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11. Prepare for activation: build capacity and test your plan

Summary

Aligning with existing systems and developing required capacities and procedures for anticipatory action is a continuous task throughout the planning and the development of your anticipatory action plan, and specifically the s/EAP. However, once you have finalized your anticipatory action plan, you will know exactly what your National Society and its partners need to be ready to activate. Of course, this will depend heavily on the needs, resources, time and circumstances under which the plan is developed. For example, you might have less resources when developing a plan with a community as compared to a full-fledged anticipatory action project with a partner which aims to develop an s/EAP. This chapter guides you through the process of assessing existing capacities and procedures, identifying gaps, and planning accordingly. This involves reviewing existing documents, consulting relevant departments, and finalizing the organizational structure of the anticipatory action plan, but with a focus on s/EAPs. Another crucial element to prepare for an activation is training and developing guidance materials to ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. Finally, disseminating the anticipatory action plan and conducting simulations help test the plan and identify areas for improvement.

Step 1: Map capacities, resources and procedures needed for the implementation of the plan

With your draft anticipatory action plan almost done, you need to make sure that what has been put on paper can also be put into practice. To do so, it is important to first identify the capacities, resources and procedures that need to be in place. Begin by reviewing the (s/EAP) document and noting which capacities are needed, both in terms of skills and quantity. To understand how much time, how many people, and which skills you need to implement each early action, consult the disaster management department of the National Society (or the branch or someone in the community) and / or the person(s) in charge of the National Disaster Response Team (NDRT). If the National Society has experience carrying out these activities, they will know these details (e.g. how long time does it take to set up an emergency shelter and how many people are required to be part of it?). With this information, you can calculate how many people you will need on your intervention team and which skills they should have to be able to implement your early actions and reach the targeted number of households within the lead time. You can later test and verify this as part of a simulation exercise (see [step 6](#) below).

If some of the activities are being carried out either partially or fully by partners, it is important to also note it for them. You also need to map which procedures are needed to ensure an efficient implementation of the anticipatory action plan (please see [chapter 8](#)).

While reviewing the s/EAP document or anticipatory action plan, note where potential bottlenecks could occur. If you have done a scoping study before starting your work on anticipatory action, you may have already identified some bottlenecks (e.g. with regards to logistics or financial procedures).

Once you are done with this step, you should have a list of capacities and procedures needed as well as a list of potential bottlenecks.

Step 2: Review existing assessments on capacities and procedures to identify gaps

Now that you know what you need to effectively implement the plan or s/EAP, it is time to look at what you have. Start by looking through existing anticipatory action scoping studies, PER assessments, or other assessments of the National Society's capacities, as well as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and contingency plans. For s/EAPs, it is important to assess the capacities at both national and branch level, as the s/EAP will be implemented at both levels.

Here you can also consult with the National Society's disaster management department or the NDRT to assess their capacity. Remember that the existing response capacities, including the NDRT, might need to be ready to respond to the hazard that your s/EAP is addressing, and it might therefore be necessary to ensure additional capacity so that the National Society can take anticipatory action while not limiting its ability to respond. In many cases, some kind of response will still be needed even though anticipatory action is taken.

As in step 1, if the anticipatory action plan is being implemented in collaboration with partners, make sure that their capacities are also assessed.

When reviewing the SOPs, pay special attention to whether the SOPs are designed in a way that facilitates acting in anticipation of disasters.

- Do the financial procedures allow for quick disbursement, e.g. to branches to initiate early actions?
- Do the logistical procedures allow for efficient disbursement of household items or cash?

To ensure that you get the full overview, set up consultations with heads of relevant departments to get their perspective. You can

do this by taking them through a scenario of how you envision the s/EAP or anticipatory action plan activation will be rolled out and at what speed and asking them to highlight where there may be challenges.

By comparing the reviewed existing capacities and procedures with the needed capacities and procedures, you should now have a clear overview of where potential gaps might be.

