Rural Action for Climate Resilience

Contributors

Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT)

SCAT is a veteran South African non-profit organisation that has worked for 39 years with more than 500 community-based organisations (CBOs) in rural communities to strengthen their capacity as agents of social change and justice. SCAT targets women, children and youth and has made a significant impact regarding access to justice, gender equality, youth and food security. Currently, SCAT provides 61 CBOs with grants, capacity building and mentorship. SCAT also monitors and supports these CBOs and, through this model, has strengthened agency in rural communities.

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)

SAFCEI is a regional NGO that works with faith communities in 12 countries in Southern and East Africa. SAFCEI supports people of all faiths, and none, to tackle environmental, climate and socioeconomic injustices, and thereby to facilitate effective, responsible and ethical action locally, nationally and internationally. SAFCEI monitors climate, energy and food system policies and makes informed responses from both science and values-based positions. The institute advocates for good governance to uphold the rights of people and planet.

Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF)

HBF is the German Green Political Foundation affiliated to the 'Alliance '90/The Greens' political party. As part of a global green network, HBF works with more than 100 project partners in more than 60 countries and currently maintains 32 international offices. In the Southern African region, HBF has actively promoted the consolidation of democracy and human rights, advancing gender and social justice, and supporting the shift to ecologically just and sustainable development models.

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SOCIAL CHANGE ASSISTANCE TRUST

Rural communities are the most affected by, yet lowest contributors to, climate change. At the time that the Rural Action for Climate Resilience project was designed, rural community-based organisations supported by us indicated that they knew that climate change was happening but that their knowledge was not scientific, and they did not know what they could do about it. This project was timeous in that it has significantly increased their and faith leaders' knowledge of climate change and how they can hold government responsible for building resilience to its effects. The partnership between the Social Change Assistance Trust, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute and Heinrich Böll Foundation combined our expertise and resulted in connections between our constituencies. We see that CBOs are now working together, learning from each other, and building community partnerships to adapt to the climate crisis.

DR JOANNE HARDING
Executive Director, SCAT

safcei
SOUTHERN AFRICAN FAITH COMMUNITIES' ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTE

The RACR project came at a pivotal time in South Africa as policy is being formulated to support climate change adaptation, mitigation as well as resilience-building interventions. It enabled us to elevate the voices of affected communities living in rural areas into national and international fora by sharing their lived experiences. Rural communities are reliant on natural resources for food, water and energy and while they often live in municipalities that are failing to provide basic services. Climate change exacerbates these community challenges, and it is critical that leaders are empowered with the knowledge and tools to understand the climate challenges ahead, and ultimately take the initiative to help their communities become more resilient to climate shocks.

FRANCESCA DE GASPARIS
Executive Director, SAFCEI

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
CAPE TOWN
South Africa | Namibia | Zimbabwe

Although the role played by local government is of the greatest consequence to marginalised communities and their abilities to safeguard their livelihoods from climate shocks, many of South Africa's municipalities do not have the capacity to respond to the already devastating consequences that global heating is wreaking on rural communities. The painstaking work of the Rural Action for Climate Resilience project was to directly support the capabilities of rural civic institutions to understand and respond to climate shocks, thereby both safeguarding short-term survival imperatives, as well as laying the ground for stronger governance institutions, both formal and informal, to emerge in future.

KEREN BEN-ZEEV
Programme Manager, HBF

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Acronyms

CBOs
Community-based organisations

HBF
Heinrich Böll Foundation

RACR
Rural Action for Climate Resilience

SAFCEI
Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

SCAT
Social Change Assistance Trust

Climate Change in a Rural Setting

Climate change will disrupt and devastate the lives and livelihoods of current and future generations. The reliance on fossil fuels and pollutive production, consumption and disposal practices is driving climate change. There are already shifts in rainfall patterns and average temperatures, as well as more frequent and severe extreme events like cyclones, droughts and floods. Communities must urgently build their abilities to withstand and respond to climate change and to recover from its impacts with minimal damage to societal wellbeing, the environment and the economy.

> **"South Africa's unique geographical position and vast landscape makes it susceptible to a range of climate-related impacts. As extreme weather events intensify, natural resources dwindle and vulnerable communities suffer disproportionately, the need for sustainable solutions rooted in social justice principles is critical."** [1]
>
> **DR JOANNE HARDING,** ***Executive Director, Social Change Assistance Trust***

Compared to their urban counterparts, rural people are less likely to be employed in the formal sector, are more reliant on social grants and nature-based livelihoods, have lower educational and literacy levels, and poor access to quality infrastructure and basic services. They tend to have limited access to networks and funding, restricting their range of responses. Rural municipalities often have less capacity to make and manage climate change investments. About 20 million South Africans live in rural areas and are already feeling the effects of climate change. The Rural Action for Climate Resilience (RACR) project (Phase 1: 2021-2024) aimed to improve rural communities' understanding of climate change and their capacity to build resilience. It worked with 35 community-based organisations (CBOs), advice offices and faith leaders in four South African provinces who had not yet integrated climate change concerns into their work. They play an important role in supporting communities to overcome challenges, ranging from gender-based violence, labour rights and HIV/AIDS to accessing social welfare and paralegal advice. The project supported these CBOs in designing context-specific interventions to build community resilience to climate change in meaningful ways and in elevating their voices in climate-related decision-making forums.

Case study: Life in Merweville, Central Karoo District, Western Cape

By Amber Julius, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

Merweville is a very small rural community of about 1 500 people, located more than 100 kilometres from the nearest town of Beaufort West. There are high levels of unemployment (about 70%) and most people are seasonal farm labourers with youth often dependent on government work programmes. Droughts and subsequent water shortages have caused local farmers to sell their livestock and cut down on seasonal labour. Eskom's load-shedding led to the malfunctioning of the water system – including the boreholes installed by the municipality – resulting in many household food gardens dying and leaving households reliant on emergency supplies of 10 litres of water a day. Water shortages have also affected sanitation, impacting health, particularly of the elderly.

Parents pay primary school fees mostly with social grants. Learners must attend boarding schools to complete secondary school and children are often removed from school because of financial strain. Jan Bostander, Merweville Community Advice Office Board member, notes that completing secondary school means nothing to learners because there are no jobs for them on graduation.

The lack of public transport makes it expensive (about R1 500) to travel to government offices and difficult to get to the health clinic, particularly for the elderly who cannot walk that far. People often queue in the hot sun for hours on the one day a week that the doctor attends the clinic to receive medical attention. Those needing urgent medical help must hope that the ambulance sent from afar makes it in time; that is not always the case.

Merweville has not been allocated any significant municipal funding in recent years. The community has limited ability to influence policy decisions and, given the economic and infrastructural challenges it faces, limited ability to build resilience to climate change.

The Rural Action for Climate Resilience (RACR) Project

Key Project Highlights (2021-24)

- Awarded 8 major grants to 8 CBOs
- Awarded 45 micro-grants to 25 CBOs
- Disbursed R2 million in core grants
- Initiated or strengthened 18 projects
- Supported policy engagement for 30 organisations
- Made 14 policy submissions
- 88 project participants
- Hosted 8 online quarterly seminars
- Held 2 introductory workshops
- Facilitated 2 Learning Festivals
- Facilitated 6 Regional Workshops
- Produced 5 knowledge products
- Facilitated 12 additional seminars
- Undertook 4 rounds of field trips
- Trained >60 women in climate literacy
- Trained 6 youth citizen journalists
- Published 27 articles in print & 44 online
- Gave 4 radio & 4 television interviews

The RACR project brought together the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) to design and implement a programme that would support the building of social, economic and environmental resilience to climate change in South Africa's rural areas. Funded by the European Union and HBF, RACR project partners worked with 35 organisations in the Free State, Northern, Western and Eastern Cape provinces.

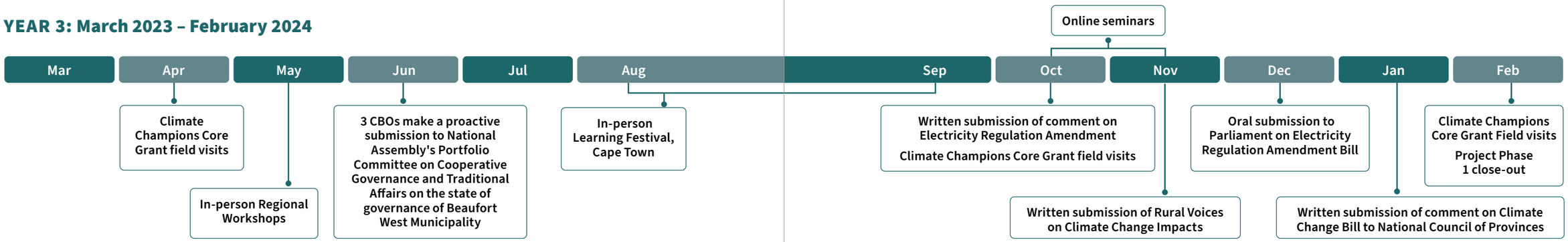
RACR Project Objectives

- Support rural communities to better understand how climate change would affect them and to design interventions to build resilience.
- Elevate the voices of rural communities in local and national government policy and decision-making circles, in particular supporting them in advocating for their constitutional rights, including the right to food, water, nutrition, health, energy, a healthy environment and social security.
- Build the ability of youth to tell stories of climate change and resilience in a rural context, through a dedicated citizen journalism programme.

