IMPACT STORY | 4

Stories worth telling

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CROSS-CITY

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CLIMATE RISK NARRATIVES: 'HUMBLE' SCIENCE

FRACTAL has experimented extensively with the use of Climate Risk Narratives (CRNs). These are stories told from the future of a changed climate and associated impacts. The CRNs were initially developed by climate scientists as plausible stories about the future climate of a city based on evidence from regional climate projections and observations. This introduced climate risk information into FRACTAL's transdisciplinary activities. CRNs then proved useful during the project's iterative co-production processes as a way to identify climate knowledge that is relevant to a specific city's climate risks, their potential impacts and suggested societal responses.

They are instrumental in supporting and generating engagements and research activities, outputs and outcomes. They are useful tools to integrate climate knowledge into resilience decision-making, to promote dialogue and to co-produce knowledge and improve the understanding of relevant city-region climate hazards and impacts.

THE CHANGE STORY

CRNs were developed as a climate information communication device. Traditional methods using maps and other complicated visualisations require too much technical capacity for interpretation, and fail to effectively communicate and promote conversations about uncertainty. They gain traction as they align with how people like to engage with complex science, by building a story that explains the information with which they're engaging.

After an early experience of producing CRNs for South Africa's Third National Communication to the UNFCCC, a set were developed for the City of Cape Town (CoCT). They formed part of a process to update climate projections for the city. They led to discussions about possible city futures, demonstrating their potential to spark constructive dialogue and integrate relevant information from a range of knowledge-holders. Draft narratives were then developed for Windhoek, Lusaka and Maputo as inputs into the city learning processes and as conversation starters about climate science, noting that other types of knowledge were also important. This process helped the climate scientists to better understand the city context. It also helped to clarify and communicate the needs and potential responses required to build resilience in the FRACTAL cities. This iterative process empowered city officials, community representatives and social scientists to engage in developing their CRNs.

Further demonstration of the CRN process as a knowledge integration device comes from work done in Blantyre, Gaborone and Harare. The process was initiated by developing socio-economic narratives with city residents. A climate lens was applied to the outcomes. The process was engaging because it dealt with issues that were important to and experienced by the city participants as a starting point.

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RELATED IMPACT STORIES (IS) | What is the climate narrative in Lusaka? (IS12); Moving towards integrated and inclusive climate change planning in Windhoek (IS15).

The Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL) project aims to address the challenge of providing accessible, timely, applicable and defensible climate information that is needed by decision-makers operating at the city-region scale in southern Africa. FRACTAL impact stories have been collaboratively developed by various research teams. They highlight key methods, engagments and research findings from the FRACTAL project.

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UNPACKING THIS STORY

The process of developing CRNs often facilitated learning between and across different stakeholder groups and city departments and institutions. It helped to build understanding and a sense of community, creating links between previously siloed activities and departments.

The process often led to a realisation that many relevant activities were already underway and even if they were not necessarily sufficient to ensure resilience to future climate, they had the potential to be built on.

The development of infographics to synthesise the narratives helped to convey more clearly what the future might hold. The infographics generated useful discussions on possible response strategies. This included identifying several of relevance across multiple futures which provided clear evidence of for future action.

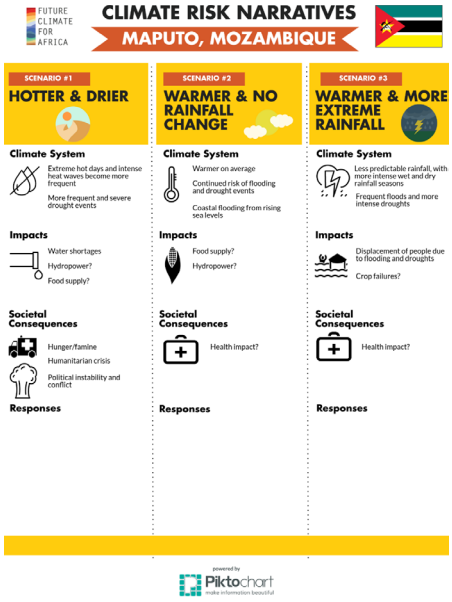
The CRNs that focused on purely negative future scenarios were not as well received as those which included positive aspects, such as building on current initiatives to improve the situation for city communities. Conveying a more positive message was also noted as important for getting buy-in from decision-makers.

The process of developing CRNs encouraged improved communication and relationships between a wide range of relevant stakeholders. CRNs developed from being simple communcation devices into a broader process that promoted effective knowldedge integration, empowerment and capacity building.

The iterative, reflective environment during engagements and research that helped to build experience and communities, generated learnings and will sustain the learning beyond the lifetime of the project.

LEARNINGS

- CRNs are a good way to start conversations and engage stakeholders and if these are sustained through an iterative, reflective process they can integrate and develop relevant knowledge. Processes should be relevant to specific issues of importance to the stakeholders involved.
- CRNs should include some negative scenarios for the future in order to underpin the need for action. They must also include positive scenarios, which can engage communities, stakeholders, decision-makers and politicians to work together to build a more resilient future.
- Data and information included in the narratives needs to be place specific to be relevant to stakeholders, thereby encouraging their buy-in to knowledge integration processes and subsequent policies and actions.
- CRNs should include a high-level summary that provides more complex information than the infographic. This enables succinct presentation of key information while underlying climate and socio-economic data provides richer contextual information as the main evidence base.
- Generating the evidence base as a combination of natural and social science findings combined with subjective future socio-economic scenarios challenged and broadened the researchers' perspective.



Co-developed climate risk narrative for the city of Maputo

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