IMPROVING THE LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Between the Private Sector (IPPs), the Public Sector and Civil Society around Climate Change Actions

DEMOCRACY WORKS FOUNDATION

KD STRATEGIES
CREATE • SUSTAIN • TRANSFORM

Co-funded by the European Union

INSPIRE
Initiative for Social Performance in Renewable Energy

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01 Introduction

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Who's Who

Democracy Works Foundation

Democracy Works Foundation (DWF) is a southern African non-profit company focused on democracy development in the region. With headquarters in South Africa, DWF works through its country offices to provide tools to develop resilient democracies.

As an independent foundation, we build and promote inclusive, equitable and sustainable consensus democracies. We do so by providing tools, platforms and content to strengthen democrats, democratic culture and democracy institutions.

Initiative for Social Performance in Renewable Energy

The Initiative for Social Performance in Renewable Energy (INSPIRE) is a female-led, practitioner-driven organisation based in South Africa, committed to ensuring that renewable energy deployment delivers equitable and transformative socio-economic benefits for host communities.

With a focus on professionalising social performance, building trusted relationships, and fostering collaboration, INSPIRE plays a vital role in advancing South Africa's Just Energy Transition and influencing global renewable energy practices.

INSPIRE aims to advance the field of social performance in South Africa's renewable energy sector, with the wider goal of becoming a leading platform across the African continent and internationally.

KD Strategies

KD STRATEGIES was built to support those that are trying to revolutionise the system – even if it's just by complying with regulations built on social consciousness locally – and those who are trying to disrupt the system altogether by redefining what it means to do business.

We exist to catalyse those project that accelerate the pace towards systemic changes in the socio-economic landscape of the global economy.

1.2
About Fostering Inclusive Growth Through Climate Champions (FIGCCC) 2019-2024

Co-funded by the European Union and DWF, this project aims to create synergies between local governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to address climate change collaboratively.

Since March 2019 FIGCCC has worked with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local governments from 4 municipalities in the Northern and Western Cape Provinces. The Climate Justice Action Network is a group of CSOs that formed as a result of the project, who were previously not engaged in climate or environment-related work. Their mission is to advocate for the constituencies they represent to be considered in climate change related decision-making. The project has also unpacked municipal climate change related planning mandates with municipalities. In the Witzenberg municipality, this resulted in the co-creation of climate change Needs Assessments and Response Plans.

Working with INSPIRE and its partners KD Strategies, the final phase of the work has aimed to deepen the understanding of how public and private development priorities can be integrated with community-driven climate action and to bring Independent Power Producers into the conversation.

As key climate change mitigation agents, their social economic development spend incentives overlap with many key development objectives of local government and the Civil Society sector. CSOs, who are often providing essential services that are meant to be provided by sub-national government, are already adapting and building resilience to a changing climate. Mitigation-related funding being used to support community-driven climate adaptation and resilience building is in line with the Just Transition. By supporting CSOs to continue their essential work of protecting the rights of people living in the most vulnerable sectors of communities in a changing climate is a key method South Africa has to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition away from fossil fuels.

The potential for climate change to direct new pathways to economic and social development requires working partnerships across the public, private and community sectors. Achieving greater legitimacy, long term sustainability, and system changes need to involve Civil Society Organisations – who are directly working on addressing South Africa's key developmental challenges – in climate change-related planning and resource allocation processes within the private and public sectors

Section Two

02

Research Context and Approach

Developed under the FIGCCC Programme and working with Democracy Works Foundation and INSPIRE, KDS has explored the ways of improving the levels of engagement and coordination between the private sector (IPPs), the public sector and civil society regarding climate change actions.

2.1 Methodology

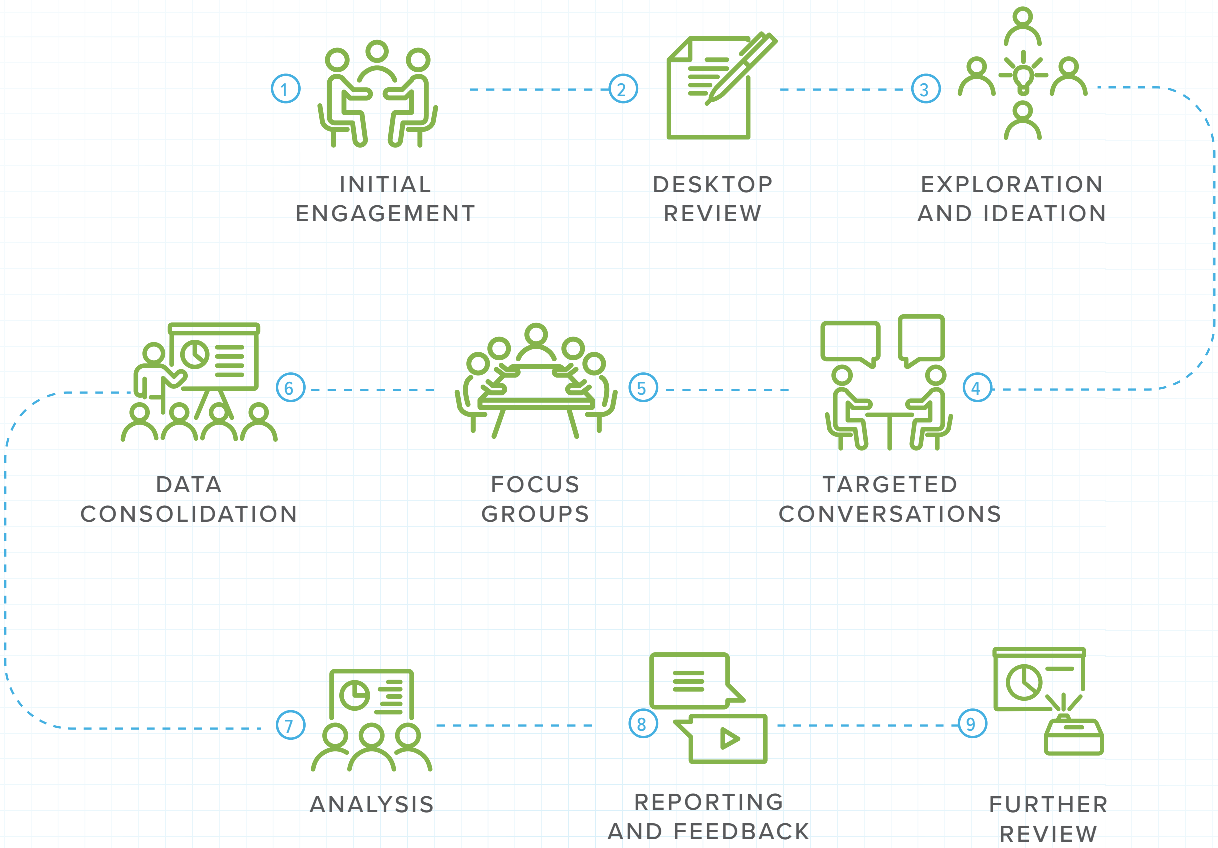


Figure 1: Project Approach and Methodology

Question 1:

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The primary research objective of this area of work is to **identify how the development priorities of the private sector, public sector, and civil society can be integrated with a specific focus on climate change actions.**

In exploring this objective, several sub-elements emerged:

1. Understanding the current priorities and goals of each sector concerning climate change,
2. Exploring the challenges and opportunities for collaboration and
3. Identifying existing models or case studies of successful multi-sectoral integration in climate action.

Question 2:

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

The primary research objective of this area of work is to **identify barriers and opportunities for improving engagement and coordination between the private sector, public sector, and civil society on climate change actions.**

In exploring this objective, several sub-elements emerged:

1. Analysing the current levels of engagement and coordination,
2. Identifying successful case studies or models of collaboration,
3. Understanding the motivations, interests, and limitations of each sector,
4. Providing actionable recommendations for enhancing collaboration and
5. Developing actionable recommendations for fostering collaboration among these sectors.

KEY REVIEW AREAS INCLUDED:

- The socio-economic and environmental profiles of the target research areas, namely, the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Local Municipalities
- Current climate change action in the target research areas
- Development priorities of the private sector, the public sector, and civil society
- Existing policies and regulations that guide climate actions, including climate change policy and sustainability frameworks
- Frameworks for public-private partnerships in environmental initiatives
- The role of civil society in influencing climate change policy and action
- Barriers to engagement between these sectors

The review revealed gaps in the current research and provided a foundation for the study's theoretical framework.

Following this theoretical review, the hypotheses below were also explored with participants and focus groups:

- Climate change and climate change action are not consistently understood.
- Conflicting priorities hinder collaboration across sectors but are potentially aligned by shared goals such as sustainability and climate resilience.
- Lack of trust is a key hindrance and significant barrier to coordination between sectors.
- The unintended consequences of regulatory systems hinder effective climate change action.
- Communication mechanisms are not resulting in effective two-way communication.

2.2 Stakeholders

Efforts focused on engaging three categories of stakeholders:

PRIVATE SECTOR	Independent power producers operating within the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Municipalities
PUBLIC SECTOR	National Departments Provincial Departments in the Western Cape and Northern Cape The administration and political structures within the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Municipalities Other public sector entities such as the South African Weather Service, Western Cape Tourism, Trade, and Investment Promotion Agency (WESGRO) and Cape Nature
CIVIL SOCIETY	Civil society groups within the identified municipal areas including Community Policing Forums; NPOs; Farmer's Associations and Religious Organisations Civil society groups with a climate action focus

Table 1: Categories of Stakeholders

2.3 How was the Research conducted?

Targeted Conversations and Focus Groups

The research was conducted primarily through qualitative means, specifically targeted interviews with 25 willing stakeholders and a series of focus groups in each research area between June and September 2024. Focus Groups 1 and 2 were validated by an additional roundtable in each municipality (Focus Group 3).

Data Consolidation and Analysis

This data was consolidated and analysed via research workshops to produce findings.

2.3
The Study Area

The study area comprises two adjacent municipal areas: the Witzenberg Local Municipality and the Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality, as shown in Figure 2.

The Witzenberg Local Municipality is in the Western Cape, and the Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality is in the Northern Cape.

