Climate Action Against Disinformation

roots

# Climate Change Communication, Culture and Disinformation in Majuba Village, Eastern Cape

www.poweredbyroots.org
hello@poweredbyroots.org

www.caad.info
contact@caad.info

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the residents of Majuba Village who shared their time, stories, and knowledge. Gratitude to traditional leaders and community facilitators who helped organise discussions and to interpreters who supported isiXhosa and Sesotho translation. Appreciation to Roots and Climate Action Against Disinformation for their support.

This is a field report written for an international audience. All local terms are explained in plain language when first used. The report balances lived experience with clear evidence so that readers who have not worked in rural South Africa can fully understand the context.

Written by Cherish Vindusa

Peer reviewed by Phil Newell

Edited by Sandra Ata and Rosario Coll

November 2025

www.poweredbyroots.org
hello@poweredbyroots.org

www.caad.info
contact@caad.info

# Executive summary

**Purpose**. This field study examined how residents of Majuba Village in the Eastern Cape understand climate change, where they get information, and how misleading stories take root. The goal was to identify practical ways to communicate climate information that is accurate, trusted, and culturally respectful.

**Where and who**. Majuba Village lies in Senqu Local Municipality within the Joe Gqabi District. Households rely on rain fed gardens, communal grazing, social grants, and informal work. The main languages are isiXhosa and Sesotho with Hlubi also spoken by some families.

**Methods.** The study combined a household survey with seven Focus Group Discussions. Groups included women, men, youth, and elders. Research was conducted in English with translation into isiXhosa and Sesotho as needed. Notes were analysed to identify common themes. The approach focused on listening to how people explain environmental change in their own words.

**What people know.** Residents are deeply aware of change on the land. They spoke about late rains, streams that run dry earlier, reduced grazing, and fruit trees that no longer bear as they did before. Many described the soil as tired and the seasons as unreliable.

**How people explain it.** Scientific language such as greenhouse gases is not commonly used. Instead, people often link drought and storms to social and spiritual causes. Explanations included ancestral warning, God's anger, or witchcraft during times of conflict. These explanations are not lies. They are moral frameworks that communities use to make sense of misfortune when trusted scientific information is missing or hard to access.

**Cultural responses.** Two practices stood out. First, the rainmaking ritual where women climb the mountain to pray and sing for rain. Second, the Iphini ritual where one village symbolically steals the wooden pap stick from another and races it to the chief's homestead while the other village gives chase. If the runners arrive first, people believe rain will come. Both practices express a local view that social harmony and environmental harmony are linked.

**Disinformation pathways.** Misleading climate stories travel through everyday spaces. Word of mouth at churches, funerals, and stokvel meetings. Family WhatsApp groups that circulate voice notes and predictions. Political gatherings where drought is framed through party loyalty. The absence of regular, local, trusted climate content makes it easier for rumours to fill the gap.

**Why radio matters.** In rural South Africa radio is the most reliable mass medium. It is free to listen once you own a receiver. A small radio can run for months on batteries. Many households do not have Wi Fi and mobile data is costly relative to low incomes. For these reasons radio reaches more people more often than internet based platforms. National public stations such as Umhlobo Wenene FM and Lesedi FM have wide reach, but they cannot serve every dialect or local issue. Community radio is close to the ground and can speak in the exact languages and dialects that people use at home, including Hlubi. This makes it the most practical tool for climate education in Majuba and similar villages.

**What is at stake?** Repeated dry spells and heat affect cattle condition, garden yields, and household water. When rains come late, families buy more food, sell livestock at lower value, or seek temporary work away from home. Clear, trusted climate information can help households adjust planting calendars, protect livestock, and store water better. Without it, people are more vulnerable to both climate shocks and misleading claims.

**What will work?** Communication should be local, in isiXhosa, Sesotho, and Hlubi where relevant. It should be dialogic which means two way, using formats people enjoy. Radio mini dramas, call-ins with trained facilitators, short talks at livestock dip tanks, and simple posters that show planting months and pests are all suitable. Training local presenters and youth facilitators to verify information and explain climate in plain words will reduce the space for rumours. Chiefs, councillors, teachers, and church leaders can carry the same messages so that people hear consistent guidance from trusted voices.

### Main recommendations

1. Establish or strengthen a community radio station for the Senqu area that includes regular climate segments in isiXhosa, Sesotho, and Hlubi.
2. Train a small team of local climate facilitators including women and youth to appear on radio, visit schools, attend dip tank days, and host community dialogues.

3. Produce simple visual materials such as a seasonal planting calendar and a livestock heat stress tip sheet that match local conditions.
4. Run a story based radio mini series that follows familiar characters and ends each episode with one practical action.
5. Create a feedback loop where listeners can submit questions by SMS or through school drop boxes and receive answers weekly on air.
6. Coordinate messages across chiefs, councillors, teachers, and church leaders so that households hear the same advice from multiple trusted sources.

