



Info Note

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RURAL COMMUNITIES IN WEST AFRICA TO BENEFIT FROM EDUCATION IN USE OF CLIMATE INFORMATION

GENEVA, 25 April 2008 (WMO) – Severe droughts, floods or temperature extremes impede sustainable farming development in the Sahelian countries of West Africa. Climate variability and change contribute to the vulnerability of individual farms, as well as entire rural communities, threatening food security in the region. Improving weather predictions and helping farmers reap the benefit for enhancing food security are a priority for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Following an expert meeting on agrometeorology held on 23 and 24 April in Niamey, Niger, it is planned that over 10 000 farmers in five countries —Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal— should benefit from roving seminars providing them with climate information and its application for increasing productivity of their cropping systems. Fifty one-day seminars will be organized in collaboration with the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services.

The meeting in Niamey was organized by WMO and the State Meteorological Agency of Spain (AEMET) at the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel Regional Centre for Agricultural Meteorology and Hydrology (AGRHYMET). Twenty experts from Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Spain and Switzerland and from AGRHYMET and the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD) participated.

WMO and AEMET propose to distribute hundreds of low-cost raingauges (about 4.5 Euros each), to volunteer farmers in the five Sahelian countries and train them in using the real-time rainfall data for making operational decisions on field preparations ahead of the rainy season, sowing, fertilizer application, intercultivation, harvesting, etc.

Farming practices need to be adapted as a response to future climate risks to agricultural productivity and to ensure food security for the large populations in West Africa. According to the Fourth Assessment Report of the WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released in 2007, the area suitable for agriculture in West Africa, the length of the growing season and yield potential, particularly along the margins of semi-arid and arid areas, are expected to decrease. In some African countries, yields from rainfed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 per cent by 2020. Specifically, it is estimated that, by 2100, parts of the Sahara are likely to emerge as the most vulnerable, with likely agricultural losses of between 2 and 7 per cent of gross domestic product.

The overall goal of the roving seminars is to secure farmers' self reliance through better informing them about effective weather and climate risk management and the sustainable use of natural resources for agricultural production. Typically they are of one-day duration and bring together

farmers from a group of villages to a centralized location in different regions of the five Sahelian countries. The morning is devoted to providing information in the local language on different aspects of weather and climate in the region, future climate change and implications, climatic risk in production of different crops in their region and better risk management. The afternoon is devoted to obtaining feedback from the farmers on the weather and climate issues in their farming operations and the nature of the assistance they need.

Feedback obtained from the farmers will help the staff of Meteorological Services and Agricultural Extension Agencies to design improved products for use by farmers and to improve the channels of communication with the farmers.

Similar initiatives will be launched in other developing regions.

WMO is the United Nations' authoritative voice on weather, climate and water

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