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Institutionalisation of anticipatory action within government disaster risk management structures: experiences from Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Purpose – This study sought to elucidate the process, mechanism and outcomes of anticipatory action (AA) initiatives at relevant governance levels in Zimbabwe with a view to drawing lessons that will inform future strategies and approaches, policy, research and practice in disaster early warning and early action.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study explored the institutionalisation of AA in Zimbabwe through a literature review, content analysis of national policy and legislative documents, and the authors' experiences in AA. The literature review identified key themes and gaps in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA), shaping the analytical framework. Using Atlas.ti, conventional content analysis was applied to examine institutionalisation of anticipatory action themes across selected documents.

Findings – The analysis emphasises the role of the AA approach within Zimbabwe's disaster risk management framework. Initially led by humanitarian actors, these initiatives were seen as parallel to government structures, hindering their acceptance. Continuous engagement with the government and stakeholders, along with demonstrating the efficacy of anticipatory action, facilitated common ground. Establishing sub-committees within existing disaster management structures promoted institutionalisation and required capacity building for government ownership and sustainability. Despite initial challenges, anticipatory action is now a crucial method for enhancing governance in the face of climate change-related risks.

Originality/value – As climate change amplifies the frequency and severity of extreme events, anticipatory action is becoming essential for effective disaster risk management. Advances in technology have improved the accuracy and accessibility of early warning information. By investing in AA, communities can save lives, protect livelihoods and enhance resilience to future hazards. Governments are increasingly integrating AA into existing disaster risk management structures to ensure sustainability and continuity at all levels.

Keywords Resilience, Early warning, Institutionalisation, Anticipatory action

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Introduction

Anticipatory action (AA) has emerged as a pivotal shift in disaster risk management, leveraging climate services to forecast extreme events and implement pre-determined, rapid humanitarian responses (Hansen *et al.*, 2022). Also referred to as forecast-based financing (FbF), forecast-based action (FbA) or risk-informed early action, AA represents a departure from conventional disaster management paradigms by embedding technical triggers and structured response mechanisms that activate funding upon reaching specific thresholds (Coughlan de Perez *et al.*, 2014; Anticipation Hub, 2022). Institutionalisation of AA within national governance structures is increasingly recognised as a strategic imperative in mitigating disaster impacts, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions such as Zimbabwe. As part of broader anticipatory governance frameworks, AA aligns with Beck's Risk Society Theory, which underscores the need for proactive mechanisms to manage emergent risks stemming from modernisation and environmental change (Gupta *et al.*, 2020). In this context, Zimbabwe presents a compelling case study, illustrating both the opportunities and challenges inherent in integrating AA within government disaster risk management (DRM) structures. While AA holds the potential to enhance early response capacities, its implementation raises critical questions regarding the extent to which technocratic, trigger-based mechanisms accommodate local knowledge systems, community participation and governance realities (Scott, 2024; Levine *et al.*, 2020). The prevailing reliance on deterministic planning models, often prioritised in global AA frameworks, risks marginalising non-Western epistemologies and reinforcing hierarchical decision-making structures that may not fully capture the lived experiences and vulnerabilities of at-risk populations (Dutta, 2020). Thus, a nuanced exploration of Zimbabwe's institutionalisation of AA is necessary to interrogate its effectiveness, inclusivity and adaptability in a dynamic risk landscape.

This study sought to critically examine the processes, mechanisms and outcomes of AA initiatives at various governance levels in Zimbabwe, to draw lessons that inform future strategies, policies, research and practice in disaster early warning and early action. Central to this inquiry is the evaluation of the operationalisation of AA within Zimbabwe's DRM framework and the extent to which it aligns with broader anticipatory governance principles (Muiderman *et al.*, 2023). By situating the discussion within theoretical insights from scenario planning (Fuller, 2016) and risk-informed governance (Stirling, 2008), this research investigates the tension between rapid, expert-led interventions and the need for adaptive, context-sensitive disaster response mechanisms. Specifically, it interrogates the extent to which pre-determined AA triggers, funding protocols and decision-making structures foster or constrain local agency, equity and resilience in disaster preparedness and response (Levine *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, by assessing Zimbabwe's experience with AA through a comparative lens, this study contributes to global debates on how best to institutionalise anticipatory mechanisms in governance settings characterised by resource constraints, diverse risk perceptions and evolving climatic uncertainties. Ultimately, the research aims to provide recommendations for refining AA implementation in Zimbabwe, ensuring that it not only enhances disaster preparedness but also fosters an inclusive, participatory and sustainable governance approach to risk reduction.

Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative research design to investigate the institutionalisation of AA in Zimbabwe. This was achieved through a literature review, content analysis of relevant national policies and legislative documents, along with the authors' experiences in AA. The literature review evaluated existing theoretical and empirical research on institutionalisation of AA in DRM, establishing a solid conceptual and analytical base for the study. This review highlighted key themes, such as disaster risk, institutional integration and anticipatory governance, while also revealing significant gaps within institutional frameworks, which guided the creation of the analytical framework. A systematic qualitative content analysis was

performed on carefully chosen national policy and legislative documents relevant to DRM and AA. These included policies, acts and strategic plans. A conventional content analysis approach was taken, identifying and coding relevant keywords, such as “preparedness”, “early action”, “anticipatory action” and “institutionalisation”, using Atlas.ti software.

Zimbabwe’s disaster risk management architecture

As depicted in Figure 1, It is government’s responsibility to put in place inclusive and functional coordination and organisational structures. The Ministry of Local Government & Public Works, through its decentralised and devolved structures, has the overall mandate to coordinate disaster risk reduction and development programs in the country. United Nations organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society, the private sector, academia, research institutions, Faith-Based Organisations, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, and others complement the Government’s effort in Disaster Risk Reduction and development initiatives. DRM is managed through multisectoral National, Provincial, District, local authority and Ward level Civil Protection Committees as illustrated in Figure 2.

Considering the diversity of stakeholders involved in disaster risk management, coordination becomes crucial for the effectiveness of the Civil Protection Organisation of this country.

In terms of crisis management, Cyclone Idai exposed glaring gaps in emergency preparedness and response in the country. It required a concerted effort in supporting affected populations, with the Department of Civil Protection, in collaboration with the National Civil Protection Committee, leading crisis management activities. Response interventions included government, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and civil society (Dalberg Report, 2019). Major weaknesses of the crisis management system included.

(1) Financing – Funding is often inadequate to execute the full suite of solutions required for emergency response, with limited money set aside in the national budget for disaster preparedness

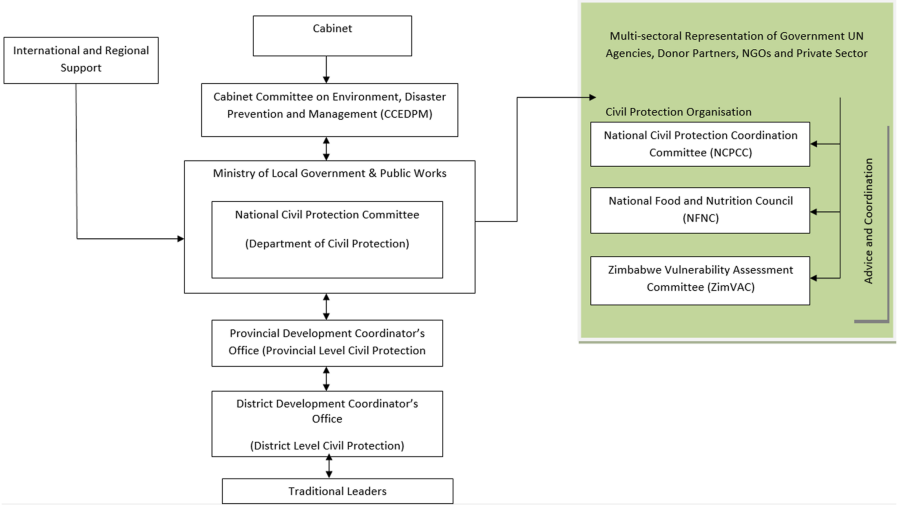

Figure 1. Coordination structure of the Civil Protection Organisations. Source: Department of Civil Protection

