

Creating a new norm for impactful weather and climate services

Lessons from the Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme

Outline of WISER and the learning process

The Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme aims to increase the resilience of African people and enhance economic development in response to weather and climate-related shocks. Funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and fund managed by the Met Office UK, Phase 2 of the programme implemented from 2017 -2021 aimed to improve the generation and use of weather and climate information across the Sahel and East Africa, through 12 projects.

WISER Fund Management organised an internal online learning event in April 2021 to distil key learning from the design, delivery and results of projects and the programme. During the event participants from across the 12 projects reflected on programme functions, approaches, climate service and products outcomes, and programme/project impacts to co-produce the lessons and recommendations outlined in this infographic.



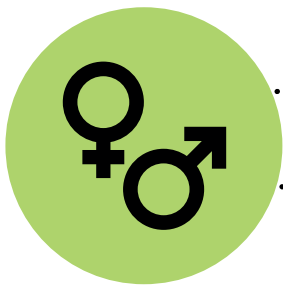
1. Co-design during inception

Ring-fence an inception phase of sufficient length to allow the co-design of projects and programmes with stakeholder engagement at all levels.



2. Develop synergies

Identify regional synergies and design project and programme activities to align with national and regional priorities to increase the likelihood that climate services will be impactful.



3. Focus on gender and inclusion

Design programmes to be gender-responsive and inclusive by having clear plans to promote equal access and inclusion to co-produced climate services.



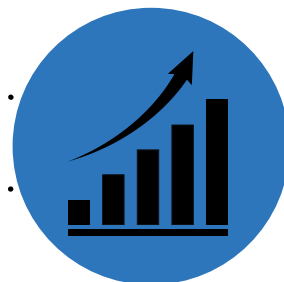
4. Implement immersive co-production

Move from consultative to more immersive co-production to deliver relevant, high-quality services and products while building strong networks and trust.



5. Develop capacities

Plan to continuously develop capacity throughout the implementation to improve and sustain a range of capabilities for all actors involved in the climate service value chain.



6. Monitor progress and gather evidence of impact

Co-design and implement mechanisms and strategies as part of the inception phase to support Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) throughout implementation.



7. Consider sustainability

Start considering sustainability in the inception phase and include in project proposals to ensure that the necessary support is available to facilitate effective transitions, scaling and replication of activities.

1. Co-design during inception

1. Tailor projects and programmes to address the needs of the end-users

Lesson 1

Including end-users in the co-design stage of projects and programmes is essential to ensure that activities, outputs and outcomes focus on addressing their needs. It is important to involve experienced facilitators who can ensure that end-users' knowledge, values and priorities are heard and integrated into the design. This ensures that the climate information services produced by projects can support the increased uptake and use of climate information.



Recommendation:

Donors and project leads should prioritise user engagement in the co-design of projects and programmes.

2. Stimulate co-ownership among all partners

Lesson 2

Co-designing projects and programmes with a range of stakeholders, including producers, intermediaries and users, fosters co-ownership for everyone involved in the delivery of climate services. This ensures that stakeholders share the co-ownership of outputs and outcomes, and empowers them to continue advocating for co-production approaches beyond funded periods.



Recommendation:

Donors and project leads should include a range of stakeholders from National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NHMS), media and communicators, non-governmental organisations, local experts and end-users in the design process to develop collective aims and goals.

3. Build strong relationships for effective programme coordination

Lesson 3

It is important to create and sustain relationships between funding partners, fund managers and project leads from the design phase, to establish a shared understanding and objectives between the project and programme. Open and trusting relationships ensure that challenges can be communicated, activities can be adjusted, and additional support can be provided where necessary. Setting up pre-implementation meetings with funding partners, fund managers and project staff can also enforce a shared understanding of programme logframes and theories of change, and ensure that project staff understand the reporting and compliance requirements.



Recommendation:

Donors/Fund Managers should establish and maintain trusting and supportive relationships with project delivery leads from the outset. Having regular check-in opportunities enables continuous communication, which builds relationships and trust over time.

