



CASE STUDY

Integrating early warning early action within disaster law in Africa

The African continent is uniquely vulnerable to a variety of disasters, including droughts, floods, and locust infestations, with climate change intensifying these risks. The implementation of early warning early action (EWEA) strategies within disaster management laws is critical for enhancing resilience and reducing the impact of these disasters.

This case study examines how South Sudan and Malawi, with the collaboration with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), are leading the way in incorporating EWEA into their legal and regulatory frameworks to mitigate the impact of disasters specific to their contexts.

Early warning early action is known as anticipatory action, anticipatory humanitarian action, forecast-based financing, forecast-based action, early action or risk-informed early action.

Terminology depends on the actor and the context, but it all means building upon climate services to forecast extreme events and their impacts and to facilitate action.

Early warning early action in law

Early action based on a warning means taking steps to protect people before a disaster strikes. It is critical for saving lives and livelihoods and helps prevent or reduce the potential impact of a disaster. The underlying rationale for early warning early action, is that pre-emptive, rather than responsive actions, are generally more effective at reducing the impacts of disasters, while also being more cost-efficient.

Early action starts with legal frameworks, and mandating early action into laws, policies and plans ensures that they happen. Legal frameworks can detail what actions will be taken, when they happen, and who is responsible for them. Legal frameworks enable governments to allocate resources for preparedness and early action measures, such as establishing early warnings systems, pre-positioning emergency supplies, or ensuring emergency response funds are available. Legal provisions can also streamline decision-making processes during critical periods.



Our call to action

In light of the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters in the Africa region, there is an urgent need for a more integrated and proactive approach in to EWEA. The integration of EWEA into disaster law should be collaborative, learning from disaster responders and community stakeholders to develop plans that save lives and reduce the impact of disasters.

IFRC calls on governments and key stakeholders to:



- Integrate EWEA within plans, laws and policies governing national disaster management, establishing robust early warning systems, pre-financing and outlining roles and responsibilities of government, responders and communities ahead of disasters.



- Address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised people and communities in legal frameworks, including people in crises and those displaced, so that they are reached, informed and included in global, national and local decisions and plans, and their needs are met.

Legislating for early warning early in Malawi

Three million people are currently at risk of famine in Malawi, where flood and drought cycles are the leading cause of endemic food insecurity. The disasters, which occur on a near-annual basis, have devastating consequences on people's ability to grow food, access water and maintain sustainable livelihoods. With support from Malawi Red Cross, the Malawi Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) has been taking proactive steps to update its legal framework for Disaster Risk Management (DRM).

In April 2023, the DRM Bill was passed by Parliament which includes making provision for the development of protocols for multi-hazard early warning systems. The Bill also assigns responsibilities for the issuance of early warnings relating to riverine floods, flash floods and other climate hazards. They are designed to alert people ahead of disaster, giving ample time for preparation and evacuation, and outlining response measures to reduce impact.

Leaving no one behind

To further increase awareness around disasters, the DRM bill includes provisions for community risk management education and training initiatives. Involvement of the community in EWEA activities builds trust and ensures engagement. It is also an opportunity for communities to provide feedback on processes.

This is critical for ensuring that they are inclusive of everyone and responsive to the unique needs of those most affected by disasters including women, the elderly, youth, the displaced, and those with disabilities. By prioritizing community input, the roadmap facilitates the creation of policies and plans that are truly people-centred.





Early warning and early funding in South Sudan

South Sudan has experienced four consecutive years of record-breaking floods. At times these have covered two-thirds of the country, leaving people without homes, land, food, or safe drinking water. In a country that is already recovering from decades of civil war, the effects of natural disasters are acutely felt.

To mitigate the impact of flooding and other disasters, South Sudan is currently in the process of formulating Disaster Risk Management (DRM) legislation which will mandate the establishment of a comprehensive multi-hazard early warning system. An Early Warning System gives people time to prepare before a disaster and allows governments and other agencies time to pre-position items that may be necessary, such as food, water and shelter.

The DRM legislation will establish an early warning technical working group that will be responsible for co-ordinating EWEA initiatives. The working group will be responsible for creating and deploying early warning tools that offer timely and accurate information to local communities and emergency responders and ensuring these tools meet international standards.

Funding for early action

A national DRM fund is also being established under the legislation. This is a crucial step - Funding for early action enables people to prepare before disasters happen and ensures quicker more effective responses to these disasters as well.

This quick, coordinated action is critical for saving lives and reducing damage during a disaster. A climate change adaptation fund, exclusively for addressing climate-related disasters is also being established.

How do we legislate for early warning early action?

IFRC's Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response offers comprehensive guidance for strengthening legal frameworks in disaster management. It emphasizes the importance of establishing robust institutional structures, ensuring clear mandates and resources for preparedness, and creating effective early warning systems.

The Checklist also advocates for laws that support disaster risk financing strategies and address the unique needs of vulnerable groups. By focusing on these key areas, the Checklist assists in the development of laws and policies that are resilient, inclusive, and adaptable to various disaster scenarios, ensuring a comprehensive and effective approach to disaster preparedness and response.

For a comprehensive list of guiding questions, check out [IFRC's Checklist](#).



The Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response

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International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Early warning for all #EW4ALL

#EW4ALL is the UN's Early Warning for All Initiative which aims to ensure every person on earth is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through life-saving early warning systems by the end of 2027.

It includes a commitment to strengthening law and policy for early action, which IFRC Disaster Law will work alongside National Societies and governments to achieve.

IFRC Disaster Law

IFRC Disaster Law works with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and governments to strengthen disaster risk governance, through the development and implementation of disaster and emergency-related legislation, policies and procedures.

With 20 years of experience supporting the development and implementation of disaster law and policy around the world, we are the global leader in disaster law technical advice to governments.

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