

ABSTRACT

Climate change for Watkins (2007: 1) is a cross-boundary scientific reality with unknown climate related changes that threatens the global humanity's shared carbon space. The post-Kioto climate conference was held in Copenhagen between 7 – 18 December 2009. This Copenhagen climate change conference represents a multinational effort to limit climate challenges and temperature increases through a comprehensive agreement. The Copenhagen climate summit concluded without an ambitious or lawful accord. In a fast-growing country like South Africa and a geographically vulnerable province like the Western Cape, that is rich with natural resources, climate change represents a growing risk with increasing challenges for disaster management. The primary source of news is newspapers and this strengthens the specific role that *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* can play in the "global village".

Newspapers content is representative of what is important, and to understand the context of the problem the role and nature of these information sources must be understood. *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* is a central source of influence, because through the content it publishes it influences the risk perceptions of the reading public. Relevant literature consulted indicated a knowledge gap in the relationship between newspapers and their readers in the context of the Copenhagen climate summit and disaster management.

This study is undertaken with the aim of establishing how three Western Cape newspapers namely *Die Burger*, *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* constructed, understood and approached the Copenhagen climate summit through a mixed method approach. The quantitative text analysis undertaken during November 2009 to February 2010 provided statistical results from 299 items. Qualitative interviews provided in-depth insights from four journalists, a climate scientist and a disaster manager.

The empirical research and the literature indicates that *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* are ideally placed to play an extensive and critical role in the context of international climate change conferences such as the Copenhagen climate summit.

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The implication for *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* is that they can be utilized to improve sustainable, responsible risk-decreasing behaviour through awareness raising of the reading public by helping them create a personal connection with climate change. Leading from this it is found that climate change is a burning issue and no longer simply an environmental issue. Obstacles complicate the communication in the climate discourse and must be overcome to realise the vision of an extensive role for newspapers with constant and newsworthy climate change reporting.

From the empirical research, factors were identified that influence the newsworthiness of the climate summit and these must be addressed to bring about change. Better collaboration between the editors, scientists and journalists must be achieved; commercial news values such as the immediacy of news must not limit the space and time allocated for climate change reporting; journalists must move away from mere recognition to more investigative journalism; the dominant neutral news coverage must be replaced with more positive and insightful articles; and more local prominence and relevance must be given to climate change and the seriousness of international climate change conferences.

Disaster management is a critical function in the management of a physical, scientific and observable unfolding event like climate change within the context of sustainable development. When considering this study in its entirety, it is clear that *Die Burger*, *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* can be utilized as a more effective component of disaster management, by conveying the importance and seriousness of international climate change conferences to their readers which can lead to public pressure for more decisive

policy formulation around climate change and bring about collective participation. conserve ecosystems and reduce fire danger. The Theoretical frameworks of different authors from local and international perspectives were consulted to gain more knowledge that will assist in improving and upgrading the current veldfire management plan.

The findings of the research show that TCLM Fire Brigade Services have the fire prevention, fire preparedness, fire protection and suppression measures in place and there has been a decline of veldfire incidents since the TCLM implemented the prevention programme which involved community participation. Hence, the Fire Brigade Services does have a veldfire management plan that is used in addressing veldfires which is not approved by the municipal council. Therefore there is a need, therefore, to have an integrated veldfire management plan that is composed of all the prevention measures and approved by the municipal council.

The importance of the research will contribute to organisational learning within all agencies involved in the management of veldfires in the district and the Mpumalanga province as a whole. The research will further focus on improved service delivery and enhanced capacity among agencies and members of local communities to understand, prepare for, prevent and respond to veldfires. In addition, the findings should, wherever appropriate, relate to the disaster management policy for South Africa, while taking account of current policies and institutions. A well developed plan cannot only directly save lives but also serve to reduce loss of property and disruption of social networks.

The results show that Thaba Chweu Local Municipality conducts most of its fire awareness campaigns at community, primary and high schools. FAO (2006) spells out that a well- informed public will be more likely to use fire carefully and adhere to policy and legal boundaries and thus assist in the prevention, detection and reporting of veldfires.

In conclusion, cooperation and coordination is the key to veldfire management and prevention strategies because of the authority given to local government by the Act. The research document will assist the municipality on upgrading the current existing veldfire management plan in order to proactively deal with the veld and forest fires within its vicinity. Compliance to the current veld and forest Act and other relative legislative frameworks on fire control and management v

must be effectively enforced to promote the use of prescribed burning and minimise breakaway fires. The research document also explores the theoretical framework of the management of veldfires as well as the legislative requirements of the given discussions.

The research document will further demonstrate the author's commitment to assist in reducing disaster risks posed by veldfires. Successful implementation of the plan will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders within the district. The veldfire management plan recognises the importance of cross-border collaboration and provides framework collaboration with the municipal's neighbours. If put to good use, the contingency plan will strengthen capacities at all levels to mount a timely and coordinated management and control to veldfire outbreaks in the district and the province.