

Planet under Pressure 2012 – Making climate science useful: Effective dialogue between climate scientists and humanitarian and development ‘end users’

Session content: The workshop aims to strengthen understanding of the need to invest in developing more effective direct dialogue between scientists and humanitarian and development policymakers on issues of future vulnerability. The session will share learning developed through undertaking an extended, two-way exchange between climate scientists from the UK Met Office Hadley Centre and the universities of Liverpool, Oxford and Sussex and policymakers from a number of major international NGOs (CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and the Red Cross). It will focus on direct experience from at risk communities in making best use of climate science in both the immediate and longer term, for both contingency humanitarian planning and for longer-term adaptation and development planning.

The target audience includes scientists, policymakers with humanitarian responsibilities working at international, regional, national, district and community level, and communities most at risk of climate variability and change. The exchange approach has sought to identify and meet the climate information requirements of community end users whose livelihoods are most dependent on having ‘good’ climate information – such as farmers dependent on rain-fed agriculture and communities living in flood prone areas.

Employing a variety of dialogue approaches, the exchange approach has sought to enable people to better understand and ‘own’ the uncertainties within climate information. The workshop will employ a number of tools to enable participants to see how important it is to enable decision makers to have information which is understandable and ‘useful’, and the processes required to make this information ‘useful’.

Bridging the Gap: Experiences of communicating climate information between producers and end-users in southern Africa

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Abstract

Climate change information is difficult to communicate beyond the scientific community, due to its inherent uncertainty and complexity, yet at the same time end users need access to the information in a format that is appropriate to their decision-making context, in order to bring about sustainable responses. This requires a concerted two-way communication process between information producers and information users, and is often best facilitated by a “boundary organisation”. This paper outlines the experience of a USAID-funded project that aims to “bridge the gap” between science producers and humanitarian organisations in southern Africa in order to improve the use of climate information in emergency preparedness, response and development activities.

As a forum working to coordinate their preparedness and response activities among humanitarian organisations (UN agencies and NGOs), RIACSO is actively trying to incorporate climate risk information. A boundary organisation has been facilitating dialogue between information users and providers, which has involved several stages: raising awareness among RIACSO members on the availability of existing information; feeding back to scientists an evaluation of this and associated “wishlist” of information and its packaging that would be useful to their programming activities; and then organising for the scientists to comment on scientific progress in terms of what would be possible, or is currently impossible, in the light of existing climate science. As a result, a dialogue has now begun, brokered by the boundary organisation with the ultimate aim that salient climate information is made available to end users in a format that is appropriate to their needs. At the same time, scientists know that their information is being actively embraced in decision-making and programming. This paper assesses the experience to date, highlighting lessons learned for improved accessibility and communication of climate information for use in decision-making.