Sean Sheridan for Mercy Corps

CLIMATE INFORMATION SERVICES RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents to climate variability and change due to its high exposure to climate shocks and stresses and relatively low adaptive capacities (IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), rain-fed agriculture, which is vital for a large percentage of the rural population and contributes significantly to GDP, is particularly vulnerable.

Providing decision-makers with timely, accurate information on climate and weather forecasts and variations helps inform decisions that enhance agriculture production and mitigate or avoid yield and harvest losses. These outcomes improve food security, lift agriculture incomes and increase farmers' resilience to future shocks. While innovative approaches to generating and communicating climate information show promise, evidence gaps exist in understanding their effectiveness.

The U.S. Agency for International Development is supporting the development of an agenda to address these gaps: the Learning Agenda on Climate Services in SSA. Work under this agenda is generating new information, while also pointing the way toward priority research and operational gaps that must be filled to improve the development, delivery, uptake and impact of climate services for African agriculture. By aligning the efforts of donors, researchers, local governments and partners toward these priority issues, this work will ultimately inform the development of more effective, sustainable, country-led climate information services (CIS) programs.

KEY LEARNING TO DATE

- The design and management of effective [climate information] services requires the identification of intended users of climate information, work to establish how climate information could be useful in the context of their lives, and plans to deliver credible, salient, and legitimate climate information that meets one or more of their needs.
  Source: Identifying Climate Information Services Users and Their Needs in sub-Saharan Africa: A Learning Agenda
- Participatory CIS systems mapping creates a practical learning process for actors to improve relationships and linkages across the CIS chain of information. In Niger and Senegal, through this process, stakeholders identified simple, low-cost solutions to address barriers within the CIS system (e.g. translating forecasts and recommendations into local languages).
  Blog: Mapping Climate Information Services Systems for Smallholder Farmers in Niger

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End Users of CIS

The Climate Information Services Research Initiative (CISRI) was designed to enhance understanding of the **user end** of the climate information chain. Its research investigates the factors that impact access and use of climate services, and applies new methodologies for evaluating CIS effectiveness in SSA. Led by Mercy Corps, CISRI draws on the expertise of its consortium partners: Humanitarian Response and Development Lab (HURDL), International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Practical Action, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

Its Winrock-led companion project – Assessing Sustainability and Effectiveness of Climate Information Services in Africa – focuses on sustainable and effective models for CIS.

CISRI Activities

The project has four integrated activities: three focused on research and one on uptake and use of learning.

Synthesis of the State of the Art and Evidence

CISRI is synthesizing and analyzing existing knowledge on CIS programming, identifying gaps, and generating peer-reviewed manuscripts that expand current theory and evidence. The first two papers—Identifying Climate Information Services Users and Their Needs in sub-Saharan Africa: A Learning Agenda and Evaluating Agricultural Weather and Climate Services in Africa—are available on ClimateLinks. Additionally, find an Info Note: What We Know about Gender and Rural Climate Services.

Lead- Users & Needs: Edward R. Carr, HURDL
Lead- Gender and Evaluation Methodologies: Catherine Vaughan, IRI

Systems Analysis of CIS

CISRI has developed and piloted a participatory CIS systems mapping methodology in Senegal and Niger that supports CIS stakeholders at all levels to address issues that influence farmers' access and use of CIS. Based on the learning from the pilot phase, CISRI will produce a final methodology with guidance and tools for others to use this approach to inform and improve CIS programs.

Lead- Kristin Lambert and Sarah Henly-Shepard, Mercy Corps

KEY LEARNING TO DATE

- A lack of evidence regarding weather and climate services prevents a realistic analysis of whether services are delivering on their potential. Priority learning areas [going forward] include: broadening our view of potential users, and uses, of weather and climate services; filling of geographic and demographic gaps; and quantifying the extent to which "good practice" leads to improved outcomes and impacts.
  Source: Evaluating Agricultural Weather and Climate Services in Africa
- Differing roles, decisions and control of resources can influence the climate information needs of rural women. Despite obstacles, women farmers who access climate information use and benefit from it.
  Source: What We Know about Gender and Rural Climate Services

Piloting Evaluation Approaches in Select CIS Programs

CISRI is conducting quantitative and qualitative evaluations in Rwanda and Senegal to understand how climate information is making a difference in the livelihoods of communities. The analysis of these evaluations will inform the design of future methodologies to measure CIS effectiveness.

Lead- Qualitative Evaluations: Edward R. Carr, HURDL
Lead- Quantitative Evaluations: Jeanne Coulibaly, ICRAF

Uptake and Application of Learning

CISRI is committed to supporting the sharing and uptake of knowledge, methodologies and tools generated by the program. All papers, reports, and guidance documents are available on the ClimateLinks website. Sign up for the quarterly newsletter to receive highlights from the Learning Agenda, including resources, project updates, and webinars, conferences and workshops.

Photograph: Mercy Corps

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www.climatelinks.org/projects/learningagendaonclimateservices