

Priorities of the CLIVAR VACS panel

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The CLIVAR Variability of the African Climate System (VACS) panel met in Dar es Salaam in mid July 2006. Prior to the meeting, VACS ran a training workshop entitled *Prediction and predictability of East and Southern African Climate and impacts of the neighbouring oceans* that was centred around the Climate Prediction Tool (CPT) developed at IRI (see article by Mason). Around 45 participants attended the workshop with an operational scientist from each National Meteorological Service in the region and from six ocean agencies. By the end of the meeting, each participant was able to put together a seasonal forecast of rainfall and temperature for their country using CPT.

An important component of the workshop, which then fed into the priorities being developed at the panel meeting, was obtaining feedback from these operational scientists to assist with developing the programme initiatives for southern Africa and for East Africa and with capacity building activities in seasonal to interannual prediction throughout the continent. Given the relative lack of resources, infrastructure and trained scientists in Africa, it is clear that a major priority for VACS has to be to facilitate appropriate training and capacity building in climate science on the continent. Following from the workshop, it became clear that in order to develop a sustainable and effective climate prediction network throughout Africa, a series of workshops to “train the teachers” is required so as to build up a base level of skill in seasonal to interannual prediction using CPT. Once each sub-region, or country, has a skilled trainer in CPT available, then this person can transfer this expertise locally.

In many respects, VACS has tended to follow a regional approach and AMMA is a good example of a multi-disciplinary, collaborative, international research programme for the West African region (see article by Thorncroft). It is clear that VACS now needs to give impetus to developing similar type programmes for the southern African and East African regions. Prototype plans exist for these regions but there is now an urgent need to refine these to meet the needs of the various stakeholders and to target funding. In addition, the central African region (Congo basin extending northwest to Cameroon) has not been adequately considered by VACS to date. In this region, the lack of observations, infrastructure, capacity and previous research poses even greater problems than for many other parts of Africa in developing an appropriate research programme.

In summary, VACS sees its highest priorities in the short term as developing appropriate research programmes for the various regions of Africa; building capacity throughout Africa in climate science through training workshops, conferences and other activities and providing scientific advice and guidance to ongoing and future research into the variability and prediction of Africa's climate.