

WISER EWSA's Lusaka Testbed beginning to take shape

Tuesday 30 January 2024

As Southern Africa's first ever WISER EWSA Testbed entered its second day on Tuesday 30 January 2024, weather scientists and practitioners based at the Operations Centre in Lusaka used the nowcasting, synoptic and verification data from the main centre in the Zambian capital and satellites in South Africa and Mozambique to propose more effective ways of forecasting and disseminating severe weather information.

The two-week testbed involves the simulation of real-time nowcasting and very short-range forecasting. This is complemented by community engagement sessions at hubs in Kanyama, Katlehong and Boane townships outside Lusaka, Johannesburg, and Maputo, respectively. The scientists and practitioners working on the project, team-up to create warnings of severe weather, deliver these to partnering user groups, and co-evaluate the effectiveness of those warnings.

Southern Africa was chosen as the site of the testbed due to its susceptibility to extreme weather, which seen hundreds of thousands of people and livelihoods imperiled on a yearly basis. In addition, the predicted increase in storms in the region as climate change continues unabated made the area an ideal site for the testbed.

Whereas the testbed's opening day ~~got off to a rather slow start~~ was focused on, with the team organising itself and its activities, ~~things operational routines~~ began to fall into place on Day 2. Among the measures proposed during briefing sessions were the need to improve the format and timing of text messages that are sent to community observers, the procedure to be followed when sending messages to community hubs, the taking into account of previous weather and underlying risks during the assessment of impact and the inclusion of data sourced from manual weather stations where automatic weather stations are not available.

At engagement hubs in Kanyama, diverse group of community members and observers unpacked the nowcasts and synoptic forecasts received from the Operation Centre in a stimulating and informative dialogue which sought to assess the efficacy of the information. The group, which comprised males and females; the young and the elderly; as well as the able bodied and the disabled, also took part in a flood risk mapping activity, pin-pointing high risk zones on charts depicting the layout of Kanyama.

Further afield in Boane, a group of disabled community members focused on familiarisation with technology and reporting. During the engagement, National Meteorological and Hydrological Services' use of technical language in their mass communication efforts emerged

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as a key concern, with the participants suggesting that important messages laden with meteorological jargon tended to fall on deaf ears. The team has already used this feedback to design message formats which are more understandable by the general public, and have translated these into Nyanja and Portuguese.



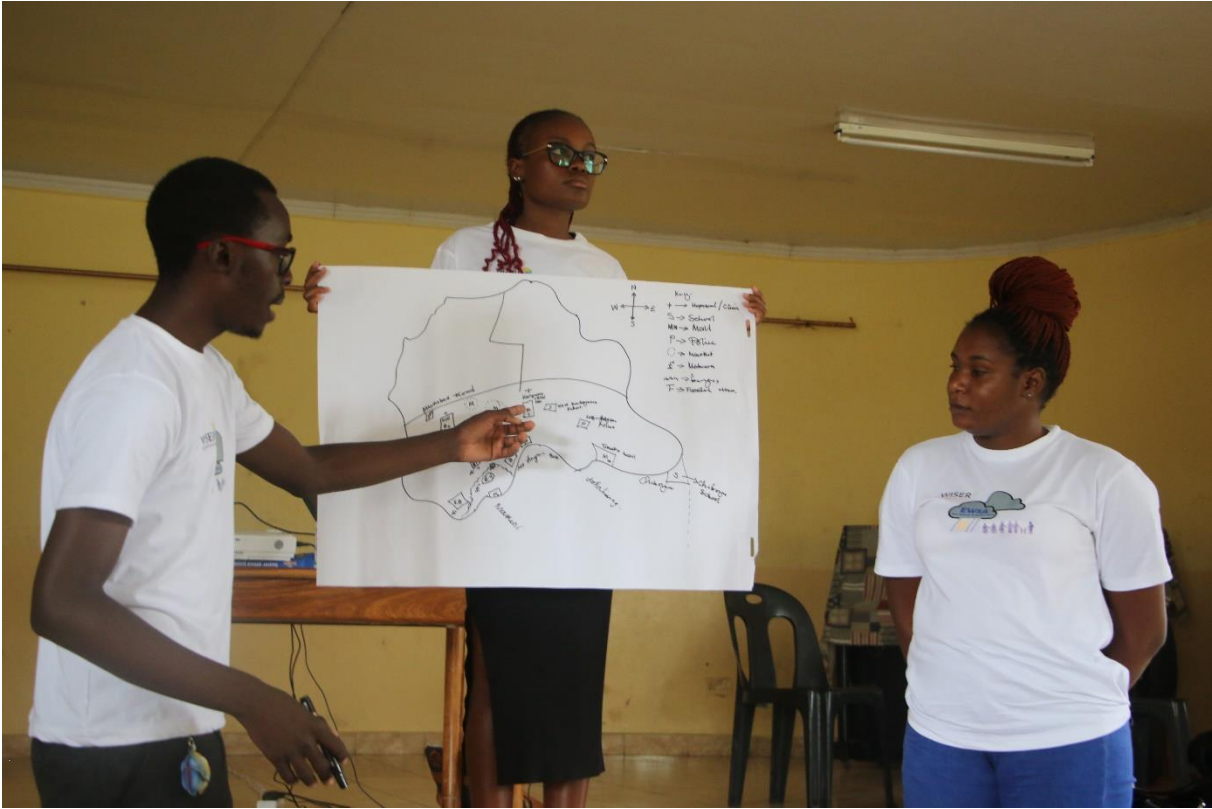
Weather scientists and practitioners gather for a briefing session in the Testbed Operation Centre at the Zambian Meteorological Department in Lusaka.

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Community members and observers engage in a flood risk mapping activity at an engagement hub in Kanyama, identifying high risk zones on hand-drawn maps depicting the layout of the township.

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Community members and observers at the engagement hub in Kanyama debate the nowcasts and synoptic forecasts received from the Operation Centre.

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