ACTING BEFORE THE CRISIS: ROADMAP FOR MORE EFFECTIVE ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN MADAGASCAR

WITH A FOCUS ON THE INTEGRATION OF ANTICIPATORY CASH AS A KEY RESPONSE MODALITY

NOR CAP
PART OF NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER

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DATE:

June 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Action Against Hunger team in Madagascar, both in Antananarivo and Manakara, for their partnership, logistical and operational support in the field, as well as for the remarkable work carried out with communities in an extremely challenging context for the humanitarian sector.

The report benefited from the careful proofreading and valuable comments of:

- Xavier Poncin (Action Against Hunger)
- Rija Rakotoson (UNOCHA)
- Irenée Ravelojaona (UNICEF / Cash Working Group)
- Angelina Ramarosandratana (Welthungerhilfe / Anticipatory Action Working Group)

We also express our gratitude to all the partners who contributed to data collection, collective reflection, and technical exchanges, including: the World Bank, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Welthungerhilfe, Start Network, AFD, FCDO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, among others.

A special thank you is extended to the Directorate General of Meteorology (DGM), the Ministry of Population and Solidarity (MPS), and the National Office for Disaster Risk Management (BNGRC), for their availability, commitment, and essential role in protecting the most vulnerable populations from climate shocks.

MANY THANKS TO ALL.

About NORCAP

NORCAP works to improve aid to better protect and empower people affected by crisis and climate change. We do this providing expertise and solutions to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding partners.

NORCAP works in two complementary ways to improve aid:

· We provide targeted expertise to strengthen our partners' response.
· We collaborate with partners to develop solutions to un-met gaps and challenges.

NORCAP is a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK. WHY THIS REPORT.

Madagascar is among the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, facing recurrent tropical cyclones, floods, and prolonged droughts. Over 50 natural disasters have been recorded in the past 35 years, repeatedly affecting a population of which 80% lives on less than $1.25 a day.

The southern part of the country, particularly the regions of Androy, Anosy, and Atsimo Andrefana, is marked by chronic food insecurity, worsened by the frequency of droughts. The phenomenon of keré, recently described as the «world's first climate-induced famine,» highlights the severity of the humanitarian and climate challenges facing Madagascar **(REAP Madagascar, 2021).**

Since 2016, in this context, the Malagasy authorities, in collaboration with their humanitarian and development partners, have gradually strengthened institutional frameworks for disaster risk management and preparedness. The National Bureau for Disaster Risk Management (BNGRC), in coordination with the Ministry of Population and Solidarity (MPS), the United Nations, and NGOs, with the support of the Cash Working Group (CWG), has launched several initiatives to integrate Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) into emergency responses and adaptive social protection strategies — notably through the recent development of two operational manuals for CVA responses to droughts and cyclones.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PUBLICATION

- **To document the current state of Anticipatory Action in Madagascar,** with particular attention to the links between Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) and anticipatory mechanisms.
- To identify concrete opportunities for supporting and strengthening CVA systems within the framework of Anticipatory Action.
- To analyze the added value of NORCAP Cash and Markets programme in supporting the coordination of CVA for Anticipatory Action, in relation to aid localization and shock-responsive social protection.
- To contribute to strategic thinking on NORCAP's positioning, both within the scope of Anticipatory Action and more broadly in responses to climate-related shocks.

The Malagasy government's growing commitment to anticipatory action is further evidenced by the creation and operationalization of the Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Action (AA-TW), under the leadership of the BNGRC. This group aims to strengthen inter-agency coordination and institutionalize anticipatory action within the national mechanisms for climate risk management and disaster response.

METHODOLOGY

The mission that led to the development of this publication took place from March 2 to 12, 2025, in Antananarivo and Manakara. It combined the analysis of secondary bibliographic data with primary data collection, notably through bilateral interviews, group meetings with key institutional and humanitarian stakeholders, as well as field visits, community surveys, and focus group discussions with communities exposed to climate-related hazards.

This approach enabled a direct understanding of local dynamics, identification of progress in integrating Anticipatory Action, and recognition of persistent operational challenges. Additional remote consultations were also conducted with certain donors and technical partners not present in-country.