Step 3: Finalize the organizational structure for the implementation

[Chapter 8](#) outlines how to design your activation process. Now, it is time to finalize the organizational structure so that organizational capacity for the implementation of your anticipatory action plan is achieved and maintained before (including the readiness activities) and during an activation. Note that the guidance below focusses on s/EAPs but have valid considerations for other plans, e.g. community-based plans or imminent DREF as well.

Some of the questions you should be asking yourself are:

- **Who is involved at national / HQ level?**

Which persons and departments, as well as partners need to be involved in the activities related to the s/EAP at national level – both during and outside the activation period. For the external partners, it is a good idea to ask them to appoint an anticipatory action focal point and a backup, at their level, so that it is always the same people that attend. Otherwise, you might need to explain anticipatory action and the s/EAP every time you start a meeting or activity.

- **What is the structure at regional / branch level?**

You need to design a structure for the implementation of the anticipatory action plan or s/EAP at regional/branch level. Where is anticipatory action and the s/EAP anchored in the branch? You can for instance, consider appointing an anticipatory action focal point at branch level, who will be the contact in the branch outside the activation period. They will then serve as the entry point to coordinate trainings, maintain contact lists, communicate anticipatory action in the branch, etc.

You will also need to design the setup of the branch during an activation. Who will be in contact with the HQ / national level? Who will be in contact with the intervention team? Which partners need to be involved?

- **What is the composition of the (s/EAP) intervention team and how are they organized?**

The best composition of the intervention team depends very much on the context, as well as the early actions to be implemented, as some activities might be sensitive. In general, the intervention team should reflect the diversity of the community they serve. There needs to be gender diversity within the team, and potentially different languages of the communities must also be spoken in the team. In addition to that, there might be considerations on ethnicity, age, and other context-specific factors, which need to be considered. Reach out to your PGI advisor to get more support on this for your specific context.

You also need to determine the size of the team and how they will implement the early actions. For instance, you can divide them into sub-teams, which have different areas of responsibility. This will also affect who and how many you need to train in specific technical skills (see step 4).

- **At what levels are external actors involved? And how?**

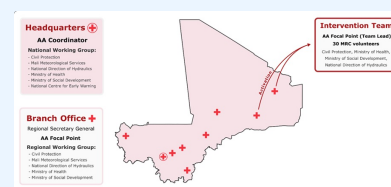
If external actors are involved in the s/EAP implementation, you need to identify at which level (national, regional / provincial / district, community) they need to be involved. You also need to make sure that their role is clearly defined and understood by them. This can be anything from coordination at national level to implementing specific early actions in the targeted communities.

- **Revise SOPs (if needed) to accommodate early actions (see step 2) or identify alternatives.**

If you identified any procedures that potentially could become a bottleneck or otherwise be a challenge for the implementation of the s/EAP in step 2, you need to explore whether it will be possible to revise this procedure in a way so that it can accommodate the smooth implementation of the (s)EAP. This could either be done by doing a total revision of the procedure or by adding exceptions, where the normal procedures can be disregarded in order to, for instance, facilitate a quick transfer of funds to branch level. If it is not possible to revise the existing procedures, you need to identify alternative ways of dealing with the potential challenges. Would it, for instance, be possible to agree with service providers that they are paid for their services after the early actions have been implemented, so that the implementation is not delayed due to the transfer of funds being slow?



Mali Red Cross (MRC) has developed a multi-level coordination structure to be used both before and during an activation of their riverine flood Early Action Protocol. The overall engagement by MRC on anticipatory action is being managed by the MRC AA National Coordinator, who is thereby also responsible for the implementation of the EAP. Outside of specific activation windows, MRC is hosting a National Working Group at HQ, consisting of relevant technical services of the state and MRC itself. This group meets every two months to discuss and exchange on various topics or challenges related to the EAP.



