

Scaling Locally-Led, Gender-Responsive, and Environmentally Sustainable Anticipatory Action

Policy Brief | 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Humanitarian needs are increasing faster than the resources available to meet them. Climate change, conflict, economic instability, and environmental degradation are driving more frequent and severe crises, while humanitarian funding continues to fall short of growing needs. Continuing to rely primarily on reactive humanitarian response is no longer sufficient.

Anticipatory Action (AA) complements, rather than replaces, humanitarian response. By using pre-agreed forecasts and risk thresholds to trigger early action and release financing before a hazard strikes, AA helps reduce impacts, protect lives and livelihoods, and limit the escalation of humanitarian needs. Evidence from AA pilots across various hazards, including drought, flood, and cyclone, shows it reduces asset loss, protects livelihoods, and lowers response costs relative to post-disaster aid - shifting part of the system from paying to recover losses toward paying to prevent them. Over the past decade, AA has evolved from small-scale pilots into an increasingly institutionalized approach at the center of the humanitarian, development, peace and climate nexus (HDP + C Nexus), supported by governments, donors and international organizations worldwide.

As AA expands, the focus must be on both **scaling up and scaling better.** CARE International (CI) believes that effective AA must be:

- **Locally led**
- **Gender-responsive**
- **Environmentally sustainable**

These approaches help ensure that actions are grounded in local knowledge and expertise, respond to how risks are experienced, reach those most affected, and reduce vulnerability without creating new risks. In doing so, they improve the relevance, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and sustainability of AA.

CI calls on governments, donors, and humanitarian, development, peace, and climate actors to increase quality financing, strengthen national systems, and invest in effective AA that reaches those most at risk before disasters strike.

FROM REACTIVE RESPONSE TO ANTICIPATORY ACTION

Humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent, severe, and complex. Climate change, natural hazards, conflict, environmental degradation, economic instability, and persistent inequality increasingly interact to drive humanitarian needs. Over the past two decades, climate-related disasters have affected more than 4.2 billion people and caused an estimated US$2.9 trillion in economic losses[1]. Climate-related shocks also intensify food and nutrition insecurity, including hunger and famine, and contribute to displacement and conflict, placing unprecedented pressure on humanitarian systems. At the same time, humanitarian financing has reduced by 30% since 2023[2] and is failing to keep pace with growing needs. Resources are increasingly stretched across multiple, protracted crises, forcing “hyper-prioritization” and leaving humanitarian actors with difficult choices about who receives assistance and when, and leaving millions of people in need behind.[3] Responding only after disasters occur is becoming increasingly costly and insufficient.

1 CRED & UNDRR (2020) Human Cost of Disasters. https://www.undrr.org/publication/human-cost-disasters-overview-last-20-years-2000-2019
2 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2026: https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-gha-report-2026/
3 ibid

This changing risk landscape requires both reacting to crises and better anticipating them. AA links forecasts and early warning systems to pre-agreed financing and early interventions, enabling governments, humanitarian and development actors, and local institutions to act before predictable hazards hit. Rather than replacing emergency response, AA complements it by reducing humanitarian impacts before they escalate. Evidence increasingly shows that acting early saves lives, protects livelihoods, and lowers the eventual cost of response.

AA is no longer an emerging innovation. According to the Anticipation Hub's 2025 Global Overview Report, more than 260 AA frameworks are operational across over 70 countries, with more than 200 additional frameworks under development. In 2025 alone, anticipatory mechanisms were activated 146 times in 54 countries, releasing almost US$120 million in pre-arranged financing and reaching 9.6 million people before disasters occurred. Governments are increasingly embedding AA within national disaster risk management systems, while donors including the European Union's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), the German government, the United Nations and other humanitarian partners have identified AA as a policy priority. This momentum is reinforced by calls for greater pre-arranged disaster financing, including the Bridgetown Initiative's ambition to increase its share from 2% to 20% by 2035,[4] and the UN General Assembly's call for fast, flexible financing for preparedness and early action, including innovative mechanisms such as forecast-based financing and disaster risk insurance. Realizing this potential at scale depends on devolving humanitarian, climate and development quality finance directly to diverse local and national actors, including to women-led organizations, so that the communities and institutions closest to the risk and with the required expertise can trigger and lead action themselves.