YEAR 2: March 2021 – February 2022

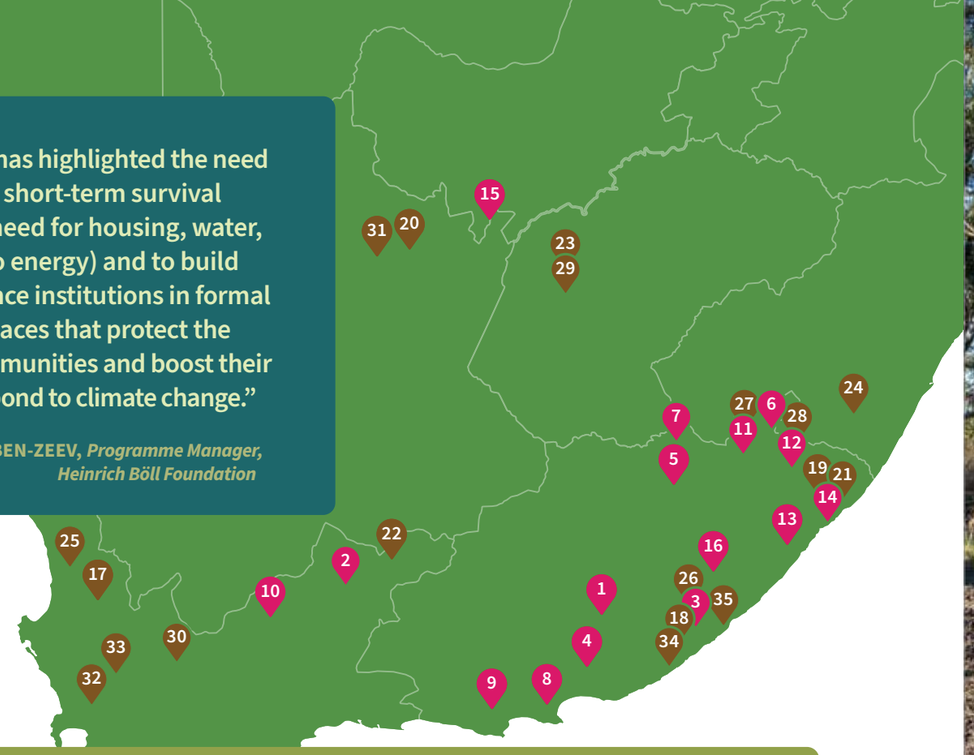
YEAR 2: March 2022 – February 2023

YEAR 3: March 2023 – February 2024



"The RACR project has highlighted the need to both safeguard short-term survival imperatives (the need for housing, water, food and access to energy) and to build stronger governance institutions in formal and in informal spaces that protect the rights of rural communities and boost their capabilities to respond to climate change."

KEREN BEN-ZEEV, *Programme Manager, Heinrich Böll Foundation*



Profiled Climate Champion CBOs

1 Adelaide Advice Centre (pg 19)
2 Beaufort West Legal Advice and Development Office (pg 19)
3 Berlin Legal Advice Centre (pg 22)
4 CARE Alicedale (pg 19)
5 Dordrecht Legal Advice & Community Development Agency (pg 24)
6 Hare Pheleng Community Organisation (pg 19)
7 Hershel Legal Advice Centre (pg 26)
8 Interchurch Local Development Agency (pg 28)
9 Masiphakameni Local Development Agency (pg 19)
10 Merweville Advice and Development Office (pg 34)
11 Mount Fletcher Legal Advice Centre (pg 19)
12 Mount Frere Legal Advice Centre (pgs 18 & 30)
13 Mqanduli Community Advice Office (pg 19)
14 Port St Johns Legal Advice Centre (pg 32)
15 Thuso Advice and Development Centre (pg 36)
16 Tyinira Rural Development Initiative (pg 19)

Other participating CBOs

17 Citrusdal Advice Office
18 Entlango Cooperative
19 Flagstaff Community Advice Office
20 Kgatelopele Self Development Forum
21 Lusikisiki Paralegal Advice Centre Human Right Organisation
22 Nelspoort Advice office
23 Otsile Bokamoso NPO
24 Reformed African Congregational Church
25 Sandveld Local Development Agency
26 Siyakhana
27 Siyanakakela Community Development
28 Diocese of Mzivumbu/ St. Phillip's Upper Mvenyane Parish
29 Tlhabologang Community Based Care and Support Services
30 Touwsrivier Advice Office
31 Tsantsabane Centre of Hope
32 Ubuntu Women and Youth Empowerment
33 Witzenburg Rural Development Centre
34 Zanoncedo HIV/Aids Centre
35 Zingisa Educational Project

Leave No-One Behind

By Imameleng Masitha, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

Rural and urban areas will both be hard hit by climate change, but in different ways. Resilience actions need to suit the context. In cities and coastal settlements, infrastructure will be hard hit by extreme events, sea level rise and storm surges are real concerns, and more intense heat islands will impact health. The consequences of these impacts will place further burdens on already constrained public health services. In rural areas, the ability to grow food will be significantly affected by changing rainfall patterns and rising average temperatures. This will devastate small-scale and subsistence farmers reliant on rain-fed agriculture. Extreme events (droughts and floods) will wreak havoc on rural communities, as it will in urban areas. Climate policy needs to speak to both urban and rural needs. In rural areas, it must prioritise land preservation, renewable energy and sustainable farming methods. It must also safeguard rural livelihoods and expand access to climate-resilient infrastructure. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change notes that to 'leave no one behind' means tackling contextual challenges and ensuring inclusive and equitable decision-making that protects Indigenous populations and neglected communities.

Often rural communities are faced with interlinked challenges. For example, they might be able to start a food garden, but to irrigate it, they must either buy water tanks (which are expensive), install boreholes (also expensive and can be damaged by the regular shutting down of the electricity grid) or use municipal water, which, again, is expensive. They might be able to produce a surplus for market, but then have to compete against supermarket chains that use their buying power to drive down prices and large-scale producers that deploy economies of scale, making it difficult for smaller producers to compete. More extreme events like floods or droughts make food production even harder without the infrastructure to protect the crops or access to insurance to protect investments. Policies need to consider these interlinked challenges and find innovative ways around them to ensure that rural people have the opportunity to become resilient.

Designing for Positive Impact

The RACR project drew on the strengths of the collaborating partners to simultaneously build CBOs' ability to engage with climate change issues and enable them to trial a range of resilience measures in their communities. HBF's experience in climate change research and working with media supported awareness raising and the opening of spaces for rural voices. SCAT's relationship of trust with members of its extensive CBO network enabled access to on-the-ground organisations. SAFCEI brought its experience in policy and advocacy work, particularly that related to climate and food justice and in facilitating popular education, to provide contextual knowledge and support.

The RACR project launched in August 2021 with an open invitation to all identified CBOs in the four provinces to attend two online information sessions on climate change. Those interested in integrating or deepening the integration of climate change into their work went on to formally participate in the project. A group of 35 CBOs remained consistently engaged throughout the three-year project. They met to learn and to exchange knowledge and experience in two online and two in-person Regional Workshops held in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape in 2022 and 2023. They also participated in two Learning Festivals held in the Western Cape in this time period. The group engaged with climate change, its causes and impacts, as well as their specific risks and vulnerabilities and the range of responses. This helped them to design their own responses to their local climate impacts.

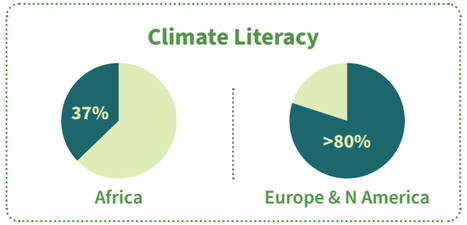
Eight expert sessions were delivered online over 2022 and 2023. These were designed to respond to the evolving topical issues and helped to deepen CBOs' understanding of climate change and to support peer learning and strengthen CBO networks, while also granting them access to the broader climate justice movement in South Africa. They were also supported in engaging with and drafting responses to emerging relevant policy developments. Popular education material was co-developed with them to enable them to share what they had learned with others in their community. A Youth Citizen Journalism Programme was established, to bring youth voices into the climate justice space and support them in telling contextual stories of climate change impacts on rural communities.

> **"Projects of this nature need to address both short- and long-term needs. Rural communities are struggling with significant challenges now – hunger, joblessness, energy scarcity – and so need to focus on the now. Climate change means that they need to also focus on the future."**
>
> **TAMZYN PAMPLIN,** ***Communications Manager, Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute***

Designing for Purpose

The logic behind the design of the programme was that informed, empowered and capacitated CBOs could help to build resilience at the local community level using their knowledge, influence and alliances, while also providing valuable insights to policy formulation and implementation. This meant designing a programme that would take its lead from project participants and focus on making a tangible difference to the communities in which the project operated. The approach was to systematically invest in selected rural CBO's abilities to build their community's resilience capabilities, with a focus on first reducing vulnerabilities. This aligns with the principles of people-centred development and asset-based community development.

A key step in unlocking people's agency to adapt and to build community resilience is sharing with them the information that they need to make informed choices. The project began by building climate literacy, which means that people understand what climate change is, what is causing it and how it will affect lives and livelihoods. It allows people to determine whether information about climate is credible and how it will affect them. Women, who are more vulnerable to climate change impacts than men, are significantly less climate literate.