Source: Mali RC

On regional level, all MRC branches have a designated AA focal point, which is a volunteer that has received specific training on anticipatory action and the EAP. The AA focal point is responsible for keeping the branch updated and ready, as well as being in regular contact with the National Society's AA coordinator at HQ level for training coordination, workshops and general updates, which also includes the monitoring data of the trigger level. Each MRC branch also hosts a Regional Working Group, which consists of the same technical services of the State as the national group, but just at the regional level. These regional working groups meet once a year, just before the onset of the rainy season to prepare and refresh their knowledge on the EAP.

All MRC branch regional secretary generals and their AA focal points also meet annually with the National Working Group and the relevant MRC HQ staff for a refresher training and a tabletop exercise on the EAP activation, as well as being informed of any potential updates or changes of the EAP. Due to Mali's vast territory and the conflict setting in parts of the country, MRC has decided to divide the prepositioned stock between five strategically chosen locations to ensure easy access and an efficient and rapid intervention.

During activation

During an activation of the EAP, the National Working Group together with MRC's heads of departments will act as the overall coordinating body of the early action intervention at national level. At the regional branch level of the area where the EAP is activated, the regional working group and the MRC branch management will similarly coordinate the intervention in their area and be responsible for deploying the intervention team. The intervention team is led by the MRC branch AA focal point and consists of 30 trained MRC volunteers, and agents from the various relevant technical services, notably the Civil Protection who plays a key role in implementing the early actions.

Step 4: Conduct trainings and develop guidance material

Especially when developing an s/EAP, where you have a bit more time, you have probably already conducted some trainings and introduced the wider organization to anticipatory action (see [chapters 1 and 2](#)). Now that you have a draft s/EAP, anticipatory action has become more concrete and tangible. It may also have been some time since other staff has been involved in anticipatory action work. It is therefore a good idea to conduct another round of training for the heads of departments at the national level of the National Society, for the relevant branches, and for other staff and volunteers who have a role to play. In addition to a general training on anticipatory action, this training should also focus on the specific content of the s/EAP in question (see Step 5 below), as well as the Anticipatory Pillar of IFRC's DREF modality (see [chapter 4](#)).

In addition to this, you must ensure that the staff and volunteers who have specific tasks in the s/EAP have the skills required to carry out these actions (e.g. how to set up an emergency shelter or organize a cash distribution). From your earlier assessment of the capacity needs and current capacities (steps 1 and 2 above), you should have an overview of the skills needed. Based on this, you can design your training for relevant staff and volunteers to ensure that they have adequate skills.

Besides skills specific to your early actions, you should ensure that staff and volunteers receive training or are sensitized on Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) aspects so that they can identify particular groups' specific needs, including marginalized groups, and know how to deal respectfully with people from different backgrounds. Also consider trainings on Psychological First Aid, First Aid, and Community Engagement and Accountability. Consult the NDRT to understand which general trainings staff and volunteers receive, as the content might be relevant for the anticipatory action intervention team as well.

As a full EAP is valid for 5 years (a sEAP is valid for 2 years), this training should not be a one-time event. There will be staff and volunteer turnover during the 5 years, and skills fade if they are not applied or refreshed regularly. It will therefore be important to plan new trainings and refresher trainings as part of your readiness activities throughout the a/EAP period (see [chapter 10](#) on readiness activities).

Step 5: Disseminate the anticipatory action plan

It is important that the content of the s/EAP is widely known across the organization. The activation window is intense, and for sudden-onset hazards rather short. There will be little time to introduce people to anticipatory action and train them once the s/EAP has been activated. Personnel must have a general understanding of how anticipatory action, and specifically the s/EAP, works within the organization, so that the early actions can be implemented efficiently and do not get stuck in organizational bottlenecks.

All staff and volunteers who have a role to play in the s/EAP must know what is expected of them during an activation – including external partners. This can be done through dissemination of the s/EAP document either printed or virtually and through presentations at trainings or workshops. Preferably, it should be a combination of these, as this will increase the exposure to the document. It is important that this does not only happen at the headquarter-level, but also reaches all the relevant branches, so that they are also informed and knowledgeable about the s/EAP and its content.

