**[Anticipatory actions](https://www.dawn.com/news/1846603/anticipatory-actions)**

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IF the merciless monsoon rains and floods in India are any indicator, Pakistan can [anticipate heavy rains and flooding](https://www.dawn.com/news/1846570/urban-flooding-feared-as-heavy-rains-forecast-till-21st) in several parts of the country. Hardly have we recouped from heatwaves, landslides and glacial disasters that we face more dark clouds on the horizon. How can we plan anticipatory actions to protect ourselves, and our communities and their assets, not forgetting our schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure?

Planning for humanitarian provisions such as water, food, medicine, and shelter is crucial, but this is essentially post-disaster action. In climate change parlance, anticipatory actions have begun to assume a new meaning, which requires a chain of preparatory measures well ahead of the anticipated disaster. This is to reduce human suffering and the cost to the economy and ecosystems.

Anticipatory allocations refer to prearranged funds and actions to mitigate the impact of predictable risks before they fully unfold. It is based on five pillars: i) linking weather forecasts to trigger mechanisms that release prearranged financing, ii) pre-agreed specific actions that can alter the trajectory of the crisis, iii) prearranged funds made available to immediately initiate time-critical activities, iv) reviewing laws and policies for institutionalisation and coordination mechanisms, and v) developing documentation on learning and evidence from each instance.

In the present state of climate governance, the last may sound overly academic. But its urgency cannot be contested. Had we drawn any lessons from the 2010 floods, according to Gen Nadeem Ahmed, who was then heading the NDMA and coordinating the government’s flood response, the cost of the 2022 floods would have been halved. Since we have seen no formal lesson-learning after the 2022 floods, which inflicted losses to the tune of $15 billion, one can only assume that, except for some critically important humanitarian preparations by the disaster management authorities, most of our actions will take place post-disaster. Are we prepared to design anticipatory actions proactively for specific shocks and locations?

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Since managing local disasters is, for the most part, a provincial subject under our Constitution, the provincial governments are best placed to undertake their own anticipatory actions tailored to suit local realities. Triggered by early warning systems, anticipatory interventions can protect livelihoods and food security before shocks such as droughts, floods, or heatwaves occur. Embedding anticipatory actions into national disaster risk management frameworks, social protection programmes and government budgets can help institutionalise and sustain national and international financing.

Several UN agencies, including OCHA, WFP, FAO, and others, are implementing anticipatory approaches by developing toolkits and other material. Anticipatory actions are being tested predominantly for natural hazards, reportedly in 60 countries, in partnership with local stakeholders. The key sectors that are benefiting include disaster risk reduction, agriculture, food security, and social protection systems. These sectors are vital for building resilience to climate shocks. Expanding to other predictable crises is the next step to tailor the response to specific crisis scenarios. However, challenges remain in fully integrating anticipatory approaches into provincial and national accounting systems and frameworks.

Anticipatory investments are made specifically to prepare for the impact of future shocks, even if the exact timing and magnitude of those future events are uncertain. This is in contrast to the reactive investments that we have habitually made after each disaster.

Social protection systems are presently undergoing fundamental changes. Governments are integrating forecast-based triggers and prearranged financing. Anticipatory actions can be integrated into existing social protection systems in two main ways: i) by leveraging elements of the social protection architecture. This involves using existing systems and delivery mechanisms for cash transfers, in-kind support, or early warning messaging to vulnerable populations ahead of a predicted shock; ii) by integrating the core components into social protection systems. This includes embedding forecast triggers, pre-defined actions, and prearranged financing for social protection programmes to scale-up their response to impending crises.

Pakistan has not, so far, explicitly tested anticipatory allocations through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), but there are efforts underway to see if the present cash transfers can become an adaptive social protection programme. If successful, this could be the first large-scale transition towards anticipatory allocations.

While BISP focuses on providing unconditional cash transfers to alleviate poverty, it lacks built-in components to actively manage climate-related risks and disasters. This gap results in limited outreach and readiness during climate disasters. BISP is not designed with anticipatory disaster risk management mechanisms, but since there are no other institutions, it is best equipped to provide some indirect resilience against sudden shocks. The unconditional cash transfers support households in managing basic needs and investing in human capital that can help them cope with the impact of climate-related shocks. When anticipatory actions are layered with social protection, they can help address the climate risks affecting them.

Social protection systems can provide a foundation for delivering anticipatory actions, while integrating anticipatory components can make social protection more adaptive to climate shocks. Going forward, it can help the district disaster management authorities or local government institutions, where they exist, in i) disseminating early warning messages, ii) evacuating people, livestock, and assets, iii) reinforcing housing, schools, and other infrastructure, iv) providing first aid, food and drinking water at evacuation sites, and v) supporting unconditional cash assistance.

Despite the challenges, there exist capacities in Pakistan that can be utilised. By linking the Nadra and BISP datasets, it is possible to provide faster, predictable, coordinated, and cost-effective assistance ahead of forecasted climate shocks. The lack of anticipatory mechanisms in BISP adversely impacts its effectiveness during disasters, as witnessed in its post-2020 floods cash disbursements.

In any case, under the IMF- and World Bank-supported reform packages, social protection is steadily being transferred from the federal government to the provinces. The provincial governments can now have an opportunity to utilise BISP’s capacities for the purposes of anticipatory actions in their jurisdictions. Punjab and Sindh have already unrolled their own conditional cash grants. This will strengthen the provincial government’s responsiveness to the needs of local communities and stakeholders. Increasing overall financing and ensuring its regular and timely disbursement can potentially contribute to the communities’ capacity to cope with climate disasters and bring anticipatory actions to their doorsteps.

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