

What motivates natural resource policymakers in Africa to take action on climate change?

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Climate services are vital tools for decision makers addressing climate change in developing countries. Science-based seasonal forecasts and accompanying materials can support climate risk management in agriculture, health, water management, energy, and disaster risk

reduction.

But in East Africa, natural resource managers have been slow to use [climate](#) information services, partly because they are difficult to understand and may not feel relevant for their local planning purposes. A new study published by the journal *Risk Analysis* suggests that one way to encourage policymakers in East Africa to use climate services more often is to appeal to the motivational factors that influence their professional actions on [climate change](#).

Researchers at the University of Cape Town found that experience with extreme weather events and social norms—external expectations of how one is supposed to feel, behave, or think in particular situations—may play important roles in motivating professional action on climate change.

"Based on our results, aligning climate services with social norms could offer low-hanging fruit for designing more effective climate services interventions," says climate scientist Anna Steynor, head of climate services at the Climate System Analysis Group, University of Cape Town. For example, messages such as "80 percent of urban planning professionals are using climate information in their planning" could highlight the use of climate information among policy planners and, therefore, encourage the use of climate services by those who aren't currently utilizing them.

Between September 2018 and January 2019, the team conducted structured surveys of 474 "policy decision influencers" in five East African countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. The majority of respondents (71 percent) were employed by national and local government ministries. Others worked for [trade unions](#), international development agencies, non-governmental organizations, research organizations, and the private sector.

All of the respondents were involved in some way with natural resource management. "These individuals are an important community because they are an accessible group for introducing adaptation-oriented interventions and are in a position of leadership to drive social adaptations around climate change," the authors write.

The participants were asked if they had taken general action, as part of their job activities, to prepare for the impacts of climate change. Three items on the survey assessed overall worry about climate change, as risk perceptions have been shown to underlie action on climate change. Other questions were designed to gauge observance of social norms, personal values, psychological closeness to climate change, and experience of [extreme weather events](#). Questions related to psychological closeness pertained to whether participants felt that climate change would have a big impact on them now, personally and on their community.

The results were statistically analyzed using structural equation modeling in order to construct a conceptual explanatory model for professional action. The resulting causal model illustrates the important role that [social norms](#), psychological closeness to climate change, and experience of extreme events play in motivating action. It also elucidates the cascading effects of variables such as age, gender, education and personal values on action.

"Our model provides a framework for prioritizing the different factors that motivate adaptation action," says Steynor. "We hope it will prompt further research on individual climate change action and encourage behavioral change among policy decision influencers in Africa."

More information: Anna Steynor et al, Understanding the Links Between Climate Change Risk Perceptions and the Action Response to Inform Climate Services Interventions, *Risk Analysis* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/risa.13683](https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13683)

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