

Climate Information Services: training a critical mass of key influencers

The “Trainer of Trainers” programme and a supporting online toolkit have been rolled out across Africa to raise awareness of the importance of climate information among key influential groups.

KEY POINTS

- The programme is intended to train key influencing groups on how climate variables can be analysed, packaged and applied to inform decisions in policy, planning and practice;
- Through a ripple-effect learning framework, trainers have trained peers from Parliament, civil society organizations and media organizations and young people at national and regional levels;
- Workshops have been rolled out nationwide – the programme is intended to train 2,000 delegate trainees by the end of 2019.

Throughout Africa, awareness is growing of the need for reliable, accessible climate information to keep economic growth on track and achieve poverty reduction goals. Progress, however, is slow – and time is not on the continent’s side. Year on year, climate extremes, such as droughts, floods, heat waves, cold spells, tropical storms and coastal sea-level surges, have been hitting countries with greater frequency and intensity.

Early warning systems and climate outlooks can help communities to predict and prepare for impending disasters and prepare for related risks. In the longer term, robust, evidence-based climate information can guide Governments on how to invest in infrastructure that is located, designed and built in the light of the current and changing climate. Using climate information to avoid immediate shocks and stresses, or to climate-

proof longer-term investment can help countries to lift themselves out of the vicious cycles of damage and recovery.

Climate change can also present opportunities for economic growth. In the context of crop production, for example, changes in temperature and rainfall may cause certain crops in a specific region to decline while others thrive. Similarly, areas that have experienced historically low yields may become more productive.

Despite climate change being an everyday reality for millions of Africans, little is known about the benefits. While state-of-the-art forecasting models may have the capacity to predict location, intensity and frequency of weather events, the average person has very little understanding of how this information is used on the ground. Those who are aware of the benefits and seek its use to support decision-making often find that it is too technical or has not been packaged for practical use.

Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) under the Weather Information and Climate Services (WISER) project, has been designed to build knowledge of climate information with the right people in the right way.

The programme has been used to train key influencing groups – parliamentarians, civil society, media and young people – on how variables, such as temperature, rainfall, wind, humidity and sunshine hours, can be analysed, packaged and applied to inform decision makers in policy, planning and practice. The training is based on the toolkit entitled “Mainstreaming/integrating climate information services into legislation, development policies, plans and practices”. Designed in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the practical, step-by-step guide explains the critical role of effective, timely climate information. The easy-to-use, interactive tool features a glossary of terms, a list of resources and useful links.

Training the trainers

The “Trainer of Trainers” programme, rolled out by the African Climate Policy



The training module:

- Demonstrates how climate information can assess climate risks for use in investment decisions;
- Shows how climate information can climate-proof development plans for different sectors;
- Explains how climate information can be used for reducing vulnerabilities and impacts of climate-related disasters, such as floods or wildfires;
- Explores the use of climate information for infrastructure investment or insurance schemes.

National roll-out

Through a ripple-effect learning framework, trainers have trained peers from government organizations, civil society organizations, media organizations and youth groups at national and regional levels. The programme is intended to train 2,000 delegate trainees by 2019 through workshops rolled out at the national level.

The training is tailored according to the needs of each group:

- **Parliamentarians.** Training for parliamentarians focuses on the economic impacts of climate change, using examples of the social and environmental costs of climate change across various sectors. Participants are trained on how climate information services can be applied in development planning to build the capacity of institutions across key sectors, including land-use planning, infrastructure planning, agricultural development and power generation. They learn how mainstreaming climate information and services into planning and policies can support regional and national early warning networks to anticipate and respond to extreme climate events.
- **Young people.** Young people are the future of the continent and have arguably the biggest role in helping to shape a prosperous, climate-resilient continent. The training for



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young people – with delegates from civil society organizations, youth organizations and environmental movements, among others – is intended to demystify the technicalities of climate information and demonstrate ways to pass this information on to their communities, down to the grass-roots. Young people are encouraged to participate fully in the training, with the programme being driven by young people. They lead the discussion groups, which focus on how art and theatre can enhance the uptake of climate information.

- **Media.** Media practitioners are change brokers. They have a key role to play in a context in which adverse and critical climate changes are having extensive economic, social and environmental impacts throughout Africa.

More than 30 participants from public, private and online media have been trained with the overall objective of informing them about the challenges of climate communication and to equip them with methods and techniques for collecting climate information and generating climate information services.

The training modules are as follows:

- Definition of climate, meteorology, climate information and climate data;
- Visual representations of climate change;
- Climate information products that could make headlines;
- Characteristics and production of climate services;
- The usefulness and role of climate information and services in development planning and policies.

Understanding the producer-user connection

Regional climate centres are located within the continent's regional economic communities and are crucial hubs for generating and scaling up the delivery of up-to-date climate and weather information, ready for use. The function of centres are to generate climate information and services at the regional level and deliver it to the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, which tailor the information for use at the national level. A variety of users draw on this country-specific information; rainfall and temperature data help farmers to decide when to plant and harvest, while water planners may refer to changing rainfall patterns to better manage resources.