2. Develop synergies

1. Support and complement national and regional development priorities

Lesson 1

It has been proven that climate services projects and programmes have a more significant impact when aligned with national and regional development priorities, ambitions for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Activities should support decision-making and offer fit-for-purpose services and products.



Recommendation:

Donors and project leads should design projects and programmes to be relevant to the regional and national contexts. Project leads need to ensure that their planned activities are embedded within existing institutional structures and strategies.

2. Leverage existing relationships and past successes

Lesson 2

Identifying and leveraging existing partnerships supports co-production since trust and capacity have already been built. Identifying and creating synergies with similar past and present projects and programmes ensures that new work builds on past successes and experience. This ensures that existing lessons on best practice are applied and improved, which improves the potential to sustain the momentum gained during projects.



Recommendation:

Donors should identify and support focal points to champion climate services within their regions and countries. Project leads should work closely with these focal points to identify and create synergies with existing initiatives and organisations.

3. Recognise the value of shared learning opportunities

Lesson 3

Events that facilitate sharing and learning within projects and across programmes are vital for learning and building networks. These events enable the sharing of good practices, identifying and strengthening synergies, and creating new partnerships. Merging these events with larger external events can save project stakeholders time and resources associated with attendance.



Recommendation:

Fund managers and project leads should allocate budgets to plan and allow staff to participate in learning and sharing events. Funding partners should encourage and incentivise participation in these events.

3. Focus on gender and inclusion

1. Make gender and inclusion a core objective

Lesson 1

Projects and programmes should move beyond merely integrating gender and inclusion, and make this a core programme objective. Programmes that are not designed to be gender-sensitive often result in projects lacking the knowledge and experience to integrate gender and inclusion in a way that addresses inequalities and social norms. Requiring projects and programmes to be designed and implemented with a gender-sensitive lens ensures that implementers actively consider addressing inequalities within climate services. This results in explicit activities and outcomes aimed at gender empowerment and inclusion.



Recommendation:

Donors should ensure that projects and programmes are designed with gender considerations as a core objective, for example with gender-disaggregated logframe indicators, and ensure that appropriate resources have been allocated to support project teams in technical areas.

2. Understand the factors that reinforce inequality

Lesson 2

Identifying and understanding the factors that reinforce gender inequality during the design phase is important in addressing imbalances during implementation. Acknowledging social contexts and norms, which lead to exclusion in engagement processes and inequality in accessing and using climate services, are important to ensure that projects are gender-responsive. This ensures that approaches are intentionally aimed at overcoming gender and social barriers to improve inclusion within co-production processes. This allows for the co-production of climate services that meet the needs of people equally, regardless of gender, age and ability.



Recommendation:

Project leads should dedicate resources to include gender expertise in project teams and support gender-specific activities. Fund managers should facilitate options for call-down support to projects when gender and inclusion expertise is absent.

3. Champion gender and inclusion at the institutional level

Lesson 3

Gender and inclusion should not solely be viewed as an outcome, but should be an institutional priority across all organisations involved in delivering climate services. Gender and inclusion should be championed by all funding partners, fund managers, project leads and implementing partners. Leading by example means that the inclusion and diversity priorities within institutions can be carried through to implementation, while building on examples of best practice. Partnering with organisations that have strong gender expertise and existing policies in gender and inclusion can support the promotion of gender equity at the institutional level.



Recommendation:

Funders, fund managers and project implementers should demonstrate a high-level commitment to redefining 'business as usual' by developing organisational policies and plans for gender and inclusion.

4. Implement immersive co-production

1. Connect to user needs through co-production

Lesson 1

Co-production is the process of working together to combine different pieces of knowledge to produce new knowledge. Co-production is particularly important for connecting producers, intermediaries and users of climate information to ensure that climate services and products are tailored to user needs. Co-production can help producers and intermediaries understand users' needs by allowing users to provide feedback for the improvement of services. This may also help producers simplify technical language, develop relevant dissemination strategies and use local language when delivering climate services.



