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African NMHSs called upon to prioritise the plight of citizens in hazardous weather-prone continent

African heads of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) have been urged to apply the knowledge they amassed from the *WMO Executive Training Programme for Leaders in NMHSs* they attended in Johannesburg, South Africa late October 2023, to alleviate the plight of millions of people across the continent who are vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change.

Nearly 60 directors of NMHS from across Africa, and other jurisdictions such as South America, South Asia, Oceania, and the Caribbean took part in the capacity-building intervention held under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in collaboration with the South African Weather Service (SAWS) and the Henley School of Business.

Closing the week-long programme on Friday, October 27, 2023, the Deputy Chairperson of the SAWS Board, Mr Itani Phaduli, implored the directors not to fail vulnerable communities who look up to NMHS for early warning systems that could help spare lives and livelihoods.

“One of the images that will stay with me for a long time is a picture of distraught communities wading through dirty waters, alongside police search and rescue dogs, in search of the remains of their loved ones, in the aftermath of the Durban floods in April last year,” Mr Phaduli said. “Whereas NMHSs may not be in control of weather and climate patterns, you need to do your utmost best to minimise such cases.”

Meanwhile, some of the directors of NMHS who participated in the programme hailed the intervention as a pivotal step towards meeting the objective of the United Nations’ (UN) Early Warnings for All initiative.

In 2022, UN Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres called on the nations of the world to make an effort to see to it that everyone on earth is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through life-saving early warning systems. According to the WMO, Africa accounted for 35% of weather, climate, and water-related fatalities between 1970 and 2021. Despite this, 60% of the African population did not have access to early warning systems – the lowest rate of any region in the world.

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Speaking at the end of the programme, WMO Regional Association I (Africa) Vice-President Dr Adérito Aramuge, who is also the director Mozambique's National Institute of Meteorology and that country's Permanent Representative with WMO, said many countries on the continent needed resources to put effective early warning systems in place to pushback against the harsh effects of climate change.

"Climate change is upon us, and Meteorological Services have a role to bring about resilience ... Leaders of the Meteorological Services must do their best to ensure that they have early warning systems in their countries. To do that we need to mobilise funds," Dr Aramuge said.

He added that the programme had equipped attendees with the necessary skills to go about finding capital to cover the costs of establishing early warning systems.

Referring to the *Early Warning for All Action Plan for Africa*, which was unveiled during the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi Kenya early September 2023, Dr Aramuge said countries had a responsibility to devise their own action plans at national level. This responsibility, he said, rested on the shoulders of NMHS directors.

Also speaking in the shadow of the programme, Somalia's Permanent Representative with WMO, Mr Omar Haji Mohamed said the training would go a long way to help NMHSs overcome the challenges they face.

Mr Mohamed shed a light on some of the difficulties in his country in respect of early warning systems. These included the fragmentation of the national Meteorological Office as a result of previous political instability. He said, however, that processes were underway to establish a central agency to play the role of an NHMS.

Mozambique, Somalia and South Africa were among the countries that contributed to Africa's status as one of the territories in the world that were most susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change.

According to the State of Climate in Africa in 2022 report, published in September 2023, Africa experienced several severe weather events in the period under review, leading to untold devastation among communities, in addition to serious economic implications. These included drought in the horn of Africa, where Somalia is located, and severe cases of flooding in the southern parts of the continent such as Mozambique and South Africa.

The training programme covered key leadership and management competencies, and included themes such as leading a purposeful organisation; complex adaptive systems; and commercial management and financial management. It was the second of its kind to be held in South Africa following one which took place in 2019.

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