Improving Availability, Access and Use of Climate Information in Africa: Ethiopia’s experience

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Abstract
Climate variability and change are serious challenges to sustainable development in Africa. The current famine crisis in Somalia and the surrounding region is yet another reminder of how fluctuations in the climate can destroy lives and livelihoods. Building resilience against the negative impacts of climate and maximizing the benefits from favorable conditions will require designing and implementing effective climate risk management strategies. Climate data are critical for this. However, lack of sufficient climate data has been one of the major constraints for integrating climate into development planning and practice in Africa. The distribution of weather stations over many parts of Africa is very sparse, and it has been declining. The available stations are unevenly distributed with most of them located along the main roads. The available observations suffer from gaps and poor quality. Besides, the available data are not easily accessible outside the national meteorological services. Even when accessible, the data are not in user-friendly formats. Thus, there is an immediate need for improving data availability, access and use in Africa. Data availability could be improved significantly by combining station measurements with global products such satellite proxies. Access could be improved by making data, tools, and targeted products available through the Internet. Training of users at different levels will facilitate better use of climate information in development practices. The National Meteorology Agency of Ethiopia has been implementing these approaches in collaboration with the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI). This paper describes the main components of the Ethiopian experience.