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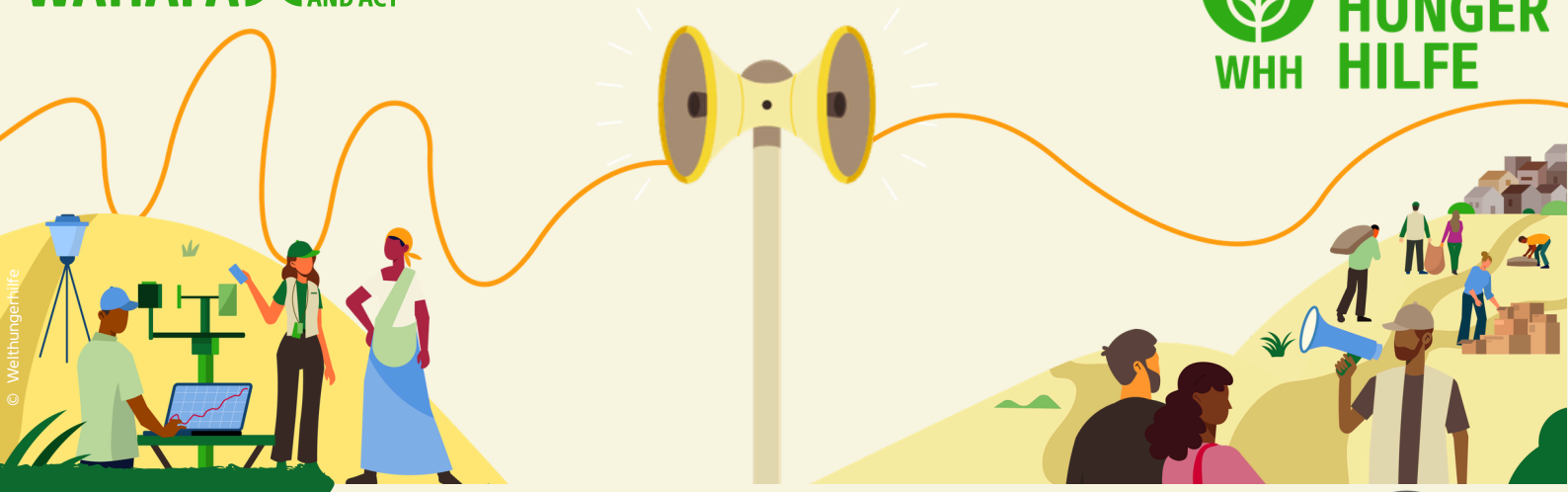

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# Case study

# THE COST-EFFICIENCY OF ANTICIPATORY ACTION IN ZIMBABWE

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Drought can rapidly erode rural livelihoods, causing water and pasture shortages, crop losses, and the loss of productive assets and income. Rebuilding livelihoods after these losses can require far greater resources than protecting them before drought impacts become critical. Anticipatory Action (AA) offers an alternative: acting ahead to protect livelihoods before predictable impacts become irreversible.

This case study presents monitoring data from AA interventions in Zimbabwe, during the 2024 and 2025 drought periods and suggests that relatively modest investments in livestock protection and drought-resilient agriculture helped protect productive assets, sustain food production, and reduce reliance on external assistance.

## Disclaimer: Cost-efficiency in Anticipatory Action

Understanding the cost-efficiency of AA is important and can help strengthen the case for the success and wider adoption of the AA approach. However, **cost-efficiency should always be interpreted with caution and in context**. Calculations often start from different baselines, include different budget lines or data, address different hazards and lead times, or are conducted in different operational contexts. These differences limit the extent to which findings on cost-efficiency can be generalized or directly compared.

There is currently no standardized process or set of clearly defined indicators that would allow for a sound cost-efficiency analysis of AA. The **evidence presented here should therefore be understood as indicative** – a snapshot and one piece of a broader evidence puzzle, rather than a definitive assessment.

## WAHAFA in Zimbabwe

Welthungerhilfe works through the Welthungerhilfe Anticipatory Humanitarian Action Facility (WAHAFA) with local partners, communities, and government authorities to protect at-risk households from predictable climate shocks.

In Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central Province, Welthungerhilfe Zimbabwe, the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, and Mvuramanzi Trust supported communities through **two Anticipatory Action activations in July and October 2024, mobilizing more than €300k in *Fuel* funds** to mitigate the anticipated impacts of the 2024 drought.

## Data & Methodology

This brief draws on program expenditure and monitoring data to examine the relationship between the cost of anticipatory interventions and the losses or humanitarian needs they may have helped to prevent.
The analysis combines:

- program expenditure data;
- intervention coverage data;
- household monitoring data;
- reported livestock losses in neighboring communities;
- estimated market values for livestock.

