



PRESS RELEASE

Ministerial meeting boosts Early Warnings and Early Action in Southern Africa

Maputo, Mozambique, 5 September 2022– The need for a major expansion in early warning systems in Southern Africa to protect lives and livelihoods from increasingly extreme weather and climate change impacts will be addressed at a ministerial level meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, from 5-9 September.

The main objective of the Ministerial Meeting on Integrated Early Warning and Early Action System Initiative is to develop a regional blueprint for implementing the call of United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that every person on earth should be protected by early warning systems in the next five years. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is spearheading the Early Warnings for All campaign.

A Ministerial Declaration - The Maputo Declaration on Bridging the Gap between Early Warning and Early Action – will be one of the major outcomes of the conference, which is organized by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union Commission (AUC), Government of Mozambique and other partners.

“Extreme weather and climate events such as severe floods, droughts, tropical cyclones and storms, heat waves and coastal flooding have eroded development gains and threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands. Early warnings are not a luxury, they are an essential tool in climate adaptation and this is why African communities are one of the primary targets of the Early Warnings for All campaign,” said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas.

“One-third of the world’s people, mainly in the least developed countries and small island developing states, are still not covered by early warning systems. In Africa, 60% of people lack coverage. This is unacceptable. To help these countries meet Target G of the Sendai Framework, international support must be enhanced so that they can build and expand their early warning systems.” Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

“The African Union Commission welcomes the UN Secretary General’s initiative on ensuring that everyone on earth is protected by early warning in the next five years. This call is timely and it is our hope that the implementation of this initiative will build on the AU’s Africa Multi-hazard Early Warning and Action System (AMHEWAS) to ensure that every African is protected in the next half decade,” said H.E. Josefa L.C. Sacko, Commissioner of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE), African Union Commission.

The WMO State of the Climate in Africa 2021 report, which will be released on 8 September at the ministerial segment of the conference, will examine in greater detail the impacts on lives and livelihoods.

Climate projections point to an increase in the intensity and frequency of heat and heavy precipitation extremes as well as an increase in the length of dry spells, more frequent droughts and an increase of the most powerful Category 4-5 tropical cyclones.

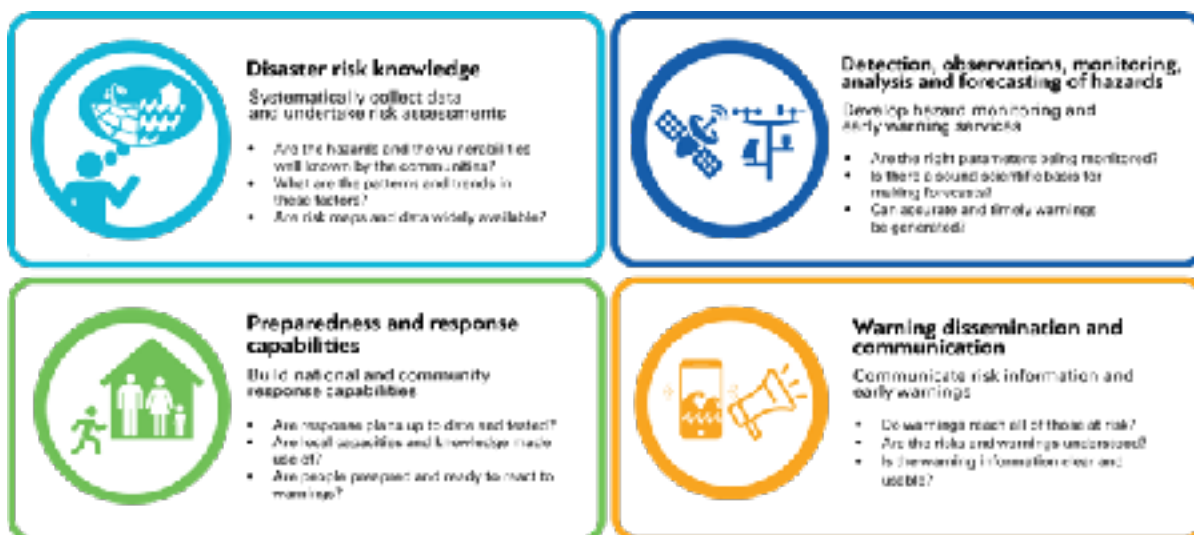
The 2021/2022 rainfall season saw 6 cyclonic systems bring devastating torrential rainfall that brought colossal damage to the region within a period of six weeks, including Mozambique and Madagascar. South Africa suffered deadly floods in April 2022, killing hundreds and forcing thousands out of their homes. Southern Madagascar is gripped by a prolonged and acute drought.