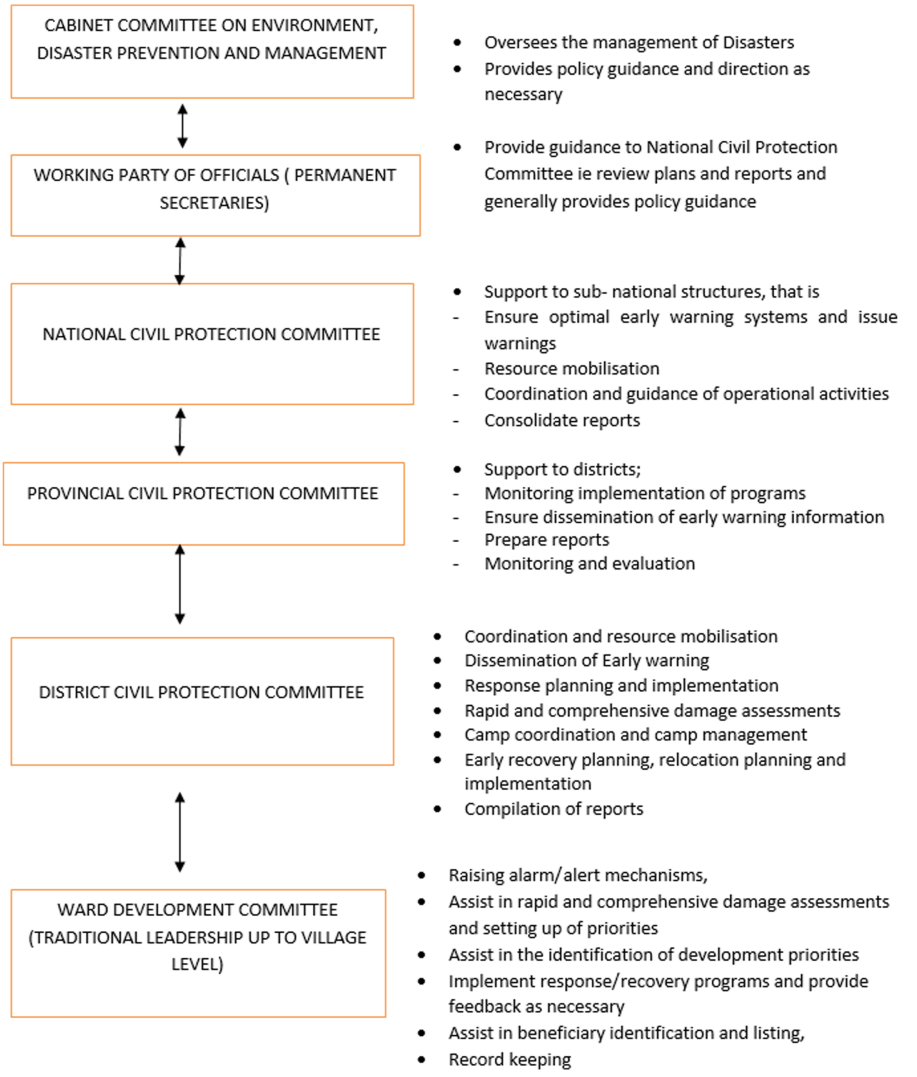

Figure 2. The Civil Protection Organisations. Source: Department of Civil Protection

(2) Communication and Information – Management Data are not integrated across ministries and information from the local level is often slow to trickle up, making real time data capture a challenge

(3) Operations Management and Planning – Response requirements and on the ground, leadership are not always clearly defined, resulting in local response that may not be harmonised across affected areas

(4) Subnational Engagement and Training – Emergency response activities are temporarily activated in response to particular crises, limiting preparedness activities and capacity building in non-crisis times, especially for subnational actors

(5) Partnerships – Government does not always fully leverage the expertise of its partner network during response activities, with actors on the ground not necessarily assigned tasks based on who is best placed to execute them (Dalberg Report, 2019).

Zimbabwe's disaster preparedness gaps, highlighted by Cyclone Idai, led to the establishment of the National Multi-hazard Emergency Operations Centre (MHEOC) and the refurbishment of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) with support from Higherlife Foundation (HLF). These centres address challenges like coordination, real-time data analysis and resource mobilisation. The PHEOC has been crucial in managing health crises like COVID-19 and cholera, improving decision-making through real-time data. The MHEOC aligns with the Civil Protection Act and international frameworks, ensuring systematic disaster responses. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), developed with the World Bank, emphasise coordinated disaster management, strengthening Zimbabwe's resilience (HigherLife Foundation, 2024).