A second step was to enable project participants to invest in building climate resilience for their constituency. Two grantmaking mechanisms were central to this intervention, and enabled CBOs to determine what was needed in their local context and to implement appropriate interventions. These mechanisms were the core and the **Micro and Core Climate Champion Grants**. Some used these grants to buy or build infrastructure to support resilience (water tanks, shade cloth for nurseries, garden tools, beehives, tree-cutting equipment) while others used theirs to expand their communities' awareness of climate change through information-sharing events.

Designing for Complexity

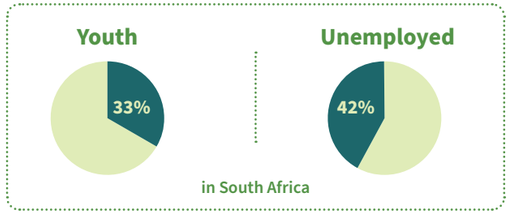
The programme was designed to act at different levels and to support multiple outcomes. It used three prongs to achieve its objectives; these were:

- **Building the capacity of CBOs to act as information multipliers in their communities regarding climate change risks and responses.** This would help enable community members to contribute to supporting or implementing context-appropriate resilience measures. This was done through Regional Workshops, Learning Festivals and co-creation of popular education materials. Micro-grants helped implement small projects as visible examples of resilience measures.
- **Enabling eight CBOs to develop and implement comprehensive climate responses in their communities, often in partnership with other stakeholders.** CBOs were supported with information, alliances, tools and technical support to meaningfully and collectively respond to localised climate change impacts.
- **Projecting the voices, experiences and knowledge of rural CBOs into local, provincial and national policy deliberations on climate vulnerabilities and appropriate response strategies.** This was done through ongoing awareness raising of the project in the media, the launch of the Youth Citizen Journalism Programme and supporting CBOs in commenting on legislation and in directly engaging with local, provincial and national government about their climate change concerns.

Focusing on Youth

Youth are economically, socially and politically disenfranchised. They will have to live with climate change impacts the longest, yet often their voices are ignored or overlooked. This disenfranchisement is more acute in rural areas where economies are weaker, and traditional leadership structures are dominated by older men. Youth networks tend to operate in isolation from existing community structures, and because they are unaware of the specific and gendered climate risks faced by their communities, they remain sidelined in contributing to building community resilience. As a result, their energy, creativity and ideas are lost to the climate fight.

A Youth Citizen Journalism Programme built the skills necessary for youth to share their stories of climate change and its impacts in their communities. The aim was that youth participants would build connections with local and national media outlets and share their own stories as well as those of the CBO participants in the RACR project. This would help to elevate the voices of rural communities on climate change. Youth voices were also brought into a panel at the 2022 Learning Festival, moderated by SCAT's Indiphile Matini. Panellists, Gabriel Klaasen, Mitchelle Mhaka from the African Climate Alliance and Geronimo De Klerk from Feed the Future spoke to the importance of youth-led movements in bringing about change and the need for intergenerational collaboration to tackle the climate emergency.



Nurturing Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Agriculture in Rural South Africa

By Keamogetswe Thomas, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

We must urgently explore innovative solutions to the crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa. The persistently high rates of youth unemployment paint a stark picture of the hurdles faced by South Africa's emerging generation, including missed opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The journey to education for many young minds in rural communities is fraught with formidable challenges. In rural South Africa this often includes the challenging task of finding ways to reach schools, often many kilometres away and over difficult terrains. At schools, youth face a shortage of essential learning materials and educational resources. Young minds are being left without the necessary tools for academic growth. Young learners sometimes prematurely end their educational journeys to seek employment and are thus denied the chance to further develop their skills and knowledge. The consequences of this extend beyond the individual, reverberating across communities and perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities that hinder socioeconomic development of the country.

In addition, in the cultural fabric of many rural communities, deeply ingrained gender norms dictate distinct roles and expectations for men and women. These cultural paradigms often support boys in pursuing education and employment and confine girls to traditional roles in the household. These disparate standards create a framework that limits the aspirations of youth, boxes them into predetermined roles and stifles any possibility of a future beyond their immediate circumstances.

Climate change will exacerbate these challenges. More frequent and more severe extreme events like flooding and storms will destroy precious infrastructure, such as school buildings, and rising average temperatures will likely impact learning capacities and outcomes.

Focusing on Women

Women (who make up just over 50% of South Africa's population), play a meaningful role in organisations; most of the CBOs that participated in this project are led by women. Women are the most vulnerable to climate change; they are more likely to die in a climate extreme event like a flood, for example. Women are also more responsible for the food, the energy and water that comes into households. The International Panel on Climate Change found that climate-related hazards exacerbate gender inequalities, intensifying an already vicious circle. Water scarcity, failed gardens and extreme events result in higher workloads for women, occupational hazards, gender-based violence, psychological and emotional stress and higher mortality compared to men.

Rural women contend with conditions shared by their urban counterparts, such as widespread gender-based violence, unpaid care work, lower incomes and restricted access to assets (including land, reproductive healthcare and education), but these tend to be felt far more acutely in rural contexts. They additionally endure uniquely rural forms of discrimination, arising from dual government systems. Patriarchal attitudes are widespread and often formally codified in 'traditional' institutions and practices, meaning that women's political marginalisation is particularly severe in rural areas. Awareness of women's rights, as well as the burdens of care placed on them by the gendered division of labour, are very low. Thus, even though women are often the numerical majority in CBO leadership, decision-making fails to adequately account for their concerns or knowledge. Rural women's ability to build their social and economic resilience is thus limited in multifaceted ways.

Despite the difficulties outlined above, women are also the bedrock of their communities. They constitute the vast majority of 'stokvel' (micro-savings clubs) members that save for household needs, and of leadership of community initiatives. But, without information on the localised (and gendered) threats that climate change poses, or knowledge of the adaptation strategies available, they are unable to take appropriate action, as they do in relation to hunger, water, livelihoods and other challenges. The inclusion of women as participants in the RACR project was prioritised from the start. Gender formed part of the selection process and the work undertaken by the youth citizen journalists helped to elevate their voices and stories in national dialogue. Through the project, many of the CBOs engaged their local municipalities directly on their gender and climate change-related concerns. CBOs were encouraged to involve more women and youth in the RACR-funded projects.

On Gender, Culture and Roles

By Lindiwe Pakati, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

Women will experience the impacts of climate change more significantly than men in South Africa because of their marginalisation from economic opportunities. They have less access to natural resources (such as land) and capital to purchase infrastructure (water tanks, seedlings, etc.).

Poverty is feminised in South Africa, reflected through increasing gender inequality levels. More women are poor than men and their experience of poverty is more severe. Climate change will amplify existing gender inequalities, including a higher risk of child marriage and labour, gender-based violence and of lower levels of educational attainment. Women and girls in rural areas are the most vulnerable. Lack of financial resources can translate into limited access to food, mobility and education. About 1 in 3 South African girls and women who menstruate cannot afford sanitary products – this equates to them each missing five days a month of education. Young girls are also often pressed into manual labour (fetching water or wood) to help their mothers, making them vulnerable to being attacked or raped when away from the home.

An important resilience-building strategy would be to support the redefining of gender roles to enable women to take up leadership roles (in politics, the church, education and society at large) and, in so doing, eliminate the false stereotypes of women as weak and unable to contribute to solving challenges in any meaningful way. Climate change interventions must consider how to enable women to play a key role in combatting the climate emergency.

Points of Intervention and Activation

The project was designed to accommodate several key intervention points and levers to amplify its impact. These included leveraging existing networks, those of the CBOs in the local context and of the project partners at the national level, and provision of technical support to CBOs in the design and implementation of their on-the-ground climate responses. Several platforms and spaces were created to encourage knowledge generation and sharing. The Climate Champion Grant mechanism enabled the trialling of resilience projects and raising of community-level awareness.

Leveraging Existing Networks

CBOs were linked to project partner networks, including national civil society networks able to provide technical expertise, policy support and media linkages. This helped to deepen their understanding of climate change risks and responses from a broader perspective and to share their rich contextual knowledge of climate change impacts on the ground. The CBOs also had their own networks and strong relationships with stakeholders, including faith groups, schools, stokvels (savings groups), and youth and women's groups that they could leverage to share information about climate change.

Providing Strategic Media and Technical Support

The project's communication strategy focused on supporting the CBOs in scaling the reach of their messaging and relationships with media houses to garner regular coverage of the project. The stories of project CBOs and of the youth citizen journalists were profiled on social media platforms and on the websites of the project partners. All online forums were recorded and shared on SCAT's YouTube channel with popular education materials loaded to the RACR website. The communications team also stored and shared the stories published by youth citizen journalists in mainstream media outlets. A quarterly newsletter kept everyone involved in the RACR project and interested stakeholders updated and media were invited to attend the in-person events.

Knowledge Generation and Exchange

A core focus was on building climate literacy along with the agency to use it in a meaningful way. Several levels of knowledge generation, exchange and sharing (learning events and platforms) were built into the programme design to support this.

The Knowledge Pathway

Accumulating meaningful climate literacy takes time. Learning interventions need to consider existing levels of knowledge, contextual factors and how people learn. RACR project partners conducted a baseline knowledge assessment prior to commencement of the project to gauge levels of understanding and identify knowledge gaps. This assessment was continually updated through what was shared in the project WhatsApp group, reports and evaluations post-learning events. This allowed the adaptation of learning events to reintroduce particular concepts (in a different way) or to bring in knowledge experts to address emergent knowledge gaps.

