INFOBRIEF

Climate Information Services: training a critical mass of key influencers

A '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 influencing groups.

Key points:

The initiative has trained key influencing groups in how climate variables can be analysed, packaged and applied to inform decisions in policy, planning and practice.

Through a ripple-effect learning framework, trainers trained peers from parliament, civil society organisation, media organisations and youth groups at national and regional level.

Workshops have been rolled out nationwide with the initiative seeking to train 2000 delegates trainees by the end of 2019

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

Early warning systems and climate outlooks can help communities predict and prepare for impending disasters and prepare for related risks. Over the longer term, robust, evidence-based climate information can guide governments in how to invest in infrastructure that is located, designed and built in light of the current and changing climate. Using climate information to avoid immediate shocks and stresses, or to climate proof longer-term investments can help lift countries out of vicious cycles of damage and recovery.

Climate change can also present opportunities for 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. Likewise, areas that have seen historically low yields may become more productive.

Yet 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 African 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 it is too technical or has not been packaged up for practical use.

Training the trainers

The "Trainer of Trainers" programme rolled out by the African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) 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 initiative has trained key influencing groups – parliamentarians, civil society, media and youth – in how variables such as temperature, rainfall, wind, humidity and sunshine hours, can be analysed, packaged and applied to inform decisions in policy, planning and practice. The training is based on the toolkit *Mainstreaming/Integrating Climate Information Services into Legislation, Development Policies, Plans and Practices*. Designed in collaboration with United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), 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 as well as a list of resources and useful links.

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 investments or insurance schemes.

National roll-out

Through a ripple-effect learning framework, trainers trained peers from policy, civil society organisation, media organisations and youth groups at national and regional level. Through workshops rolled out at national level, the initiative seeks to train 2,000 delegates trainees by 2019.

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

- **Parliamentarians**. Training for parliamentarians focused on the economic impacts of climate change, with examples of the social and environmental costs of climate change across various sectors. Participant were trained in 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 learnt 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.

- **Youth**. Africa's young generation are the continent's future and have arguably the biggest role in helping shape a prosperous, climate-resilient continent. The training for youth – with delegates from civil society organisations, youth organisations and environmental movements among others – sought to demystify the technicalities of climate information and demonstrate ways to pass this information on to their communities, down to the grass-roots. The youth were encouraged to fully participate in the training, with the programme being driven by the youth themselves. They led the discussion groups which had a particular 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 where adverse and critical climate changes are having huge economic, social and environmental impacts across Africa.
  More than 30 participants from public, private and online media were trained with the overall objective of informing participants 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 were 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

Africa's Regional Climate Centres (RCC) sit within the continent's Regional Economic Communities (REC) 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 RCCs is to generate climate information and services at the regional level and deliver this to National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) who tailor this information for use at the national level. A variety of different users draw on this country-specific information; rainfall and temperature data help farmers decide when to plant and harvest while water planners may draw on changing rainfall patterns to better manage resources.

Some of the WISER training workshops included field visits to NMHS, to build a practical understanding of how climate information is produced. Participants 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 invited NMHS 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 Africa's development 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 economists down to the farmer

in the field – can integrate climate information for improved decisions-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 (PAMACC)

"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 see how climate information can really benefit their communities"
Ann Kobia, Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), 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."

Professor 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 ring-fence 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 CIS is, how it can be applied and scepticism about reliability, means limited uptake of climate information at the grassroots of African society. Civil Society Organisations (CSO) are the bridge to the grassroots. They can show farmers how rainfall predictions can increase their harvests and how fishers can avoid damage to their equipment, or even fatalities if warned about violent incoming storms. CSOs can demonstrate to women in rural households how to prepare for flooding that damage their homes and critical assets. CSO 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 unpicking 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, Africa's urban populations and those in remote rural communities.

Youth
Africa's youth 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 Africa's core industries adapt and thrive – for example, how climate information can be localised and used very specifically in different parts of the supply and production chain

WISER is supported by: