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Evaluation of GFFO fund- ing on Anticipatory Action („Vorausschauende hu- manitäre Hilfe“)

Executive Summary

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Background

The development of anticipatory humanitarian action represents one of the most significant innovations in the humanitarian system. Rather than providing assistance primarily in response to crises, conflicts and disasters after they have occurred, anticipatory humanitarian action seeks to deliver support when a crisis is foreseeable. This approach is grounded in the recognition that a substantial share of humanitarian needs arises from events that are at least partially predictable. Extreme weather events such as droughts, storms or floods – which frequently trigger humanitarian emergencies – can increasingly be identified with greater precision through effective early warning systems. Acting early enables better protection of affected populations, reduces losses and damage, strengthens longer-term resilience and lowers the costs of subsequent humanitarian response.

Germany is a leading donor in the field of anticipatory humanitarian action and finances a wide range of partners and initiatives in this area. As early as 2021, the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) committed to allocating at least 5% of its humanitarian budget to anticipatory action and set a target of providing EUR 100 million for this purpose in the 2023 fiscal year, which was achieved. In its Humanitarian Strategy published in 2024, the GFFO characterizes anticipatory humanitarian action as a paradigm shift in the humanitarian system from reactive to proactive and anticipatory approaches, and it has actively promoted the expansion of this approach for several years.

Evaluation focus

In April 2025, GFFO commissioned the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), through a public procurement process, to conduct an evaluation of the “Anticipatory Humanitarian Action” programme. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which anticipatory humanitarian action funded by GFFO is relevant, effective and efficient.

Five overarching evaluation questions were addressed based on document analysis, expert interviews, a survey, an efficiency analysis, and case studies with field visits in Ethiopia, Kenya and Mozambique:

- 1) *To what extent have the GFFO’s objectives in anticipatory humanitarian action been achieved through the funded interventions?*
- 2) *How economically and efficiently were the funds used?*
- 3) *Which factors influence effectiveness and efficient use of resources, including with a view to future programming?*
- 4) *How effective is coordination with other actors in the field of anticipatory humanitarian action?*
- 5) *How should support for anticipatory humanitarian action be further developed?*

Findings

The analysis of the collected data and evidence leads to a clear overall assessment: anticipatory humanitarian action supported by the German Federal Foreign Office has proven to be highly effective and relevant, while still offering scope for further development. Expanding on this, the evaluation identifies six key findings:

1

GFFO has made a decisive contribution to the establishment and institutionalization of anticipatory humanitarian action. Over the past decade, anticipatory humanitarian action has evolved from a niche concept into a widely recognized approach within the humanitarian system. GFFO has played a central role in shaping this development by sending early and consistent political signals that significantly contributed to the international visibility and anchoring of anticipatory action. Through three key political initiatives – its own 5% commitment, the G7 process, and efforts through the Grand Bargain – the GFFO has made a substantial contribution to mainstreaming anticipatory humanitarian action internationally and has encouraged key humanitarian actors in the system to increase their engagement in this area. At the same time, it has directed a substantial share of Germany’s humanitarian funding towards anticipatory action, thereby meeting its own 5% target, and has built and sustained core operational capacities and partnerships through continuous funding. In addition, the GFFO has directly and indirectly supported systematic learning and evidence generation on the relevance and effectiveness of anticipatory action. Overall, GFFO emerges as a key enabler whose diverse activities have had a lasting influence on the international development of anticipatory humanitarian action.

2

GFFO’s anticipatory action portfolio is broadly objective-oriented, but exhibits strategic gaps. The anticipatory humanitarian action portfolio of the GFFO is broadly coherent with the strategic objectives of German humanitarian assistance. In the 2024 Humanitarian Strategy, anticipatory action is highlighted as a relevant approach that supports the target attributes of humanitarian assistance being “localized, flexible, reliable, anticipatory and rapid.” The breadth of the portfolio has provided a robust basis for piloting different approaches, working with a range of partners, and testing anticipatory action in diverse geographical contexts, thereby balancing the strengths and weaknesses of different models. At the same time, individual funding decisions and the overall composition of the portfolio indicate that key strategic parameters could be further refined. In particular, weaknesses are evident in linking “build” components (development of anticipatory frameworks) with “fuel” components (financing for trigger-based activations), in an oftentimes limited harmonization of local early action plans, and in the absence of a clear prioritization of partners and regions.

