

Workshop | Equitable urban climate adaptation

Noordhoek, South Africa | 19-20 September 2022



Photo | Participants presenting their drawn responses to the questions around understanding each other's worlds from their group

INTRODUCTION

Much of the research agenda that exists in the urban climate resilience and adaptation space has historically been set by the global north, with a knowledge gap of the African perspective. The topic of how equity and justice might be better addressed in resilience and adaptation in cities is an emerging question, that requires an African response. In order to address this gap, a workshop was convened with 25 participants from academia, NGO and NPO sector, activist communities and government. The purpose was to co-produce critical questions and to strengthen networks among those working in the African academic and practitioner space on equitable urban adaptation.

African cities are a particularly important place to focus climate adaptation given the concentration of people and growth in cities. Yet, African cities have been slow to develop climate adaptation and mitigation policies and practice, for numerous reasons. Although equity and justice are being fought for internationally and locally, it is often hard to find examples of adaptation action that has met the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups on the ground.

Moving climate adaptation equity issues into sharper focus for practitioners, researchers, civil society and officials is vital if we are to make progress on designing urban interventions that really meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

WORKSHOP AIM

To foster collaborative thinking to feed into conceptualising and enacting what equitable urban adaptation might look like in African cities

OBJECTIVES

To produce a series of questions and priorities that might inform work on equitable urban adaptation with a focus on African cities

To explore the intersecting space between researchers and practitioners to establish where interests overlap and what specific topics are a priority across the knowledge-practice continuum

To identify areas of initial engagement that could foster equitable climate adaptation

TAKING THE EQUITABLE AGENDA FORWARDS

“Although much of the just transitions work was initially focused on mitigation, it is clear that it needs to include an adaptation focus as well. For adaptation to be just, it must meet the needs of the most marginalised groups.”

Gina Ziervogel

The participants discussed what it means for climate adaptation to be equitable, with a focus on “carrying the burden together”. *Together* refers to working across boundaries, sitting and planning together, and listening to one another. However, this is not a straightforward process. We need to consider how people can come together when some of them will feel the impacts of climate change more strongly than others at the same table. There are those who work in this field and return to live in their safe spaces, and those who return to unsafe lifestyle conditions after work.



Photo | Collection of posters with drawn responses to the questions around understanding each other's worlds

How do we ensure we share the burden equitably and leave no one behind?

A series of questions asked to participants helps to frame some of the issues and highlight critical areas that need to be better understood:

WHO IS MOST AT RISK TO CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS IN THE CITIES WHERE YOU LIVE AND WORK?

Those most at risk reside in informal settlements, which are often built on wetlands with greater flood risk and limited or no public services. One participant challenged the idea that informal settlements are homogenous both in South Africa and across other African cities, which highlighted the importance of defining informal settlements and recognising their diversity.

Beyond spatial vulnerability, those most at risk in cities include marginalised populations based on identity and socio-economic circumstances, including women, the elderly, children, the unemployed, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups based on sexuality, race, ethnicity, and immigration.

WHAT PARTS OF THE CITY HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN?

Participants differentiated between physical and institutional divides. There are areas that have been forgotten due to lack of access to infrastructure, but also those forgotten due to more intangible divides such as the way people live.

An example provided was the loss of indigenous knowledge, and specifically knowledge about nature, which is sometimes oral and unwritten and lost due to migration, over time or insufficient effort to preserve these knowledge forms.

WHAT DOES ADAPTATION OR RESILIENCE LOOK LIKE IN THE AREAS WHERE YOU WORK?

Adaptation and resilience is often not inherently positive as many communities adapt to floods for example as a form of survival. These communities rebuild and continue showing up at work, until the next impact, which requires rebuilding again to continue surviving, not with the aim of preventing future harms.

To create positive resilience, participants felt it is necessary for some people and groups to do and give more so that everyone gets a share of benefits. Here, procedural and recognitional justice are vital to ensure that everyone is at the decision-making table and part of the adaptation process and its outcomes.

EXAMPLES OF HOW EQUITY HAS BEEN CONSIDERED OR UNDERMINED IN URBAN ADAPTATION IN DIFFERENT AFRICAN CITIES



Participants were part of a panel discussion to talk about examples from their work about equity in urban climate adaptation.

The examples below are all from work in African cities.

Photo | Panel discussion focusing on equity issues in urban adaptation in cities in Mexico, South Africa, Angola, and Zambia

SOUTH AFRICA

WHO? South African National government official

EXAMPLE? Unbalanced climate finance favours mitigation, due to the potential of revenue down the line, over adaptation. It is usually those with greater capacity who are able to answer calls for proposals and receive funding, consequently overlooking more vulnerable groups with less capacity. International donors often fund projects with short timelines, making it difficult to take the time to identify, build relationships with, and co-create adaptation projects with the most vulnerable populations.

