



# Flooding in Cape Town's informal settlements: micro-politics and community leadership

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# Context 1: South Africa and Cape Town

- SA does have pro-poor policies and housing legislation.
- Still – new informal settlements every year – many on private land
- Particular national political history – tension
- CT's 3.7 mill people
  - Aprox. 400 000 live in inadequate dwellings – shacks in informal settlements



# Context 2: The flooding problem in Cape Town's informal settlements:



- Most informal settlements located in low lying area – the Cape Flats
- Flooding every winter:
- Natural factors - high water table
- But also lack of- or broken infrastructure (e.g drains)



# Flooding in informal settlements:



- When rain – flooding - water both inside and outside shacks
- Still standing grey-water
- Effects: health, mobility, belongings

# Earlier project insights: towards analysing interaction

- In Cape Town, efforts made:
  - **Individuals:** residents apply coping mechanisms
  - **Local government:** 'flood risk management plan', relief aid, some upgrading
- However moving from coping to adaptation needs:
  - Better collaboration - interaction within settlements and between residents and local government
  - Insights into political dynamics that impact this interaction
- Flood risk management literature: household vulnerability or government policy
  - but lately also acknowledged political dynamics at several levels

# Methods and focus

- **3 flood prone settlements** visited for 3 years:
  - Observation, interviews, surveys
- Focus:
  - **Community leaders:** 'Intermediates' in between local government and residents
  - This give insights into **political dynamics**



# Varied expectations to community leaders:

- **Residents: often feel fatigue, want leaders to work for them**
  - Report flooding to government
  - Influence government - provide upgrading
  - However, difficult for leaders to reach local government
- **Local Government: want leaders to work downwards**
  - Inform and get residents to join workshops
    - difficult because residents feel information not useful, want upgrading
  - Regulate residents (e.g waste in drains, relocate) –
    - difficult as residents suspicious to authorities

# Micro-politics: flooding and broader informal settlement issues

- **Politics within settlements:**
  - Suspicion. e.g around handing out flood aid
  - Tension between residents and between leaders related to deeper issues
  - Leaders expected to work voluntarily, but they marginalized too sometimes quit, find paid employment, or even corruption
- **Outsiders also change political dynamics:**
  - Co-optation
  - Too many different outside actors
  - Fatigue or tension after heightened expectations
  - However, also change for the better possible – increase learning about political systems



# Conclusion

- Improved interaction necessary, but **attention to political dynamics at all levels** important
  - Impacts community scale vulnerability
- Clarity about roles and communication channels – **increase transparency, decrease suspicion**
- Avoid different actors collaborating with different community leaders
- Constant **mediate expectations**, and explain bureaucratic processes and formal political systems

# Thanks

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