3

The anticipatory humanitarian action supported by GFFO is effective, even in non-ideal conditions. The scientific and evaluative literature consistently shows that anticipatory humanitarian action can achieve high levels of effectiveness. The evaluation confirms that this also applies to GFFO-supported anticipatory action, particularly when context-specific measures are triggered and implemented in a timely manner. In the case study countries, early support demonstrably contributed to preventing irreversible harm such as loss of life, reducing losses and damage, stabilizing livelihoods, strengthening the capacity of affected populations to cope and act, and maintaining their agency – all through a way of support that was clearly preferred by affected communities themselves. No negative effects of anticipatory humanitarian action were identified in case studies. Rather, anticipatory action also generates important positive systemic effects, including strengthening national leadership, reinforcing technical co-

ordination mechanisms, improving early warning systems and local disaster preparedness, and enhancing the effectiveness of reactive humanitarian response. Importantly, the evaluation shows that anticipatory humanitarian action can generate positive effects and clear added value compared to purely reactive approaches even when implemented under suboptimal conditions, such as delayed activations, partially anticipatory implementation, or deviations between forecasted and actual impact locations.

Selected Evidence on the Impact of Anticipatory Humanitarian Action

- ➔ Cost-benefit studies and meta-analyses on the effectiveness of anticipatory humanitarian action show, inter alia, an increase in preventive actions undertaken by affected populations (Balana et al. 2023), improved protection against irreversible losses (Pople et al. 2024), and contributions to safeguarding income and productive assets. In addition, AHA-based interventions are associated with lower losses of crops and livestock (START Network 2024). Further positive effects include improved food security and reduced reliance on negative coping strategies (WFP 2025).¹
- ➔ The in-depth analysis of activations in the Ethiopia, Kenya, and Mozambique case studies demonstrates a clear reduction in irreversible losses and an overall mitigation of adverse impacts. In Kenya, for example, the early rehabilitation of water supply infrastructure helped reduce water scarcity ahead of a drought. In Ethiopia, preventive livestock vaccinations lowered disease susceptibility and improved animal survival rates during critical periods. In Mozambique, early warnings enabled people to move to safety in advance of approaching floods.
- ➔ In slow-onset crises such as droughts, interventions that protect harvests or open up alternative agricultural production options have proven to be particularly effective. In the case study countries, for instance, WFP and FAO distributed drought-resistant seed varieties and supported the establishment of irrigated community plots capable of securing yields even in the absence of rainfall.
- ➔ The results of the expert survey conducted as part of the evaluation corroborate these findings. Of the 38 respondents who answered the question on overall effectiveness and who had each received GFFO funding for anticipatory humanitarian action, nearly 70 percent rated anticipatory approaches as “much more effective” and a further 26 percent as “somewhat more effective” compared to traditional humanitarian assistance. No respondent considered anticipatory humanitarian action to be equally effective or less effective.

4

The efficiency of anticipatory humanitarian action is largely determined by scale of activation and opportunities for scaling. According to the available evidence, preventive action is generally more cost-efficient than reactive humanitarian response. However, the magnitude of efficiency gains depends to a large extent on the scale of activations, opportunities for scaling, initial set-up costs, and the long-term reusability of early action plans (see point 5 below). The evaluation indicates that while anticipatory humanitarian action is in principle cost-efficient, a number of GFFO-funded interventions show potential for further efficiency gains.

5

Effectiveness and efficiency are influenced by multiple factors that have so far only been partially addressed. Anticipatory humanitarian action tends to be most effective and efficient when early warning systems are accurate, actions are implemented in a timely manner, approaches and early action plans across actors are harmonized, interventions are of sufficient scale and scalable, organizations have reliable access to activation funding, and linkages with broader disaster risk management are well designed.

¹ Balana et al. (2023). “Anticipatory cash transfers for climate resilience: Evidence from northeast Nigeria”; Pople et al. (2024). „The Importance of Being Early: Anticipatory Cash Transfers for Flood-Affected Households”; START Network/Kersting, F. (2025). “Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Interventions. Impacts, Challenges & Best Practices in Uncertain Times”; WFP (2025). “WFP’s evidence base on Anticipatory Action 2015-2024”.

In the case study contexts, these enabling conditions were only partially in place, either due to external constraints or because implementing partners pursued different priorities. As a result, the absence of some of these conditions has limited the effectiveness and efficiency of GFFO-supported anticipatory action, while at the same time highlighting key aspects that are relevant for the design of ongoing and future funding.

6

Linkages with other policy areas offer significant potential for stronger integration and scaling of anticipatory humanitarian action, which remains underutilized. Anticipatory humanitarian action as a concept has numerous conceptual and operational linkages with development cooperation and climate change adaptation, offering substantial potential for scaling. Individual examples demonstrate that such linkages are feasible and can be effective. However, to date approaches linking anticipatory humanitarian action with neighboring fields have largely remained ad hoc and have been driven primarily by implementing partners, without being systematically anchored in strategy or guided through political steering. Stronger cross-ministerial coordination and targeted advocacy led by GFFO - but staying within its mandate - could enable much broader use of these linkages. To this end, the GFFO should build on its successful political and advocacy work within the humanitarian system and increasingly engage a wider range of actors – in particular in development and climate finance – where significant scaling effects for anticipatory approaches are possible.