# Methodology

### Research purpose

The research aimed to understand how people in Majuba Village experience and explain climate change, where they get information, and how inaccurate or misleading stories circulate. The study also sought to identify practical ways to make climate communication more effective, inclusive, and trusted at community level.

### Design

A mixed-methods design was used. This means both numbers and stories were collected and analysed together to give a fuller picture. Quantitative data came from household surveys, and qualitative insights came from Focus Group Discussions and key informant interviews.

### Sampling

The research planned for 100 survey participants but achieved 74 complete responses due to travel distance and availability of participants. Respondents were aged between 15 and over 65 and included men and women from all sections of Majuba. Seven Focus Group Discussions were held, each with 10–12 participants selected by a simple number-draw method to ensure fairness and diversity.

### Focus Group Discussions

Each FGD lasted about 90 minutes and followed a 12-question guide translated orally into isiXhosa and Sesotho. The guide covered topics such as local weather changes, beliefs about their causes, sources of information, and whom people trust most. Two facilitators

managed each session one leading and the other taking detailed notes. With participants' consent, discussions were video recorded and later transcribed.

The FGD method allows people to build on each other's thoughts, reveal shared cultural reasoning, and surface local metaphors that might not appear in individual interviews. The approach is widely used in rural development research because it respects oral tradition and group knowledge.

### Key informant interviews

Additional short interviews were conducted with a traditional leader, two health workers, a teacher, and a local councillor. These interviews provided background on community communication patterns, leadership roles, and existing environmental activities.

### Data processing and analysis

Survey responses were entered into a spreadsheet and analysed for frequencies and patterns for example, how many people had heard the term "climate change" and from which sources. FGD and interview transcripts were coded for recurring themes such as spiritual interpretation, institutional mistrust, and disinformation channels. Findings from both methods were then compared and integrated.

### Ethics and consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. Permission was obtained from community leaders before fieldwork began. No names were taken.

### Limitations

Some participants were unavailable during planting season, and a few older respondents preferred to speak only in their home dialects, which required extra translation time. Despite these constraints, the combination of surveys and FGDs produced a reliable and representative picture of community perceptions.

## Theme 1. Confusion between climate and weather

Many residents described immediate weather events such as heat waves, sudden storms, or heavy rainfall rather than long-term patterns. When asked what climate change meant, common phrases included "the weather is angry," "the sun is too hot," and "the seasons have lost their order."

These expressions reveal that people observe environmental shifts daily but use local language to describe them. The words “angry” or “mood” suggest a belief that nature has personality or moral intent. For Majuba residents, weather is relational; it reacts to how people behave toward each other and toward the land.

When asked for examples, participants mentioned goats miscarrying after sudden temperature changes, fruit trees that no longer produce, and streams drying earlier in the year. This shows a lived awareness of climate variability even if the terminology is not scientific.

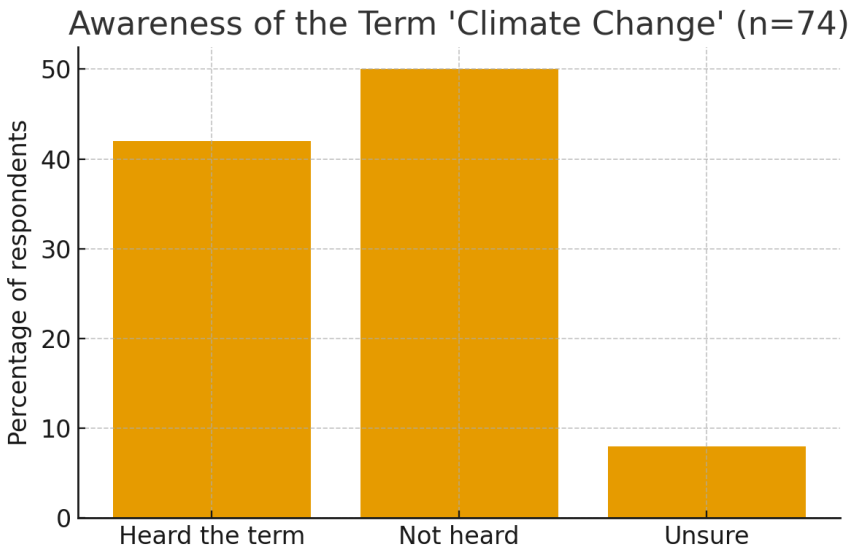


Figure 1. Awareness of the term “climate change” among survey participants (n = 74). Only 42 percent had heard the term before; half had not.

### Theme 2. Spiritual and supernatural framings

Many participants framed environmental changes through spirituality or traditional belief. Some said drought was punishment from God or the ancestors; others spoke of witchcraft between families. Such interpretations were particularly strong when families experienced conflict or loss.

