



Darian Pearce

CLIMATE CHANGE in a climate of change

These days the terms 'climate change' and 'integrated water resource management' are bandied about with total abandon. However practical knowledge and experience of these concepts, and especially how they interrelate are often still lacking.
Words by Darian Pearce.

While climate change is not a new concept, knowing what the term means is a far cry from understanding the specific impacts this phenomenon might have. The general consensus is that it is going to get hotter, the glaciers will melt and sea levels will rise, but it is from this point onwards that the opinions begin to diverge.

Integrated water resource management is in essence a big high five to the realisation that our dependence on and relationship to clean drinking water permeates through every level of our human society and that in order to be managed effectively we need to adopt a holistic approach. While most water professionals

understand the logic behind this concept, knowledge gaps remain.

The identification of gaps in the knowledge market was the key motivator that spurred the University of the Western Cape's (UWC's) Groundwater Research Group to organise the Climate Change and Integrated Water Resource Management short course. The course, organised in collaboration with the Water Research Commission, was conducted at the university's Belville campus in August this year.

Heading up the organising committee for the course were Extraordinary Professor of Geohydrology, Eberhard Braune of the University of Pretoria and Prof Yongxin Xu, head of the UNESCO Groundwater Research Group hosted by the Department of Earth Sciences at the UWC.

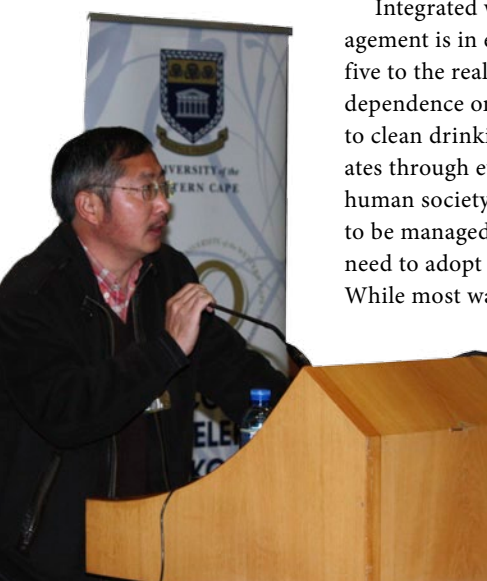
The course was held over three days, and drew a wide range of attendees from as far afield as Mozambique, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan, among others. According to assistant member of the organising committee, Zayed Brown, they were inundated with applications right up until the closing date. "There is a real hunger out there for knowledge about climate change, and it is good to know that there are people willing to work for the betterment of Africa."

The presenters, a true reflection of integration, represented a wide range of expertise and organisations.

Prof Roland Schulze, Professor Emeritus of Hydrology at the School of Bioresource Engineering and Environmental Hydrology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal conducted a remarkable presentation as he delved into the complex mechanisms of the weather and climate systems that drive hydrology. In turn, Dr Gina Ziervogel of the Climate Systems Analysis Group at the University of Cape Town expanded on her group's work aimed at understanding the vulnerability of impoverished communities to climate change and natural disasters.

A plenary session by Prof Braune on the final day of the course provided an opportunity for the attendees to provide feedback and to give their impressions on the course in general. A comment that recurred time and time again was that there needs to be a greater effort, in South Africa, and Africa in general, to apply the knowledge that we produce through our research. It was stated that in Africa, too often scientists take their lead from the politicians, and that it was time for politicians to take more advice from scientists.

Short courses such as this one, akin to conferences, seminars and similar academic exercises, present an excellent opportunity for industry professionals to immerse themselves in a wealth of expertise. Conversation, it seems, may be the first and most essential step on the road towards integration. □



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Prof Yongxin Xu, head of the UNESCO Groundwater Research Group at the University of the Western Cape welcomes attendees to the course.