Recommendations

The proposed recommendations aim to further strengthen GFFO's practice on anticipatory humanitarian action, consolidate existing achievements and build on them, sharpen the focus on key enabling conditions for effective assistance, and maximize its impact under changing financial and political conditions by engaging more strategically with the fields of development cooperation and climate change adaptation.

Recommendation 1: Expand funding for anticipatory humanitarian action beyond 10% and anchor it politically.

Given the clear evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of anticipatory humanitarian action, the GFFO should significantly increase its support for this approach. The existing 5% target is no longer appropriate in light of overall budget cuts, as it would effectively halve the absolute funding available for anticipatory action. The GFFO should therefore raise its target to allocating more than 10% of its total humanitarian budget to anticipatory humanitarian action. This would also send a strong signal to other donors to maintain and strengthen their engagement. Beyond such a signal, the GFFO should continue its efforts to encourage other donors to make reliable and binding commitments in support of anticipatory humanitarian action.

Concrete measures:

- *Set a target of allocating more than 10% of total humanitarian funding to anticipatory humanitarian action.*
- *Communicate this target externally and intensify efforts to encourage other donors to make comparable commitments.*
- *Seek to anchor the new target in international forums such as the Grand Bargain.*
- *Strengthen political advocacy for anticipatory humanitarian action in the context of the global “humanitarian reset.”*

Recommendation 2: Focus future funding on priority countries for German humanitarian assistance or development cooperation.

Anticipatory humanitarian action makes a significant contribution to achieving the humanitarian objectives of the German Federal Government. A stronger focus on priority contexts is necessary to enable broader political anchoring of anticipatory action within the government. At the same time, the continued use of pooled funds, while appropriate, limits strategic steering by the GFFO. Both contributions to pooled funds and project-based funding should therefore primarily be directed towards countries identified as priorities for German humanitarian assistance or development cooperation, where contexts are conducive to anticipatory action and key enabling conditions are either already in place or can be established through targeted support.

Concrete measures:

- *Concentrate new anticipatory humanitarian action funding on priority countries for German humanitarian assistance or development cooperation.*
- *Assess contextual conditions and feasibility of anticipatory action against key enabling conditions for effectiveness.*

Recommendation 3: Sharpen the portfolio through more fuel funding, greater complementarity, stronger efficiency data, and continued investment in learning and networks

The evaluation shows that GFFO's anticipatory action portfolio is generally well designed and that funded interventions complement each other's strengths. At the same time, greater strategic focus is required. First, the GFFO should continue and institutionalize the shift from build to fuel funding. Second, it should more strongly require complementarity and harmonization across partners' anticipatory action activities. Third, efficiency indicators should play a stronger role in the selection of future funding. Finally, continued support for learning, evidence generation and networking remains essential.

Concrete measures:

- *Formalize strategic guiding principles for anticipatory humanitarian action and use them to guide future funding decisions.*
- *Consolidate the shift from build to fuel funding and support partners in access to activation financing.*
- *Require stronger complementarity and harmonization of partners' anticipatory action interventions.*
- *Request more detailed information on partners' use of funds, including unit costs.*
- *Continue to support learning, evidence generation and networking, particularly with development and climate actors*

Recommendation 4: Actively promote the use of development and climate finance instruments for anticipatory action.

In addition to its own engagement in anticipatory humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction, the GFFO should intensify its advocacy for stronger support of anticipatory approaches within disaster risk reduction, transitional assistance, resilience building and climate risk financing led by other ministries. The more systems relevant to anticipatory humanitarian action are strengthened by other actors, the greater the impact of GFFO-funded anticipatory action. Conversely, the more development actors leverage existing and future GFFO investments, the greater the overall effect for acting early, for

securing development gains and for mitigating negative climate change effects. For priority countries, more regular exchange between GFFO and BMZ country units, as well as between German missions and HQ, should be strengthened to advance integrated planning and better align funding.

Concrete measures:

- *Advocate for the use of climate finance instruments to support anticipatory humanitarian action, for example through dedicated funding windows under the International Climate Initiative and stronger integration of anticipatory elements within the Global Shield against Climate Risks.*
- *Establish forecast-based, action-plan-linked crisis modifiers as a standard element of humanitarian and development funding at the GFFO, within BMZ, and vis-à-vis other donors, combined with strengthened internal and external advocacy on the same topic.*
- *Strengthen cooperation between GFFO and BMZ country units and with German missions abroad on anticipatory humanitarian action, ensuring regular discussion of synergies and interfaces between funding instruments led by different ministries.*