



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Climate hazards deepen health risks across Africa – UCT study

Climate-related hazards are impacting community health and healthcare provision across the African continent, resulting in increased vulnerability and reduced capacity to withstand further impacts, a paper by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Elzarie Theron and Dr Wayne Smith of the [Division of Emergency Medicine](#) in the Faculty of Health Sciences warns.

The paper is titled "Emergency preparedness and disaster management for primary health care in Africa from the perspective of climate hazards and extreme weather events".

Published in the [African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine](#), the paper notes that while it is important to recognise that not all climate-related hazards result in disaster, this is often the case in populations that are already vulnerable, creating a vicious cycle that further increases risk.

However, with appropriate multisectoral collaboration, planning and preparedness, community resilience can be strengthened, thereby reducing the likelihood and severity of disasters.

"Disasters occur from the interaction between a hazard and vulnerability. A climate-related hazard, such as heavy rain, only becomes a disaster when communities are not adequately prepared to respond to its impacts. Understanding vulnerability within the communities we serve, and communicating these risks effectively in a way that is inclusive and appropriate for diverse audiences, is essential to strengthening preparedness and community resilience," said Theron, a research fellow in the Division of Emergency Medicine.

Situated at the interface between health systems and communities, primary care providers are uniquely placed to identify climate-related vulnerabilities and emerging risks. Sharing these insights through disaster risk management platforms can inform planning processes and strengthen preparedness and resilience, the paper notes.

The paper also notes that experiences from the Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness have demonstrated the benefits of multiagency collaboration in enhancing climate and disaster resilience.

For example, early warnings issued by national meteorological services enable proactive mobilisation and preparedness for potential hazards, including floods and heatwaves.

Collaboration also improves data integration for risk mapping. By combining meteorological data – such as rainfall, river levels and soil saturation – with demographic and infrastructural information, authorities can identify high-risk zones more accurately.

With this purpose in mind, the article outlines key concepts and approaches in disaster risk management, supported by a real-life case study that illustrates lessons learned and their implications for primary health care, aiming to better equip providers to participate in and support resilience-building efforts.

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- [Read the paper.](#)

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Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5672

Cell: (072) 563 9500

Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za