

AHEAD LEARNING SERIES

From Response to Preparedness

Strengthening Diaspora & Local Partner Capacity in Anticipatory Action



Background

AHEAD – Anticipatory Humanitarian Action for Displacement is a global project led by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) that aims to strengthen humanitarian responses by improving the ability to act before displacement occurs. By leveraging and improving early warning (EW) tools and anticipatory action (AA) mechanisms, the project seeks to mitigate the negative impacts of conflict-driven displacement, increase operational preparedness, and ensure more effective humanitarian interventions.

A key objective is to enhance the inclusion of diaspora and other humanitarian actors that have not traditionally been invited into AA frameworks. Diaspora, though often outside formal aid structures, plays an essential role in supporting conflict-prone contexts. In emergencies, they act as first responders, mobilizing resources quickly, flexibly, and at scale. They engage across different sectors - from health and education to protection, livelihoods, and peacebuilding - as well as across response stages. Their ability to bridge acute needs with long-term recovery makes them prime agents of nexus solutions, providing a strong foundation for engaging effectively in AA.

Yet diaspora face structural barriers that limit their access to AA frameworks, forecasting tools, and flexible funding, leaving diaspora humanitarianism overly reactive rather than proactive. With deeper knowledge of AA, stronger links to AA plans, and improved capacity to secure financial resources for early action, diaspora organizations and their local partners can better leverage their joint strengths and abilities to mobilize quickly, advocate internationally, and support communities in ways that directly strengthen AA and overall humanitarian responses.

In this context, the AHEAD Learning Series was designed to a) strengthen the diaspora's overall capacity to apply AA in their response to conflict-induced displacement, b) improve the diaspora's access and ability to use the AHEAD forecast model, and c) create space for the generation of learnings and recommendations on the diaspora's overall role in AA.

On 27-29 November 2025, the AHEAD Learning Series featured its first two-and-a-half-day interactive workshop, combining expert presentations, facilitated discussions, and group exercises. **Day 1** focused on participants' overall understanding of AA to enhance their practical capacity to use forecasting tools and conflict-sensitive planning to support communities at risk of displacement. **Day 2** set the scene with a session on partnerships between diaspora and local organizations, followed by a full-day training by the London School of Philanthropy on crowdfunding as a tool for mobilizing flexible resources for AA initiatives. **Day 3** looked forward, identifying specific anticipatory actions that diaspora and partners could potentially take as part of an AA Plan.

This report provides an overview of the workshop, summarizing the activities, key takeaways, main outcomes, as well as next steps for strengthening diaspora engagement in AA under the AHEAD project.

Workshop Details

- **Title:** AHEAD Learning Series: From Response to Preparedness - *Strengthening Diaspora and Local Partner Capacity in Anticipatory Action*
- **Date:** 27, 28 and 29 November 2025
- **Location:** Ibis Styles Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya
- **Number of Participants:** 27 participants representing refugee-led organizations, diaspora organizations and their local partners.

Selection of Participants

This workshop targeted humanitarian diaspora organizations, and their local partner organizations or representatives, when relevant, operating in the East Africa and Great Lakes (EAGL) Region. This limitation was informed by the Integrated Context Analysis (ICA) weighing factors like the scope and scale of diaspora engagement in the countries.

Organizations were invited to submit a joint Expression of Interest form, completed by one diaspora organization together with one local partner or representative. DRC received 33 expressions of interest from a total of 66 diaspora and local representatives. Due to limited capacity, priority was given to organizations that a) had participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) earlier in the year,¹ b) were active in AHEAD's geographical target areas, or c) were able to expand their response to cover AHEAD target areas. The final participant list included diaspora organizations and their local partners from Somalia (14) and Ethiopia (4), as well as South Sudanese refugee-led organizations based in Uganda (5). In addition, strong diaspora organizations and their local partners from DR Congo (2) and Sudan (2) were invited, as they bring either experience with crowdfunding campaigns or with the diaspora's role in sharing protection information with populations at risk of displacement. As both topics represent potential diaspora response modalities in AA, the organizations were invited to create peer-to-peer exchange and learning.

To ensure a solid knowledge foundation ahead of the in-person workshop, a pre-departure online session was organized on 6 November 2025 for all selected organizations to introduce the AHEAD project and its objectives and align expectations and learning priorities for the workshop.



Setting the scene for the workshop with an introduction to AHEAD and how the AHEAD model works

¹ As part of the ICA, FGDs were conducted with diaspora representatives from the AHEAD focus countries.