The question is therefore not whether AA works, but how it can be scaled effectively, equitably and sustainably.

CARE INTERNATIONAL'S VISION FOR ANTICIPATORY ACTION

Scaling AA should go beyond expanding the number of frameworks or increasing financing. It should be part of a holistic approach to financing and operationalizing the Humanitarian, Development, Peace and Climate Nexus and should ensure it reaches the most vulnerable people, centers gender equality, effectively reduces potential humanitarian impacts, strengthens local leadership and contributes to longer-term resilience.

CI believes that **three principles should guide AA.**

1 LOCALLY LED AA

CI believes that AA is most effective when it is designed, led, and implemented by those closest to and most exposed to risk and with the required knowledge, expertise, and experience. Locally led AA places communities, local organizations, and national institutions at the center of decision-making, ensuring that anticipatory systems reflect local priorities, capacities, and knowledge. Rather than viewing local actors as the final link in implementation, CI is committed to support them as equal partners in AA design, governance, and delivery.

4 Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development delivers renewed hope and action for sustainable development , 2025, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2025/07/ffd4-closing-press-release/

This means:

- **Supporting communities to lead AA.** Support communities to identify risks, define priorities, co-design AA, and participate in decision-making throughout the AA cycle and beyond as critical Nexus actors. Strengthen local capacities and institutions to ensure interventions are context-specific, sustainable, and locally owned.
- **Strengthening national and local systems.** Where possible, work alongside governments and authorities at national, regional, and local levels to embed AA within disaster risk management systems, strengthen institutional capacity, and ensure community perspectives inform policies and preparedness planning.
- **Making early warnings accessible and actionable.** Ensure weather forecasts and climate information are accurate, locally relevant, and communicated through accessible languages, formats, and channels so that all members of communities, including women who tend to face specific barriers to accessing information, can act with confidence before disasters occur.
- **Combining scientific and local knowledge. I**ntegrate indigenous, traditional, and community knowledge, including the specific knowledge of men and women, with scientific forecasting to improve the accuracy, relevance, trust, and uptake of early warning systems and AA.
- **Supporting locally led action in fragile and conflict-affected settings.** Invest in flexible AA that adheres to Do No Harm principles and conflict sensitivity, and builds on the contextual knowledge, legitimacy, and trusted relationships of local actors, including Women-Led Organizations.

2 GENDER-RESPONSIVE AA

CI believes that AA should not only reduce immediate disaster impacts but also recognize and address the underlying inequalities that drive vulnerability. Effective AA must be at a minimum gender-responsive, and ideally gender challenge and change gender norms which constrain access and agency of women in decision making related to AA, and ensure that women, girls, and marginalized groups are equally able to shape decisions, access resources, and lead AA. Through approaches such as Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE), CI recognizes that women hold critical knowledge of local risks, coping strategies, and community and women support systems, making their leadership essential to effective and equitable AA.



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This means:

