

BURUNDI

Early Warning Early Action

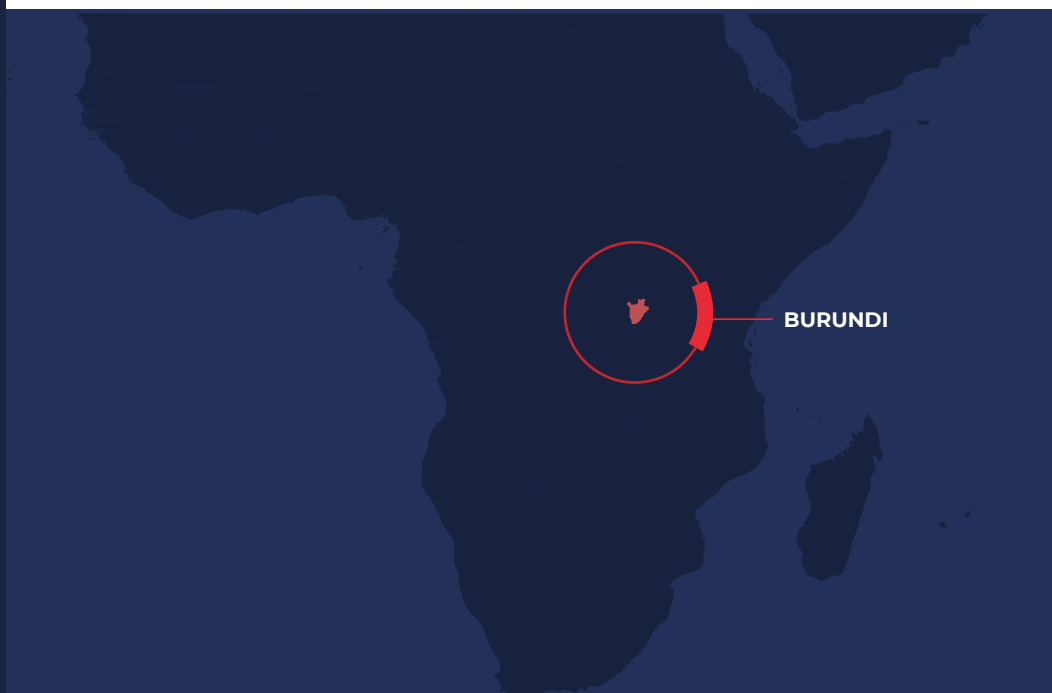
CASE STUDY



Context

Burundi, a landlocked country in Eastern Africa, is facing natural hazards and disasters that are further exacerbated by climate change. In the last ten years, the country has experienced extreme weather and climate events with prolonged droughts in the northern part of the country, increasingly disastrous floods in the Imbo plains, along the shores of Lake Tanganyika and the Rusizi River, and in certain districts of the capital Bujumbura. The country is often hit by severe landslides and rockfalls in the northwestern part, due to its rugged terrain. According to a report of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the year 2021, Burundi is one of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change, with more than 80% of internal displacement caused by natural hazards. Floods and landslides triggered by torrential rains and high winds are causing severe damage to households and essential crops in a country where more than 90% of the population depends on subsistence agriculture.

Enhancing Emergency Alerting Systems to Save Lives – Institutional Capacity Building and Stakeholder Engagement for Early Warning Early Action



Status of Early Warning Systems in Burundi

Burundi currently lacks a comprehensive early warning system based on a legal framework and with clear mandates for warning across various institutions. Instead, the country counts with various initiatives related to the provision and dissemination of forecasts that operate in a fragmented manner, including the direct sharing of forecasts by the Geographic Institute of Burundi (Institut Géographique du Burundi, IGEBU) with various partners, a Burundi Red Cross (Croix Rouge Burundi, CRB) and World Food Program (WFP) Forecast based Financing (FbF) initiative and efforts to establish and maintain community based early warning systems (CBEWS) by CRB. Forecasting information is disseminated through IGEBU, the national service responsible for meteorological monitoring. IGEBU is responsible for seasonal weather forecasts, which are then widely shared by humanitarian and development actors through the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management (Plateforme Nationale pour la Prévention de Risques et Gestion des Catastrophes, PNPRGC).