Purpose of the Workshop

The AHEAD Learning Series aimed to strengthen the capacity of diaspora organizations and their local partners to engage in AA related to conflict-induced displacement. The workshop provided participants with an introduction to key AA concepts, approaches, and practical tools, while creating a space for peer learning and exchange across different country contexts.

The series also aimed to strengthen collaboration and facilitate a knowledge exchange between diaspora organizations, local partners, and AHEAD project staff in the EAGL region. Through practical sessions and discussions, participants explored how diaspora actors can contribute to early action and preparedness efforts, including through improved forecasting awareness, stronger partnerships, and innovative fundraising approaches such as crowdfunding.

Workshop Objectives

- Strengthen participants' understanding of AA for conflict-induced displacement.
- Improve participants' capacity to engage in AA frameworks by building capacity to apply AA tools.
- Facilitate learning exchange and collaboration among diaspora organizations, local partners, and DRC to enhance diaspora inclusion in AA.
- Equip participants with the skills and tools needed to design effective crowdfunding campaigns effectively for AA.

Workshop Summary

Day 1 – Introduction to Anticipatory Action

Summary

The first day of the workshop focused on the core concepts of AA and building a shared understanding of how early warning and forecasting tools can support preparedness for conflict-induced displacement. This included an introduction to the **AHEAD Forecasting Model**, facilitated by Zaibu Juma Wafula (Regional Information Management Specialist, DRC EAGL), exploring how early warning data and contextual indicators can help anticipate displacement risks. Participants discussed how forecasting represents a range of possible scenarios rather than a precise prediction and requires continuous monitoring of conflict dynamics and community-level signals. Participants were invited to register their organizations to receive the AHEAD Displacement Forecasts and learned how to interpret the data. This was followed by a session on **AA Terminology and Definitions**, facilitated by Dushyant Singh Mohil (Regional Anticipatory Action Coordinator, DRC EAGL), who presented key AA concepts, including triggers, preparedness measures, and the “no regrets” principle. Finally, Kavita Kapur (DRC Global Protection Advisor) and Ahmed Omar (DRC Diaspora Outreach Officer) facilitated a discussion on **Protection and Conflict Sensitivity in AA**, and how anticipatory actions must integrate protection principles and be designed to avoid unintended harm.

In the afternoon, participants applied these concepts through practical exercises. **Workshop I: Context Monitoring Tool**, facilitated by Dushyant Singh Mohil, introduced a framework and tool for monitoring context developments as part of adaptive programming. Participants worked in groups identifying early indicators of displacement, assessing their current or potential impacts, and identifying possible response actions and recommendations. This was followed by **Workshop II: Displacement Scenario Building**, facilitated by Thomas Abate (Program Coordinator for Anticipatory Action and Emergency Response, DRC Ethiopia) and Alemu Lemma (Deputy Head of Program, DRC Ethiopia), where participants learned about the key components of an AA Protocol and how to build a scenario as part of developing an AA Plan. Working in four groups, participants analysed different components of an AA protocol, including risk and shock analysis, hotspot identification, preparedness and early response actions, and the definition of early warning indicators, triggers, and stakeholder roles. The exercise enabled participants to discuss the importance of having these reflections in place before shocks to properly understand their potential impact. The group work highlighted the importance of combining contextual analysis, locally grounded indicators, and clear trigger mechanisms to enable timely anticipatory responses.

In the evening, participants continued informal discussions and peer exchange during a networking dinner.

Key Takeaways

- The workshop exercises of Day 1 highlighted the value of joint analysis between diaspora, local partners, and DRC to identify indicators, define triggers and lead times, and develop coordinated response plans.
- Diaspora organizations often receive early information from affected communities through personal, community, and partner networks, positioning them as important actors in identifying emerging risks.
- Participants suggested developing a mapping tool to document the communication channels diaspora use to reach local communities, helping link these networks to formal forecasting and EWS.
- Participants noted that if diaspora engage in EWS in conflict contexts, conflict-sensitive communication and community mobilization training are essential to maintain local trust and avoid perceptions of bias.
- As AA frameworks and tools can be complex, participants noted that training should be designed to be more inclusive of non-traditional AA actors, in order to support broader uptake and effective use of the tools.

Day 2: Partnerships and Joint Crowdfunding for Anticipatory Action

Summary

The second day focused on strengthening diaspora–local partnerships and on exploring crowdfunding as a joint resource mobilization tool for anticipatory action. The morning set the scene with a workshop on **Equitable Partnerships between Diaspora and Local Organizations in Anticipatory Action**, facilitated by Agatha Banaga (Partnerships Officer, DRC Uganda). The session explored partnership models and, through facilitated group exercises, discussions focused on partnership dynamics, power relations, and the importance of transparent communication and shared decision-making in joint initiatives. The exchange also highlighted the complementary capacities each partner brings: diaspora networks often contribute strengths in advocacy, fundraising, and information sharing, while local partners bring contextual knowledge and operational access, all of which are foundational for effective programming.

