specific data and insights about people's experience, gathered through the media, can inform anticipatory action. For example, local media organisations will have data on existing audience reach and engagement that inform who and how to target early warning messages. These insights can provide information about the type of media content target audiences will most likely engage with, and whether existing early warning and risk communication activities are reaching and engaging audiences. The level of these insights will depend on the resources media organisations have to allocate towards this work, which is something that humanitarian actors can influence as outlined above.

The high levels of uncertainty in the lead up to, and during, a crisis often enable misinformation and disinformation to flourish. This can have a disproportionate impact on communities who have lower access to media or have lower levels of media literacy. People affected by a crisis may become desperate or overwhelmed by information, which may cause them to miss or distrust early warning messages. This may lead to them making poor or ill-informed decisions that reduce their ability to access support or take preventative action, potentially exacerbating the impact of an emergency.⁸

⁸ BBC Media Action (2021) [Tackling Information Disorder](#)

Paying attention to discussions taking place in the media, on digital platforms and in communities can be extremely informative for anticipatory action actors. Understanding people's vulnerabilities to misinformation and disinformation (accidentally and deliberately misleading information, respectively) can provide useful insights into the types of early warnings that they will trust, engage with and act upon. This understanding can also help to anticipate and prevent the negative coping mechanisms people might adopt by acknowledging and helping them to overcome some of the challenges they may face.

Beyond this, media outlets often have information that can inform a broader understanding of a local context, which can be particularly helpful in conflict affected settings. For example, increasing attacks on media practitioners, or the forced closure of media institutions, may indicate impending repression by state actors, a common precursor to armed conflict.



Media organisations can also provide non-media related information that may be challenging for humanitarian aid agencies to obtain, such as the closure of health services or markets, or insights and predictions from grassroots organisations.

Social media monitoring by media outlets or other actors can indicate a rise in hate speech broadcast on local media, indicating growing tensions that may precede conflict. These insights can be considered in broader monitoring and anticipatory action plans.





3. COMMUNICATE IN RELEVANT AND INCLUSIVE WAYS

Communication with communities should influence anticipatory action planning, early warning and other action before crises. Communication with affected communities can continue to evolve and support them as a crisis emerges. Overall, communication can build people's readiness to respond, alert people and enable actions, and initiate and sustain dialogue across society to support effective actions and change.

However, effectively communicating with communities is not simply about providing information – it requires:

- › Understanding people
- › Reaching them through their preferred channels
- › Providing information that is relevant to them in their language

BBC Media Action's humanitarian response research and programming have found that audiences expect humanitarian media to be engaging, give people a voice, hold power-holders to account, be easy to access, have localised information and be trustworthy.⁹ This all applies in anticipatory action, emphasising the importance of working with trusted local media practitioners and other local experts.

⁹ BBC Media Action (n.d.) [What People in Emergencies Expect from Media](#)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEETING THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES MOST EXCLUDED

As outlined in section 3, understanding different audiences' needs is vital to ensuring that the people who most need it get the information they need. Communication can take many forms but a key principle for reaching people is to go where they are. This is particularly important for audiences who are excluded from media because of poverty, social norms, digital exclusion, literacy levels or are based in remote locations. This is also vital for people who face particular barriers to social inclusion, such as people with disabilities.

Possible communication methods outside of traditional media could include:

- › Playing audiovisual content in well used community spaces (such as schools, religious buildings, community centres and markets).
- › Working with particularly trusted community connectors, such as traditional leaders, local elders or extension workers to pass on key information to the wider community.
- › Conducting listening groups to access content in contexts with few radios/ audio players. These motivate dialogue among audience members, providing opportunities to reinforce informed dialogue, leading to action.

In delivering this, practitioners must collaborate with individuals or organisations that understand, are trusted by and can reach the target community.

