

Brief Concept Note
Ministerial Meeting on ‘Integrated Early Warning and Early Action System Initiative in Southern Africa
5-9 September 2022 in Maputo, Mozambique

Introduction

On the 23rd of March 2022, the Secretary General of the United Nations called on the WMO to lead a new initiative that will provide every citizen on the planet with Early Warning Systems¹ in the next 5 years. This call is a result of the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather and climate events, which are causing disasters with devastating impacts across the globe compromising the attaining of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global and regional agendas. In Africa, the initiative by the Secretary General comes at a very critical time.

During the 35th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 5-6 February 2022, the AU Heads of State and Government adopted the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032) and the Integrated African Strategy on Meteorology (Weather and Climate Services) (2021-2030). While the former provides a framework to guide, coordinate and support Africa’s response to climate change, the Meteorology (Weather and Climate Services) Strategy serves as a continental strategic framework for integrated and coordinated mechanisms that provide strategic direction to Member States and other stakeholders in streamlining policies that address challenges and opportunities associated with the development and application of adequate weather, water and climate services at national, regional and continental levels. Among others, Pillar 3 of the Meteorology Strategy calls for action on improving early warning systems and climate risk management for the protection of life, property and the environment.

In addition, the 40th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 02-03 February 2022, adopted the Africa Institutional and Operational Framework for Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Early Action. Consequently, the African Union further translated the Framework into Africa Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Early Action System (AMHEWAS) Programme, which aims to substantially reduce continental disaster losses by 2030 by ensuring availability and access to multi-hazard early warning and risk information to the African public by 2030. A coherent implementation of the initiative will significantly contribute to operationalization of effective multi-hazard early systems across the African continent.

In Africa, extreme weather and climate events have constituted serious threat to the socio-economic development of the continent. Severe floods, droughts, tropical cyclones and storms, heat waves, ocean surges and several other climate extremes have impacted negatively eroding the recent socio-economic gains made by the continent. In March 2019 Southern Africa was hit by Tropical Cyclone Idai that caused devastation to the City of Beira

¹**Early Warning System:** *This is a Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) for floods, droughts, heatwaves, storms, etc. It is an integrated system which allows people to know that hazardous weather or climate events are on their way, and informs how governments, communities and individuals can act to minimize impacts. End-to-end MHEWS include disaster risk knowledge, monitoring, forecasting, warning, communication, and response.*

and the Province of Sofala in Mozambique to be followed a month later by Tropical Cyclone Kenneth the strongest cyclone ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere, which hit the northern part of Mozambique.

Climate projections point to a future which, if appropriate measures are not taken, will see more adverse impacts as a result of the robust increase in the intensity and frequency of temperature and heavy precipitation extremes as well as an increase in the length of dry spells, more frequent droughts and an increase of tropical cyclones of Category 4-5, which are the most devastating. 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.

Challenges in the provision of Early Warning Systems

Early warning systems (EWS) which allow people to know that hazardous weather or climate events are on their way, and inform how governments, communities and individuals can act to minimize impacts are inadequate in the region. Efforts are therefore needed to tap on WMO, continental, regional and national frameworks, weather, water and climate services to enable effective forecast and prediction systems that will provide information and warnings to disaster management institutions, decision-makers and citizens in general to take appropriate actions to safeguard life, property and development gains.

With increasing impacts and evolving needs of users there is need to shift from the current state of affairs to impact based forecasts and risk-based warning to enable early actions by relevant stakeholders, and in particular the communities most at risk. To realize this ambition, efforts and investments are needed in the entire weather and climate service value chain from observations, forecasting and prediction, to communication of early warning as well as effective coordination with the disaster management institutions to ensure that early warning information leads to effective early action and response. These investments however need to be prioritized and coordinated to ensure that resources are invested in the areas where improvements are required in a manner that brings transformational change from the current status and ensures sustainability.

Objectives of the Conference

The Conference is aimed at converging on the priority requirements for the region to further accelerate the implementation of Sendai Framework Target G, to substantially increase availability of and access to early warning and risk information to people by 2030. The Conference will also take into consideration the gaps identified in the implementation of the Sendai Framework and recommendations as developed in the recent Third Multi Hazard Early Warning Conference (MHEWC-III) of 23-24 May 2022 in Bali, Indonesia. The main objective of this Conference is to develop the Southern African region action plan on Early Warning System (EWS) in response to the call of the Secretary General of the United Nations to ensure that every person on earth is protected by EWSs and in this case, the Southern Africa region. In keeping with the continental strategic direction, preparation of the Action Plan will be informed by the existing African strategic framework (i.e. the Integrated African Strategy for Meteorology (Weather and Climate Service)), relevant SADC Regional Strategic frameworks, and the Africa Institutional and Operational Framework for Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Early Action, AMHEWAS). The specific objectives include:

- To identify the specific requirements from both the meteorological and disaster risk management communities for effective early warning systems which are informed by existing experiences in the Region, which among others would include enhancing Earth system observations and monitoring; better predictive and early warning capabilities; coordinated communication for anticipatory action, a strategy for reaching the last mile with hydrometeorological information leveraging the use of ICT technology as well as operational coordination between meteorological and disaster risk management institutions;
- To identify the resource needs for the establishment of a fully integrated SADC Humanitarian and Emergency Operations Centre (SHOC), leveraging authoritative hydrometeorological information from WMO mandated Centres and supporting Member States in the anticipation of crises;
- To promote integrated cross-border cooperation and transboundary collaboration among stakeholders including development partners;
- To prepare the sub-regional contribution to the EWS initiative to be launched at COP 27; and
- To support the rollout of the AMHEWAS in the SADC region, including member states;

Expected Outcomes

The main outcome from the Conference is the development of an Early Warning Systems (EWSs) Initiative and Action Plan for Southern African countries to ensure that every person in the region is protected by EWSs in line with the UN Secretary General's call. Other outcomes include:

- The specific requirements from both the meteorological and disaster management communities which is informed by existing experiences in the Region to set up an effective EWS to cover all citizens in the Region are identified. These requirements would include enhancing Earth system observations and monitoring; better predictive and warning capabilities; coordinated communication for anticipatory action and investment;
- Regional Ministers responsible for Meteorological and disaster risk management institutions are committed through a Ministerial Declaration to achieve the EWS Initiative. In addition, these ministers are supported with requirements for early warning system in their preparation for COP 27;
- Ministers committed to facilitate and support operationalization of AMHEWAS; and
- Opportunities for investment in response to the EWS initiative are identified as EWSs are proven effective and feasible adaptation measure providing greater return on investment, including in support of the SHOC. This would be a follow-up on the call on developed countries to follow through on their commitment to at least double their climate finance for adaptation to developing countries by 2025.

Significance of the Conference

The importance of this Conference is to provide an opportunity to develop an integrated action plan in response to the call of the UN Secretary General to ensure that every person on Earth

is protected by EWSs. The Roadmap to bridge the gap between early warnings and early action together with the specific requirements to enhance an effective EWS in SADC Region, can be replicated in other subregions of the continent and elsewhere, as a contribution towards the five-year action plan for universal EWS to be presented in the UNFCCC COP 27 in November 2022. Furthermore, the commitment of Ministers responsible for meteorological and disaster risk management institutions would be achieved through a Ministerial Declaration. Finally, investment in EWS initiative to overcome current challenges in addressing EWS initiatives in the region would have been considered.