This was followed by a full-day tailored training on **Crowdfunding for Anticipatory Action**, facilitated by Dr. Ikhlaq Hussain (London School of Philanthropy). The training introduced the fundamentals of crowdfunding and diaspora giving, focusing on how to design and implement effective fundraising campaigns. Key stages of campaign planning were covered, including setting SMART objectives, developing a compelling case for support, and creating effective campaign pages with clear messaging and trust signals. The session also explored strategies for donor engagement, such as storytelling, video content, social media outreach, and targeted communication through email and messaging platforms, as well as ways to sustain momentum and maintain relationships with supporters after campaigns conclude.

Discussions further explored how crowdfunding—often used to respond to crises after they occur—could be adapted to support Anticipatory Action. Campaigns can be prepared in advance based on triggers, seasonal risks, or early warning signals, allowing diaspora and partner organizations to build narratives around preparedness and early action. Dr. Ikhlaq noted that crowdfunding campaigns are most successful when around 25% of the target amount is secured before launching a public campaign. The lead time between an AA trigger and a potential shock could therefore be used to prepare campaign materials, secure initial contributions within diaspora networks or other funding sources and launch public campaigns to mobilize additional resources for anticipatory interventions. The possibility of using pooled funding mechanisms to provide this initial contribution was also discussed.

The day concluded with group exercises in which campaign concepts were developed, including identifying target audiences, defining campaign messages, and designing strategies for donor engagement. These exercises encouraged strategic thinking about how diaspora networks can mobilize resources quickly to support preparedness and early response activities.

*“A good partnership means being approachable and inclusive. We should always lead by example. **Be a leader and not a boss!** Make sure everyone is involved in decision-making and planning from the beginning.”*

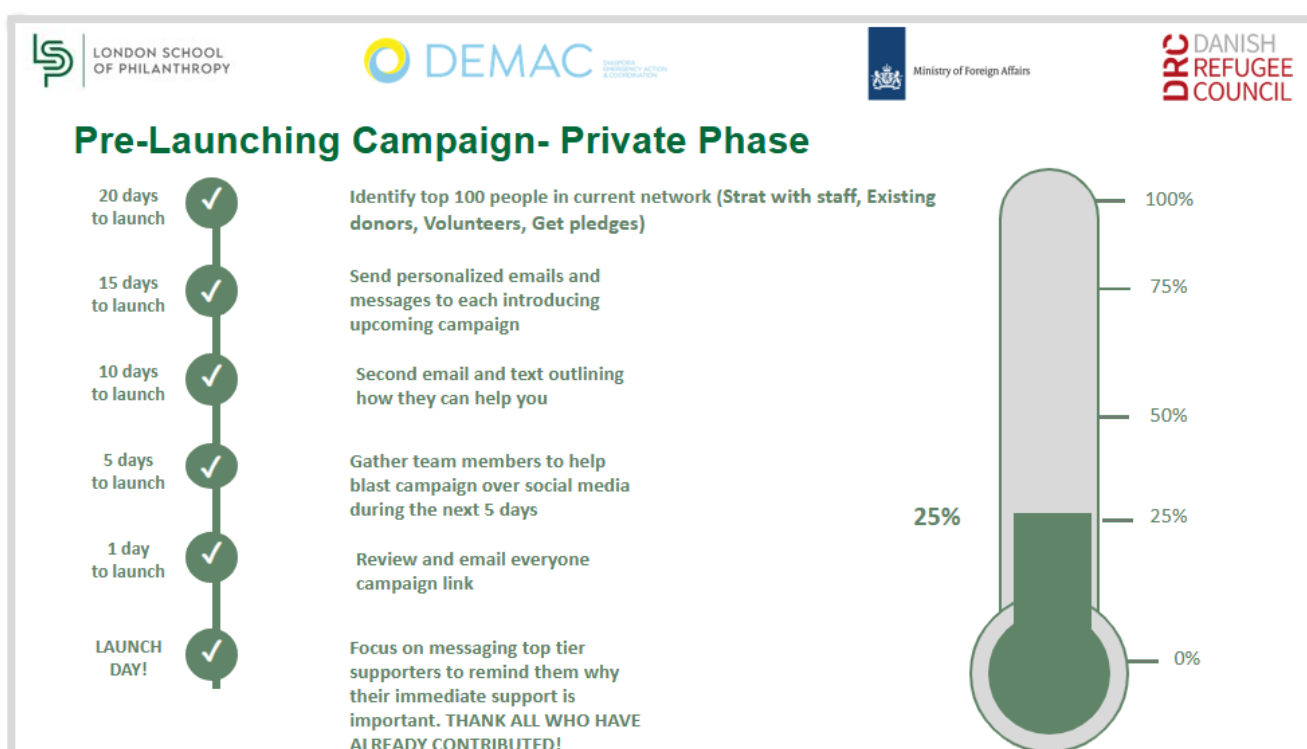
– Betty Wani, Diaspora representative from South Sudanese Women Building Association (SSWBA)