- **Applying an intersectional approach to AA.** Design AA systems that recognize and respond to the diverse needs, capacities, and risks of people based on sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other intersecting factors, ensuring that no one is left behind. This may include ensuring that sex, age, disability, and other characteristics based on context, disaggregated data, as well as intersectional gender analysis inform AA plans and strategies.
- **Promoting and investing in women's safe, direct, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership and decision-making.** Support women and marginalized groups to take on leadership roles within community disaster management committees, AA governance structures, and national policy processes through targeted capacity sharing/strengthening, dedicated resources, and enabling environments for meaningful participation.
- **Removing barriers to early warning and early action.** Address structural barriers - including limited access to communication channels, mobility restrictions, digital exclusion, literacy barriers, and discriminatory social norms - that prevent women and marginalized groups from accessing and acting on timely early warning information.
- **Embedding protection throughout AA.** Integrate protection and safeguarding into AA by incorporating protection risk analysis, ensuring early actions are safe and accessible, and strengthening referral pathways and community-based protection mechanisms before crises occur.
- **Centering gender-specific and gender mainstreamed interventions, including preventing and responding to violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV).** Ensure AA includes gender-responsive early actions that adhere to sector-specific gender mainstreaming guidelines (e.g., gender in WASH), include gender-specific interventions such as Sexual and Reproductive Health, Nutrition for pregnant and lactating women, and reduce protection risks before disasters occur. This must include pre-positioned dignity kits, confidential and accessible GBV referral services (including access to the MISP), safe shelter options, women and girls' safe-spaces, and survivor-centered approaches that uphold the dignity, safety, and rights of women and girls, survivor-centered approaches that uphold the dignity, safety, and rights of women and girls.

3 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AA

CI believes that AA should not only reduce the impacts of climate-related hazards but also strengthen the environmental systems that underpin community resilience. As climate risks intensify, AA must minimize its own environmental footprint while investing in nature-based, locally led solutions that reduce future risks. Guided by CI's Climate and Environment Policy and grounded in CI's commitments as a signatory of the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations and the Core Humanitarian Standards (Commitment 4), environmental sustainability is integrated throughout the design and implementation of AA to ensure that today's early actions do not compromise tomorrow's resilience.



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This means:

- **Embedding environmental considerations throughout AA.** Integrate mandatory environmental and climate risk screening across the full programme cycle to identify, mitigate, and monitor environmental impacts, including – but not limited to – procurement, delivery modalities, logistics, and waste management.
- **Promoting environmentally sustainable humanitarian operations.** Reduce the environmental footprint of AA by prioritizing sustainable procurement, renewable energy solutions, reusable and locally sourced materials, circular approaches, and low-carbon operational practices wherever feasible.
- **Investing in integrating nature-based solutions (NBS) into AA where they can provide timely and locally appropriate protection against forecast hazards while strengthening longer-term resilience.** This may include measures such as protecting existing wetlands and mangroves, maintaining natural drainage and riparian buffers, or using locally appropriate vegetation-based erosion and flood-control measures, ensuring that actions do not shift environmental costs onto already vulnerable communities.
- **Linking AA with long-term climate resilience.** Design AA as a bridge between humanitarian response, climate adaptation, and environmental restoration, and as an essential element of HDP and Climate Nexus approaches, ensuring that early actions reduce immediate humanitarian risks while contributing to more resilient communities and healthier ecosystems over the long term.

CARE INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION IN ANTICIPATORY ACTION

CI is positioned to scale AA by combining humanitarian action, climate adaptation, gender equality, and development within a single integrated approach. CI's AA programming is underpinned by four complementary strengths:

Integrated climate, humanitarian and resilience programming: CI's AA programs combine early action with climate-smart programming and gender-responsive resilience building, ensuring that immediate humanitarian interventions also contribute to reducing long-term vulnerability and are embedded within the HDP and Climate Nexus. Drawing on decades of experience in climate adaptation and disaster risk management, CI strengthens Climate Information Services and improves the accessibility, understanding, and use of weather forecasts and early warning information, enabling at-risk communities, with attention to women and girls, to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to climate-related hazards.

