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Cooperation between Cape Town and stakeholders can improve flood risk management in informal settlements, UCT study finds

The City of Cape Town manages flood risk every winter in many of its flood-prone informal settlements on the Cape Flats. However, flooding in Cape Town is a complex socio-political problem to manage that needs the shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders for it to be successfully managed, a study by the University of Cape Town's Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences has found.

In a thesis titled: *A nodal governance approach to understanding the barriers and opportunities for disaster governance: A case study on flood governance in an informal settlement in Cape Town, South Africa*, Dr Joy Waddell found that each set of stakeholders does not always have all the resources, expertise, knowledge, and social capital to tackle flood risk in isolation. Therefore, there needs to be greater collaboration between different tiers of government, as well as with communities, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and research institutions.

The aim of the study was to understand "how municipalities and poor communities living in cities of the global South manage day-to-day disaster risk in the face of urbanisation, service delivery backlogs and constraints, urban poverty, and a changing climate". The study highlighted how in practice, a collaborative and inclusive approach to managing urban disaster risk, which involves bringing together different stakeholders "who often do not see eye-to-eye on these issues", is hard to design, implement, and maintain.

The researcher took an in-depth look at what barriers might be present as a product of these characteristics, and how these barriers impact on the ability of these actors to collaboratively address disaster risk. She found that unclear roles and responsibilities, a lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms, unclear definitions of flooding, and a lack of human resources are significant barriers to collaborative flood governance in Cape Town. Addressing these barriers, through multi-actor platforms and inclusive partnerships, was seen as one approach to creating a more inclusive environment for local disaster risk reduction in Cape Town's informal settlements.

Dr Waddell says her interest in disaster risk management began from a young age. "I grew up in India and Bangladesh, and lived and worked in Cambodia, Thailand, and Cape Town; these places all have annual flooding that impacts heavily on communities who

often lack the resources to cope properly with and recover from chronic disaster risk. With climate change, flood risk is predicted to increase, and therefore its impact on poor flood-prone communities will only continue to worsen," she says.

"Our hope is that this conversation that we started will encourage more stakeholders to realise that disaster risk cannot be tackled in isolation, but requires collaboration with stakeholders that aren't always part of the conversation. I also hope that my research will challenge the misperception that poor communities are unable and unwilling to protect themselves from disaster risk; instead, these communities want to be part of the conversation and have a critical role to play in helping to reduce their risk to potential disasters," says Dr Waddell.

This research will contribute to the developing of policies that enable and encourage City of Cape Town departments to work more closely with local non-governmental organisations who carry out educational and disaster relief activities; working together, they can pool their resources, avoid overlaps in activities, and instead expand their reach in more communities across Cape Town. "There needs to also be more deliberate, systematic approaches to fostering collaboration between different actors, through existing multi-actor platforms such as the City of Cape Town's Flood Task Team. Although the Flood Task Team is a step in the right direction in terms of collaborative disaster governance, residents and local politicians such as ward councillors need to also be invited to play a key role in informing and implementing decisions by the Flood Task Team," she says.

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