Strategic scope and added value

This work aligns with the strategic direction of NORCAP CashCap programme, in partnership with Action Against Hunger (AAH) in Madagascar, aiming to demonstrate the added value of independent, neutral, and expert support within governmental and humanitarian coordination mechanisms. It highlights the potential for replicating this type of support in other contexts exposed to climate shocks, while also strengthening NORCAP's positioning on humanitarian cash assistance programming within Anticipatory Action and adaptive social protection.

The lessons learned from this publication will feed into NORCAP's strategic thinking for 2025 and beyond, and will support advocacy efforts to expand the CashCap model in countries most vulnerable to climate-related hazards.

THE USE OF CASH TRANSFERS IN ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN MADAGASCAR

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The integration of CVA within AA in Madagascar is key as per operational documentation, national strategies, and community perspectives.

The contribution of anticipatory cash assistance

Complementary to other response modalities, anticipatory cash assistance plays a central role in AA mechanisms by providing exposed households with financial resources to act before, during, or immediately after a disaster. In Madagascar, CVA linked to AA enable:

• **Upfront preparedness:** Households use advance cash assistance to buy essentials, reinforce shelters, or invest in resilient livelihoods. Forecast-based funds (e.g., CERF) are used to pre-position resources before shocks.

• **Rapid response:** Post-shock, unconditional cash assistance allows immediate recovery. Mobile money facilitates rapid distribution and promotes financial inclusion, though in Madagascar around 90% of payments still rely on cash-in-hand due to infrastructure gaps.

• **Long-term resilience:** Linking CVA to systems like the Unified Social Registry (RSU) can establish sustainable safety nets. Market-based approaches strengthen economic stability and reduce dependency on external assistance.

Operational frameworks: Cyclone and drought response manuals.

Madagascar currently has two operational manuals guiding CVA use for climate shocks, both available only in French.

• The Cyclone/Flood Response Manual outlines triggers, standard amounts, delivery systems, and roles. It is more tailored to cyclone contexts than to non-cyclonic floods.

• The Drought Response Manual targets slow-onset crises and integrates PSRC strategies, including options for scaling existing safety nets.

Both manuals implementation remains limited and are currently being updated with support from NORCAP.

However, in the case of Madagascar several challenges remain in operationalizing them: no CVA linked to Anticipatory Action has yet been implemented for cyclones or floods; the role of the RSU in enabling comprehensive targeting is still unclear; discussions are ongoing around rapid and effective delivery mechanisms and agreed AA transfer amounts; and coordination between humanitarian anticipatory cash and shock-responsive social protection systems remains limited.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON CYCLONE PREPAREDNESS AND CASH ASSISTANCE.

Focus group discussions and a household survey in Mangatsiotra and surrounding areas (Dec 2024–Jan 2025) provide local insights into livelihoods, preparedness, and assistance preferences:

• **Livelihoods** are primarily agricultural (rice, cassava, maize), with supplementary income from artisanal fishing, weaving, or charcoal production. These activities are highly vulnerable to cyclones.

• **Assistance preferences** reflect critical needs: 96% food, 53% shelter, 37% education, 32% health—supporting the case for multisectoral cash assistance aimed at immediate survival and recovery.

• **Alert systems** depend mainly on radio and informal relays. Messages are understood, but actions are limited due to lack of resources. No formal data exists on household preparedness.

• **Timing is critical:** 83% of respondents said that, in case of not anticipatory cash being distributed, cash would be most useful in the first week after impact, emphasizing the need for fast fund release to avoid negative coping mechanisms.

• **Key takeaways:** AA must address basic needs, combine CVA with capacity building, strengthen alert systems via local committees , and ensure that even post-shock responses are timely if AA is not feasible.

STATUS AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM PREVIOUS AND CURRENT ANTICIPATORY CASH INITIATIVES

@ACF. Registering beneficiaries of anticipatory cash assistance on KOBO in Beloha.

The integration of CVA into Anticipatory Action in Madagascar is emerging but remains limited in its practical implementation. Several structural, technical, and operational elements are hindering large-scale deployment, despite strong interest and clearly identified opportunities.

There is consensus on the potential of anticipatory cash, but implementation is still lacking.

Stakeholders unanimously recognize the relevance of cash transfers as a form of assistance within AA (for both cyclones and droughts), particularly due to their speed, flexibility, and alignment with community preferences. However, **it has been clearly noted that cash transfers have never been implemented in a cyclone-related AA framework in Madagascar.** In drought contexts, only isolated pilot projects have been carried out in the South.

