

Lessons learnt regarding climate service needs for local government in South Africa

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The South African Risk and Vulnerability Atlas (SARVA) is a tool established by the Department of Science and Technology under the Global Change Grand Challenge Programme. It seeks to provide climate change data as well as risk and vulnerability information of key sectors to climate change. SARVA was anticipated to be a technology transfer and communication platform that facilitates the science-policy link. To date the tool has mainly focused on providing national, provincial and local government with information to anticipate, respond and mitigate risks posed by climate change. Target user groups were local government officials and business. Two phases of the project have lapsed and the targeted users especially at local, district and provincial government struggle to use this information for various reasons, which include the fact that this information cannot be applied at local level with certainty. Two user needs assessment workshops were held with local government officials from the Eastern Cape and Limpopo to get a better understanding of challenges in using available climate information, to identify their information and research needs. The workshops were designed to be participatory so as to promote social learning for the researchers and the government official who shared knowledge and experiences from their complex systems. Participants provided insights on what they need which is more than just provision of information or products such as SARVA. Partnership between local government, private sector, and science/academic institutions is also essential to help with the development of science based solutions, the implementation of response projects, as well as developing processes for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of adaptation interventions

Climate information user needs in the Eastern Cape



The workshop was held at the University of Fort Hare with 28 government officials and academics. The participants shared narratives on how they had experienced climate change and the following were identified to be the key climatic hazards that affect them;

*Thunderstorms Tornadoes Flash floods Fires High Temperatures
Sea level rise Sea storms Increased rainfall variability Snow*

Participants highlighted the following to be the things they need the most to respond effectively to climate change;

- Funding for research and implementation of climate change projects
- Improved coordination and learning across sectors
- Commitment from officials
- More local level research that provides evidence based intervention programmes e.g. how to address water challenge in the Eastern Cape
- Creating a simple platform for learning and sharing experiences with all relevant stakeholders e.g. politicians, municipal senior managers and communities
- Build capacity to interpret climate information and apply it in decision making. For many of them projections did not mean much if they were not interpreted and there were no narratives on how this affects their sectors and development plans
- Enforcing climate change related legislation as there are currently no consequences for non compliance
- The need to foster relations between the Eastern Cape based Risk and Vulnerability Science Centres and government departments to ensure research is accessible and meaningful to users; and address the local gaps in knowledge.
- Addressing issues of corruption and complicated institutional procedures

Climate information user needs in Limpopo Province



The University of Limpopo hosted the workshop which was attended by 35 participants from Limpopo's provincial, district and local municipal government and academics. Participants shared experiences on climate change in Limpopo and they identified the following key climatic hazards in the province;

Droughts Strong winds Flash floods Thunderstorms Disease outbreaks e.g. diarrhoea Hailstorm High temperatures Drying Changes in land cover Shifts in rainfall season resulting in late rains Frost Increased health risks area – mosquitos, malaria and other diseases

Participants identified the following to be the things they need the most to respond effectively to climate change in Limpopo;

- Access to funding at national and international level to implement projects
- Improved information sharing at district/sector level especially for rural municipalities with limited resources
- Accessing information that is easy to understand and apply in decision making- 'less jargon'
- Commitment from officials to implement what they learn in workshops and courses
- Political buy in to avoid climate change and environmental falling off the agenda
- Being able to contribute to research and not just have information "dumped at us"
- GIS technical support to help map vulnerable areas in the province
- Improve relations with support partners such as the Risk and Vulnerability Science Centre at the University of Limpopo