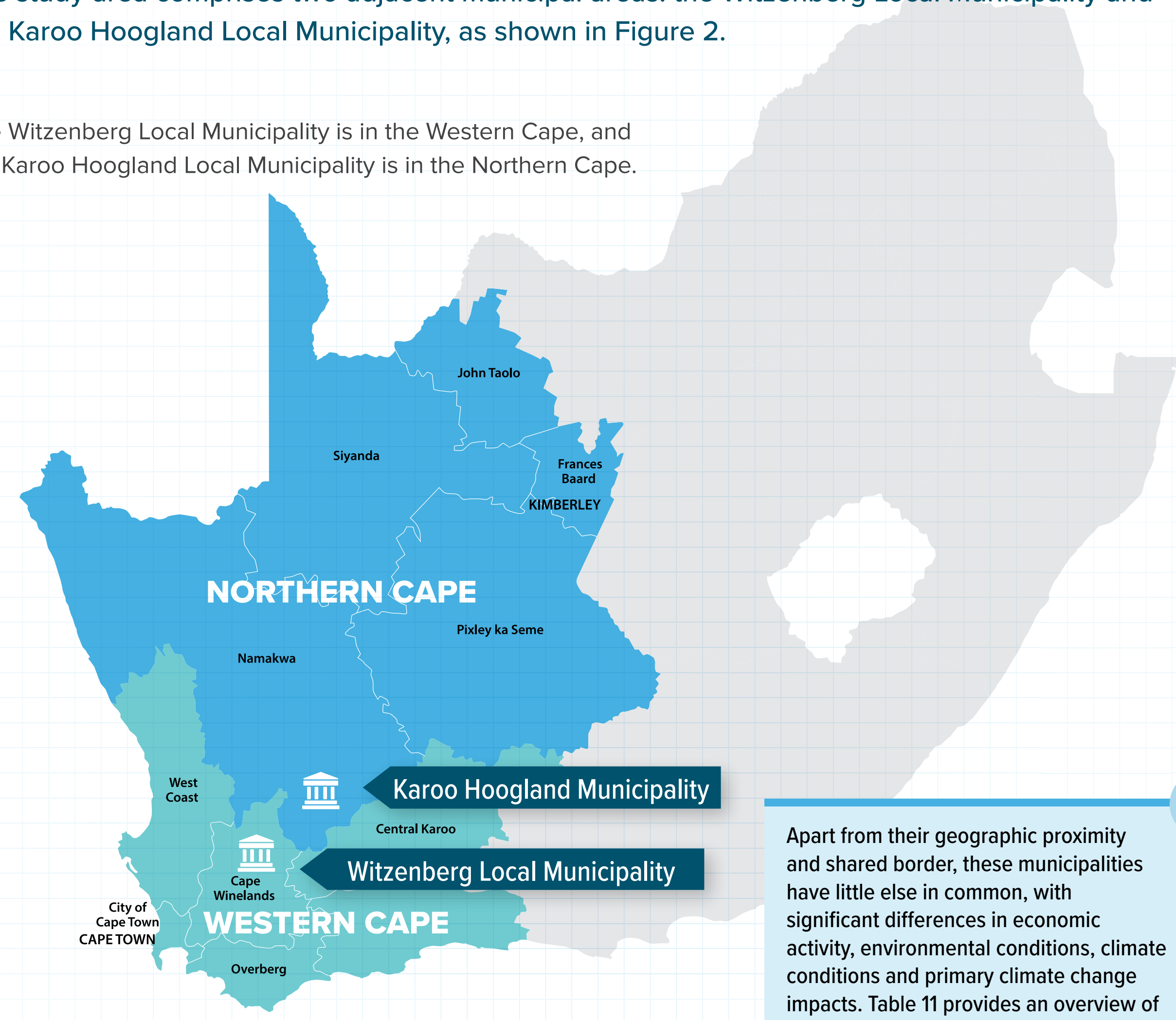


Figure 2: Map showing the Study Area

Apart from their geographic proximity and shared border, these municipalities have little else in common, with significant differences in economic activity, environmental conditions, climate conditions and primary climate change impacts. Table 11 provides an overview of the two study areas.

	WITZENBERG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY	KAROO HOOGLAND MUNICIPALITY
Province	Western Cape	Northern Cape
District	Cape Winelands	Namakwa
Size	10 753 km2	29 423 km2
Primary Economic Activity	Commercial agriculture (fruit)	Agriculture (livestock), tourism
Renewable Energy Development Zone Allocation	None	Komsberg REDZ
Environmental Conditions	• Diverse topography • Valleys flanked by mountain range • Cape floristic region • Water catchment advantage	• Poor soil quality, sparse vegetation • High altitude • Nama-Karoo biome • Scarce water availability
Climate/Weather Conditions	• Micro-climatic conditions • Hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters	• Arid to semi-arid climate, with very low annual rainfall • Summer rainfall, and dry for most of the year
Primary Climate Change Impact	• Drought • Flooding	• Desertification

Table 2: Overview of Study Area

Section Three

03

Impacts of Climate Change in the Study Area

3.1
Witzenberg Local Municipality

Climate change in the Witzenberg Local Municipality is no longer a theoretical eventuality as this municipality has been experiencing shifts in climatic conditions, seasonal weather patterns and environmental conditions over the past few years.

Many of these patterns mimic the aggregated challenges predicted over a decade ago[1] and those faced in the rest of the province (country and continent) presently, including increased extreme weather events, changing rainfall patterns, and rising temperatures.[2]

Interestingly, the Witzenberg Local Municipality faces increasing risks of drought and flooding due to climate change's impacts, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Changing weather patterns, specifically reduced rainfall, will likely shift the Witzenberg Local Municipality's climatic conditions, severely impacting the area's social and economic conditions.[3] Climate studies indicate that the winter rainy season in the Western Cape is shortening, with less overall rainfall during critical agricultural periods.[4]

The reduced rainfall threatens water supplies and agricultural productivity, leading to prolonged droughts. Farmers, reliant on seasonal rains, face crop failures and dwindling water resources for irrigation.[5]

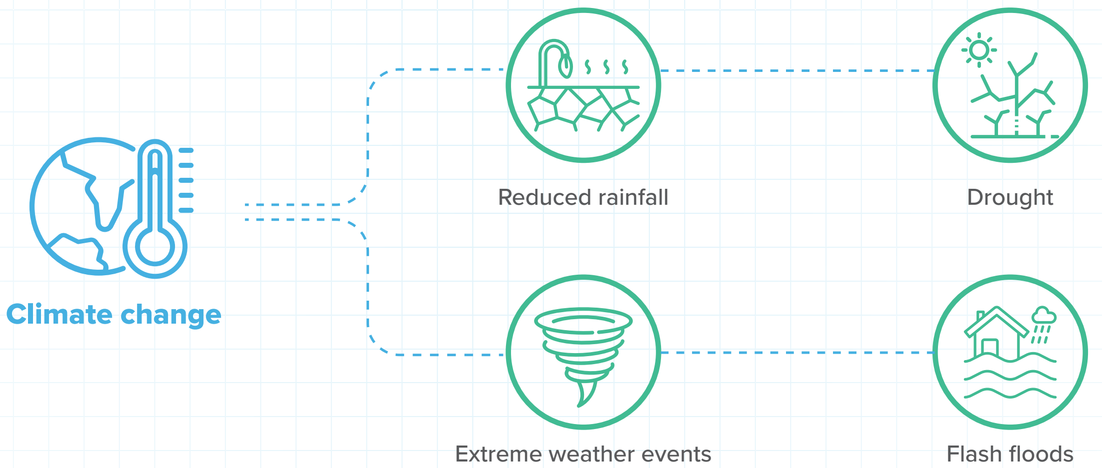


Figure 3: Drought and Flash Floods as a direct result of climate change in the Witzenberg Municipality

[1] Morishima, W., & Akasaka, I. (2010). Seasonal trends of rainfall and surface temperature over southern Africa. Journal of Geography and Climate Studies, 40, 67–76. https://doi.org/10.14989/96297

[2] Dunning, C. M., Black, E., & Allan, R. (2018). Later wet seasons with more intense rainfall over Africa under future climate change. Journal of Climate, 31(23), 9719–9738. https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-18-0102.1

[3] Interviews – South African Weather Service, Witzenberg Municipality.

[4] du Plessis, J A, & Schloms, B. (2017). An investigation into the evidence of seasonal rainfall pattern shifts in the Western Cape, South Africa. Journal of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering, 59(4), 47-55. https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-8775/2017/v59n4a5

[5] De Clercq, W. P., de Witt, M., & Laker, G. (2021). Challenges and opportunities for water conservation in irrigated agriculture in South Africa. South African Journal of Plant and Soil, 38(3), 238–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/02571862.2021.1891475.

While drought conditions are noted as a sustaining climate change risk in the Witzenberg Municipality over the long term, an immediate and persistent challenge has been flash flooding caused by the increased frequency of extreme weather events.

Community-based organizations and municipal stakeholders indicate that recent flooding caused by extreme rain and snowfall (and subsequent melting) resulted in the displacement of households and the interruption of educational activities because schools were used for emergency accommodation.[6]

The flooding risks posed by periods of intense rainfall are intensified by ineffective waste management that contributes to blockages in stormwater drainage systems.[7]

The existing drainage and stormwater management infrastructure in many areas of Witzenberg is inadequate to cope with the increasingly severe rainfall events. Insufficient investment in these systems leaves communities vulnerable to floods, with roads, bridges, and homes at risk of damage during storm surges.[8] [9]

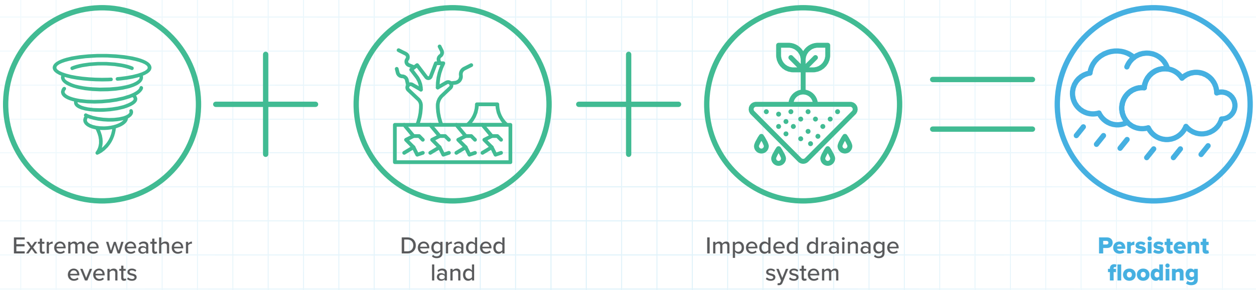


Figure 4: Persistent flooding as a cumulative result of climate change and other factors in the Witzenberg Municipality

This municipality's need for disaster management and emergency response has increased over the past 4–5 years, specifically due to extreme weather and flooding. Extreme weather events resulted in prolonged interruptions to essential services, including electricity supply, communication networks, and water distribution, impacting all households in this municipality. Those living in poverty, particularly those living in informal households, were disproportionately impacted; many were displaced.[9]

[6] Interviews – Witzenberg CSOs and Municipality.