Recommendation:

Project leads should plan for regular engagements with all stakeholders throughout the design and implementation of projects and create mechanisms to incorporate user feedback into climate services.

2. Allow co-production to support collective action

Lesson 2

Co-production can facilitate effective collaboration between the full range of stakeholders in the climate services value chain. Identifying key stakeholders and establishing continued engagements is important for creating relationships and building trust. Experienced facilitators play an essential role in managing existing power dynamics and hierarchies during engagements and creating open and productive environments. Co-exploring issues and co-developing and delivering solutions ensure that stakeholders work together to achieve common goals and shared outcomes.



Recommendation:

Project leads and implementing partners should promote a culture of inclusivity through co-production principles. Projects should include experienced facilitators to support collaboration between stakeholders.

3. Use immersive co-production to strengthen networks and improve outcome

Lesson 3

Shifting from consultative to immersive co-production ensures that the process is more deeply engaging, interactive and flexible. While immersive co-production requires more time and resources for continued, equitable and trust-based collaboration, the outcomes of the process are much greater. The iterative nature and robust feedback loops of immersive co-production allow for more beneficial and stronger relationships to be forged over time. Stronger relationships result in shared values and increase trust in climate services and products. This both increases the uptake of climate information and results in improved climate services.



Recommendation:

Funding partners and project leads should consider the level of co-production of climate services in WISER as the minimum viable level. Funding partners should reconsider project timeframes to allow project implementers to plan for immersive co-production approaches that would produce better outcomes.

5. Develop capacities

1. Focus on improving capacity gaps in the climate services value chain

Lesson 1

Capacity development should focus on a range of skills and capacities relevant to different stakeholders within climate services delivery. Adequate resources should be set aside to understand the capacity gaps for producers, intermediaries and users, and plan activities to fill these gaps. Capacities should be developed throughout the implementation phase and sustained beyond project timelines to avoid the adverse effects of staff turnover. Since co-production supports knowledge-sharing while offering the potential to connect to user needs and improve services, activities should be planned to develop co-production skills, including facilitation and engagement skills.



Recommendation:

Funding partners should dedicate resources to performing collaborative capacity needs assessments during the design phase. Project leads should use the needs assessment to guide continuous capacity development strategies. Fund managers should monitor and coordinate capacity development initiatives to ensure that programme-wide outcomes are being realised.

2. Develop capacities in National Met and Hydrological Services (NMHS)

Lesson 2

While co-production can enhance the ability of NMHS to deliver user-relevant climate services, connecting to user needs may also place strain on NMHS capacities. A range of capacities should be considered to enable sustainable capacity development for NMHS. Holistic institutional skills (such as project management, reporting and proposal writing) are crucial for NMHS to manage and assume increasing leadership roles in future projects. NMHS also require the capacity to demonstrate their value and advocate for additional funding from national governments such as through socio economic benefit finding of their work (see 6.3).



Recommendation:

Project leads should develop structured capacity development plans targeted towards NMHS. These plans should be continuous and focus on long-term, strategic skills.

3. Increase the capacity of intermediaries and communicators

Lesson 3

Communication and dissemination strategies are vital to realising impactful climate services. Investments are needed in building the communication skills within NMHS (and other producers) and increasing the capacities of intermediaries and communicators in understanding climate science. Facilitating engagements and creating strong relationships between producers and intermediaries can improve understanding between the two groups and develop a common language. This is particularly important in helping producers understand information needs, while building the capacity of intermediaries to communicate weather and climate information.



Recommendation:

Project leads should include capacity development activities aimed at improving communication skills and supporting intermediaries. Funding partners should also ensure that calls for proposals are targeted at a range of organisations to encourage more intermediaries to apply for funding.