The host country Mozambique was hit by Tropical Cyclone Idai that caused devastation to the city of Beira and the Province of Sofala in Mozambique in 2019. It was followed a month later by Tropical Cyclone Kenneth, the strongest cyclone ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere, which hit the northern part of Mozambique. The two cyclones killed more than 700 people and displaced 420,000.

Although early warnings were issued, they did not reach those who needed them most. In the case of Idai, nobody expected a storm of such magnitude and the warnings did not communicate the potential impact and damage, in particular to vulnerable homes in poor communities. In addition, the early warnings weren't used to initiate anticipatory action in the critical time window between forecast and actual cyclone landfall, in order to mitigate the impact of the torrential rains and devastating winds ahead of time.

“The adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters are increasingly driving human mobility including displacement, particularly in countries with high vulnerability and exposure, and limited adaptive capacity,” said IOM's Deputy Director General for Operations, Ugochi Daniels. “Investing in adaptation measures, including early warning systems are key to saving lives and securing a livable future. Effective climate change adaptation can minimize loss and damage but more importantly will avert any future displacement for millions of internal climate migrants that could be stranded in Sub-Saharan region over the next decades”.

Multi-hazard early warning systems and impact-based forecasts



The Maputo ministerial meeting will therefore discuss how to scale up impact-based forecasts and risk-informed warnings for all— supporting the gradual shift from forecasts that tell end users what the weather will BE to what it will DO to allow for earlier, informed decision making. Efforts

will prioritize the robust integration of impact-based forecasts and related risk thresholds into sustainable MHEWS.

The Maputo meeting will contribute to an integrated framework to achieve the UN Secretary-General's five-year action plan for universal early warning systems. WMO will present a blueprint of this to the UN Climate Change conference, COP27, conference in Egypt in November 2022. A critical element will be the development of a joint vision on how MHEWS could be better able to activate anticipatory actions ahead of climate shocks, with the aim of reducing the humanitarian footprint of weather-related shocks in southern Africa. In doing so, the ministerial conference will bring together the forecasting community and actors in the field of anticipatory action.

Along the past years, the humanitarian community in southern Africa has enhanced efforts at offering more aligned and harmonized support to SADC member states in effectively linking early warnings to anticipatory action.

"As forecasts become increasingly accurate in predicting the impact of natural extreme events, using the available information on predicted climate shocks to inform earlier decision-making is becoming part of WFP's mandate. Anticipatory Action has proven to reduce the humanitarian footprint of disasters and by that required investments in the emergency response operations," says Margaret Malu, Deputy Regional Director, WFP Regional Bureau for Southern Africa.

"With climate extremes intensifying in line with the climate crisis, we aim at moving from piloting to mainstreaming this approach as part of our assistance to the most vulnerable across southern Africa. This important event comes at crucial timing to accelerate this systemic shift jointly, in partnership, ahead of COP27," says Margaret Malu.

"Alignment is not limited to the multitude of agencies working on Anticipatory Action in Southern Africa, true government-led coordination can only happen if the humanitarian community collectively engages in systems-building whilst developing their respective Anticipatory Action Protocols," said Dr Michael Charles, Head of IFRC Pretoria Delegation and Acting head of Health Disaster, Climate and Crises for Africa.

The Maputo ministerial conference statement will contribute towards building political support for a Heads of State declaration at COP 27 on early warnings and climate adaptation, in line with the Egyptian presidency priorities.

The meeting also seeks to further accelerate the implementation of Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction Target G, to substantially increase availability of and access to early warnings.

This will entail greater efforts and investments in observations, forecasting and prediction. There also needs to be better communication of warnings reaching all citizens (last mile) and more effective coordination with the disaster management institutions - to ensure that early warning information, from the National Meteorological Hydrological Service (NMHS), as authoritative voice in Weather, Water and Climate related warning, leads to effective early action and earlier response to save lives and property.

The ministerial meeting will identify resource needs for the establishment of a fully integrated SADC regional Emergency Coordination Center, leveraging authoritative hydro-meteorological information from WMO mandated centres and supporting Member States in the anticipation of crises.

It also seeks to promote integrated cross-border cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders including development partners.

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