

Early Action for All: Social Inclusion From Practitioners' Perspectives.

Introduction

When disasters strike, humanitarian aid cannot always reach people in time, calling for proactive actions before an impending hazard, an approach known as Anticipatory Action (AA). Additionally, disaster impacts are experienced differently across communities. Marginalised individuals are more likely to experience losses and damages from disasters, requiring planning to take various perspectives into account from the start. AA provides an opportunity as the proactive, predefined process of its plans enables it to address individual vulnerabilities to hazards, but only when initiatives are appropriately tailored. However, ensuring these early actions benefit marginalised groups remains a challenge. This research showed that reliance on tangible actions and organisational approaches, as well as differences in knowledge and responsibilities, can make social inclusion difficult to translate from theory into practice, yet also open pathways for the future.

Main text

Disaster risk reduction and management is most effective when considering the needs, capacities and perspectives of marginalised communities from the start. As a humanitarian approach that plans actions and budgets before a hazard occurs, AA has the potential to address different vulnerabilities and support those who are disproportionately affected, namely persons with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, women and children. Despite growing interest in AA, little research has explored how organisations include marginalised communities. To address this gap, practitioners across the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement working with AA were interviewed.

The study found that practitioners generally recognise the importance of social inclusion. The results describe how social inclusion is understood generally and within AA, as well as which groups are typically identified. Furthermore, how practitioners implement social inclusion in AA, or lack thereof, was presented through assessments, activities, trigger setting, funding, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. Enablers and barriers to practitioners' implementation of social inclusion in AA include resources, knowledge and awareness, relationships, formal and informal environments, and early entry as key factors, as well as complexity.

Notably, social inclusion is often understood differently by people, with some having great insight into it and others lacking expertise. While AA relies on clearly defined and tangible actions, social inclusion can be challenging to define and measure. This can lead to a mismatch of priorities, where inclusion is recognised as important but is not always translated into practical action, or risks omitting inherent complexities.

Moreover, the mainstreaming approach to social inclusion further results in uncertainty surrounding responsibilities. Social inclusion becomes a task that does not have a clearly defined role or responsibility and risks becoming forgotten in practical implementation. Organisations should ensure that mainstreaming does not become a scapegoat for responsibility and instead a requirement throughout.

Another important finding was the need for stronger collaboration and communication. Working closely with local governments, community members, civil society organisations, and other partners was seen as essential for designing more inclusive AA programmes. Moreover, improved internal coordination and communication were identified as a requirement to produce more inclusive AA and move more effectively from international to local levels.

Overall, the study shows that making Anticipatory Action more inclusive is not only about identifying vulnerable groups. It also requires clearer responsibilities, stronger collaboration, and a shared understanding of what social inclusion means in practice. By addressing these challenges, humanitarian organisations can ensure that early action reaches all people who need it most before disasters strike.