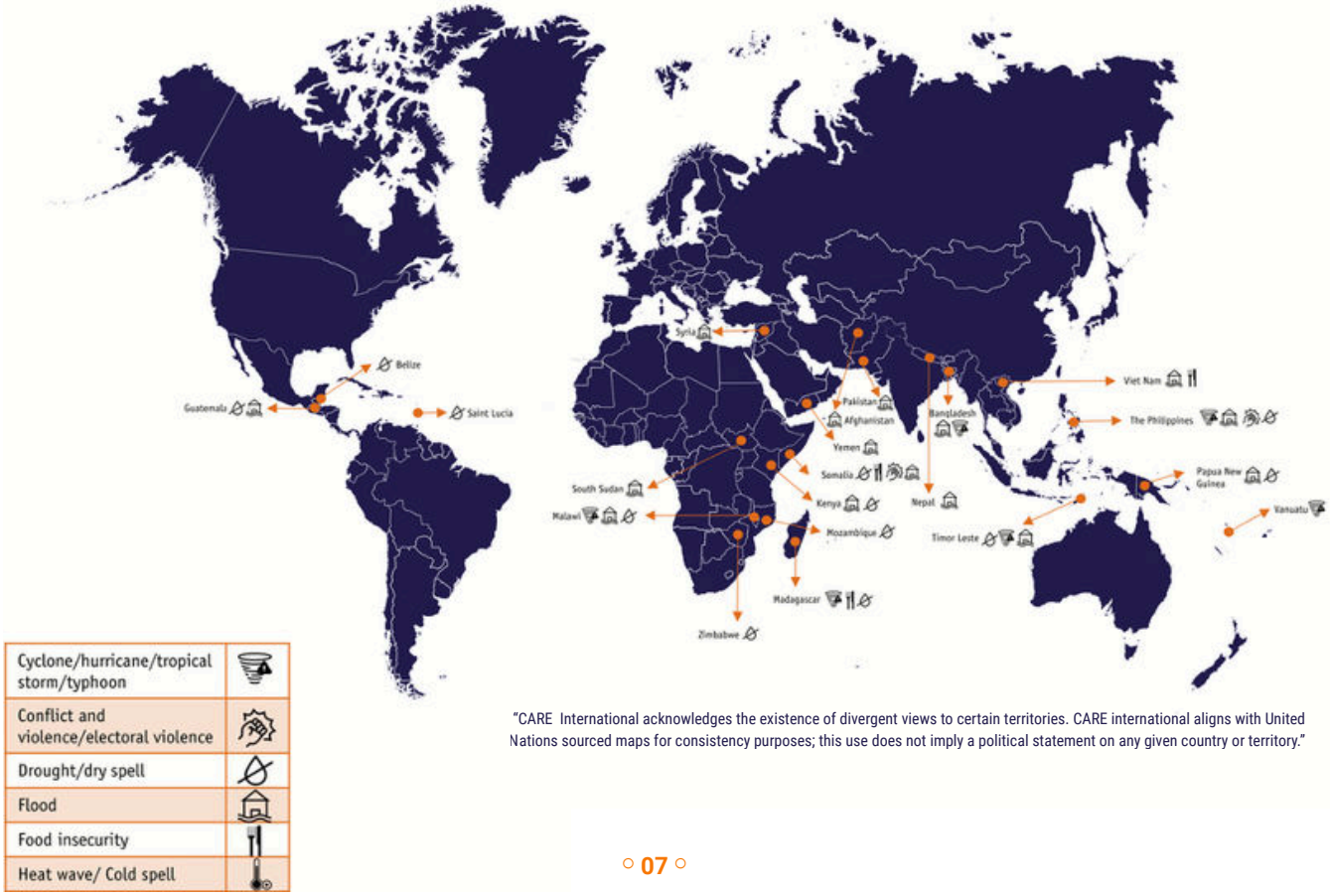
Strong operational preparedness and rapid response capacity: CI's global humanitarian architecture enables rapid, flexible, and scalable AA. This includes pre-positioned relief supplies, rapid deployment teams, digital cash delivery systems, operational tools such as the Emergency CARE Package, and extensive networks of partners. These capacities are reinforced through comprehensive cash preparedness measures and operational readiness assessments, ensuring assistance can be delivered quickly when forecast triggers are activated. AA is integrated into CI's country-level Emergency Preparedness Plans, embedding it as a core component of organizational and operational readiness for timely activation and scale-up.

