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The Importance of Integrating Climate Science in Health Systems

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Abstract:

East and South African countries face challenges to adequately prepare for health emergencies, control disease burdens, provide coverage of basic healthcare and public health services, manage inequity, and use resources in a cost-effective way. This is further compounded with climate variability, and causal pathways between sub-seasonal and seasonal weather, livelihoods, disaster preparedness and health systems, remain ill-defined. As such, health systems in this region are at particularly high risk of future setbacks.

While Climate Information Services (CIS) can be an effective tool in ensuring positive health outcomes, they should be developed with, and applied in, partnership, driven by local need prioritization. While the current gaps and corresponding needs are recognised at international, national and grassroots levels, current responses continue to rely on piecemeal implementation. Information sharing is largely siloed within specific sectors. Existing tools and methodologies are often insufficient for users 1) to identify cross-sectoral risk, 2) to understand or monitor impact, particularly with regards to public health, or, 3) to create an evidence-base that informs decision making and implementation of appropriate response and mitigation strategies.

Effectively integrating CIS with Health System users has proven to be especially challenging, with many previous applications failing to assess the current state of national health systems, structures and services or account for the capacity (technical, knowledge, data availability, managerial and fiscal) for determining a country's readiness and ability to integrating climate resilient health frameworks and scale CIS. Critical to this assessment is the underpinning premise of defining the minimum data needed to deliver maximum benefit.

This paper presents an assessment of the current situation in Uganda and Malawi regarding the challenges of integrating climate information services with health systems. It presents pathways forwards for working with national institutions to drive nationally prioritized systems via collaboration between climate and health sectors and integrated implementation.