[7] Dibaba, Wakjira Takala. (2018). A review of sustainability of urban drainage system: Traits and consequences. Journal of Sedimentary Environments, 3(3), 131–137. https://doi.org/10.12957/jse.2018.37825.

[8] Focus Group 2 – Witzenberg.

[9] Focus Group 1 – Witzenberg.

3.2 Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality

Climate change is profoundly impacting the Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality, with desertification, dust pollution, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and extreme weather events posing significant challenges for the region's environment, economy, and communities.

The loss of biodiversity due to desertification is particularly concerning because it threatens the resilience of local ecosystems and reduces the region's ability to recover from environmental shocks.[10]

These climate-related impacts threaten the sustainability of local ecosystems, agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and the health and livelihoods of communities in the region.

Desertification is one of the most pressing concerns in the Karoo Hoogland region, and it has severe consequences for both the environment and biodiversity. Prolonged droughts and reduced rainfall are accelerating land degradation, leading to the loss of plant cover and ecosystems. As desertification intensifies, plant species that maintain soil diversity and provide food for herbivores are disappearing, threatening the agricultural capacity of the land and reducing the habitat for various wildlife species.[11]

The Karoo region is home to a range of unique and endemic species that rely on the delicate balance of its semi-arid ecosystem. However, as the land becomes increasingly arid, these species face habitat loss and, in some cases, extinction.[12] The reduced vegetation cover leads to a decline in food availability for herbivores, affecting predator populations. In addition, the shrinking plant biodiversity weakens the region's ability to support pollinators, essential for maintaining the overall health of ecosystems.

As desertification progresses, the region's biodiversity is severely compromised, which has long-term implications for ecosystem resilience and the region's natural heritage.[13]

Closely linked to desertification is the issue of dust pollution. Land degradation through the loss of vegetation cover and soil erosion creates ideal conditions for dust storms, which are becoming increasingly frequent in arid and semi-arid regions. In the Karoo Hoogland, strong winds lift loose soil particles from the dry, barren land, resulting in severe dust storms that degrade air quality. CBOs and the local municipality indicate that the frequency and severity of dust storms have increased in recent years.[14]

Dust pollution poses a significant health risk, particularly for those with respiratory conditions, thus adding pressure to the local healthcare services.

Local healthcare providers in the Karoo Hoogland Municipality note an increasing number of respiratory conditions among young people in the community, which has resulted in prolonged absences from school for many children in the basic education system, thus impeding their academic progress. In addition, it has prevented many young adults from entering the workforce and participating in the employment opportunities created by the (renewable energy) construction activities. Individuals with respiratory conditions cannot pass the medical assessments required to take advantage of these opportunities.[15]

[10] Interview – SANBI.

[11] Blanckenberg, M.C. (2021). The effects of land use change, from small livestock farming to protected area, on vegetation and mammal communities in the SKA region of the Karoo, South Africa. Faculty of Science, Department of Biological Sciences. http://hdl.handle.net/11427/35576.

[12] Skowno, A. L., Jewitt, D., & Slingsby, J. A. (2021). Rates and patterns of habitat loss across South Africa's vegetation biomes. South African Journal of Science, 117(1/2), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2021/8182.

[13] González-Robles, A., Salido, T., Manzaneda, A. J., Valera, F., & Rey, P. J. (2020). Habitat loss and degradation due to farming intensification modify the floral visitor assemblages of a semiarid keystone shrub. Ecological Entomology, 45(6), 1476–1489. https://doi.org/10.1111/een.12933.

[14] Focus Group 1 – Sutherland.

[15] Focus Group 2 – Sutherland.

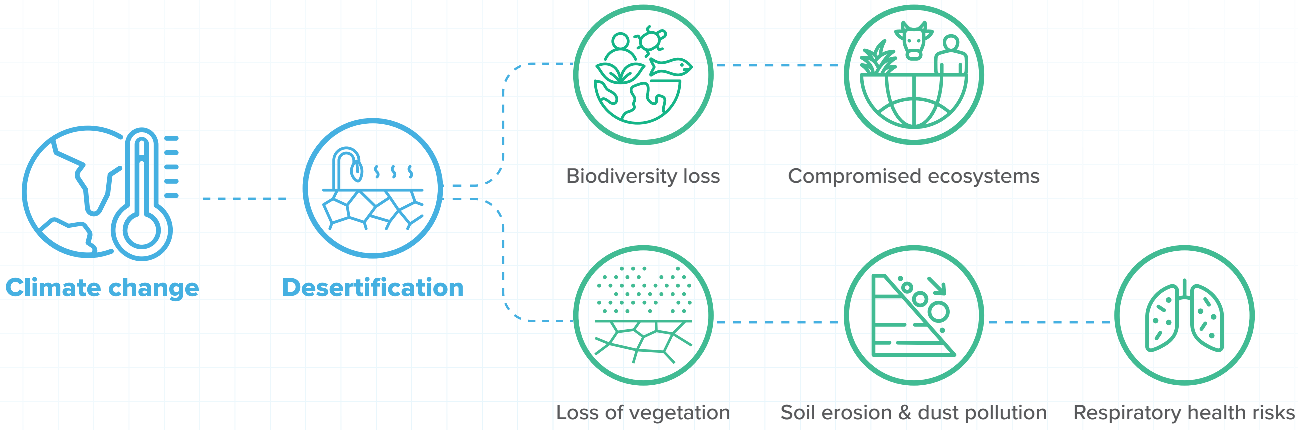


Figure 5: Compromised ecosystems and Respiratory health risks due to climate change in the Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality.

Moreover, farmers indicate that dust pollution has significantly impacted the quality and quantity of agricultural output.[16] Dust and particulate deposition on crops impair photosynthesis by blocking sunlight and interfering with plant gas exchange: dust reduces photosynthesis, affecting crop yield.[17]

Extreme rainfall events, becoming more common due to climate change, further exacerbate the issue. Rain in these areas often comes in short, intense bursts, quickly washing away the topsoil. The loss of fertile soil reduces agricultural productivity, threatening both food security and the economic viability of farming in the region.[18] [19] [20]

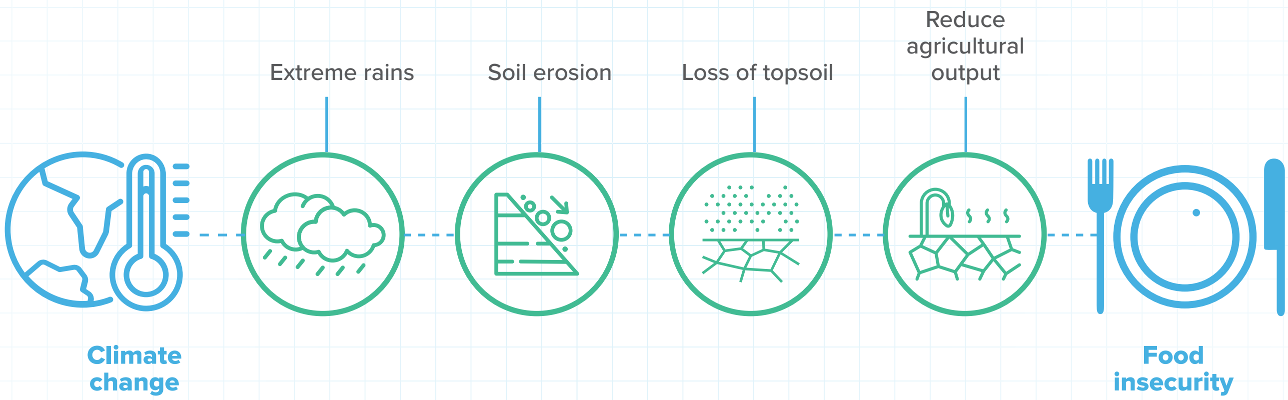


Figure 6: Food Insecurity as a result of climate change in the Karoo Hoogland Local Municipality

LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES - AN ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE'

Questionable land management practices are an additional challenge which are increasing soil erosion and decreasing the land's ability to retain water. [19] Degraded soils absorb less water, which increases surface runoff and accelerates the onset of floods, which also has long-term consequences for agricultural productivity because eroded land becomes less fertile and more prone to further degradation.[20]

[16] Interview – Farmers Association.

[17] Taheri, F., Forouzani, M., Yazdanpanah, M., & Ajili, A. (2020). How farmers perceive the impact of dust phenomenon on agricultural production activities: A Q-methodology study. Journal of Arid Environments, 173, 104028. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaridenv.2019.104028.

[18] Interview – SANBI.

[19] Chávez, C., Fuentes, C., & Brambil, F. (2011). Erosion control in furrow irrigation using polyacrylamide. InTech Open. https://doi.org/10.5772/24067.

[20] Tun, K., Shrestha, R., & Datta, A. (2015). Assessment of land degradation and its impact on crop production in the Dry Zone of Myanmar. International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology, 22(6), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2015.1091046.

Climate Change

HOW IT'S ALREADY BEING EXPERIENCED

Climate change has also exacerbated extreme weather conditions in the Karoo Hoogland communities, with periods of intense heat and extreme cold. Both extremes have significantly increased pressure on social services, particularly healthcare, which experiences a surge in demand during these times.

In the winter of 2024, which extended from May to September, the extreme cold, combined with the geographic remoteness of the area, led to disruptions in essential services, including interruptions to basic utilities (electricity, communications, water) and food supply chains.