One way to ensure that the content is easily accessible, especially during an activation, is to develop a “Pocket s/EAP” that summarizes the key elements of the s/EAP and provides an overview of its content (see example from Peru and the Philippines in the [toolbox](#)). The Pocket s/EAP can also be tailored so that different versions address different parts of the organization and highlight their specific focus areas: for instance, one version for the intervention team focusing on the early actions they need to implement in the communities, and another version for the heads of department at headquarters focusing on the decisions they need to make.

A good way to ensure that everybody has understood their role(s) and the content of the s/EAP, while also training them in carrying out their tasks is through simulation exercises, as discussed in the next step.

Step 6: Test your plan through a simulation

A simulation exercise, also known as a tabletop exercise or a drill, is a great way to test the effectiveness of developed plans, procedures, protocols, guidelines and capacities (please see [chapter 8](#)), whether your early actions are feasible within the given lead time, and whether roles and responsibilities are clear to everyone involved. A simulation allows the s/EAP to move from theory to practice, to evaluate, and eventually to refine its procedures.



The s/EAP is often developed heavily at the headquarter-level, but the implementation of the s/EAP is often the responsibility of branches and local governments. Ensure that you include branches and other relevant partners (e.g. local authorities and hydro-meteorological service) in the simulation.



Alejandro Terán talks about the importance of drills and simulations and his experiences with volcanic ash exercises in Ecuador:

Step 6.1: Understand why and when to use a simulation

IFRC and CADRIM's simulation guide (see [toolbox](#)) distinguishes between four types of simulation exercises:

Tabletop exercises: A discussion-based exercise whereby stakeholders discuss actions to be taken during a made-up disaster situation. The goal of a tabletop exercise is to identify and resolve problems while allowing participants to better understand each other's responsibilities, resources and operational procedures.

Objectives of a tabletop exercise for anticipatory action include:

- Evaluate the decision-making capacity of staff and volunteers responsible for implementing the early actions outlined in an s/EAP or anticipatory action plan.
- Validate the anticipatory action plan, e.g. s/EAP and its assumptions.
- Test the coordination mechanisms of internal and external stakeholders with a role in the anticipatory action plan.
- Prepare those with decision-making authority to manage relevant aspects of the anticipatory action plan during activation.

Drills: An operations-based exercise that requires mobilization and the use of resources during a made-up disaster scenario. The goal of a drill is to test a single specific operation, function, or system. For example, a drill for shelter strengthening kits can be used to test the National Societies procedure for this early action.

Objectives of a drill for anticipatory action include:

- Test the feasibility, viability and timeliness of the early actions.
- Identify possible challenges in coordination among stakeholders involved.
- Evaluate abilities and the use of techniques, tools, resources, and actions related to the implementation of the anticipatory action plan.
- Test the capacity of volunteers and branches to successfully implement the anticipatory action plan, e.g. s/EAP in order to identify gaps.
- Assess the general response of a sample community to the early actions foreseen, if applicable.

Functional exercises: A fully simulated operations-based exercise that tests the capacity of an organization to respond to a made-up situation. This exercise also requires the mobilization and use of resources, but it differs from a drill in that it is used to test multiple functions of an organization's operations plan.

Field exercises: A full-scale operations-based exercise that is conducted in a highly stressful environment, usually lasting up to several days. This type of exercise tests most functions within an operations plan as it involves the mobilization of all the equipment and emergency personnel needed in a real situation.



In 2019, the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) organized three simulations to test the Typhoon EAP early actions, namely: early harvesting of abaca trees in Catanduanes Island, shelter strengthening in Aurora Province, and livestock evacuation in Davao Oriental Province.

PRC Tabletop + Drill Format

Although the early actions tested varied, the three-day format for all PRC chapters remained the same:

Day 1

The first day was used for a tabletop exercise to review what must be done by the chapter to simulate the moment the chapter received the message that the trigger was reached (four-days before the typhoon will make landfall).