Key principles of effective communication with people in crisis include:

- › **Clear and consistent:** keep information simple and deliver the same message across different pieces of content
- › **Sensitive:** demonstrate empathy and solidarity with people affected by the current crisis
- › **Engaging:** ensure information is high quality and captures community members' attention
- › **Targeted:** use resources to ensure the right information reaches the right communities
- › **Relevant and actionable:** provide useful information in line with people's circumstances and suggest potential actions that are possible
- › **Timely:** deliver information with enough notice for action
- › **Multi-way:** drive discussion between agencies and community member, and also among community members themselves.
- › **Accessible:** share information in the right language, through target audiences' preferred platforms, repeating key information without using jargon
- › **Local:** aim to deliver information that is as localised as possible
- › **Multi-platform:** deliver content across multiple platforms to achieve maximum audience reach and engagement

A. BUILD PEOPLE'S READINESS TO RESPOND

As noted above, effective media and communication before crises can drive informed discussions and decision making among affected communities, by increasing their awareness of risks and prompting them to take timely actions. In contrast, failing to communicate effectively before or during crises can “fuel rumour, erode trust, hamper solutions and increase risk”.¹⁰ Facing uncertainty (including approaching hazards) with limited information can also fuel misinformation and disinformation.

During the early warning and ongoing phases of a crisis, media and communication can **increase people's understanding about what is about to happen, the potential impact on their lives, and actions they can take** that may ease this. Media and communication can also reach diverse audiences and the most at-risk groups.



Seeing and hearing local stories from people like them taking anticipatory action makes those steps feel more possible for others, whether that is destocking cattle in the weeks before a predicted drought, stacking sandbags the day before a flood, accessing any additional assistance available¹¹ sooner rather than later, or understanding what support is available and where. For example, showcasing respected community figures discussing possible actions and assistance to help people prepare for crises, or providing information through trusted media, helps people to navigate proliferating information during an anxious time.

Furthermore, **connecting target audiences with other people facing similar choices**, perhaps by sending WhatsApp voice-notes to a radio station, attending a community meeting featuring audiovisual content or participating in an online chat forum, can help people to feel less alone, discuss their situation and take action. These efforts can also connect community members from different backgrounds, providing a platform to develop joint solutions among different demographics, giving under-represented community members a greater voice and ultimately **highlighting any community efforts people can participate in**.

Investing in **using communication to build relationships with a community before a crisis can improve the efficiency of anticipatory action and aid delivery**. If communities have already developed trusted relationships with aid agencies and others delivering assistance, they will be more likely to trust their advice and seek support from them.

¹⁰ UNDRR (2022) [Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction](#)

¹¹ Advance assistance to people is not currently very common.

All of this communication **should involve two-way – and ideally multi-way – discussions** between humanitarian actors and affected and at-risk populations. This comprises multiple discussion layers and levels, between community members, between communities and aid providers, between audiences and the media, and between aid providers and the media.

Using media and communication to prompt discussions between community members – whether through playing audio content at an event or leading a public discussion show – encourages knowledge sharing, joint action and ongoing connectedness within crisis-affected communities, which are all essential requirements for disaster recovery and resilience. Working through the media also means that communication relating to anticipatory action can reach beyond the target group, encouraging discussions in wider society.

Through discussions with affected communities – whether face-to-face or in WhatsApp groups – aid providers can quickly gain insights into whether early warnings have been effective in spurring people to take anticipatory action, and what additional or improved communication is needed by whom, where, when and how – to strengthen future initiatives.



“ If you work in a fast changing crisis, the key is not to simplify right down to a simple message, but to be more available for an ongoing conversation... Answer people's questions... We need to increase availability and have an ongoing conversation.”

Humanitarian practitioner during BBC Media Action key informant interviewⁱ

The humanitarian communication sector often focuses on having early warning messages. But to build trust, understanding and enable action, communication must go beyond a ‘message’. Increasing understanding through providing information and facilitating discussion means that people understand their options and can take more informed decisions when critical messages arrive. While consistent messages are important, this does not replace supporting ongoing discussion with, and among, crisis-affected communities.

ⁱ BBC Media Action, [Preparing to communicate in an emergency](#)



CASE STUDY: BBC MEDIA ACTION ANTICIPATORY ACTION PROGRAMMING FOR EL NIÑO IN SOMALIA

In 2024 Somalia was one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of El Niño. These floods endangered lives and livelihoods, especially in low-lying areas and displacement camps. To tackle this, BBC Media Action, in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, worked with local radio stations to launch a series of programmes containing life-saving information before and during the floods. The project enhanced the capacity of partner local radio stations to produce and broadcast accurate and relevant information to affected communities.

These radio programmes aimed to empower communities to deal with the floods and their aftermath, by increasing listeners' knowledge of their causes and consequences, and the best ways to mitigate associated risks. Programme content was designed to inspire and motivate listeners to take action to protect their families and communities, and to encourage listeners to support each other during crises.