The Sutherland community experienced food shortages for weeks during these periods of extreme cold: road access was obstructed due to poor visibility and ice build-up, so food deliveries were impossible. Emergency services were also dysfunctional due to the breakdown in telecommunications in the inclement weather.[21]

[21] Focus Group 2 and 3 – Sutherland.

Section Four

04

Development Priorities Concerning Climate Change Action

4.1
Renewable Energy Sector Context

The renewable energy industry in South Africa has experienced significant growth over the past decade, driven by a confluence of both global and domestic factors. This expansion is a key component of the country's strategy to sustainably meet its energy needs while reducing its reliance on coal, historically the backbone of its energy sector.

The global decarbonization movement has played a pivotal role in catalysing South Africa's shift towards renewable energy. International climate agreements, like the Paris Agreement,[22] have created global pressure to reduce carbon emissions, driving investors to focus on sustainable projects. As a result, financial capital has increasingly flowed into renewable energy industries, particularly in emerging markets, such as South Africa, where the potential for renewable energy development is substantial.[23]

Studies highlight that financial development and the inflow of foreign capital positively correlate with renewable energy capacity in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. External funding has proved crucial in driving renewable energy projects in the region, emphasizing financialization's role in supporting this sector's growth.[24]

Furthermore, fostering financial development within the country has been identified as an essential factor for enhancing investments in renewable energy, ensuring that the industry continues to grow as part of the global energy transition.[25]

However, the development of South Africa's renewable energy industry is also shaped by government policies, technological advancements, international agreements, local energy security concerns, private sector involvement, community engagement, and access to climate finance.

Domestically, the South African government has been instrumental in fostering the growth of renewable energy through targeted policies. The most prominent is the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), which has successfully attracted domestic and international investments. Since its inception, the REIPPPP has facilitated the integration of renewable energy into the national grid, ensuring a more diversified energy mix and helping to reduce the country's heavy reliance on coal. By the end of 2021, the program had secured over ZAR 209 billion in investment commitments, indicating its substantial role in driving the industry forward.[26]

[22] United Nations. (2016) The Paris agreement. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/parisagreement_publication.pdf.

[23] Baker, L. (2015). The evolving role of finance in South Africa's renewable energy sector. Geoform, 64, 146–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.06.017.

[24] Appiah, M., Ashraf, S., Tiwari., A. K., Gyamfi, B. A., & Onifade, S. T. (2023). Does financialization enhance renewable energy development in sub-Saharan African countries? Energy Economics, 125, 106898. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2023.106898.

[25] Chireshe, J. (2020). Finance and renewable energy development nexus: Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa. International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy, 11(1), 318–325. https://www.econjournals.com/index.php/ijeep/article/view/10417.

[26] Pinto, A. F. (2021, Sept 30). REIPPP: One of the world's best renewable energy tenders, but there's room for improvement. PV Magazine. https://www.pv-magazine.com/

Global initiatives like the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), announced at the COP26, aim to assist South Africa in accelerating its transition away from coal through financial and technical assistance, underscoring the importance of global partnerships in the country's energy transformation.[27]

Another key driver of renewable energy development in South Africa is the advancement of renewable technologies. South Africa benefits from exceptional solar and wind resources, making it an ideal location for renewable energy projects.

Advances in solar photovoltaic (PV) technology and wind turbine efficiency have reduced the costs of renewable energy production, making these options increasingly competitive with traditional fossil fuels. As technological costs continue to fall globally, renewable energy is becoming an environmentally friendly and economically viable option.[28]

Figure 7: Climate change and decarbonization as key enabling factors for the renewable energy industry

[27] Presidential Climate Commission. (2024). South Africa's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan. https://www.climatecommission.org.za/south-africas-jet-ip.

[28] Elia, A., Kamidelivand, M., Rogan, F., & Ó Gallachóir, B. (2021). Impacts of innovation on renewable energy technology cost reductions. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 138, 110488. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2020.110488.

4.2
The Private Sector

Development Priorities of the IPPs

Insights gathered from interviews and focus group discussions with industry stakeholders reveal key development priorities influencing the sector's trajectory. While these priorities may align with the country's goals for sustainability, economic growth, and compliance with national and international regulations, the primary objectives of the IPPs remain project feasibility, commercial viability, and organizational profitability.[29]

IPPs and renewable energy project developers indicate that innovation and technological advancement are key development priorities of the sector, specifically research into hybrid systems, battery technology, alternative distribution models, and other innovations that could drive down costs, improve efficiency, and expand energy access.[30]

Energy security remains a critical issue for South Africa, with a key industrial drive to reduce reliance on the state-owned utility.[31] Ensuring energy reliability is paramount for the industry to gain public trust and support, making it a high priority.

A critical development priority for IPPs and renewable energy companies is compliance with the terms of their commercial agreements. Most commercial agreements in South Africa, especially in strategic sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and construction, are not only focused on achieving financial and operational success but also emphasise the broader developmental goals that align with national priorities that aim to promote socio-economic growth, redress historical inequalities, and ensure sustainable development.[32]

Developmental targets typically align with the Broad-based Black Economic Act requirements and ensuant regulation and include localisation, local content, job creation, black ownership, skills development, and socio-economic development.[33] These provisions intend to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are equitably distributed while addressing key social and environmental challenges. In addition, compliance with the Environmental Management Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act is a mandatory requirement in commercial agreements to ensure that projects do not degrade the environment or endanger the health and safety of workers and surrounding communities.[34]

Renewable energy projects, in particular, are required to undergo environmental impact assessments (EIAs) to minimise their ecological footprint. Environmental compliance is essential for securing project financing and regulatory approval and gaining community and stakeholder support.[35]

[29] Interview – IPP.

[30] Elia et al., Impacts of innovation.

[31] Moghayedi, Alireza & Hübner, Dylan & Michell, Kathy. (2023). Achieving sustainability in South African commercial properties: The impact of innovative technologies on energy consumption. Facilities. 41(5/6), 321-336. https://doi.org/10.1108/F-06-2022-0089.

[32] Fourie, D., & Malan, C. (2019). Public procurement in the South African economy: addressing the systemic issues. Sustainability, 12(20), 8692. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208692.

[33] South African Government. (2003). Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003. https://www.gov.za/documents/broad-based-black-economic-empowerment-act#:~:text=The%20Broad-based%20Black%20Economic,Economic%20Empowerment%20Advisory%20Council%3B%20and.

[34] Interview – IPP.

[35] Interview – IPP.

What is
A SOCIAL LICENCE TO OPERATE?

A key priority for many commercial projects in South Africa is obtaining and maintaining a “social licence to operate.” A social licence to operate (SLO) refers to the ongoing acceptance and approval of a project or company by local communities and other stakeholders. Unlike formal legal permissions, an SLO is based on the perceptions, trust, and social acceptance of the communities and society in which a business operates. It often includes environmental stewardship, community development, ethical business practices, and respect for cultural and social norms.[36] This concept refers to the ongoing acceptance and approval of a project by local communities and stakeholders. Engagement with local communities is essential for maintaining a social license to operate and mitigating risks such as social unrest or opposition to projects.

PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION
1	Commercial Viability and Profitability
2	Innovation and Technology Advancements
3	Energy Security and Reliability
4	Compliance with terms of Commercial Agreements
5	Risk Mitigation and Social Licence to Operate

Table 3: Development Priorities of the IPPs

[36] Santiago, A. L., Demajorovic, J., Rossetto, D. E., & Luke, H. (2021). Understanding the fundamentals of the Social Licence to Operate: Its evolution, current state of development and future avenues for research. Resources Policy, 70, 101941. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2020.101941.

4.2
The Public Sector

Development Priorities of the Municipalities

The municipalities of Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland are situated in distinct geographical regions of South Africa, each with unique economic, social, and environmental challenges. However, despite their differences, both municipalities share core development priorities to foster economic growth, improve infrastructure, enhance social well-being, and ensure environmental sustainability. These priorities are aligned with national and provincial goals for sustainable development:

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DIVERSIFICATION

Economic empowerment and diversification are critical to the long-term development of both Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Local Municipalities. These municipalities are primarily rural, with agriculture and tourism as the main economic drivers. However, reliance on a limited number of industries makes them vulnerable to external shocks, such as market fluctuations and environmental changes. Both municipalities prioritise economic diversification by promoting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), agri-processing, and sustainable tourism to mitigate these risks.

In Witzenberg, a key focus is on agricultural value addition, where local farmers are encouraged to move up the value chain by engaging in packaging, marketing, and processing agricultural products. This focus not only enhances local job creation but also helps to boost economic resilience in the region.[37] Similarly, Karoo Hoogland seeks to diversify its tourism sector by promoting eco-tourism and heritage tourism, leveraging the region's rich biodiversity and cultural history.

Both municipalities are committed to fostering inclusive economic growth by ensuring local businesses, particularly black-owned enterprises, benefit from government procurement policies and other economic opportunities (including those in the renewable energy sector).

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Infrastructure development is a central priority for the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland municipalities. Given the rural nature of these regions, improving access to basic services, such as water, sanitation, electricity, and transportation infrastructure, is essential for stimulating economic activity and improving the quality of life for residents.

- Road and transport infrastructure are crucial for enhancing connectivity between rural communities and markets. In Witzenberg, efforts are focused on improving the road network to facilitate the transport of agricultural products to urban centres.[38] Similarly, in Karoo Hoogland, infrastructure development aims to reduce the isolation of remote communities and improve access to services.[39]
- Water resource management and access to sanitation are significant challenges for both municipalities. Witzenberg faces periodic droughts that strain water supply systems, while Karoo Hoogland's arid environment makes water scarcity a persistent issue. Investments in water infrastructure aim to improve water supply reliability through projects such as boreholes, dams, and water treatment facilities. Ensuring access to sanitation facilities is also a priority, particularly in underserved rural areas.[40]
- Ensuring reliable access to electricity, particularly through integrating renewable energy, is an important goal for both municipalities. Karoo Hoogland is exploring solar energy projects as part of its efforts to promote sustainable development and energy security.[41]

37 Witzenberg Municipality. (2022). Integrated Development Plan–Draft Amended 2023–2024. http://www.witzenberg.gov.za/sites/default/files/documents/Witzenberg%20Municipality%20-%20Draft%20Amended%20IDP%202023-2024.pdf.

