Community Perspectives on Climate Change Communication

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This study amplified the voices of South African communities with regards to their knowledge on climate change. It found that they preferred the use of social media and community engagement as methods of dissemination and were vested in learning how to contribute towards mitigation.

BACKGROUND

Humankind, have succumbed to the debilitating effects of climate change, with their homes and livelihoods suffering crippling effects. Developing countries such as South Africa have experienced huger climate impacts on their health due to its social determinants and are in dire need of capacitating communities to adapt and develop resilience to climate change. Communities should be empowered with knowledge to understand the associated concept and the tools to adapt to the changing climate. Over a third of South Africans live in rural areas and remain ill-informed or totally unaware of the associated concepts. This research study enables community voices to be heard, to create a deeper understanding of community needs, and their knowledge and experiences of climate change. Given the gap in the literature particularly in the African context regarding climate change communication, this study will make a valuable contribution regarding the South African community scenario, specifically the eThekwini, Durban area.

Aim of the study: To explore the current knowledge, opinions, challenges and preferences of communities with regards to climate change communication

METHODS

Qualitative research methodology guided this study. Participants comprised of community members from diverse demographic, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Participant group selection was stratified according to the main sectors within eThekwini i.e. rural, urban, peri-urban and informal settlements. Six participants were selected from each of the four sectors. A total of twenty-four one-on-one interviews were conducted with members of the community at their homes or community centers. Data collection concluded after saturation was reached. Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to determine recurring themes within the responses.

RESULTS

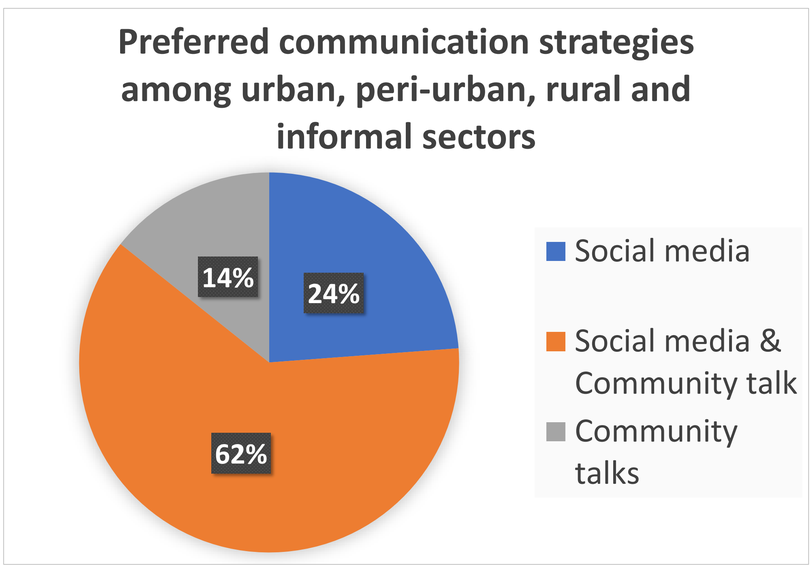
The findings reflected that the South African public have a basic knowledge of climate change. All participants had heard of the concept and were able to describe the effects of climate change. Most participants initially learned of climate change in school. Participants were able to identify human activities as the contributor of climate change. Air pollution from industries and open burning was the most cited activity by 18 of 24 participants. Deforestation was the second most mentioned activity contributing to climate change. Sources of knowledge were radio talks, local news, observation, experiences of the environment and even schooling. Participants stated that climate change was important to them and would make minor changes to address environmental issues if provided with information for practical application. Community members highlighted the lack of information from local government and welcomed such information to educate them further on the topic.

RESULTS CONTINUED

Climate change communication preferences across the urban and peri-urban sectors were found to be similar. Participants in the age category 50 years and younger requested information sharing through social media. Community talks, newsletters and posters were preferred by participants over within the 52–62-year category. These responses were from participants across all four residential sectors. The findings are significant as it directs climate change communicators to understand that regardless of where people live i.e. urban, peri-urban, rural or informal, they prefer information dissemination in similar methods. This information can assist in streamlining efforts to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of climate change communication .

"I don't like technology that much, but something like a newsletter I definitely will sit and read it" (P1)

"I think social media, everyone has access, almost everyone has a phone. Whether it's a WhatsApp message or a TikTok video. I think a TikTok video that would reach all kids." (P4)



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings illuminated critical views of community members on the methods of communicating climate change that would most serve the community. Both these methods cover a range of age groups within a community thereby ensuring that everyone is reached. Participants expressed that they wanted information explaining climate change and the actions that people could take to minimize the effects and to adapt to the changes. These findings are significant for local government and those involved in dissemination of scientific information to the public as it provides an understanding of the preferences of communities regarding how they would like to receive climate change information and the types of information that are required. Local government can direct efforts towards engaging social media and physical community engagement platforms to educate and capacitate communities. Communicating climate change in an effective manner can ultimately build the resilience of communities and pave the way for more adaptative behaviour in communities amidst the global climate crisis.

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