Some of the Water Isotope System for Data Analysis, Visualization, and Electronic Retrieval training workshops included field visits to the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, to build a practical understanding of how climate information is produced. Participants have visited different departments to build an understanding of how each department works and the role it plays in generating climate information. Some of the workshops have invited National Meteorological and Hydrological Services professionals who spent part of the programme sharing their practical experience with trainees.

Reflections: participants and trainers

"The training was a real eye-opener for me. The role of climate information services in the development of Africa is often ignored or not properly understood. Many young people don't know what climate information is, where it comes from, or how to use it. The training made it crystal clear how so many different groups in society – from regional

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economists down to the farmer in the field – can integrate climate information for improved decision-making in their daily lives.”

Vanessa Deboua, ASMAC student, youth representative

“Increasingly climate information is available from the Internet or via mobile apps. Farmers may not receive information in this way; they may get information from the radio, or from chiefs or elders. It’s important the Met Offices know this. The training showed us how civil society, youth groups and the media have an important role to play as the mouthpiece for local groups – ensuring their needs are fed upwards and into the processes of generating climate information.”

Caroline Elongue, workshop translator

“The training showed us how scientific information can be integrated with indigenous knowledge. This is critical: indigenous information has long been used by farmers and they see it as a reliable tool for predicting climate change. There is some mistrust that the new technologies that generate climate information services will erode or overtake traditional method and practices. Civil society and youth groups can play an intermediary role between the producers of climate information and farmers – to show how the two can work hand in hand.

If farmers understand the links between indigenous and scientific knowledge, they are more likely to trust climate information.”

Elias Ntungwe Ngalame, Pan African Media Alliance for Climate Change

“It’s the media’s job to get the importance of climate information to be understood and appreciated by the wider population. As a journalist, if you don’t understand a concept properly, you can’t tell a story accurately. This training empowered the media to report on climate information whether that’s in newspapers, for the TV or on the radio. The training covered the broad concepts of climate information in relation to climate change, including key terminology. Language was a fundamental part of the training: reporting in a way that local people understand. Many journalists being trained work for community radio where programmes are broadcast in the vernacular. The training demonstrated how to translate the technicalities of climate information into simple formats that would be easy for local people to use.”

Prosper Nga Nkou, Equinoxe TV

“Climate change is an issue of major concern in Africa. Journalists must provide the public with information that anticipates and predicts events”

Elong Bébé, Royal FM

“At the beginning of training a number of young people admitted they were not aware of the topic of climate change, but they showed a clear willingness to learn. By the end of the workshop, they had taken full ownership and were asking where they could get more information, where they can get the best research, will there be further modules? There’s a real appetite among young people – it’s about breaking down the technical information and helping them to see how climate information can really benefit their communities.”

Ann Kobia, Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, youth trainer

“You could tell by the energy in the room during the workshop that the media practitioners had really connected with the topic. They absorbed the material with genuine enthusiasm and by the end showed a thirst to continue learning. The media grasped the relevance of climate information in light of the threats of climate change – and their duty as intermediaries to report on it accurately.”

Olivier Nana Nzepa, media trainer.

Who does the training target?

Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians have a key role to champion climate information as a tool to support national development. They can help to ring-fence the budget for critical infrastructure – high-quality observational equipment, more powerful computers, more sophisticated satellites, more advanced rain gauges – and the funding needed to secure crucial human resources.

Civil Society Organisations

Poor understanding of what climate information services is, how it can be applied and scepticism about its reliability means limited uptake of climate information at the grass roots of African society. Civil society organizations are the bridge to the grass roots. They can show farmers how rainfall predictions can increase their harvests and how fishermen can avoid damage to their equipment, or even fatalities if warned about violent incoming storms. Civil society organizations can demonstrate to women in rural households how to prepare for flooding that damages their homes and critical assets. They can show how scientific and indigenous knowledge of weather and climate can work together; if local people understand the synergies between indigenous and scientific knowledge, they are more likely to trust climate information.



Media

Media have an integral role in unpacking the complexities of climate information and translating the benefits to the wider population. They can work with climate scientists to turn climate information into locally relevant, practical information, such as daily weather forecasts, seasonal outlooks and weather alerts. They are then positioned to deliver this information to actors across the whole continent: pastoralists and fishermen, village elders and business executives, women and men, young and old, the continent's urban populations and those in remote rural communities.

Young people

The young people of Africa have the energy and power to raise awareness in their communities of the need for robust climate information, and to urge their Governments to implement policies that support uptake. They also have the entrepreneurial spirit, the brains and technical know-how to explore how climate information can be used to help core industries in Africa to adapt and thrive – for example, how climate information can be localized and used very specifically in different parts of the supply and production chain.

About ACPC

The African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) is a climate knowledge Centre with an overall goal of contributing to poverty reduction through successful mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Africa and to improve the capacity of African countries to participate effectively in multilateral climate negotiations.

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