These explanations are not acts of misinformation. They are moral frameworks built on generations of experience. In rural South Africa, where formal environmental education rarely reaches households, spirituality provides meaning and comfort. According to

national surveys by the Human Sciences Research Council, more than one-third of rural respondents still attribute misfortune to witchcraft or ancestral anger.

Understanding this worldview is essential for communicators. It shows that factual climate messages must coexist respectfully with cultural belief systems rather than try to replace them.

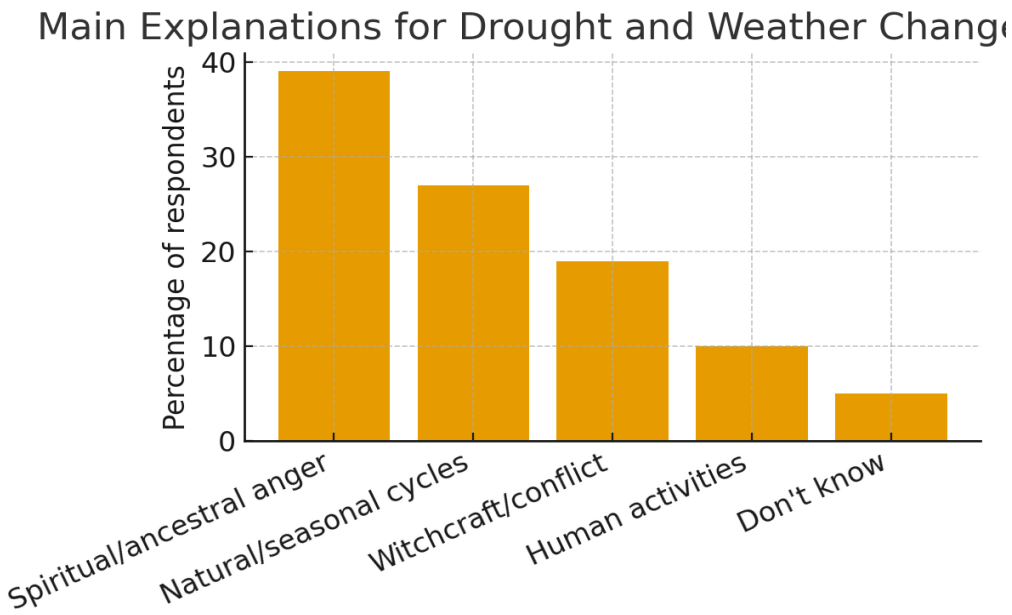


Figure 2. How respondents explained environmental change. Spiritual and moral interpretations outweigh scientific ones

### Theme 3. Environmental memory and loss

Older participants spoke with deep sadness about visible environmental decline. Many said, “The soil is tired” or “The stream is sick.” They compared today’s landscape to their childhood memories when rivers flowed longer, birds were more plentiful, and gardens flourished with maize, peas, and pumpkins.

When asked how they knew things had changed, participants pointed to specific indicators: fruit trees flowering later, tadpoles disappearing, and grazing fields turning bare before mid-summer. These detailed observations show a community that closely monitors its environment even without formal measurement tools.

### Theme 4. Institutional mistrust and media silence

Participants expressed strong mistrust of local government and said they had never received any municipal information about climate or drought. A few had heard news about floods in other provinces but none explaining local droughts.

Radio was identified as the main information source, yet residents said that national stations such as Umhlobo Wenene FM (isiXhosa) and Lesedi FM (Sesotho) rarely talk about climate issues in a way that connects to their daily lives. These stations are respected but are national in scope and broadcast mainly urban content. Their headquarters are far from the Joe Gqabi District, and presenters may not know local dialects such as Hlubi.

Without regular, relatable information, people turn to word of mouth and local leaders for explanations, which leaves space for rumours and misconceptions to grow.

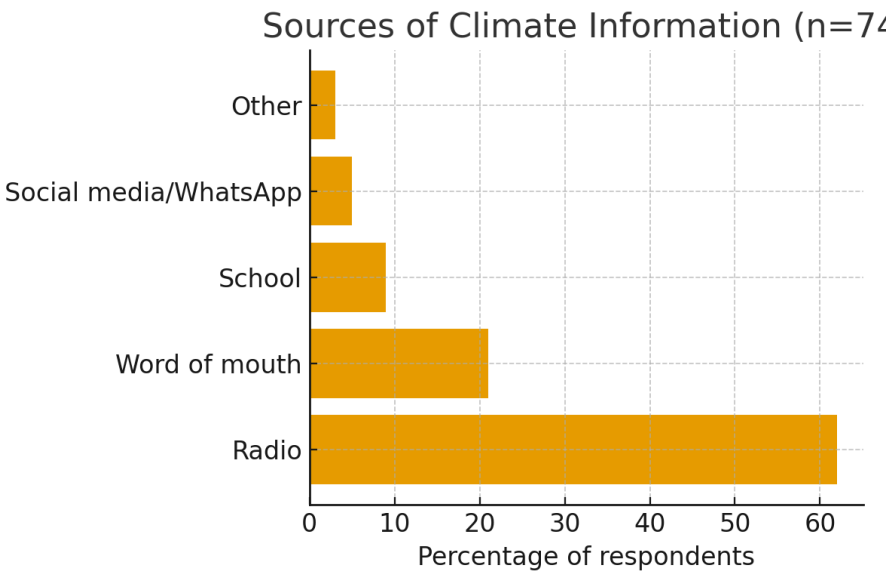


Figure 3. Main sources of climate information. Radio dominates as the key channel of awareness.