> **"These concepts need to be told in many ways at many different times. It is like putting together a puzzle of concepts in a way that the whole makes sense. We used different angles and different speakers to find the messaging that resonated with RACR participants."**
>
> **CLAIRE TAPSCOTT,** ***Climate Change Programme Coordinator, Social Change Assistance Trust***

The RACR project worked to make the connections between aspects of everyday life and the impacts of climate change clear. Popular education materials provided localised information highlighting specific implications for particular communities to motivate and support them in acting. Many people learn visually or by doing. The workshops and Learning Festivals held in 2022 and 2023 took full advantage of being together in person to use interactive games and activities to 'show' rather than 'tell' climate change stories. They did this through:

- **Working with Case Studies**

  Participants were given a case study – either focused on drought or flooding – and prompts to discuss in groups. This allowed participants to collectively come to an understanding of the importance of landscape (rivers, slopes, degraded ecosystems, for example) in weathering climate shocks and how they affect societal groups differently; for example, older people or those with disabilities will be more severely affected than others.

- **Mapping Communities**

  Each organisation mapped the physical landscape of their community as well as the overlapping social landscape to make specific vulnerabilities and risks visible in their localities. It also encouraged knowledge sharing regarding responses to these challenges. The maps were combined into one designed map highlighting the most relevant climate hazards and appropriate responses. This was given to CBOs to take back to their community as learning tools.

- **Illustrating Injustice Intersections**

  Participants wrote down different social issues on pieces of paper and then, holding their pieces, formed a circle, with climate change in the centre. Each issue was connected with a piece of wool to other issues. The result was a web showing the interconnected nature of these issues and how climate change affects them. It illustrates the need for a broad approach when developing climate change responses that are fair and just, and that recognise this complexity.

- **Participatory Theatre Focused on Gender and Climate Change**

  Participants were grouped, and each group allocated a scene from RACR's Gender and Climate Change booklet. They were asked to devise a scene related to climate change with a focus on gender roles in responding to and experiencing climate change impacts. A participant noted that: "Acting the scenes brought the concepts to life and provided different perspectives and learnings."

Needs-based Knowledge Products

The RACR team regularly engaged participants at workshops through surveys and WhatsApp to identify emergent knowledge gaps that could be addressed with knowledge products, such as posters, infographics, videos and booklets. These popular education materials outlined key climate change information in visual and accessible formats, including translations into two local South African languages – Xhosa and Afrikaans – widely spoken in three of the provinces. Topics ranged from the science of climate change, the gendered climate impacts in rural communities to lives and livelihoods, and how to engage local government on climate change issues. The materials included guidance on how to use them to engage with communities.

Use of these materials in communities was tracked through comments about the experience on the project WhatsApp group and in workshop evaluations. To support engagement with local government, additional materials, including templates, were developed and shared at the workshops and in online sessions.

Hosting Expert Sessions

Different knowledge needs emerged throughout the project, these were tracked through polls, surveys and evaluations. This enabled the RACR team to fill these gaps in the subsequent online seminars or workshops by bringing in topic specialists to speak to participants. The team provided speakers with a concept note, including learning expectations, and a briefing on the levels of climate literacy among participants. Eight sessions were held between 2021 and 2023. Experts, including practitioners, shared their insights and experiences, on topics like agroecology, livestock protection interventions, environmental advocacy and activism, food sovereignty and seed saving, the South African Climate Change Bill and the Just Energy Transition, scientific research on droughts and floods in South Africa and community-based early warning systems.

Regional Workshops

Two Regional Workshops were held online in 2021 and two in-person in 2022 and in 2023 in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces (six in total). Participants were able to consolidate their knowledge through exchange with their peers and to explore regionally specific content. They were also used to build skills around proposal writing, asset-based community development, working with media, the science of climate change and on the intersectionality of challenges related to climate change (water, energy, food, etc.) and on engaging with integrated development plans.

The sharing of knowledge has gone both ways in the RACR project. While information has been translated into accessible knowledge products and specialised training has entrenched information into practical working knowledge for participants, RACR partner organisations have also been able to use the knowledge generated at Learning Festivals and Regional Workshops to take into other spaces. The knowledge generated about the reality of rural life in a time of climate change – through testimonials, citizen journalist interviews, community maps of assets, hazards and vulnerabilities – becomes a powerful advocacy tool to be used in other spaces in which the core partners operate. There was also a focus on sharing knowledge about indigenous belief and knowledge systems that could help communities to adapt to climate change.

The Value of Indigenous Knowledge in Building Climate Resilience

By Kabelo Moratwe, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

In the vast landscapes of the rural Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces, Indigenous communities are facing the profound impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns and more frequent and severe droughts can lead to reduced crop yields and livestock productivity, threatening food security. In addition, increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as floods or storms, has damaged infrastructure and disrupted daily life for many communities.

These regions, which are rich in cultural diversity and ecological significance, have long been home to Indigenous communities with a deep understanding of their environment. As the climate changes, the exchange of indigenous knowledge becomes crucial for adapting to the evolving challenges. The Western perspective on addressing these social and environmental challenges often emphasises scientific and technological solutions, policy frameworks and global cooperation.

There is, however, increasing recognition of the value of integrating local knowledge and community-driven initiatives into climate action strategies. A holistic and collaborative approach that draws from both perspectives can yield more effective and culturally sensitive solutions to the complex challenges posed by climate change.

A values-based approach to addressing climate change challenges in these communities involves incorporating cultural values, community priorities and traditional wisdom into climate action strategies by recognising and respecting their cultural values, beliefs and practices. An outcome of this collaboration was the introduction of drought-resistant crop varieties into production systems that also integrated traditional water conservation methods, as was done by Mount Frere Paralegal Centre in the Eastern Cape province. The Centre also creates platforms for community elders to share traditional practices related to climate resilience to ensure that their wisdom is available to share. In the Northern Cape, Thuso Advice Centre co-designed climate activities with the community to ensure that activities met the needs of the community, and it has developed partnerships with researchers, policymakers and technocrats, including with the Department of Agriculture, to develop content to train community members on climate resilience.

Climate Champions Grant Mechanism

The grant mechanism aimed to support CBOs in starting or expanding adaptation projects in their communities and to elevate community voices – particularly those of women and youth – into policymaking spaces. It was designed at two levels: a broad dissemination of 45 micro grants (R8 000 each) and targeted dissemination of core grants (R200 000 each) to eight qualifying CBOs. Priority was given to CBO applicants that included a strong focus on women and youth in their activities. There was an extensive review of grant applications and an external technical expert who provided applicants with online and in-person support in refining their proposals. This expert also travelled to the CBO locations to meet with staff and local community members to gain a better sense of the proposed projects prior to approval of the grants by the RACR steering committee and SCAT Board. The RACR project awarded R2 million in grants between 2021 and 2024.

The Micro-Grants

SCAT's extensive experience and research into the community philanthropic sector shows that small grants can yield meaningful outcomes when leveraged with existing resources and work undertaken by CBOs.

These R8 000 grants enabled CBOs to design and implement contextually relevant activities in their own communities. These could include actions to build climate literacy, facilitate collective consultation and planning for climate change responses, make political or policy interventions or implement tangible adaptation interventions. Some of the micro-grants were also provided to core grantees to enable them to deepen or scale the impact of their RACR-related work.

- **Adelaide Advice Centre** hosted a workshop to educate the community about climate change. It provided seedlings to participants and mentoring to newly established small-scale home gardens.
- **Beaufort West Legal Advice and Development Office** hosted workshops to change community perspectives on climate change and to bring youth into developing adaptation strategies.
- **CARE Alicedale** held workshops to inform the community about climate change, its causes and impacts and ways to build resilience, including food production.
- **Hare Pheleng Community Organisation** held a climate education workshop that outlined strategies on how best to adapt to climate change and build resilience to its impact.
- **Masiphakameni Local Development Agency** shared climate change information and its gendered impacts and encouraged community members to start food gardens. It also created a forum to engage with local municipalities and institutions to discuss adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- **Mount Fletcher Advice Centre** raised awareness of climate change linked to gender issues and advised community participants at the workshop to start food gardens to combat food insecurity, and it focused on sharing climate knowledge with learners at local schools.
- **Mqanduli Community Advice Office's** project raised awareness of climate change with faith leaders, aiming to create a network able to play a more active role in the climate emergency.
- **Tyinira Rural Development Initiative** hosted workshops with learners about climate change resilience in four schools in a four-day educational programme.

Food Gardens as a Response to Climate Change

Food insecurity is more acute in rural areas and women are more affected than men. Access to food is significantly affected by a household's ability to buy it in South Africa. The number of households without an employed family member is growing in South Africa, this is more prevalent in rural areas.[9]

Many CBOs were already producing food in gardens on office premises; the grants often enabled them to establish more or larger community vegetable gardens. These food gardens were supported with specialist training from John Nzira, a permaculture specialist, on practices, such as rainwater harvesting and building soil health. Many of the food gardens have noticeably improved soils and even those projects focused on non-vegetable food sources, such as honey production, have been able to establish spaces that can more easily support food production through permaculture design. It is the start of symbiotic relationships that can support healthy food ecosystems and it allows diversity of income sources – through the sale of honey, beeswax and vegetables, for example.

