

WISER: reflections and observations from the UK Government

By Jane Marriott – British High Commissioner to Kenya

Here in Kenya, it's easy to see how people across Africa are already dealing with the effects of climate change. We're seeing more frequent severe weather events like the ongoing drought, as well as other extreme events like floods and locust swarms in East Africa. In order to make decisions that can help protect themselves from events like these, people urgently need accurate weather forecasting at the right time, in a format they can use and understand.

That's why the UK Government is backing the Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme, which is supporting millions of people across East Africa with better forecasts, so they are able to prepare for weather and climate impacts. Crucially, it has focused on partnering with people on the ground: the people who feel the impacts. So, from the start, WISER aimed to identify who was going to use the weather information and ensure they were involved in developing the services that scientists produced.

This can make a life-changing, and even lifesaving, difference to people. For instance, for the HIGHWAY project on the shores of Lake Victoria, having the technology to better predict storms is all well and good, but that would be of no use to communities unless scientists can translate data into understandable information for the people who need it. From science to supercomputers to developing vital communications services, WISER has looked at every link in the chain to make sure information gets to communities effectively. So, what starts life as data crunched by scientists can be translated into a red warning flag on the beach so that fishermen know not to go out that day and the people know to stay away from the water's edge.

As well as focusing on co-production, WISER is an inspiring programme because it opens up dialogue. It's been an opportunity for the Met Office, the UK's national meteorological service, to share climate expertise with other national meteorological

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offices around the world. The Met Office is considered to be a global centre of excellence, and to have such a national asset working side by side with its counterparts is an effective way to share knowledge and gain understanding.

Looking back on WISER now, it has also proved to be excellent value for money. For every £1 spent on the programme, it has generated between £7 and £23 in economic benefits. Modelling has shown how many crops, fishing boats and other resources were saved thanks to timely forecasts and weather warnings – as well as how many lives were saved. This cost benefit analysis of the impact of the climate information generated by WISER suggests that it helped to avoid around £200 million worth of losses to people on the ground. That is much more money than went into the programme, and it beats the predicted target too.

Behind those figures are real people. I've been fortunate enough to meet some of the people who have benefitted from these weather alerts made possible through WISER. One of those people is called Faith, who lives in Kibera, an informal settlement on the sharp end of climate change in Nairobi. Hers is an inspiring story and one the UK is proud to back – using weather information from WISER, she alerts the community to the threats of flooding, helps organise the community to clear the channels so water can move more freely, and people can barricade their doors against flash floods – saving lives and property.

People like Faith have done nothing to contribute to climate change but are the most affected by it. Kenya contributes 0.13% of global emissions but is the 34th most impacted country by climate and weather shocks.

The UK is helping build global resilience to climate change, including through pledging £11.6 billion in International Climate Finance. Half of that funding will be spent helping people adapt to climate change and shocks, and WISER is an example of a key programme that will continue to support that commitment.

We're delighted that the partnerships made through WISER are growing the demand for accessible weather information, not just in East Africa, but across the continent and beyond. It's one way to show how East Africa is leading the way against climate change and demonstrates what can be achieved – that's why the UK is looking to replicate this in other regions. There is no point investing in technology and science unless you can translate it for those that need it most – and this approach is now influencing climate science around the world.

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