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What should be kept in mind when integrating anticipatory action and social protection?

There are several opportunities when linking the two approaches, but also a few challenges and considerations to be aware of. Some of these include:

Accuracy of forecasts and reputational risks

The success of anticipatory action relies heavily on accurate and timely weather or disaster predictions. Uncertainties in forecasting can lead to false alarms that trigger unnecessary interventions or missed events that prevent timely action. Since social protection systems are often nationally owned and implemented by government actors, it is important to design and incorporate anticipatory action in a way that carefully considers the credibility and reputation concerns.

Data Limitations

Reliable data is crucial for effective integration, but many vulnerable regions lack adequate/updated data on climate risks, social vulnerabilities, institutional capacities, and the specific needs of communities. Insufficient data can hinder the provision of accurate forecasts and effective social protection measures. To address this, National Societies may need to map and coordinate with multiple stakeholders and identify who holds what data that could support an integrated intervention. Social protection ministries are a particularly important data source, as they typically maintain beneficiary registries containing household-level information that can directly support geographic and demographic targeting of anticipatory transfers. Once relevant datasets and the responsible institutions have been identified, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) should be established with the data-holding ministry, setting out the terms for data collection, storage, use, and disposal in the context of the anticipatory action intervention. An example template has been developed to support National Societies in this process and can be used as guidance (see toolbox).

Targeting Strategy

While social protection programs often target the most vulnerable, in some cases, those most affected by a particular climate hazard might not be those that are traditionally considered vulnerable under a social protection approach and are enrolled in existing programs' registries. Understanding climate-related vulnerability to individual or multiple hazards is key to aligning targeted populations for a joint anticipatory action-social protection approach. To support this, National Societies could play a crucial role in expanding social registries or developing beneficiary lists to complement existing social protection databases and include indicators on climate vulnerability. For guidance on targeting strategies see (see toolbox).

Choice of Early Actions

Understanding specific climate-related vulnerabilities and the historical impacts of disasters is essential for prioritising actions within a joint anticipatory action-social protection system. For instance, the type of support originally provided through a social protection mechanism (public works, cash or in-kind) might not help households to address, cope with or prepare for the impacts from a specific shock that the anticipatory action program is intended for. An understanding of potential shock impacts on targeted populations and the type of support needed is key. Also, anticipatory action is not likely to eliminate completely the need for ex-post response – though it could significantly reduce it – and appropriate response actions will still be needed.

Coordination and collaboration

Integrating anticipatory action with social protection requires collaboration between various stakeholders, including meteorological agencies, government bodies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities. Achieving effective coordination among these diverse entities can be challenging due to differing priorities, mandates, and operational structures. A practical starting point in this regard has been the establishment of cash working groups (e.g. the KRCS is part of the Kenya Cash Working Group) and anticipatory action technical working groups and the inviting of social protection actors to engage in such platforms.

Policy and institutional barriers

Differences in policies, regulations, and institutional frameworks across the social protection and disaster management sectors (primary sector leading national anticipatory action efforts) and levels of government can impede integration efforts. Establishing a coherent legal and regulatory environment that supports the integration of anticipatory action and social protection is essential. Sometimes, this could be addressed if National Societies engage with contingency plans or disaster management plans of the government, promote anticipatory action and social protection approaches and help establish this as a priority for relevant sectors and officials in national governments.

Capacity Building

Many regions, particularly in low-income countries, may lack the capacity to implement and sustain integrated systems. This includes technical capacity for forecasting, institutional capacity for social protection, and community capacity for preparedness and response. National Societies could start by improving their own capacity in terms of understanding social protection and implementing anticipatory action and identifying opportunities in linking the two and then engage in activities with relevant actors as well as communities to share lessons learned and find ways to build on this vision.

Financing requirements

Financing of an anticipatory action system requires overcoming significant challenges in the way funding is structured. Integrating the two may pose challenges in terms of securing adequate funding, aligning budgetary cycles, and ensuring sustained support for both proactive and reactive measures. However, channelling financing through an existing social protection system might be cost-efficient, and contingency funds or budget reserves from programme funds could be used. Additionally, sustainable sources of financing would be required for longer term, sustained action at scale, and National Societies could potentially seek to engage with climate financing and global climate funds that can provide funding to social protection programs for taking anticipatory action.