"The food garden projects also helped to revitalise indigenous knowledge related to what and how foods were produced a few generations back. Part of this project has therefore been about bringing a level of care and appreciation of the innate wisdom and knowledge that people have, that has perhaps gone dormant."

INDIPHILE MATINI, *Programme Assistant, Social Change Assistance Trust*

The Core Grants

The intent of these grants was to provide adequate funds for selected CBOs to undertake a significant piece of work. Those applying for core grants had to design their intervention in one of four categories and were tasked with making their projects visible and engaging with decision-makers, such as government officials. These categories were:

- Buy and install adaptation infrastructure (e.g. livestock shelters) or develop systems (e.g., community-based early warning systems.
- Engage with government's climate change planning and implementation processes or monitor the extent to which government programmes consider climate change.
- Host sustained climate literacy campaigns.
- A combination of these.

For the CBOs, having funds to buy and install infrastructure (like beehives, water tanks) or to build it provides not only the opportunity to gain access to the technology and its benefits, but also an opportunity to learn new and valuable skills. For example, participants in the Merweville project were taught how to build a ferro cement tank and went on to build two of their own.

Core grantees were supported with project and financial management, as well as specialised technical and research support where needed. This support was facilitated by SCAT programme officers who understood the context in which the CBO operated. Of the eight projects, six focused on community vegetable garden initiatives, one on supporting small-scale beekeepers and one on clearing invasive alien trees.

Berlin Legal Advice Centre, Berlin (Ntabozuko)

About

The Berlin Legal Advice Centre tackled the climate emergency on multiple fronts. The CBO re-established a community food garden on its premises and supported several household food gardens in the community. It used its core grant to initiate a project focused on the removal of alien trees, namely black wattle, which use significantly more water than local trees and vegetation, from land designated for the grazing of community-owned cattle. About 30 beneficiaries are entitled to this site on which about 125 cattle were grazed.

Challenges

Eleven months into the project implementation, heavy rains caused the recently re-established community garden to flood, which damaged the raised beds and pathways, and destroyed the crops. This setback affected the morale of staff and volunteers who had invested time and effort into cultivating the garden. The organisation had to allocate resources to assess damage and replant the garden, while also considering measures to prevent future flooding events.

Project Outcomes

- The extraction of wattle trees served a dual purpose: it restored four hectares of land for grazing cattle and created a revenue stream for the CBO through the sale of the wood.
- The proceeds were reinvested in the CBO to support further climate change initiatives.
- Clearing the area allowed for the planting of indigenous trees, which, in time, will provide much-needed shade to grazing animals without consuming excessive volumes of water.
- The community garden provided an income-generating opportunity for the group involved and provided food to indigent people in the community.
- Permaculture training received through the project was transferred to other community gardens and helped to elevate awareness of environmental issues and sustainable living practices.

> **"A key finding for us from the RACR project was the vulnerability of women to climate change. Women typically collect firewood and water, sometimes walking long distances. Climate change-related impacts like droughts will affect them significantly. We must act now to stop the climate emergency."**
>
> ***Berlin Legal Advice Office team member***

Top Left & Right: Setting out the garden and planting seedlings.
Bottom Left: The garden team proud of their accomplishments
Bottom Right: Spinach, an example of the harvest

Dordrecht Legal Advice & Community Development Agency, Dordrecht

About

Using their grant, the CBO supported the Boniswa Machubeni Co-operative in establishing food gardens across six villages within the Machubeni and Boniswa regions, providing permaculture skills training to 60 households. They supplied tools, hosted community climate change awareness workshops and conducted monthly monitoring sessions to enhance local food security and empower communities with food production skills. They distributed trees and watering cans to 200 households in the Harry Gwala Section to mitigate the vulnerability of buildings and infrastructure to strong winds. Dordrecht also received micro-grants that were used to hold several workshops in nearby communities and schools to raise awareness of the health risks associated with burning waste, a common practice in this area. It has continued to engage with local government to grow awareness in the community of climate change and its likely impacts.

Challenges

Dordrecht had initially proposed a project aimed at combatting invasive shrubs, specifically the bush known as Lapesi, to restore grazing land. They revised their proposal though as Lapesi is very difficult to control. It is self-seeding and highly adaptable; also, the site was not large enough to provide forage for the animals.

Project Outcomes

- The home gardens improved the food security of participating households, as some had previously been indigent.
- The surplus produce from these household gardens provided an economic opportunity for gardeners to sell within the community. Notably, one participant was able to cover his grandson's tertiary education registration fee using profits from selling vegetables.
- Permaculture training provided both essential skills and indigenous environmental knowledge.
- The training reduced their dependence on store-bought fertiliser as they were trained to make their own organic fertiliser using vegetable scraps, dried grass and other garden matter.
- Over time, the planted trees will act as a natural barrier, mitigating wind damage to property and infrastructure. Their deep roots will stabilise the soil, preventing erosion and bolstering community resilience against adverse weather conditions.

Top Left: Harvest of cabbages in well-mulched beds
Top Right: Drip irrigation reduces loss of water to evaporation
Bottom Left: Proud showing of good-sized leek plants
Bottom Right: Gathering of the food gardening teams

> **"The RACR project helped us to build food security at the community level for about 300 households by transferring skills, like compost making, related to sustainable vegetable production – previously we have been growing mostly maize and sorghum. This helps community members access fresh & healthy vegetables, grown without chemical fertilisers."**
>
> ***Dordrecht Legal Advice & Community Development Agency team member***

Hershel Legal Advice Centre, Sterkspruit

About

The CBO used core grant funding to support two community beekeeping projects, providing training, necessary infrastructure and equipment to improve and expand their operations. Smokers, bee kits, a straining machine, water storage tanks and proper storage containers were provided. Additionally, one project site was fenced to prevent hive theft, while the other was supported in establishing a community vegetable garden to provide forage for the bees and vegetables for the community. Funds were allocated to both sites to erect small structures for material storage and shade during hot weather. The CBO used micro-grants to host community workshops focusing on tree preservation, honey harvesting techniques and demonstrations on producing nutrient-rich fertilisers from kitchen waste. These workshops also highlighted the symbiotic relationship between bees and gardening, leading to household food gardening initiatives. The Centre also held a two-day workshop with local ward councillors and traditional leaders to discuss climate change, bees' crucial role in pollination, and explore revenue opportunities from honey and wax candle sales.

Challenges

Insufficient water supply in drier months threatened the health and productibity of the bees and infestations threatened the stabiity of the colonies. Water tanks were provided and advice on controlling the ants using traditional methods, like wood ash. Efforts were make to foster a sense of ownership among youth in the project to ensure its longevity.

Project Outcomes

- Equipping beekeepers with additional equipment facilitated the expansion of their operations, with anticipated long-term benefits including an increased bee population in Sterkspruit. This has the potential to enhance crop production for farmers in the area.
- Community workshops effectively raised awareness about the significance of beekeeping and environmental conservation, especially in proximity to beehives, while also providing valuable insights on climate change.
- Women and youth participating in the project acquired valuable beekeeping skills and received ongoing support in production and marketing.
- Both projects achieved success in selling 20 litres of honey from their last harvest, resulting in an income of R2 400 each. It is anticipated that two harvests per year will be achieved.

> **"The RACR project opened my eyes to how our actions affect the environment, and what we can do to protect it. I am very passionate now about activities we can take to recycle our waste, to generate sustainable livelihoods – like honey production – and the need to share the knowledge gained with others at every opportunity."**
>
> ***Hershel Legal Advice Centre team member***

Top Left & Right: Beekeeping team heads into bush to check on their hives
Bottom Left: Beekeeping team gives a thumbs up to their progress
Bottom Right: Beekeeping team member shows off the honey to visitors

Interchurch Local Development Agency, Uitenhage

About

This CBO used the core grant to provide support to a community vegetable garden at the Amanzi Farm and Moegesukkel Informal Settlement in the way of providing permaculture training, Jojo tanks (water tanks), rainwater harvesting systems, garden tools, seedlings, the construction of green shade cloth structures to house nurseries and fencing for the gardens. Volunteers at Amanzi Farm received stipends as part of the Community Work Programme. More than 20 participants, mostly women, benefitted from training and support. The CBO also used a micro-grant to organise a training workshop for the community on sustainable waste management, with the participation of local municipality representatives. Given the absence of government waste collection in the area, residents resort to burning waste. The workshop aimed to demonstrate methods for waste reduction, reuse and recycling, including composting organic waste to produce nutrient-rich natural fertilisers.

Challenges

Gardeners at the community garden received a stipend as part of the Community Work Programme, which initially incentivised participation in the community-run garden. There were, however, some challenges in ensuring that the gardeners stayed motivated by broader goals such as food production, sustainability and community benefit to ensure the garden's long-term success and viability. Balancing financial incentives with a genuine passion for gardening and community engagement was essential for addressing this challenge.

Project Outcomes

- The provision of resources to the gardens increased the production of vegetables available to community members, thereby advancing their food security.
- The gardens provided opportunities for local economic development as the gardeners sold vegetables to generate profits for the garden and project participants.
- Participants who were trained in gardening not only benefited from increased permaculture knowledge but also shared their expertise with others in the community, expanding its reach. This peer-to-peer model empowered more individuals to practise sustainable gardening.

