

Towards improved public awareness for climate related disaster risk reduction in South Africa: A Participatory Development Communication perspective

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ABSTRACT

Southern Africa has frequently been struck by damaging climate hazards which increasingly continue to threaten sustainable development efforts. Ominously, climate models predict that the incidence of major 'wet' events, such as floods and cyclones will increase in frequency against the background of a changing climate. Unfortunately, local mechanisms for communicating and raising public awareness of the consequent risks and appropriate risk reduction options remain weak. At the core of policy responses to the threat posed by climate related hazards, the South African government has adopted a disaster risk reduction approach to disaster management. This article details how, among many other measures to limit the adverse impacts of natural hazards, South Africa's National Disaster Management Framework calls for the implementation of effective public awareness activities to increase the knowledge among communities of the risks they face and what risk-minimising actions they can take. Emphasis is laid on the importance of information provision and knowledge building among at-risk communities. Citing established theories and strategies, the author proposes a participatory development communication approach through Development Support Communication strategies for the provision of disaster risk reduction public awareness activities by government and other disaster risk reduction role-players in South Africa. By way of a review of completed studies and literature, the article provides guidance on the planning and execution of successful public communication campaigns and also discusses the constraints of communication campaigns as an intervention for comprehensive disaster risk reduction.

KEYWORDS

disaster risk reduction, development communication, development support communication, public awareness, public communication campaigns, national disaster management framework, climate disasters