Cyclone-related AA also involves in-kind interventions and/or direct services, depending on the sector. For example, in the education sector, sandbags are pre-positioned in schools to protect infrastructure in case of cyclones, through community mobilization. This diversity of modalities reflects the multi-sectoral nature of AA, which cannot rely solely on cash, but must instead be part of a **complementary programming framework where cash transfers are one of several adapted forms of assistance.**

Fragmentation of practices and lack of harmonization in amounts and durations are persistent issues.

Practices vary significantly between programs:

• In AA, transfer amounts differ widely from one actor to another (e.g., Start Network, WFP, Action Against Hunger), without a consolidated reference framework.

• There is currently no national matrix defining harmonized transfer values per household, frequency, duration, or specific conditions for anticipatory contexts.

• The link between AA and social protection (SRSP, RSU) has not yet been formalized, leading to potential overlaps or duplications.

Major operational challenges also impede the use of cash in AA due to technical constraints:

• **Targeting:** Although the RSU holds promise, it is not accessible in all high-risk areas, and beneficiary lists are not always up to date, making rapid targeting at the time of alert difficult.

• **Pre-positioning:** Payment operators do not always have the resources or pre-arranged logistics that can be activated within 72 hours, especially in remote areas.

• **Coordination:** The absence of a dedicated operational forum for AA limits joint planning and the alignment of triggers, thresholds, and validations among actors.

Recent integration examples and opportunities to build upon do exist. Pilot initiatives have laid some groundwork for broader implementation:

• **The Start Network's anticipatory plan enabled small-scale transfers** during cyclones Batsirai and Emnati, and ACF planned to reach 1,000 households with cash under an ECHO-funded project.

• **During the El Niño-induced drought in 2023–2024, the AA response relied primarily on multisectoral activities** such as emergency well construction, livestock distribution, and provision of adapted seeds. **Cash transfers were also anticipated and combined with these interventions through an $11 million emergency appeal.** This integrated approach helped mitigate the drought's impact on food security in the Grand South.

Sector recommendations for strengthening the use of cash in AA include institutional efforts at the national level.

The national Cash Working Group (CWG), co-led by BNGRC, MPS, and UNICEF, acts as the central institutional and technical coordination platform. This body should continue reinforcing the integration of cash transfers into AA mechanisms, particularly by strengthening its ties with the national AA platform (AA-TWG). The CWG has a key role to play as a technical advisory group, providing operational guidance to ensure coherent and effective implementation of cash transfers in anticipatory responses.

Specific recommendations include:

- **Establishing a consolidated matrix of transfer amounts and durations** tailored to each type of intervention (AA, PSRC, emergency).

- **Fully integrating AA into the operational cash transfer manuals** (cyclone and drought).

- **Continue the reactivation and strengthening of the AA** Technical Group (AA-TWG) to harmonize practices, formalize triggers, and support the sharing of pre-identified beneficiary lists.

THE STATE OF ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN MADAGASCAR

@NORCAP. Focus group with women in Mangatsoa, Manakara.

1. Structural vulnerabilities and hazard typology. Madagascar experiences both rapid-onset and slow-onset climate hazards. Cyclones and floods, which mostly strike the eastern regions, require immediate response mechanisms. In contrast, droughts in the Grand South develop more gradually but have persistent effects on food insecurity. These hazard types demand differentiated anticipatory protocols in terms of timing, coordination, and response modalities.

2. Growing recognition of Anticipatory Action (AA). Since 2016, Malagasy authorities have made progress in strengthening disaster risk management systems. The establishment of the AA-TWG under BNGRC leadership reflects institutional interest in AA. However, the group is still in the process of becoming fully functional and embedded in national coordination structures.

3. CVA widely recognized as relevant for AA. CVA are valued for its speed, flexibility, and suitability to affected households' needs. Despite this consensus, they have not been implemented for cyclone-related AA in Madagascar. In drought contexts, small-scale pilot projects have been launched, but no systematic deployment exists.

4. Lack of harmonization and fragmented practices. There is no standardized national framework guiding CVA implementation in AA. Transfer values, durations, and conditions vary across organizations. This fragmentation has created inconsistencies in practice and challenges for coordination.

