



## IMPACT STORY | 1

*Stories worth telling*

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CROSS-CITY

AUTHORS  
BETTINA KOELE  
ELIZABETH DANIELS  
JESS KAVONIC  
ALICE MCCLURE

# FRACTAL CITY LEARNING LAB APPROACH

City learning lab processes were introduced to ensure a sound method of co-production, integrating a range of stakeholders in the process of exploring climate information for decision-making at city level.

Cities face many challenges and operate in complex systems. The learning lab approach allows partners from various backgrounds to explore challenges in more depth, looking for integrated ways to address them.

The primary impact was to unpack the burning issues identified in each city. An important, secondary impact was the establishment of interpersonal connections, resulting from the iterative nature of the process.

The approach can be an effective way to engage diverse stakeholders on tackling a shared problem by exploring different perspectives. It requires skilled facilitation, and ideally contributes to a deeper analysis of a specific problem and possible solutions, while developing new cross sectoral networks.

## THE CHANGE STORY

A city learning lab process starts with a joint discussion with a range of city stakeholders to identify one or several burning issues that the group would like to take forward. In the course of the learning lab process, different stakeholders may participate, supporting the diversity of perspectives and possible solutions. The iterative, emergent nature is especially important. The anchor points in the FRACTAL city learning processes were the city learning labs. In between learning labs, a series of other learning events took place, to ensure that the problem would be explored from various perspectives. These included workshops, training courses, high level breakfasts, webinars, etc. Importantly these learning processes were guided by an Action Research and social learning approach, allowing the delegates themselves to determine the learning process.

FRACTAL city learning labs have provided effective mechanisms to co-explore climate risks within city systems (framed as “burning issues”), as well as co-produce knowledge for solutions (see Lusaka, Maputo and Windhoek impact stories). Examples of these are listed below:

- Five city learning labs in Lusaka, focusing on water security and climate change, which resulted in four co-produced policy briefs.
- Four city learning labs in Windhoek, focusing on water and energy and climate change, which resulted in the Windhoek Integrated Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (ICCSAP).
- Four city learning labs in Maputo, focusing on water provision in the city region, which resulted in a co-produced online tool for estimating the risk of vector-/water-borne diseases as a function of climate variables.

See also the FRACTAL working paper, *Dialogue for decision-making: unpacking the ‘City Learning Lab’ approach*, available at [www.fractal.org.za](http://www.fractal.org.za).



RELATED IMPACT STORIES (IS) | Distillation of climate information through transdisciplinary co-production (IS3); Climate Risk Narratives: ‘humble science’ (IS4); The importance of relationships & networks (through transdisciplinary co-production) (IS6).

The Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL) project aims to address the challenge of providing accessible, timely, applicable and defensible climate information that is needed by decision-makers operating at the city-region scale in southern Africa. FRACTAL impact stories have been collaboratively developed by various research teams. They highlight key methods, engagements and research findings from the FRACTAL project.

[WWW.FRACTAL.ORG.ZA](http://WWW.FRACTAL.ORG.ZA)



## UNPACKING THIS STORY

The city learning lab processes contributed to stronger relations within and between cities for dealing with cross-cutting issues related to climate. They also added to concrete decisions in Lusaka, Maputo and Windhoek. Stakeholders in all three cities expressed an appreciation for this new way of learning and collaborating when addressing complex challenges, and they are exploring ways to maintain this way of working at a city level.

During FRACTAL's annual meeting, the team reflected on the outcomes and benefits of the learning lab journeys in Lusaka, Maputo and Windhoek. Partner feedback

highlighted common themes across the cities. The productive and informal environment at the labs proved a valuable method for breaking down barriers and putting everyone on an equal level.

Participants from Lusaka and Maputo noted that the labs gave an opportunity for in-depth analysis of critical issues with a social bearing. By taking people out of their normal work spaces to co-explore, people felt 'freer' to share their knowledge and listen to others' perspectives.

Lab processes in Windhoek contributed to sharing lessons across levels and scales of

government - the Windhoek team invited representatives from other towns and national government to contribute to the conversation.

The facilitation style of learning labs is rooted in the ethics of co-production. It contributed to conceptual developments related to key contextual issues.

The principles were transferred to engagements in other cities where ongoing learning labs have not been implemented (e.g. Blantyre, Harare, Gaborone) to support joint problem and solution framing.

## LEARNINGS

City learning labs, if facilitated effectively, are a valuable mechanism to collaboratively explore complex problems and solutions. They can also strengthen relationships and networks of stakeholders dealing with climate-related impacts.

In the course of running learning labs in a number of cities, FRACTAL team members learned some key lessons:

1. Design the learning lab process as an experiential learning process, to allow full and active participation by delegates.
2. Maintain an iterative learning process that is guided and directed by its participants.
3. Allow a diversity of learning styles to embrace complex systems and diversity of perspectives.
4. Create the learning labs as residential workshops to allow full participation and informal networking time.
5. Ensure the ownership of the process rests with the delegates and that decision-making is done jointly, with facilitation (and not manipulation) by the moderating team.



Experiential learning was fundamental to FRACTAL's learning lab process



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