

Changing the face of weather forecasts



Festus Luboyera, the executive director of Uganda National Meteorological Authority

By Owen Wagabaza

The weather forecast for January, February and March has been accurate, something which was rare in the past. Are you seeing the rains?

When I addressed the press in January, I remember telling the country that I have come with good news; rains are coming, start preparing your gardens," Festus Luboyera, the Executive Director of Uganda National Meteorological Authority says.

However, when asked about his perception on weather forecasts in Uganda, Steven Baliruno who lives in a city suburb says, "I do not trust Uganda's forecasts, they are never spot on." Just like Baliruno, some Ugandans still doubt these forecasts.

But Luboyera disagrees. "We have just been having a challenge of people misinterpreting our forecasts, and this is because we had not set up measures to educate our population about the products on offer, but we are solving this by having more interactions with the public and telling them what is expected," says Luboyera.

"People were reading the information and not understanding it and this was wrong, interpreting a message you do not understand can be dangerous. We are, therefore, improving the sensitisation and communication tools to solve such challenges," he says.

That changing face of weather forecasts is more apparent today as we observe the World Meteorology Day under the theme, weather ready, climate smart. The main celebrations are being held in Lira district.

What is UNMA?

Uganda National Meteorological Authority, formerly the Department of Meteorology under Ministry of Water and Environment, is a semi-

How efficient is the meteorological authority?

According to Luboyera, there have been massive improvements in the last five years which include among others capacity building both in terms of human resource and equipment and as of now, the Authority is well equipped to deliver internationally recognised forecasts.

"We have well trained forecasters for producing standard and customised weather and climate forecasts and packaging hydro-meteorological data and information into suitable format for user agencies and local community."

Luboyera adds that the authority is well equipped, with human resource standing at over 93% backed with the equipment to fully execute the job. "Last year, we received the ISO 9001:2008 certification and by the time you attain that certification, you have adhered to the set rules of International Standards Organisation," Luboyera says.

"We have for example upgraded our weather and climate forecasting facilities including an integral hydro-meteorological data management and information system and an online platform for

operationalising collaboration arrangements and procedures," Luboyera adds.

There has been capacity development for operating and maintaining observation networks and related instructor including training meteorological and hydrological trainers, weather observers, raising local community awareness and developing the Operation and Maintenance tool box.

Still on technical capacity building, the authority has trained over 300 sub-national partners in early warning dissemination and to promote efficiency and effective use of hydro-meteorological and environmental information for making early warnings and long-term development plans, the technical capacity has been strengthened.

"Currently, weather information is being packaged with daily forecasts which are real time. There are also 10 days forecasts and seasonal forecasts, all made possible by the heavy investments in both infrastructure and software by the government and UNDP through the SCIEWS project," Luboyera explains.

autonomous government institution responsible for weather and climate services and a focal institution to Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, an international body of experts mandated to analyse scientific research findings on climate change.

The authority is mandated to promote and monitor weather and climate as well as provide weather predictions and advisories to the Government and other stakeholders for use in sustainable development of the country.

The Uganda National Meteorological Authority is responsible for establishing and maintaining weather and climate observing stations network, collection, analysis and production of weather and climate information, including warnings/advisories

UNMA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WEATHER AND CLIMATE OBSERVING STATIONS, COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND PRODUCTION OF WEATHER INFORMATION.

to support social and economic development.

The key sectors served by UNMA include transport mainly aviation and marine, defence, agriculture, disaster preparedness, environmental and water resources management, tourism and construction industry.

"UNMA accomplishes these responsibilities in collaboration and coordination with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and its member states and other global and regional meteorological centres," Luboyera says.

The authority is mandated with the provision of meteorological and climatological services to weather dependent sectors such as agriculture, forestry, water resources management, civil aviation, marine and the private sector, including

industry, commerce and public utilities for the better exploitation and utilisation of natural resources for national development;

UNMA is also tasked with the provision of tailored meteorological services to the aviation industry for the safety of the civil aviation operations in accordance with WMO and International Civil Aviation Organisation recommendations.

The authority is tasked with the organization and administration of surface and upper air meteorological observations within our area of responsibility and the publication of all relevant Climatological data.

Another function is the maintenance of an efficient telecommunications system for rapid collection and dissemination of meteorological information required for national and international use in accordance with the World Meteorological Organisation and the International Civil Aviation Organisation procedures.

Co-ordination of research in the fields of meteorology and climatology including co-operation with other authorities in all aspects of applied meteorological research and the maintenance of the National Meteorological Library;

Challenges

Luboyera says there is lack of adequate accommodation for both headquarters and up country weather stations, as well as a need for more stations to provide data for the different parameters across the country.

To improve on the efficiency, the authority successfully lobbied the government and approved the purchase of three radars.

"These are going to be installed in Lira, Mbarara and Entebbe. We have also heavily invested in training and currently, a number of our staff are in the UK, China, South Korea and Makerere University. We are also hoping that in the near future, we will get a building that is ideal for us," Luboyera says.