



Tanzania: Climate Services for Action

13 May 2014 - The United Republic of Tanzania has held national consultations on how to roll out climate services to make the East African nation more resilient to climate variability and change. Immediate priorities include the provision of tailored weather and climate forecasts to help pastoralists cope with drought, disaster managers to prepare for flooding and the health sector anticipate outbreaks of malaria, cholera and other diseases.

A meeting in Dar es Salaam 7-9 May agreed on a series of measures to move forward with the Climate Service Adaptation Programme. It recommended the creation of a permanent platform to strengthen dialogue between weather and climate service providers and a wide range of stakeholders. This will ensure that the weather and climate services provided are relevant, accessible and understandable to users ranging from government ministers to local community leaders.

The Climate Services Adaptation Programme is funded by a grant of US\$ 9 750 000 (NOK 60 000 000) from the Government of Norway, it is the first multi-agency initiative to be implemented under the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) spearheaded by the World Meteorological Organization.

It represents a unique approach that includes natural and social scientists, development and humanitarian agencies, and other key user sectors. It combines cutting-edge science with traditional indigenous knowledge. The programme is being implemented in both Tanzania and Malawi, which will hold national consultations next month.

Tanzania is one of many African nations at risk from a changing climate. The tourist icons of Mount Kilimanjaro and the spice island of Zanzibar are both vulnerable to climate change impacts such as shrinking ice caps and rising sea levels. Densely populated areas regularly suffer from flooding and semi-arid regions are prone to drought. There are about 10-12 million clinical malaria cases per year, caused by mosquitoes which thrive in wet, warm conditions, and which are also responsible for an increase in dengue fever.

“This programme has come at the right time,” said Tanzania Meteorological Agency Director-General Agnes Kijazi in a speech delivered on behalf of Minister of Transport Dr Harrison Mwakyembe.

“If local actors involved in planning of climate risk management, societies will be better prepared. It is my belief that this is the best approach to adapting to weather and climate challenges in the country,” said Dr. Kijazi.

Science and traditional knowledge

The programme, also known as Climate Services Action, will initially focus on improving weather and climate services in two pilot areas in the Longido and Kiteto Districts of northern Tanzania. Both districts are populated by Maasai communities which depend almost exclusively on livestock for their livelihood and have traditionally relied on local indigenous knowledge – including observations of cloud cover, winds and movement of birds and animals – to predict the weather.

Samwel Olekao, a community leader in Kiteto, said traditional knowledge alone was no longer enough to forecast the weather, because of climate change and variability. “So many changes have happened,” he said.

The rainy season this year was unexpectedly long and bounteous, he said. But because local farmers had no access to seasonal forecasts, they could not take advantage of this and plant additional seeds.

“If we had had that knowledge earlier, we could have sown seeds and we would be doing well now. So this new project will definitely help,” said Olekao.

In the Longido District, pastoralists saw about 40 % of their livestock decimated in the 2009 drought. More accurate predictions would allow the Masai communities to herd their livestock to less affected areas, including over the border in Kenya, said Longido council representative Ally Msangi.

Under the pilot projects, the Tanzania Meteorological Agency will seek to improve the accuracy and range of its short-term weather and longer-term seasonal forecasts. New trial products to predict the onset and end of the rainy season offer hope for dramatic improvements, according to Filipe Lucio, Director of the Global Framework for Climate Services Office.

To maximize the relevance and reach of the project, meteorologists will work closely with a range of partners. These include the CGIAR Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS); the Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo (CICERO); the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI); the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) through the Tanzanian Red Cross; the World Food Programme (WFP); and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The multi-agency collaboration means that Climate Services Action is a flagship for the GFCS, which aims to strengthen climate services for everyone.

“The GFCS intends to help vulnerable countries and communities take advantage of what is currently possible and feasible in science to support their decision

making. This can not be done by one sector alone,” said Mr Lucio. “For climate services to be effective, it has to be user driven. If it is not user driven it will fail,” he said.