

DARAJA: reflections and observations

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DARAJA is a Swahili word meaning bridge, and this project aimed to create a bridge between weather information producers and people in communities in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The aim is for local people to receive information that is relevant and useful to them. We focused specifically on informal settlements because these communities are particularly marginalised and unable to access even the most basic services. They are also highly vulnerable to weather events like flooding, for instance, as many informal settlements are built along water courses.

There were two main purposes driving the project. Firstly, to improve the resilience of the local communities and secondly to develop the communication systems that carry weather-related information, including early warnings of flooding and other weather events.

Looking back on the project, we achieved a number of our objectives. First and foremost, DARAJA helped to improve the level of trust that the public had in their national meteorological service. When the project began, we had noticed that people simply didn't trust forecasts due to reliance on traditional methods of weather forecasting - but two and a half years of workshops and interactions helped to build stronger bonds between the public and the meteorological offices. That's vital going forward, as resilience to weather events can only really happen if the public trusts the source of weather information and feel confident to take action on it.

The project also improved the public's engagement with weather information, both in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam. Before DARAJA, weather forecasts tended to be quite scientific in its presentation, using meteorological jargon that listeners might not understand, with information that was not particularly relevant to the audience's needs.

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We broke down the barriers between broadcasters and audiences by holding workshops with journalists and the public, where meteorologists were able to explain some of the terms they used. This enabled journalists to co-produce broadcasts that people could understand. By the end of the project, we had a new template for the forecasts which enabled more localised and user-friendly information.

Lastly, at the end of the project we also found that people were in a much better position to take action as a consequence of forecasts and weather warnings. These actions can range from anything as simple as moving important paperwork up to a safe, dry location where it's unlikely to be affected by floodwater, all the way to evacuating an entire community before a heavy rainfall. Some actions people took were designed to protect their assets and belongings, whereas others were simply about making their daily life and productivity better than it would have been.

Carrying out user research after the project had come to an end, we identified the five top actions people took to make their communities more resilient to weather events. For example, to prevent flash flooding, families cleaned debris from around their houses, and whole communities also came together to clear debris from drains. People also told us that they were able to plan safer travel routes, both for their daily commute and for their children going to school, as the forecasts gave them an indication of which routes might be flooded and which might be safe.

Schools in Dar es Salaam also introduced changes following the updated weather forecasts. One of the schools we worked with arranged a room where students could leave their schoolbooks during the rainy season, so they wouldn't get drenched in the heavy rains. This helped to add economic resilience too, as it meant families wouldn't have to pay for new exercise and text books following a downpour. Another school also acted on forecasts of warmer weather by introducing more drinking water facilities.

To sum up, I'd say that DARAJA turned a public service – meteorological broadcasts – into something that truly was delivering value to the public. Community members now feel that forecasts are designed for them and are catering to their needs, rather than being esoteric scientific programmes with little relevance to them.

All the way through the project, co-production was vital. By getting lots of stakeholders involved in producing weather broadcasts, we gave users a sense of agency and ownership. The people who got involved in our workshops felt that the

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forecasts belonged to them, so we didn't have to spend too much time and effort convincing communities to try out this new service.

Speaking personally, DARAJA was very enjoyable to work on, as the team here at Resurgence learnt so much about the communities and the culture in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. This is a model that can be replicated in other parts of the world, with a little contextualisation depending on the geography. We are eternally grateful for the confidence the Met Office showed in Resurgence. We are probably one of the smallest organisations involved in WISER projects, but the Met Office was always very responsive and supportive, and we enjoyed working together.

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