“ The programme taught me... many new things, including... forecasting information, [and] to avoid water catchments that may affect electricity wires. Also, I learned health knowledge and I advised my friends and neighbours about health issues.”

| Female, 20-45, Mogadishu, Badqab listener

Research indicated that, overall, these programmes had a positive impact on listeners' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, as well as on the capacity of the local radio stations. Qualitative research showed that listeners had improved their knowledge on topics such as water and food security, hygiene and sanitation, preventing waterborne diseases, economic coping mechanisms and climate change.

The research highlighted that listeners had acted to protect themselves and their communities from the floods. Listeners also stated that the programmes had strengthened their sense of community solidarity, and that they had supported each other during times of crisis.

However, quickly delivering anticipatory action programming was challenging. Different regions faced very different situations – some were already affected by floods and others had time to take pre-emptive action. Pre-existing relationships and involvement with radio stations before the floods happened meant that information could be disseminated quickly, mitigating their potential negative impact.

Local radio stations reported having significantly enhanced their content through BBC Media Action support, ensuring that accurate and effective information reached wider audiences. They also reported having established better relationships with local authorities and humanitarian actors, which supported their content development.

“ The training was very effective... we apply the knowledge and skills. We learned how to produce beneficial programmes and provide sufficient awareness to the community to avoid effects of El Niño floods.”

| Female producer, Radio Hiiranweyn

“ We have got knowledge and skills [so] we can avoid biased news and incomplete information, which can be misleading [for] audiences... We attempt to share accurate and complete information to the community.”

| Male producer, Radio Warsan



B. ALERT PEOPLE AND ENABLE ACTIONS

Facilitate the co-production of forecasts and early warnings

Weather forecasts and early warnings co-produced by climate scientists, local media, humanitarian actors and communities are vital for providing accurate, contextually relevant and trusted information.¹²

The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledges the important role that communication specialists and social scientists can play in helping people to understand climate impacts and make appropriate decisions in response.¹³ Media organisations can simplify technical jargon in forecasts and early warnings to make information accessible. Relationships between media practitioners, technical specialists and local actors can also ensure that warnings and recommended actions are relevant to, and appropriate for, the target audience.



“ This time round the rains did not affect us as negatively as previous seasons, and this is because we got information from the programme in time. **”**

SMS feedback from listener to a BBC Media Action-supported programme in East Africa, BBC Media Action study

Media and communication can support the co-production of forecasts with communities. While there is growing recognition of the need for participatory, people-centred or “bottom-up” early warning systems as enshrined in Pillar 3 of Early Warnings for All initiative, few studies have considered how to deliver this.¹⁴ However, local media and communication interventions can support collaboration, and potentially more substantive co-creation, between communities, observers and decision makers on early warnings and risk communication. This could result in localising forecasts, ensuring that Indigenous and local knowledge is included in forecast information, and feeding back audience reactions and requirements to forecasters and communicators.

The International Network for Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems (IN-MHEWS) updated and refined the four elements of early warning systems through the lens of the Sendai Framework. These elements also constitute the four components of the Early Warnings

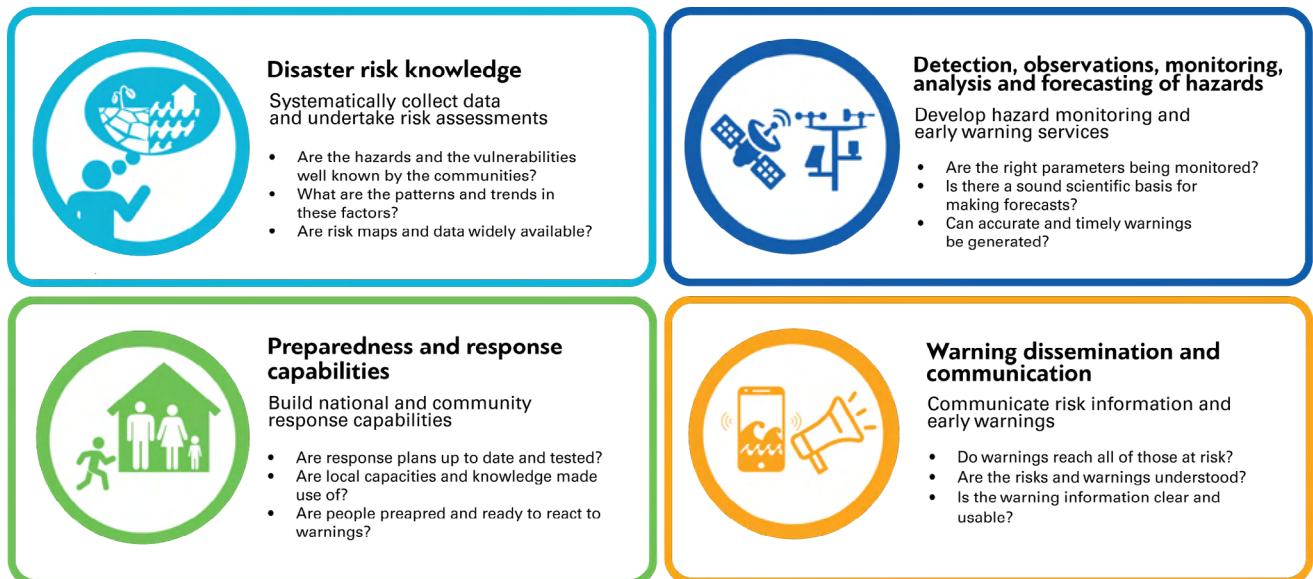
¹² Met Office (2020) [Building blocks for co-producing climate services](#)