### Theme 5. Cultural coping mechanisms and ritual solutions

Two traditional practices were discussed in nearly every focus group: the women's rainmaking ritual and the Iphini ritual.

When drought persists, women in the community climb the nearby mountain to pray and sing for rain. Men do not participate; the act is led exclusively by women because they are seen as life givers, symbolising fertility and renewal. The ritual strengthens unity between

community members and the ancestors, expressing the belief that social harmony restores environmental balance.

Linked to this is the Iphini ritual, named after the wooden stick used for stirring pap, a thick maize porridge. During severe drought, one village symbolically steals the Iphini from another and runs with it to the chief's homestead while the other village chases them. If the runners reach the chief first, it is said the drought will break and rain will fall; if they are caught, the drought may continue.

For outside readers, these rituals may appear symbolic, but in Majuba they are social actions that restore moral order. They show that people use collective storytelling and ceremony to respond to crisis.

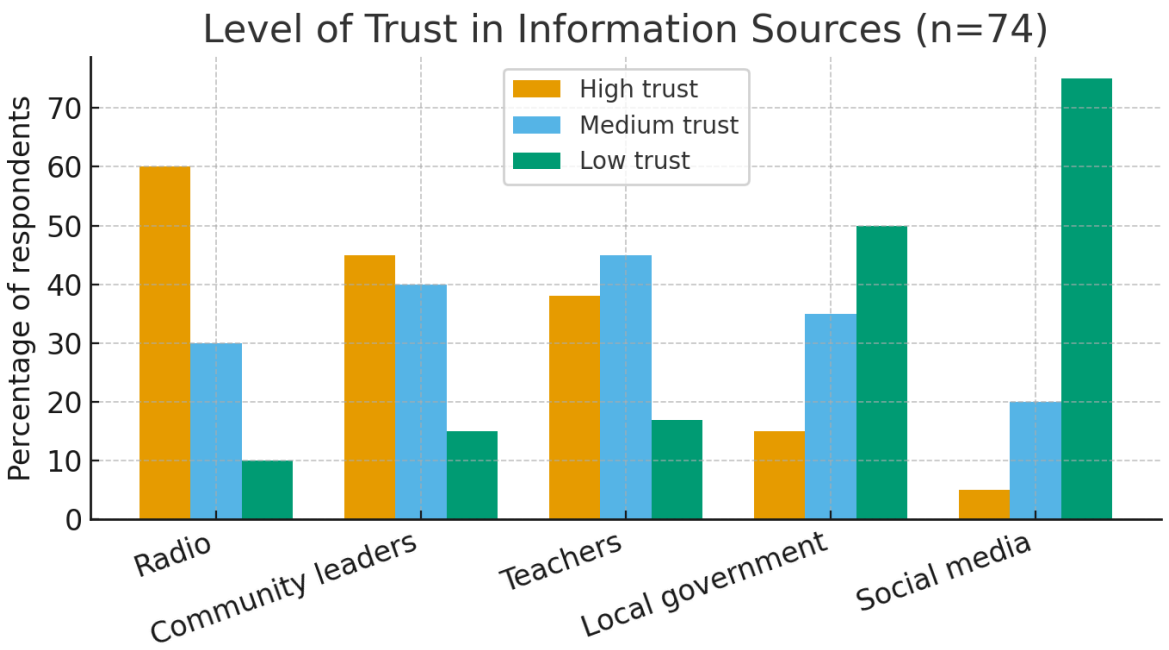


Figure 4. Trust levels in different information sources. Radio and community leaders enjoy the highest credibility.

### Theme 6. Disinformation pathways

The study found several ways that climate-related misinformation spreads:

- **Word of mouth** at churches, funerals, and stokvel gatherings.
- **WhatsApp and Facebook** messages predicting "government-made weather" or claiming that rain was stolen by other provinces.

The absence of clear local information allows these ideas to circulate widely. Similar patterns have been documented nationally by the Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC, 2023), which notes that rural audiences are highly exposed to misinformation when internet access is limited and local journalism is weak.