Day 2

The second day the PRC employed a drill, which covered the early actions to be taken three and two days before landfall.

Day 3

The final day was reserved for a thorough debriefing of the simulation exercise.

For each simulation exercise, PRC encouraged additional PRC chapters to join and also invited provincial government partners. The participants were split on the second day to go to different communities (with different early actions).

Each simulation required ample preparation prior to the exercise taking place. It is crucial that the simulation be jointly planned with all involved agencies at the province level as well as the involved communities at an early stage (at least a month prior).

The criteria below represent the minimum PRC preparation components:

- A typhoon scenario as close to reality as possible
- Engagement of all agencies and participants needed to execute all EAP roles and responsibilities
- Resources (e.g. transport, material, volunteers)

PRC's 2019 Simulation Report (in the toolbox) details the approach.

Practicing simulations has yielded significant benefits for the PRC. The German Red Cross Anticipatory action delegate at the time of the simulation put it like this:

"The simulation was a great help in enabling the Catanduanes PRC chapter to activate early actions December 2, 2019 prior to the landfall of Typhoon Tisoy. In past storms, when Abaca trees were destroyed, this not only meant significant losses for farmers, but also a continuous lack of income for those workers normally employed for processing the fibres. PRC volunteers were on their own as our team didn't manage to reach the island three days before typhoon landfall. However, the Catanduanes chapter took full agency of their early actions, and executed everything as planned: Five barangays (communities) were selected with Caramoran municipal authorities, and volunteers were deployed to each of them to (i) recruit 20 workers, (ii) validate the list of the farms that should be assisted in early harvesting of abaca trees, and (iii) supervise the early harvesting of matured abaca trees in the selected farms. Although coordination with provincial authorities could have been a bit better, the volunteers applied the learnings from the simulation exercise – and even tested leaf trimming for the young abaca trees.

Aside from the importance of training chapters, authorities and volunteers, simulation exercises are very important to validate some of the assumptions we make in the EAP: like the time needed to strengthen houses with shelter strengthening kits, how best we can orient workers and beneficiaries, how to do the registration of animals being evacuated, etc. All these learnings can be only gathered through real time testing (and if we don't have a typhoon to do activation, it is best to do simulations)."

Step 6.2: Decide what kind of simulation you would like to conduct and plan, design and organize the simulation

Many National Societies have lots of experience with different type of simulations. If you are less experienced, it is useful to start with a tabletop exercise and not with a full-fledged-field exercise.

Guiding questions to decide what type of simulation to do:

- What exactly do you want to test? Do you want to test early actions or processes? Select the approach that best fits what you want to test.
- How much experience do you have with simulations? If you have never done a field exercise but have conducted drills, start with a drill.
- What is your experience with this early action? Has it been implemented similarly as a response action or is this a completely new approach? If completely new, a drill might be more suitable than testing several actions simultaneously.
- Have the early actions already been tested or even implemented elsewhere? Can lessons be drawn from this for your anticipatory action plan?
- Who is being tested or will be involved? Are all parties willing or available to participate?
- When and where will the simulation take place? Is the timing appropriate?
- How involved were partners and local authorities in the developing of the anticipatory action plan? A simulation is a learning experience for all involved, but it should also not overwhelm partners. Select the kind of simulation according to partners capacity.
- Do you already assume where your National Society or partners might have gaps (e.g. in capacity, processes, knowledge)? This might be worth testing!
- How much budget and time do you want or have available to invest?



Reach out to IFRC for simulation support

Reach out to IFRC to support you with the planning and implementation of the tabletop exercise that tests the communication and administrative processes, particularly of an s/EAP activation. IFRC has supported several tabletop exercises for anticipatory action, including support of staff from the Anticipatory Pillar of IFRC-DREF. This is particularly helpful when this is your first s/EAP and processes are not yet clear to everyone.

