



## **VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19 AND HYDROMETEOROLOGICAL SYSTEMS IN AFRICA**

### **SUSTAINING OBSERVATIONS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE HYDROMETEOROLOGICAL OPERATING SYSTEMS**

#### **Background**

Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the loss of over 430 thousand lives globally and over 6000 lives in Africa from WHO reports. Regrettably, and tragically, numbers keep on rising on a daily basis. Measures to contain the pandemic such as lockdowns come at a cost including effects on people's social lives, economic activities, and also operations of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) to conduct observations and provide services. Viewing COVID-19 as a health issue leads to actors focussing most of their attention on containing the pandemic on a health aspect rather than a multi-sectoral approach. This view leaves behind the critical component of effective delivery of services by NMHSs.

Weather, water and climate services provided by the NMHSs and Regional Climate Centres (RCCs) significantly contribute to the safety and well-being of the African people and communities, and support key socio-economic sectors including agriculture, aviation, forestry, fishing, water resources, energy industries, transportation, health, tourism, among others. The services are also crucial to enhancing adaptation to climate change, resilience to, and reducing vulnerability from natural hazards and the effects of climate variability and climate change. There is an increasing need for the delivery of sector specific weather, water and climate services to ensure food security, improved water resource management, disaster risk reduction and better health. To enable the provision of these services, effective observation network, data processing and Member States' human and infrastructural capacities are critical. The simple fact is that NMHSs are enablers for the prevention of COVID-19 hence safeguarding human health from epidemics and pandemic as well as providers of key socio-economic services for sustainable development of the continent.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic is having increasing impacts on the quantity and quality of weather observations and forecasts, as well as atmospheric and climate monitoring. According to statements from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), there has been significant reduction in meteorological measurements taken from aircrafts as well as surface-based weather observations in the southern hemisphere. This is especially so in Africa and parts of Central and South America where many stations are manually ran. Very few observations are automatic. In many developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries and most of which are in Africa, the transition to automated observations is still in its infancy. As such, the meteorological community still relies on observations taken manually by human weather observers who are highly vulnerable to current national lockdowns and

mandatory stay at home- or teleworking policies. Events show that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of climate change and growing number and frequency of weather-related disasters continue. Floods in East Africa are a clear example of such hydromet hazards. The coronavirus pandemic is demonstrating the importance of having resilience in the weather observation systems and further a pointer for Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Governments to invest in appropriate state-of-the-art meteorological and hydrological infrastructure for effective service delivery, particularly early warning of disasters due to extreme weather events.

### **Main Objective**

The main objective of the webinar is to distill critical weather, water, and climate observation challenges faced by NMHSs and recommend practical actions on how member states can sustain the critical role meteorology and hydrology play in the socio-economic development of Africa.

### **Participants are drawn from the following organizations:**

- African Union Commission
- Member States – National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs)
- African Ministerial Conference on Meteorology (AMCOMET)
- African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW)
- Regional Economic Communities (RECs)
- WMO Regional Office for Africa
- African Development Bank
- UNECA – ACPC and Other UN Agencies
- Regional Climate Centres (RCCs)
- African River and Lake Basin Organizations R/LBOs
- Regional Climate Commissions
- Water Centres of Excellence
- African Civil Society Group: PACJA; ANEW
- African Youth

### **Expected Key Outcomes**

- a) Identification of the risks, threats, and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the development and delivery of accurate and timely weather, water, and climate services for socio-economic development
- b) Identification of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the provision of weather, water and climate services
- c) Concrete technical and policy recommendations on sustaining weather, water and

climate services for all sectors.

- d) Enhanced exchange of knowledge, lessons learnt, and good practices of weather, water and climate monitoring in constraining circumstances.

### The Webinar

While many countries have dedicated their efforts to providing timely and accurate weather and climate information, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected observations, generation and provision of timely and accurate weather, water and climate information. This, in turn, has impacted on the overall mandate of NMHSs. Governments are presently putting their available resources towards COVID-19, leaving other critical sectors more vulnerable. Governments’ efforts to strengthen their NMHSs could be undermined as there are competing demands for available national resources. While the Integrated African Strategy on Meteorology (Weather and Climate Services) can provide a continental framework to respond to the meteorological challenges presented by the COVID-19 outbreak, regional and national strategies and Action Plans equally play an important role at respective levels.

In order to identify the risks, threats, challenges and responses related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the development and delivery of accurate and timely weather, water, and climate services, the African Union Commission and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Regional Office for Africa will jointly hold a dedicated webinar on *‘the COVID-19 Pandemic and Meteorological Activities in Africa: Sustaining Observations and Building Resilience in the Operating Systems’* on Tuesday, June 23, 2020 from 15h30 to 17h00 East African Time.

The following key speakers will make presentations on the following topics.

Topic	Speaker
Opening Remarks <b>(5 min)</b>	H.E. Amb. Josefa SACKO, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, AUC WMO Secretary-General
Overview: COVID-19 impacts on hydrometeorological activities <b>(10 min)</b>	Dr. Daouda Konate, Director, Côte d’Ivoire National Meteorological Services & Chairperson of WMO Regional Association I (Africa)
Hydrological activities and COVID-19 <b>(5 min)</b>	Prof. Abdin Mohamed Ali Salih, Former President of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Programme of UNESCO ((IHP), Sudan
National perspective on COVID-19 impacts, experiences, lessons <b>(10 min)</b>	i) Ms. Stella Aura, Director, Kenya Meteorological Services ii) Mr. Omar Chafki, Director-General of Maroc Météo, Member of WMO Executive

	Council
Continental perspectives and approaches: Preparing for the aftermath of the pandemic <b>(5 min)</b>	Dr. Andre Kanga, Director-General, African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development (ACMAD)
Building resilience in the hydro meteorological operating system in Africa <b>(5 min)</b>	Dr. Amos Makarau, Director, AMCOMET Secretariat and WMO Regional Office for Africa
Policy Perspectives and Strategic Partnerships during and after COVID-19 <b>(5 min)</b>	Dr. Jolly Wasambo, Coordinator, DREA, AUC
Interactive session: Perspectives from participants on impacts, challenges, and suggested actions <b>(45 min)</b>	AMCOMET, AMCOW, RECs, Member States, CSO, Partners, etc.
Wrap-up and closure of the webinar <b>(5 min)</b>	Mr. Harsen Nyambe Nyambe, Head of Division – Environment, Climate Change, Water and Land Management, DREA, AUC

Speakers will highlight key areas on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on meteorology with respect to various sectors. They will also highlight the challenges the pandemic has prompted and explore potential solutions aimed at addressing the situation at national and regional levels. Furthermore, they will also look at the aftermaths of the pandemic and propose measures NMHSSs, RCCs, and policy/decision makers need to consider putting in place for a swift return to normal.

There will be ample opportunity for participants to present their own perspectives on these challenges and suggested actions that will generate lively debates and exciting session.

The webinar will be conducted via Zoom and login credentials will be sent to participants in advance. Simultaneous interpretation for English and French will be provided.