

MAINSTREAMING CLIMATE INTO AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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Climate parameters such as rainfall and temperature determine the availability of natural resources such as water, vegetation, forests, wildlife, general flora and fauna as well as biodiversity etc. Climate extremes, such as droughts and floods, have far reaching implications for natural resources availability and renewability that impact severely on the livelihood of most societies. These impacts sometimes retard the economic growth of many developing countries by several decades.

Notable examples of the potential hazards of extreme climate events have been demonstrated by the impacts of the large scale 1997/98 El-Niño floods and the 1999-2001 droughts on Kenya and surrounding countries. The effects of the 1997/98 El-Niño associated floods immediately followed by those of the 1998-2001 La Niña related drought, will linger for a long time.

The 1997/98 El Niño related floods led to loss of life and property, destruction of infrastructure and large losses to the economy. The El-Niño floods were immediately followed by one of the longest and severest droughts in the history of the region. The 1998-2000 drought had harsh negative impacts on agriculture, livestock, wildlife, tourism, water resources and hydroelectric power generation. The low water levels in the dams led to severe power rationing in some countries, which resulted in large losses to their economies. Water supply for industrial and domestic consumption was not spared by the drought. There were serious water shortages both in urban and rural areas. Lack of water and pasture led to severe conflicts between wildlife and pastoral communities. The impacts of the 1997/98 El-Niño related floods and 1998-2001 La Niña associated drought were so severe that they could not be accommodated within the limited national resources. The governments of some of the member states had to seek support from the international community to address the impacts. It should be noted that the impacts of extreme climate events affect the welfare of the communities and tend to increase poverty, especially in this region where rain-fed agriculture and hydroelectric power form major sources of food and energy, respectively. The destruction of crops resulting from floods and low yields resulting from drought reduce the economic status of most of the rural communities, especially women, who form a majority of the population. Similarly, lack of adequate power, as was experienced in 2000, due to prolonged drought, resulted in loss of employment and reduction of the economic status of the people.

The climate-related needs for sustainable development of Africa can be better achieved through (i) proper understanding of the African climate systems; (ii) an enhanced observation network, (iii) improved modelling, prediction and early warning capacity, (iv) effective and timely dissemination of early warning products; (v) availability of effective disaster risk reduction policies; (vi) and improved education and awareness on the usefulness of climate information and prediction products in all socio-economic development systems.

The need for intergrading climate variability and change into African development is now being recognized as an integral component of sustainable development of Africa as has been seen in many recent initiatives including decisions taken at the Africa Union and sub-regional groupings, by heads of states and governments. For example three regional climate centres ICPAC (IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre in Nairobi), DMCH (Drought Monitoring Centre, Harare), and ACMAD (African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development in Niger) have been established recently in Africa. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), and NMHSs have also introduced new programmes such as CLIPS. Several bilateral initiatives have also been witnessed in the recent years including those by IDRC, UK DFID, the Gleneagles Plan of Action by the G8 countries, UNFCCC process etc. UNDP and ISDR have also initiated several initiatives in Africa. Several new UNDP programmes in Africa now include issues related to the mainstreaming of climate variability and change into development. Within the framework of a safer by 2015 as agreed upon within Hyogo world disaster management conference resolution ISDR has also initiated an African regional office in Nairobi. The office has worked with the A, NEPAD and the member countries to develop an African regional strategy for disaster risk reduction (ISDR 2004).

One of the new and most challenging climate services in Africa are the seasonal climate outlook forums that have been running since 1998. The Climate Outlook Forums bring together climate scientists from within and outside Africa involved in seasonal climate prediction, the user community and decision-makers. The Climate Outlook Forums provide consensus seasonal climate outlooks and examines their potential impacts. They have made enormous contributions to the improvement of the quality of the seasonal rainfall outlook and dissemination of climate information and prediction products for early warning and disaster risk management. They also provide unique dialogue opportunities amongst the climate scientists, a wide range of user communities including those from water resources, policy makers, donors, and many other stakeholders.

WMO and the NMHSs provide various climate services including climatological products for freshwater resources mapping and risk zoning, to early warning prediction products of time scales ranging from hours to inter annual time scales. Such products can help to reduce the risk / vulnerability of the fresh water systems to various climate related stress.

References

ISDR 2004 “Disaster risk reduction and sustainable development in Africa: **African regional strategy**” ISDR 16 pp.