

Scaling Up Climate Services for Farmers in Africa and South Asia

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The CGIAR program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Climate Services Partnership (CSP) are convening a workshop on “Scaling Up Climate Services for Farmers in Africa and South Asia.” This event aims to foster South-South learning and collaboration between sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, to strengthen and scale-up climate information and advisory services that serve smallholder farmers.

Background

Smallholder farmers in the developing world are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate fluctuations and weather extremes. Although farming communities throughout the world have survived by mastering the ability to adapt to widely varying weather and climatic conditions, increasingly erratic climate variability and the rapid pace of other drivers of change are overwhelming indigenous knowledge and traditional coping practices. Effective climate information and advisory services offer great potential to inform farmer decision-making in the face of increasing uncertainty, improve management of climate-related agricultural risk, and help farmers adapt to change.

Climate services are receiving increasing attention globally:

- At the World Climate Conference-III (WMO, Geneva, September 2009), delegates of 155 nations endorsed a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) “to strengthen the production, availability, delivery and application of science-based climate prediction and services.” The GFCS implementation plan targets gaps in climate services in support of four key climate-sensitive sectors, including agriculture, in vulnerable developing countries.
- The CSP, launched at the International Conference on Climate Services (New York, October 2011), is a global network of climate service providers, users, funders and researchers. It aims to advance climate services worldwide by fostering collaboration, capturing and sharing knowledge; and filling gaps in knowledge and evidence.
- Improving climate-related information products and services for agriculture and food security is part of the agenda of the CGIAR research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Securing (CCAFS), under its Theme, “Adaptation through Managing Climate Risk.” The program is connecting the considerable research capacity of the CGIAR with new climate science and climate service partners, including the CSP.

Several challenges confront efforts to use climate-related information to improve the lives of smallholder farmers, including:

- *Delivery*: providing timely access to remote rural communities with marginal infrastructure.
- *Salience*: tailoring content, scale, format and lead-time to farm decision-making.
- *Legitimacy*: giving farmers an effective voice in the design and delivery of climate services.
- *Equity*: ensuring that women, poor and socially marginalized groups are served.

Several initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have used innovative approaches to overcome these challenges. A few national agrometeorological advisory services reach a significant proportion of their farming populations on a sustained basis with information and

guidance. CCAFS and partners are conducting in-depth studies of agrometeorological advisory services in India (which recently announced plans to scale up to 10 million farmers in 2012) and Mali (which has provided innovative services to farmers since 1982), in order to provide evidence of use and benefit at the village level; and insights about factors that have contributed to their uptake, impact and sustainability. Although initiatives that have grappled with the complexities of communicating and applying seasonal forecast information in Africa and South Asia have tended to be pilot-scale and project-based, they demonstrate good practice and provide valuable insights. The time is right to learn from and build on examples of good practice in farmer-focused climate information and advisory services, and to share elements of good practice between Africa and South Asia.

Objectives of the workshop

- To capture and share lessons and evidence about how climate information and advisory services can be used to improve the lives of smallholder farmers, building on examples of good practice in Africa and South Asia.
- To identify critical gaps in the design, delivery and effective use of climate-related information for risk management among smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; and to identify and foster institutional linkages that could address those gaps.
- To foster collaboration between and within sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia on climate information and advisory services for smallholder farmers.
- To initiate a collective process toward regional roadmaps for strengthening and scaling-up climate information and advisory services for agriculture and food security in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Expected outcomes

Case studies circulated in advance of the meeting, including in-depth studies of mature advisory services in Mali and India, will provide a solid evidence base for workshop discussions and follow-up actions. A highly interactive program will engage all participants in discussion. This might involve, for example, facilitated brainstorming to generate and capture promising ideas; or Market Place sessions to allow organizations that offer particular capacities to connect with other interested organizations.

The workshop will highlight synergies between farmer-focused climate service initiatives in Africa and in South Asia, and catalyze regional and cross-regional institutional linkages to exploit those synergies. It will develop an agenda and preliminary plan of action for strengthening and scale-up salient climate information and advisory service for smallholder farmers in the two regions. Examples of promising near-term actions for consideration include:

- Staff exchanges or other forms of collaboration among African and South Asian institutions;
- Project proposals to accelerate intra- and inter-regional cooperation on climate information and advisory services;
- Publication of a handbook of good practice for the production, communication and evaluation of climate information and advisory services for farmers;
- Training programs on elements of good practice;
- Joint publications or a journal special issue by workshop participants on topics of interest.

Proceedings of the workshop, and a concise summary in the form of a policy brief, will be published and disseminated widely through the sponsoring organizations' networks.