38 Focus Group 1 – Witzenberg.

39 Focus Group 1 – Sutherland.

40 Karoo Hoogland Municipality. (2022). 5th generation Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of the Karoo Hoogland Municipality. https://www.karoohoogland.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/IDP-2022-2027-NC066-To-Council-30-March-2022.pdf.

41 Interview – Karoo Hoogland Municipality.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development is another priority for the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland municipalities, particularly in health, education, and poverty alleviation. Both regions face significant socio-economic challenges, including high levels of unemployment and poverty, which are exacerbated by limited access to quality healthcare and educational facilities.

- Access to healthcare remains a critical issue in these municipalities, especially in remote areas of Karoo Hoogland, where residents may need to travel long distances to reach medical facilities. Municipal initiatives hope to improve access to primary healthcare by constructing clinics and mobile health units to provide basic health services to underserved communities.[42]
- Education is a cornerstone of social development, and both municipalities are focused on improving access to quality education. Witzenberg is working to enhance school infrastructure, improve teacher training, and provide learning materials to schools in disadvantaged areas. In Karoo Hoogland, efforts are being made to expand access to education through partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies that provide scholarships, skills training, and adult education programs.
- Both municipalities have developed poverty alleviation strategies, including promoting job creation through public works programs, providing social grants, and supporting community-based projects that generate income for residents. Promoting agricultural cooperatives in Witzenberg and eco-tourism ventures in Karoo Hoogland are examples of initiatives to reduce poverty while promoting sustainable livelihoods.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Given the environmental sensitivity of both regions, environmental management is a crucial aspect of the development priorities in Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland. Sustainable land use, water resource management, and biodiversity protection are key components of the environmental management strategies in these municipalities.

- The Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland municipalities are located in regions of high biodiversity value, such as the Succulent Karoo biome, recognised as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Protecting endangered species and ecosystems is essential for preserving the region's natural heritage and promoting eco-tourism. Municipal environmental programs focus on combating illegal poaching, managing invasive species, and conserving critical habitats.[43]
- Sustainable land use practices are necessary to combat land degradation, which is a significant challenge in the arid regions of Karoo Hoogland. Agricultural practices that promote soil conservation, water efficiency, and sustainable grazing are being promoted to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in these areas. In Witzenberg, the focus is on promoting sustainable farming practices that reduce the environmental impact of agriculture while improving productivity.
- Water is scarce in both municipalities, and the sustainable management of water managing water is a key priority. Efforts are being made to improve water infrastructure, reduce water losses, and promote water conservation among residents and businesses. The municipalities are also exploring alternative water sources, such as rainwater harvesting and desalination, to meet the growing demand for water.

PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION
1	Economic Empowerment and Diversification
2	Infrastructure Development (Roads + Transport, Water + Sanitation, Basic Services)
3	Social Development (Health, Education, Poverty Alleviation)
4	Environmental Management (Biodiversity Protection, Sustainable Land Use, Water Resource Management)

Table 4: Development Priorities of the Municipalities

[42] Focus Group 2 – Sutherland.
[43] Interview – CapeNature.

Development Priorities of the Municipalities and Integration Climate Change Action

The municipal Integrated Development Plans focus heavily on core development issues, such as infrastructure improvement, job creation, and social development; at the same time, climate change strategies are treated as secondary or standalone issues rather than embedded into broader developmental plans.

This disconnect between development and climate action results from the perception that the core development issues are immediate/short-term priorities that need to be dealt with urgently; climate change is seen as a longer-term challenge, and therefore, dealing with it can be deferred.[44]

The current consequences of climate change (extreme weather, flooding, etc.) and the required actions are not acknowledged as climate change actions but rather are perceived as "disaster management" or "emergency responses."[45]

The lack of integration between climate change adaptation and development strategies has significant consequences for municipalities struggling with service delivery and infrastructure backlogs. The impacts of climate change, such as water shortages, extreme temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns, disproportionately affect rural and vulnerable communities, exacerbating existing developmental deficits and making it harder for municipalities to catch up on their developmental goals.

In the Karoo Hoogland, where water scarcity is a persistent issue, climate change is expected to exacerbate droughts, placing additional pressure on already strained water systems. This municipality has significant backlogs in delivering basic services such as water and sanitation, and without integrated climate resilience strategies, these backlogs worsen under the stress of climate-related disruptions.[46]

Similarly, in Witzenberg, where agriculture is the backbone of the local economy, the increasing unpredictability of weather patterns threatens to undermine food security and economic stability. Farmers are increasingly exposed to crop failures due to droughts and heatwaves, yet agricultural development plans remain focused on immediate productivity goals rather than long-term climate adaptation.[47] This disconnect between development and climate change action leaves this municipality vulnerable to economic shocks caused by climate variability.

Climate change impacts and developmental backlogs create a vicious cycle, reinforcing the two problems. For example, as municipalities struggle to provide basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity, climate change exacerbates these challenges by increasing the frequency of droughts, heat waves, and extreme weather events.

A further challenge that municipalities need to contend with is that the challenges posed by climate change require innovative solutions that incorporate new technologies for sustainability and resilience. However, despite the availability of climate-smart technologies and forward-thinking solutions, the bureaucratic structures and embedded systems within municipal governance often hinder the ability to adopt and implement these innovations. Procurement mechanisms, designed to ensure transparency and accountability, can also become a significant barrier to innovation, delaying or preventing the adoption of new technologies that could help municipalities address the urgent challenges posed by climate change. In many cases, municipalities operate within an entrenched system of decision-making that does not readily allow for the rapid testing or deployment of innovative technologies.[48] In addition, municipalities often suffer from limited technical capacity and expertise to assess and implement new technologies. Officials in charge of development and infrastructure may lack the training or knowledge required to fully understand the potential benefits of innovative solutions, further hindering their ability to adopt cutting-edge technologies.

[44] Focus Group 3 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[45] Focus Groups 2 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[46] Karoo Hoogland Municipality IDP.
[47] Witzenberg IDP Municipality; Interview – Farmers Association.
[48] Uyarra, E., Zabala-Iturriagagoitia, J. M., Flanagan, K., & Magro, E. (2020). Public procurement, innovation and industrial policy: Rationales, roles, capabilities and implementation. Research Policy, 49(1), 103844. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2019.103844.

As a result, municipal strategies tend to fall back on traditional, familiar methods that do not necessarily address the evolving nature of climate-related risks. Furthermore, procurement mechanisms prioritise cost considerations, often awarding contracts to the lowest bidder, even if that solution may not be the most innovative or sustainable long-term. The result is that municipalities may opt for outdated or less effective technologies simply because they meet the immediate budget constraints rather than investing in solutions that offer greater long-term resilience. Moreover, the public procurement process is often risk-averse, favouring established suppliers and technologies over new and potentially disruptive innovations.

Municipalities are incentivised to stick to tried-and-tested solutions that meet established criteria, making it difficult for startups or companies offering cutting-edge technologies to break into the market. This aversion to risk significantly limits municipalities' abilities to adopt forward-thinking approaches to climate change challenges.[49]

For example, renewable energy technologies like solar panels or microgrids could solve energy shortages and reduce the carbon footprint of municipalities. However, the rigid procurement system means that municipalities often find it easier to continue relying on traditional energy sources, such as diesel generators.[50] The reliance on outdated infrastructure hinders progress toward sustainability and exacerbates the climate vulnerabilities of the communities they serve.

Figure 8: Impacts of Climate Change exacerbate Developmental Lags at the Municipal Level

[49] Focus Group 3 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[50] Interview – Karoo Hoogland Municipality.

4.3
Civil Society

Development Priorities of Civil Society and Community-Based Organizations

Civil society and community-based organizations (CBOs) are vital in addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges in South Africa. These organizations are often at the forefront of efforts to tackle poverty, improve education, promote health and wellbeing, protect the environment, and foster community cohesion. Their development priorities are deeply connected to the communities' needs and aim to provide holistic, sustainable solutions to local challenges.

PRIORITY	DESCRIPTION
1	Poverty alleviation and social support (food and nutrition; social welfare (caring))
2	Education and youth development (ECD; schools' programmes; skills programmes)
3	Health and wellbeing (primary healthcare; preventative education)
4	Environmental conservation and advocacy
5	Community cohesion and cultural preservation

Table 5: Development Priorities of CSOs/CBOs

Poverty alleviation is a central priority for civil society and CBOs in the Karoo Hoogland and Witzenberg municipalities, where high unemployment and food insecurity persist. These organizations are often the first responders to poverty-related challenges, providing essential services such as food security, nutrition programmes, and social welfare support for vulnerable populations.[51] These initiatives are critical as many households depend on subsistence farming or low-wage jobs in agriculture, which are vulnerable to environmental shocks and economic downturns.[52]

In Karoo Hoogland, CBOs such as Karoo Women Empowerment Projects focus on addressing poverty through income-generating activities, such as local craft production and supporting vulnerable groups such as women and seniors with social welfare services.[53]

These organizations also provide psychosocial support, helping individuals and families cope with poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity.[54]

Education and youth development are key priorities for civil society and CBOs in the region. With limited access to quality education and high levels of school dropout, these organizations seek to fill the gaps in early childhood development (ECD), school support, and youth skills training to reduce dropout rates and improve youth employability.[55]

[51] Focus Group 1 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[52] Interview – CapeNature.
[53] Interview – Karoo Hoogland Municipality.
[54] Focus Group 1 – Sutherland.
[55] Focus Group 2 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.

Access to quality healthcare remains a challenge in the Karoo Hoogland and Witzenberg municipalities, where healthcare facilities are often limited, and many residents face barriers to accessing basic services. Civil society and CBOs play a critical role in primary healthcare delivery and preventative education efforts to improve health outcomes for these communities.

