ESWATINI

Early Warning Early Action

CASE STUDY

Stakeholder Engagement for Early Warning Early Action through the Promotion of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP)

Context

The Kingdom of Eswatini is a land-locked country to the east of South Africa. It is bordered by Mozambique to its northeast and South Africa to its north, west, south, and southeast. Eswatini is mountainous in the west, dropping via uplands and valleys to lowlands in the east. Characterized by a subtropical climate with wet, hot summers (October–March) and cold, dry winters (April–September), Eswatini faces a range of hydrometeorological hazards including seasonal flooding, periods of drought and violent storms. Especially persistent droughts and dry spells are further exacerbating the country's existing challenges of food insecurity and the ability to attain development goals. Drought conditions result in several environmental impacts, including vegetation loss (due to several factors such as deforestation, loss of forest quality and vegetation migration), reduced water availability and degradation of aquatic systems, extinction of local fauna, ecosystem changes, and soil degradation that can ultimately lead to desertification. It also impacts environmental disease incidents, including malaria. Consequences of severe, recent droughts in the country have resulted in 25% of the population being vulnerable and acknowledged as food and water insecure, with many households reliant on welfare and social safety nets.

Status of Early Warning Systems in Eswatini

An evaluation of the Early Warning System in Eswatini was conducted by the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2022 to identify existing gaps and opportunities for improvement within the country's multi-hazard early warning system to provide timely and better services to communities. While the country has made progress on the dissemination, communication and response capability as well as the governance of early warnings, deficits persist in the areas of risk knowledge and the monitoring and warning services. Risk maps that provide a comprehensive overview of the interaction of hazards and vulnerabilities to inform policy and enable an effective multi-hazard early warning approach are needed. Regarding the status of monitoring and warning services, the lack of a coordinated approach and institutional mechanisms for the exchange of data were identified as key challenges.

In the context of the IFRC Alert Hub Initiative, which aims to increase adoption of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) together with actionable messages to strengthen end-to-end early warning systems and enable early action in the face of disasters, the Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) conducted an assessment and analysis of existing early warning system structures at the beginning of 2023. The analysis built on the NDMA-led 2022 evaluation and expanded the focus to the use of the CAP standard for public alerting in Eswatini. The assessment conducted by the National Society with support from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre (RCCC, Climate Centre), a specialized unit of the IFRC that works to promote climate resilience and reduce the risks associated with climate change through innovative and evidence-based approaches, highlighted that some engagements with CAP, including training of the Meteorological Agency, took place in 2022, however CAP is not yet fully operational in Eswatini and there is limited awareness of CAP and its application in-country. The assessment also highlighted the need to strengthen stakeholder coordination within the disaster management system to enable information sharing, guide resource allocation and reduce duplication of efforts. Gaps were identified regarding limited operation of the forecasting service to weekdays, the availability of reliable, secure and fast dissemination mechanisms and the lack of financial and human resources to maintain monitoring infrastructure which limits data collection, analysis, and provision of forecast information.

Stakeholder engagement to strengthen Early Warning Early Action

In the course of the Forecast based Financing (FbF) and CAP related work, Eswatini has continuously shown commitment to strengthen stakeholder participation for a coherent early warning system that enables early action. To inform and guide FbF work, the Government of Eswatini established a technical working group (TWG) which doubles as an Early Warning Committee. The committee provides technical guidance on the design and implementation of anticipatory action programs e.g. the development of Early Action Protocols (EAP). In their auxiliary role to the government, BERCS is a key actor in the country's FbF project focused on drought and food insecurity and has led efforts to develop an EAP including setting of triggers for drought events. In collaboration with the Eswatini Meteorological Services and the NDMA, the FbF project intends to send alert information to at-risk communities.

The existing FbF engagement and its alignment with BERCS' strategic priorities on 'Climate & Environment' and 'Disaster and Crisis' and corresponding policies created an enabling environment for the National Society to build out their work on Early Warning Early Action (EWEA). In addition, internal reflection of the National Society identified the need to implement the

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Preparedness for Effectiveness Response (PER) approach to increase institutional capacity which is a critical area of intervention. As a result, through the FbF project, the National Society conducted a PER assessment and developed a PER Plan of Action (PoA) that will increase the ability of the National Society to effectively implement FbF projects. Therefore, BERCS revised the work plan so that their approach to impending hazards included an EWEA component. This created an entry point for the CAP project as part of the IFRC Alert Hub Initiative. In Eswatini, project activities were implemented from January 2023, intended to be completed by June 2023, and included convening of different public authorities from across the Early Warning landscape to identify synergies with existing FbF approaches in-country and plan the way forward.