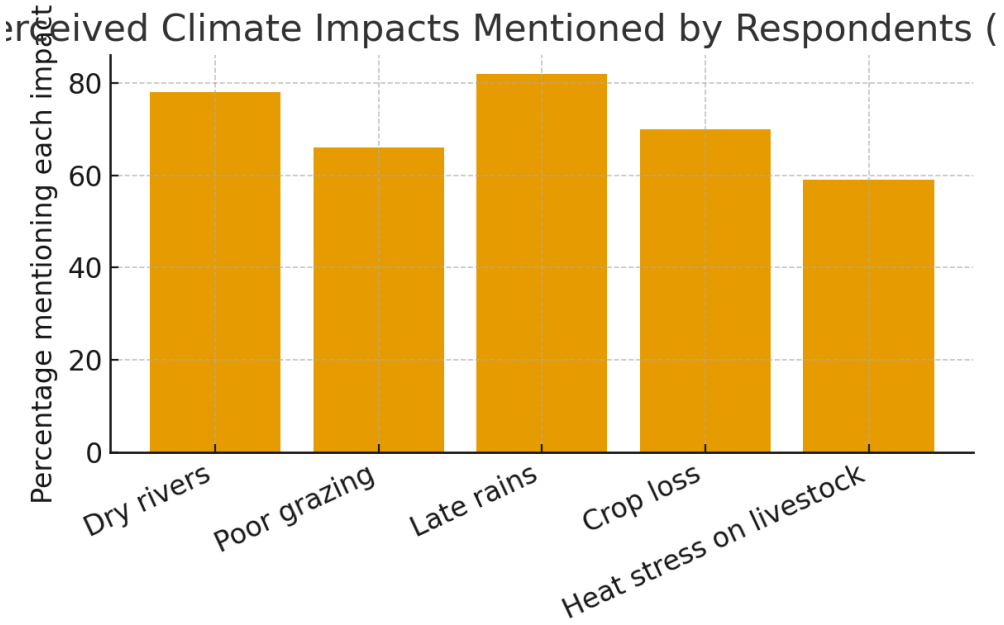


Figure 5. Commonly observed climate impacts mentioned by Majuba residents.

### Focus Group Narratives

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) provided detailed, human accounts of how Majuba residents interpret and live through climate change. Each group discussion lasted about ninety minutes and was guided by twelve open questions. The process created space for participants to debate, question, and reflect on their own experiences.

### Structure and Participation

Groups were held in the community hall over two consecutive days. Each included ten to twelve participants representing women, men, youth, and elders. Discussions were translated between English, isiXhosa, and Sesotho as needed. Women were especially active in the sessions that dealt with rainfall, agriculture, and spirituality, often connecting environmental issues to household responsibilities.

After each question round, participants chose one spokesperson to summarise their group's views. The rest of the room could then respond, leading to a lively dialogue. This method encouraged inclusion and let the researcher observe how ideas spread and how consensus formed.

### Common Storylines

Across all groups, a consistent narrative emerged: environmental change is real, visible, and deeply felt. Participants spoke of unreliable rains, stronger heat, and soil that "no longer listens." Yet very few used the term *climate change*. Instead, they described what they saw and connected it to social or spiritual causes.

One woman said:

*"When the river no longer flows, it means we have forgotten the ways of our mothers. We must go up the mountain and sing again."*

A middle-aged man linked climate shifts to global behaviour:

*"The people in cities are polluting the sky. That is why it burns the earth. We pay the price here."*

A 78-year-old traditional leader provided a remarkably accurate scientific explanation:

*"The seasons have changed. That is climate change. We pollute mother earth and that pollution goes up and heats the sky. It melts the ice at the poles and makes the sea rise. The same heat brings floods and fires."*

His statement shows that accurate understanding can exist even without formal education when people listen to multiple information sources.

### Emotional Tone and Memory

Elders expressed nostalgia and grief for the environment they grew up in:

*"We had fruit trees everywhere. We swam in clear water. Now the trees are gone, and even the horses refuse to drink from the stream."*

Such reflections were often followed by silence or murmurs of agreement, revealing that climate impacts are experienced not only materially but emotionally. Many participants

used words such as “the land is tired” or “the soil is old,” which personify nature and signal a deep relationship with place.

### Belief and Interpretation

While a few participants referenced scientific or media sources, most framed the issue through belief systems. Several stories linked drought to witchcraft between families or villages. One man said a neighbour’s field failed because “he was bewitched for boasting about his harvest.” Others cited the Bible, describing floods as signs of the “end times.”

These interpretations show how social tensions and spiritual frameworks shape environmental understanding. For communicators, this highlights the need to start from within these belief systems rather than outside them.

### Knowledge Gaps and Information Sources

When asked where they heard about climate change, only two participants mentioned school lessons. The majority cited radio news, but they recalled hearing about distant events like Cape Town’s “Day Zero” water crisis rather than local advice. Others said they rely on community leaders, church announcements, or phone messages shared by relatives.

Young participants reported using WhatsApp and Facebook, but only when they had data or Wi-Fi access in town. As one youth explained, “Data is expensive; we use it for chatting, not for climate.” This confirms that cost barriers limit digital learning.

