

Creating climate services in Bangladesh

Melody Braun, John Furlow

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We have a realistic way to curb the impacts of climate change in the concept of climate services

As we recently passed the second anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP21, we have seen leadership on climate action accelerating.

Governments have been increasingly joined by states, cities, the private sector, while the civil society maintains a continuous pressure on their elected leaders. Universities are joining forces around the world to foster capacity building and climate education for the younger generation.

However, the level of ambition remains insufficient, and developing countries are facing two challenges: improving the productivity of their agricultural sector and diversifying their economies, while managing a number of growing additional stresses and constraints, including climate variability and change. Each sector is facing its share of climate impacts, and is mobilizing efforts and funding to respond to it.

With the broad agreement that countries need to adapt, funds are made increasingly available from multiple sources. But a major challenge to adaptation is the gap between climate scientists and the rest of the world.

On the one hand, a great deal of climate information is constantly generated at global, national and subnational scales by climate scientists and national meteorological services, but is often disconnected from concrete applications, and not available at a useful timescale to support decisions that are being made. Of course, tremendous efforts are invested on the ground by agricultural extension officers, NGOs, private sector, donors to better anticipate, adapt and react to climate impacts, but rarely take advantage of the best information available.

Applying appropriate information to the most pressing challenges is a difficult but vital task. Information on the climate expected at the end of the century is useful for some infrastructure projects, but not for farmers trying to make decision for the next growing season. Users and producers of information need to communicate their needs and abilities to each other so that the best information is used for the best outcomes.

What is often missing is a body or platform to help connect two communities that speak different languages. Just like in a multidisciplinary or multicultural environment, each group needs to understand in their own terms how the others think, what they can do, what their needs are and how to best complement each other. The concept of “climate services” seeks to address this information challenge. According to Climate Services Partnership, climate services “involve the production, translation, transfer, and use of climate knowledge and information in climate-informed decision making and climate-smart policy and planning. Climate services ensure that the best available climate science is effectively communicated with agriculture, water, health, and other sectors, to develop and evaluate adaptation strategies.”

Climate service information should be accessible, timely, and relevant to decision-maker needs in order to help societies cope with current climate variability and build resilience to future change. There are four components of climate services, and together they provide: A voice for the users of information to define what information will be useful and in which format; a responsibility for high quality information; a mandate to translate that information into terms that decision makers can understand and use; and, a call for effective communication of information to users.

Ideally, an effort to enhance climate services will create working relationships between information providers — weather agencies — and information users in agriculture, fishing, transportation, energy, construction, etc.

Bangladesh has a talented meteorological service (the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, BMD), is clearly at risk of climate impacts, and is running up a steep learning curve on adaptation. BMD faces greater demand for support than it has the capacity to provide.

To meet this demand and bridge this gap between climate scientists and decision makers, BMD together with the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), CIMMYT Bangladesh which leads the Climate Services for Rural Development (CSR) project, and the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) at Columbia University, which leads the Adapting Agriculture to Climate Today for Tomorrow (ACToday) project, are jointly establishing a climate services academy.

The climate services academy is intended to become a dynamic, participatory platform to centralize and coordinate efforts on climate services, that brings together multiple actors and sectors, with various levels of knowledge on climate information.

It will be established as a sub-group of the Bangladesh research Gobeshona umbrella, and as such it will be hosted at the Independent University of Bangladesh. The academy will fill a number of functions, to be shaped by priorities and interests of its members. It can host professional training courses for staff at BMD and certification programs for cross-sectoral training in climate science.

It can facilitate discussions between users and producers of weather and climate information. The academy can help identify specific information needs in specific sectors, and how to best tailor that information to support implementation of Bangladesh's national adaptation plan and other development strategies.

It can facilitate the co-creation of tools to help decision makers understand and manage risk. It can host tools like the Columbia University's Data Library, a versatile dynamic online data management system. It can provide a climate science curriculum for a new generation of Bangladeshi experts in climate change adaptation.

The climate services academy was presented and discussed in a Symposium on Climate Services in Bangladesh at the Gobeshona conference 2018, on January 10th. Next steps will be based upon the outcomes of the discussion.

Originally this article was published on January 11, 2018 at [Dhaka Tribune](#). The author Melody Braun is a Research Staff Associate specializing in Financial Risk Management, and John Furlow is Deputy Director, of The International Research Institute for Climate and Society at Columbia University in New York.