



# Storytelling in community development

How narratives can inspire and create a shared spirit of development

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## Why storytelling matters?

The Cape Town Water Strategy sets the City on course towards a future in which there will be sufficient water for all, and which is resilient to the possible impacts of climate change. This ambition calls for collaboration between the City, the State and communities. Better water use, sustainable water supply and better sanitation is a shared responsibility: sustainable community development takes place when people take responsibility for their own development. This can be reached when there is space for **open-ended narratives**, in which storytellers move from the marginalized to the center, thus creating a shared experience by interrelating different and diverse identities and stories.

The Cape Town Water Strategy, Commitment 1: *"The City will work with communities in informal settlements and other stakeholders to improve the daily experience of access to water and sanitation, with an emphasis on building trust and increasing safety within these communities."*

Creating trust starts with a **grounded understanding** of the everyday water challenges within Cape Town's informal settlements.

## Narratives and sustainable community development

Sustainable community development takes place when people take responsibility for their own development. Narrative contributes to sustainable community development by connecting persons with each other. Within the narrative mode, the storyteller, who moves from being marginalized to the center, is related to Others in an interdependent manner. The storyteller, through a position of shared power relations, draws others into shared experience by interrelating different and diverse identities and stories.

Narrative contributes to community development by creating the space for persons, specifically marginalized persons, to take responsibility for their own development. Narrative for development enables the storyteller to set the stage for relationships with the Other and other stories so that the story of the poor does not lose its value of agency. Narrative agency, not economic agency, means **active participation in the transformation of the self and community**. Narrative agency is characterized by identity, which in turn is about both being and doing.

Narrative mode transcends isolated individuals and forms relationships between persons, which make them a community of interdependent persons. Development is a community concern, and sustainable community development is within the context of open-ended narrative.

## Abstract of "Informality and water justice: community perspectives on water issues in Cape Town's low-income neighbourhoods"

Cape Town's water injustices are entrenched by the mismatch between government interventions and the lived realities in many informal settlements and other low-income areas. This transdisciplinary study draws on over 300 stories from such communities, showing overwhelming frustration with the municipality's inability to address leaking pipes, faulty bills and poor sanitation. Cape Town's interventions typically rely on technical solutions that tend to ignore or even exacerbate the complex social problems on the ground. Water justice requires attention be paid to the range of everyday realities that exist in the spectrum from formal to informal settlements.

Johan Enqvist, Gina Ziervogel, Luke Metelerkamp, John van Breda, Ntombikayise Dondi, Thabo Lusithi, Apiwe Mdunyelwa, Zinzi Mgwigwi, Mpumelelo Mhlalisi, Siya Myeza, Gciniwe Nomela, Ann October, Welekazi Rangana & Maggie Yalabi (2020): Informality and water justice: community perspectives on water issues in Cape Town's low-income neighbourhoods, International Journal of Water Resources Development.

## Three stories from Cape Town



### Story 168: Unattended water problems in our locations

"I live in a communal block of flats in Langa township, I have been living there for almost ten years now. We use taps that are leaking and very rusty as they have been there for quite some time without being changed, and no one seems to care anymore. Toilets are the same, sometimes blocked. We are helped by other community members who also live there, other than that [we get] no help from the City of Cape Town officials. We sometimes wake up to empty taps – no warning, nothing whatsoever. That is our daily life. What is strange is that they do not attend to water problems [but] they say we must be water-wise. How ironic".



### Story 310

"My problem is a drain leaking inside my yard. My house has been built on top of a pipe, so I have to demolish my house in order to solve the problem. I went to the Housing Department and they told me that it's not their problem. The owner is supposed to play a big role. The owner is supposed to hire a planner before extending the house. I can't afford all of these problems – that's why I took shortcuts."

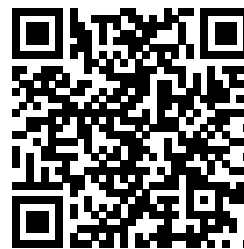


### Story XX

"Yesterday I woke up in the morning and found our tap's head was gone and water was flowing out. I tried to stop the water by sticking a pipe in it. I called our municipality office and reported it. They came on the same day and fixed it by replacing [the old tap] with a new one. And I was so happy to see that they are there for our problems, and sort them out with no delays."

## Incorporating a narrative approach within the Cape Town Water Strategy

- Integrate Story Telling in the protocols, rules and regulations of the Transversal Programs.
- Invest in training the necessary soft skills for community enrollment of CoCT officials.
- Cooperate with community-based organizations such as non-governmental organizations and religious institutions.



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Cape Town's Water Strategy



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Narrative and Community Development

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