

Same weather, different needs – the importance of user engagement

The four-year Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme aims to make it easier for people to access weather and climate information across East Africa. The programme is focusing on co-production, bringing knowledge and experience together to improve weather services in the region.

Co-production starts with user engagement, with WISER projects reaching out to people on the ground to assess their different needs from weather services. The stories of Ekoporus and Albert show just how different those needs can be.

Ekoporus is a 52-year-old pastoral farmer living in Northern Kenya. He has six herds of livestock, including 200 goats and 50 cows. The unpredictable weather has made work very difficult for Ekoporus, as he can no longer rely on the traditional wet season during February and March.

Albert is a 45-year-old fisherman living in Uganda. He specialises in deep water night fishing, using a traditional canoe on Lake Victoria, where he and his team trawl their net. His catches have dwindled recently, and he attributes the problem to the frequent strong winds, which don't just scare away the fish but are also potentially dangerous to fishermen.

Ekoporus and Albert would both benefit from receiving accurate, daily weather forecasts to help them plan their day ahead. However, providing the same forecast to both men might be more of a hindrance than a help, as each of them needs very different things from a weather forecast.

Fishermen like Albert need information about wind to make daily decisions about whether to go fishing. He needs highly localised forecasts, covering the islands and

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shoreline. And, as a night fisherman, he needs those forecasts to be delivered during the daytime, ideally between 11am and 1pm.

Meanwhile, farmers like Ekoporus not only need daily forecasts but also information about the rainy season in general, so they can plan where to move their cattle to find forage and water. Ekoporus also wakes early to tend his crops and meet with the elders, so he would prefer to have forecasts before dawn.

Ekoporus' and Albert's stories, which were gathered as part of the WISER Weather Wise project, show just how important it is to start with the users' needs first before creating and delivering a forecast. That way National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) can ensure that forecasts are tailored specifically to people's needs. Otherwise, end users might receive forecasts that are at best irrelevant to them and at worst could make them decide to ignore forecasts in the future.

Seeking views and opinions

The WISER projects have been using different ways to reach relevant audiences in order to assess their needs in respect of weather and climate services.

To understand how people across Kenya used forecasts and what they wanted from weather services, the Weather Wise team sought opinions from people on the ground by hosting an Audience Research Breakfast in Nairobi. Kenya Meteorological Department (KMD) were present to hear people's thoughts, along with radio stations and broadcasting companies, who added insight into what could be achieved by tailoring forecasts for target audiences. This also provided an opportunity to work together with other WISER projects working in Kenya, including the Coastal Resilience and Improving Services for Potato Production in Kenya (CRISPP) and High Impact Weather Lake System (HIGHWAY) projects. It was an excellent opportunity to harness a wide range of opinions and get people working together to share ideas.

The WISER TRANSFORM project has also been looking at how to make sure different knowledge and experience can be brought together to make informed decisions about weather services. This relationship building and co-production is vital in order to match weather and climate information with user needs. Stronger relationships can lead to other benefits too. As Suzanne Carter from SouthSouthNorth (SSN), the TRANSFORM project's lead organisation, explains:

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“Learning from each other builds trust and stronger working relationships, which can be a key step towards combining different types of knowledge and developing climate services that would better meet user needs.”

In a TRANSFORM workshop, participants discussed what they wanted to see from climate information, and the best way for them to receive it. For agriculture, delegates suggested information about when the rains began and stopped, the length of dry spells and rainfall distribution over space and time. The science may not yet be in place to do all of this in all locations, but the group agreed that climate services producers and end users should commit to regular liaison to help move things forward. Meanwhile, the predictions of extreme weather through early warning systems are well received where available, explained participants, but additional advice such as when best to trade livestock or what crops to choose in the face of potential drought, would also be very useful.

Gender and social equity

One particular aspect of cooperation and co-production that WISER is focussed on is the emphasis on gender and social equity. For instance, the programme hasn't just focused on interviewing men like Ekoporus and Albert, but also women, families and young people with livestock too. Traditionally, women in East Africa have household and family responsibilities, and the weather affects them in different ways from farmers and fishermen.

The CRISPP project also sought out views across a range of industry sectors, from the tourism and hotel industry as well as businesses from the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI). However, WISER projects seek to balance feedback from institutional partners with the views of people on the ground – people like Ekoporus and Albert. CRISPP is bringing views together from across the spectrum, working with everyone from county administrations through to potato farmers to understand how climate services can help improve the potato crop's resilience to floods, droughts and a changing climate.

Ensuring relevant weather and climate services

Through the co-production that WISER is championing, the CRISPP project will bring together weather information producers with potato growers and processors to draw up new weather services. And, thanks to the listening approach of this project and

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others within the WISER programme, these services will be relevant to people on the ground like Ekoporus and Albert.

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