Top Left: Garden team relaxing in the garden

Top Right: Garden team proud of the progress to date

Bottom Left & Right: Team tending to the garden, weeding and checking for pests

> **"Following the RACR project, we have incorporated information about climate change into all of our other work, taking the opportunity to raise awareness of what it is and how it will affect us. We now have a radio slot to talk about climate change risks and good responses to building resilience."**
>
> ***Interchurch Local Development Agency team member***

Mount Frere Legal Advice Centre, Mount Frere

About

Mount Frere Legal Advice Centre used the core grant to support vegetable gardens at three different sites in Mount Frere. These projects received gardening tools, Jojo tanks, and cloth shade structures to house nurseries for seedlings. The grant also funded a series of workshops to educate community members about climate-adaptive vegetable gardens including skills training on compost making, permaculture planting techniques and bookkeeping.

The CBO also received micro-grants, which were used to raise awareness about the benefits of food gardening in addressing climate change and mitigating its effects.

Challenges

The community gardens in Mount Frere faced challenges during periods of heavy rains and extremely high temperatures, which damaged crops and caused reduced yields for the gardeners. This underscored the gardens' vulnerability to climate variability, emphasising the need for resilience-building strategies. Gardeners were advised to use early weather warning systems and implement succession planting techniques to mitigate future risks.

Project Outcomes

- The home gardens increased the food security of 40 households while equipping them with skills and indigenous knowledge of gardening and caring for the environment.
- Surplus produce from the gardens provided an economic opportunity for the gardeners to sell to the community and local shops. Throughout the project, R60 000 was generated between the projects.
- Following the workshops on how to enhance the financial productivity of their gardens, the project beneficiaries successfully established their own business accounts and implemented a structured system for tracking their crops and managing sales.

Top Left: Garden team turning the compost
Top Right: A celebratory dance in the food garden
Bottom Left: Garden team members proud of their accomplishments
Bottom Right: Garden team members watering the garden by hand

> **"Through the RACR project, we have learned that all stakeholders must work together to build resilience – government, community-based organisations and individuals. The challenges are urgent, and we must raise awareness and work together to address them."**
>
> ***Mount Frere Legal Advice Centre team member***

Port St Johns Legal Advice Centre, Port St Johns

About

The CBO supported three different projects, two of which were community vegetable gardens (Ngxongweni and Sinako) and one beekeeping project (Cwebeni Bee Farming Co-operative). Both projects involved mostly women. Support included provision of essential gardening tools, permaculture training, Jojo tanks and fencing to support the gardening initiatives, while the beekeeping project received necessary beekeeping equipment and beehives. The CBO hosted worksohps to educate other communities about climate adaptive vegetable gardeens. It used its micro-grants to hold additional workshops to promote adaptation strategies, like water conservation and harvesting and sustainable food production. The workshops aimed to promote climate change adaptive community vegetable gardens to enhance food security in the community.

Challenges

There were challenges around land tenure at the Sinako site as the land was reallocated to a community member by the local chief. This was carefully negotiated to ensure project continuity. The dispute highlighted broader issues of resource distribution and community dynamics highlighting the need for conflict resolution mechanisms in community developent projects. Tailored training sessions and leadership opportunities were provided to youth in the project to maintain their interest and involvement.

Project Outcomes

- The additional equipment for the Cwebeni Bee Farming Co-operative helped them to expand their operation and produce honey that provided revenue to the project. The long-term impact will be an increased number of bees in the area, benefiting local farmers and boosting project funds.
- The permaculture training taught the gardeners how to adopt holistic approaches to farming, emphasising the integration of diverse plant species, natural pest control methods and soil conservation practices. The training was effective as it provided essential skills and knowledge to manage their organic waste, transforming it into valuable compost for fertilising their gardens. This improved soil health and significantly increased crop yields and overall garden productivity.
- The success of the gardens at Ngxongweni and Sinako had a profound impact on the lives of women in the project. Previously reliant on piecemeal work, they developed a consistent source of healthy, organic food for their families and have been able to generate a profit from the sale of the surplus profit. Additionally, the inclusion of herbs in the gardens brought about health benefits for some of the gardeners, who utilised them for medicinal purposes.

Top Left & Right: Community members tending the garden
Bottom Left: Community members harvesting food
Bottom Right: Community gardeners showing off what they have produced

> **"The techniques we have been exposed to related to contour farming, permaculture design incorporating fruit trees, for example, echo the wisdom held by our ancestors. In their days, households had food – enough for the family and for guests and those passing by. Their indigenous knowledge is what we need to build climate resilience in our communities now."**
>
> ***Port St Johns Legal Advice team member***

Merweville Advice and Development Office, Central Karoo

About

The core grant was used by the Merweville Advice and Development Office to rejuvenate a 7.5-hectare community food garden situated on the outskirts of the community. With the assistance of the CBO, the garden steering committee secured a nine-year lease for the site, established a cooperative and acquired a solar panel to power the borehole pump supplying water to the garden. This initiative targeted issues surrounding food security and the significant levels of youth unemployment. The gardeners underwent comprehensive permaculture training and received additional training focused on constructing ferro cement tanks, a specialised skill essential for water conservation and management.

Challenges

The project encountered challenges regarding the use of the land by a group that had previously occupied it, despite holding a lease from the municipality. The disputing group resorted to stealing the existing fence, necessitating the use of project funds to purchase a replacement. The situation highlighted the precarious nature of community development and underscored the significance of community engagement and stakeholder buy-in as a key factor for a project's success.

Project Outcomes

- The permaculture training equipped the gardeners with invaluable knowledge and skills in sustainable agricultural practices. This training enabled them to design resilient and self-sustaining ecosystems, optimise their available resources and minimise the environmental impact, thus ensuring the garden's sustainability.
- The ferro cement tank training provided them with the expertise required to design, build and maintain three tanks effectively.
- The project transformed previously barren land into what has been described as a “beacon of hope for the community of Merweville”, as it underwent a remarkable transformation into a productive garden. This garden not only provided sustenance for the gardeners but also yielded surplus produce sold to local shops.

All images: The garden steering committee building their own ferro cement tank to store water. After initial training, the team went on to build two on their own

> **“We have learned so much about climate change, and now can inform our people and make sure that they know that climate change is real and that we are experiencing it. We share our knowledge through the climate change map we designed, through workshops, through pamphlets and by going door to door.”**
>
> ***Merweville Advice and Development Office team member***

Thuso Advice and Development Centre, Pampierstad

About

Thuso utilised the core grant to provide a Jojo tank, garden tools, seedlings, trees and permaculture training to a vegetable garden located at a local high school that supported the school feeding scheme. Surplus produce was sold to the community and donated to indigent individuals. In the second phase of the project, fruit trees and seedlings were supplied to vulnerable households in two informal settlements in Pampierstad. A small stipend was allocated to a volunteer team for monitoring and supporting the trees' care, as well as to a small group of volunteers who tended the high school garden.

Challenges

The impact of the project was hindered by inconsistent commitment from the community and the implementing team, highlighting the importance of widespread engagement and consistent participation for sustainable community development projects. Despite this, there were pockets of success where dedicated participants effectively implemented sustainable farming practices. The CBO has approached the local municipality to support in developing local disaster management plans and is hoping to access disaster funds to undertake repair of infrastructure in the community, as well as encourage the municipality to employ people to monitor and report water leakages. The aim is to integrate climate change strategies into municipal plans and programmes.

Project Outcomes

- The project's production of more locally grown vegetables reduced dependence on external suppliers, resulting in more affordable prices for community members.
- The household vegetable gardens served as a powerful model for community development.
- Workshops involving community members, stakeholders and the local municipality were instrumental in creating awareness about climate change adaptation and encouraging resilience-building activities.

Top Left: Water tanks installed at the local high school to support the garden

Top Right: Thus Advice and Development Centre at the garden site

Bottom Left: Crops grown under shade cloth

Bottom Right: Pumpkin crop starting to spread

> **"Through the RACR project, we have been able to engage our municipality around our climate change concerns and find ways to link these to integrated development plans. We need to raise awareness of the likely impacts of climate change in our community and build their resilience, including on aspects related to health."**
>
> ***Thuso Advice and Development Centre team member***

Some Communities May Never Get Back Up Without Concrete Resilience-Building Plans

By Siphamandla Mqomboti, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

In July 2023 fierce winds took the roofs off homes in Gubevu village in the Eastern Cape. Residents were left in a landscape of flailing electricity lines on tree-strewn streets. Communities had to rally quickly to take in the homeless and to check on the elderly and vulnerable. Some lost homes that they had just started building, some lost their only safe haven after losing their jobs during the COVID-19 economic lockdowns. Health services were disrupted as clinics had to close, and education came to a standstill. While government services were quickly on the scene, they were unable to restore what was lost and could only act in response. The Eastern Cape province was hard hit by drought in 2019, flooding in 2022, gale-force winds and storms in 2023, and persistent heat waves in early 2024. Each time, the resilience of rural households and communities is hollowed out, and many lack the resources to build up again.

These events are not unique to Gubeva village, they are replicated across South Africa's rural areas that have been ravaged by extreme events. Beyond the loss of homes and infrastructure and disruption to livelihoods, there are serious long-term consequences to

aspects such as health. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that more frequent and severe floods, resulting in water-borne diseases, could kill hundreds of thousands of people by 2030.

While government does have policies focused on climate change responses, there is not enough focus on contextual resilience building, and investment often does not focus on long-term gains, like durable water harvesting and distribution infrastructure or climate-resilient food production, storage and processing infrastructure. Government needs to get more involved in future climate change plans and listen to what communities have to say about the support that they need.