Evolution of anticipatory action in Zimbabwe

AA initiatives in Zimbabwe started around 2019, being championed mainly by UN agencies like FAO and WFP, the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS), as well as NGOs, particularly WHH. Then, the focus was more on getting stakeholders and other players in the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) sector to understand the new approach and how it fits into the conventional broader DRM cycle and process. These initial processes were also implemented in collaboration with Government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) involved in hazard early warning, preparedness and response, especially the Department of Civil Protection (DCP) and the Meteorological Services Department (MSD). This early phase of AA initiatives was limited largely to small-scale AA projects that were meant, in addition to cushioning at-risk communities against the impacts of forecasted hazards, to act as pilot projects from which to draw lessons and good practices on AA. Early pilot projects were therefore implemented by WFP, ZRCS and FAO in 2021 through 2022, focusing largely on drought mitigation. At the same time, these agencies, with technical climatological expert support from MSD, were also developing drought trigger models or protocols, which they used to "trigger" anticipatory action for drought mitigation in the various districts they were operating in. WFP initially worked on drought mitigation in Mudzi, ZRCS on drought mitigation in Binga and cyclone-induced flooding in Chipinge and Chimanimani, while FAO worked on flood and drought mitigation in selected districts of Matabeleland South Province. In February 2023, the Anticipatory Action Community of Practice (CoP) held its first-ever physical meeting in Masvingo, where it sought the guidance of the Department of Civil Protection concerning how it could contribute to DRM in the country. The Masvingo CoP meeting was followed by meetings and other forms of engagement between FAO and other actors in the AA space, to seek clarity and consensus on the development of AA as an emerging approach in DRM. Different humanitarian agencies had various donor-driven initiatives to drive the AA agenda, with the ECHO-funded joint AA project co-implemented by FAO, IFRC and WFP playing a key role in the institutionalisation of AA within the country's DRM structures. The title of the project is *"Building capacity in Southern Africa to enable effective disaster risk management through regional systems for inter-agency anticipatory action using a multi-hazard, multi-sectoral approach"*. In May 2023, the core team of the ECHO project steering committee of FAO, WFP and IFRC met to discuss the objectives and modalities of project implementation in Zimbabwe and thereafter led to the catapulting of project initiatives in the country.

Institutionalisation of anticipatory action

The Government of Zimbabwe adopted the Maputo Declaration on Bridging the Gap between Early Warning and Early Action on 8 September 2022. The Declaration heeds the call of the

World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Secretary-General to provide every citizen on the planet with access to reliable, accurate and timely Early Warning Systems within the next five years. To address the pressing need for enhanced multi-hazard early warning and early action in Africa, the African Union Commission (AUC) developed the Africa Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Early Action System Programme (AMHEWAS). At the global level, the UN's Early Warning for All (EW4All) initiative was launched at the 27th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties (UNFCCC-COP27) to protect every person worldwide through early warning systems within the next five years. The multi-hazard Early Warning for All Action Plan for Africa (2023–2027) is being developed to bridge existing gaps and establish continent-wide early warning systems coverage by 2027, in line with AMHEWAS and EW4All objectives.

Under the leadership and support of the DCP, a National AA Review Dialogue was conducted in September 2023as an AA diagnostic platform to take stock of AA initiatives in Zimbabwe, setting the stage for the development of a harmonised approach that falls within the overall mandate of the Government of Zimbabwe's DRM architecture. It also provided a platform for a SWOT dialogue between the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), CoP and other players in AA. Participants in the workshop were from government ministries (particularly members of the National Civil Protection Committee), academics, non-governmental and civil society organisations and UN agencies. Following this, the CoP was invited to participate in the 2023/24 National Contingency Planning Workshop, where AA was formally adopted as part of the national process. It was also agreed at this workshop that the Government would set up AA sub-committees within the DRM structures at national, provincial and district levels. These sub-committees are linked to provincial and district structures through the national civil protection committee (NCPC). This was followed by the convening of the Multi-Stakeholder National AA Workshop in October 2023, where the strategy and roadmap for AA in Zimbabwe were developed. A mapping exercise (5Ws) of who is doing what, where when and why was undertaken to produce a snapshot of the AA partner landscape in the country.

A national trigger models triangulation workshop was held in December 2023. Participants to the workshop were drawn from across government ministries (particularly members of the National Civil Protection Committee), academics, non-governmental and civil society organisations, UN agencies and the private sector. This three-day trigger model triangulation workshop took stock of AA trigger models being used by respective agencies in Zimbabwe. This marked the beginning of a process of reviewing the performance of these trigger models for at least three years to set the stage for the development of a harmonised approach to their use. It also provided a platform for simplified but detailed explanations of how these trigger models operate, a discussion of the indicators, justification for their selection and their performance for the agencies using them. The workshop also validated the draft AA Roadmap that was developed by DRM partners in October 2023 under the coordination of the DCP.

There was serious engagement and debate around ownership of the trigger models, since most of the models were developed by experts outside Zimbabwe. Participants felt that for effective utilisation of the models, there must be local ownership, capacity and ability to modify and redefine parameters and indicators. The issue of testing the performance of the trigger models was raised, with participants indicating that this needed to be done through project evaluations and After Activation Evaluation (AAE), After Action Review (AAR) and Return on Investment (RoI) studies. Overall, it was unanimously agreed to ensure the layering of models instead of relying on one, hence the need to focus on the triangulation of the various models. The next major event in the institutionalisation of AA was the implementation of El Niño Drought AA projects in various semi-arid and arid districts, mostly to the southern parts of the country, by WFP, FAO, IFRC/ZRCS and WHH, among others. These activations were implemented in collaboration with the relevant Government MDAs. Some NGOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs) were also part of the implementation, coming in as implementing partners or sub-recipients of donor funds for these projects. The projects, implemented from September 2023 to June 2024, were designed to be short-term and to focus on critical

"windows of opportunity" for optimal drought mitigation. In the 2023–2024 season, 12 districts were targeted by WFP under drought AA, with four districts (Binga, Hwange, Masvingo and Chiredzi) activating AAs after the drought trigger model predicted a moderate drought during the first window (October, November, December) of the 2023/24 season. FAO implemented in Beitbridge, Gwanda and Matobo Districts, with IFRC/ZRCS also activating in Binga District in the same season. Implementing agencies ensured coordination through the AA Community of Practice (CoP).