ANGOLA

WHO? Zimbabwean researcher, based in UK

EXAMPLE? The youth in Lobito and Luanda, Angola that have been leveraging social media to fight for the rehabilitation of damaged mangrove ecosystems in their communities. Through social media campaigns, these youth groups have created awareness and put pressure on local authorities to rehabilitate their natural environments. They found that they could foster greater support from their communities by focusing not only on the environmental issues, but by showing how healthy ecosystems could help the community thrive, for example with access to clean water and flourishing fish habitats.

ZAMBIA

WHO? Researcher, from Lusaka, Zambia

EXAMPLE? An adaptation project that aimed to address water vulnerability in Lusaka, Zambia by improving drainage systems and protecting groundwater in both high income areas, as well as informal settlements. While there was some effort at consultations during the project, it lacked full involvement in the decision making process with the affected communities, which reduced its impact. High-risk flood areas were neglected because of a fear to deal with the most challenging spaces.

SOUTH AFRICA

WHO? Researcher, from Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa

EXAMPLE? A project involving the rehabilitation of rivers and water catchments in Durban helped to reduce the impact of the recent devastating floods in the area. This showed the progress made including how the adaptation projects around the rivers have provided opportunities for different governance forms, groups of people and communities to collaborate together. It also highlighted remaining gaps.

OCEAN VIEW ORGANIC FARMERS VISIT



Photo | The Kos Gangsters giving a tour of the farm to the workshop participants, talking about their farming practices, the work they do for the community and the challenges they face

A group visit to the women-led Ocean View Organic Farmers complemented the workshop sessions and grounded the workshop discussions in a local lived reality. The women urban farmers, who call themselves the Kos Gangsters, took participants on a tour of their farm, highlighting the transformative ways they were building resilience within their community. They also highlight the ongoing challenges that include theft of their produce and other infrastructure, expenses to keep up their farming practices and a lack of volunteers from the community due to the limited financial gains.

Resilience in the community is strengthened by the work opportunity the farm provides and through its organic practices which contribute to feeding schemes in the community. The farm played, and continues to play, a crucial role in supporting those in need since the COVID-19 pandemic by donating food to local soup kitchens and setting up vegetable patches at the school (from which they rent their land) and in planter boxes they have set up outside the homes of the elderly in the community.

IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES FOR A JUST URBAN TRANSITION

Through an in-depth process on day two, participants divided into breakout groups and put forward their most important questions for understanding and responding to urban climate adaptation equitably. Emerging from this were nine themes that participants felt need to be addressed to work towards more equitable urban climate adaptation (see box on the right).

The richness of these themes and the questions developed around them, illustrates the experience and insight from workshop participants. They provide a useful set of questions to help inform National governments and other actors, when thinking through their adaptation priorities and reflecting on the extent to which they currently are addressing equity and justice as part of their urban adaptation efforts.

PRIORITY THEMES THAT EMERGED AS IMPORTANT FOCI FOR EQUITABLE URBAN ADAPTATION

Governance and
leadership

Inclusivity and
participation

Quality of relationships

Human rights

Finance

Structural considerations

Context and reality

Knowledge brokers

Knowledge and
information

KEY OUTCOMES

During a feedback session, individuals were asked which of the nine themes they would like to discuss, with four groups emerging around these themes: structural considerations, context and reality, quality of relationships, and knowledge brokers.

Each group was asked to discuss and answer the following questions:

1. What priority actions can you take in response to these question(s)?
2. Where will support from others be needed?
3. What existing opportunities are there for addressing this question/issue?
4. What are the next steps (process details and/or knowledge outputs)

STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

QUESTIONS? How do we reframe urban climate adaptation to tackle deep-seeded structural issues that acknowledge historical injustice and trauma? How can we make climate adaptation programmes more responsive to structural economic and social issues, and support sustainable livelihoods?

DISCUSSION | The need to map existing adaptation actions to highlight what groups are being targeted, by who, and in which sector. This can help reveal gaps. Community engagement in adaptation implementation and climate assemblies need to go beyond the most obvious representation, in order to uncover the invisible stakeholders. Adaptation interventions need to create time and space to acknowledge and process historical injustice and past/present trauma. They must appreciate the diversity of vulnerability within groups and include socio-economic empowerment outcomes.

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

QUESTIONS? How can state and non-state actors collaborate (knowledge and action) in productive ways that build equity? How can organisations bridge governments, private sector and communities effectively across different scales and timeframes? How can we address the mistrust and barriers through the opportunities for spatial design in climate adaptation?