¹³ [Sixth assessment report IPCC](#)

¹⁴ [Marchezini, V et al. \(2018\) / A Review of Studies on Participatory Early Warning Systems \(P-EWS\): Pathways to Support Citizen Science Initiatives’](#) [Frontiers in Earth Science](#)

for All action plan, outlined in figure 1. Media and communication can play a role in each layer, underlining the vital need for actors to co-ordinate and collaborate with media practitioners to deliver successful early warnings.

Figure 1: The four components of an early warning systems



| Source: World Meteorological Organisation 2023¹⁵

In an effort to improve forecasting tools and develop technical guidance and training resources for its members, Start Network reviewed existing forecast-based financing tools and platforms used to inform anticipatory action. Start Network¹⁶ found that despite improvements, forecasting skills gaps remain “in the accessibility, reliability, timeliness and appropriateness” of national hazard forecasting information to inform local-level early action, and noted the ongoing challenge of making risk information accessible to audiences. Two of the review’s recommendations included areas that media and communication, particularly local media, can play in localising national forecasts and early action processes.

Wagner and Jamie (2020)¹⁷ noted that humanitarian agencies are increasingly investigating forecast-based action for conflict emergencies, but there has been little discussion about the role media and communication could play in this. By using different channels, tools and methods, media and communication can reach communities across conflict boundary lines so critical warnings can reach everyone who may need them. This could also reduce the harm of misinformation and disinformation that can grow in insecure environments. Media and communication can quickly pivot in response to (or anticipation of)

¹⁵ Early Warnings For all (2023) [Executive Action Plan 2023-2027](#)

¹⁶ Start Network (2019) [Forecast Based Financing Tools Review: Final Report](#)

¹⁷ Anticipation Hub (2020) [An Agenda for Expanding Forecast-based Action to Situations of Conflict](#)

CASE STUDY: BBC MEDIA ACTION'S WEATHER WISE PROJECT IN KENYA, TANZANIA AND UGANDA

BBC Media Action's Weather Wise project strengthened the capacity of both media professionals and technical experts so they could jointly meet the climate and weather information needs of farmers, pastoralists and fishers in Eastern Africa.

Through on-the-job mentoring during production, BBC Media Action strengthened the capacity and understanding of local media organisations to produce accurate, timely, relevant and practical weather and climate-focused radio content in local languages across a range of formats. The project brought scientists and journalists together to collaborate more effectively, providing them with training on communicating weather and climate information in a way that audiences could understand.

All partner radio stations committed to broadcasting weather and climate content after the end of the project, as they recognised its relevance to their audiences. Scientists reported being better able to communicate weather and climate information to their audiences and working more closely with media outlets to share information with community members.

Critically, target audiences reported knowing more about weather and climate issues as a result of listening to the radio programmes, and applied information featured in the programmes to make decisions that preserved their livelihoods. New practices they had learned include planting drought-resistant crops, planting trees to avoid soil erosion and harvesting rainwater.

rapidly changing contexts, which is particularly advantageous in conflict-affected contexts, where overall trust in institutions may have diminished, and a breakdown in social cohesion can challenge community-based anticipatory action.