Key Takeaways

- Effective diaspora–local partnerships rely on mutual respect, transparency, and shared decision-making, including recognizing and valuing the distinct roles and mandates of each partner.
- In partnerships where funding flows from diaspora to local organizations, discussions about roles and expectations are crucial to ensure the relationship remains equitable and avoid a donor–recipient dynamic.
- Joint resource mobilization between diaspora and local partners can strengthen accountability, shared ownership and results. This could entail designing campaigns and initiatives based on local knowledge, needs and priorities while leveraging diaspora experience, networks and donor reach.

- Crowdfunding campaigns can be pre-designed as part of an AA protocol, allowing diaspora networks to activate fundraising rapidly once early warning signals are reached. The lead time between a trigger and a potential shock can be used to contextualize campaigns, ensure seed funding, and launch public fundraising to support anticipatory interventions before displacement risks escalate.
- Because successful campaigns require around 25% of funding secured before launch, diaspora giving networks or pooled funds mechanisms could provide initial seed funding to activate campaigns linked to AA triggers.

In the evening, participants continued informal discussions and peer exchange during a networking dinner featuring an intercultural performance that highlighted the strong connections between diaspora communities and their countries of origin.



Slide from Dr. Ikhlq’s presentation on ‘Crowdfunding for Anticipatory Action’, reinforcing the timeline for campaign activation and the importance of pre-secured funding before launching campaigns.

Day 3: Looking AHEAD. Diaspora’s role in AA

Summary

The final day focused on translating the concepts discussed during the workshop into practical applications and identifying the role diaspora and their partners can play in Anticipatory Action (AA). The day began with a session facilitated by Muhidin Abdullahi (DRC Somalia), who presented a case study from Somalia highlighting key drivers of displacement in the Hiiraan region, including clan dynamics, governance structures, and environmental pressures. The session illustrated how displacement patterns often follow recognizable trends and how diaspora networks

frequently receive early information from affected communities, positioning them as important actors in anticipatory responses.

Building on this discussion, participants engaged in group exercises exploring how diaspora organizations and their partners could contribute to AA in practice. Working with scenario-based exercises, groups analyzed displacement risks, identified potential early warning indicators, and proposed anticipatory actions that could be implemented before a crisis escalates. These included assembling response teams, negotiating access with conflict actors, sharing information on safe routes, pre-positioning life-saving supplies, activating diaspora networks for rapid support, and continuously monitoring protection risks.

The discussions also explored barriers that may hinder anticipatory action, such as limited coordination mechanisms, insufficient communication infrastructure, and resource constraints. Participants reflected on how stronger collaboration between diaspora networks, local actors, and humanitarian organizations could help address some of these challenges and enable more timely and coordinated responses.

Key Takeaways

- Group exercises demonstrated that diaspora-supported anticipatory actions may include activating response teams, disseminating safe route information, supporting evacuation planning, and pre-positioning critical supplies in collaboration with local partners.
- Diaspora networks can be mobilized rapidly once AA triggers are reached, enabling quick information dissemination, advocacy, and resource mobilization during the lead time before displacement escalates.
- Effective diaspora engagement in AA requires clearly defined operational roles within AA plans, ensuring that diaspora contributions complement rather than duplicate local or humanitarian response capacities.
- Participants highlighted that diaspora networks can help bridge communication between affected communities, local partners, and international actors, improving coordination during the early stages of crises.
- Integrating diaspora capacities into AA frameworks requires clear coordination mechanisms and communication channels between diaspora organizations, local partners, and humanitarian actors.

Workshop Evaluation

At the end of the workshop, participants were invited to complete an evaluation survey to assess the relevance, usefulness, and overall quality of the workshop. A total of 21 participants submitted responses. Overall feedback was highly positive. Participants rated their overall satisfaction with the first two-and-a-half-day workshop under the AHEAD Learning Series at an average of 4.6 out of 5, while the overall relevance of the workshop received an average score of 4.7 out of 5. Respondents also indicated that the Learning Series largely met their expectations, with an average score of 4.6 out of 5.

