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Climate risk and vulnerability atlas to be launched

By: Carla Thomaz

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A new atlas of local risk and vulnerability in the context of global environmental change will be launched in March, in electronic, as well as in a hard-copy format.

The South African Risk and Vulnerability Atlas, a project initiated and funded by the Department of Science and Technology, aims at equipping decision-makers with information on the impact and risk associated with global change and promoting public access to scientific information. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) manages the project, with key content, intellectual and technological inputs from local institutions and research groups.

"[The atlas] focuses on supporting decisions that increase a local community's resilience to global change impacts by encouraging the integration of information from different sectors," says CSIR project manager Dr **Rebecca Maserumule**.

The Atlas captures and links to data related to groundwater, surface water, forests, bio-diversity, human health, crops, demographics, economics and social dimensions. It will provide a portrayal of South Africa's changing environment through images, photographs and case studies that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding essential for adaptation and mitigation. The project team reports that the atlas will be useful to urban planners, policymakers and government institutions, such as municipalities, needing to make long-term land-use decisions based on key risk and vulnerability information.

Maserumule explains that the atlas aims to assist in the identification of research gaps. Further, the atlas should be seen as a living platform, as, when new information becomes available, it will be added to the body of knowledge, she says.

The Internet Atlas will have similar features to Google Earth, which allows users to zoom in on specific locations in South Africa and obtain information about future climate conditions, such as the likelihood of droughts, floods or large ocean waves affecting a neighbourhood, rising sea levels, changes to vegetation and expected changes in minimum and maximum temperatures, as indicated by a range of results.

The atlas is expected to be of significant value to policymakers and decision-makers at regional, national, provincial and municipal levels, as well as consultants, researchers and students. The project team reports that it will also help support national initiatives, such as the National Disaster Management Framework, by equipping decision-makers with information on the impact and risk associated with global change in the region.

"The atlas will provide a data platform from where South Africa's world-class research can be freely accessed and used to inform policy and adaptation measures," concludes CSIR principal climate change scientist Dr **Emma Archer**.

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Tel: +27(0)11 622 3744 | Fax +27(0)11 622 9350 |
newsdesk@engineeringnews.co.za
<http://www.engineeringnews.co.za>