Amplifying Voices and Building Agency

A core focus of the project was on building the skills of CBOs to share the knowledge they had gained about climate change and ways to build resilience and to enable them to advocate themselves for better climate-related policy. Many of the micro-grants were used for community workshops related to this. There was also a focus on supporting youth in better telling their own stories related to climate change, done through the Youth Citizen Journalism Programme in which six youth journalists underwent training and were supported in publishing their articles in print and on online platforms.

> **"The vulnerability of communities has never been as stark as it is now. The impacts of climate change on all aspects of life including access to basic services is becoming more visible each day. And we are seeing the results of climate policy failure."**
>
> **FRANCESCA DE GASPARIS,** ***Executive Director, Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute***

Engaging with Policy

Climate-related policy related to building resilience covers land-use planning, climate-resilient infrastructure, public services and ensuring access to clean energy, food and safe water. Decision-makers need to calculate climate-related risks and how these affect economic, social and physical assets. At the community level, climate change concerns mostly focus on basic services – access to water, electricity, adequate drainage and sanitation and firefighting services, as examples. It is local government that is at the frontline of responding to local climate change impacts and in helping communities prepare because they are mandated to supply basic services, like water, and carry the costs of building, maintaining and repairing public infrastructure, like roads and bridges.

They are, however, often under-resourced or ill-informed about climate change and related mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies. In addition, many rural communities have dual

governance systems: traditional leadership structures and elected local councils. These two systems tend to have a complex relationship that sometimes undermines effective governance.

Policy should be informed by the contextual, lived realities of the communities it shapes. In South Africa's rural areas, communities are marginalised from decision-making spaces and/or do not have the necessary knowledge, resources and ability to engage. When they are able to access public participatory spaces, these are often experienced as check-box exercises conducted by government out of obligation and not from a truly consultative, democratic spirit. Communities cannot build resilience to climate change on their own; particularly those communities that already experience poor service delivery (water, electricity, waste, sanitation) and limited infrastructure development.

There were two layers to the policy work: First, providing general education on climate change through popular education materials, workshops and learning spaces to enhance CBOs' understanding of the policy space, and how their engagement could lead to increased social, economic and environmental resilience. Information was also shared on what is happening at the local, provincial, national and international policy level on climate change. Second, once the knowledge baseline was established, CBOs were supported in targeted action by identifying their local climate change concerns and finding relevant entry points in local legislation.

Templates were provided that CBOs could use to engage local municipalities on their concerns, such as service delivery in a time of climate change.

The RACR team conducted consultative sessions around ongoing policy to collectively draft submissions and comments on relevant policy or legislative development. This included providing comment on South Africa's draft Climate Change Bill (during both rounds of public comment), the Western Cape Climate Change Response Strategy and Implementation Plan, the Electricity Regulations Amendment Bill, the Integrated Resource Plan 2024 and the National Parliament Submission on the state of governance in the Beaufort West Local Municipality.

The team also supported on relevant public policy engagement opportunities, ranging from local government climate change planning events to the Presidential Climate Change Commission consultations on the Just Energy Transition Partnership Investment Plan and Implementation Plan. While some of the CBOs had prior experience with policy advocacy work, the RACR project enabled them to deepen their engagement by finding the entry points into complex policy and planning documents that they could link to their climate change concerns. At the RACR Learning Festival in 2023, CBOs collectively identified their key climate change concerns and what they needed to build resilience in their rural communities. These were compiled into a submission outlining rural risks and appropriate responses in rural South Africa that was distributed in December 2023 at COP 28 in Dubai, and to South African policymakers and civil society actors at SCAT's Gender-Based Violence workshop held in Cape Town in November 2023.

When communities are able to understand how climate change will affect their everyday lives and livelihoods, they are able to critique policies and plans, as well as planned developments and projects.

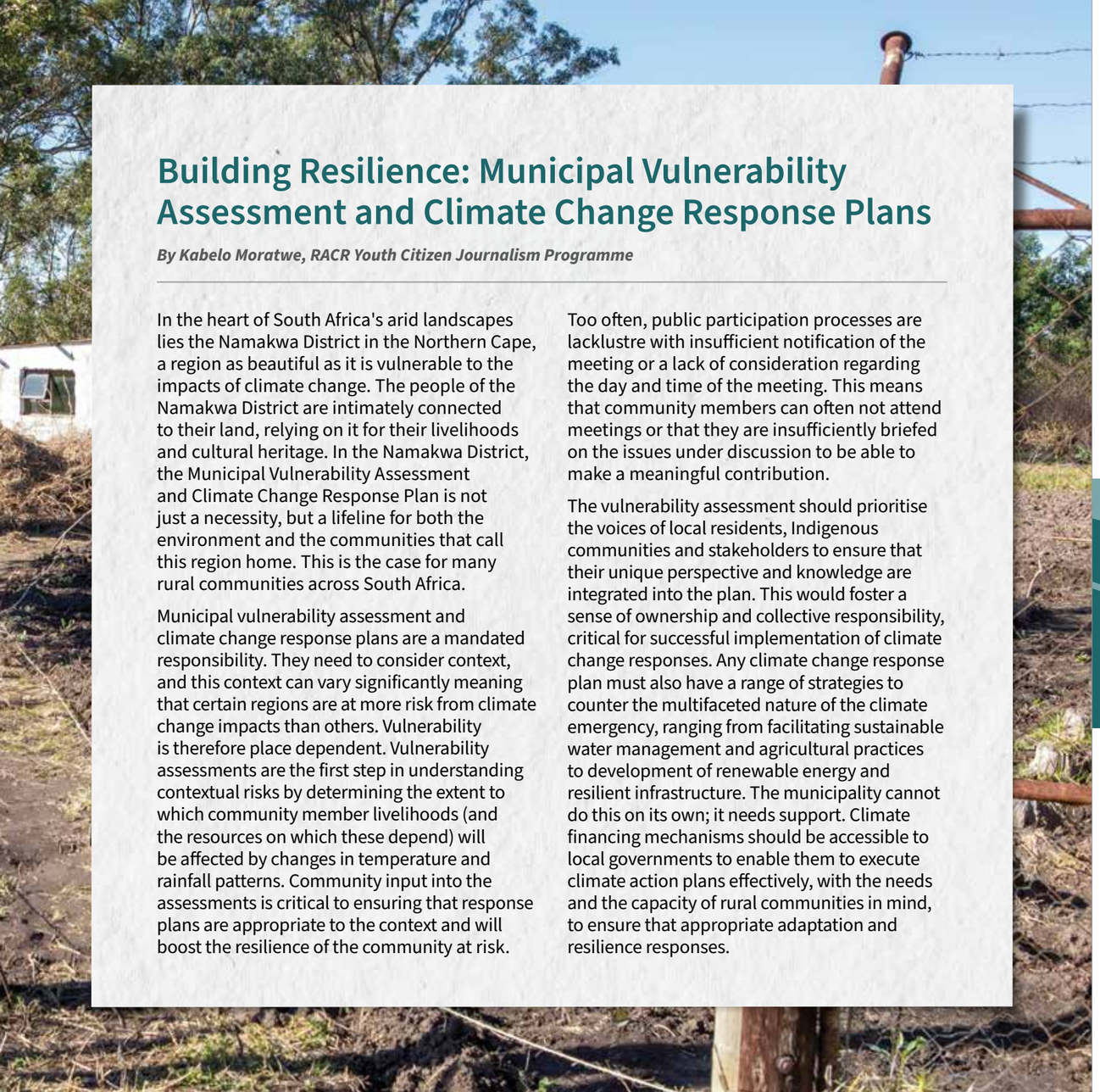
Entry Points for Engagement With Integrated Development Plans

Baseline research was undertaken on the five-year integrated development plans in 14 municipalities, as well as of annual service delivery and budget implementation plans. It is these plans that guide local government's activities. Of the 14, only half – 2 metropolitans, 4 district municipalities and 1 local municipality – have explicit response or management strategies (some still in development) regarding climate change. The others defer to provincial or district strategies or management documents.

Of the seven plans that address climate change, many make theoretical reference to its impacts, rather than proposing clear and concrete service delivery targets or climate preparedness activities that deepen municipal workers' understanding of climate change. Overall, the review of the 14 plans indicated a concerning lack of preparedness among municipalities. The research identified climate change relevant entry points linked to service delivery targets. For example, if an organisation is concerned about climate change increasing the severity of local flooding and their municipality has a target for installing or updating stormwater infrastructure, this can be leveraged to ensure that infrastructure is installed in appropriate areas. In this way, it gave many people from rural areas a way to access and influence the policy space at a local level.

"The biggest hindrance to rural climate resilience is inadequate service delivery due to weak local governments that suffer from a combination of poor municipal management, a lack of capacity and insufficient funding to address failing infrastructure."

TARA NAIR VAN RYNEVELD, ***RACR Policy Lead***



Building Resilience: Municipal Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Change Response Plans

By Kabelo Moratwe, RACR Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

In the heart of South Africa's arid landscapes lies the Namakwa District in the Northern Cape, a region as beautiful as it is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The people of the Namakwa District are intimately connected to their land, relying on it for their livelihoods and cultural heritage. In the Namakwa District, the Municipal Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Change Response Plan is not just a necessity, but a lifeline for both the environment and the communities that call this region home. This is the case for many rural communities across South Africa.

