

Extreme weather events forecasting and Africa's preparedness

*My experience covering weather
issues*

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Introduction

- I have been exposed and covering weather related events since 2012.
- My entry and main point of point of interaction came and has been through water/hydrology issues.
- A Workshop on Water, Climate, Food and Energy in Nairobi in 2014 aroused my interest.
- Made contact my very initial contacts with some experts from this workshop and this was followed by an invitation to a similar, regional event on the Hydrological Cycle at Kenya Met department in 2015.
- In both events I was the only journalist among experts in different water-related fields, so I was forced to make friends with the experts, participate in their group activities, exposing me further to water/weather issues.

Introduction cont....

- In all these learning events I would always strive to come up with a story, from notes, observations, overt and not-so overt interviews with participants.
- An invitation to attend an Experts Conference in Disaster Risk Reduction(DRR) by USAID/ WMO in Antalya, Turkey exposed me to how water, climate, extreme weather and disasters relate.
- Here again I was the only journalist amongst experts, was being forced to “know” things I didn’t .

Introducing..

- As freelancer I had to come up with some stories that Thomson Reuters Foundation would publish against their will (they do not to like field stories) .
- Over this period I have sat through numerous water sector “cafes” hosted by Water Capacity Network (Watercap).
- Most of what I know about water and weather is courtesy of Watercap’s water “dialogues”.

What I have learnt

- As happens with many other sectors Africa sadly has world's poorest weather infrastructure/network.
- Few countries have adequate modern, dependable weather facilities.
- Weather information is a lowly priority in Africa ,governments have not invested in weather infrastructure.
- Weather forecasting/observation is costly business, the equipment is costly and standards are set by World Meteorological Organisation.
- More important is that weather data is very important for planning in agriculture, aviation, disaster mitigation, power generation etc.

Lessons....

- Notably Climate Change has made weather information important than ever before.
- Also learnt that water (rainfall) makes the biggest part of weather observation, other elements being temperature, humidity, wind, air quality , atmospheric pressure etc.
- Large parts of Central Africa , have no weather stations, are unobserved, Africa suffers billions of dollars in weather related losses each year-mainly water-flooding, destruction of infrastructure.

Some new/common terms as well

- 1) Hydrometeorology/ hydro-meteorology- the branch practice of weather observation in relation to water/ rainfall.
- 2) Weather Observation- study of weather behaviour going beyond prediction and forecasting.
- 3) Upper--Air Weather Stations-sensors sent into the atmosphere in balloons to capture data including atmospheric pressure.
- 4) National Meteorological and Hydrological Services- national meteorological offices/departments.

I have observed

- A rise in weather reporting in Kenyan media is very evident now especially in the past 2 years.
- Weather reports including 2-3 forecasts on their own are forming stories in mainstream media- a new high!
- Reporters are calling KMD and a few minutes conversation on weather for next 48 hours is a story enough.
- Ordinary people, government departments, companies are calling weather offices to seek forecast information to enable them plan their events/activities.
- Weather data will become is becoming increasingly relevant in Africa.

Sources

- National Met offices (KMD) in case of Kenya remain good sources of weather information for weather articles.
- Regional weather organisations such as IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (Horn of Africa region), others in West and Southern Africa regions.
- The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).
- Climate lobbies, advocacy groups, scholars/researchers.
- Regular weather information users-farmers, aviation industry, disaster management bodies.
- Development Organisations such as World Bank, African Union, African Development Bank.

Conclusion

- Effective weather reporting like in every other subject is dependent on good understanding of the same.
- Should focus on all users of weather information.
- It should seek to create awareness among all social classes, policy makers, authorities etc.
- All the variables that define good journalism such as stories backed by evidence, data, facts, expert opinion must be observed.
- Challenges in doing so are similar to the ones we daily encounter with other forms of reporting.
- Our knowledge of these other issues comes from how much we write about them, how many opportunities we get to attend events that help stretch our exposure.

Ends