6. Monitor progress and gather evidence of impact

1. Co-design Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategies from the outset

Lesson 1

Programme-level MEL strategies should be co-designed by project leads, stakeholders and end-users during the programme inception phase. This can guide projects in co-developing and aligning their own MEL strategies. Including end-users in developing the MEL strategy is particularly important in establishing relevant metrics to measure progress and supporting the development of baseline assessments where needed. MEL strategies should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant during implementation and to make appropriate adjustments based on emergent learning.



Recommendation:

Donors should provide seed funds to allow fund managers and project leads to work with key stakeholders and user groups to co-design MEL strategies. Fund managers and project leads should ensure continued engagement with stakeholders and user groups during implementation to regularly review MEL strategies.

2. Invest in dedicated MEL expertise

Lesson 2

MEL is essential for tracking and evidencing progress, identifying emerging needs and collating lessons of success within projects and across programmes. However, relevant expertise is required (either within project teams, at the programme level or through external support) to lead the development and implementation of MEL strategies. Having dedicated MEL focal points ensures that progress can be tracked relative to intended outcomes and impacts, while capturing valuable learnings during implementation. These learnings are essential for projects to adjust approaches or shift activities when challenges or opportunities arise.



Recommendation:

Donors should encourage project leads and fund managers to invest in dedicated MEL support at both the project and programme levels. Both should appoint MEL focal points, and consider forming a MEL working group to ensure alignment between project and programme level MEL strategies.

3. Demonstrate the value of co-production by generating evidence of impacts and benefits

Lesson 3

Demonstrating the socio-economic benefits of co-produced climate services is valuable in justifying further investments in climate services. Studies that gather evidence to show socio economic benefits are extremely valuable for demonstrating avoided losses and potential gains resulting from improved climate services. Building an evidence base for the impacts of climate services is important to demonstrate the investment value for funding partners, and can also be used by NMHS to justify requests for additional budget allocation from national governments.



Recommendation:

Project leads should include a range of social and economic expertise in projects to gather evidence of the socio economic benefits of co-produced climate services. Fund managers should support projects, and coordinate a programme-level evidence base to advocate for further investments from funding partners in co-producing climate services.

7. Consider sustainability

1. Sustain improved levels of service to meet increased demand

Lesson 1

Improved climate services and products come with increased user demands that need to be sustained beyond project timeframes. Projects should target strategic gaps in services and capacity with the greatest potential for sustainability. Projects, together with NMHS and other implementing partners, should co-produce training materials and guides to ensure that capacity improvements are not lost due to staff turnover. Any investment in new infrastructure (e.g. upgraded hardware and software) should be paired with training to ensure that the infrastructure can be serviced and maintained by NMHS staff. However, projects are constrained by short timeframes, so additional support may be required to produce the intended sustainable outcomes of improved climate services.



Recommendation:

Project leads should develop sustainability plans within their proposals and provide the necessary support during project closure to ensure that improved levels of service can be sustained. This may require identifying local champions who can continue to advocate for project activities and seek alternative funding sources.

2. Institutionalise improved climate services for sustainability

Lesson 2

By aligning project activities to fill known capacity and service gaps, projects and programmes are strategically positioned to address known needs. Activities to improve capacity and services should support the creation of new institutional norms and standard operating procedures, with strong local ownership for improved services. When filling strategic gaps, projects should ensure that there are options to transfer management and financing responsibilities to local partners in the long term. This may include supporting NMHS in acquiring additional funding to ensure the potential for sustainability.



Recommendation:

Funding partners should set aside a sustainability fund to support activities or projects with proven effectiveness in continuing beyond original timeframes to support a transition phase.

3. Support replication and scaling by sharing success and examples of good practice

Lesson 3

Capturing lessons learnt on successes and challenges during project implementation is important for replicating and scaling project activities. Projects and programmes should ensure that sufficient time is dedicated to reflecting and capturing lessons, and producing knowledge products to share learnings. Producing guides and manuals for good practice and other training materials can support the replication of effective approaches and expand the influence of projects and programmes.



Recommendation:

Project leads should dedicate sufficient time and resources to knowledge generation and the development of knowledge products. Fund managers should provide knowledge management support when projects lack the capacity to lead this.