### The Role of Women in Rainmaking

Women described their role in the mountain rainmaking ritual with pride. They emphasised that only women are allowed to go because women bring life, just like rain brings life. One older participant explained that when the drought is severe, the women climb before sunrise, carrying traditional cloth and singing ancestral hymns. The men stay behind to prepare the village. After the ritual, everyone gathers at the chief’s kraal for a prayer of unity.

### The Iphini Ritual

Several groups recounted the *Iphini* ritual. Villagers laughed as they explained how one community “steals” the wooden cooking stick from another. The chase to the chief’s

homestead is both competition and collaboration: whichever side wins determines whether the rains will come. Participants said this event strengthens relationships between villages and provides relief through humour and shared purpose during hard times.

To outside observers, the ritual may seem playful, but within the community it symbolises moral cleansing. Reconciliation between villages is believed to restore the balance of nature.

### Signs of Change

Beyond rituals and beliefs, participants offered concrete observations. Many said winter is warmer, rivers dry sooner, and certain birds no longer migrate through the valley. A young man noted that snakes appear earlier in summer, which elders confirmed as unusual. Farmers said they now plant later to avoid losing seeds to unexpected frost.

### Implications from Narratives

The focus groups show that Majuba residents already possess rich environmental knowledge but lack trusted, locally relevant information. They draw on spiritual, experiential, and communal sources to interpret what they see. Strengthening local communication systems, especially community radio, could bridge this gap by blending scientific information with cultural context.

### Implications for Communication

The findings from Majuba Village reveal that communication around climate change must start where people are  within their languages, belief systems, and daily realities. Information cannot simply be transmitted from scientists to communities; it has to be translated into the cultural and economic terms people live by.

### Why Radio Matters

In rural South Africa, radio is the most widely used and trusted medium. A simple radio receiver costs little and can operate for months on two batteries. Many households have no Wi-Fi and very limited internet coverage. Data and airtime are among the most expensive in the world relative to income. The International Telecommunication Union (2023) reports that one gigabyte of mobile data can consume up to 5 percent of a

low-income household's monthly income. Because of this, families prioritise calls and messaging over internet browsing. In contrast, radio is free once you own it.

People listen while cooking, herding, or travelling, which means radio accompanies daily life. It is also inclusive: listeners do not need literacy, electricity, or smartphones. For these reasons, any national or regional climate-communication plan should treat radio as core infrastructure, not as an optional supplement.

### National vs. Community Radio

South Africa has a three-tier radio system: national public service, commercial, and community.

- **Umhlobo Wenene FM** (broadcast in isiXhosa) and Lesedi FM (broadcast in Sesotho) are national public stations of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. They reach millions across the country but their programmes are produced in urban centres such as Johannesburg and Gqeberha. As a result, they cannot fully reflect the dialects, customs, or challenges of remote areas like Majuba.
- **Community radio**, by contrast, operates within a small broadcast radius. It is locally owned and often volunteer-run, using the languages, humour, and idioms of the region. Community presenters are neighbours rather than distant professionals, which builds credibility and trust.

Community radio is therefore the most practical medium for climate education in Majuba. It can include local dialects such as Hlubi, a language closely related to isiXhosa and isiZulu but distinct enough that many speakers feel excluded from national broadcasts.

### Why Local Languages and Dialects Matter

Language carries a worldview. When information is delivered in a dialect people use at home, it feels familiar and trustworthy. A single isiXhosa word can have different meanings across the Eastern Cape; local presenters instinctively understand these nuances. Including Hlubi, for example, would acknowledge a group that is often invisible in national programming and increase inclusiveness in public information campaigns.

### The Case for Localised Climate Radio

Community radio stations understand their listeners' context. They know when rivers dry, which roads become impassable, and what crops are failing. They can schedule programmes to match local routines for example, a short climate bulletin after early-morning church news or before evening farming updates.

Possible broadcast formats include:

- **Call-in dialogues** where farmers, women's groups, and youth ask questions directly to trained facilitators.
- **Radio mini-dramas** that use storytelling to teach climate adaptation in entertaining ways.
- **Weather diaries** where elders share traditional indicators such as bird migration or early flowering.
- **Community reports** giving weekly updates on water supply, grazing, and planting advice.

Because community radio staff are locally rooted, they can quickly correct rumours and misinformation. For example, if a false message spreads on WhatsApp claiming "government controls rain," a presenter can invite a local agricultural officer to explain the science in familiar terms.

### Building Trust and Countering Disinformation

The research shows that misinformation fills the space left by silence. Regular, consistent, and friendly communication builds a layer of protection against false claims. Trust depends less on high technology and more on *who* delivers the message. Chiefs, councillors, teachers, pastors, and especially women's groups are all respected voices within the community. Partnering them with trained climate facilitators ensures that accurate information is repeated in multiple settings.