Activations were followed by the conducting of After Action studies by FAO, IFRC–ZRCS and WFP around June–July 2024. Soon after the study, the DCP led agencies in convening the national AAR Workshop, conducted at the end of July 2024 in Harare. Findings of the post-activation survey were presented and discussed at the AAR workshop. The AAR was a one-and-a-half-day event with participants drawn from the AA CoP members, government departments and research institutions. The purpose of the AAR was to reflect on preparedness activities for the activation, AA implementation processes, results of the post-activation survey and performance of the trigger models. Through this workshop, stakeholders identified lessons learned and captured best practices for future activations.

The National AAR workshop was followed by the development of the national AAR framework between June and August 2024, led by WFP. The framework articulates how the National Roadmap on AA will be implemented. To demonstrate the importance of community engagement in anticipatory action (CEAA), FAO Zimbabwe, through the CoP, conducted a CEAA piloting exercise in Bikita District of Masvingo Province in July 2024. The piloting exercise set out to ensure that, in the context of growing importance of anticipating (and preventing) food crises, AA stakeholders are equipped to facilitate a more inclusive and bottom-up approach to AA programming by reflecting the perspectives and priorities of at-risk and affected populations, including particularly vulnerable groups, in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of AA. Cementing the integration of AA into the national contingency planning process, the CoP was given an opportunity to present on the state of AA in the country at the national multi-hazard contingency planning workshop for the 2024/25 rainfall season conducted in October 2024. As with the 2023–24 contingency plan, the 2024–25 plan also has a section on AA appended to it. The development of policy and strategic documents was followed by a more practical phase of capacity building of the staff of government MDAs involved in DRM, to ensure smooth nesting of AA within government structures. To this effect, national, provincial and district-level sensitisation and capacity building workshops for AA sub-committees were conducted in May, September and October 2024, respectively. Members were also sensitised on their TORs, which were developed by the CoP. The trainings were meant to train participants on the basics of AA and to sensitise them on their roles as members of the sub-committees. In November–December 2024, there was a government-led effort, supported by FAO, IFRC and WFP, in conducting a flood and drowning simulation exercise in Chipinge District as part of capacity strengthening and testing of the functionality of preparedness and response capabilities of local authorities and community members. The CoP provides AA briefings and updates during the monthly National Civil Protection Committee (NCPC) meetings.

The momentum towards institutionalisation of AA by many countries, Zimbabwe included, has been acknowledged by the Anticipation Hub (2024), which also observes that full integration remains a work in progress, particularly concerning financing and the use of social protection mechanisms to deliver anticipatory action. The lack of, and limited access to, funding is another persistent challenge, affecting countries' ability to implement national strategies (build funding) and to implement anticipatory actions at the national and local levels (fuel funding).

Zimbabwe's disaster risk profile

Before delving into the nitty-gritty of institutionalisation of AA in Zimbabwe, an overview of the disaster risk profile of the country is proffered. According to The World Bank Group

(2021), Zimbabwe has endured various natural hazards, including droughts, epidemic diseases, floods and storms over the past century. From 1900 to 2017, the country encountered seven drought events, 22 epidemic episodes, 12 floods and five storms, which resulted in total deaths of roughly 7,000 people, with more than 20 million people affected and total damage of USD 950 million. The number of total people affected, and economic loss caused by droughts has been observed to increase considerably. In 2019, the country experienced a devastating Cyclone Idai. Flooding and landslides caused damage to homes, fields, schools and roads and disrupted livelihoods, particularly in Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts. Seven other districts in Manicaland, Masvingo and Mashonaland East Provinces were also affected but did not suffer to the same extent in terms of infrastructure damage, loss of human life and livelihood disruptions. Cyclone Idai affected 270,000 people in Zimbabwe: 51,000 were displaced, more than 340 died, and many others went missing (Chatiza, 2019). Epidemic diseases, particularly bacterial and parasitic types, contribute to a significant portion of total deaths and total affected people due to natural hazards. Floods are strongly associated with total economic loss. The country has experienced several riverine floods. During the same period, nine riverine floods occurred, affecting over 300,000 people, resulting in the loss of over 270 lives and causing monetary losses exceeding $270 million (The World Bank Group, 2021).

