INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN ESWATINI

INTRODUCTION

The African Union Commission led AU-AIP Multi-Country Green Climate Fund Readiness Support Initiative implemented in 15 AU Member States, supported an indigenous knowledge campaign aimed at documenting knowledge that contributes to drought and flood management, water harvesting, soil and ecosystem conservation, climate forecasting, and livelihood resilience.

This learning brief documents some of Eswatini's identified indigenous knowledge for climate forecasting and water resource management.

ONSET OF DRY SEASON

A swarm of locusts indicates that a dry or drought year is expected. In anticipation such a dry spell, farmers delay the season from the usual September to December or January. Farmers also attempt no tillage farming (a form of conservation agriculture), to retain moisture & conserve water.

Other indications for a dry season include when the moon rises with a crescent facing up, the absence of numerous black swallows and the north winds, suggesting a delay in the rainy season.

ONSET OF WET SEASON

The calling of umfuku or phezukomkhono (birds) signals the onset of a wet season. Other indigenous signs for the onset of the wet season include frogs making noise (croaking) or their abundant presence in streams, the sighting of numerous black swallows, and playful behaviour of cows (especially heifers and bullocks) indicate that rain is very close. With such signs, farmers begin ploughing their fields.

When the moon rises with a crescent facing sideways, and westerly winds it is considered an early warning for larger amounts of rainfall

Some communities use these signs to prepare for rainwater harvesting by placing containers under their roofs. Rainwater harvesting is one of the most widespread indigenous water management practices in Eswatini.

KUSISA SYSTEM TO REDUCE IMPACT OF DROUGHT

This is a traditional livestock management strategy designed to reduce the impacts of prolonged drought.

When multiple environmental indicators signal the likelihood of severe drought, livestock owners relocate portions of their cattle herds from drought-prone areas, to relatives or trusted custodians in higher rainfall areas.

Kusisa helps distribute grazing pressure across different ecological zones, safeguards household assets and preserves livelihoods.

Citation: 2022 Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs national outreach programme and the resulting March 2023 NAP Global Network briefing note, community sources, & published academic literature