After establishing the type of simulation, hold a first coordination meeting with the key partners. For example, this could include:

- The anticipatory action coordination team and other relevant staff from the National Society,
- Government authorities (e.g. national hydrometeorological services, disaster management and relevant sectoral departments),
- Volunteers of the respective branches,
- Community members,
- IFRC offices and relevant partner organizations.

Note: Have a look at the suggested team structure and their responsibilities in the IFRC CADRIM Simulation guide.

Generally, all types of simulations need thorough planning. Please refer to the respective section in the IFRC and CADRIM simulation guide which also includes templates. Some common aspects across all kinds of simulations include:

- Define the objectives of the simulation
- Determine the scope, outputs and activities for each objective
- Set your timeline for each output and activity
- Define the target audience and stakeholders
- Identify resources and logistical agreements needed
- Allocate a budget
- Final verification of preparations

Once you have a plan, design the simulation. Usually this includes the following steps:

- Develop the script or master truth (note: this is never shared with the participants beforehand!)
- Develop supporting materials (e.g. media reports, government statements)
- Develop injects (Injects are prompts or updates of the scenario that stimulates additional responses from participants)

Lastly, you need to organize the simulation before conducting it. This includes aspects like sending invitations, organizing accommodation arrangements, and confirming the venue.

Step 6.3 Conduct the simulation

Once you are done with all the planning and participants arrive at the scheduled place at the scheduled time, you can start your simulation. Again, here are some general steps for the execution of the simulation:

- Brief participants on process and objectives
- Brief evaluators on their roles and responsibilities
- Ensure that all participants are properly identified
- Manage the release of injects
- Manage discussions with participants
- Conduct a debrief immediately after the simulation
- Follow-up with participants



Inform the communities!

If you test a national plan, be sure that you inform the communities about the simulation so that it is clear to all members of the community. Also have people in mind who might not be able to hear or see understand that this is a simulation and not an activation of an anticipatory action plan. It needs to be clear to all that their homes will not be flooded in five days but that you are just simulating this.

Step 6.4: Evaluate and share lessons learned

An evaluation of the simulation is key to identifying the lessons learned and improving processes going forward. We want to know the following: What went well? What can be improved? What are lessons learned? What are ways to improve the mechanisms tested?

Usually there are two types of evaluations

Evaluation of the participants' performance during the simulation.

Participants and organizers should take a critical look at the following:

- Organization: The achievement of goals given the assumptions and conditions under which participants were working.
- Information management
- Decision making: Their ability to take appropriate and pertinent decisions under pressure. The use of innovation in the absence of critical resources.
- Coordination and integrated management of the situation.
- The logic and consistency of decisions made compared to the National Society Standard Operating Procedures.
- The specific performance of each of the participants (leadership, involvement, interest, teamwork, etc.).

Evaluation of the organization of the simulation

The evaluation of the organization relates to the planning, design and execution of the exercise.



Make use of existing resources

If you have already developed a MEAL plan (see [chapter 9](#)) you can use this to support the evaluation of your simulation.

Eventually, the evaluation team should meet to exchange notes and to analyse and compile a comprehensive assessment. A final evaluation document should include lessons learned and recommendations. Please find an example of Nepal in the [toolbox](#).

Step 7: Integrate lessons learned in guidance and trainings

If your simulation has shown that certain assumptions, timelines, procedures, or arrangements of your anticipatory action plan are not realistic or feasible, revise the plan accordingly. For s/EAPs, also make sure to note in the s/EAP document that you have tested certain aspects of the s/EAP in a simulation. This will help the validation committee in better understanding your decisions.

If you have developed guidance, e.g. a pocket s/EAP or other training material, make sure that you also update this material and train the staff and other stakeholders accordingly.

Toolbox

Simulation guidance



CADRIIM Simulation Guide (2013)



Guidelines for Developing Emergency Simulations and Drills (2011)



Philippine Red Cross simulation report 2019 (PRC, 2019)



Anticipatory Action Simulation Exercise Toolkit and Facilitator Manual from the Asia Pacific TWG (2025)

Examples from other countries



Pocket typhoon EAP Philippines (2020)