According to an analysis of the CMIP5 multi-model ensemble projection, the annual likelihood of Zimbabwe encountering severe drought is projected to increase by 21% in 2040–2059 and by 47% in 2080–2099 compared to the baseline period of 1986–2005 under the RCP8.5 scenario. It is projected that western Zimbabwe is more likely to experience drought conditions. Extreme temperatures and precipitation events will be more prominent in the country. The number of days per year with a maximum temperature greater than 35 °C is expected to increase by 39 days in the period from 2040 to 2059 and 108 days in 2080–2099 from the reference period under RCP8.5. The number of days of consecutive dry spells per year (or days without significant rainfall of at least 1mm) is projected to increase by 13 days in 2040–2059 and 25 days in 2080–2099. Climate change is expected to negatively impact the future occurrence, intensity and magnitude of floods, droughts, and epidemic episodes, which can consequently lead to enormous social and monetary loss across multiple economic sectors (The World Bank Group, 2021).

The community of practice (CoP) on anticipatory action in Zimbabwe

The AA community of Practice (CoP) functions as a collaborative platform for practitioners, policymakers, researchers and organisations involved in anticipatory action initiatives. Formally established in 2023, its main objective is to share knowledge, experiences and best practices related to anticipatory action in the context of disaster risk reduction and response. Given the extensive experience in Zimbabwe in Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning, AA forms an integral part of the contingency planning in that it ensures adequate prepositioning of materials before the hazards occur. Current emphasis is on the use of climate services and risk analyses to predict where crises might strike and enable actions to prevent or mitigate impacts before disasters occur. An anticipatory action sub-committee has been formed within the Civil Protection Committee in the same manner as other sub-committees, such as search and rescue, early warning, agriculture and food security, etc. Key functions of the CoP are knowledge sharing, capacity building, networking and collaboration, policy advocacy, research and innovation and monitoring and evaluation.

The AA community of practice serves as a collaborative space for stakeholders involved in anticipatory action to learn from each other, enhance their capabilities and collectively advance the field to better address the impacts of disasters and climate change. Organisations making up the CoP include: The Department of Civil Protection (DCP), Meteorological Services Department (MSD), Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), Agricultural and Rural Development Advisory Services (ARDAS), START Network, World Vision, Plan

International, Welthungerhilfe (WHH), CARE International, Christian Aid, Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS), Christian Blind Mission (CBM), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), FAO, UNESCO, WFP, UNICEF, IFRC, Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) and Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (MUAST).

Discussion

Notwithstanding some challenges that may be associated with the institutionalisation of AA, and as Choularton and Montier (2023) observe, the international community, including humanitarian organisations, has been moving toward more risk-informed action for decades. The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and its predecessor, the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action, clearly define the international community's commitment to anticipatory action to reduce the losses and damages caused by natural disasters (*Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015–2030*, 2015). This commitment is also reflected in the UNFCCC process, including Article 8 of the Paris Climate Agreement, which covers loss and damage. The Compendium on Comprehensive Risk Management Approaches, developed by the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, highlights "anticipatory action to reduce the risk of loss and damage" as part of comprehensive risk management and the value of various financial risk transfer mechanisms (WIMS, 2019). Moreover, through the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations, the humanitarian community has committed to increasing its focus on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and AA. In recent years, anticipatory action was highlighted in the Group of Seven (G7) Foreign Ministers' statement on strengthening anticipatory action in humanitarian assistance, released in 2022, which asserts that "for the humanitarian system to continue to be able to protect affected populations, to bridge the growing financing gap and protect hard-won development gains, a paradigm shift toward more efficient, effective and forward-looking humanitarian assistance is needed" (G7, 2022).

ICRC (2024) posits that in order to truly reach scale and ensure more people are protected, it is indispensable for governments to integrate anticipatory action into their own DRM systems. Pre-agreed funds, responsibilities and processes, supported by adequate capacities, are essential for the effective implementation of anticipatory action. This requires governments to clarify the place of anticipatory action in the wider government-led DRM system and to assess relevant laws, acts, policies, tools and capabilities. This has been seen in current efforts being made by the Zimbabwean Government to establish AA sub-committees within the pre-existing DRM structures from national through local levels. It also means building on and leveraging existing frameworks and actors to deliver anticipatory action. In line with this, it has been pointed out that a National Roadmap on AA and a National Framework on AA have been drafted. This should happen in parallel with the strengthening of DRM systems and laws in general, as outlined in the resolution adopted at the 32nd International Conference "Strengthening legal frameworks for disaster response, risk reduction and first aid" and the proposed resolution for the 34th International Conference "Strengthening disaster risk governance through comprehensive disaster laws, policies and plans". It also follows that the institutionalisation of AA in Zimbabwe is happening at a time when the country is drafting a Disaster Risk Management Bill, premised on DRR, to replace the current Civil Protection Act that was developed with a focus on relief and response. At the same time, the country has also, between 2020 and 2022, developed a Disaster Risk Management Strategy Draft, a Disaster Risk Communication Strategy Draft and a National DRM Plan Draft. What will be critical is to identify entry points for AA to be incorporated into these new documents. On a positive note, AA has been integrated into the contingency planning process since 2023.