DISCUSSION | There is a need to push for greater transparency in relationships. Aim to prioritise finding consensus through the process. The emphasis should be on listening and ensuring a common understanding of the shared burden. There is a need to capacitate local representatives to empower the voices of marginalised groups.

CONTEXT AND REALITY

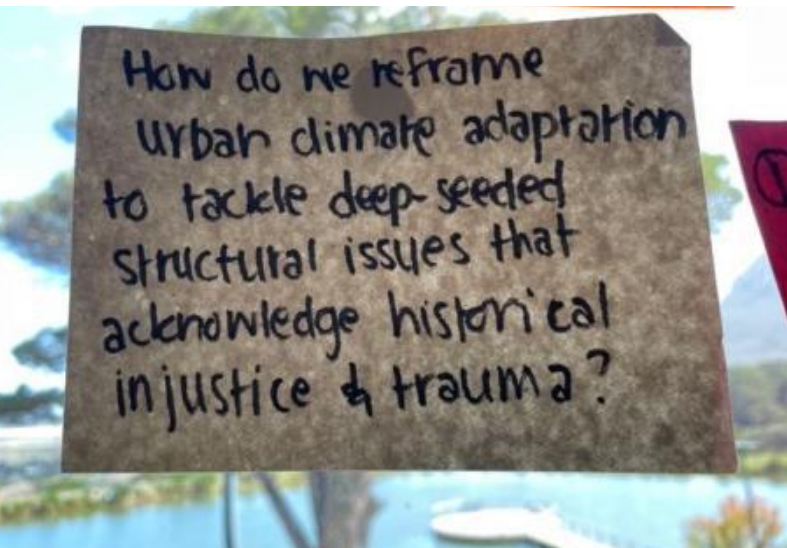
QUESTIONS? How can we centre socio-economic issues in climate action? How do we ensure that climate adaptation is informed by the everyday realities on the ground? How can the basics of development be done in more equitable ways?

DISCUSSION | Researchers do not always acknowledge the context and diversity of communities. There is a need to develop intersectional methodologies for risk/vulnerability assessments. There is also a need to recognise and pay attention to the specific experiences of people and be careful of narratives which homogenise groups of people. Research-led focus groups with the most vulnerable groups can cause more harm than good. It would help to identify existing organisations which work with vulnerable groups, have access to those groups, and can map their diversity in a respectful and sensitive manner.

KNOWLEDGE BROKERS

QUESTIONS? How do we develop, resource and capacitate intermediaries/knowledge brokers to ethically collect and share knowledge of actors? How can we learn better together to ensure that learning translates into knowledge and action that provides equitable and context-based outcomes?

DISCUSSION | There is a need to better coordinate those engaged in knowledge brokering and ensure they come to the table as collaborators and not competitors. Knowledge brokers should be an inclusive network of intermediaries. There is a need to find ways to better articulate the value of knowledge brokers and ensure resources and funding for knowledge brokering activities. There is a need to provide tangible examples and/or stories of knowledge brokers contributing to equitable urban climate adaptation



Photos | The key priority questions for equitable urban climate adaptation grouped together in themes

CONCLUSION

Within African cities, the development focus has tended to be on economic growth and supporting the status quo at the expense of marginal groups who get pushed further to the margins - this despite expanding informal settlements where much innovation is occurring. If African nations can ensure that they are considering and addressing the questions raised around the nine themes identified in this workshop, they can make progress towards a more equitable urban adaptation and a just urban transition. It will likely be challenging, as entrenched interests will need to be shifted. However, the price of not doing this and not meeting the needs of the most marginalised groups will be significant – both from direct climate impacts and from indirect impacts on the rest of society.

This workshop brought together practitioners and academics to deepen thinking about what equitable urban adaptation could look like in southern Africa. The aim was to co-produce critical questions and strengthen networks among those working on equitable urban adaptation in this region. It is hoped that the questions will inform and shape collaborative and meaningful research and action from now on. To help achieve that, in the final session of the workshop, academics and practitioners were separated into their communities of practice to discuss how to take the workshop’s learnings and outcomes forward within their own work and through collaborations across their differing affiliations.

Poem | Part of a poem by Ian McCullum, resident poet, presented at the workshop's close and drawing on the groups' final sharing

What I would most like to say... today

I am the youngest here
 I am the messenger
 I come away with deep reflections
 Inspired, frustrated ... hopeful
 That we are moving forward
 *

A just adaptation for dignified survival?

Human rights is everything?
 What does it all mean?
 Some call the shots and some get shot
 Some people were missing today
 *

Our greatest hope is in community ...
 There is nothing for them, or us, without it.
 *

What an opportunity for academia to act

To reconnect and to participate
 With the more familiar
 With the unknown ... and with each other.

Together we ask richer questions,
 Together we hear many stories.

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