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# Climate Information & Early Warning Systems Communications Toolkit

## UNDP Programme on Climate Information for Resilient Development in Africa

Learn to issue and package early warnings and create integrated communications strategies that support the value proposition for climate information, weather forecasts and National HydroMeteorological Services in Africa.

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United Nations Development Programme

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY



# Overview

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This toolkit provides National HydroMeteorological Services (NHMS), policy makers, and media and communications for development practitioners with the tools, resources and templates necessary to design and implement an integrated communications strategy.

These communications strategies include the effective issuance and packaging of early warnings as well as the creation of supportive communications products and outreach efforts that will support the long-term sustainability of investments in the climate information and services sector. While this communications toolkit is tailored to the specialized needs and political contexts of sub-Saharan Africa, it can easily be applied to other developing nations.

Communications is a cross-cutter and should be injected and leveraged at every stage of project implementation. Thoughtful and purposeful communication and advocacy can build in-house collaboration, foster knowledge sharing between nations, support technology transfer and build political support.

More importantly, through the issuance of early warnings and improved climate and weather information – and the development of appropriate public service announcements on what to do when bad weather hits – integrating communications into the everyday activities of NHMS can save lives, support sustainability and build livelihoods.

In this toolkit, we will define goals for the issuance of early warnings, and creation of improved climate information products and supportive communications strategies. These supportive strategies serve to engage actors, build political support, engage the private sector and present a true value proposition to end users. The toolkit explores best practices, defines roles and expands on the tools that are necessary to create an integrated communications strategy. The toolkit continues with a step-by-step outline to create response protocols and issue early warnings, address challenges and opportunities, define messages and stakeholders, package early warning systems, and engage with individual media and other relevant actors. There is a communications strategy template and TORs template that can be used by projects and practitioners to generate integrated communications strategies.



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# Defining Goals

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The goal of individual communications strategies will in many ways define the approach. In the case of the climate information and early warning systems space the main goal is to leverage best practices, innovative methodologies and existing assets to share actionable early warnings and build sustainability for climate information and early warning systems initiatives. From this central goalpost, the approach is based on four high-level pillars that should be considered when creating a communications strategy.



**Early Warnings.** According to the WMO, “The primary objective of a warning system is to empower individuals and communities to respond timely and appropriately to the hazards in order to reduce the risk of death, injury, property loss and damage. Warnings need to get the message across and stimulate those at risk to take action.” In order to do this, one needs to collect and analyze data, package and distribute early warnings, build appropriate processes and response matrixes to allow fast delivery, and share relevant information with stakeholders and actors to ensure people know what do

to when bad weather hits.



**Forecasts.** Short-term forecasts and long-term outlooks can all benefit end users. The packaging, distribution and messaging is going to depend on the end-user, the information provided and the final goal of sharing that information.



**Supportive Communications and Advocacy.** This is a softer piece of the equation. The goal is to build political support, foster understanding of the importance of NHMS, early warnings and climate information, share best practices, actively engage community actors and brand ambassadors, and build the value proposition being offered by NHMS.



**Coordination.** Coordination between agencies is key. NHMS are often the generators of early warnings and weather and climate-related communications. However, NHMS need to work with partner agencies, ministries, the media and more to ensure effective distribution and action based on climate information and early warnings.

# Best Practices, Defining Roles, Required Tools

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This section provides you with best practice examples from both industrialized and developing countries on how to issue early weather warnings. There is continued exploration on defining roles and required tools. To truly understand what's required, it's also worthwhile to quickly explore the context of early warning systems in Africa.

There are a few high-level principles and challenges that should guide this conversation. For many African readers, this will come as no surprise. However, only by understanding high-level challenges can we create communications products and strategies to overcome those hurdles. Principle challenges for the effective issuance of early warnings in Africa include:

- **Lack of reliable data.** With limited staffs, restricted budgets and unreliable monitoring systems, the information coming out of most NHMS in sub-Saharan Africa is very limited – but it's getting better! Without good information, you can't meet the needs of end-users or build a true value proposition.
- **Lack of credibility.** With new investments in climate monitoring and information services, the information generated by NHMS is getting better. However, many NHMS continue to suffer from a serious image problem. Because there hasn't been much reliable information, people, politicians and media do not always trust the information coming out of NHMS. This means that the main actors you would use to share climate information and early warnings are disconnected from your core product offering. Re-engaging these actors to demonstrate your value proposition will be key to success.
- **Lack of protocols.** Let's say you've figured out how to collect and analyze weather and climate data, and by creating some smart and innovative communications strategies, you've nipped the credibility challenge in the bud. Now how do you create the response matrix necessary to issue early warnings, and how do you work with other government agencies, actors, media and more to make sure everybody knows what they're doing? While most African nations have some sort of emergency response protocol, the packaging and diffusion (and preventative response actions) are limited. Benin's response protocol shows an example of how it can work.
- **Limited sophistication in packaging.** People read with their eyes and hearts – minds come in later when you are analyzing what you've just read. In large part, there is still limited capacity to effectively package weather information – in the form of early alerts, actionable climate information (like crop reports, Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on what to do when bad weather hits, and tailored information for private sectors). By creating pretty packages, NHMS not only have the opportunity to bust the credibility problem, they also work to build more effective connection with their end users.
- **Limited relationships with traditional media and other actors.** The role

of the NHMS is often limited to the generation of the early warning messages. These are then passed onto other actors in the system that are responsible for dissemination and action. Other actors – including the media, extension agencies, government partners, private companies and more – need to play a part. While limited cross-sectorial, cross-agency collaboration is currently hindering the ability to effectively engage with these potential brand ambassadors and messengers, there is a strong opportunity here to engage them.

- **Lack of distribution systems.** The information is good, it's packaged well, people trust what you are saying and know what to do in the event of bad weather, now how do you get the information to a farmer living in a remote valley? There are numerous opportunities in this space – along with just as many challenges. In some cases, African nations are making good strides in creating effective distribution systems, but still lack an-effective end-to-end package that will truly reach end-users and save lives.
- **Limited business-development capacity and necessary frameworks.** Developing business plans and communications strategies – or building the conducive legal and policy frameworks necessary to foster these plans – is a very different skill set from the traditional skills of collecting, analyzing and sharing data. By developing business acumen, NHMS have the opportunity to address credibility challenges, build revenue streams and engage with a whole new group of potential partners. The connections are not yet there, but in several countries they are starting to blossom.
- **Cultural challenges.** Cultural challenges span language, belief, education, gender, age and literacy. This is one of the largest challenges in the use and/or understanding of early warnings. How do you reach a diverse group who speak numerous languages, have unique cultural optics on weather information (where the word of the village elder may trump that of the weather forecaster), and are often illiterate or have lack of formal educations? This piece is not easily answered, but we make some attempts in the following sections.
- **Political challenges.** The continued lack of credibility has fostered a lack of political will to support NHMS with either bigger budgets or stronger institutional status. This is where the software piece comes in. By

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