

# The Last Mile: Uganda towards the Finish Line



Uganda President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, releases a weather balloon at UNMA Stall in Jinja. Before him in a black jacket is Dr.

**UNMA is working hard at bridging the last mile with the help of the private sector and civil society.**

By Dr. Robert K. Rutaagi, Chairperson of the UNMA Board

Since the CIRDA Team, led by Project Manager Bonizella Biagini, blew the whistle in Livingstone to launch the workshop The Last Mile, the Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA) has been sprinting towards the finish line. As we travelled to Livingstone, braving both distance and the clock, the ride became more enjoyable, courtesy not only of the beautiful Zambian geography and climate but also to the rich subject matter being discussed. We were provided more time to deeply reflect upon the workshop agenda that was focused on identifying the means and messages needed to communicate climate information to vulnerable communities.

The trip to and from Livingstone and the debates that arose from the regional workshop allowed for my delegation to quickly formulate a package of nine recommendations to move Uganda towards the finish line in looking to bridge the Last Mile. These included:

- Working for the distribution of hydro meteorological information through efficient and effective channels like schools, churches, Rotary Fraternities, Police and media (among others)
- Simplifying the message by translating technical meteorological terminologies into simpler and better understandable language.
- Exploring opportunities for partnering with private sector companies such as Fit Uganda and others to disseminate weather and climate information.
- Working towards unpacking weather data and tailoring it for different audiences depending on the needs and the devices used by end users.
- Guide UNMA's Expatriate Technical Advisor to analyse all available raw materials/resources including Consultancy Reports, to develop practical and implementable follow up actions.
- Arrange an urgent meeting between the UNMA and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) Department of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Management to harmonize issues of intersecting mandates in the generation and dissemination of climate and weather information.
- Invite CIRDA Experts to visit to both agencies (UNMA and OPM), evaluate the technical environment for early warning systems and review the design for automatic weather stations (AWS) that includes the option to host in school premises as well as to provide support in arranging a national workshop to bring together national stake holders involved in communicating climate and weather information.
- Bring the Climate Action Hackathon to Uganda through a Ugandan Hackathon Sattelite Group that will include brilliant, dynamic and highly self-motivated ICT-survey youths from higher institutions of learning like Makerere University and its Business School, Uganda Technology and Management University, Kyambogo University, among others.

- An increased focus on downscaled weather product dissemination to provide an important building block for the product development needed by the Country.

To begin to enact these strategies, UNMA and the UNDP/GEF/SCIEWS Project organized national stakeholders through a Forum that took place from 20-23 June, 2016 in Entebbe. The Stakeholder Forum had among its objectives to identify the opportunities for partnering with the private sector for the dissemination of weather and climate information as well as to visualize the potential for product development.



Participants to the Uganda Stakeholder Forum

The workshop was well attended by local, regional and international stakeholders from public, private, civil society, international development partners and NGOs. While time and space will not permit me to delve into greater details of all that transpired, I will endeavor to articulate the pertinent outputs and outcomes of the event that both prove testament to the hard work being developed by the UNMA as well as its vision in moving forward and reaching the Last Mile:

- UNMA has become more accurate, with its accuracy levels rising from 50% (2014) to 80% (June 2016). This has been validated by both ACCRA and World Vision which has used the information with Ugandan farmers

and has found it to be "commendable" (ACCRA UNMA & MWF: The Climate Forecast Model, 2016).

- Based on the information generated and shared during the Forum, UNMA has or is en route to enter into several Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with significant stakeholders. These include the Uganda National Road Authority and the Uganda National Farmers' Association. While entering into formal PPPs will require harmonization, refinement and expedition in terms of commercialization prospects, these issues are well noted and will be addressed.

We have appreciated the work realized by the CIRDA Team through its own market study in bringing to light the various challenges that will be faced.

- UNMA now has some local (FIT Uganda Ltd) and international (a Where, HNI, etc.) partners ready to improve its dissemination of weather and climate information products through radio stations on mutually agreed upon terms, including pro bono (free) ones. All that is required is the training of the radio station staff in presentation techniques, good public relations and marketing.

- UNMA will urgently plan to conduct an in-depth study on the contribution of meteorological services on Uganda's GDP. Once completed, it will assist UNMA in mobilizing the much needed resources to develop the requisite infrastructure on her other operations as well as her corporate image.

- An SCIEWS Application Programming Interface (API) has emerged with an imminent capacity to "enable smoother PPPs, rapid end user application development and sustainable weather and climate solutions for Uganda" (ref. PPP Forum main report 20-23 June, 2016).

- UNMA also took note of the urgent need to review its organizational structure, especially the need to create an independent Aeronautical Division/Dept. to handle its strategic aeronautical services which have the highest potential to internally generate revenue for the Authority and augment the insufficient Government funding.

- The need to re-brand UNMA was a recurring topic and a basic output of the Forum. Much will depend on it being seen as an efficient and effective service delivery of meteorological services to end-users.

All conversations, during the Last Mile from Livingstone to the PPP Forum in Entebbe seem to suggest that Uganda, as she approaches the finish line, is in fact becoming ever more conducive towards creating the PPP partnerships needed to communicate climate and weather information and do so in a manner that can become sustainable in the long term.

As if to validate the above conclusion, soon after the PPP Forum UNMA was invited to participate in the annual Uganda National Farmers Agricultural Show in Jinja. UNMA's performance was excellent and its stall became the centre of much attraction and had the distinction of being twice visited by President Yoweri Museveni. His enthusiasm in the event spurred him to personally launch and release UNMA's weather balloon and provide much attention to the relevant and exciting work being developed by UNMA.