At the regional and international levels, Burundi aligns its National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2018-2025) with the Sendai Framework's four priorities. It also takes inspiration from the [regional African Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) and the sub-regional strategies of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) and the East African Community (EAC). Burundi is also a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Nationally, important documents related to disaster risk reduction include the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2018-2025) and its two action plans, the National Strategy for Communication on Climate Change Adaptation and Early Warning (2014-2018), the National Emergency Response Plan (*Organisation des Secours/ORSEC* Plan) from 2009, and the National Multi-Hazard Contingency Plan for Preparedness and Emergency Response in Burundi (2020-2022). The PNPRGC serves as the central coordination body for disaster risk reduction and management. At the provincial and communal levels, contingency plans have been developed, but their revision and development are strongly linked to funding and projects implemented in partnership with Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs). At the community level, Community Disaster Risk Reduction Committees develop prioritized risk maps as well as community contingency plans for anticipatory actions.

Different sectors have specific roles in public alert systems in Burundi. The health sector focuses on public alerts related to epidemics and epizootics, while the food security sector

addresses alerts related to nutrition and food security. The IGEBU collects climate data and provides meteorological forecasts for the entire country, issuing public alerts on climate hazards. Short term-term information and forecasts for various timeframes, including seasonal forecasts can be produced independently, however financial, material, and human resource constraints limit IGEBU's capacity to fulfill its mission fully. The public security sector monitors the movement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, while partner NGOs provide technical and financial support to these sectors, including the Burundi Red Cross, IOM, Oxfam, WFP, OCHA, and UNDP. The Burundi Red Cross plays a central role in collecting and disseminating information, especially for rapid response, leveraging its extensive network of volunteers.

The communication and dissemination of alerts varies depending on the type of disaster. Generally, the responsibility for communicating alerts lies with the leading minister of the respective sector. Seasonal information is disseminated three times a year during workshops involving members of the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management, sector ministries, journalists, UN agencies, and NGOs. Currently seasonal information is transmitted via the Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RTNB) and through the facebook page of the IGEBU. Once the seasonal information is disseminated to partners, the Burundi Red Cross plays the role of relaying this information to the communities to learn about it and prepare accordingly, especially to consider substantial AAs given the magnitude of the forecasts.

Burundi Red Cross Engagement for Early Warning Early Action

The Burundi Red Cross has taken proactive measures to promote early warning and early action as part of its strategic focus. The organization has implemented programs and strategies to increase the “culture of risk” in the country. They conduct vulnerability assessments, develop community vulnerability maps, and facilitate discussions on risk mitigation. The Burundi Red Cross’ Strategic Plan 2022–2026 prioritizes early warning and early action as key contributions to disaster risk reduction. This strategic focus ensures that interventions and projects are aligned with the overarching strategic objectives and contribute to the bigger picture.

In 2021, the World Food Program (WFP) began to support a Forecast-based Financing feasibility study through an ECHO funded project. In 2023, this programme is now in its third phase in establishing and institutionalizing AA in Burundi. Supported by WFP and with technical guidance from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center, a simplified Early Action Protocol (EAP) for extreme precipitation was developed and efforts are underway to develop an EAP for droughts as well. The collaboration with WFP included the implementation of Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (EVCA) and institutional capacity building for Burundi Red Cross on early warning early action. Community Disaster Risk Reduction groups were created as part of the process. The anticipatory action efforts together with the strategic priority on early warning motivated the Burundi Red Cross to engage in the IFRC Alert Hub Initiative that aims to expand the use of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) together with actionable messaging globally. This work

contributes to the UN Early Warning for All Initiative (EW4A) to extend multi-hazard early warning systems to everyone by 2027, including the most vulnerable people. The lack of an integrated national early warning system and legal mandates surrounding this in Burundi complicate the implementation of the CAP, however, the engagement of the Burundi Red Cross plays a significant role in establishing foundational systems and fostering collaboration between the National Society, hydromet institutions, and the national platform for disaster risk reduction. Given their ongoing engagement in support of an anticipatory action system, the CRB is well placed to contribute to discussions on strengthening early warning to enable early action, building relationships, and pushing national institutions to take responsibility for public alerting.