Feedback on individual workshop days was also positive. The content on Day 1 received an average satisfaction score of 4.1 out of 5, while the Day 3 sessions received a score of 4.0 out of 5. The crowdfunding training on Day 2 was particularly well received, with participants reporting an improved understanding of joint crowdfunding (average score 4.7 out of 5) and increased confidence in launching AA crowdfunding campaigns (average score 4.5 out of 5).

Qualitative feedback highlighted that participants particularly valued the practical exercises, real-world examples, and peer exchange between diaspora organizations and local partners, as well as with key DRC staff. Several participants noted that the sessions helped them better understand how AA tools and approaches could be applied in their own work. Participants also suggested opportunities for further support, including sharing workshop materials and providing additional guidance on applying AA tools in practice, as well as designing effective crowdfunding campaigns. Feedback further highlighted that while participants found the introduction to AA frameworks valuable, the presented tools can be complex to apply for organizations that are not traditionally involved in AA programming. This underscores the importance of developing simplified, tailored learning materials for non-traditional AA actors to support broader uptake and practical application of the tools developed under AHEAD.



Groups discussing the anticipatory actions diaspora and partners can implement before displacement happens, during displacement, on route and at the arrival site.

Workshop Outcomes

The first workshop resulted in several immediate outcomes:

- Strengthened understanding of Anticipatory Action concepts among diaspora organizations and their local partners.
- Increased awareness and use of the AHEAD displacement forecasting model and its potential application in diaspora-led preparedness efforts.
- Identification of practical roles diaspora actors can play in AA planning and response, including information sharing, advocacy, and rapid resource mobilization.
- Strengthened dialogue and collaboration between diaspora organizations, local partners, and key AHEAD staff across the EAGL region.
- Development of initial concepts for crowdfunding campaigns that could be activated in response to AA triggers.
- The sessions and discussions throughout the workshop established a strong foundation for identifying different modalities for diaspora inclusion in AHEAD programming, informing the development of initial concept notes on potential diaspora engagement in Anticipatory Action.

Next Steps

The workshop clearly confirmed that there is strong motivation and potential to enhance and formalize the inclusion of diaspora into AHEAD programming. Discussions that AA frameworks can be strengthened by combining diaspora networks' capacity for information sharing, advocacy, and resource mobilization with local partners' contextual knowledge and operational access and DRC's knowledge, expertise and role in strengthening partners' capacities in applying the AHEAD model.

Following the workshop, several follow-up actions have been identified to build on the outcomes of the workshop and further strengthen diaspora engagement in anticipatory action.

- **Crowdfunding coaching:** Selected participants will be offered follow-up coaching and support by Dr. Ikhtlaq, London School of Philanthropy, to develop crowdfunding campaigns, enabling them to translate the concepts introduced during the training into practical fundraising initiatives.
- **Strengthening partnerships:** The workshop helped establish stronger connections between diaspora organizations, local partners, and key AHEAD staff. Maintaining these relationships through continued dialogue and knowledge exchange will be important for strengthening collaboration and identifying opportunities for diaspora engagement in AA.
- **Future capacity building:** Insights generated during this workshop will inform the design of future capacity-building activities. Some will be target diaspora across all AHEAD countries, while others will be designed specifically for diaspora operating in the AHEAD pilot country for diaspora engagement (country to be selected). Whereas this workshop focused conceptualizing and strengthening broader AA capacities, the next in-person workshop will prioritize discussions on how to operationalize diaspora inclusion in AHEAD.

- **Development of engagement modalities:** Initial concept notes outlining modalities for diaspora engagement in AA will be drafted, e.g. within areas such as economic engagement, early warning information sharing, community mobilization, and context monitoring. All modalities will be centred around the principle of “no regrets” to ensure the full impact of diaspora programming.
- **Identification of diaspora pilot context:** Based on factors such as conflict sensitivity, diaspora presence in AHEAD target locations, and the capacity of DRC country operations to engage with diaspora actors, one country will be selected to pilot diaspora inclusion in the design and implementation of an Anticipatory Action plan.



Group photo of participants and facilitators of the first two-and-a-half-day workshop under the AHEAD Learning Series for Diaspora and Local Partners, November 2025.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Concept Note_AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 2: Evaluation Data_ AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 3: Visual Evaluation Data_ AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 4: Total Participants List_ AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 5: Final Programme_AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 6: Participant Purchase and Reimbursement Guide_AHEAD Learning Series pt. 1
- Annex 7: AHEAD-DEMAC OnePager