Improve access to available assistance and services

The Cash Learning Partnership outlines the importance of communication in providing critical project information to cash transfer beneficiaries and their communities, and addressing fears and answering questions from stakeholders and the general public. However, the 2023 State of the World's Cash Report highlighted communication, participation and feedback as key challenges in cash transfer programming.¹⁸ The role of communication before an emergency in conveying how any aid will be distributed is vital in supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of that aid, and ensuring that "do no harm" and "leave no one behind" principles are applied. Greater discussion and examples of connecting social protection programmes with anticipatory action means this may be a growing area.¹⁹

Media and communication can enable communities to understand what new assistance is available, for whom and why. Media also has a wider reach than the direct recipients of aid, so can improve understanding and manage expectations among the general public, helping to reduce tensions and challenges related to assistance. It can also serve to inform people of which services are continuing to operate during a crisis – for example what essential health services are available and where.

Media and communication can improve people's understanding of how they can access the

¹⁸ CALP Network (2023) [The State of the World's Cash 2023](#)

¹⁹ For example see Anticipation Hub (2024) [Linking Nepal's social protection programmes with anticipatory action](#)

support available. A strong communication strategy, involving locally trusted media outlets, can ensure that eligible and at-risk groups understand whether they will be able to access support. Media can also serve as a strong feedback loop to the aid sector, helping to inform next steps and strengthen accountability to affected populations.

Effective and well-targeted media content can also **inspire household and community discussions about how aid could reduce people's vulnerability to crises.** This can include media content that provides (positive and negative) examples of how people spend their money, or a drama about family decision-making to increase people's awareness of decisions made by people like them.



CASE STUDY: START NETWORK'S TYPHOON RESPONSE IN THE PHILIPPINES

A consortium in the Philippines led by Humanity & Inclusion, and including Tearfund, Philards, Relief International, St. Paul University Philippines Community Development Center, and Green Meadows Development Foundation Inc., delivered multiple activities to prepare communities for Typhoon Dokuri, and to support early response. These included enhancing people's knowledge and understanding of the services and resources available to them.

Key actions included:

- Producing a brief to explain what multi-purpose cash transfers are and how they can support anticipatory action
- Reminding community members that the cash could be for multiple purposes, and that women should be equally involved in financial decision-making
- Translating materials into local languages to ensure that target audiences, including children, understood them
- Using images to convey key information quickly and clearly, even to people with low literacy



IN FOCUS: ANTICIPATORY ACTION AND HEALTH

While expanding the discussion of anticipatory action related to public health emergencies is beyond the scope of this policy note, it can contribute to a growing discussion, particularly around preparedness as part of the One Health concept (for people, animals, and the environment), and prevention, preparedness and response to public health emergencies.

There is a broad spectrum of activity that supports preparedness to respond to public health emergencies.ⁱ Risk communication and community engagement are essential to prevent, and fundamental in responses to, public health emergencies.ⁱⁱ The vital role of media and communication in supporting people to understand and take action has become even clearer since the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africaⁱⁱⁱ and the global COVID-19 pandemic.^{iv}

These events also reinforced the need to act ahead of health-related hazards such as infectious disease outbreaks. Alongside this, scientific modelling and forecasting has improved through technological progress, providing more opportunities to take anticipatory action approaches for health.^v Climate and other factors can compound health threats, exacerbating the risks people face and the impact on

their lives. For example, public health emergencies can be triggered by a different event such as a climate event or conflict.

While there is an evolving discussion and understanding around potential anticipatory action for infectious disease outbreaks^{vi} and other health hazards, the role of media and communication continues to be under-discussed and under-used in this field. As well as the recommendations in this policy note, anticipatory action in relation to health threats should be informed by wider learning from health preparedness initiatives, to develop communication in response to predicted health emergencies.^{vii} A key element of this is likely to involve determining how to support people to understand, trust and use these predictions and to reduce related health risks. As noted above, media and communication can help to translate complex scientific information and forecasts to affected community members.

 Before, I believed that this disease targets only non-Muslims. However, we've heard on the programme that it can affect both a Muslim and a non-Muslim.”

