

## Embedding Climate Change Adaptation within Local Government

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue that has significant implications for virtually all basic municipal services, local economic and developmental planning, livelihoods and human well-being. Despite the scope and urgency of climate change, a number of barriers to South Africa's implementation of an integrated response by government at all levels have been identified. A five-year project aimed at supporting municipalities to embed climate change in local government level planning and actions has developed deeper insights into the institutional challenges and how they may be overcome. More specifically, by adopting a systems approach to climate change adaptation and supporting local stakeholders to engage in dialogue and social learning processes, the capacity of municipalities to anticipate and implement adaptive measures was enhanced. Residual challenges associated with climate change adaptation at the local government level were also identified and recommendations are made to improve the understanding, institutional support, agency and effectiveness of local government action on climate change adaptation.

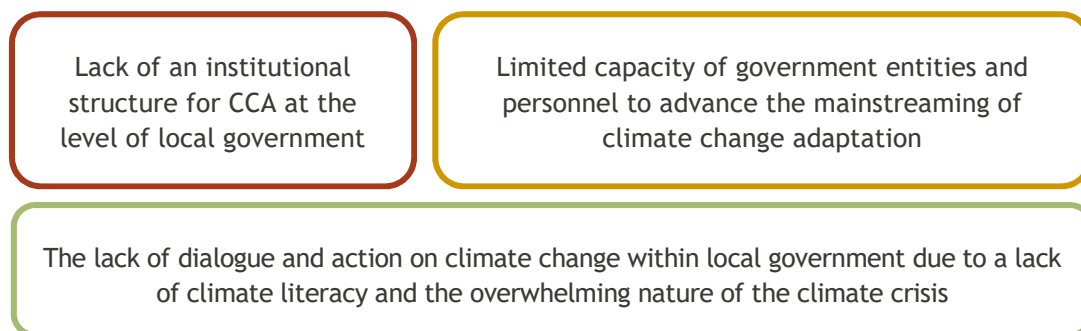
*“The degree to which municipalities can anticipate and implement adaptive measures to reduce the impacts of climate change to these important functional areas will reduce the vulnerability of communities to climate change.”*

The focus of this policy brief is on embedding climate change in municipal planning and actions. This work is urgent given that climate change impacts on many of the basic services (e.g. water, energy and waste management), planning for spatial and economic developments, coordinating local disaster responses and managing infrastructure and local resources that municipalities and municipal officials are mandated by legislation to deliver.

The **Climate Change Bill** is an important contribution to climate change legislation in South Africa. It signals a growing recognition of the significance of climate change and climate change adaptation and places substantial emphasis on the responsibilities of local government in developing and implementing appropriate responses to climate change.

In order to fulfil these responsibilities, a number of institutional barriers identified in both national and local studies have to be better understood and addressed.

These barriers include:



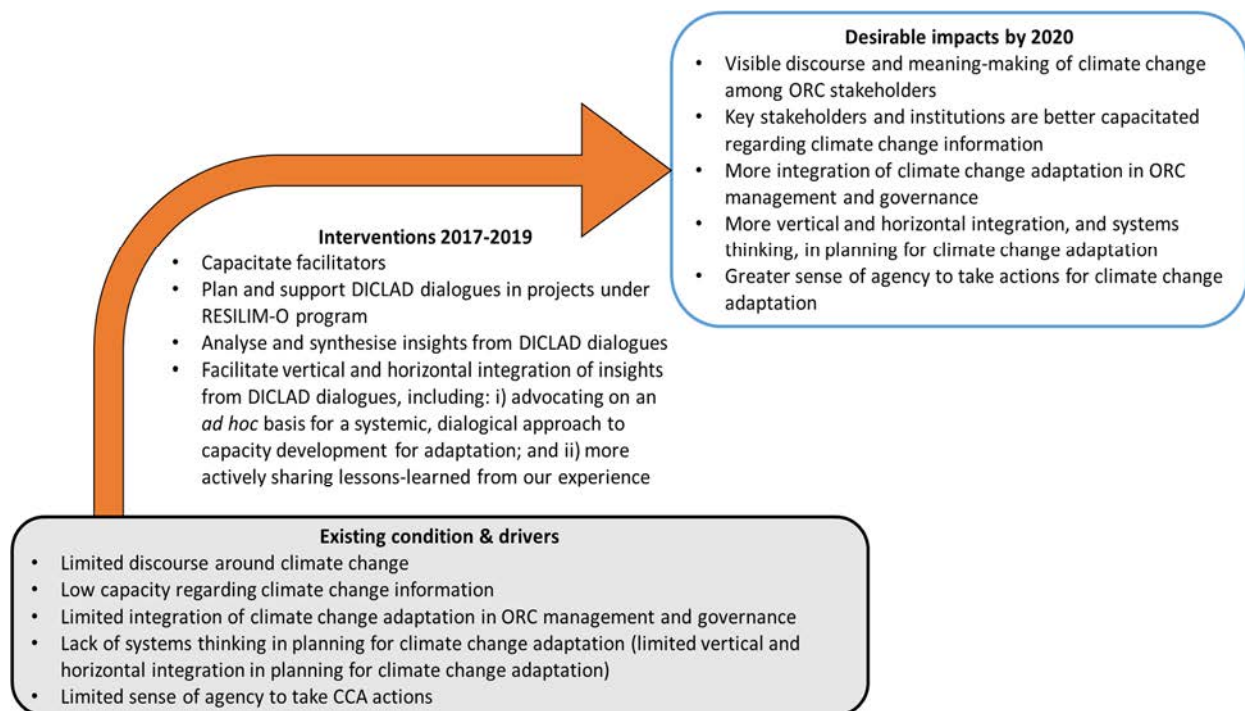
## Approach and Results

Given the challenges outlined above, AWARD sought to build a sense of agency amongst stakeholders for taking actions for climate change adaptation through:



