

Community hub discussions get weather scientists and practitioners into the minds of users

Thursday 1 February 2024

Day 4 of the ongoing WISER EWSA Tested 1's community hub activities in Kanyama outside Lusaka, Zambia, was characterised by informative conversations that gave a sense of the preferred lead times for the issuing of forecasts and the exact times of day for broadcasting the information from the perspective of the users.

The community members and observers participating in the discussions were as divided on the preferred lead times for forecasts as they were on the timing of the distribution of the details. Whereas some preferred that the forecasts be communicated six hours ahead of time, others felt that it would be in everybody's best interest if the information was disseminated 24 hours in advance, with two-hourly updates in times of adverse weather.

Likewise, there were mixed views when it came to the timing of the actual dissemination of the information. While some were satisfied with the Zambia Meteorological Department's (ZMD's) lunchtime and early evening broadcasts, others were adamant that receiving a daily forecast in the morning would help them to better plan for the day ahead.

In the day's next session, participants interrogated a tropical storm warning issued by the Malawian Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCMS) over a month ago. This provided an opportunity for the participants to draw parallels between warnings issued by the DCCMS, ZMD and the testbed.

Most felt that the explanation of the movement of the tropical storm was clear. Many were also impressed that the DCCMS used a multilingual approach for the warnings. However, they were apprehensive about the use of technical meteorological language as this made the information inaccessible to lay people. Although graphics used to communicate weather proved popular, there was a feeling that the illustrations could be better.

At the Operations Centre, usual forecasting activities and briefing sessions continued, with efforts concentrated on the forecasted and nowcasted events over the north-

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eastern parts of Zambia as well as the alert that was issued for Kanyama earlier on the day. A storm had developed south of Kanyama, producing little rain before dying down as quickly as it had come.

During the afternoon briefing session, it was noted that while the nowcast had accurately predicted the rainfall, it had overestimated the amounts thereof. The nowcast of the storm and the issuing of the warning were, however, considered successful. In the future, the warnings would be phrased in such a way that they communicate the possibility of severe impacts rather than appearing to ascertain that the event would occur.

Meanwhile, the test bed issued several warnings on the day. These included a level 4 warning for the 6-hour outlook over the northern province, a level 1 warning was issued for the north-west province, a level 5 warning for the occurrence of moderate to heavy rains with thunderstorms for the provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado, Sofala and Manica in Mozambique and a level 2 warning to the west of Zambia.

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