The evidence is presented at three levels: 1) Observed outcomes are directly reported through program monitoring. 2) Indicative avoided losses are estimated using a "counterfactual scenario" based on reported losses in neighboring areas. 3) Longer-term resilience effects are presented as emerging qualitative evidence where the available monitoring data do not allow a financial evaluation. The analysis does not attribute all observed differences between project and non-project areas solely to Anticipatory Action. **This means that the evidence is neither causal nor generalizable**. Expenditure data, moreover, cover material costs only and excludes coordination and other implementation costs.

# Protecting livestock before drought impacts escalate

## The costs of acting ahead

For households in Mashonaland Central Province, their livestock represents productive assets, income and a form of financial security. When drought reduces water and feed availability, however, animals quickly become vulnerable. Households may be forced to sell weakened cattle at very low prices or, in severe cases, lose them altogether.

**Anticipatory Action aimed to intervene before these losses occurred.**

Ahead of the 2024 drought, livestock protection measures were implemented across five wards in Mbire District to help safeguard animals against worsening health conditions and feed shortages.

WAHAFA partners provided deworming and vaccination services alongside supplementary feed. The investment required for each of these measures was relatively modest:

| Intervention | Total material cost | Coverage | Cost per animal |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Deworming & vaccination** | €13,672 | 13,000 cattle | €1.05 |
| **Supplementary feed** | €9,888 | 5,500 cattle | €1.80 |

Deworming and vaccination cost approximately €1.05 per animal, and supplementary feed €1.80. Together, these measures amount to an indicative combined cost of:

**€2.85 per animal** [1]

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## A small investment to protect a larger asset

Across the five project wards, approximately 14,000 cattle were potentially exposed to the drought impacts, while 13,000 were reached with the intervention.

A healthy animal had an estimated market value of approximately €350-510. During a drought, this value can decline dramatically. Households may be forced to sell animals at distress prices of approximately €70-85.[2] If animals die, the productive asset is lost.

According to program monitoring, **no livestock losses were reported in the project wards** during the 2024 drought or the subsequent drought in 2025. This **contrasts with reports from individual neighboring wards** in Mbire District that had not received the same anticipatory support, where livestock losses due to drought were estimated at 20% of an average cattle population of 3,000 animals per ward.[3]

Even though this comparison does not prove causality, it highlights the potential scale of avoided losses:

**13,000 cattle × 20% loss rate**

**= 2,600 potentially lost animals**

**= €0.91 – 1.33 million in livestock assets** [4]

The comparison does not mean that the total €23,560 that were invested directly "generated" €910,000-1,326,000. The estimate is based on the assumption that the project wards would otherwise have experienced livestock losses similar to those reported in neighboring communities.

It illustrates the economic logic of acting ahead: Once drought has already resulted in livestock mortality, households have lost a productive asset. Replacing animals and rebuilding livelihoods can require significant time and resources. Acting beforehand can be considerably cheaper.

**A relatively modest investment before the drought helped protect a livestock population whose total asset value was measured in millions of euros.**

[1] As not all cattle received both activities, the average actual expenditure across the total cattle population was even lower than €2.85. The figure therefore represents the indicative cost of combining the measures rather than the amount spent on every individual animal.
[2] FEWSNET, supplemented by input from WHH Zimbabwe specific to Mbire District.
[3] Nel Madhodha, District Livestock Officer, Mbire.
[4] At the lower estimated market value of €350 per animal, this would represent: €910,000. At the upper estimated value of €510 per animal, it would represent: €1,326,000.

# Investing in production before drought creates future needs

Drought can turn a production shock into a wider livelihood crisis. When households lose their harvest, they face a shortage of food or lose the income needed to pay for other essential expenses, leaving them increasingly dependent on external assistance. Thus, following the activations, WAHAFA supported 500 households in Mt. Darwin District to help them meet their immediate food needs as well as maintain productive capacity despite drought conditions. As part of the intervention, households received agricultural support worth **€72.60 per household.**

The package combined:

- ☑ drought-tolerant sorghum seed;
- ☑ 50 kg of basal fertilizer;
- ☑ 50 kg of top-dressing fertilizer.

The support package was informed by communities' **own priorities** through the pilot implementation of the **People First Impact Method (P-FIM)**, which incorporated community-driven insights into WAHAFA's AA planning. P-FIM is based on the assumption that communities themselves know best what matters to them and should be engaged from the outset, not merely as informants, but as co-creators of solutions to the challenges they face. By identifying this package as a key priority, communities helped shape contextually appropriate anticipatory actions and strengthened local ownership of the response.