Initial work (2015) focused on a review of climate change adaptation options, policies and projects in the Olifants River Catchment. This work established that the existing projects in the catchment were specifically aiming to support the transformation of practices in local government. This led AWARD to develop the *Embedding Climate Change in Municipal Planning and Action* project that was piloted in Maruleng LM, Ba-Phalaborwa LM and Mopani DM in 2016. The focus of the project was on supporting municipalities' efforts towards climate change adaptation through training, sharing climate information for collaborative sense-making about climate change adaptation and embedding climate change adaptation into municipal planning and actions (e.g. Integrated Development Plans).

The grounded engagement and action research carried out with local government, provincial initiatives such as the Limpopo Climate Change Working Group, the Limpopo Climate Change Summit, the Mpumalanga Climate Change Forum and national initiatives such as the National Committee on Climate Change provided important insights. In addition to confirming many of the institutional barriers identified above, it also became apparent that additional challenges included the lack of systems thinking in planning for climate change adaptation contributing to limited vertical and horizontal integration in planning for climate change adaptation. Building on these insights, AWARD initiated a new project entitled *Dialogues for Climate Change Literacy and Adaptation (DICALAD)*. This project explicitly incorporated principles of social learning and systemic thinking into collaborative dialogues with key stakeholders embedded within practice-oriented initiatives.



*Overview of Dialogues for Climate Change Literacy and Adaptation (DICLAD)*

The project contributed to a number of improvements in the ability of key stakeholders, including local government, to engage both with each other and with climate change. This included the increased ability of different stakeholder groups to collaborate in meaning-making processes on climate change impacts and adaptation actions. In particular the co-development of systemic, social learning approaches for building climate literacy and actions contributed to an enhanced sense of agency with regards climate change adaptations.

*During the project, technical staff in local governments revealed that in many instances the formulation of SFAs and projects in the IDPs, as well as budgeting processes were often dominated by political interest rather than climate change vulnerability assessments and adaptation priorities.*

Despite these successes a number of institutional challenges remained and were highlighted during the dialogue processes. Policy frameworks developing at the national level such as the draft Climate Change Bill, appear uninformed by the realities and needs on the ground to effectively support adaptation in planning and implementation. This is evident in, for example, assigning to mayors the responsibility to oversee the development, implementation and review of climate risk and vulnerability assessments and climate change plans at the level of local government. This places a significant burden on a political appointee who may not have the technical expertise or the longer-term perspective (beyond election cycles) required by complex climate change issues. Another tension that emerged is the continued lack of vertical and horizontal integration within government. Horizontally, for example the draft bill does not mention the disaster management sector including the disaster managers who have a specific mandate to include climate change considerations in their plans. Vertically, there was little evidence of reference of the provincial adaptation strategies in the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.



## Implications and Recommendations

In the context of many local governments struggling to fulfil their current roles and responsibilities, the addition of a complex, multifaceted issue such as climate change, that is impacting on many aspects of service delivery and adding to their portfolio of activities requires careful consideration. Without dedicated support and adequate resourcing of climate change adaptation work, better alignment between horizontal and vertical responsibilities, addressing the disjuncture between technical staff and political appointees and higher levels of accountability for not complying with climate change adaptation requirements, it is unlikely that local government will reduce the growing vulnerability of communities, local economies and environment to climate change.

Based on the above we make the following policy and practice recommendations:

1

There is an urgent need to ensure that the office (e.g. Mayor; Municipal Manager; Disaster Manager) mandated with the responsibility to embed climate change adaptation within local government has the capacity and institutional support to fulfil this mandate.

2

Climate literacy needs to be built across all stakeholders with a particular emphasis on those stakeholders with a mandate to shape related planning and implementation processes including the Integrated Development Plans; Vulnerability Assessments; Disaster Management Plans, Spatial Development Plans...

3

Climate change adaptation work requires dedicated support and adequate resourcing.

## Further Reading

Available on [www.award.org.za](http://www.award.org.za)

1. Climate Change - Understanding scenarios, RCPs and ppm [Brochure]
2. Climate Change Adaptation Options (2016) [Technical Report 23]
3. Historical Trends & Climate Projections per climate region Olifants River Catchment (2019) [Technical Report 24]
4. Historical Trends & Climate Projections (2019) for:
  - Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality [Technical Report 25]
  - Maruleng [Technical Report 26]
  - Tzaneen [Technical Report 27]
  - Lepelle Nkumpi [Technical Report 28]
  - Elias [Technical Report 29]

### About AWARD

AWARD is a non-profit organisation specializing in participatory, research-based project implementation. Their work addresses issues of sustainability, inequity and poverty by building natural-resource management competence and supporting sustainable livelihoods. One of their current projects, supported by USAID, focuses on the Olifants River and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems to sustain livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment.

### About USAID: RESIIM-O

USAID: RESILIM-O focuses on the Olifants River Basin and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment. The 5-year program, involving the South African and Mozambican portions of the Olifants catchment, is being implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development [AWARD] and is

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