In Witzenberg, organizations such as the Witzenberg Palliative Care provide essential healthcare services, particularly for seniors and the terminally ill. CBOs in the region also focus on preventative health education, raising awareness about hygiene, nutrition, and the importance of regular medical check-ups to prevent diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes, which are prevalent in rural areas.[56]

In the Karoo Hoogland, mobile health clinics run by organizations like the Karoo Health Network provide primary healthcare services to remote communities. These services include immunisations, health screenings, and maternal healthcare for pregnant women, ensuring that even the most isolated communities can access basic health services. Preventative health education programmes also focus on addressing substance abuse, a significant challenge in the region.[57]

The Karoo and Witzenberg regions are home to unique ecosystems threatened by climate change, desertification, and human activity. Civil society and CBOs in these municipalities prioritise environmental conservation and advocacy to protect biodiversity, promote sustainable land use, and address environmental degradation.

In Karoo Hoogland, CBOs such as the Karoo Environmental Action Group work on biodiversity conservation projects, advocating for the protection of the Succulent Karoo biome, one of the most biodiverse desert regions in the world. These organizations also engage in land restoration projects to combat desertification, promote sustainable grazing practices, and prevent soil erosion, all of which are critical for the sustainability of local agriculture.[58]

In Witzenberg, environmental advocacy organizations like CapeNature focus on water conservation and sustainable farming practices. These organizations promote the protection of wetlands and water resources through education and awareness campaigns targeted at local farmers and communities, encouraging the adoption of water-efficient practices.[59]

The Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland regions have rich cultural traditions, and communities seek to protect and promote local heritage through community initiatives that foster social unity and celebrate diversity.

In Karoo Hoogland, CBOs such as the Karoo Cultural Heritage Society work to preserve the region's rich cultural history through storytelling projects, cultural festivals, and heritage tours. These initiatives strengthen community ties and serve as a means of economic empowerment by promoting cultural tourism.[60]

In Witzenberg, CBOs focus on social cohesion through sports programs, community events, and cultural workshops that bring together residents from diverse backgrounds. These initiatives aim to reduce social divisions and promote unity in a region where historical inequalities and economic disparities continue to shape community dynamics.[61]

ROLE OF CSOS/CBOS AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in South Africa have long been critical in addressing socio-economic issues in rural and underserved communities. However, their role in climate change action is an emerging but often unrecognised responsibility.

As climate change intensifies the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, CSOs and CBOs are increasingly on the front lines of responding to crises such as droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures, placing an added burden on organizations already operating with limited resources, a situation made worse by municipal backlogs in infrastructure and service delivery.[62]

While CSOs and CBOs in South Africa are not traditionally seen as climate action agencies, their involvement in grassroots-level responses to climate-related challenges positions them as critical actors in community adaptation and resilience.

[56] Focus Group 2 – Witzenberg.
[57] Focus Group 2 – Sutherland.
[58] Interview – Karoo Hoogland Municipality.
[59] Interview – CapeNature; Interview – Farmers Association.
[60] Focus Group 2 – Sutherland.
[61] Focus Group 3 – Witzenberg.
[62] Focus Group 1 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.

The impacts of climate change, particularly in the Karoo Hoogland and Witzenberg Municipalities, manifest as extreme weather events such as prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and increasing temperatures. These events threaten agricultural production, disrupt livelihoods, and exacerbate food and water insecurity.

In response to these challenges, CSOs and CBOs have become de facto leaders in implementing climate adaptation strategies, even when these efforts are not explicitly labelled as climate action. For example, in the Karoo Hoogland region, local organizations like the Karoo Environmental Action Group provide education and resources to farmers on sustainable land management and drought-resistant agricultural practices, and in Witzenberg, churches and schools provided emergency shelter and provisions for displaced families during the floods.[63]

While CSOs and CBOs play an essential role in supporting communities during extreme weather events, their capacity to respond effectively is often constrained by limited resources and operational challenges. These organizations typically rely on donor funding and volunteer networks, which may not be sufficient to meet the growing demands placed on them by climate change impacts.[64]

Municipal infrastructure and service delivery backlogs further complicate the situation CSOs and CBOs face. These backlogs leave communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and as a result, CSOs and CBOs are often forced to fill the gaps left by municipal failures.[65]

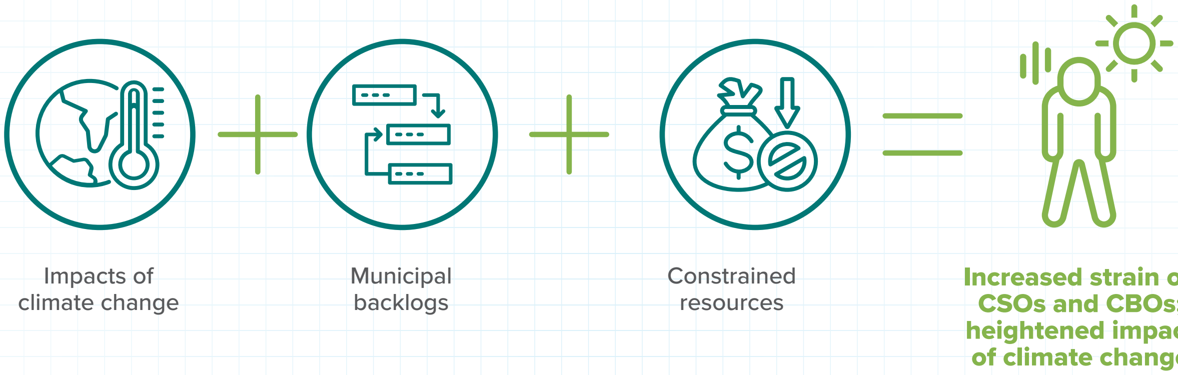


Figure 9: Impacts of climate change and municipal backlogs place additional strain on communities and CSOS

[63] Focus Group 1 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[64] Focus Group 2 – Witzenberg and Sutherland.
[65] Interview – CBO.

4.4
Levels of Engagement between the Different Sectors

Effective communication between the private sector, public sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) is critical for addressing multifaceted issues such as climate change and sustainable development. However, communication barriers often inhibit collaboration, creating gaps in understanding and action. These barriers arise from divergent approaches to climate change vocabulary, differences in communication mechanisms, and power dynamics that skew influence and decision-making authority across sectors.

Climate Change Vocabulary

One of the primary barriers to effective communication between the private sector, public sector, and CSOs is the disconnect in the vocabulary surrounding climate change. Each sector tends to frame climate change in different terms, resulting in misaligned priorities and approaches. This disconnect is evident in the divergent ways that the private sector, public sector, and CSOs interpret and communicate about climate change and development.

In the private sector, climate change is often conceptualised in terms of risks and opportunities. The emphasis is typically on managing climate risks to protect business interests, reduce operational costs, and comply with regulatory requirements.[66]

Companies may view climate action as enhancing brand reputation or meeting shareholder expectations, often framing discussions around compliance, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and sustainability metrics. This perspective prioritises market-based solutions and profitability, which may not align with the more immediate concerns of communities facing the impacts of climate change.[67]

The public sector, conversely, approaches climate change through a policy and governance lens. Policymakers are focused on meeting international climate commitments, such as the Paris Agreement, and integrating climate adaptation and mitigation into national and local development frameworks.[68]

Terms such as carbon neutrality, resilience, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) dominate public sector discourse. These abstract and often technical terms can create a disconnect when communicating with local communities or CSOs dealing with the day-to-day impacts of climate change.

For CSOs and CBOs, the language of climate change is rooted in the lived experiences of communities. These organizations often focus on the immediate needs of vulnerable populations, such as food security, water access, and disaster preparedness.[69] Terms such as community resilience, social justice, and climate adaptation are central to their advocacy efforts. However, these grassroots priorities can be sidelined in policy discussions driven by economic or regulatory concerns from the private and public sectors.

This divergence in climate change vocabulary creates a disconnect between development priorities and climate action, as each sector approaches the issue with different assumptions and goals. While private sector actors may focus on sustainability as a business strategy, CSOs are more concerned with how climate change exacerbates existing socio-economic inequalities.[70] The result is fragmented communication, which undermines the potential for effective collaboration on climate initiatives.

[66] Linnenluecke, M. K., Griffiths, A., & Winn, M. I. (2013). Firm and industry adaptation to climate change: A review of climate adaptation studies in the business and management field. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, 4(5), 397–416. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.214.

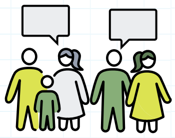
[67] Schaltegger, S., & Wagner, M. (Eds.). (2006). Capturing the relationship between sustainability performance, business competitiveness and economic performance. In Managing and measuring the business case for sustainability (pp. 1–27). Routledge.

[68] United Nations, Paris Agreement.

[69] Schipper, L., Ayers, J. Reid, H., Huq, S., & Rahman, A. (2014). Community based adaptation to climate change: scaling it up. Routledge.

[70] Pelling, M., O'Brien, K., & Matyas, D.(2015). Adaptation and transformation. Climatic Change, 133, 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-014-1303-0.

Communication Mechanisms



Another significant barrier to effective communication is the difference between legislated communication mechanisms used by the public and private sectors and the community-based or traditional communication mechanisms employed by CSOs and CBOs.

In the public sector, communication is often governed by formal, top-down mechanisms, such as public consultations, stakeholder forums, and policy briefings. These processes are designed to ensure transparency and accountability but may be inaccessible to marginalised communities due to their bureaucratic nature.[71] Moreover, public sector communication tends to be driven by political agendas and formal regulations, which may not fully incorporate community concerns.[72]

The private sector similarly relies on formal communication channels such as corporate reports, press releases, and sustainability audits. These mechanisms are geared toward investors, regulators, and shareholders, often neglecting the grassroots realities faced by local communities.

Corporate communications may focus on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance or carbon reduction initiatives but fail to engage directly with CSOs or community-based actors dealing with climate change's localised impacts.

In addition, in renewable energy project development, "Public Participation" is mandated in the National Environmental Management Act of 1998.[73]

Public participation is essential to environmental governance and development planning, particularly in South Africa. While public participation is legally mandated in South Africa, particularly under NEMA, various factors often limit its effectiveness. Communities face significant barriers to engagement, including limited access to information, capacity constraints, tokenism in consultation, and power imbalances. Table 15 highlights the barriers to effective participation.

[71] Gaventa, John. (2009). Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. IDS Bulletin. 37(6), 23 –33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x.

[72] Cornwall, A., & Coelho, V . S. P. (Eds). (2007). Spaces for change? The politics of citizen participation in new democratic arenas. In Spaces for change (pp. 1–32). Zed Books.