Diversified financing mechanisms: Scaling AA requires quality financing that is predictable, multi-year, flexible, and rapidly accessible. This includes unearmarked or lightly earmarked funding, simplified application and reporting requirements, and streamlined financial management, compliance rules, and procedures to enable timely action at scale. CI complements donor funding through a portfolio of internal and external financing mechanisms that enable early action before crises escalate and transition to recovery and development after crises hit. These include internal rapid response mechanisms such as the Humanitarian Surge Fund and dedicated anticipatory financing through the Early Action Fund (EAF), providing dedicated financing to support locally led AA and foster learning across CI (see Annex 1). CI is also exploring innovative financing approaches, including climate risk insurance and partnerships with the private sector, to strengthen the sustainability and scalability of AA.

Linking AA with adaptive social protection: AA works best when it strengthens, rather than bypasses, the systems that governments and communities already use to reach vulnerable households. CI calls for connecting anticipatory triggers and financing to national social protection mechanisms - such as cash transfer programs and safety nets—so that pre-existing registries, payment systems, and delivery channels can be scaled up or shock-responsive ahead of a forecast hazard. This strengthens the case for embedding AA within national systems for the longer term, improves cost-efficiency and speed of delivery, and builds a durable link between humanitarian preparedness and the social protection architecture that governments are already investing in and own.

Global experience with locally led, gender-responsive and environmentally sustainable AA: CI operates in more than 100 countries, and it has been supporting the implementation of more than 38 AA initiatives across 21 countries, working alongside governments, local organizations, and communities to develop and operationalize forecast-based approaches.

CARE ANTICIPATORY ACTION INITIATIVES MAP



"CARE International acknowledges the existence of divergent views to certain territories. CARE international aligns with United Nations sourced maps for consistency purposes; this use does not imply a political statement on any given country or territory."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **INSTITUTIONALIZE AA AS A CORE PILLAR OF DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

   Governments and humanitarian actors should embed AA within national disaster risk management systems, contingency planning, and sectoral policies. This requires clearly defined governance arrangements, nationally agreed triggers, and stronger links between early warning systems, preparedness planning, and early action protocols.

2. **REFORM HUMANITARIAN, CLIMATE, AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCING TO ENABLE EARLY ACTION**

   Humanitarian, climate, and development financing should achieve a better balance between reactive funding and predictable, flexible, easily accessible, and pre-arranged financing that can be released before disasters escalate. Donors should ensure quality financing for AA.

   AA cannot scale to meet growing risk if it remains dependent on institutional humanitarian budgets alone. Governments and donors should connect AA to climate finance mechanisms - including the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and National Adaptation Plan processes - as well as disaster risk insurance and explore blended finance and private-sector partnerships that can mobilize commercial capital alongside public funding. Diversifying the financing base reduces reliance on a single, already-stretched system and strengthens the case for AA as core risk-management infrastructure rather than an extension of emergency response.

3. **STRENGTHEN LOCALLY LED AA**

   National and local governments, civil society organizations, and communities should play a central role in designing and implementing AA. Investments should support capacity sharing / strengthening, ensure equal access to climate information and early warning systems, and provide flexible resources that enable local actors to act quickly based on forecast information.

4. **MAKE AA GENDER-RESPONSIVE**

   Governments, donors, and humanitarian actors should ensure that gender equality is systematically integrated across AA policies, financing, and implementation. AA should recognize and address the different risks, barriers, and impacts faced by women, girls, and people experiencing intersecting forms of inequality, while strengthening women's leadership and decision-making in AA. Investments should support gender-responsive risk analysis, early warning and communication systems, and early actions that address gender-specific needs, including protection, safety, dignity, and access to essential services. Where possible, AA should go beyond responding to gender differences to challenge the structural inequalities and power relations that shape vulnerability and constrain women's agency. Priorities should be given to supporting WLOs' safe, direct, equal and meaningful participation and leadership.