The assessments on the status of public emergency alerting and the use of CAP in Eswatini informed the planning of a Multi-Hazards Early Warning System (MHEWS) conference together with a CAP workshop that took place between 20th - 23rd of March 2023. The conference and workshop were organized by NDMA in close collaboration with BERCS and multiple government and non-governmental partners. This event created an opportunity to introduce CAP to the early warning stakeholders for awareness raising and promoting the adoption of CAP in Eswatini. A central factor for strengthening EWEA in Eswatini is the need for more sustainable coordination mechanisms between the NDMA and Eswatini's Meteorological Agency in support of CAP implementation. BERCS is leveraging its auxiliary role to public authorities to strengthen collaboration among government agencies and other relevant stakeholders to address this gap. As an example, Eswatini Red Cross planned and funded the CAP training to complement the MHEWS conference, creating awareness for the need of inter-agency coordination and information exchange. In addition, BERCS co-created a national Plan of Action for CAP with multiple stakeholders to provide technical support and where feasible financial support to augment government efforts. BERCS also supports efforts to clarify the mandate of each institution and harmonise the early warning systems for the different hazards through better management and coordination. Going forward, BERCS encourages the co-creation of projects and initiatives through means such as joint brainstorming sessions, involving key stakeholders in developing joint concept notes for programmes and opening doors for joint discussions on what different departments are working on at any given time.

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Lessons learned from Anticipatory Action and CAP engagement in Eswatini

The CAP project implementation in Eswatini identified various points of synergies between the FbF engagement and efforts to strengthen EWEA through CAP. The design of triggers for the EAP for drought highlighted challenges in the availability of forecast data and issues in data sharing between different actors. To address this gap, Eswatini RC liaised with the Climate Centre to conduct analyses using previously stored data provided by the Eswatini Meteorological Services to design triggers. Through the collaboration with the Climate Centre, NDMA also shared some datasets for the development of another drought trigger that is based on the Drought Composite Index for Eswatini (CDI-E) developed by the NDMA. The Movement's FbF framework provided many lessons for BERCS to strengthen stakeholder coordination for the advancement of end-to-end EWEA in Eswatini. CAP project implementation in Eswatini reinforced the need to increase the participation of diverse stakeholders in the national FbF TWG that doubles as the Early Warning Committee. The working group sets the critical path for in-country implementation and it is vital to change the invitation strategy so that future meetings of the TWG would have more attendance. For both the FbF and CAP engagement, the need to plan and work with longer time horizons that acknowledge the extensive stakeholder engagement was identified as a key lesson.

Building on these experiences, BERCS is developing a Plan of Action together with government partners that includes forging public-private partnerships with network service providers and regulators in Eswatini to identify how they can move forward with CAP, expedite full implementation of CAP once a sound collaboration system is established between Eswatini's Met Agency and NDMA, and overall increase CAP awareness in Eswatini.

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Recommendations to National Societies with EWEA Engagement

BERCS' experience reiterates the need to engage key stakeholders i.e. the NDMA and the Meteorological Service early in the process and jointly develop concept notes or program plans. When preparing the concept note for the CAP project, BERCS had initially not included these two relevant stakeholders which led to the need to change the CAP work plan later on. The implementation of the CAP project facilitated the shared understanding amongst the key actors that proper inter-agency coordination, co-creation starting from projects' planning notes and information sharing are all essential success factors. This was also informed by the recommendations of assessments done by NDMA and BERCS. In addition, strengthening stakeholder coordination within the disaster management system also guides resource allocation and reduces duplication of efforts which is mainly caused by working in silos. BERCS also sees the need to expand the project time allocation both under the FbF and CAP engagement and provide some flexibility on the implementation timeline to ensure full completion of activities. For National Societies who are interested in implementing work on Early Warning Early Action and CAP, BERCS stresses the importance of early stakeholder engagement and co-creation of concept notes, project plans and other guiding documents.

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