

CRISPP: reflections and observations

By George Gibson, International Development Manager, UK based Met Office

In the coastal region of Kenya, local communities have historically found it difficult to rely on weather forecasts and climate services. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the forecasts that were available to them weren't relevant to their needs. And secondly, the forecasts weren't being made available in a consistent and timely way. So, if someone was having to make a decision about whether to go fishing the next day, for example, the weather forecasts simply didn't give them the information they needed.

CRISPP was a project set up in partnership with the Met Office, the Kenya Meteorological Department (KMD) and the Global Climate Adaptation Partnership (GPAC) in Kenya to try to ensure that communities across the region could receive weather information that was appropriate to them. The acronym stands for Coastal Resilience and Improving Services for Potato Production in Kenya. I was mainly involved in the coastal aspect of the project, where there was a wide range of user groups and communities who would benefit from more relevant and timely weather forecasts, including farmers, miners and fisherfolk. KMD wanted to work with these communities to develop services that catered to them.

KMD hoped that the project would help to reach 300,000 households with weather information that was relevant to their needs. One of the first tasks was to assess the media landscape, looking at how people currently received their weather information and what other channels might be better suited to them. We found that most people were receiving forecasts in an ad hoc way, picking information up from the odd radio station or the KMD website, for example. We looked at cheaper or even free alternatives, and then trained the region's County Directors of Meteorology in how to use social media such as Facebook, and how to engage with audiences via community radio stations.

The local radio stations were an excellent way for the CRISPP project to reach end users, as many households were already keen listeners and trusted the information

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coming over the airwaves. County Directors and other scientists featured in discussion programmes, talking about forecasts, and gaining interest and awareness. Through their ongoing interactions with audiences as well as listener feedback, it became apparent that the programmes were reaching a large audience across the region, which was encouraging news.

At the same time as the work with County Directors, CRISPP also engaged with different user groups such as farmers, fishing communities and mining businesses in order to co-produce forecast services with the people who would be using them. Ongoing feedback then enabled everyone involved to fine tune the forecasts to ensure that they delivered to people's needs. Working together like this was invaluable, as it helped to improve the esteem in which KMD was held across the region. Strong links were being forged between the communities and the organisations that were in place to serve them.

To make sure that co-production was a success, we worked with county governments and organisations from the private sector to get their buy-in right from the start. The Red Cross in particular was extremely important in helping the project engage directly with communities and user groups, as it had a network of volunteers already in place across the region.

I'm glad to say that the forecasts are still going strong, and I still get feedback from the County Directors and receive forecasts myself. But what I'd really like to do now is to carry out a household-level survey to see what impact the forecasts are having. Because, although we know the forecasts are being produced, we cannot be sure who is using them or whether they are still finding them useful outside of statistical information. That last mile in communication makes all the difference. In fact, we did start to carry out a user survey, looking at the socio-economic benefits to assess the tangible impacts that CRISPP had had on livelihoods, but the coronavirus pandemic sadly meant that the work had to be abandoned.

However, on the whole, I would say that the project was a great success. It was certainly very enjoyable to be part of the team, as we had a really strong group of partners that complemented each other well. KMD were leading the technical aspect, while Kenya Red Cross carried out the community engagement and a local communications consultant was on the ground getting continual feedback, which was so much more effective than a UK-based consultant doing that work. We also had a dedicated monitoring and evaluation specialist based in Kenya, who was able to work with KMD and help them appreciate just how important it was to capture feedback.

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In my opinion, CRISPP has made a real difference to communities on the ground, despite the challenges of COVID. We certainly reached those 300,000 households that were targeted. But what is equally important is that the project raised the profile of the KMD and has driven demand up for their services across the region. Once you have established a service that is relevant and useful to people, and made it consistent and timely, then you can build up trust and demand. Hopefully that is still there, and households are still tuning in to weather information that they can use to make informed decisions about their lives and livelihoods.

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