### Integrating Culture and Science

Communication should not dismiss traditional beliefs but connect them to practical action. For instance, the women's rainmaking ritual could be broadcast as a cultural story followed by a short scientific explanation about rainfall cycles. This approach respects heritage while encouraging critical thinking.

In Majuba, people are already observing environmental patterns with great accuracy; effective communication helps them link these observations to global processes.

## Recommendations

The lessons from Majuba Village point to clear, practical steps that can improve how climate information is shared, understood, and trusted in rural South Africa. These recommendations are designed to be realistic for communities with limited resources and to align with the goals of combatting climate disinformation.

### 1. Establish a Regional Community Radio Station

A dedicated community radio station for the Joe Gqabi area should be created or strengthened to serve Majuba and surrounding villages. It should broadcast daily or weekly programmes on climate change, weather, agriculture, and sustainable practices in **isiXhosa, Sesotho, and Hlubi**.

**Purpose:**

- Provide locally relevant and accurate climate information.
- Translate scientific concepts into everyday language and stories.
- Counter misinformation by addressing rumours directly on air.

**Practical actions:**

- Recruit and train local presenters who already have community trust.
- Involve schools, women's groups, and youth clubs as content contributors.
- Partner with agricultural officers and educators for verified information.

### 2. Train Local Climate Facilitators

Identify and train a small group of local climate facilitators, especially women and youth, who can act as interpreters between scientific and community knowledge systems.

**Their role:**

- Host short radio segments and participate in call-in programmes.
- Lead school and church dialogues about climate adaptation.

- Visit livestock dip tanks and community gardens to give practical advice.

Training should cover basic climate science, local storytelling methods, and misinformation spotting. Facilitators can work part-time and be supported by small stipends or partnerships with local NGOs.

### 3. Use Storytelling and Drama

People learn best through stories that reflect their own lives. A radio mini-drama series can follow characters who face drought, make decisions about planting, and learn through experience.

**Example:**
A fictional family navigates a changing climate, showing what actions help and which make things worse. Each episode ends with a short explanation of the science behind the story and an invitation for listeners to send their questions.

This method humanises climate education and avoids technical jargon.

### 4. Create Visual and Print Materials

Simple posters and leaflets in isiXhosa, Sesotho, and Hlubi can reinforce radio messages. Visual materials are useful for schools, churches, and municipal offices.

Examples include:

- **Seasonal planting calendars** that show when rains typically start and what pests appear after hot winters.
- **Livestock care tip sheets** on watering, shading, and disease prevention during heat waves.
- **Household water conservation guides**.

These materials should use pictures more than text so they are accessible to everyone, regardless of literacy level.

### 5. Build a Feedback Mechanism

Set up an easy way for residents to ask questions and give feedback about climate information. In Majuba, many people own basic phones but not smartphones. Therefore, SMS or call-in systems work better than online forms.

Schools can also serve as collection points for written questions that are later answered during radio broadcasts. This two-way approach ensures that communication remains interactive rather than one-directional.

### 6. Coordinate Trusted Messengers

Climate communication is strongest when multiple respected voices repeat the same message. Chiefs, councillors, teachers, and pastors should be engaged as partners. Local government offices can provide up-to-date forecasts and advisories that these leaders share during meetings or services.

Training sessions for leaders can include how to recognise and correct misinformation without shaming those who believe it.

### 7. Encourage National Support for Community Media

National policy should recognise that community radio is public infrastructure. Funding and technical support are needed to sustain local stations, maintain equipment, and pay minimal stipends to presenters. Without stable funding, rural stations risk closure, which deepens information inequality.

### 8. Integrate Culture into Communication Strategy

Respect for local traditions increases community buy-in. For example:

- Link modern weather forecasting with ancestral practices such as observing animal behaviour or tree flowering.
- Broadcast interviews with elders explaining traditional ecological knowledge alongside youth who discuss new methods.
- Frame environmental care as both cultural duty and scientific necessity.

This integration turns communication into cultural renewal rather than external instruction.

### 9. Support Ongoing Research and Monitoring

Majuba's situation should not be treated as unique. Similar studies should be conducted in other villages to compare communication barriers and track improvement. Annual follow-up surveys can measure changes in awareness, behaviour, and trust.

# Researcher's reflections

During the time of fieldwork in Majuba Village, I saw clearly how the absence of regular, reliable and simple climate communication leaves people vulnerable to confusion and fear. Climate change is not an abstract issue here; it touches water, food, livestock, and community relationships every day. Yet information about it arrives from faraway sources that feel disconnected from village life.

### Observations from the Field

I noticed that discussions about climate change are often confined to urban or academic settings. Scientists, government officials, and NGOs talk about it in conferences or reports, but those conversations rarely reach rural households. When residents in Majuba hear about global warming on the radio, it sounds like something happening elsewhere, not something shaping their own rainfall and crops.

Most people learn about the environment through everyday experiences by watching rivers, feeling the wind, or noticing when certain birds return. Their observations are accurate but their explanations are shaped by culture, spirituality, and inherited wisdom. Without consistent access to verified information, these explanations become the main interpretive lens. This does not make them wrong; it makes them incomplete.