Advocates of AA position it as a means of improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and dignity of humanitarian aid (AATF, 2021; Anticipation Hub, 2022, cited in De la Poterie *et al.*, 2023). In relation to this, this paper has described the formation, evolution and functionality of the AA CoP and its role in bridging the gap between Government and players in the wider

humanitarian sector (NGOs, private sector, CBOs, multi-lateral agencies, etc). While their concepts overlap and many have called for greater integration across fields (Hinds, 2015; Kelman *et al.*, 2015; Thomalla *et al.*, 2018), development, DRR, climate change and humanitarian response often operate in silos and with separate funding streams and systems (Schipper *et al.*, 2016; Raikes *et al.*, 2021). No matter which silo is at work, international aid is informed not purely by need, but by donor's geopolitical priorities and recipient government's agendas (Tozier de la Poterie *et al.*, 2018). It is distributed through political systems characterised by power imbalances and indirect accountability chains (Winters, 2010; Renzio, 2016). Aid programs are often designed and implemented by foreign actors with limited knowledge of local contexts and based on donor schedules (Gaillard and Mercer, 2013; Baudoin *et al.*, 2016), factors that preclude ownership, hinder sustainability and undermine local capacities. Recognising these realities, part of the AA interventions co-implemented by the Government and CoP members include CEAA, which has been a critical strategy to create space for at-risk communities to have a say in AA activities, ideally right from their formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The Bikita District case has already been highlighted. More still needs to be done on CEAA, and this case only serves as a demonstration of the importance of community engagement in anticipatory action for local ownership and locally-led implementation, resonating with the localisation agenda.

Some scholars argue that despite optimism that climate services can improve decision-making, thereby reducing the need for aid and bettering aid outcomes (Cane *et al.*, 1994; Haile, 2005; Braman, 2008), extensive research has documented the technical, political, and socio-economic challenges of realising these benefits. Precipitation forecasts often do not provide sufficient detail regarding the timing, intensity or distribution of rainfall to facilitate agricultural, fishery or humanitarian decisions (Tozier de la Poterie *et al.*, 2018). Communication channels (Vogel and O'Brien, 2006), trust in forecasts, community power dynamics (Carr and Onzere, 2018), politics and the resources to act (Tozier de la Poterie *et al.*, 2018) are among the factors that constrain individual and humanitarian responses to climate services. However, these challenges are being tackled, albeit with various forms of resource and technical limitations. For instance, agencies implementing climate services and AA initiatives are working with meteorological services agencies, agricultural extension agencies and community radio stations in disseminating impact-based forecasts and farmer advisories in local vernacular languages to ensure listeners fully understand the messages.

As highlighted earlier, the lack of ownership of the top-down, externally driven, project approach to AA initiatives to date and the highly technical, resource-intensive process of developing and approving EAPs (De la Poterie *et al.*, 2023) are critical issues that need to be taken into consideration and addressed during institutionalisation. These issues were also raised by participants in the trigger model triangulation workshop alluded to earlier. Participants in the AA Review workshop also pointed out that there was now a need to move beyond a project-based piloting approach to AA towards scaling up and reaching out to more districts in the country. In some contexts, anticipatory action's popularity as a concept also results in small-scale, uncoordinated pilots, which risk wasting valuable resources and could result in mixed messaging ahead of forecasted crises, potentially undermining existing early warning systems (Choularton and Montier, 2023). This is echoed by Easton-Calabria (2025), who opines that persistent gaps in funding, short funding cycles and ongoing "projectisation" across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding spheres all contribute to situations where AA (and, indeed, wider humanitarian assistance) may be a standalone "band-aid" rather than an impactful tool emplaced within larger interventions and responses. This is a key area that stakeholders involved in global climate action and other commitments related to climate finance and wider investment in FCV contexts must take seriously. Similar to other aid programs (Theisohn and Lopes, 2003), a lack of on-the-ground training, ensuing capacity gaps, and a dearth of localised resources to develop or sustain that capacity are critical challenges facing AA. The same can be said to be the situation in Zimbabwe, despite the early efforts made to scale up AA.