5. **SCALE INTEGRATED, CLIMATE-RESILIENT AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES**

   AA should be integrated with disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, social protection, and development planning to address underlying drivers of vulnerability. Investments should promote climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable interventions that protect lives and livelihoods while reducing future humanitarian needs and the impact on the environment. Cross-sectoral programming embedded within the HDP and Climate Nexus can maximize both immediate humanitarian outcomes and longer-term resilience.

6. **INVEST IN EVIDENCE, INNOVATION, AND LEARNING**

   Governments, donors, and humanitarian organizations should continue to strengthen the evidence base for AA by investing in monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning. This requires greater collaboration between meteorological agencies, research institutions, humanitarian and development actors, and local organizations, alongside a stronger commitment to collecting and sharing timely, disaggregated and, wherever possible, open-source data. Demonstrating the cost-effectiveness, value for money, and successful and impacts of AA will be essential for sustaining political commitment and scaling investment. Based on CI's learning, more applied research and evidence is required on the gendered impacts of AA.

ANNEXES

1. SUSTAINABLE FINANCING: CARE INTERNATIONAL EARLY ACTION FUND

Early Action Fund

In 2025, CARE International UK and CARE Nederland with technical support from CI's Climate Justice Center (CJC) and private funding, launched an Early Action Fund (EAF)5. The EAF's three-stream architecture ensures the right funds are available at the right time enabling CI Country Offices and partners to access timely financing for AA and early action activities.

These three funding streams allow for injections of resources at different tactical types of early action windows.

- Stream 1 – Preparedness and system readiness: annual funding to build national and local capacity, train CI and partners' staff, and strengthen or enhance early action protocols.
- Stream 2a – Structured, triggered disbursements that can be used for pre-agreed, structured funding against AA triggers for specific identified hazards.
- Stream 2b – Flexible funding for emerging risks that can be used for early/AA as soon as a risk escalation is clear (from a few days to a few weeks depending on the hazard).

The Early Action Fund ensures activities align with CI's core values, putting women and girls' needs and participation at the center in disaster preparedness and early action.

2. CASE STUDIES

Locally-Led AA — Bangladesh (SUFAL Project)

In Bangladesh, the Supporting Flood Forecast-based Action and Learning (SUFAL) project illustrates how AA can be genuinely community-owned. Under the project, locally led AA was reinforced around three pillars:

- **Local monitoring of triggers and thresholds:** Local volunteers were trained to read river gauges and share water-level data twice daily, providing localized flood forecasts.
- **Community-based early warning:** Voice messages were delivered in local languages at times suited to both women and men, and over 90 community volunteers helped spread early warnings and facilitate preparedness sessions.
- **Community risk assessments and early-action planning:** Communities co-developed risk assessments and early action plans, including cash-for-work schemes and infrastructure repairs, alongside local disaster committees. All protocols and procedures are coordinated with government agencies, linking community early actions to social safety nets programs.

When floodwaters began inundating Afroza Begum's village, residents had no option but to move to shelters. At the market, Afroza's husband heard a loudspeaker announcement that boats were available free of charge to help people reach safe locations. Evacuation support had been pre-identified as an early action for the village in flood scenarios.

Afroza's family accepted the boat assistance and relocated to a nearby embankment with essential items — utensils, stove, and clothing. On arrival, they were given a tarpaulin to erect a temporary tent.

"If we had not received the boat support at that right moment, my family would have had to live in the flood water by setting up a high platform under the ceiling. It was a huge support that we could shift to a dry place." Afroza Begum (ECHO-funded SUFAL project).



