

Contributing African climate information to Wikipedia: Building the capability of African researchers

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IMPACT

The edit-a-thon brought together 30 African climate researchers from across Africa and representing seven climate research programmes. The quantity of African climate change information on Wikipedia was increased – with over 106105 characters added and 23 climate-related Wikipedia pages edited. A number of the editors also appeared as top 10 contributors on pages.

The quality of the pages was improved by the increased number of references from scientific journal articles and the fact that participants were editing and adding content from their own peer-reviewed research. The edit-a-thon also helped to create a community of practice and a dedicated space on Wikipedia for editors to collectively plan how to increase the African climate content on Wikipedia pages. As a result, [the Wikiproject climate change / Africa task force](#) was created.



THE CHANGE STORY

Africa's climate is already changing and future climate change is expected to create an even more challenging environment for development and livelihoods in the region. Whilst new scientific understanding of climate change in Africa is being advanced, this climate information is often inaccessible, because it is not translated and interpreted into simpler, jargon-free language for broader public consumption, and it is often behind extremely expensive paywalls of academic journals. Wikipedia is a powerful platform that can be used to address these issues by making climate change information more accessible to millions in the broader public, including policymakers and other stakeholder groups.

Recognising this, FCFA, together with the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) and Wikimedia South Africa (WMZA), convened [Africa's first Wikipedia edit-a-thon on climate change](#) in Cape Town, South Africa from 6-8 August 2019. The aim was to address the 'Africa Gap' on Wikipedia by increasing the contributions from African researchers on climate change information thereby making African climate information more accessible and representative of the climate research being done. It was also held to build the capacity of African researchers in contributing to Wikipedia.

FCFA area of change 2:

Strengthening scientists' capacities to develop decision-relevant climate information.



FURTHER RESOURCES

[Guide on How to contribute climate change information to Wikipedia](#)

[Video: Using Wikipedia to accelerate climate knowledge: Africa's first edit-a-thon on climate change](#)

LEARNING

Anyone can edit Wikipedia. All you need is a computer, an internet connection and reliable information to share. However, despite striving for neutrality and a diversity of contributors and knowledge, Wikipedia struggles with what it has termed ‘systemic bias’ in terms of who is editing the platform - tending towards specific cultural, gender and social perspectives. There is a lack of content from Africa in particular and the continent has the fewest Wikipedia contributors per capita of any other region. Although there are inherent barriers, such as limited access to resources and technology, in developing countries, there is a need and an opportunity to promote research and knowledge from the ‘Global South’ to start tipping the power imbalances in the geographies of knowledge.

Through this process, it became clear that although there is groundbreaking research coming out of Africa on climate change, much of this research remains within scientific communities. To encourage science communication and a representative distribution of knowledge, innovative opportunities and platforms need to be identified for African scientists to communicate their work in meaningful and accessible ways. Without tools to add value and promote research into use, climate science and research remains an abstract topic that most people cannot access or comprehend. By consistently editing and adding information to Wikipedia, African scientists could be shaping the way people begin to engage with and understand climate change information.

Future Climate for Africa’s Areas of Change are:

- 1. Enhancing scientific knowledge and prediction of African climate and new understanding of the resulting impact on the robustness of future climate change scenarios.
- 2. Strengthening scientists’ capacities to develop decision-relevant climate information.
- 3. Increasing the capacities of users/decision making bodies/institutions to appropriately integrate climate information within medium-term decision-making.
- 4. Approaches that support co-production of decision-relevant climate information and enable channels for on-going dialogue between the providers and users of climate information.
- 5. Identifying social, political, behavioural and economic barriers to the use of climate information in long-term decision-making, working to elicit solutions which support effective integration of climate risks within decision making across scales, sectors and social groups.
- 6. Approaches to climate science research and climate-sensitive risks within medium-term decision making which enable active participation and address the specific concerns of women and marginalised groups.

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