

Building adaptive capacity to cope with increasing vulnerability due to climatic change in Africa – A new approach

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Abstract

The world community faces many risks from climate change, with most scenarios indicating higher temperatures and more erratic rainfall in Africa. Predictions for southern Africa suggest a general decrease in total seasonal rainfall, accompanied by more frequent in-season dry spells that will significantly impact crop and livestock production, and hence economic growth in the region. The hardest hit will be the rural poor in the drier areas, where crop failure due to drought is already common and chronic food emergencies afflict the region in most years. Lessons can be learnt on how the rural poor currently cope with the vagaries of climate and these can be used to help them adapt their current production systems to the future threats of further climate change. But this assumes the institutions that work towards the economic empowerment of the rural poor have the requisite skills to understand their current coping strategies and how adaptation can be facilitated. A new initiative led by Midlands State University and the Zambian Meteorological Office proposes that improving the ability of institutions that train the 'Future Change Agents', who will subsequently support smallholder communities in adapting their agricultural practices to current climate variability, is the first step in building adaptive capacity to cope with future climate change. The capacity of African scientists, regional organizations and decision-makers in dealing with the issues of climate change and adaptation will be enhanced on a continuing basis, and the impacts of their agricultural development programs improved.