

A localised Experience of a Changing Climate - Workshop in Durban, South Africa

News

How do people in different countries experience changes in climate conditions, and what relevance do their experiences have for national and international climate change politics? These were the guiding questions of a workshop in Durban, South Africa, organised jointly by the Water Governance Group of the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Ecologic Institute as an external side event to the UNFCCC COP 17 in December 2011.

The documentary "Finding the Fable" presented to the workshop participants how climate change impacts people's everyday lives in the South African Limpopo province.

People who live along the Limpopo river range from rural communities to game farm owners to mining operators. The poor are particularly vulnerable to changing weather patterns as the region is progressively getting drier. Such climatic changes affect people's ability to make a livelihood, for example through subsistence farming.

While people can already feel climatic changes at the local level, their perceptions and beliefs relating to these changes are often different from the explanations of climate change that scientists and politicians refer to. This is a result of research conducted by Karen Nortje from the CSIR in the framework of the EU FP7-funded [LiveDiverse](#) project. She focused on how people in rural VhaVenda communities speak about their experiences of a changing climate and the reasons they believe lie behind these changes. Karen Nortje explained in her workshop presentation that locals might see drought as a punishment from the ancestors or as the result of people not performing cultural practices (e.g. fetching water) the way they believe they are supposed to. Obviously, such perceptions and beliefs need to be taken into account in adaptation activities.

Climate change is also sometimes overshadowed by factors such as a history of conflict and distrust, as well as issues of domination and control. This is for example the case in Palestine and Israel, according to Christiane Gerstetter from Ecologic Institute. She conducted interviews on perceptions on the link between climate change and water scarcity in Israel and Palestine in the framework of an EU funded project on [climate change, water conflicts and human security](#) (CLICO).

In Israel and Palestine, climate change was not seen as a major issue by the persons interviewed, mostly policy-makers and academics. Many Palestinians said that a political solution had to be found to resolve Palestine's problem of access to water and control of water resources which is currently limited due to the Israeli occupation. If such a solution could be found climate change would not really matter. For the Israelis interviewed, water scarcity can rather easily be resolved through technological solutions such as desalination. From this point of view, climate change is not of significant importance as the Israeli government has strategies in place to cope with drought. Obviously, such perceptions influence if adaptation measures will be taken and in what form.

These two very different experiences of climate change in local contexts were discussed by the workshop participants in order to identify whether and how local experiences of a changing climate should inform climate change policies and interventions at the global and national levels.

The workshop was held as part of an ongoing collaborative project between the CSIR and Ecologic Institute on [water and land management](#).

The presentations are available for download.

- [Presentation by Karen Nortje](#) [pdf, 4.5 MB, English], CSIR
- [Presentation by Christiane Gerstetter](#) [pdf, 31 kB, English], Ecologic Institute

Further Links:

- Ecologic Institute Project: [Integrated Water and Land Management at the Regional SADC and EU Level](#)
- Ecologic Institute Project: [Climate Change, Hydro-conflicts and Human Security](#) (CLICO)Â
- Ecologic Institute Presentation: [Events on Climate Change, Conflict and Human Security during Durban Climate Summit](#)
- [Ecologic Institute Events in Durban](#)
- Ecologic Institute Publication: [Saving Tomorrow â Today? International Perspectives in the Run-Up to the UN Climate Change Conference 2011 in Durban - Perspective: The European Union](#)

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