Gender-responsive Anticipatory Action — Nepal (Sajag Samaj Project)

In the flood-prone districts of Bardiya and Rautahat, CARE Nepal's Sajag Samaj project demonstrates how placing women's leadership at the heart of AA can save lives. Six women-led Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) were strengthened, enabling women, including those from marginalized groups, lead risk analysis, decision-making, and early response. Women leaders were trained in AA protocols, gender-based violence (GBV) referral pathways, and psychosocial first aid. Gender-sensitive relief supplies were pre-positioned, while women-led task forces coordinated early warnings, search and rescue operations, and relief distribution. The result: zero casualties during recent floods, safe evacuation of children and people with disabilities, and a tangible positive shift in community perceptions of, and attitudes towards, women's leadership and capabilities in disaster management.

Voices of leadership: Rautahat

In Rautahat, the project helped strengthen women's agency and challenge traditional gender norms in the community. Chinta Devi emerged as a leader and advocate for women's safety, while women-led groups disseminated early warnings, demanded gender-sensitive relief, and organized community kitchens, helping ensure timely access to food and contributing to safer disaster response.



"What began as a simple training became a turning point in my life. It strengthened my confidence, my voice, and my role as a community leader," reflected Chinta Devi.

Other women also emerged as agents of change. Bandana provided psychosocial first aid and led hygiene awareness campaigns, while Binita progressed from disaster volunteer to recognized community leader. Their experiences illustrate how investing in women's leadership can create a ripple effect, strengthening women's participation and influence across communities

Greening AA — Philippines



CARE International's efforts to integrate environmental considerations into its work in the Philippines started in 2007 with the adoption of a **"natural resource management (NRM) approach to disaster mitigation."** Between 2011 and 2020, CI and its local partner ACCORD implemented the Dutch government-funded Partners for Resilience program, which helped develop, operationalize, and mainstream Integrated Risk Management (IRM). This approach brings together disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), and ecosystem management and restoration (EMR) to strengthen resilience across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions.

Building on this experience, environmental considerations have been integrated into procurement, pre-positioning, and delivery of AA. In-kind assistance is favored where safe market access is unavailable, while cash-based early action is prioritized where feasible, helping reduce the environmental footprint associated with transporting relief supplies. CI also incorporates environmentally sustainable practices into contingency plans, Early Action Plans, and AA protocols, extending these efforts to household preparedness. Simple measures, such as encouraging families to bring their own utensils to evacuation centers, help reduce single-use plastic waste.

Other measures include sourcing sustainable, locally available supplies, assessing suppliers against environmental criteria such as renewable energy use and waste management, and replacing disposable items with reusable alternatives — including washable feminine pads produced by local livelihood groups. Priority is also given to durable supplies that require less frequent replacement, further reducing waste and environmental impacts.

The use of Environmental Screening Tools, CI's Climate Resilience Marker, and the Integrated Risk Management approach helps integrate environmental considerations across programming. While some resources involve little or no additional cost, others require significant investment. These costs are recognized as necessary to protect people and communities, particularly the most vulnerable, both now and in the future, while preventing further environmental degradation.

RESOURCES

- CARE's Global Study on Anticipatory Action Readiness: Assesses the operational readiness of AA frameworks, identifies key enablers and challenges in maintaining protocols, and offers recommendations for sustainable and effective AA.
- CARE's Self-Paced Course on Gender Responsive & Locally Led Anticipatory Action: Introduces the principles and practical application of gender-responsive and locally led Anticipatory Action.
- CARE's Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA): Provides a participatory approach to assessing community-level climate vulnerabilities, including gender-specific risks, and identifying existing capacities to adapt and build resilience. vulnerabilities) and capacities for climate change.
- Making It Count: Integrating Gender into Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction: Offers practical guidance on integrating gender considerations into disaster risk management and early warning systems.
- CARE's Practical Guide to Participatory Scenario Planning: Explains how to bring together climate forecasts and local knowledge to co-produce seasonal advisories to inform anticipatory action and long-term adaptation strategies.
- CARE's Women Lead in Emergency's Guidance note: Outlines a practical, flexible approach to strengthening women's participation, voice and leadership in humanitarian preparedness and response.

For further information on CARE International's Anticipatory Action work, explore the resources available on the CARE Climate Justice Center website and the Early Action Fund website.