

# On Ground Early Warning Information Dissemination and Communication in Kenya

The following brief outlines the development of Early Warning information in Kenya and the achievements of the country. It further dives into the challenges and gaps, especially around the dissemination and communication activities in Samburu County, Kenya. Through the existing challenges and gaps opportunities for further enhancement of early warning in the county has been identified and presented as recommendations.

## History of EWS in Kenya

Early Warning Systems (EWS) have been developed and operational in Kenya for many years. They were initially introduced in Turkana in 1988 and expanded to Samburu, Marsabit, and Isiolo in 1992. The systems were then further spread to cover Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Tana River and Baringo between 1995 and 1999. The development of EWS can be categorized into 5 different phases as listed below :

1. Turkana Rehabilitation Project (TRP) : Established Turkana Drought Contingency Planning Unit
2. Drought Monitoring Project
3. Drought Preparedness Intervention and Recovery Project (DPIRP)
4. Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) - GoK World Bank funded project
5. National Drought Management Authority (NDMA)

## About DRESS EA

Funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented by the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) and the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the DRESS-EA (Drought Resilience in East Africa) project supports countries in developing proactive drought management plans through capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and applied research. It promotes integrated, community-centered approaches to enhance resilience, reduce vulnerability, and strengthen early warning systems across drought-prone regions in East Africa.

## Achievements in Early Warning

The years of advancements in early warning has enhanced adaptive capacity for drought preparedness activities at both community, county and country levels by institutionalizing guidance on implementing drought response initiatives by providing clear thresholds for drought indicators.

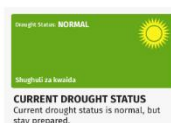
Activities such as timely and consistent updates to stakeholders through monthly/seasonal products as well as understanding stakeholder needs to improve product relevance has improved the reputation, credibility, and reliance on the information generated. These have increased the level of awareness on drought across stakeholders at different levels of governance.

In terms of scaling early warning efforts, at both vertical and horizontal scales, information systems have expanded from one county in 1998 to current 23 counties, for which information is customized compared to the national level products available. Despite the customization, significant efforts have been put forward to ensure data comparability and interoperability, to ensure that the product contents can be compared with information from other sources.

Strides have also been made to adopt and integrate emerging technologies in development and dissemination of EWS products across the manual- digital spectrum. These activities and achievements have allowed for development of good will from partners to support EWS.

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## Gaps and Challenges in Communication and Dissemination

Although customisation of the EWS products have been implemented, packaging of EWS products remains a challenge due to language barriers and use of jargon at a community level. Furthermore, the formatting of products and usage of complex charts do not communicate the intended information clearly.

Additionally, there is currently limited engagement with mainstream media like local FM stations as there are cost implications for airtime on early warning information. Given poor network coverage for internet-based products, local radio stations provide an opportunity to effectively translate and share drought information.

Social media has not been actively used and may be beneficial in targeting information to younger demographics. However, the digital divide must be considered prior to implementation. Currently there are limited or an absence of community feedback meetings on the drought products. This would allow in understanding stakeholder needs and adapting products based on the community, locality, and state. This could also include exploration of alternative products such as pictorials, pamphlets and others.

## Recommendations

The following actions are recommended to further enhance drought information dissemination and communication:

- Identify and develop alternative EWS products for the communities
- Enhance use of social media platforms for wider coverage particularly for targeting young people
- Reintroduce raising of drought flags at strategic social meeting places for the community members (For communicating drought phases).
- Enhance engagement with the mainstream media particularly the FM media stations for wider coverage of disseminating EWS products
- Use of bulk SMS- Appropriate for remote areas with poor networks
- Establish strong coordination and feedback mechanisms
- Balance scientific accuracy with accessibility on drought products



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