Delays and transportation challenges are not new in humanitarian aid, but in the context of rapid-onset hydrometeorological hazards, logistical and bureaucratic challenges mean the difference between AA and early response (De La Poterie *et al.*, 2023). Short lead-times have major implications for the kinds of actions that can be implemented, especially when combined with the logistical challenges above. In relation to this, one of the key findings from the activation research done by WFP, FAO and IFRC shared at the National AAR workshop was the delay in implementation of the 2023–24 El Niño Drought activations due to bureaucratic challenges, among others. Time was taken to critically review the operational readiness of organisations implementing AA activities, and it was unanimously agreed that more still needs to be done to expedite procurement processes and strengthen operational preparedness to ensure meaningful support towards the institutionalisation of AA. Lessons learned from the late implementation of actions should be used to inform what needs to be done differently to ensure that activities originally planned as anticipatory actions do not end up being implemented after the peak of the hazard (for slow-onset) or before the onset (for rapid onset).

According to Choularton and Montier (2023), national governments and humanitarian organisations are employing disaster risk financing (DRF) to reduce reliance on the "begging bowl" model of humanitarian financing, whereby funds are mobilised after an event through slow and often uncoordinated processes that can undermine national and local capacities (Clarke and Dercon, 2016) and incur high process costs (Knox and Hillier, 2023). DRF offers a framework by which countries and organisations can quantify disaster risk and cost different disaster risk management options ahead of time and make better-informed decisions to manage risks. Although the Zimbabwean institutionalisation case may not have gone this far in terms of capacity, the initial activations, sensitisation trainings in AA and related interventions are considered critical foundational steps. Risk-informed approaches are being tested, scaled up and institutionalised across the humanitarian system. We have alluded to the activations by FAO, IFRC and WFP based on signals from their trigger models. The START Network has also been a formidable partner in the AA space in Zimbabwe, as they are an active member of the CoP. These efforts are generating a growing evidence base on the value of using available risk information to facilitate earlier and more predictable assistance to climate-vulnerable populations. However, the increasing popularity of these approaches, partly driven by significant unmet humanitarian needs and the need for new tools to limit the impacts of climate change, brings challenges around clarity and coherence, the diverse mechanisms to implement such approaches, and how these can be supported (Choularton and Montier, 2023). These are issues that the DCP will need to work on, with support from the wider humanitarian community.

Involvement of communities and other local actors in the build (design) phase of AA programmes has often been limited within current AA initiatives. In early AA programmes, a focus on scientific data often excluded less formal inputs and harder-to-access community perspectives. Meaningfully engaging local people, organisations and government on questions of risk assessment, identifying existing capacities and designing opportunities for action have often received insufficient attention within AA initiatives (McCluire and Montier, 2024). This paper has described how the CoP is supporting the Government in rolling out community engagement in anticipatory action as one of the cornerstones of the successful implementation of initiatives and institutionalisation of AA within government structures.

Conclusion

Improving the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the humanitarian system has never been as vital as it is today. Rapidly accumulating disaster risk driven by climate change, rapid increases in populations and assets in hazard-prone areas, conflicts and other factors underlie the urgency of humanitarian reform. DRF and anticipatory action are two critical approaches that contribute to addressing the challenges faced by populations, communities and countries worldwide and their institutionalisation within government structures and systems therefore

becomes imperative. As Wilkinson *et al.* (2020) assert, what started as a few pilot initiatives implemented by humanitarian agencies in a small number of rural communities is now developing into a community of practice. The ambition is to scale up AA financing and coverage, and drive a systemic shift towards anticipatory action, including through engagement with national risk management systems. From a national perspective, a range of interventions, over various timescales, can be used to manage risk and mitigate hazard impacts, but these must be weighed against other development needs in public investment decisions. The justification for allocating resources to risk reduction and adaptation, therefore, rests on their effectiveness, not only in reducing impacts when a disaster occurs in the future, but also on generating other resilience dividends (see Tanner and Wilkinson, 2016, cited in Wilkinson *et al.*, 2020). Anticipatory action should be a collective effort shared between humanitarian, development, peace and climate stakeholders in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace-Conflict (HDPC) nexus (SIDA HUM, 2024). Embedded within the broader rubric of anticipatory governance, institutionalisation of anticipatory action must be effectively supported from a multi-sectoral, multi-actor perspective for enhancement of resilience to hazards, shocks and stresses. More resources and effort should be poured into supporting and further strengthening Zimbabwe's maiden dance with anticipatory action.

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