To further support and strengthen the stakeholder engagement and coordination with government partners, the Burundi Red Cross supported by the IFRC Kinshasa Cluster Office organized a multi-stakeholder workshop on March 7–9, 2023 in the premises of the Burundi Red Cross training center located in Ngagara, Ntahanga Commune in Bujumbura Mairie. The workshop objectives included

- i) the presentation of an assessment on gaps and opportunities for sustained CAP adoption,
- ii) the development of a roadmap for CAP implementation, and
- iii) the contextualization of key actionable messages at national level to be included in emergency alerts.

This workshop brought together around twenty participants who had been identified as key actors in public emergency alerting. They were

representatives of various institutions such as the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management, the Ministry of the Environment and Agriculture and Livestock, the Ministry of Telecommunications, Information and Media, IGEBU, WFP, academia, the Climate Centre, members of the media, and the staff of the Burundi Red Cross.

The engagement of the Burundi Red Cross to organize the CAP workshop was well-received, with acknowledgment of the Red Cross's credibility and the role they played as conveners. CRB reiterated its ambition to be a champion for early warning in Burundi, supporting efforts to develop a 'culture of risk' through various programs and strategies including information and community awareness campaigns. In their presentation, IGEBU highlighted its ability to produce and share regular weather forecasts and meteorological information using the MyDewetra platform with specialized actors, however it was mentioned that their official role is not to alert the general public. Following this discussion, the workshop served as a starting point for conversations with the National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management, expressing their intention to take over and lead the implementation of an integrated early warning system. The absence of legal structures poses challenges for implementation, however the workshop sparked discussions on next steps to implement a multi-hazard early warning system and highlighted areas that are in need for continued support. There were considerations about the involvement of other organizations, such as the WFP in the early warning landscape, which would require additional coordination and clarity on roles and responsibilities. The opportunity of continued engagement for early warning under the UN Early Warning for All initiative was mentioned, highlighting the ongoing interest in the country.

Linking Forecast-based Financing and CAP for Early Warning

The connection between early warning systems and the anticipatory action of the Forecast-based Financing approach in Burundi is complex and not clearly articulated. While there is a theoretical understanding of acting early and initial coordination structures are established between the Burundi Red Cross, the National Hydrometeorological Service, WFP and others through the FbF engagement, the integration of concepts and systems is challenging.

The potential linkages between FbF and CAP lies in the communication of organizational-level triggers and the dissemination of warnings following the CAP format to increase the speed and reliability of public alerts to enable communities to take action ahead of a disaster. However, further discussions and engagement are needed to establish this connection. The introduction of CAP as a mandatory technical standard of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) globally creates an opportunity to advance conversations on CAP implementation with Burundi Red Cross playing a key role in convening relevant stakeholders, facilitating discussion and ensuring the voice of communities are factored into the approaches to strengthen multi-hazard early warnings in Burundi.

Conclusions

The absence of a functional national early warning system in Burundi hampers the effective dissemination of forecasting information and limits the ability of key actors including the Burundi Red Cross to reach communities at risk with potentially life saving information. Stakeholder collaboration and advocacy are essential for building a legal basis and clarifying roles for public alerting between different actors. The National Platform for Risk Prevention and Disaster Management provides a crucial opportunity to unify otherwise fragmented responsibilities for public alerting following a multi-hazard approach. The involvement of multiple actors, including the Burundi Red Cross, the WMO and UN, is seen as beneficial for advancing early warning systems in Burundi. Especially the UN Early Warning for All Initiative paired with the provision of technical expertise and funding creates opportunities for progress.

Building on its experience in working with WFP and different government ministries in the implementation of an anticipatory action approach and following its goal of becoming a champion for early warning, the Burundi Red Cross plays a vital role in convening stakeholders, advancing plans for CAP implementation for public alerting and for continued efforts to establish a people centered early warning system in-country. The involvement of all key institutions in consultations and workshops organized by Burundi Red Cross on the topic of early warning indicates progress and increased awareness. Regional coordination and collaboration with organizations like ICPAC and IFRC's regional office in Kinshasa are recognized as potential avenues for further progress. Sustainability and coherence are emphasized, with the need for long-term engagement and collaboration among different actors.

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