Internally displaced man aged 26–35, Kismayo, Hagaha Nolosha (Life Guidance) listener^{viii}

ⁱ WHO: [Preparedness and Resilience for Emerging Threats \(PRET\)](#) (who.int) and 9789240032729-eng.pdf (who.int). Also, [International health regulations](#) (who.int) and [World Health Organization Emergencies Programme](#) (who.int), [WHO launches new initiative to improve pandemic preparedness, One health](#) (who.int) and [Pandemics– One Health – Europe preparedness for the next – The Lancet Regional Health – Europe](#)

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization (n.d.) [Communicating risk in public health emergencies](#) and [Collective Service](#) (rcce-collective.net)

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, see BBC Media Action (2016) [Using media and communication to respond to public health emergencies: lessons learned from Ebola. Practice briefing](#)

^{iv} For example, see BBC Media Action (2022) [How can media and communication support Somalis throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?](#)

^v Anticipation Hub (n.d.) [Health](#)

^{vi} For example, see World Health Organization (2023) [Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord](#) Online Q&A available at: [Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord](#) (who.int)

^{vii} For example, see World health Organization (n.d.) [Surveillance in emergencies](#)

^{viii} [BBC Media Action \(2022\)](#)

C. CATALYSE DIALOGUE TO SUPPORT CHANGE

Prompt learning exchanges and expertise

Media and communication can help to strengthen the capacity of different stakeholders and community members who may lead community-level anticipatory action planning, early warnings and early action.

Media can provide people with **access to information and advice from technical experts, even in remote areas**. For example, audiovisual content can be shared by community-based extension workers or hubs to increase grassroots understanding of a warning and recommended actions, or to facilitate consistent and accurate information sharing. Alternatively, a local radio show could support greater community understanding of specific local risks and recommended actions by asking humanitarian, meteorological or seismological experts relevant questions from community members about these topics.

Media and communication can also **facilitate the exchange of learning, practices and Indigenous knowledge** between local communities and anticipatory action planning experts around when people should take early action, such as through social media groups or radio call-ins. Media content can help to get people thinking and talking about things they may not feel comfortable or confident about, to increase their engagement and likelihood to take action.

Overall, media and communication can increase community engagement in anticipatory action in several ways. For example, it can **boost individual and community understanding and skills, deepen discussions and collective efficacy, strengthen local networks and provide evolving support**. It could also facilitate learning between local leaders and decision-makers to understand and discuss their role in supporting communities to take anticipatory action.

CASE STUDY: START NETWORK'S HEATWAVE RESPONSE IN PAKISTAN

In May 2023 Start Network's heatwave model was triggered three times in three different regions of Pakistan, leading to the activation of the Start Ready financing mechanism.

Start Network members took anticipatory action with three projects that included a variety of communication methods to increase awareness of heatstroke and other risks from heatwaves so individuals could better protect themselves.

In Jacobabad, the project led by ACTED used media and communication to reduce risks and harm during extreme heat conditions. This included voice messages and education materials containing key messages, alongside face-to-face awareness-raising sessions with teachers, health workers and the local community. This reflected a deliberate effort to disseminate information through multiple channels, and to enable key community communicators/facilitators to support further dissemination.

“ They created awareness among us for our behavioural changes during the times of heatwave. Like, we should carry umbrella while travelling or we should wake up early in the morning to do chores... so that we can avoid extreme heat during peak hours.”

Sibi informant talking about a similar Start Network Pakistan project, 2022

Amplify the voice of affected populations when designing and delivering anticipatory action

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction recommendations to meet the 2027 Early Warnings for All goal included ensuring “local ownership” and an “all of society” approach where “*local actors must be placed at the heart of EWS [early warning system] design, development, implementation, evaluation, improvement and operation*”.²⁰ Developing a truly whole society approach requires mass engagement and understanding of potential risks and recommended anticipatory action. Clearly, media and communication can reach and engage large and diverse audiences, enabling communities to be part of early warning processes.

Media and communication can amplify the voice of affected people in media content and discussions, driving audience trust and engagement. For example, a discussion show about early or anticipatory action could develop people’s understanding of the issue, and provide opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions about it.

Strong two-way media and communication interventions can enable **affected populations to hold anticipatory action actors to account**, including traditional aid providers and local or national government. It is clear that effective communication, and investment in trust and relationship building, are necessary for people to feel able to hold agencies to account.

Media can amplify and strengthen community **dialogue and dialogue between communities and local or national decision makers**. For example, a debate or drama programme might demonstrate “people like me” talking to decision makers, inspiring others to engage in discussions with local representatives.

