

From strategic planning to improved weather and climate services

The aim of the Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme is to deliver transformational change in the quality, accessibility and use of weather and climate information services for sustainable development in Africa. Two distinct strands of the programme are working towards this aim, with clear objectives around influencing policy development and improving governance, and improving the quality and relevance of weather and climate information.

The African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) is one of two fund managers for the WISER programme, alongside the Met Office, the UK's national meteorological service. Founded in 2010, ACPC has one simple vision: "To make Africa's development sustainable, inclusive and climate-resilient." By taking climate change into account and using it to inform development policy, the centre aims to make countries across the continent ready for climate change.

To achieve this, ACPC needed to ensure that people receive the forecasts and weather services that could help protect their livelihoods and even save lives. But before they could do that, clear strategies were needed to influence national policies. Through the WISER programme, ACPC commissioned the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO's) African Ministerial Conference on Meteorology (AMCOMET) in 2016 to work with the national meteorological and hydrological services (NMHSs) of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda to develop strategic plans. Also supported by the Met Office strand of the WISER programme, the WMO/AMCOMET were able to develop their approach to NMHS strategic planning.

Strategic planning is a critical management tool to enable organisations to identify priorities, and can help leaders create the capacity to design and execute long-term solutions to complex problems. WISER also recognised the requirement for sustainable funding from governments and delivery partners in order to implement

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strategic plans through the development of appropriate operational projects. “Having specific targets and objectives in a strategic plan means that any project that develops from it is on a much more sustainable footing,” explains George Gibson, International Development Manager at the Met Office.

By demonstrating that their projects are delivering to this strategic plan, NMHSs can receive governmental resources and funding for long-term objectives.

The Kenyan example

In Kenya, the strategic development process was led by the Kenya Meteorological Department (KMD) with support from AMCOMET. Regular meetings brought together a diverse range of people and organisations from across the country. Each added insight into what types of climate services people needed.

Any strategy or policy had to be focused on the requirements of people on the ground – rather than on what the KMD might think would be most useful. This was why it was so important to gather opinion from a wide range of sources. “The Kenyan Red Cross played a key role,” explains Gibson. “They have a long-term presence in counties across Kenya, with staff and volunteers working on the ground, and they meet a huge range of different types of people.”

As the Red Cross works with people right across communities – including marginalised groups and people with disabilities – they were a particularly rich source of information when it came to understanding people’s needs.

Strategy meetings took place across a number of counties in Kenya, over six to nine months. Each county then signed off their plan at what became known as *validation meetings*. “There was quite a lot of media interest at those meetings,” says Gibson. “The results were designed to change the future for people – and counties had made a commitment to achieve them.”

From strategy to project

Following the strategy development in the various East African countries, WISER East Africa, the Met Office-led strand of WISER, set up a number of projects to develop new weather and climate services that would deliver on some of the objectives outlined in the strategy documents.

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For example, Coastal Resilience and Improving Services for Potato Production (CRISPP) is a project that aims to develop vital information services for potato growers in Kenya, identified as a critical sector. Potatoes are the second most important food crop in the country, and the industry employs nearly 2.8 million people. Any information or forecasting that can safeguard the crop and make it more resilient to floods, droughts and a changing climate will make a huge difference to people's lives.

CRISPP brings together potato growers and processors along with meteorologists from KMD to design new services that will give farmers access to reliable, relevant information that will help them safeguard their businesses and their livelihoods.

Another example is Developing Anticipatory Risk Awareness & Joint Action (DARAJA), a project that aims to deliver climate information to poor urban communities in Tanzania and Kenya. People living in informal urban settlements are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather and climate change. DARAJA aims to improve the climate resilience of up to 20% of poor urban residents in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. By generating reliable, local forecasts and making sure that people on the ground can access those forecasts, DARAJA aims to transform the lives of 300,000 people.

“We call it last mile forecasting and it's absolutely crucial,” explains Gibson. “It's not just about what KMD can produce in terms of weather and climate information, it also links to what impact that information will have down at the level of individual households.”

One of the explicit goals in each of the WISER projects is providing equality of access to weather information. No matter what someone's household income or gender is, everyone should be able to access forecasts so they can plan ahead and make decisions about their lives. People sometimes are wary of official information, so the projects deliberately pinpoint the principal decision makers in households and farming co-operatives that everyone trusts and listens to.

“If the information comes from people who are trusted in their communities then their peer groups are more likely to act on that information,” says Gibson.

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Closing the loop

The ongoing work within WISER is critical to ensuring that the programme achieves its aim, but it has been the work in the early stages of the programme that will mean that the operational work now being carried out will indeed be transformational and sustainable. The strategic planning which took place and the subsequent project development is ensuring that WISER is meeting both the strategic needs of the NMHSs in East Africa and, critically, the needs of the users of weather and climate information.

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