## What was achieved?

Households were able to plant crops and expect increased crop yields despite erratic rainfall. AA helped families avoid total harvest failure. Monitoring in **October 2025 – i.e., over a year later –** indicated that participating households were **still productive and retained cereal stocks** ahead of the subsequent lean season (November-February). Rather than entering this period with depleted stocks and no agricultural income, participating households had food reserves and continued access to income-generating opportunities.

Households also reported being able to sell agricultural surpluses, generating income that could be used for other essential expenses (e.g., school fees) and reducing reliance on casual labor.

## Preventing a chain of future needs

This is where the potential cost-efficiency of Anticipatory Action becomes clearer: **protecting agricultural production before drought impacts escalate can reduce the need to replace lost production with external assistance**.

By comparison, at the time when reactive assistance would likely have become necessary, the Minimum Expenditure Basket, which represents the minimum household requirements to meet essential needs, cost approximately €21 per household per month.[5] If households had required support for at least four months during the lean season, meeting these minimum needs alone would have cost around €84 per household, exceeding the €72.60 invested in anticipatory support.

### ~€73 before impacts escalate vs. ~€84 to cover essential needs after production losses

The value of Anticipatory Action lies not simply in replacing food assistance. It lies in **protecting productive capacity** before a harvest failure can trigger a wider chain of household and humanitarian needs.

By investing before drought impacts escalated, the intervention helped households to maintain food production, retain stocks and generate income. The available monitoring data suggest that the investment therefore had the potential to reduce future dependence on external support while helping households **sustain their livelihoods**.

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"We now know, drought-tolerant small grains like sorghum are a solution to hunger in this changing climate era evidenced by changes in rainfall patterns in our community. My harvest for the past season surpasses what my seven-member-sized family requires. This is the first time this has happened in many years."

**– Tonge Gomo, farmer from Chipaze Village, Mt. Darwin**

[5] World Food program (2025). Zimbabwe - Food Security and Markets Monitoring Report, January 2025. https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-food-security-and-markets-monitoring-report-january-2025

[6] This illustrative comparison assumes four months of support at the MEB value; it does not demonstrate actual savings. Assistance needs without the intervention were not established, and anticipatory costs include materials only.

# Beyond one drought season: the resilience dividend

## Sustaining benefits beyond the intervention

The potential value of Anticipatory Action may not end with the immediate protection of assets or agricultural production. Monitoring evidence suggests that some benefits may have extended beyond the original intervention period.

As noted above, no livestock losses were reported during either the 2024 drought or the subsequent drought period in 2025, while participating households remained productive and retained cereal stocks ahead of the lean season. Communities and households also reportedly **continued several practices introduced or strengthened through the program**, including:

- ☑ supplementary livestock feeding;
- ☑ livestock health measures;
- ☑ feed preparation;
- ☑ resource-efficient agricultural practices;
- ☑ maintenance of water systems; and
- ☑ early planting and seed retention.

This points to a potential **resilience dividend**: an initial anticipatory investment may contribute to capacities, practices and systems that continue to reduce exposure to predictable risks beyond the original activation period. At this stage, however, the economic value of these longer-term effects cannot be fully quantified. They should therefore be understood as emerging evidence, rather than as monetized benefits attributable to the original intervention.

## Local ownership can reduce future costs

A second potential resilience dividend relates to local ownership. Through close collaboration with communities (e.g., through P-FIM), WAHAFA helped strengthen **processes that may support the continued management of predictable risks** beyond the intervention period.

Examples included:

- → water committees developing rules and maintenance mechanisms;
- → dip-tank committees assuming responsibility for livestock health infrastructure;
- → Lead Farmers supporting agricultural practices;
- → communities maintaining water systems;
- → communities independently excavating approximately 1,500 meters of drainage channels.

These developments also have implications for **long-term cost-efficiency**. If communities are able to continue preparedness practices and manage predictable risks with less external support, the need for repeated external investment declines over time.

The value of Anticipatory Action extends beyond the immediate activation. By strengthening local capacities and ownership, an initial investment may help communities continue to manage predictable risks after external support ends, reducing future vulnerability and the need for external support.

# Key messages

**1 Small investments can protect high-value assets.**
An indicative investment of €2.85 per animal helped protect livestock assets valued at approximately €350-510 per animal. Based on the reported loss rates in neighboring wards, the intervention may have helped protect livestock assets worth approximately €0.91-1.33 million.

**2 Acting ahead can prevent a chain of future needs.**
A one-time investment of €72.60 per household helped households maintain food production, retain cereal stocks and generate income from surplus sales. By protecting productive capacity, Anticipatory Action can reduce immediate food gaps but also the wider humanitarian and financial needs that can follow harvest losses.

**3 The benefits of acting ahead can last beyond the intervention.**
Communities continued livestock, agricultural and infrastructure management practices after the initial support. This suggests that the anticipatory investments contributed to longer-term resilience and potentially reduced future dependence on external assistance.

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