Municipal vulnerability assessment and climate change response plans are a mandated responsibility. They need to consider context, and this context can vary significantly meaning that certain regions are at more risk from climate change impacts than others. Vulnerability is therefore place dependent. Vulnerability assessments are the first step in understanding contextual risks by determining the extent to which community member livelihoods (and the resources on which these depend) will be affected by changes in temperature and rainfall patterns. Community input into the assessments is critical to ensuring that response plans are appropriate to the context and will boost the resilience of the community at risk.

Too often, public participation processes are lacklustre with insufficient notification of the meeting or a lack of consideration regarding the day and time of the meeting. This means that community members can often not attend meetings or that they are insufficiently briefed on the issues under discussion to be able to make a meaningful contribution.

The vulnerability assessment should prioritise the voices of local residents, Indigenous communities and stakeholders to ensure that their unique perspective and knowledge are integrated into the plan. This would foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, critical for successful implementation of climate change responses. Any climate change response plan must also have a range of strategies to counter the multifaceted nature of the climate emergency, ranging from facilitating sustainable water management and agricultural practices to development of renewable energy and resilient infrastructure. The municipality cannot do this on its own; it needs support. Climate financing mechanisms should be accessible to local governments to enable them to execute climate action plans effectively, with the needs and the capacity of rural communities in mind, to ensure that appropriate adaptation and resilience responses.

Youth Citizen Journalism Programme

This programme was envisaged as both a way to upskill youth to tell their own stories of climate change and to amplify rural voices regarding climate change in mainstream media. It equipped selected youth with reporting and writing skills, supported them in securing and undertaking interviews with public figures, including government officials, and in relaying climate information in an accessible and impactful way. The six citizen journalists were based in the Eastern, Northern and Western Cape provinces – regions that have limited access to mainstream media.

> "I am very grateful for the RACR citizen journalist programme. It gave me the chance to showcase my writing skills and to work in a team that has become my family."
>
> **SIPHAMANDLA MQOMBOTI**, *Youth Citizen Journalist*

> "Through the citizen journalism programme, I have new insights into how people build climate resilience with what they have in front of them and with the people around them. I have a new set of skills related to writing about climate change and am finding my voice."
>
> **IMAMALENG MASITHA**, *Youth Citizen Journalist*

> "Collaborating with this group of citizen journalists has been amazing because of their passion, diverse perspectives and commitment to reporting quality stories about climate change. Together, we have amplified voices that might otherwise have gone unheard, and we have brought out untold stories in the rural areas through the art of storytelling."
>
> **THABO MOLELEKWA**, *Youth Citizen Journalism Programme Product Coordinator and Editor*

Through their work with the RACR project, the citizen journalists have developed a deeper understanding of local climate issues and how they interconnect with many aspects of daily life. They have been able to witness and document changes to the environment, and the impact on communities, firsthand. New partnerships have been formed with local media in the process, including with IOL, Sunday World, Daily Dispatch and Taung News. Citizen journalist articles were also published on the RACR website.

The citizen journalists have written many articles over the course of the project on topics ranging from changing weather patterns to agricultural practices and disruptions to traditional livelihoods. Of these, 44 have been published online. In addition, they have built relationships with local nongovernmental organisations in the climate space and with the communications departments in their municipalities. This will allow them to continue engaging long after the project ends.

Reflections and Recommendations

On Programme Design

- **Project design must consider people and not just project activity outcomes.** It is key to build in socialising spaces to enable people to engage in dialogue in a safe space, and in such a way that it builds trust. This requires deliberate cultivation of both formal and informal spaces.
- **CBO interventions need to align to their core purpose – in other words, it must serve to deepen, extend or expand their existing work.** This helps to ensure that the intervention is not viewed as something outside of the organisation that is undertaken solely to secure the funding. It is worth spending considerable time in designing projects and activities prior to inception to ensure that it makes a meaningful contribution to the community.
- **Effective governance structures play a key role in successful project implementation.** It helps to ensure that funds are directed where they are needed, resources are intentionally used, and that monitoring and evaluation – and thus reporting – is undertaken.
- **Project budgets should consider aspects such as logistics costs in remote areas.** Travel to and from and within these spaces can be expensive, given sometimes limited or no public transport, and often participating organisations cannot cover these costs.
- **Key considerations related to community food garden projects:**
  - Having a rigorous baseline understanding of the context in which the food garden will operate is key to success. For example, issues around land tenure and relationships with decision-making individuals and institutions (traditional leaders, municipalities, private landowners) can significantly support or limit the success of a project. Another is access to water, which can make or break a food garden. There are often issues around shortages or lack of rainwater harvesting equipment, like tanks.
  - There are distinct differences related to location of projects in deep rural areas and those located in peri-urban areas. Those set in deep rural areas are often central to people's livelihoods, and projects in these areas are often characterised by higher motivation, initiative and investment levels from community members.
- **SCAT's research shows that small grants deployed to supplement, support or scale CBOs existing work can generate meaningful results** because they are often what is needed to purchase the essential piece of equipment (borehole, water tank, fencing, etc.) that is needed for success. The grant-making mechanism for this project therefore used micro-grants to leverage this finding.

On Learning

- **Learning happens in different ways for different people, some learn visually, some by reading materials and others by doing.** Creating appropriate learning methodologies is key to project success as is the facilitation of cross-learning between participants to generate the rich knowledge needed to undertake contextual resilience-building interventions. There are benefits to bringing everyone together in the same space, but also benefits to facilitating learning exchanges in the spaces in which participants live and work.
- **A key success at workshops and learning events was the practical demonstrations that relied on co-creation between participants and facilitators.** This was the case with many of the sessions that were viewed as more useful by the participants, such as making eco-bricks and hot box cookers and traditional seed saving demonstrations. This approach of co-creation also enables deeper engagement with more complex concepts, through activating participants' experiential knowledge, for example, to map their different communities and identify local climate hazards, vulnerabilities and adaptive responses in their own landscapes.
- **Central to learning about a complex concept like climate change is to balance information that is of global relevance with locally specific information.** By combining creative learning approaches with information that is locally specific and relevant, as well as learnings that emerge from the participants, there is more space for participants to activate a space of deeper learning.
- **Another successful element of in-person workshops was collective singing and prayer, which encouraged participants to be present and helped to open and hold the space for facilitation.**

On Policy Advocacy

- **It is important that rural people and communities understand their constitutional and legal rights related to food and service provision, such as water.** They need to know what they should expect from municipalities, especially regarding climate change. But this can be difficult, given that many municipalities are unclear as to what they should be doing about climate change and many people are focused on survival, rather than on abstract policy matters. Civil society organisations play a critical role in monitoring government's actions in this regard and in capacitating communities. This includes translating complex issues into accessible information for rural communities – accessible in terms of language and relevant to their particular context – and in supporting communities in identifying relevant entry points to policy engagement.
- **Often advocacy focuses on engaging politicians, but the long-term implementation and interpretation of policy and government projects is carried out by government bureaucrats who carry institutional memory and are often employed for longer.** For advocacy to translate into long-term impact there needs to be engagement with both politicians and bureaucrats.
- **Municipal officials are often not capacitated sufficiently or at all on the subject of climate change.** There is insufficient recognition within municipalities that climate change is both a local and global issue. They will, however, be the ones who will need to plan for and implement adaptation and resilience building activities and projects. There is a lot more work that needs to be done in capacitating municipal staff to support them in rolling out inclusive, sustainable and appropriate interventions.
- **It can be difficult to be heard by politicians and policymakers, who often do not want to engage with the reality of those living in rural areas.** Finding ways to support CBOs in demanding and enforcing their rights to rigorous public engagement processes is key to ensuring that they can influence policy regarding climate adaptation and resilience building. Elevating rural concerns into the policy space is not just dependent on growing the knowledge and capacity of rural stakeholders on this issue, it also requires the opening of space in the media for these stories. The Youth Citizen Journalist Programme played a key role in establishing and holding this space, and at the same time upskilling youth journalists to continue with this work.
- **It would be beneficial to facilitate peer learning between participating CBOs.** This is particularly with regards to CBOs that function as advice offices as they may have a greater understanding of human rights and the channels that can be used when human rights violations take place. This knowledge can be shared with CBOs that are not necessarily in the paralegal field, to broaden their understanding of how legislative processes work, thus consolidating the need for and the understanding of Integrated Development Planning engagements with their local municipalities.
- **More has to be done by government to activate engaged public participation in the development of climate change adaptation and resilience strategies and plans.** Often these are viewed as tick-box exercises, but without a deep understanding of context and related vulnerabilities, these plans will not serve to build the much-needed resilience in South Africa's rural communities.

Whispers of a Wounded Earth

Farmers' eyes filled with anger and rage
Strong resentment towards mother nature.
So many questions to ask climate change
Smelling the strong odour of death

Who would have thought water would kill?
Green slimy water flowing through grass.
Killing everything in sight
Nappies, paper, plastic making their homes in our water…

Water – a division between privilege and the forgotten.
Water – running dry. Hard, solid cracked ground.
For the forgotten, where is justice?

Bug eat roots
Bug eat stem
Bug eat leaves
Bug eat bug
The great green food chain
Death never tasted this sweet before.

Green, red, dark soil requires gentleness.
Look again. Be slow a bit.
Where are you running to?

The soil is rejoicing. The products are bragging
A big smile she had!
How excited she was while sharing.

Collaborative poem by the RACR Youth Citizen Journalists 17 November 2023

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To find out more about the RACR project visit ruralaction4climate.org.za

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