

Guidance on anticipatory climate action and climate adaptation actions

When integrating climate action into your interventions, you will frequently encounter two complementary terms: **anticipatory climate action** and **climate adaptation action**.

Understanding these terms helps you decide how best to adjust your existing programmes:

Climate adaptation

Climate adaptation originally comes from climate science and policy rather than humanitarian terminology. However, it's now widely adopted by humanitarian actors to describe **longer-term strategies and interventions aimed at systematically reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience to climate impacts** (IASC, 2020; IPCC, 2023). Climate adaptation typically refers to ongoing or structural actions—such as developing climate-resilient infrastructure or promoting drought-resistant agriculture—that assist communities in reducing vulnerability and better coping with future climate hazards.

Anticipatory climate action

Anticipatory action is explicitly humanitarian in origin and **focuses specifically on short-term measures triggered by credible forecasts of imminent climate hazards**. Its aim is to quickly address immediate humanitarian needs and minimize the direct impact of predicted events (IASC, 2020). These actions are **short-term, temporary relief measures**—like distributing emergency cash or hygiene kits shortly before an expected flood—to immediately reduce harm.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO ACTIONS?

Climate adaptation actions

Long-term: Months or years ahead, ongoing, continuous.

Purpose: Structural, ongoing vulnerability reduction and resilience building.

Example: Building flood-resistant sanitation facilities or continuously improving community water systems based on longer-term projections of increased flood frequency.

Anticipatory climate actions

Short-term: Days or weeks before a specific forecasted hazard.

Purpose: Immediate relief to reduce direct, immediate harm.

Example: Distributing emergency hygiene kits or providing rapid cash transfers days before a forecasted flood.

HOW ANTICIPATORY ACTIONS AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION ACTIONS LINK TOGETHER IN HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME:

Anticipatory climate actions and climate adaptation actions can overlap and complement each other in practice, because both involve proactively responding to climate hazards before impacts fully occur:

- Both types of actions aim to reduce negative impacts from climate hazards.
- Both require understanding of climate hazards and risks in advance.
- Some climate adaptation actions (like improving infrastructure or establishing early warning systems) directly support the effectiveness of anticipatory actions by making rapid response easier or quicker.

Where terms are commonly confused or interpreted differently across sectors, a short clarification and tip for coordinators is provided.

Examples

Nutrition: A nutrition programme routinely integrates information about heat stress and hydration for breastfeeding mothers in regular maternal health sessions (climate adaptation action). When a severe heatwave is forecast, the programme immediately scales up targeted messaging and rapidly coordinates with WASH actors to ensure emergency water supplies (anticipatory action).

WASH: A WASH programme regularly maintains climate resilient water infrastructure (climate adaptation action). When a severe drought is forecast it immediately distributes additional water storage containers and emergency hygiene kits to ensure water availability and prevent hygiene-related illnesses (anticipatory action).

FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

Distinguishing anticipatory and adaptation actions is critical for securing funding, particularly from climate-focused donors who prioritize long-term resilience.

Why it matters:

- Climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Adaptation Fund, prioritize adaptation actions for their structural impact on vulnerability reduction and resilience, aligning with global frameworks like the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. For example, the GCF reported in 2024 that over 60% of its portfolio supports adaptation projects, compared to less than 10% for rapid-response mechanisms like anticipatory action.
- Anticipatory actions, while effective for immediate harm reduction, are often funded through smaller humanitarian or disaster risk reduction (DRR) budgets (e.g., UN Central Emergency Response Fund or IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund). Framing anticipatory actions within a broader adaptation strategy makes them eligible for larger climate finance pools, increasing funding opportunities.
- Humanitarian donors like the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) may directly fund anticipatory actions through DRR budgets, but climate funds require a stronger adaptation focus, making strategic framing essential.

Funding proposal tips:

- For anticipatory actions (e.g., pre-flood cash assistance), highlight how they enhance preparedness and contribute to long-term adaptation goals (e.g., community resilience). For example, a project distributing emergency kits (anticipatory) can be positioned as supporting adaptation by strengthening community preparedness for future floods.

- Label short-term, forecast-driven activities as **anticipatory climate actions** and long-term, structural measures as **climate adaptation actions** to ensure clarity for donors.
- Acknowledge funding challenges: Climate finance often has strict eligibility criteria (e.g., proving long-term impact). Partner with local governments, meteorological agencies, or climate experts to strengthen proposals and demonstrate alignment with national adaptation priorities.
- Further guidance:
 - [IFRC's Climate-Smart Programming Guide \(2023\)](#): Offers steps for integrating anticipatory and adaptation actions into humanitarian programs, with templates for funding proposals. Available at: [IFRC Climate-Smart Guide](#).