5. Major operational bottlenecks. Logistical pre-positioning in high-risk areas remains weak, especially for essential supplies. In many cases, beneficiary lists are outdated or unavailable, hindering rapid targeting. Physical access to certain areas becomes nearly impossible just before cyclones. Payment systems often cannot operate within the short timeframe required for anticipatory response (typically 72 hours).

6. Insufficient coordination between systems The alignment between AA and SRSP is still not operationalized. The RSU, although promising, is still under development and not fully accessible or interoperable with humanitarian systems. Risk management committees and social protection actors tend to operate separately, without mechanisms for formal collaboration.

7. Uneven performance of community-level structures. Local structures such as Local Committees of Risk Management are often inactive or under-resourced. Their functionality depends heavily on externally funded projects. In some cases, they lack the capacity for rapid targeting or AA coordination. Several remote communities did not receive early warnings or anticipatory aid, pointing to gaps in communication and outreach.

8. Strong technical manuals, weak implementation. Two manuals developed in 2023 for cyclone/flood and drought responses provide clear technical guidance. However, they are mainly applied in isolated project contexts. There is no nationwide system to monitor their application, and no wide-scale training has been delivered. The integration of AA elements into these manuals is underway but not yet complete.

Priority Actions for Anticipatory Action in Madagascar

Adapt approaches according to the types of hazards. Cyclones and floods (rapid-onset hazards) and droughts (slow-onset hazards) require differentiated responses; it is therefore essential to develop specific protocols tailored to each type of hazard.

Reduce operational activation delays. Decision-making delays, insufficient pre-positioning of logistics, and the lack of beneficiary lists limit the effectiveness of Anticipatory Action (AA) in the face of cyclones. It is recommended to pre-position stocks in high-risk areas, shorten operational activation times, establish framework agreements with logistics and financial service providers, and develop sustainable anticipatory financing mechanisms (e.g., contingency funds).

Strengthen coordination between risk management and social protection. The partnership between the BNGRC and the MPS is central. It is important to formalize joint coordination for the activation of AA, define a shared intervention framework (joint plans, technical committees), and integrate AA into regional contingency plans.

Clarify decision-making chains. Although a national legal framework exists and the Directorate of Meteorology (DGM) is systematically integrated into coordination mechanisms and the formalization of anticipatory protocols, its operational capacity remains limited in terms of technical and human resources.

Strengthen existing community structures which are still underutilized. Support in training, equipment, and coordination protocols is essential for rapid targeting and early warning.

Further operationalize the Unified Social Registry (RSU). This key targeting tool is still under development and remains underutilized; it is crucial to operationalize secure access and fully integrate it into the activation mechanisms of Anticipatory Action.

Harmonize anticipatory cash transfers. The lack of consensus on transfer amounts and modalities creates inconsistencies. It is recommended to develop a national reference matrix that includes: differentiated amounts by hazard type, standardized durations and frequencies, and alignment with the cyclone/flood and drought operational manuals.

Institutionalize the Anticipatory Action Technical Group (AA-TWG). The AA-TWG should be endowed with a permanent mandate, a multi-year work plan, and be decentralized in high-risk areas (e.g., the Grand South). It will play a crucial role in: harmonizing AA protocols, monitoring ongoing initiatives, and supporting inter-agency coordination.

Build bridges with shock-responsive social protection (SRSP). Programmatic complementarity between AA and SRSP should be promoted, through alignment of transfer amounts and targeting criteria, a coherent sequence between anticipation, response, and recovery, and increasing use of the Unified Social Registry (RSU) as a cross-cutting tool.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL NORCAP CASHCAP CONTRIBUTIONS TO STRENGTHENING ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN MADAGASCAR.

- Technical support for updating operational manuals (Cash Transfers for cyclones/drought) with integration of Anticipatory Action (AA) components.
- Development of training modules on Cash Transfers in AA contexts (content design, pilot sessions, dissemination).
- Joint coordination of the Anticipatory Action Technical Group (GT-AA) and its technical Task Teams, particularly on: targeting, transfers, and MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning).
- Facilitation of dialogue between BNGRC and MPS on convergence points between Anticipatory Action and Shock-Responsive Social Protection (PSRC).
- Support for harmonizing anticipatory transfer parameters, through multi-sectoral feedback and experience sharing.
- Active participation in the “Cash & AA Cyclone” pilot project, including documentation, monitoring, and support for scaling up.

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