



CARICOF - The Caribbean Regional Climate Outlook Forum

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Regional Climate Outlook Forums (RCOFs) are viewed as a critical building block in the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The GFCS seeks to extend RCOFs to all vulnerable regions of the world such as the Caribbean, of which the entire population is exposed to water- and heat-related natural hazards. An RCOF is initially intended to identify gaps in information and technical capability; facilitate research cooperation and data exchange within and between regions, and improve coordination within the climate forecasting community. A focus is given on variations in climate conditions on a seasonal timescale. In this view, the relevance of a Caribbean RCOF (CARICOF) is the following: while the seasonality of the climate in the Caribbean has been well documented, major gaps in knowledge exist in terms of the drivers in the shifts of amplitude and phase of seasons (as evidenced from the worst region-wide drought period in recent history during 2009-2010).

To address those gaps, CARICOF has brought together National Weather Services (NWSs) from 18 territories under the coordination of the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH), to produce region-wide, consensus, seasonal climate outlooks since March 2012. These outlooks include tercile rainfall forecasts, sea and air surface temperature forecasts as well as the likely evolution of the drivers of seasonal climate variability in the region, being amongst others the El Niño Southern Oscillation or tropical Atlantic and Caribbean Sea temperatures. Forecasts for both the national-scale forecasts made by the NWSs and CIMH's regional-scale forecast amalgamate output from several forecasting tools. These currently include: (1) statistical models such as Canonical Correlation Analysis run with the Climate Predictability Tool, providing tercile rainfall forecasts at weather station scale; (2) a global outlooks published by the WMO appointed Global Producing Centres (GPCs). Indications are that the current seasonal forecasting system used by CARICOF has produced reliable outlooks than previously available. Nevertheless, through its forum platform, areas for further development are continuously being defined, which are then implemented through efficient information exchanges between and hands-on training of forecasters.

Finally, the disaster research and emergency management communities have shown that effective early warnings of impending hazards need to be complemented by information on the risks actually posed by the hazards and pathways for action. CARICOF is to address this issue by designing the outputs of the seasonal climate outlooks such that they can then effectively feed into an early warning information system of seasonal climate variability related hazards to its constituent countries' and territories major socio-economic sectors.