[73] South African Government. (1998) National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998. https://www.gov.za/documents/national-environmental-management-act.

4.5
Summary - Barriers to effective participation

Technical Complexity

Environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and other reports are often written in highly technical language, making it difficult for laypeople to understand the potential impacts of proposed developments. Communities unfamiliar with environmental legislation or scientific terminology may struggle to engage meaningfully with the documents provided.[74]

Inconvenient Timing

Public meetings may be scheduled during working hours or at times that conflict with other obligations, such as farming activities or family responsibilities, which is especially problematic in rural areas, where livelihoods are often tied to agricultural seasons and schedules.[79]

Language Barriers

South Africa is a linguistically diverse country; many communities speak languages that are not reflected in official documents.[75] Public consultation materials are typically produced in English or Afrikaans, excluding people who speak other indigenous languages from fully participating.

Lack of Genuine Dialogue

Public meetings may be held simply to meet legal requirements, with little effort to foster meaningful stakeholder dialogue. Sometimes, communities may feel that their input is not taken seriously or that decisions have already been made before consultation.

Digital Divide

Access to the internet and digital platforms is limited in rural and marginalised communities, where residents may lack the technology or connectivity needed to access online documents or participate in virtual public hearings. Access was particularly problematic following the COVID-19 pandemic, where digital platforms increasingly replaced in-person consultations.

One-Way Communication

Instead of creating spaces for two-way communication, public consultations are sometimes structured as information sessions where project proponents present their plans without soliciting or addressing feedback from affected communities, reducing the opportunity for community members to express their concerns and influence the outcome of the process.

Organizational Weakness

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and local advocacy groups are often underfunded and understaffed, limiting their ability to mobilise community members, gather technical expertise, and participate in the public consultation process.[77] These organizations play a crucial role in representing the interests of vulnerable groups, but their limited resources constrain their effectiveness.

Lack of Knowledge and Skills

Many community members do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to interpret complex environmental documents or understand their rights under environmental law.[76] Without sufficient capacity-building efforts, communities cannot contribute meaningfully to discussions about development projects.

Geographical Barriers

Public meetings or hearings may be held in urban centres or locations far from the communities most affected by the proposed development. Travel costs, poor infrastructure, and long distances make it difficult for rural residents to attend these consultations.

Marginalisation of Vulnerable Groups

Marginalised groups, including women, indigenous people, and people with low incomes, often face additional barriers to participation due to their social or economic status. These groups may be systematically excluded from decision-making processes because they are not invited to participate or because the consultation process does not accommodate their specific needs.[80]

Financial Limitations

Engaging in public consultations requires time and resources. Communities already facing economic hardship may not have the financial means to attend public meetings, travel to consultation venues, or dedicate time to reviewing lengthy documents. For example, in rural areas, public meetings may be held far from the affected communities, making it difficult for residents to participate.

Table 6: Barriers to Effective Public Participation

[74] Glucker, A. N., Driessen, P. P., Kolhoff, A., & Runhaar, H. A. (2013). Public participation in environmental impact assessment: Why, who and how? Environmental Impact Assessment Review, 43, 104–111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2013.06.003.

[75] Choung, M., & Manamela, M. (2018). Digital inequality in rural and urban settings: Challenges of education and information in South African youth context. Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology, 15(2). https://shorturl.at/gwGR9.

[76] Therivel, R. (2019). Strategic environmental assessment in action (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[77] Fung, A. (2015). Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future. Public Administration Review, 75(4), 513–522. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361.

[78] Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. J. (2004). Evaluating public-participation exercises: A research agenda. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 29(4), 512–556. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243903259197.

[79] Shepherd, A., & Bowler, C. (1997). Beyond the requirements: Improving public participation in EIA. Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, 40(6), 725–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/09640569711877.

[80] Ribot, J. C., & Peluso, N. L. (2003). A theory of access.* Rural Sociology, 68(2), 153–181. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x.

In contrast, CSOs and CBOs often use community-based communication mechanisms, which are more participatory and informal. These methods include community meetings, traditional knowledge-sharing practices, and direct engagement with affected populations. Such communication is typically more inclusive and sensitive to local cultural contexts but may struggle to influence formal policymaking processes. The disconnect between formal, legislated communication mechanisms and informal, community-based methods further complicates efforts to bridge the communication gap between sectors.

The result is that CSOs and CBOs, which rely on community-based communication to mobilise grassroots action, often find themselves excluded from formal discussions on climate policy and development priorities. At the same time, the public and private sectors may perceive community-based communication methods as lacking the rigour or structure necessary to inform policy decisions, leading to a breakdown in communication between these key actors.

Power Dynamics and Competing Interests

A third major barrier to effective communication is the imbalance in power dynamics between the private sector, public sector, and CSOs. Each sector holds differing levels of influence, resources, and decision-making authority, which shapes how communication occurs and whose interests are prioritised.

The private sector holds significant economic power, which can skew communication and decision-making in favour of profit-driven interests. Large corporations may use their financial clout to lobby for weaker environmental regulations or prioritise projects that maximise economic returns rather than promote long-term sustainability.[81] This imbalance often leads to unequal communication processes, where private sector actors have disproportionate influence over climate policy, while the voices of CSOs and CBOs representing vulnerable communities are marginalised.

Governments hold regulatory and political power in the public sector, yet their priorities may not always align with those of CSOs or communities. Public sector actors often focus on meeting national or international commitments, such as climate targets, while navigating political pressures and resource constraints.[82] This focus can lead to top-down approaches that neglect the grassroots concerns CSOs raise, particularly when powerful private sector interests influence public sector actors.

In contrast, CSOs and CBOs typically operate with limited resources and often rely on donor funding, which can constrain their ability to participate in climate governance processes effectively. These organizations are frequently seen as advocates for marginalised groups but may lack the formal authority or financial leverage to shape high-level policy discussions. The result is a power dynamic where CSOs and CBOs are often relegated to the periphery of decision-making processes despite their critical role in addressing climate change's social and environmental impacts at the community level.[83]

The competing interests of the private sector, public sector, and CSOs exacerbate these power dynamics, further undermining effective communication. While private companies may prioritise short-term profitability, public sector actors are driven by political timelines, and CSOs are focused on immediate social justice concerns. This divergence in interests creates communication silos, where each sector pursues its own objectives rather than working collaboratively toward shared climate goals.[84]

[81] Banerjee, B. (2008). Corporate social responsibility: The good, the bad and the ugly. Critical Sociology, 34(1), 51–79. 10.1177/0896920507084623.

[82] Meckling, J. (2011). Climate capitalism—Global warming and the transformation of the global economy – By Peter Newell and Matthew Paterson. Review of Policy Research, 28(2), 226–227. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.2011.00491_3.x.

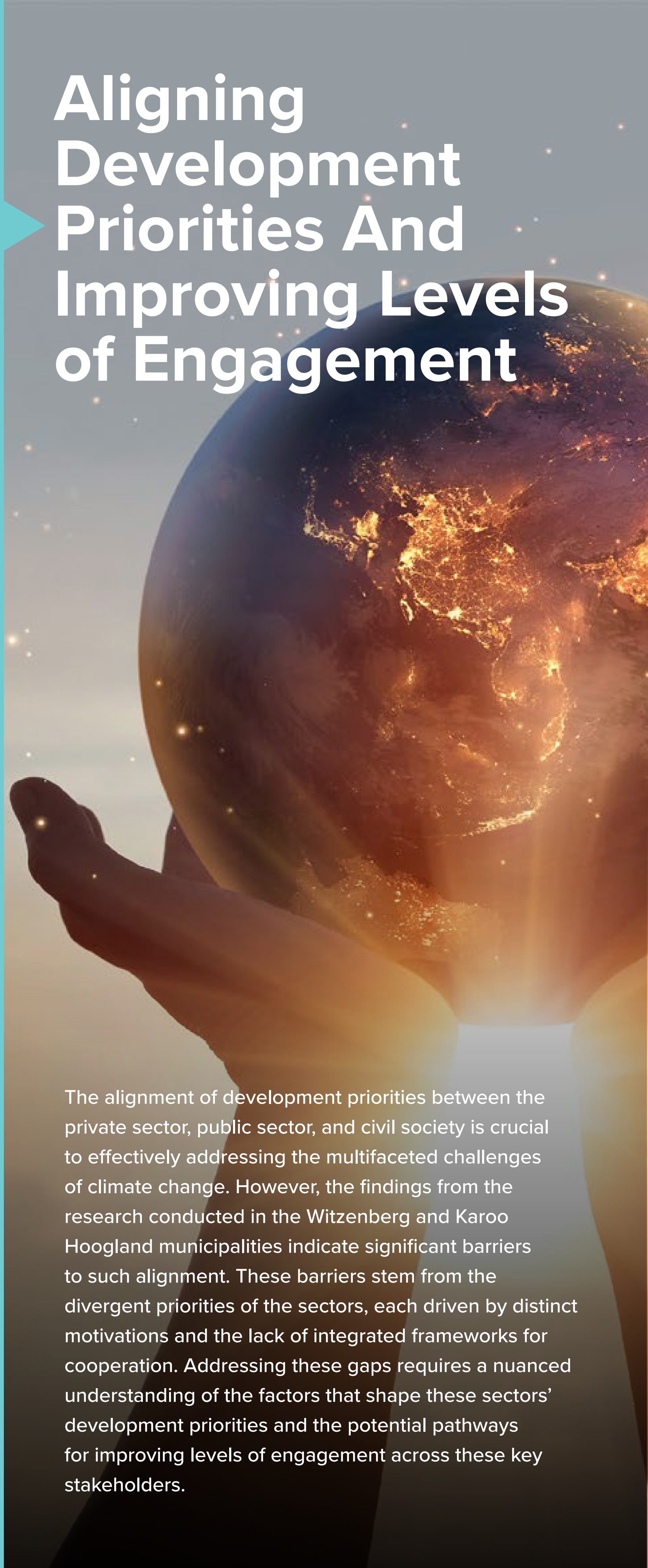
[83] Edwards, M., & Hulme, D. (Eds.). (1995). Non-governmental organizations–Performance and accountability (1st ed.). Routledge.

[84] Hulme, M. (2009). Why we disagree about climate change. Cambridge Universeity Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511841200.