Finally, media and communication can **increase the profile and legitimacy of existing local initiatives at a national or global level**, supporting locally led and more inclusive anticipatory action processes, and potentially informing future interventions.

²⁰ UNDRR [Global status of multi-hazard early warning systems 2023](#)

CASE STUDY: GLOBAL NETWORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (GNDR)

In Nuevo Amanecer, a rural village in El Salvador, many of the residents are migrants who have been internally displaced by climate change, socio-political disputes and a lack of economic opportunities.

GNDR brought together members from the Latin America and Caribbean region, including national and local social media organisations, to share lessons, challenges and identify common solutions while working with displaced populations in rural contexts. Social media played a crucial role in bringing the voices of the most at-risk population to local- and national-level discussions about the community support and anticipatory actions needed.

The national social media organisation YUSCA joined a field visit to Nuevo Amanecer, and local media were invited to cover the story and collect testimonials and interviews during the visit. This media coverage and support resulted in a call to action to raise awareness of the drought season projected for October to December 2023. This included recommended anticipatory actions for different local actors, including local authorities, community members and social media channels.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on gathering evidence and insights into anticipatory action, BBC Media Action recommends three key actions the humanitarian sector can take to harness the potential of media and communication. Implementing these should help to provide vital information and communication to equip people to make decisions before a crisis hits, to protect themselves, their loved ones and their community.

1. Strengthen the media and communication ecosystem – through involving local media and including them in designing and preparing anticipatory action plans.
 - a) Include media outlets in anticipatory action planning and allocate specific resources for media and communication in anticipatory action plans. This might include specific training and workshops for media practitioners to help them understand and translate technical forecasts, and asking local media outlets to provide insights into what media content and formats target audiences would most engage with. This also includes working with media and communication organisations to develop their internal anticipatory action plans so that they can continue to deliver lifesaving information even in challenging circumstances immediately before and during crises.

- b) Support collaboration between expert forecasters (weather, seismological and political as appropriate), and humanitarian and communication actors to support relationship building and stronger early warning and humanitarian communication.
- c) Strengthen the capacity of humanitarian actors in understanding how to deliver effective communication for anticipatory action, and key principles of communication with affected communities.
- d) Support research to understand audiences' communication needs so that media and other communicators are better able to deliver relevant information in the right formats and at the right time.
- e) Take anticipatory action that protects communication methods and channels, to enable the delivery of efficient and effective "communication as aid". Consider timeframes for the preparedness of media organisations and infrastructure to 1) communicate to support community anticipatory action and 2) support and resource local media organisations to develop anticipatory action protocols so they can continue to provide a service during an emergency. The impact of these should be measured as separate outcomes to understand their impact at different crisis preparedness and response stages.

2. Listen to local media audiences – and use audience insights to inform and adjust anticipatory action.
 - a) Conduct and plan for research in high risk settings to understand the media ecosystem, key audiences' level of media access and their most trusted information sources. Local media and audience analysis highlight audiences' vulnerability to mis- and disinformation and communities' exposure to wider early warning and disaster risk recovery interventions. It can alert humanitarian actors to impending risks of conflict, enabling timely anticipatory action.
3. Communicate through local media – to build people's readiness to take anticipatory actions and catalyse dialogue to support change.
 - a) Devise communication for anticipatory action goals that go beyond information sharing to: support discussion and encourage connections within communities; build relationships and trust between the humanitarian and communication sectors and communities; facilitate multi-way communication and highlight local community action.
 - b) Ensure that communication to support anticipatory action is in local languages, engaging, clear, and reflects practical, realistic actions.
 - c) Involve local media in co-producing risk forecasts, and work with local media to support the localisation, relevance and accessibility of forecasts by facilitating collaboration with communities and technical experts.
 - d) Develop media and communication about anticipatory action services that are available to communities before and during a humanitarian response. This should include available support, who is entitled to it and examples of how it can be used. This communication should be community wide – not just targeted at direct recipients.
 - e) Consider using communication tools to support local learning exchanges on anticipatory action, so that community members have an understanding of when and how to act, based on technical advice. This may start with local staff or volunteers on the ground.
 - f) Amplify the voices of crisis-affected people and support community discussions about anticipatory action, to hold decision makers to account, share local learning and experiences, and support ongoing initiatives on understanding the likelihood and possible impact of potential risks, to strengthen future anticipatory action efforts.



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