### The Silence of Official Communication

Throughout the research, I found no evidence of systematic climate awareness campaigns from local government or provincial departments. The municipality has no ongoing climate-education programme, and schools treat the topic only briefly in science lessons. Public service radio stations provide some national coverage, but their content rarely links to rural realities.

When the national news reports drought in Cape Town or floods in KwaZulu-Natal, rural listeners do not hear what that means for them in Senqu. This lack of localisation creates distance between policy and lived experience. It also feeds mistrust people assume that if authorities are silent, they are indifferent.

### The Cost of Connectivity

Digital exclusion is another barrier. Many households in Majuba own basic phones, not smartphones. Data costs remain extremely high by global standards. People explained that they buy airtime mainly for voice calls and text messages. Several said they have never used Wi-Fi and do not fully understand what it is. As one youth commented, "We use phones, but data is for rich people."

Because of this, radio is the only consistent channel. It is cheap, portable, and free to listen to. You buy batteries twice a year and you are connected. Radio is a shared experience families listen to together in the evenings or during work in the fields. It keeps people informed about funerals, elections, and music; it can do the same for climate adaptation.

**Lessons About Disinformation**

When reliable information is scarce, rumours become explanations. Disinformation in Majuba does not appear as organised propaganda but as everyday stories that fill the vacuum of knowledge. Some claim that government programmes are stealing rain or that droughts are punishment for political disobedience. These narratives are powerful because they speak to real frustrations with inequality and governance.

Countering disinformation, therefore, is not only a technical task of correcting facts; it is a social task of rebuilding trust. People believe those who speak their language, understand their customs, and share their struggles. Communication efforts that ignore this reality risk sounding like outsiders lecturing from afar.

**The Gendered Dimensions**

Women play central roles in both community life and spiritual response to environmental stress. Their leadership in the mountain rainmaking ritual demonstrates that cultural authority and environmental stewardship are intertwined. Any communication strategy should acknowledge women not only as beneficiaries but as knowledge holders and messengers. Empowering women to host radio segments or lead school clubs connects climate action with the community's moral core.

**Personal Reflection**

As a researcher, listening to the community challenged me to think differently about knowledge. I realised that academic definitions of climate change capture only one form

of truth. The other truths are held in lived experience through stories, songs, and rituals are equally important for motivating action.

Majuba reminded me that effective communication is not about translating English into isiXhosa or Sesotho; it is about translating unfamiliar ideas into familiar experiences. When people see that climate science aligns with what they already observe, understanding becomes trust, and trust becomes action.

## Conclusion

Majuba Village offers a clear view of how global climate change is experienced and interpreted at the community level. The residents do not debate whether the climate is changing; they live with the evidence every season. What differs is how they explain it and where they turn for guidance.

This study shows that knowledge alone does not create understanding. People need messages that speak in their language, recognise their beliefs, and respond to their immediate conditions. When these needs are not met, spiritual and social explanations step in to fill the gap. Those explanations give meaning but can also open the door to misinformation.

Reliable communication must therefore be local, dialogic, and culturally grounded. It must combine scientific accuracy with empathy for how people experience uncertainty and loss. The community already holds valuable environmental knowledge through observation, farming experience, and oral tradition. Linking that knowledge to verified information can make adaptation strategies more practical and trusted.

Community radio stands out as the most realistic and sustainable vehicle for this work. It is free to access, familiar to every household, and capable of broadcasting in the dialects people use daily. A small, well-supported station for the Joe Gqabi area could become a hub for both education and accountability, turning passive listening into active participation.

Majuba also demonstrates that countering disinformation is not simply about fact-checking; it is about building consistent relationships of trust. When people hear clear and respectful explanations from voices they know, false claims lose power. Chiefs,

teachers, church leaders, and especially women can serve as bridges between tradition and science.

In the long term, investing in community-based communication is an investment in resilience. Climate adaptation begins with understanding, and understanding begins with conversation. The people of Majuba have already shown willingness to talk, question, and learn; what they need is the means to keep that conversation alive.

Knowledge is power. Without knowledge it is very easy for communities to be misinformed and that is very dangerous

## References

Broadcast Research Council of South Africa (BRC). 2023. *Radio Audience Measurement Survey (RAMS) Data Summary.* Johannesburg.

Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC). 2023. *Misinformation and Disinformation Trends in South Africa.* University of Cape Town.

Department of Agriculture, Eastern Cape. 2019. *Provincial Drought Impact Assessment Report.* Bhisho.

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). 2022. *South African Social Attitudes Survey.* Pretoria.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU). 2023. *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2023.* Geneva.

Research ICT Africa. 2022. *The State of Data Affordability in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Cape Town.

Media Monitoring Africa. 2023. *Climate in the Media: Coverage Analysis.* Johannesburg.