

Policy support for climate adaptation and transformation: capacity building and community resilience in Cape Town

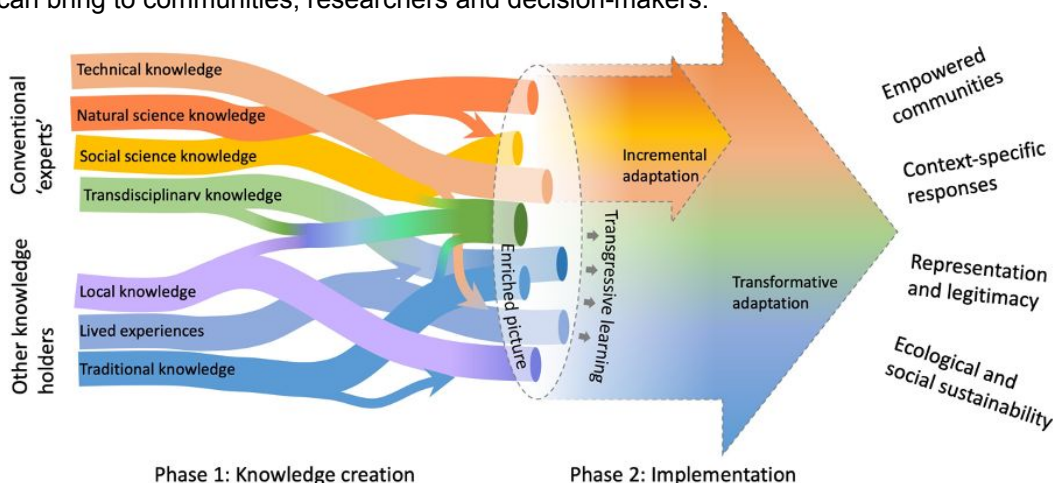
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RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Globally, there are increasing calls for transformative adaptation to climate change. It is seen as key to meeting climate and sustainability goals – such as the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Sustainable Development Goals. In the context of climate change, *transformative adaptation* refers to the reduction of climate risk while simultaneously addressing issues of social justice and the root causes of that risk. Adaptation to climate change often takes place at a local level and there is a need to both build communities' capacity to adapt and to ensure local perspectives are given legitimacy so they can be integrated into higher-level adaptation measures.

The Community Resilience in Cape Town (CoReCT) project in Cape Town engaged local and academic knowledge, in order to understand and address the frustrations of residents in low income areas who have limited access to water and sanitation services. It aimed to build local capacity and experience among communities in their study areas (including Mitchells Plain, Du Noon, Makhaza, Joe Slovo, Green Park and Kraaifontein), drawing especially on the lived experiences of community members in these areas to generate invaluable research insights about these and similar low income areas, and piloting a co-design approach to the powerful data collection tool that they used to collect stories: SenseMaker.

In order to mobilise capacity at a scale needed to meet the climate adaptation challenge, it is important to consider shifting from a top-down transfer of existing knowledge, towards social learning that is locally grounded and draws from a broad set of knowledge systems. This style of learning can inform measures that support transformative adaptation and empowered communities. The CoReCT project demonstrates the benefits that this shift can bring to communities, researchers and decision-makers.



Above | The phases of capacity building for transformative adaptation (adapted from Tengö et al, 2014)

KEY FINDINGS

Transdisciplinary research methods present a promising pedagogical approach to building transformative adaptation capacity.

A transdisciplinary approach, that collaboratively develops knowledge at a community level, can result in outcomes beyond those originally envisioned - such as reciprocal learning and empowerment.

Collaborative knowledge creation, rather than the top-down transfer of existing knowledge, can support a nuanced understanding of local problems to develop context-specific adaptation responses.

Capacity building efforts can better confront inequalities and power dynamics if they are informed by processes that acknowledge and engage with locally relevant and sourced knowledge and knowledge systems.