Section Five

05

Aligning Development Priorities And Improving Levels of Engagement



The alignment of development priorities between the private sector, public sector, and civil society is crucial to effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges of climate change. However, the findings from the research conducted in the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland municipalities indicate significant barriers to such alignment. These barriers stem from the divergent priorities of the sectors, each driven by distinct motivations and the lack of integrated frameworks for cooperation. Addressing these gaps requires a nuanced understanding of the factors that shape these sectors' development priorities and the potential pathways for improving levels of engagement across these key stakeholders.

5.1
Divergent Development Priorities

The private sector, particularly independent power producers (IPPs), often approaches development through the lens of commercial viability and profitability.

Renewable energy companies, for instance, are primarily driven by the need to ensure that their projects remain financially sustainable, while their developmental contributions are largely in response to obligations set out in commercial agreements coupled with risk mitigation actions.

On the other hand, the public sector, particularly at the municipal level, operates under a different set of constraints and priorities. The development focus of municipalities in Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland is heavily centered on infrastructure development, economic diversification, and social service delivery. While these priorities are aligned with national and provincial goals for sustainable development, the research highlights that climate change actions are often treated as secondary or standalone initiatives.

The municipalities' emphasis on immediate socio-economic challenges, such as job creation, poverty alleviation, and infrastructure development, reflects the urgency of addressing the basic needs of local communities. Climate change is often seen as a long-term issue, leading to a disconnect between development planning and climate adaptation strategies.

The civil society sector, represented by community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), is deeply embedded within the communities they serve. These organizations prioritise poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental conservation as their core focus areas. While these initiatives are critical for community resilience, the findings reveal that CBOs often assume a tacit role in climate change action, particularly in response to extreme weather events such as droughts and floods. However, their capacity to implement long-term climate adaptation strategies is limited by resource constraints and the growing demands placed on them by gaps in municipal service delivery.

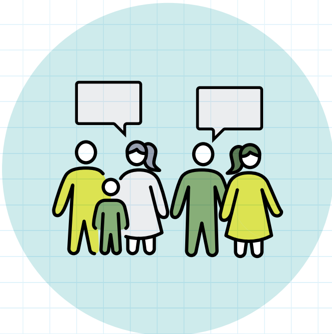
5.2
Improving Levels of Engagement

Improving levels of engagement between these sectors requires a shift from fragmented, sector-specific strategies to integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that align development priorities. The key barriers identified include misalignment in climate change vocabulary, differing communication mechanisms, and power dynamics that skew influence and decision-making.

Aligning Climate Change Vocabulary

The disconnect in how sectors frame and communicate about climate change is a significant barrier to collaboration. The private sector tends to focus on risks, opportunities, and compliance, while the public sector often uses technical language related to resilience and carbon neutrality. In contrast, CSOs focus on the human costs of climate change, such as food security and disaster preparedness.

Addressing this disconnect requires the creation of a shared language around climate action that bridges these perspectives, enabling all stakeholders to understand and align their goals. Public sector frameworks must incorporate grassroots concerns more meaningfully, while the private sector should ensure that their climate commitments are responsive to community needs.



Strengthening Communication Mechanisms

The research highlights the gap between formal, legislated communication mechanisms used by the public and private sectors and the informal, community-based communication approaches of CSOs.

Effective collaboration requires creating platforms for two-way communication, where grassroots feedback is genuinely integrated into policymaking and project design. Moreover, public participation, as mandated by the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), must be made more accessible, particularly for marginalised and rural communities. Accessibility potentially involves simplifying technical documents, addressing language barriers, and ensuring public consultations are held at convenient times and locations.

Addressing Power Dynamics

The imbalance in power between the private sector, public sector, and civil society exacerbates the challenges of effective engagement. The private sector's financial clout and the public sector's regulatory authority often marginalize the voices of CSOs, particularly those representing vulnerable communities.

There needs to be a more equitable distribution of decision-making power to improve collaboration, where all stakeholders, particularly those most affected by climate change, have a meaningful role in shaping policies and development projects. Improved collaboration can be achieved by fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships that build trust, align incentives, and promote transparency.

Recommendations for Integrated Development and Climate Action

Address Bureaucracy and Encourage Innovation in Procurement Processes

One of the key barriers to innovative climate solutions in municipal development is the bureaucratic nature of procurement processes. Municipal procurement systems in South Africa are governed by strict rules designed to ensure transparency and accountability. However, these regulations can also stifle innovation by prioritising cost efficiency and risk aversion over creativity and sustainability.

To foster innovation in procurement, the public sector could:

- Reform procurement policies to allow for more flexible and innovative approaches, particularly in adopting new climate-smart technologies and infrastructure solutions.
- Introduce pilot programs that permit testing of new technologies on a smaller scale before full-scale implementation, allowing municipalities to test innovative solutions without the high risks associated with immediate large-scale investment.
- Create innovation funds for climate adaptation projects, enabling municipalities to invest in cutting-edge technologies and solutions that may not initially meet the conventional procurement criteria focused solely on cost-effectiveness.

Embed Climate Change into Development Planning

Municipalities should integrate climate change adaptation into their broader development strategies. For example, infrastructure projects should be designed with climate resilience in mind, ensuring that roads, water systems, and energy infrastructure can withstand the impacts of extreme weather. This integration would help municipalities address immediate developmental needs and long-term climate risks simultaneously.

Capacity Building for CSOs

There must be targeted efforts to build their capacity in terms of technical knowledge, resources, and organizational strength to enhance the role of CSOs in climate action, which can be achieved through government support programs, donor funding, and private-sector partnerships aimed at equipping CSOs with the tools they need to implement effective climate adaptation projects at the community level.

Enhance Collaborative Platforms

Establish multi-sectoral forums that facilitate regular dialogue, collaboration and cooperation between the private sector, public sector, and civil society. These platforms should focus on aligning development goals with climate action, enabling stakeholders to share knowledge, pool resources, and coordinate their efforts. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) could also be expanded to include CSOs, ensuring that the voices of local communities are heard in decision-making processes.

Conclusion

This report has examined the complex interplay between the private sector, public sector, and civil society in the context of climate change action, focusing on improving engagement and coordination among these stakeholders. Through an in-depth exploration of the Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Local Municipalities, the study has revealed critical insights into the barriers and opportunities for multi-sectoral collaboration in addressing the pressing challenges posed by climate change.

A key finding of this research is the substantial divergence in the priorities of the three sectors. The private sector, primarily represented by independent power producers (IPPs), is driven by commercial viability, innovation, and compliance with regulatory frameworks. In contrast, the public sector focuses on infrastructure development, socio-economic growth, and service delivery, with climate change often viewed as a secondary concern. Civil society, on the other hand, is deeply embedded in local communities, prioritising immediate needs such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and environmental conservation. These differing perspectives create a significant challenge in aligning development priorities, ultimately hampering collective action on climate change.

The study further highlights that the lack of a shared vocabulary surrounding climate change hinders effective communication between these sectors. While the private sector tends to frame climate risks in terms of market-based opportunities and regulatory compliance, the public sector focuses on policy-driven approaches, and civil society emphasises grassroots impacts on vulnerable populations. This misalignment in language reflects deeper structural divides between the sectors and contributes to fragmented efforts in climate action. Creating a shared communication framework that bridges these diverse perspectives is imperative to address this. Developing platforms for regular dialogue between stakeholders, where grassroots concerns are meaningfully incorporated into policy discussions, will be essential for fostering collaboration.

Power dynamics further complicate the landscape of climate change action. The private sector's economic power, particularly its access to financial resources and influence over policy, often marginalises the voices of civil society, which lacks the same financial and political leverage. While holding regulatory authority, the public sector is frequently constrained by political timelines, budgetary limitations, and bureaucratic processes, which can limit its ability to respond effectively to immediate socio-economic challenges and long-term climate risks. Correcting these imbalances will require a more equitable distribution of decision-making power, where all sectors, particularly those representing vulnerable communities, have a meaningful role in shaping climate policies and development projects.

A critical recommendation from the research is the need for municipalities to embed climate change adaptation into their broader development strategies. Climate change should not be viewed as a standalone issue but rather as an integral component of all aspects of development planning, particularly infrastructure, water management, energy, and agriculture. The current tendency to separate climate adaptation from core development objectives has significant consequences, particularly in regions like Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland, where climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, such as water scarcity, food insecurity, and social inequality. By integrating climate resilience into infrastructure projects and service delivery, municipalities can better address both immediate developmental needs and long-term climate risks.

In addition, the research underscores the need for reforming bureaucratic procurement processes, which often hinder the adoption of innovative climate-smart technologies. Municipalities are frequently constrained by procurement systems prioritising cost-efficiency over sustainability, limiting their ability to invest in forward-thinking solutions. The report recommends introducing more flexible procurement policies that allow for the testing and implementation of new technologies, particularly in climate-sensitive areas, to overcome this. Innovation funds and pilot programs should be established to facilitate the adoption of sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy solutions at the municipal level.

The role of civil society and community-based organizations (CBOs) in climate change action is particularly noteworthy. These organizations are often the first responders to the impacts of climate change, providing essential services such as disaster relief, healthcare, and education in vulnerable communities. However, their capacity to drive meaningful climate action is frequently constrained by limited resources, operational challenges, and inadequate engagement with the public and private sectors. Enhancing the capacity of CBOs through targeted funding, technical training, and greater inclusion in decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring that community voices are heard and that climate resilience is built from the ground up.

In conclusion, the research highlights the need for a paradigm shift toward more integrated, collaborative approaches to climate change action. The challenges of climate change cannot be effectively addressed by any single sector acting in isolation. Instead, the private, public, and civil society must collaborate to align their development priorities, improve communication, and share decision-making power. By embedding climate change adaptation into all aspects of development planning, reforming bureaucratic structures to foster innovation, and enhancing the capacity of civil society, these sectors can collectively create a more sustainable and resilient future. The Witzenberg and Karoo Hoogland Municipalities, while unique in their local contexts, offer important lessons for broader national and global efforts to address climate change through coordinated multi-sectoral action.

> *Climate change should not be viewed as a standalone issue but rather as an integral component of all aspects of development planning, particularly infrastructure, water management, energy, and agriculture.*

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