



Follow the Money

How DA-Governed Cities Could Put Communities at the Centre of Climate Resilience

On a winter morning in Cape Town, the impacts of climate change are easy to see—if you know where to look. In low-lying informal settlements, residents brace for flooding as storms intensify. In townships, households juggle water scarcity, rising food prices, and rolling blackouts. Yet just a few kilometres away, climate finance discussions unfold in boardrooms, far removed from the daily realities of those living on the frontlines.

South Africa is not short of climate funding. From international climate finance to the multibillion-rand Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), the money is flowing. What's missing is not capital, but connection: a direct line between funding and communities. Nowhere is this disconnect more visible—or more politically consequential—than in DA-governed municipalities, particularly in the Western Cape.

The Democratic Alliance governs the Western Cape province, the City of Cape

Town, and several municipalities across the province. With this control comes significant authority over infrastructure, planning, disaster management, and service delivery—precisely the areas most exposed to climate change. Yet climate finance largely bypasses communities altogether.

Consider the Just Energy Transition Partnership. Heralded as a landmark deal to help South Africa decarbonise while protecting workers and communities, most JETP funding is channelled into large-scale energy infrastructure, Eskom reform, and private investment. For communities facing energy poverty and load shedding, the promise of a just transition feels distant.

The same pattern holds with international climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund. These mechanisms prioritise scale, compliance, and institutional capacity—criteria that systematically exclude grassroots organisations. While their mandates emphasise adaptation and resilience, the

money rarely reaches informal settlements, small-scale farmers, or community disaster networks.

And yet, communities are not waiting. Across the Western Cape and beyond, residents are leading water resilience initiatives, agroecological food systems, and community energy projects. These efforts work because they are grounded in lived experience. They treat climate resilience not as a technical exercise, but as a question of dignity, survival, and collective power.

DA-governed municipalities are uniquely positioned to change the equation. With political will, existing tools—infrastructure grants, disaster risk budgets, and local procurement—could be repurposed to support community-anchored climate action. The question is no longer whether this is possible, but whether it will be done.