Full paper:

Ziervogel, G., Enqvist, J., Metelerkamp, L. and van Breda, J. 2021. [Supporting transformative climate adaptation: Community-level capacity building and knowledge co-creation in South Africa](#). *Climate Policy*. (Special issue: Capacity Building)

Keywords:

capacity building; transformative adaptation; transdisciplinary methods; adaptation policy; learning; community-level adaptation; water

CASE STUDY | CAPE TOWN WATER GOVERNANCE

Many residents in Cape Town's low income areas are frustrated by limited access to water and sanitation services. In order to better understand residents' lived experiences and gather information to present to decision-makers, academic researchers partnered with a local community based organisation: the Western Cape Water Caucus (WCWC). Together with academic researchers, the CoReCT project was initiated to assist the WCWC in learning how to conduct a study that supports their work on water related issues in low income areas and enable them to interact more effectively with City of Cape Town (CoCT) representatives. WCWC aimed to help improve conditions in communities, support its members to learn how to do 'citizen science' and produce credible evidence to support their advocacy.

The project used a data collection tool called SenseMaker in order to collect short narratives that describe experiences and problems. WCWC members and researchers worked together to design an appropriate SenseMaker approach for the purpose of understanding water-related issues in Cape Town neighbourhoods.

Using a narrative-based approach enabled the facilitation of knowledge creation and other emergent outcomes. It took place within a broader action learning process, which in itself forms part of the knowledge creation phase of capacity building. The CoReCT project saw co-produced knowledge emerging as a platform for an empathetic understanding of one another's challenges, which shifted away from blaming and finger pointing and towards empowering individuals and organisations to better adapt to climate risk and water stress.

"We've shifted from not wanting to work with the CoCT to thinking that it's best to work with the City, because being rebellious doesn't help us." WCWC member

"I actually came out of [the workshop] on a high. It was such a good encounter, such a positive encounter." CoCT Official

"In the past we had heard stories but they weren't documented. But now we have them documented so can use them to support our advocacy." WCWC member

Above | SenseMaker data collection tool, co-designed to be easily accessible

311 responses were collected from across Cape Town. A number of workshops and sessions were then used to return stories and present findings to the studied communities and CoCT officials. Activists and academics collaborated to help share the qualitative stories as well as quantitative evidence of themes that emerged across the sample. Tensions did occur between the two different types of knowledge and levels of interpretation of the data, so translating the insights into practice was not always easy. However, learning how to work with this tension is important for transdisciplinary work that aims to support collective adaptive capacity. The process strengthened relational competency between the CoCT and WCWC, and the WCWC have subsequently been brought into city-wide policy and planning activities.



Above | Number of respondents interviewed in Cape Town neighbourhoods
Below | Constructive dialogue between WCWC and CoCT emerged from a workshop that included role playing common problems, backed up by hard numbers and data



UNPACKING THE RESEARCH



Above | Contrasting Cape Town neighbourhoods mean that the CoCT must manage water in a way that matches the lived realities of all of the city's residents

The findings of the CoReCT project have broad implications and suggest that community-level capacity building can empower individuals and organisations to better adapt to climate risk and water stress. Furthermore, they suggest that targeted policy support could enable more widespread, transformative, community-level capacity building. The learning processes in this Cape Town case study built trust and legitimacy for stakeholders, which in turn helped to prevent conflict arising from potentially controversial insights and supported their inclusion at future higher-level discussions. The WCWC has been empowered as a voice representing local communities, and has helped to generate new information and understanding about everyday issues. This knowledge has helped to guide discussions between WCWC, the CoCT and other community organisations.

A goal of the next phase of UNFCCC capacity building support is to provide more long-term support for locally-owned processes such as the CoReCT project. Focusing on capacity building during the knowledge creation phase of adaptation gives transformative adaptation a far greater chance of success. Learning processes are themselves a form of adaptive behaviour, and a sustained process of collaborative learning can support a locally relevant responses. Furthermore, collaborative learning engagements are seen to result in anticipated outcomes as well as providing unexpected lessons and interpersonal relationships that develop during the process.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

- In order to address equity and justice issues as well as climate risk, adaptation policy needs to better support transformative adaptation.
- Adaptation policy for capacity building would benefit from a broader understanding of governance that includes local participation and values bottom-up contributions.
- Co-creating knowledge helps to legitimize knowledge of marginalized stakeholders and sharing this knowledge can gain them a 'seat at the table' for policy level discussions to integrate their perspectives into higher-level adaptation measures.

FURTHER READING

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